

Hip-Hop Education Center receives STEAM Forward Grant to Launch STEAMHER Accelerator

Hip-Hop Education Center receives STEAM Forward Grant to Launch STEAMHER Accelerator, a groundbreaking Hip-Hop, technology, and workforce development initiative

NEW YORK, NY, UNITED STATES, May 5, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The Hip-Hop Education Center (HHEC) has been awarded a highly competitive STEAM Forward Grant from NYC Her Future and the New York City Department of Education – Office of Business Development to launch the Hip-Hop STEAMHER Accelerator: Girls Leading the Algorithm.



This award recognizes HHEC’s alignment with the goals of STEAM Forward, including the integration of artificial intelligence, culturally responsive pedagogy, and project-based learning to expand access and opportunity for young women across New York City. The grant will support HHEC in continuing to deliver high-quality, school-based programming while providing meaningful career exposure in emerging fields.

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Martha Diaz, Founder and President of the Hip-Hop Education Center

As an awardee, HHEC will contribute to a citywide effort to ensure that young women—particularly young women of color—are equipped with the skills, confidence, and exposure needed to pursue pathways in STEAM and AI. The grant will culminate in participation in the STEAM & AI Student Showcase in June 2026.

“This program is about more than learning AI, it’s about reclaiming our narratives, building

confidence, and creating pathways into industries where our young people have historically been underrepresented,” said Martha Diaz, Founder and President of the Hip-Hop Education Center. “We’re empowering students to see themselves not just as consumers of technology, but as creators and innovators shaping the future.”

HHEC is partnering with Create Labs Ventures, a premier technology company specializing in Generative AI, Digital Human Design, and immersive experiences to develop the AI platform, and [Brooklyn Emerging Leaders Academy](#) (BELA) in Bedford-Stuyvesant to expand its Fresh, Bold & So Def: Women in Hip-Hop initiative through the launch of the STEAMHER Accelerator, an innovative workforce development program designed to equip high school girls and gender-expansive youth with skills at the intersection of Hip-Hop culture, artificial intelligence (AI), and STEAM careers.



Rooted in culturally responsive pedagogy and the Women in Hip-Hop Living Archive, the six-week accelerator offers a hands-on, project-based learning experience that integrates research, digital archiving, AI literacy, and ethical design thinking. Through this immersive program, students explore how technology can be used to preserve culture, tell stories, and build more equitable futures.

Nicia Fullwood, Founder and Head of School at Brooklyn Emerging Leaders Academy, said, “At BELA, we are deeply committed to preparing our young women to lead in the world as it is—and to shape the world as it should be. The Hip-Hop Education Center’s STEAMHER Accelerator represents a powerful intersection of culture, innovation, and opportunity. Through this partnership, our students are not only gaining technical skills in AI and STEAM, but also developing the confidence to see themselves as architects of the future. This is what it looks like when education is both rigorous and relevant.”

Glenda Smiley, Chief of Partnerships & Strategic Initiatives, Brooklyn Emerging Leaders Academy, said “The STEAMHER Accelerator is a bold example of what’s possible when strategic partnerships are rooted in shared values and a commitment to equity. By bridging Hip-Hop culture, archival history, emerging technology, and workforce development, we are creating pathways for our young women to engage critically and creatively with the tools shaping tomorrow. This work is about access, authorship, memory, and preservation. Our students are not just learning systems; they are learning to build and transform them while safeguarding the cultural histories that shape who we are.”

Participants will engage in workshops, mentorship, and collaborative learning experiences led by educators, researchers, and industry leaders. Program sessions include digital archiving and metadata, AI ethics, prompt engineering, and design thinking, alongside career panels featuring leading voices in technology and culture.

Students will work in teams to design and develop an AI-powered chatbot informed by the Women in Hip-Hop research dataset developed by HHEC’s research committee. Through this process, they will contribute original research and archival entries that expand the historical record. The program also includes portfolio development, personal branding, and public speaking training, preparing students for real-world opportunities in both creative and technical fields.

The accelerator will culminate in a public presentation at the NYC Her Future STEAM Forward Fair on June 27, 2026, where students will showcase their chatbot projects, research, and digital portfolios to educators, industry professionals, and community members.

Program Outcomes

Participants will:

- Build AI literacy and ethical technology awareness
- Develop research and digital archiving skills
- Contribute to the Women in Hip-Hop Living Archive
- Explore STEAM career pathways
- Create a digital portfolio and professional profile

The Hip-Hop STEAMHER Accelerator reflects HHEC’s ongoing commitment to advancing equity in education through culturally grounded, future-focused programming that bridges the gap between arts, technology, and workforce development.

About the Hip-Hop Education Center (HHEC)

The Hip-Hop Education Center is a nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing research, policy, and practice in Hip-Hop education. Through curriculum development, curated programming, and archives, HHEC empowers individuals and communities to drive cultural, educational, and social change.

About the Brooklyn Emerging Leaders Academy (BELA)

Brooklyn Emerging Leaders Academy (BELA) Charter School is an all-girls high school located in the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood of Brooklyn, New York with a mission to empower each young woman to be the best version of herself. Through a rigorous college preparatory curriculum, service learning initiatives and a commitment to cultivating a spirit of ownership within each young woman, BELA students will attend and graduate from college. BELA's mission, college preparatory curriculum, student leadership opportunities, access to mental health services, and approach to building community is fostering the new generation of leaders that our communities need.

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