

The Library as Bridge

Hosting EDsnaps to Strengthen the Precollege Pipeline

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Community colleges have long functioned as primary access points to higher education for students from historically underserved communities. Yet for many young people, college remains an abstract idea rather than a realistic or attainable goal. As an academic librarian at Bronx Community College (BCC), one of the authors has observed how early affirming exposure to campus environments can significantly influence students' perceptions of possibility, belonging, and future academic pathways. When the opportunity emerged to partner with EDsnaps—a two-week science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics (STEAM) enrichment program for girls and young women ages ten to eighteen—the librarian moved quickly to consider how the community college could serve as a meaningful host site.

This article presents a practical and replicable model for hosting EDsnaps on a community college campus, with the academic library positioned as a key institutional connector. In the summer of 2025, EDsnaps was hosted at BCC in a classroom located on the first floor of the library building, adjacent to the BCC Library. This strategic placement enabled the library to function as a central hub for campus engagement, mentorship, and early academic orientation. Drawing on this case study, the article details program design, planning, implementation, and lessons learned, and it concludes with a concise checklist to support libraries seeking to develop similar partnerships that promote access, equity, and community building.

Institutional Context

BCC, a member institution of the City University of New York (CUNY), primarily serves a first-generation, working-class student body drawn from the Bronx. Many students juggle coursework alongside employment and caregiving responsibilities and have had limited prior exposure to college environments. Within this context, early affirming interactions with higher education are especially consequential, shaping students' educational aspirations and sense of possibility.

The academic library occupies a distinctive position at BCC. It is a shared highly visible space that is open to all students, without prerequisites or disciplinary boundaries. Librarians routinely support students navigating academic expectations by providing research assistance, information literacy instruction, and informal mentorship. This combination of accessibility and academic purpose made the library a natural anchor for a precollege enrichment initiative, even when the program itself was housed in an adjacent campus space.

Library as Hub

Locating EDsnaps in close proximity to the academic library was a deliberate and strategic decision. Academic libraries function simultaneously as instructional infrastructure, communal



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spaces, and access points to institutional support—roles that are especially significant within the community college context. For precollege participants, the library offers an introduction to academic culture without the formality or pressure often associated with classrooms or administrative offices.

First, the library provided equitable access. As an open and welcoming environment, it enabled EDSnaps participants to move freely, ask questions, and engage with academic resources without barriers or gatekeeping. Second, librarians and library staff served as accessible academic partners to the EDSnaps leadership team. A library-facilitated information literacy session introduced participants to locating books and articles, borrowing materials, and seeking research assistance, reinforcing the idea that asking for help is both expected and integral to academic success. Finally, the library fostered a sense of belonging. Guided tours, informal exploration, and the visible presence of library staff conveyed a clear and affirming message: You belong here.

Together, these elements positioned the library as an institutional bridge connecting precollege students to the culture and practices of higher education, even though the primary instructional space for EDSnaps was located just outside the library itself.

This approach is consistent with emerging frameworks that reconceptualize libraries as active sites for youth development. McChesney and Fade contend that library-based summer programs cultivate confidence by fostering autonomy, competence, and social connection¹—core dynamics that explain why the library functioned as a strong institutional anchor for EDSnaps.

Program Overview: What Is EDSnaps?

Founded in 2017 in the Bronx, EDSnaps (short for Educational Snapshots) emerged from a shared commitment to expanding access to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education for girls and young women, particularly within immigrant families and historically underserved communities.² The organization's origins are closely tied to grassroots academic and community networks in New York City. EDSnaps founder Susanne Cappendijk, PhD, MBA, first articulated the vision for the program during a public education panel held in the Bronx, where she spoke about the need for early, skills-based exposure to STEM pathways. María Elena Pizarro, then a doctoral student affiliated with the CUNY Graduate Center, attended the panel as part of a broader academic and nonprofit network that included educators and community advocates. Moved by the program's mission and its potential impact, Pizarro connected with Dr. Cappendijk and soon became actively involved in shaping the initiative. The first EDSnaps program launched at John F. Kennedy High School in the Bronx, grounding the organization firmly

in the local community from its inception. Reflecting its focus on accessibility and contemporary learning, the EDSnaps logo features a smartphone, symbolizing the idea of delivering educational “snapshots” that capture skills, confidence, and possibility—one student at a time.

EDSnaps is a nonprofit organization that transforms STEM learners into STEM leaders. This particular summer program, hosted at BCC, was a STEAM enrichment program for girls and young women ages ten to eighteen, designed to expand exposure to science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics through hands-on learning, creative expression, and career exploration. The two-week summer 2025 cohort followed a balanced model combining on-campus workshops with off-campus field trips to cultural, environmental, and professional sites across New York City.

EDSnaps operates through a partnership model with New Settlement, a community-based organization that recruits participants through its year-round girls' program and handles registration and consent forms. Many EDSnaps participants are already engaged in New Settlement's after-school programs, creating continuity between academic-year and summer enrichment. This partnership allows EDSnaps to focus on program design and instructional delivery while New Settlement manages recruitment, enrollment, and family communication. For BCC, this meant the college partnered with an established program that arrived with participants already enrolled, streamlining logistical coordination and allowing the library to concentrate on campus integration rather than recruitment.

At BCC, the program emphasized intentional exposure to college spaces. Participants took part in guided tours of the BCC Library and the Hall of Fame for Great Americans—the first Hall of Fame established in the United States—as well as structured and informal interactions with college staff. These experiences were designed to demystify higher education and help participants envision themselves as future college students. The library served as the program's conceptual and relational anchor, providing continuity and a welcoming academic reference point throughout the two weeks.

Planning and Preparation

Planning for EDSnaps at BCC began with a short timeline. When EDSnaps' usual summer space became unavailable, a mutual community contact explored BCC as an alternative host site. The initial plan was to house the program in one of the library's two instructional classrooms; however, library administration determined that those spaces could not be used for the program during the requested period.

With approval from library administration, the lead librarian contacted the Office of the Provost to explore alternative options. Following a meeting with the Provost's



Office personnel and an explanation of the program's goals and structure, approval was granted to host EDSnaps in a college classroom located on the first floor of the library building. The proximity of this classroom to the library proved to be a significant asset, enabling seamless integration of library-led programming into the daily schedule.

Preparation then focused on logistics and coordination: confirming classroom availability for two full weeks; ensuring access to computers, projection equipment, and a smartboard; and clarifying responsibilities related to supervision, scheduling, and campus policies. The library-led sessions—including an information literacy workshop and guided tours of the library and the Hall of Fame for Great Americans—were intentionally embedded into the program. Despite the compressed planning timeline, clear communication and administrative support enabled a cohesive and well-supported experience.

Marketing and Community Outreach

Program marketing and recruitment were handled entirely by the EDSnaps leadership team, allowing the college to focus on logistical preparation and campus integration. EDSnaps developed promotional materials that clearly communicated the program's focus on STEAM enrichment for girls and young women ages ten to seventeen, emphasizing hands-on activities with themes such as Brilliant Bubbles, Magic in the Mind, Dragonflies & Dragonfruits, and Happy Hexagons. The colorful, youth-centered flyer prominently featured the BCC location and highlighted both on-campus activities and science and art field trips. Registration was managed through an online form, and the program was offered free of charge to participants. This division of labor—with EDSnaps managing community outreach and BCC providing space and academic infrastructure—proved efficient and allowed each partner to leverage its respective strengths. For libraries considering similar partnerships, clarifying marketing responsibilities early in the planning process can prevent duplication of effort and ensure consistent messaging to families.

Program Execution

The program unfolded over two weeks, with the library serving as a consistent point of reference.

Week One: Exploration and Discovery. Participants engaged in STEAM workshops and creative projects on campus, supported by flexible space and technology. Field trips to sites such as the Museum of the City of New York, the Morgan Library and Museum, Pier 26 at Hudson River Park, and the Conservatory Garden in Central Park connected learning to cultural and environmental contexts. Near daily returns to the library

normalized it as a place for inquiry, safety, and support. On campus, guided tours of the BCC Library and the Hall of Fame for Great Americans, along with a library-led information literacy session, reinforced academic skills and campus familiarity.

Week Two: Career and Campus Immersion. The second week emphasized career exploration, including a corporate visit to American Airlines. Attendance remained consistent, and participants became increasingly comfortable navigating campus and initiating conversations with staff—an observable shift by the program's conclusion.

Feedback, Outcomes, and Observations

Although no formal assessment was conducted, informal feedback and staff observations provided insight into the program's impact. Participants' confidence increased over time, particularly in navigating campus spaces and asking questions. Many expressed surprise at the range of library services and the role of librarians as partners in learning.

EDSnap and library staff noted that the two-week duration—rather than a single visit—enabled relationship building and trust. Unexpected outcomes included strong interest in campus history during tours and reflection among library staff on how space design communicates belonging. Overall, the library functioned not just as a venue but also as a relational and symbolic space supporting early college identity formation.

Connection to Related Outreach Models

The approach implemented at BCC reflects a broader movement within academic libraries to establish precollege pipelines through sustained, relationship-based engagement. Dennis and Osborne document a comparable initiative at the University of Mississippi, where Library Experience Day (LED) invited high school students and school librarians to campus for a full day of interactive programming, library tours, and makerspace activities.³ Similar to the EDSnaps partnership at BCC, LED prioritized reducing barriers to campus access, cultivating relationships between students and information professionals, and framing the academic library as an entry point to higher education.

Dennis and Osborne further report that 100 percent of 2024 LED participants found the experience valuable and indicated that it strengthened their connection to both librarians and the university—outcomes that closely mirror the informal observations gathered from the BCC EDSnaps cohort.

Smith and Marquez present an additional illustrative model through their account of summer camps hosted by the Saint Ambrose University Library



for middle school students. Programs such as the Digital Film Camp and the National History Day Boot Camp demonstrate how academic libraries can draw on existing strengths in media production, archival research, and information literacy to create engaging, low-cost learning experiences for youth. Notably, Smith and Marquez report that participants expressed interest in learning about careers in libraries and archives, underscoring the capacity of such initiatives to support both early recruitment and the cultivation of future information professionals.⁴ The authors also highlight practical implementation considerations—including snack selection, technology troubleshooting, and allowing sufficient time for project completion—that closely align with the planning realities encountered during the EDsnaps partnership at BCC.

Together, these examples suggest that academic libraries across institution types, from community colleges to private universities, can serve as effective partners in precollege programming when they foreground accessibility, relationship building, and intentional engagement with young learners.

Lessons Learned

What worked. Rapid administrative support was essential. Sustained exposure to the library over two weeks proved more impactful than one-time visits. Library-led engagement, particularly information literacy and tours, added clear value. Defined

roles and communication with EDsnaps facilitators supported smooth operations.

What to improve. Broader involvement of library staff could deepen mentorship opportunities. Implementing a brief participant feedback survey would strengthen reflection. Additional structured campus exploration activities, such as a scavenger hunt, could further enhance familiarity and confidence. (Although no scavenger hunt took place at BCC, EDsnaps held scavenger hunts for each field trip in the city, after the group visited the Morgan Library, Pier 26, and the City Museum, with an emphasis on math and “using your eyes” for real-life applications.)

Conclusion

Hosting EDsnaps at BCC demonstrates how academic libraries can serve as effective bridges between community and college. By opening library spaces to precollege students and embedding them in authentic academic environments, libraries can help transform college from an abstract aspiration into a navigable reality. Leveraging existing infrastructure and professional expertise, rather than new funding, allowed the library to act as a visible partner in advancing access, belonging, and long-term educational pathways. As community colleges continue to function as engines of social mobility, academic libraries are well positioned to ensure that young people not only see college as attainable but also recognize it as a place where they belong. &

Implementation Checklist for Replication

- **Identify partners:** Align with youth-serving organizations; define goals, age range, and supervision.
- **Secure buy-in:** Engage provost/dean early; align with diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) and community engagement priorities.
- **Coordinate space/technology:** Confirm classrooms and equipment; identify backups.
- **Clarify logistics:** Establish schedules, supervision, waivers, and points of contact.
- **Plan library engagement:** Design tours, information literacy sessions, and informal interactions.
- **Create a welcoming environment:** Provide signage, staff presence, and time for exploration.
- **Document and reflect:** Gather informal feedback; share outcomes with campus leadership.
- **End-of-program presentation:** Share the projects with the campus community through the showcase event.

References

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