



GAME ON!

AI PATHWAYS X USA 250

WE DON'T JUST PLAY THE GAME.

WE DESIGN IT.





Game On! AI Pathways

GROW YOUR LIFE · CHANGE THE WORLD

A Letter from Our Founder · Celebrating Over a Decade of Impact

History has reached a hinge point. Artificial Intelligence is rewriting our world faster than any force before it, and the defining question of our era is not whether the future will be built, but who will build it. Game On! AI Pathways is my answer. For more than a decade, I have worked to ignite the innovative spirit that runs deep in our community, transforming young minds into the explorers, adventurers, and creators of tomorrow. My own vision was born in the rich soil of rural Louisiana and nurtured by the enduring African American tradition of uplifting the beloved community.

I understand that in the age of AI our youth need more than opportunity — they need a launchpad into the stratosphere of Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics (STEAM). I draw inspiration from Sister Joan Chittister, “you may not be able to change the world, but you can do one thing,” and from musician Marcus Roberts, “take what a young person knows, and give them the tools to use what they know, to unlock what they don’t know.” Guided by that wisdom, I have watched Strong TIES become a beacon of hope, illuminating paths into high-tech fields like Gaming, Artificial Intelligence, and Data Science. By honoring our youth’s knowledge and placing cutting-edge tools in their hands, we have empowered more than 9,900 underserved students not merely to enter the STEAM ecosystem, but to thrive and lead within it.

This has never been about individual success; it is about reshaping our collective future. In the truest American tradition, we are building a legacy of giving back, ensuring that every student who we reach becomes an advocate for change, ready to shape society through technology, science and the arts. As Strong TIES prepares to scale this work globally, I look toward a future in which our young people are not passive users of technology but its authors — makers who understand that every algorithm reflects a human choice, and who claim their rightful place as designers of the systems, and the world, they will one day lead. Game On! AI Pathways is more than a program — it is my life’s work and our shared movement, centering our people and our planet in the culture of STEAM, and forging a path to a more sustainable, equitable tomorrow. With deep gratitude, thank you.

Dr. Loretta H. Cheeks, Ph.D.

Founder & Chief Executive Officer
Strong TIES



THE NATIONAL GEM CONSORTIUM

CONGRATULATIONS GEM 50

ONE SPARK.

IGNITES A VISION.

EMPOWERS GENERATIONS.

LAUNCHES THE FUTURE.

SEPTEMBER 3–5, 2026 | DALLAS, TEXAS

— THE NEXT ERA BEGINS NOW. —

Every breakthrough begins the same way.

A spark.

An idea.

A connection.

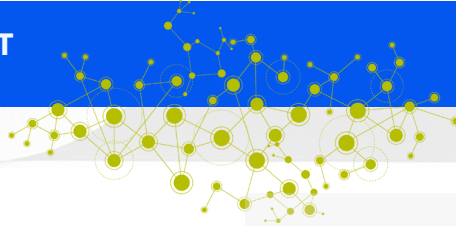
A moment that changes everything.

For 50 years, GEM has transformed sparks into impact.

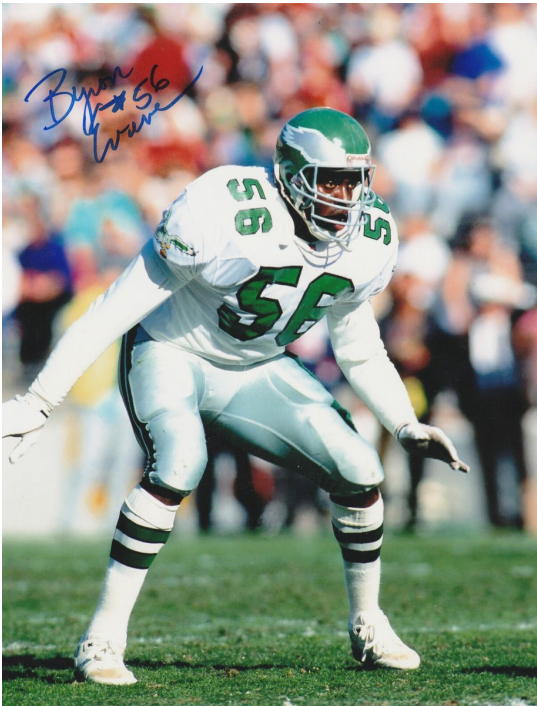
Into opportunity.

Into legacy.

www.gemfellowship.org



Impact and *Influence*



Mover and shaker, pioneer and legend-celebrating the power of Excellence, Education, and Servant Leadership

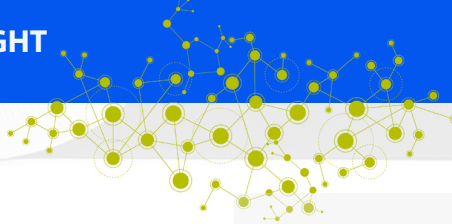


The year 2026 feels all the brighter for the chance to celebrate a true champion in our society — a man who loves God, cherishes his family, and gives himself fully to his community: Byron Evans. Time and again, he shows the world that no boundary and no stereotype can hold him back.

Byron excels in every arena he enters, his impact felt from the football field to the classroom. “When work and action meet opportunity,” he reminds us, “amazing things happen” — and his life is the proof. Whether mentoring young people or modeling the discipline behind real achievement, he turns his own hard-won lessons into a launchpad for the next generation.

No boundaries, no limits —
Byron Evans turns discipline
and service into
limitless possibility.

What sets this award-winning champion apart is not only how tall he stands, but how humbly. Generous with his time, quick to help, and genuinely devoted to making humanity better through service and education, Byron Evans is a living example of success, discipline, and process — proof that greatness is built one deliberate step at a time.



Computer Scientists *Leadership*

Born to lead and soar-salute to
our Young & Gifted Scholar



Viviana “Vivi” York — a scholar, leader, and innovator designing the future she’ll one day lead.

The year 2026 shines all the brighter for the chance to celebrate a rising star I have mentored since she was twelve — Viviana York, affectionately known as “Vivi.” Today she is a high-achieving Computer Science scholar at Tuskegee University, proving no ceiling can contain a young woman of vision, discipline, and heart.

Vivi leads at the highest levels, holding a national leadership role in the National Society of Black Engineers and guiding several campus organizations. That excellence opens doors each summer: designing accessible health tools with Noam Platt’s Make Good in New Orleans, advancing AI for education at USC’s Institute for Creative Technologies, and Data & Analytics with PepsiCo in Richardson, Texas.

Alongside her Tuskegee peers, she has spent two years on remarkable research — from autonomous robots and crop phenotyping to community outreach helping local farmers improve crop health. Now entering her senior year and bound for a Ph.D. program, Vivi is everything a mentor dreams of: brilliant, grounded, and just getting started. I could not be prouder.



Sowing Seeds of Creativity

Some voices move quietly and land with the greatest force. Hope Agnew is one of them — a young artist who has grown with Strong TIES since she was thirteen, revealing herself as a quiet and powerful thinker whose gifts are only beginning to be tapped. Her future, without question, is bright.

A visual artist at heart, Hope draws the vastness of space and the wonder of science into her work, using them as a language for the full expression of her ideas. Where others see separate worlds, she sees one canvas — arts, technology, and design converging into something entirely her own.

A recent high school honors graduate, Hope now carries that vision forward: this fall she begins her journey at Arizona State University's Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts. We cannot wait to see what she creates once her full expressivity is unleashed — the world is about to meet an original.

“If they don’t give you a seat at the table, bring in a folding chair.” — Rep. Shirley Chisholm, a New York Democrat and the first Black woman to run for president.

Engineering the Future, Together

A Computer Systems Engineering senior at Arizona State University with a passion for building agentic systems, and tackling hands-on projects spanning networking, machine learning, and personal software development.

When Mica Moya stepped in front of a room of young learners at the National Geographic-sponsored AI Workshop in Scottsdale, he didn't come to lecture — he came to hand them the keys. Serving as a Strong TIES mentor-coach, coach, and presenter under the guidance of Dr. Loretta Cheeks, Mica introduced students to Python by helping them build something they could actually talk to: a voice-activated AI assistant in the spirit of Alexa. He named his creation JARVARS — Just A Rather Versatile AI Response System — a playful nod to Iron Man's J.A.R.V.I.S. and a window into how he thinks. Take something that feels like science fiction, and make it real, approachable, and entirely your own.

That instinct to demystify the complex runs through everything Mica does. Under the hood, JARVARS drew on real engineering — API integration, speech recognition, text-to-speech, and system automation — the same rigor he brings to his coursework at Arizona State University, where he'll earn his B.S. in Computer Systems Engineering in 2026. brings to Strong TIES.



His portfolio reads like a tour of modern computing: low-level embedded software in C for a rover control system, tuning PID loops and wiring up motors, encoders, and ultrasonic sensors; a secure, role-based JavaFX application built with an Agile team; and a physics-driven defense simulation in MATLAB. Fluent across C/C++, Java, Python, and Linux, he moves comfortably from the register level to full-stack design.

But what makes Mica stand out isn't only his range — it's his generosity with it. Off the clock, he has coached basketball for the Boys and Girls Club and packed meals with Feed My Starving Children, carrying the same mentorship spirit into his community that he brings to Strong TIES. Passionate about mission-critical systems and the frontier of agentic AI, Mica Moya is exactly the kind of engineer the future needs: brilliant, grounded, and determined to bring others along with him.

STRONG TIES

SERVICES

Programs

STEAM & Global Citizenship Mentoring. Culturally centered mentoring that pairs young people with role models and provides globally minded educational materials, cultivating empathy, compassion, and cross-cultural collaboration as students grow into engaged global citizens.

Global Stewarts. A global youth storytelling and problem-solving challenge that invites students to pitch bold, one-minute ideas for a healthier planet — building research, media, and communication skills alongside environmental awareness.

STEAM Activation (featured). Our flagship, two-audience offering that turns STEAM concepts into action for both educators and students. STEAM Activation is delivered through three connected components:

- Design Thinking — a human-centered approach to creative problem-solving, from empathy and ideation through prototyping and testing.
- Systems Thinking — the discipline of seeing the whole, understanding how parts interact, and solving problems at their root rather than their symptoms.
- Game On! AI Pathways — sports-powered AI Literacy that meets students inside the identity and culture they already carry as athletes and competitors, teaching autonomous coding, prompt engineering, data analytics, and the critical evaluation of AI while opening doors to STEAM-adjacent careers.

Events

STEAM In The Game — hands-on STEAM experiences that bring learning to life through play, competition, and real-world challenges.

Turn Up for STEAM — high-energy community activations that make STEAM exciting, social, and accessible for young people and families.

Nat'l STEAM Day — a signature day-of celebration spotlighting student work and inviting the wider community into the Strong TIES mission.



STEAM ACTIVATION

Professional Development

For educators, community leaders, and professionals. A workshop series that equips educators, community leaders, and professionals with the methods, tools, and strategies of Design Thinking and AI Literacy — practical, ready-to-use approaches they can bring straight back to their own learners and organizations.

Activation Lab

For students (ages 13–18)

Hands-on lab sessions where students take on real-world challenges using Design Thinking and AI-tools — carrying a project all the way from ideation to prototype, and building the confidence to see themselves as creators and designers of technology, not just its users.

Recent & Summer 2025 - 2026

Summer Camp & Cultural Immersion 2025: Two Weeks, Game On! AI Pathways & Philadelphia Cultural Immersion Summer Camp — June - July 2026.

Recent programming (since July 2025 thru May 2026): a full year of STEAM Activation Design Thinking and Activation Lab sessions.

Summer Camp & Cultural Immersion 2025: Two Weeks, National Geographic Slingshot Challenge, AI Literacy and LA Cultural Immersion.

SCALING AI LITERACY

Strong TIES's ambition reaches beyond a single classroom or camp. In partnership with the cities and schools, we are advancing one integrated AI literacy strategy — three city-aligned programs delivered by two organizations that together span the full pipeline, from a thirteen-year-old's first line of code to a small business winning its next city contract. Strong TIES (a nonprofit) leads the youth and workforce programs; DS Innovation, an SBA-certified Woman-Owned Small Business with active federal AI engagements, leads business certification. The result is a citywide ladder of opportunity in which no learner — or employer — is left out of the AI economy.

01 · PATHWAYS Game On! — AI Literacy Scale-Up

Youth ages 13–18 · Maricopa County schools · Delivered by Strong TIES

Expand our proven Game On! AI Pathways model nationwide, adding two Phoenix-area school or community based partner cohorts each year. Offered in summer over 8-days and 12 weeks implementation. AI integration of sports and innovation experience uses football and basketball as the living laboratory for AI literacy, data science, biomechanics, and college-and-career readiness — led by Dr. Loretta H. Cheeks, Ph.D., and NFL alumnus Byron Evans.

» 60 youth/year · 3 Phoenix sites · AI + financial-literacy credentials · Annual public showcase

02 · AI Workforce Pathways — Ages 18–25

Young adults · Community colleges & workforce pipeline · Delivered by Strong TIES

A 12-week AI workforce development program for young adults who are out-of-school or underemployed. Participants earn micro-credentials in AI Literacy, Data Analytics, and Trust & Safety — aligned to the advanced manufacturing, semiconductor, healthcare, and logistics sectors, in partnership.

» 50 participants/cohort · 2 cohorts/year · Employer-validated credentials · Internship pipeline

03 · AI Ready Phoenix — SMB Certification

Small & mid-size businesses · City vendors & contractors · Delivered by DS Innovation

Six modular half-day workshops for SMBs that hold or seek City of Phoenix contracts, covering responsible AI adoption, AI-assisted compliance tools, data privacy, and workforce AI integration — delivered by DS Innovation, whose federal AI work includes engagements with the U.S. Air Force.

» 100 businesses/year · 6 half-day workshops · City vendor certification pathway · Federal-grade curriculum



ARIZONA SLINGSHOT CHALLENGE & AI LITERACY & STEAM ACTIVATION DESIGN THINKING & AI — IMPACT REPORT

Top-Line Impact Metrics

At-a-glance numbers from Arizona's implementation of the STEAM Activation Series.

30

DIRECT CAMP
PARTICIPANTS

12

VIDEO
SUBMISSIONS

9

MENTOR-
COACHES

330

EDUCATORS
REACHED

9,900

STUDENTS REACHED
DIRECTLY

150,000

STUDENTS REACHED
INDIRECTLY

540

INSTRUCTIONAL
HOURS

480

PLANNING & EXECUTION
HOURS

15

SLINGSHOT CHALLENGE
PROJECTS

Empower youth by building strong ties.

6 / 26



GAME ON! AI PATHWAYS

Youth AI Literacy, Synthetic Media & Sports-Powered Workforce Development (Youth Served 120)

STRONG TIES

*Lead / CBO*Metro-Phoenix, AZ
Suburban & Urban

ST. AUGUSTINE HIGH SCHOOL

Urban Partner

New Orleans, LA

HELIUM COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

Rural Partner

40 miles outside Baton Rouge, LA

STEAM ACTIVATION PATHWAY *Design Thinking + AI*

THE PATHWAY

1

EXPERIENCE

Today's PD

Teachers work through the Design Thinking + AI methodology as learners using Strong TIES Challenge Cards and SDG-aligned scenarios.

2

IMPLEMENT

Full-day (flexible) PD + resource suite

Teachers receive the four-document suite, select a subject-specific lab, and leave with a planned unit on their calendar.

3

COACH

Half-day reflection session

Teachers return with student work, troubleshoot together, and refine practice. Builds a community of practice within your school.

Global Stewart & AI Literacy

SUMMER PROGRAM

National Geographic Slingshot Challenge in the Box

Hands-on storytelling and environmental action — University of Arizona, Scottsdale Center



SUMMER PROGRAM

AI Literacy

First of its kind in Arizona





Los Angeles Cultural Immersion

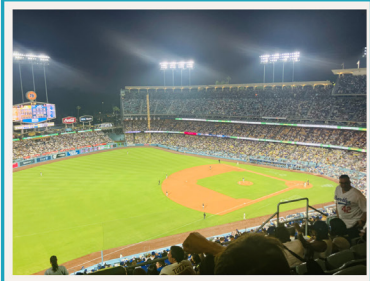
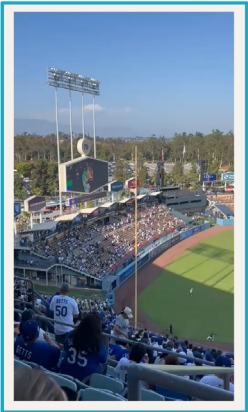


Los Angeles Cultural Immersion

Science, Performance, Culture



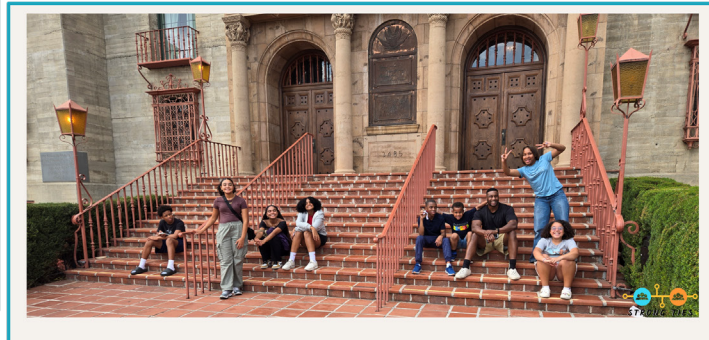
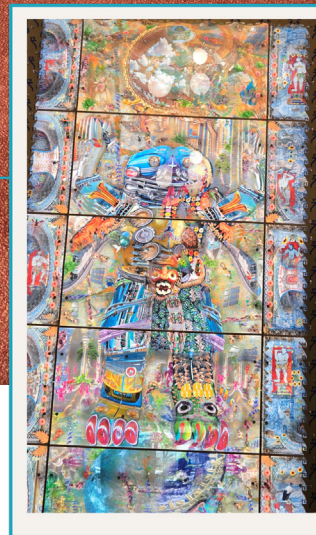
Science, Performance, Culture



Empower youth by building strong ties.



MEMPHIS RAISEMAYHE CULTURE



Learning. Growing. Sharing.

Please join us in celebrating and supporting Arizona's teachers and students as well as the educational programs and organizations that provide opportunities to our communities.



Spotlight on our Community-Building Partners



As we spotlight the champions of our community, Diana Gregory Outreach Services stands tall, marking over 15 years of unwavering commitment to battling food insecurity. What began as a mission to nourish underserved communities has grown into a movement — including a dedicated initiative to improve food accessibility and promote healthy lifestyles among seniors, veterans and military families. For more than a decade, the Veggies for Veterans program has delivered free, fresh produce to those who served our country, reaching over 24,000 veterans and their families since its inception.

Now this beacon of hope has joined forces with Strong TIES, donating fresh fruits to fuel young minds in their pursuit of STEAM education. The partnership beautifully intertwines the fight against hunger with the cultivation of future innovators, addressing multiple UN Sustainable Development Goals in one powerful stroke. By providing nutritious food, Diana Gregory Outreach Services isn't just filling stomachs — it's opening doors to a world of food-related disciplines and careers, from agricultural technology and nutrition science to sustainable farming and food policy, exposing our young people to a buffet of possibilities.

This collaboration reminds us that food security and education are deeply interconnected, and that by addressing both — for students and veterans alike — we're cultivating a generation of problem-solvers equipped to tackle our community's most pressing issues. Diana Gregory Outreach Services continues to sow the seeds of a brighter, one piece of fruit at a time.

A group of approximately ten Black men of various ages are posed for a photo. They are dressed in formal attire, including suits, ties, and a vest. The background is a repeating pattern of the "100 Black Men of Phoenix" logo, which features a silhouette of a person and the text "100 BLACK MEN OF PHOENIX".

EMPOWERING OUR COMMUNITY

100 Black Men of Phoenix is dedicated to empowering and improving the quality of life for African American communities in Phoenix. Our mission is to mentor and empower young men and women through education.

100 Black Men of Phoenix

STEAM ACTIVATION

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



STEAM ACTIVATION

LABS IN COMMUNITY



SUMMER



Philadelphia Cultural Immersion



250 USA



Summer



Memories



POMP AND PARADE

Red, White, & Blue To-Do

Philadelphia, PA, 2026. Strong TIES was invited to be in the parade on behalf of Mother Bethel A.M.E. We made the CBS news.



Mother Bethel A.M.E. Church

**Rev. Carolyn
C. Cavaness**



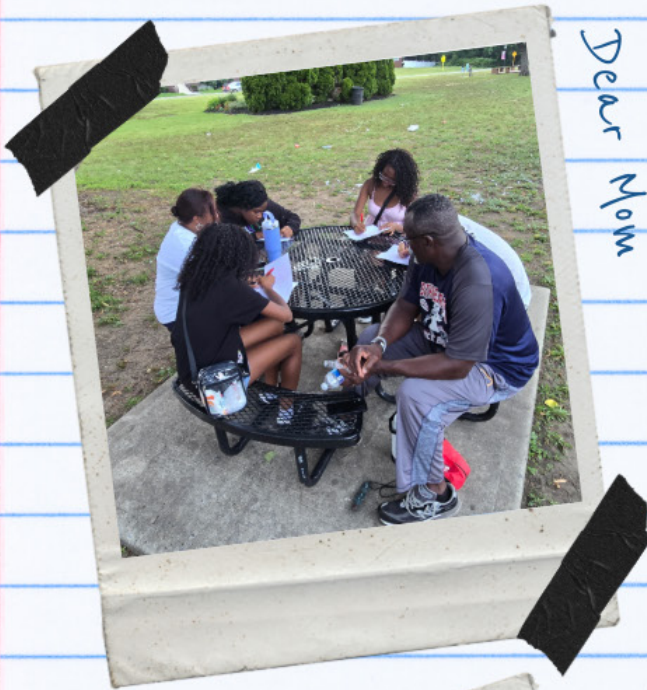
NFL Legends



Little Rock Baptists Church

Pastor S. Mack

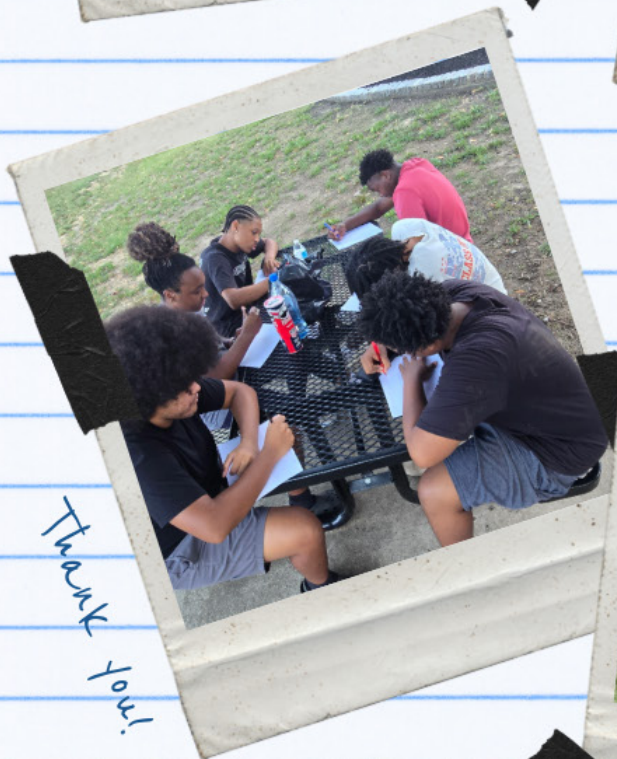
Reflections & Play



Dear Mom



Dear Self



Thank You!



Remembering



GAME ON!

AI PATHWAYS

an AI Literacy and Sports program.

LEARN AI. BUILD SKILLS. CHANGE THE GAME.

WHEN:

 AI PATHWAYS CAMP – WEEK 1	JULY 13 – 16, 2026 MONDAY – THURSDAY	SCOTTSDALE CENTER, THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA (day camp, non-residential)
 AI PATHWAYS CAMP – WEEK 2	JULY 20 – 23, 2026 MONDAY – THURSDAY	SCOTTSDALE CENTER, THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA (day camp, non-residential)
 SHOWCASE, CERTIFICATES & PARENT TRAINING	JULY 24, 2026 FRIDAY	SCOTTSDALE CENTER, THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA (day camp, non-residential)

WHO: AGES 13–18

 **FREE, PLUS BREAKFAST, LUNCH AND SNACKS!**

 www.strongtiesaz.org

 **STRONG TIES**
— ARIZONA —

Of everything Strong TIES delivers, **Game On! AI Pathways** is our flagship priority — the program where our mission is most concentrated and our impact most measurable. It answers the single most urgent gap Arizona has named for its young people, AI literacy, and it reaches the learners least likely to be invited into that future: underserved youth who already see themselves as athletes and competitors. By making football and basketball the living laboratory for AI, data science, financial literacy, and college-and-career readiness, Game On! AI Pathways meets students inside an identity they already own and hands them the technical fluency the AI economy demands. This is not a talent problem — it is a resource problem, and it is solvable.

Our 2026 Workshop Leads

GenAI: Under the Hood & In Your Hands, Errol King
 The Art of Storytelling in the Age of GenAI, Retha Hill, Ph.D.
 Financial Literacy, Joyce Willis

Communication Discussion — “Are You Listening: GenAI Interactions & Impact on Black and Brown Youth”, Neal N. Lester, Ph.D.



OUR TEAM



Sincerely, Thank You. Stronger Together!
Dr. Loretta H. Cheeks, Ph.D.



A Special Thank You to Our 2025–2026 Sponsors

Strong TIES is proudly supported by APS Foundation, APS Community Affairs, National Geographic, the Arizona Community Foundation (ACF), and our generous private donors.

Game On! AI Pathways & Cultural Immersion

This work is made possible by a whole tribe of goodwill folks — Byron Evans, Alva Evans, Kayla Willis, Mark and Teresa Strickling, Mother Bethel A.M.E. (Rev. Carolyn Cavaness), Rutgers University–Camden (President Shields), the Arizona Community Foundation (ACF), Nicky Agnew, Coach Moore, Giovanna Chavez Vincent, Carl Davenport, Jordan Cheeks, Mica Moye, Keith Moye, Dawn Jerome, Dianne Hendrickson, Kevin Palmer of KP Studio for the t-shirt design and artwork, Jasper of AZ Custom Print for print service, The University of Arizona, the Arizona Informant, and the Philadelphia Eagles–NFL Legends — and to each of you, our deepest thanks and big love.

Our Community Partners

With gratitude to the Academy of Math and Sciences, Goodyear High School, SciTech, 100 Black Men, the Arizona Informant, the Greater Phoenix Urban League, Rehoboth CDC, St. Augustine High School, Helix Community School, OIC Phoenix, NBA Legend Mr. Sam Stelth, Phoenix Suns Ambassador Mark West, Kwelin Pipkin, Dr. Robert and Mrs. Yvonne Pipkin, Diana Gregory, Michael Kelly, and Robbin Coulon — thank you for walking alongside us.

On the Horizon — Partnerships We're Thrilled to Be Building

The future of Strong TIES is bright, and we're energized by the partnerships taking shape for the year ahead. We look forward with great excitement to the anticipated support of organizations who value the time invested in our deserving youth.





www.strongtiesaz.org

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