

Strategies and Resources for Engaging with Families

Family involvement in children's education has a positive impact on children's learning and overall academic skills. At the same time, many organizations struggle to recruit and retain parents and family caregivers as active participants in education programs. Based on our experience at the Oregon Museum of Science and Industry (OMSI) during the Designing our World project, we offer the following recommendations and tips.

- **Provide a clear description of the program/training:** It is important to state the benefits of participating in the experience. It also helps to share an agenda beforehand, the time and location of the training, and other services that will be provided during the session (parking, transportation, food, childcare, etc.)
- **Provide childcare:** This benefit has been strongly shown to increase participation among families, especially ones with younger children. Many families have kids of different ages, so plan accordingly. If the registration for the program is conducted in advance, you can ask whether childcare services will be needed and how many children are expected.
- **Provide a meal:** Many families are coming to the workshop directly from work; having food available at the site of the workshop will increase the chances of these families attending the experience.
- **Plan the time and day of the training according to parent/caregiver needs and cultural values:** Assess the best times and days to deliver the program. A large number of families will be absent if the experience is scheduled during a cultural or religious holiday. It is a good idea to ask families directly or to talk to other organizations around the area that conduct similar programs. Evenings and/or weekends work best for many families because most caregivers work during the day, but make sure to ask and assess the situation before committing to a time.
- **Share a calendar of events at the beginning of the program and remind caregivers when important dates are approaching:** Doing so will give families the time to plan their attendance. Even if the training/workshop is not happening in the near future, it is important that caregivers have the event on their calendars. Reminders about the event are also important; send these reminders a week before and on the day of the event. Effective communication methods

include phone calls, emails, and in-person communication, and these methods depend on the program and the preferred method of communication caregivers have established with the program/organization.

- **Make the experience social:** From providing food and childcare to having activities that facilitate connections between participants (small-group and/or big-group discussions, team-building activities, etc.), make sure to encourage social interactions. Parents/caregivers have reported that hearing and connecting with other families/parents that are going through the same experiences as can make these experiences more enjoyable.
- **Be aware of families' preferred languages:** when planning a workshop try to determine which languages are spoken at home and if any support (interpreters) will be needed to deliver the experience. Ideally, the workshop/training should be offered in the language familiar to the majority of participants, even if doing so means scheduling multiple sessions of the same workshop to accommodate language preferences.