Sunflower STEMS

R.I.S.E. – Representation in Science & Engineering for Girls of Color

Sunflower STEMS helps girls of color grow in STEM and AI through hands-on learning, near-peer mentorship, family engagement, and real pathways into advanced coursework, college, and careers.

Why We Exist

Girls of color remain underrepresented in science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and AI pathways and are too often left feeling like they are the only one in advanced STEM spaces. Sunflower STEMS creates a supportive environment where girls of color can build confidence, curiosity, and belonging while exploring STEM and AI through collaborative, real-world learning.

Our Pilot Program

Our Year 1 pilot is an 8-week after-school cohort for girls of color in grades 7–9 in Santa Ana and Tustin.

Mentor Network

Sunflower STEMS is building a mentor network of UCI and CSUF students, women of color in STEM and AI, engineers, scientists, technologists, researchers, and community volunteers.

Why “Sunflower”

Sunflowers are mathematical flowers whose spirals reflect patterns such as the Fibonacci sequence and the golden ratio. They also turn toward the light as they grow. Sunflower STEMS uses this symbolism to connect science, identity, growth, and possibility.

Impact Goals

In Year 1, Sunflower STEMS aims to increase STEM confidence and belonging, expand awareness of STEM and AI pathways, connect girls of color with mentors and role models, and encourage participation in advanced STEM classes, clubs, and programs.

Pilot Goal: 1 school site · 25 students · 8 weeks · 2 sessions per week

- Hands-on STEM and AI projects
- Girls-of-color-centered learning environment
- Near-peer mentors from local universities and STEM careers
- Family workshops on STEM pathways, college, and financial aid
- Exposure to college campuses and STEM workplaces
- Final Showcase Night and Lab Coat Ceremony

The Sunflower Scientist Experience

Each participant receives a Sunflower Scientist Kit that may include safety glasses (“Helia Specs”), a STEM and AI notebook, sunflower seed kit, and project materials. Graduates earn a personalized Sunflower STEMS lab coat as a symbol of belonging in STEM and AI.

“For many girls, this may be the first time someone places a lab coat on them and says: you belong here.”

What We Need Now

- 1 pilot school partner
- Founding funding ($35,000–$50,000)
- Mentors and STEM volunteers
- Community and university partners
- In-kind support including supplies, transportation, printing, and student learning tools

Contact

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