

STRATEGY 6



Building relationships with families and youth to get buy-in for pursuing immersive STEM opportunities

What is the strategy?

Strategy 6 is about the intentional work supportive adults do to get family and youth buy-in for STEM learning opportunities to make them more comfortable and enthusiastic about youth participating in STEM programs.

Why would you use this strategy?

This strategy inspires and engages youth and their families as it creates opportunities for youth to have access to immersive STEM events and experiences (e.g., Space Camp, STEM internships).

Who would use this strategy?

This is for networks/programs that need to deepen family investment and engagement in STEM opportunities and those who see families as partners in their children's education.

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.



“The parents are invested, we have really good relationships. They want good things for their kids. STEM camps are a big thing, and I know that a lot of our families, that’s not something that you can just shell out money for. And they really want their kids to have that opportunity, and so they’re willing to get them here or find a way to get them here most days. And (students) look for someone to treat them like an equal...so speaking to them about what they want is really important, giving them space to express who they are.”

-Taylor, Woodland Forrest

Design Considerations

Network Level >>>

Build program leaders' networks and capacity by connecting programs to grant and leadership opportunities.

Networks can connect program leaders to one another through communities of practice (CoP) engaged in similar work on engaging youth and families in STEM.

Program Level >>>

Program leaders should build on the strengths of the afterschool space to engage in face-to-face conversations with families when possible.

Program leaders should approach relationship building with an eye toward shared humanity, yet acknowledge difference in experiences.

STEM opportunities should be presented in ways that respond to youth and family needs (e.g., working around logistics of transportation or resource availability) and connect to broader interests of youth and families (e.g., leadership development, collaboration and teamwork).

Thoughtful and systematic ways to build family relationships are built into practice (e.g., sharing a personal point of contact, writing specific points of feedback on progress reports, offering alternative ways to participate remotely).

Making intentional and positive connections with youth and their families, especially after more difficult days, especially with more non-participatory school-day parents.

Seek constant improvement by building on strengths of networks (e.g., other teachers, district and university leaders) to learn new systems and improve existing ones for brokering family relationships.

Target Outcomes

Youth, families, and program leaders are on the same page, and feel connected and committed to supporting youths' STEM interests toward future opportunities.

Opportunity structures within the program design support alumni youth in becoming STEM mentors.

Continuous quality improvement for STEM offerings that connect to youth and family interests; increased participation in program.

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Important Considerations

- Often labeling a program as "STEM" can be intimidating and act as a barrier to entry; consider how to market a program to youth and family interests - perhaps youth are interested in exploring fashion design. How is that done from a STEM-based perspective? Families may be drawn to programs that offer youth leadership opportunities. How can that be built into the program's meta-curriculum?
- If youth are attending an immersive experience that may require extended time away from home, they may be nervous or unsure of being away. If they have not been away on their own before, they may need support with borrowing/buying luggage and packing what they will need.