

# Boosting Engagement: 10 Ways to Increase Newcomer Youth and Family Participation in Programs and Services

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This tip sheet provides strategies to encourage newcomer youth and families to participate in programs and services. It is a companion to the [Info Guide: Strategies to Increase Refugee and Newcomer Youth and Family Participation in Programs and Services](#) and offers quick, actionable tips for real-world application. These strategies can be applied in both **mandatory** programs (e.g., school attendance, foster care requirements) and **voluntary** programs (e.g., after-school activities, recreational programs). This tip sheet is especially relevant to support youth PARTICIPATING in the Unaccompanied Refugee Minor (URM) program. Engagement strategies should consider youth age and autonomy—those under 18 may be required to participate and benefit from family support, while older youth often engage voluntarily.

## 1. Build Trust Through Meaningful Relationships

Consistent, trauma informed check-ins foster safety.

- Keep tone welcoming and curious and meet youth and families where they are at.

## 2. Use Strength-Based Approaches

Highlight youth and families' assets, not deficits.

- Ask what they are proud of learning recently and offer opportunities to lead groups or activities based on their answers and interests.

## 3. Ensure Accessible Programming

*Family involvement may be necessary for younger youth*

Build programs around youth and families' schedules, languages, and cultural norms.

- Offer flexible scheduling, provide childcare as needed, and materials in home languages with simple visuals to aid understanding.

## 4. Center Youth and Family Cultural Backgrounds and Trauma-Informed Care

Recognize that culture, grief, and past trauma shape how youth and families show up.

- Invite youth to share home traditions, languages, and values and align programs with this information, not just service goals.

## 5. Provide Hands-On Learning Experiences

*Different levels of autonomy depending on age*

Incorporate experiential learning opportunities to help youth and families' develop life skills.

- Host mock interviews, budget games, or job shadowing. Include tech literacy and VR for digital confidence.

## 6. Spark Engagement with Creative, Interactive Approaches

Best suited for **voluntary** programs and adaptable for **mandatory** programs with structured learning goals

Make participation meaningful, fun, and relevant.

- Try friendly group competitions, storytelling nights, or art prompts. Offer downloadable tools or activities to keep the learning and participation going at home.

## 7. Leverage Community Partnerships

Best for **mandatory** programs with family involvement and **voluntary** programs where community support is key.

Foster belonging beyond your program.

- Establish credibility by connecting and co-hosting with faith, school, or cultural leaders. Keep a “community contacts list” to efficiently connect youth and families to available resources.

## 8. Organize Social and Community-Building Events

Most effective for **voluntary** programs, but structured events can be included in **mandatory** programs as well.

Play builds connection.

- Mix structured (e.g., cultural nights) and unstructured (e.g., arcade hangouts), and don’t underestimate the power of free food.

## 9. Uplift Youth and Family Voice in Decision-Making

Best suited for **voluntary** programs and older youth in Independent Living (IL) programs, but also relevant for younger youth with family support

Youth and families engage more when they help shape what they're part of.

- Involve them in planning events, choosing topics, or setting program goals—then reflect their ideas in action.

## 10. Offer Incentives and Recognize Engagement

Most effective for **voluntary** programs, especially IL youth who have more autonomy in participation

Small rewards can boost motivation and show youth and families their time matters.

- Celebrate attendance milestones with certificates, raffles, or shout-outs. As able, match incentives to needs—like IL stipends, bus passes, or gift certificates.

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