

The Essential Funders' Guide to STEM-Focused Family Engagement

Executive Summary



OVERVIEW

STEM Next Opportunity Fund is committed to ensuring that every child – including girls, youth of color, kids in low-income communities, and youth with disabilities – has equitable access to STEM opportunities that lead to greater opportunities in academics, careers, and furthering personal interests. Family engagement is fundamental to achieving this goal. Research shows that parents and caring adults have a profound impact on children's learning, aspirations, and educational and career outcomes. Parents want to nurture their children's academic and career interests. Yet, when it comes to STEM, many parents feel anxious and unqualified to do so. While parents may think that it's their expertise, or knowledge that makes for their child's success in STEM, research shows it's their encouragement that matters most.

Philanthropic leadership has the potential to help close the race, gender, and other gaps in STEM through investments in family engagement. [The Essential Funders' Guide to STEM-Focused Family Engagement](#) identifies practices, research, narrative, policy, and systems change for this work. These recommendations are informed by [Changing the Game in STEM With Family Engagement](#), our white paper for practitioners in the field.

Seven Strategies to Support Families in Advancing Young People's STEM Interest, Persistence, and Achievement

Practice

Strategy 1a. Invest in family engagement that centers on listening

Invest in the capacity of organizations to effectively engage families in supporting their children's interest, persistence, and achievement in STEM. Funders and grantees should begin this work listening and learning to better understand how to meet families' needs in culturally-affirming ways.

Strategy 1b. Prioritize funding for those closest to the community served

Invest in tools designed to help families support their children's interest, persistence, and achievement in STEM. Prioritize funding for leaders and organizations who are best suited to work in partnership with families to develop programs and resources that meet their needs and build from their assets. Those closest to the issues bring experience understanding barriers and expertise developing culturally-responsive

Evaluation and Research

Strategy 2a. Support measurement that is culturally responsive

Use formative measurement and provide grantees with flexibility to pilot and refine STEM family engagement efforts over time. Support efforts to define success and progress in ways that are culturally responsive and that encourage innovative approaches and opportunities to iterate.



Strategy 2b. Prioritize support for measurement by leaders and researchers who represent diverse communities of color

Sufficiently fund research-practice partnerships that enable effective, evidence-based family engagement practices to take root and inform policy. Prioritize funding for evaluators and researchers who have relationships within communities of color for deeper understanding of the issues facing these communities and for sustained and significant impact for equity in STEM.

Narrative, Policy, Financing, and Systems Change

Strategy 3a. Support media campaigns to inspire youth and their families

Support initiatives that use popular media and public discourse to inspire girls and young people from populations who have been historically underrepresented in the STEM fields, and their families, to engage, persist and achieve in STEM. Creative STEM campaigns with role models can dispel stereotypes and expand how parents and youth imagine the future in STEM where every race and gender and ability is valued.

Strategy 3b. Support funding to sustain and scale family engagement in STEM

Support the creation and implementation of local, state, and federal policies and funding mechanisms to scale and sustain STEM family engagement. Lead by funding and advocating for ambitious and sustained efforts that support professional development, partnerships in and out-of-school, and advocacy at all levels.

Strategy 3c. Empower families in advocating for quality STEM opportunities

Support efforts that engage parents as key players in this work so that family engagement can reach its potential for supporting equitable and anti-racist STEM learning pathways for their children. Funders must prioritize innovative and audacious work that supports large-scale and long-term change and empowers parents—especially those who have been discriminated against—to inform and lead this change.



CALL TO ACTION

Investing in efforts to empower families to support their children is more urgent than ever. STEM Next issues a call to action to foundations and corporations that invest in STEM education to leverage family engagement for achieving educational equity and social justice.

01

Listen and learn from the leaders of nonprofits — particularly those who are Black and Latinx— who work with youth in their communities and ecosystems across the country. Bear responsibility to understand the systemic injustices in education and inequities in access to STEM learning in and out of school.

02

Make family engagement a priority across all STEM initiatives. Fund staff capacity and professional development to effectively engage and empower parents and begin with this [set of questions to guide the gathering of baseline data from grantees.](#)

03

In funding and advocacy, address the systemic problems, biases, and inequities in order to expand STEM opportunities to children and young people who have been historically denied access. Encourage other funders to do the same to multiply effects and make impacts faster. Speak up for justice and challenge others in philanthropy to elevate the importance of family engagement and equity in STEM.

We welcome your feedback. Send us your comments and questions to familyengagement@stemnext.org