

## STRATEGY 4



# A near-peer mentorship model to support transitions to STEM academic and career opportunities through mentorship.

## What is the strategy?

Strategy 4 is a near-peer mentorship model that supports transitions to STEM academic and career opportunities through relationship building.

## Why would you use this strategy?

Supporting transitions to STEM opportunities requires mentorship from people who can relate to youths' experiences and help them refine their STEM interests toward future academic and career possibilities.

## Who would use this strategy?

This is for networks/programs that need to find ways to build relationships with youth, connect with youth culture, and better understand their STEM related interests; also for networks/programs who have a pool of potential near-peer mentors.

This brief is a product of research conducted in 2021-2022 within the [Making Connections](#) project, a collaboration between the [Connected Learning Lab](#) at UCI and [STEM Next](#) and their regional partners. This is one of [eight strategies](#), which are still evolving, for coordinating and brokering connections across settings in STEM ecosystems.



*“Let’s bring in teenagers who are from the community themselves, who love education, who are passionate about it and have a story to tell, and let them lead the way.”*

*-Joshua, The Career Academy*

# Design Considerations

## Network Level >>>

Suggest partnerships and support coordination between organizations offering the STEM programming, whether in schools or in OST, and support communications to cultivate and sustain strong partnerships.

Ongoing network coordination is needed to support sustained relationship development, as well as helping to find ways to financially sustain high-quality programming.

Periodically connect different OST providers and schools running near-peer mentorship programs to share experiences and practices.

## Program Level >>>

Program schedule and curriculum should be co-developed with near-peer mentors at the onset of a project and STEM program activities should be observed to ensure quality (e.g., aligned with DoS, age-appropriate).

Mentorship work should be framed as a leadership opportunity to support academic and career-related goals beyond the programming experience.

Supportive adults should select near-peer mentors based on their ability to connect with mentees through shared experiences and/or relevant identity markers such as race, gender, or sexual orientation.

STEM programming activities should connect to local culture in ways made relevant to students.

Near-peer mentors ought to be financially incentivized (e.g., through a stipend, scholarship) for participating and helping to shape programming.

# Target Outcomes

Near-peer mentors build relationships with mentees, develop their identities as teachers/ mentors, and gain leadership experience.

Youth engage their STEM interests in programming and develop relationships with mentors who can offer guidance and support, whether STEM-related or not.

## Important Considerations

- Varying commitment levels of individual youth may make it difficult to maintain consistency throughout the program; attending regularly has potential for highest impact.
- Different incentive systems may be appropriate for different contexts (e.g., stipend, course credit, work experience credit, National Honor Society volunteer credit).
- Finding financial resources to pay near-peer mentors in addition to afterschool staff can be burdensome.
- When working with near-peer mentors (especially those under 18), there may be licensing requirements or supervision issues to resolve.
- The best near-peer mentors likely have full plates already with other extracurricular and/or family commitments so determining the best incentives for participation is key.