



Youth Engagement

2015 Annual Impact Report





Thank you for helping to make this a remarkable year for Youth Engagement Programs at The Nature Conservancy. Together we have successfully empowered young people around the world to learn, take action and lead conservation solutions in their communities.

On October 21st, I had the privilege of seeing that impact first-hand at Environmental Charter Middle School in Inglewood, California, where I joined students, teachers, and community members to build a native plant garden in Los Angeles, a city struggling with drought. Not only did we install a drought resistant native plant garden, we educated and empowered middle school students on the role that they play in saving water, supporting biodiversity, and restoring nature to the greater community.

For me, that day was a clear manifestation of our three strategies in action—and a great example of the positive impact that we have achieved across the country and around the world. Not only were these sixth grade students learning about the benefits that nature plays in their everyday lives, they were taking action to protect it. For the next three years, these young people will continue to take action by caring for the garden to ensure it thrives into the future. The middle school students were guided throughout the day by high school students who participated in our summer internship program. These high school students exemplified what we mean by leadership by carrying forward the conservation lessons they learned in their summer internship and inspiring their younger peers to action.

Understanding the role that nature plays in our everyday lives is the first step to protecting our natural resources, and our efforts to educate today's youth on a large scale ensures that the next generation grows up with a conservation ethic. Empowering youth to take volunteer action on behalf of the environment ensures future advocates for our natural resources. And, training and supporting youth as they embark on their college and professional careers in conservation ensures that our future leaders will represent the rich cultural and ethnic diversity of our nation's largest cities.

I am truly inspired by the positive impacts that we have been able to achieve this year in building stronger communities, a healthier world and an educated generation of young people, and I look forward to continued work together empowering the next generation of conservation leaders.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Brigitte'.

Brigitte Griswold
Director of Youth Engagement Programs
The Nature Conservancy

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Executive Summary

By 2030, 60 percent of city residents, who make up the majority of the world's population, are predicted to be under 18. Today's youth are growing up more disconnected from nature than any previous generation. If not exposed early to nature, they will be less likely to see themselves as stewards of the planet as they reach voting age and make decisions about the future of our natural resources.

The Nature Conservancy is meeting this challenge head-on with a determined focus to help youth learn about nature and how it works around them; engage them in volunteer service to make positive change in their communities; and build career pathways to strengthen the conservation workforce.

This year, we have significantly expanded the Conservancy's Youth Engagement Programs—harnessing today's technology to bring interactive, nature-based curriculum into the classroom, increasing the number of volunteer opportunities available; and securing vital internship slots for youth to experience nature and see first-hand how it can grow into a life-long career.

It is critical that we continue to build upon this success to prepare today's youth with the knowledge, experience and connections to meet the challenges that will define their generation.

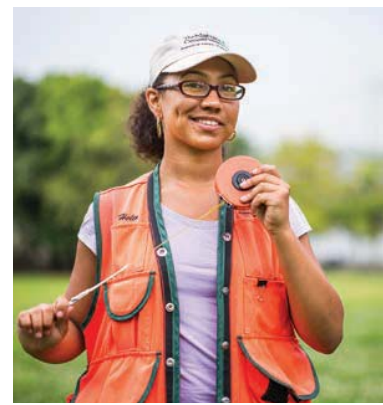
1M students gained environmental science knowledge focused on nature's benefits through the use of our digital education curriculum

205,000 students learned about global conservation strategies directly from leading Conservancy scientists through virtual field trips

14,200 youth took volunteer action to address environmental challenges in their communities

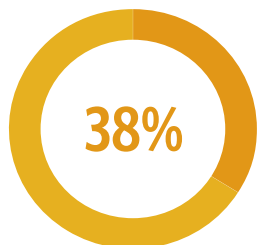


733 students and mentors gained paid conservation work experience and professional training through Conservancy internship programs



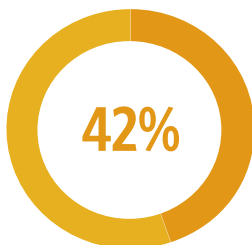
Our Impact by the Numbers

LEARN



OF SCHOOLS THAT USE OUR CURRICULUM ARE SUBURBAN

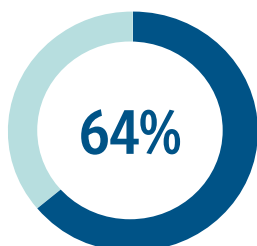
33% are urban and 29% are rural



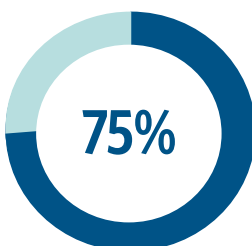
OF SCHOOLS THAT USE OUR CURRICULUM ARE MIDDLE SCHOOLS

39% are elementary and 19% are high schools

ACT



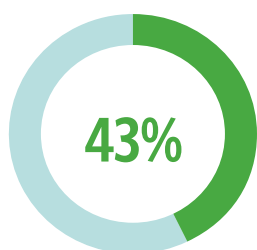
OF STUDENTS AT SCHOOLS SUPPORTED BY OUR GARDEN GRANTS QUALIFY FOR FREE OR REDUCED LUNCH



OF GARDENS BUILT AT SCHOOLS THIS YEAR WERE NEW GARDENS

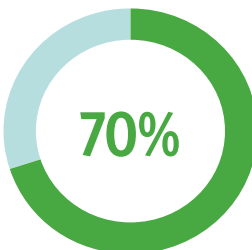
25% were revitalizations of gardens not in use

LEAD



OF OUR STUDENTS VOLUNTEER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL CAUSES IN THEIR COMMUNITIES;

14 times the national average



OF OUR INTERNSHIP PROGRAM ALUMNI BELIEVE THE LOSS OF NATURAL AREAS IS EXTREMELY SERIOUS;

over three times the national average

Evaluating Our Methods

Each of our programs within our Learn, Act and Lead strategies is measured quantitatively and qualitatively through accredited third party evaluators: Life Long Learning Group and New Knowledge Organization.

Our evaluations track:

- Student knowledge of conservation
- Teacher engagement and impacts of professional development
- Actions taken by students and the impact of those actions on the community
- College and career paths students pursue in conservation
- Student leadership, cultural competency, self-efficacy, and critical thinking skills
- Student development as social change agents in their communities
- Conservancy staff enrichment and professional growth

Past third-party reports for our programs are available upon request. Reports for our Learn and Act strategies for this year will be available in summer 2016. Reports for our Lead strategy will be available in early 2016.

2015 Outcomes and Our Strategies in Action



Learn



Act



Lead



2015 Outcomes

Learn

Harnessing the power of technology to bring nature to life in the classroom for millions of youth

This year, we have significantly grown the reach and impact of our Nature Works Everywhere digital learning platform to provide innovative standards-aligned curriculum to more educators and classrooms.

The curriculum, designed to help students learn the science behind how nature works and how to take action to protect it, demonstrates nature's benefits to students and connects them to global challenges to protect our natural systems.

The curriculum has reached 1 million students this year, which represents considerable growth in reach during a single school year. Since the program's launch in 2012, our digital learning resources have reached over two million students.

Additionally, we have developed three new standards-aligned lesson plans designed for the high school level, which will be completed by January 2016. This represents the program's first systematic expansion to provide curriculum for high school students and teachers. We are also creating four new videos to support the project-based learning gardens curriculum. And, we delivered four virtual field trips, during which students learned about environmental science and virtually "visited" some of the world's most stunning natural areas, accompanied by top Conservancy scientists.

Our Impact at a Glance

- 1 million students reached through digital curriculum
- 205,000 students learned about global conservation strategies from top Conservancy scientists through three virtual field trips
- 4 new gardens educational videos in development
- 4 virtual field trips provided
- 3 new curriculum units in development

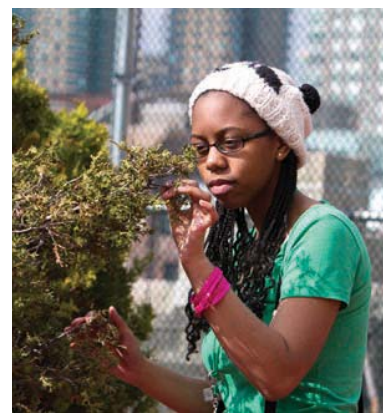


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Our Impact In Action



© Ian Shive

Learn: Advancing conservation through digital education



© Karine Agner

Conservancy Scientists Educate and Inspire — Stephanie Wear

Stephanie Wear is a lead scientist for coral reef conservation at The Nature Conservancy. Stephanie's science and work focus on building sustainability for people and the coral reefs they depend on.

This year, Stephanie had the opportunity to share her passion for conserving our oceans and the resources they provide with students through a virtual field trip to the coral reefs of Palau.

View the recorded virtual field trip to the coral reefs of Palau at natureworkseverywhere.org/#events.

"I don't work to protect the environment for the environment's sake. I work to protect it for the billions of people that require clean air, clean water, and a healthy ocean to survive. I do it for my children and their children."

— Stephanie Wear, on why she's passionate about sharing nature with the next generation

Our Impact In Action



© Debby Thomas

Learn: Advancing conservation through digital education



© Michael North

Conservancy Scientists Educate and Inspire — Charles Oluchina

Born in Nairobi, Charles Oluchina grew up in Kenya. His father's work as a physician carried the family from the western Rift Valley to coastal Mombasa. Charles's passion for conservation was informed by the diversity of the regions he grew up in and experiences on the land and waters.

After earning a degree in natural resources management, Charles gained extensive conservation experience with USAID before joining The Nature Conservancy's Africa program in 2012.

This year our Nature Works Everywhere program hosted a virtual field trip with Charles, during which thousands of students from across the U.S. tuned in live to learn directly from Charles how people and nature work together in the deserts and grasslands of Africa.

View the recorded virtual field trip to the deserts and grasslands of Africa at natureworkseverywhere.org/#events.

"Thanks for providing me the opportunity to share the beauty, purpose and promise of nature, now and into future, with tomorrow's conservationists."

— Charles Oluchina, on his opportunity to take thousands of students on a virtual field trip to discover his native Africa

2015 Outcomes Act

Growing volunteer opportunities for thousands of youth to become conservation change agents in their communities

Youth who spend hands-on time in service to nature, in the company of others, are more likely to develop the aesthetic, emotional and social values that lead to deep personal commitments to conservation.

This year, we expanded conservation stewardship opportunities for youth in their own communities, addressing challenges like climate change, air and water pollution, human health and quality of life. Implementing natural solutions like building community or school gardens helped benefit families, neighborhoods and the planet by empowering youth to care for their local environment. In the coming years, we will expand opportunities for youth to take environmental action in their communities, whether by planting and stewarding trees to improve air quality and reduce heat island effect, or by growing native pollinator plants to save water and increase biodiversity.

We built 20 school gardens in urban neighborhoods in New York City, Philadelphia, and Los Angeles this year. In the spring of 2016, we will award an additional 50 grants to schools across the U.S., more than doubling the number of grants provided in one school year from 20 to 50, and scaling the availability of grants to more schools across the country. Across the Conservancy, we empowered 14,200 students to take volunteer action to address environmental challenges and protect our natural resources around the world.

Our Impact at a Glance

- 225,000 students reached with project-based learning opportunities through school gardens curriculum
- 14,200 students took volunteer action to address environmental challenges in their communities
- 3,000 students gained direct access to nature and contributed to natural infrastructure solutions through school gardens
- 20 new urban school gardens built
- National expansion of school gardens program



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Our Impact In Action

© Apples and Honey Photography

Act: Strengthening communities through volunteerism and service learning



© Apples and Honey Photography

Environmental Charter Middle School, Inglewood, California

The Environmental Charter Middle School campus in Inglewood, California is steps away from some of the most congested freeways in Los Angeles, and 95 percent of students qualify for free and reduced lunch.

This fall, the students, along with community volunteers, transformed a concrete parking lot outside their school into a vibrant green space, bringing the benefits of nature to the school and to the greater community. By rolling up their sleeves and getting their hands dirty to plant drought resistant plants, the students built a rich learning environment for themselves, their classmates and future students, and created the opportunity for them to not only understand the importance of conservation, but to take action to make a difference in their neighborhood and solve local environmental challenges like water scarcity and lack of green space.

This year, we have made this kind of impact in 20 other urban schools and communities around the U.S., expanding our school garden grants program nationally.

“The Nature Conservancy is helping our school create a living campus that serves as a safe, healthy and vibrant oasis for our students to learn in, while strengthening their local community.”

— ECMS-Inglewood Principal Beth Bernstein-Yamashiro

Our Impact

In Action



© Jonathan Grassi

Act: Strengthening communities through volunteerism and service learning



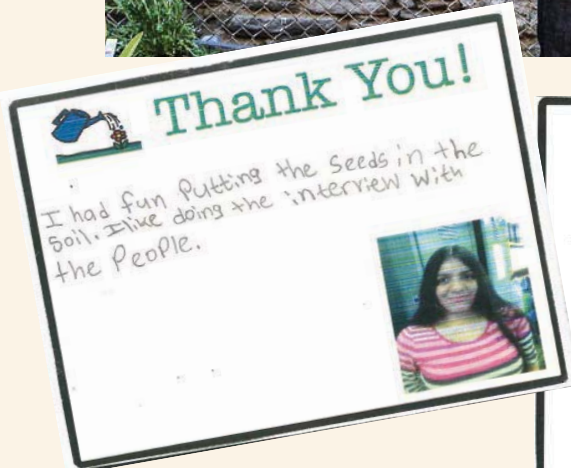
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PS 811x — The Academy for Career and Living Skills, South Bronx, New York

PS 811x — The Academy for Career and Living Skills is a special needs school for high-school-aged students in the South Bronx, NY, and 85 percent of students qualify for free or reduced lunch.

Pictured above is Lamont, a student at PS 811x, and his teacher Ms. Paula. This year, Lamont used his significant talents to identify an environmental challenge in his community and implement a natural solution to address it.

The issue nature helped Lamont address related to a food desert in his community, and students and teachers came together to create a fruit and vegetable garden to ensure fresh food for the greater community. Gardens like this have also been used to demonstrate other natural solutions that help to improve habitat for pollinators, address storm water runoff, tackle air quality issues, and abate heat island effect.



2015 Outcomes

Lead

Creating pathways to careers to empower hundreds of global conservation leaders

The demand for environmental specialists is expected to grow 15 percent between 2012 and 2022, outpacing the national employment average. Yet only 11 percent of underrepresented students pursue natural resource management degrees in college. Broadening participation in conservation career fields is critically important to establishing the next generation of environmental stewards and conservation scientists, and this year, the Conservancy integrated and improved upon its existing internship programs to launch the first-ever Conservation Career Pathway.

Through our Lead strategy, we support a network of green high schools across the nation and provide paid summer internships for high school students in the conservation field. At the college level, we are expanding opportunities that supplement students' area of study with real-world, paid internships in specialized fields of conservation. We are also developing a two-year fellowship program for recent college graduates to provide essential on-the-job work experience, networking, and mentorship opportunities for emerging leaders to be competitive in the workforce. Taken together, this Conservation Career Pathway is having a transformative effect on students' lives, their communities and the future of the conservation workforce.

This year, we welcomed over 700 students and mentors to our high school, college and post-college internship programs across the Conservancy. Our high school interns participated in conservation science and management projects, including water quality testing, bird banding, tree health monitoring, community outreach and shellfish restoration. Our college interns worked in a variety of specialized areas across the Conservancy, including science, marketing and outreach, corporate engagement, business management and information technology.

Our Impact at a Glance

- 733 students and mentors participated in conservation internships as part of our Conservation Career Pathway
- 33 states and 3 countries hosted high school and college interns
- 30 high school internship alumni participated in additional paid conservation internships; an 80 percent increase over last year
- Launched the first-ever integrated Conservation Career Pathway at The Nature Conservancy



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Our Impact In Action



© Erika Nortemann

Lead: Empowering conservation leaders through career pathways



Courtesy of Jerome Cunningham

Jerome Cunningham, Nature Works Everywhere Program Coordinator, The Nature Conservancy

Growing up in Harlem, Jerome Cunningham dreamed of being an astronaut or a basketball player, not of a career in conservation. But with his natural propensity for exploration, Jerome stepped out of his comfort zone and participated in a four-week high school summer internship doing hands-on conservation work with the Conservancy in 2008.

There were three things that pushed Jerome to pursue the internship that would have a profound effect on his life: curiosity, the advice of his friend and alumni of the program Victor Medina, and free boots. "I am the type of person that aims to make good on what I am provided and I embrace a challenge. I don't play football, but if you give me cleats and gloves and ask me to play, I will. I was given boots and was asked to help save the world, so I did."

Jerome went on to major in Communications at the City College of New York. He then completed an internship with the Trust for Public Land, four paid internships with the Conservancy, and a nine-month fellowship with the Conservancy. Jerome now holds a full-time position as Program Coordinator with the Nature Works Everywhere Program, and he feels passionately about his work in youth engagement.

"Our Youth Engagement Programs are absolutely necessary for the progression of the work that The Nature Conservancy does. The Conservancy's goals span generations; we are planting seeds for trees that we may never see fully grow. Who is going to water them when we're gone? I take my work seriously because it is going to outlive me. It has to."

"My internship experiences with The Nature Conservancy provided countless benefits. I was exposed to a world outside of Harlem. I gained more confidence, and I am on a path to leaving the world a better place than I found it."

— Jerome Cunningham

Our Impact In Action



© Mary Ann Griggs

Lead: Empowering conservation leaders through career pathways



© Audubon

Gladys Ruiz, Eastside Conservation Education Coordinator, Audubon Society of Portland

Growing up in New York City public housing during the 1980's, Gladys Ruiz had little opportunity to enjoy nature. "There were a lot of drugs and violence, and I wasn't really allowed to go out much. My mom always said, 'the safest place in the neighborhood is right here at home.'" Gladys's love of the ocean led her to study at the High School for Environmental Studies (HSES), where she was able to participate in an internship with The Nature Conservancy that helped change the trajectory of her life. "The most impactful part of being in The Nature Conservancy's internship program was getting into nature, igniting my passion for educating and engaging youth like me in the natural world. Seeing the importance of serving as a role model made me want to focus my career on helping others engage with nature."

Gladys has worked full-time for Audubon in Portland, Oregon since 2011. With Audubon, she has grown her love of nature and her passion for mentoring young people into a career building diversity in the environmental community—working in programs that connect children to meaningful experiences in nature through community-based camps, and helping connect young adults to environmental careers.

"For me, this work is extraordinarily personal because it provides me with an opportunity to shepherd young people into careers in the environmental field, and completes the circle that I have been working towards my whole life."

"My experience in the Conservancy's high school internship program replaced the fear of the woods with a sense of comfort, practical experience and a huge sense of accomplishment. The program provided more than just an opportunity in nature; it provided a whole list of life skills that I would otherwise never have been able to get at that juncture in my life."

— Gladys Ruiz

Youth Engagement Around the Globe

We are developing a Community of Practice to support youth engagement programs across the Conservancy. Below are a few examples of youth engagement work around the globe.



SEAS (Supporting Emerging Aboriginal Stewards) Community Initiative in Canada is a partnership of the Conservancy, First Nations communities, and local environmental organizations. Every summer at traditional fish camps, Lutsel K'e youth learn not only to harvest and prepare the season's catch, but also conservation science in ecology and fisheries management. This is just one example of how the SEAS initiative is supporting youth by building leadership and creating opportunities for field experiences.



The Nature Conservancy in Hong Kong launched its first youth engagement program in 2015, in partnership with Seeds Training, recruiting close to 200 students and professional volunteers. The program follows students through a 10-week mentorship with corporate professionals who help them build and refine a business plan, and culminates with a pitch day where student teams present their conservation projects, many of which are then piloted and implemented in the community.



The Gulf Coast Restoration Initiative is a partnership with The Corps Network, which employs youth and veterans on restoration projects across the U.S. Gulf Coast. Through this partnership, the Conservancy is helping not only to build capacity for restoration in the Gulf Coast, but also to establish a Conservation Corps which will continue the legacy of inspiring young people to serve their communities and embark on pathways to promising careers.



The Young Indigenous Leaders Program in Australia, launched in 2015, aims to develop conservation leaders from indigenous communities. The program supports and trains young indigenous leaders through a leadership training program in four indigenous communities in Northern Australia. The young indigenous leaders create development plans and attend trainings, leadership workshops and knowledge exchanges, contributing to their growth and development as local conservation leaders.

Thank You

For Your Support



© Karine Aigner

Thank you for supporting the next generation of conservation leaders.

Together, we've ensured a more hopeful future for the planet by educating, engaging and empowering youth to protect the lands and waters on which all life depends.

In the years ahead, we will continue to advance our three-pronged strategy of Learn, Act and Lead. We will increase the number of students reached through our digital education curriculum to keep us on the path to reaching six million students. We will host more school volunteer projects, and expand impact and coordination with partner organizations, to engage 50,000 youth in volunteer action. And, we will expand the number of young people that we serve through our career pathways program to provide 2,000 paid internships and fellowships, as well as implement improved alumni engagement strategies to help convert a greater percentage of alumni to full time employment in the conservation field. Thank you for your support in helping us on the path to achieving these ambitious goals.

The scope of what we have accomplished with your support this year has been instrumental in helping the Conservancy broaden our Youth Engagement Programs and will leave a lasting impact on our country's schools, communities and young people around the world.

Our Supporters



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