2017
YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IMPACT REPORT
Developing Conservation Leaders of Tomorrow
Imagine if we could re-introduce outdoor time into the school day, redefine educational outcomes to include civic and community engagement, and empower the next generation to tackle the environmental challenges facing the world today.

ANGELA BRISON
Director of Youth Engagement

This year has proven to be an outstanding year for Youth Engagement at The Nature Conservancy. We have made extraordinary advances in empowering the next generation of conservation leaders and I’ve been amazed at the impact that our efforts have made on students, families, educators, and the communities they call home. This year, our work has impacted over 2.2 million young people—by delivering advanced environmental science curriculum and training for students, offering volunteer opportunities for young people to take action for nature in their communities, and providing paid high school, college, and post-college internships. This has been an impressive year. As we continue to redefine educational outcomes to include civic and community engagement, to re-introduce outdoor time into the school day, and educate young people about the importance of nature to their everyday lives, we know we are creating the leaders of tomorrow by improving lives today. We are so grateful we have you as a partner in cultivating the next generation of nature champions and growing communities where people and nature can thrive.

Sincerely,

Angela Brisson
Director of Youth Engagement
The Nature Conservancy
Results & History

By helping youth learn about nature and the benefits it provides, engaging youth in volunteer service in their communities, and building career pathways for young people to enter the conservation workforce, we are achieving our vision to engage and empower the next generation of conservation leaders. For more than twenty years, The Nature Conservancy has been ensuring that young people from all backgrounds gain the necessary mentoring, leadership, education, and critical workplace skills needed to become a force for nature. By working to change the face of the conservation movement, we are creating the leaders of tomorrow by improving lives today.

Bolstering Nature Champions for the Future

Top: High School interns and their mentor examine healthy oyster clusters in the marine sanctuary section of Ninigret Pond, the largest of nine salt ponds in southern Rhode Island. Bottom: A college intern studies oyster genetics in the Center for Biotechnology and Life Sciences building on the University of Rhode Island campus.

How We Work

Three-Strategy Approach

• Learning: by utilizing digital technology to deliver standards-aligned environmental science curriculum and lesson plans, we are helping students understand nature’s benefits and learn the science behind how nature works.

• Action: by developing and growing youth volunteer opportunities, we are empowering young people as social change agents and helping them implement solutions to environmental challenges in their communities.

• Leadership: by creating a conservation career pathway that begins with high school and college internships, culminating with two-year post-collegiate fellowships, we are preparing students to join the environmental workforce.

2017 IMPACT

2.2M students gained environmental, science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) skills

46K young people gained direct access to nature through building & revitalizing urban greenspaces & gardens

560 future conservation leaders gained professional training and direct, real-world work experience in nature
We saw unprecedented growth with our innovative digital education platform www.natureworkseverywhere.org that provides free, high-quality science curriculum to educators and students across the United States. The curriculum helps students build critical thinking and problem-solving skills while simultaneously engaging them as social change agents to address environmental challenges in their communities.

Serving a Critical Need in the Classroom

Top: A flooded church parking lot in Detroit, Michigan. Bottom: Middle school students view Nature Works Everywhere virtual field trips. This year 200,000 students traveled to shores, Rainforest Edge, and learned from 60 STEM professionals through virtual events. These events allow students to travel around the world without leaving the classroom.

Educator’s Toolkit for Sustainable Urban Design

How can we use sustainable solutions, including natural infrastructure, to improve the health and resilience of people across the nation? As communities around the world rapidly urbanize and work to adapt to the impacts of natural disasters, the answers to this question are more important than ever. That’s why The Nature Conservancy has launched efforts across the nation to engage young people in the creation of natural infrastructure that mitigates the impacts of natural disasters like flooding. In 2017, thousands of students learned how nature is a critical tool to improve the resilience of their local communities. Through a project-based learning toolkit and curriculum created to help schools, community leaders, business owners, and others understand the benefits of innovative, sustainable urban design, the Conservancy is activating our next generation in cities across the country to address challenges to their communities’ health, resilience and well-being. The toolkit gives teachers, students, and families the information they need to better understand natural infrastructure and determine the best type of project for their location; conduct feasibility studies for school-and-community-based sustainability projects; identify suitable community partners and fully incorporate their green projects into their classroom.

“[Nature Works Everywhere] teaches [students] to be a citizen at different scales; the desk, the classroom, the school, the community. Always keeping in mind, if everyone behaves like me, how would the world be?”

TEACHER
Nature Works Everywhere

2017 IMPACT

2.2M students gained environmental science knowledge from Nature Works Everywhere

200K students received an immersive learning experience through three virtual field trips

5 new curriculum units, enhanced urban conservation & sustainability resources for teachers & students

6 new videos highlighting original project-based science for grades 3-12

Top: A flooded church parking lot in Detroit, Michigan. Bottom: Middle school students view Nature Works Everywhere virtual field trips. This year 200,000 students traveled to shores, Rainforest Edge, and learned from 60 STEM professionals through virtual events. These events allow students to travel around the world without leaving the classroom.

Spotlight on Learning

[Nature Works Everywhere] teaches [students] to be a citizen at different scales; the desk, the classroom, the school, the community. Always keeping in mind, if everyone behaves like me, how would the world be?”

TEACHER
Nature Works Everywhere
School gardens and urban green spaces provide an inspiring and interactive way to bring the natural world alive for youth of all ages, ethnicities, and backgrounds—and they do so while serving as a model of sustainable living and smart, ecological design for the entire community. For years, The Nature Conservancy has joined forces with schools, students, and local environmental groups to develop innovative green infrastructure projects across the country.

Impactful Partnerships

46K

students were inspired to volunteer for nature at their schools and within their communities

55

school gardens and green spaces were built or revitalized in 23 cities across the United States

2017 IMPACT

Combating Community Flooding

Students at Walter B. Saul High School didn’t know when they started the 2016-17 school year that they would dive headfirst into an innovative, cross-sector venture with The Nature Conservancy to design and construct a resilient water management system, addressing the school and surrounding communities’ storm water flooding challenges. Students worked alongside Conservancy professionals to incorporate natural infrastructure into their campus, and connected with talented mentors and professionals while gaining hands-on experience in creating healthier, more resilient urban environments.

“[Gardens] are the one place [students] find solitude. It’s the one place they feel relaxed, it’s the one place that they don’t feel the stress of urban living and a lot of the things going on in their home life. It’s a place without judgment and it’s a place with smells, colors, and tastes that connect them to the natural world. Without it they don’t go outside.”

JAMES JILER
Executive Director of UrbanGreenWorks & Garden Project Lead, Miami Northwestern High School

" relatively unpopulated neighborhood. It’s a place where they can have some privacy and probably have a little bit more exposure to nature. That’s important for the students..."
Conservation Career Pathways

The Nature Conservancy's career pathway program offers young people from communities and backgrounds underrepresented in conservation the unique opportunity to fully engage in protecting and revitalizing natural environments while building critical professional skills and learning how their actions can positively impact our shared future. High schoolers from around the country worked in paid internships on Conservancy-owned nature preserves for four weeks during the summer, where they were immersed in everything from water quality monitoring and bird banding to shellfish restoration and community outreach. College interns gained professional experiences in conservation science, corporate engagement, marketing and outreach, business management, information technology, urban sustainability, and more. Building on the success of these programs, in 2017 we launched a pilot of a post-collegiate fellowship program, building the final rung of our career ladder. These foundational professional experiences are designed to spark a life-long interest in the environment while building professional skills and networks to help young people be highly competitive as they apply for college and enter the workforce.

Spotlight on Leadership


Conservation Career Pathways

We know that providing paid professional opportunities for young people of color is essential to building a diverse and inclusive conservation movement. This year, two young leaders participating in our career pathways programs witnessed first-hand the power of nature and how they can make a life-long career in the field.

Growing up in New York City, Gustavo Figueroa did not have much opportunity to meaningfully engage with nature until he started working for The Nature Conservancy as a high school intern in 2015. After his experiences working on invasive species removal and tree health monitoring, Gus found inspiration in nature and pursued an environmental studies degree in college. Gus has always known the importance of conservation, but throughout his undergraduate work, he felt uneasy about pursuing his career goals because of the homogeneity within the field. Relieved when he entered the Conservation Career Pathways Program, he says, “programs like [these] highlight the lack of diversity and representation in the environmental field. It’s a call to action for NGOs and other organizations to engage people of color, meet them where they are, and involve them in the environmental principles that relate to them.” In 2017, Gus was an inaugural participant in an effort by the Conservancy to build the final rung of our career ladder. Developing critical professional skills, Gus is the first program alumnus to work in a full-time, paid fellowship position with the Conservancy.

For young leader Samia Alkhalili, her relationship with nature didn’t blossom until joining the Conservancy’s high school internship program in 2017. After participating in the program she “began drawing connections from nature and the environment to [her] everyday life and developing a deep passion for it.” The program opened her eyes to the many careers that benefit the environment and how she can join the movement. After her experience working in New Jersey banding osprey, she not only wants to help nature, but also wants to “empower the next generation [and] inspire others to feel the same passion.” Building from her experiences with The Nature Conservancy, Sam wants to work for an organization that protects wildlife.

2017 IMPACT

560 participants in the Conservancy’s Career Pathway strategy
67 Conservancy chapters and country programs hosted high school and college interns
16 alumni of the Conservancy’s college & high school internship program continued in additional paid internships and fellowships

Diversifying the Conservation Movement
Youth Engagement Around the World

From the United States to Canada, Hong Kong to China, Great Britain and beyond, The Nature Conservancy is making huge strides to empower the next generation of leaders all around the globe.

SEAS: Supporting Emerging Aboriginal Stewards Community Initiative

Through innovative education programs that combine Indigenous and western modes of learning in Canada, SEAS is engaging, and preparing Indigenous First Nations youth to become the next generation of leaders and land stewards in their communities and territories.

Leveraging Existing Strategies

The Nature Conservancy’s China Program is building from a 20+ year history of empowering the next generation of conservation leaders in the U.S. to design and launch a comprehensive youth engagement program in China that will focus on building learning, service, and leadership opportunities for young people. This year in Hong Kong, students worked on projects promoting renewable energy, sustainable farming, and redistribution of food waste, among others.

China & Hong Kong

Clockwise from center: SEAS Coordinator and intern wash poison root during a SEAS internship field trip to Steep Creek near Klemtu, British Columbia, Canada. A fire mentor gears up for work in Osceola National Forest. A GulfCorps worker examines species in the coastal streams of southern Mississippi. Students in Shenzhen, China build a rain garden to address local stormwater management issues.

Engaging YouthCorps in the Gulf Coast

The Nature Conservancy is working with partners from The Corps Network, Student Conservation Association, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), U.S. Forest Service, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to create and provide hundreds of ecosystem restoration and wildland fire-fighting jobs for young people. The Fire Mentor and GulfCorps programs have already restored nearly 100,000 acres and have plans to create over 300 restoration jobs over the next three years. The mission is to protect and restore the Gulf’s lands and waters while recruiting, training, and certifying young people in coastal conservation and providing fire mentoring to future wildland firefighters, creating another pathway for young, diverse leaders.
Looking Ahead

We are committed to marshalling our scientific expertise and strong partnerships with teachers, schools, and communities to drive meaningful change through hands-on applied learning, internships, mentoring, and job placement programs. At our core, we believe these experiences are critical to fostering a community conservation ethic that will last a lifetime.

The statistics about youth and nature are sobering—there are 2.4 billion young people between the ages of 4 and 24 worldwide, and by 2030, 60% of people living in cities will be under the age of 18. The current generation is growing up more disconnected from nature than any previous generation. Those who aren’t exposed early and often to nature are less likely to see themselves as stewards of the planet as they reach voting age and begin to make decisions about the future of our natural resources.

Building Upon Success

We recognize young people as vital ambassadors for the planet who can energize our conservation work, help us protect and restore natural systems and transform our relationship with the planet.

ANGELA BRISSON
Director of Youth Engagement, The Nature Conservancy

"We understand nature’s benefits, 330K youth volunteers, 5400 paid internships & fellowships.

2025 GOALS

Our Supporters

Thank you for helping us engage and empower the conservation leaders of tomorrow by improving lives today.

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The John G. & Jean R. Gosnell Foundation
Daphne and Stuart Wells

Evaluating Our Methods

Each of the programs with The Nature Conservancy’s Youth Engagement strategy is measured quantitatively and qualitatively through accredited third-party evaluators at New Knowledge Organization.

Our methods track:

1. Students’ knowledge of nature’s benefits
2. Teacher engagement and the impacts of professional development
3. Students’ actions and the impacts of those actions on the community
4. Conservation related college and career paths students pursue
5. Student leadership, cultural competency, self-efficacy and critical thinking skills
6. Student development as social change agents in their communities
7. Conservancy staff enrichment and personal growth
Young people are our future, and the key to unlocking a sustainable planet. This is why Linda and I support college internship opportunities in conservation and marine research, especially for young leaders not typically represented in these fields. The collaboration between The Nature Conservancy and Mote Marine Laboratory is providing access and training to the next generation of conservationists while advancing important coral restoration and resilience work. This partnership is important to fostering a world where people and nature thrive together.

KEITH D. AND LINDA L. MONDA

A group of young coral gardeners from Grenada plant young staghorn corals grown in from coral nurseries.
To learn more about the Conservancy’s youth engagement work, visit: nature.org/youth

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