

American Airlines and CR Smith Museum launch aviation education program



Students at the CR Smith Museum's annual Aviation Career Day in 2022 were coached on flight simulators by students attending the American Airlines Cadet Academy

[American Airlines](#) has teamed up with [CR Smith Museum](#) to introduce an education program that aims to inspire the next generation of aviation professionals. The multi-year Aviation Career Pathways program will educate students in middle school and high school.

The program provides students with access to aviation STEM education and exposure to career opportunities in the aviation industry. Initially, for grades seven to 12, the program will encompass students from schools across the Dallas Independent School District. According to the press release, the Aviation Career Pathways is currently only serving students in Dallas-Fort Worth. However, the CR Smith Museum has resources available to students around the country and there is potential for the program to expand in the future.

Translating STEM concepts into aviation careers

The program will increase students' exposure to aviation STEM careers and skills. According to the press release, most of the schools in the Aviation Career Pathways program are Title 1 schools in underserved communities.

The CR Smith Museum is an independent nonprofit organization on American Airlines's Fort Worth campus. It understands the challenges faced in such communities and centres solutions to these challenges in its educational approach, the press release said.

"The challenges we see in research and hear from school leaders are threefold. First, one touch point isn't enough. Second, opportunities need to be more than a presentation. And finally, transportation at schools in underserved communities is limited," said Marie Eve Poirier-Harris, Education Director at ¹

the CR Smith Museum. "Aviation Career Pathways brings the programming to the classroom, provides multiple touch points that include hands-on experiences and goes beyond presentations to creating connections with professionals."

The program will help students build confidence in future aviation career opportunities by engaging them in four to seven touch points. These hands-on experiences will expose them to real-world scenarios from which they can learn.

Touch points will range from in-classroom engagements to participation in the CR Smith Museum's annual Aviation Career Day, the press release said. Students will also connect with American Airlines team members who will guide students on this career path.

American Airlines inspiring students

Approximately 15 American Airlines team members are volunteering to coordinate the Aviation Career Pathways program in Dallas. Karon Washington, an American Airlines engineer, works on curriculum development for the program and leads volunteer outreach.

"I didn't have a role model in my immediate family or network of friends who could guide me into a STEM or aviation career," said Washington. "When it came time to decide college majors, I searched 'highest paying job with an undergraduate degree' on Google. That's how I stumbled upon engineering. It was a leap of faith, but that's how I got started."

Washington earned a spot in the engineering program at the University of South Florida and wanted to continue volunteering while in school. That was how he became involved in a nonprofit in the area and the National Society of Black Engineers. Both organizations helped him grow a STEM outreach program that provided engineering education to a local school.

"I want to make sure that kids have a role model," said Washington. "Early exposure makes all the difference. At first, they may not think they can do it because they've never heard about it or known someone who has pursued an aviation career. That all changes when someone who is relatable can connect with them and encourages them to try it for themselves through digestible programming."

Wanting to continue his outreach as a professional with American Airlines, he said, "When the CR Smith Museum's education team came to me with this program, I was all in."

"With multiple touch points, kids enjoy having an outlet that lets them get away from things that may be happening around them. Plus, it reinforces confidence and helps increase the chances that they pursue the subject or career in the long run," Washington added.

The Aviation Career Pathways program leaders are seeing the impact of their work through in-person feedback and preliminary survey results. According to the press release, survey results showed a 32 percent increase in students' interest in pursuing a career in the airline industry from those who were previously unsure and had no desire to work in aviation before the program.

"With a focus on equity, inclusion and belonging in our organizations, serving these students and providing them with the resources they may not otherwise have access to is something that can be life-changing for this generation and their families," said Poirier-Harris.