

2016-2017

ANNUAL REPORT

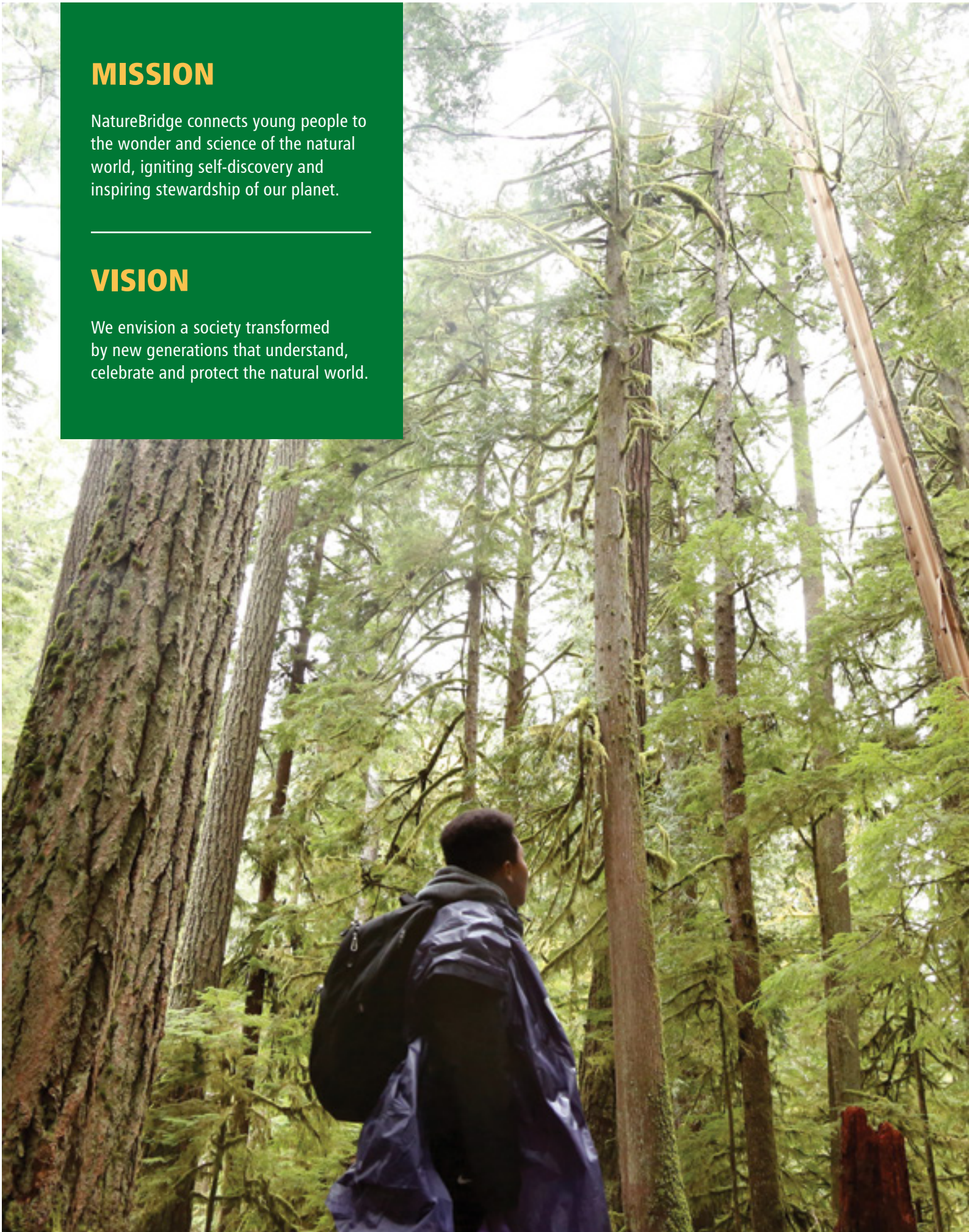


MISSION

NatureBridge connects young people to the wonder and science of the natural world, igniting self-discovery and inspiring stewardship of our planet.

VISION

We envision a society transformed by new generations that understand, celebrate and protect the natural world.



2016-2017

ANNUAL REPORT

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INCREASING

ACCESS

In 2017, we celebrated the 20-year anniversary of the NatureBridge Diversity Initiative. The Initiative launched a new era at NatureBridge—one that focused on providing opportunities for all students to connect with the outdoors, regardless of socioeconomic status. We expanded our reach, deepened our impact and awarded \$1.2 million in scholarships reaching 40 percent of our student body.





FROM FIVE TO 40: THE DIVERSITY INITIATIVE

It started with a plane ride in 1994. Linda Brownstein, a teacher traveling from New York to California, sat beside then NatureBridge President Gary Mitchell. That flight paved a path of engagement for Linda—from joining the board to making her the most pivotal player of NatureBridge’s Diversity Initiative.

As Linda became Board Chair in 1997, she shared a belief that NatureBridge was serving too narrow a segment of the population—a broad array of students was needed to effectively build the next generation of environmental stewards. Financial and cultural barriers meant NatureBridge programs were inaccessible to thousands of kids—kids who might not otherwise be exposed to our public lands.

SOMETHING HAD TO BE DONE SO THAT MORE KIDS COULD DISCOVER, LEARN AND GROW IN OUR NATIONAL PARK CLASSROOMS.

Sporadic past efforts engaged more kids from underrepresented communities, but these short-lived programs withered after allocated funds were used up. We needed a more sustainable solution and a bold, new vision.

A new strategy took shape that revolutionized our operations. With the help of the Department of Informal Education at Stanford University, NatureBridge programs were evaluated and the results laid the foundation for community support.

According to the study, not only were NatureBridge programs effective, but it proved that financially disadvantaged children learned equally as well in our programs as advantaged children, typically not the case in traditional classroom settings.

Equipped with the study’s credibility, Linda guided the board and the organization into a new era of fundraising. With NatureBridge staff, Linda sought grants and individual

donations. She helped schools independently fundraise to make up what scholarships didn’t cover. She solicited equipment donations from outdoor adventure companies.

IN 1997, FIVE PERCENT OF OUR SCHOOLS CAME FROM UNDERREPRESENTED COMMUNITIES. 20 YEARS LATER, THE NUMBER IS NOW 40 PERCENT.

The Initiative’s emphasis on providing environmental education from a multicultural perspective influenced our Core Education Framework, launched educator training programs and continues to impact how tens of thousands of students experience the outdoors at NatureBridge.

Although Linda and other early leaders of the Diversity Initiative no longer stand at the forefront of NatureBridge, their fervor to make the natural world accessible to all lives on thanks to today’s donors, partners and friends.

BUILDING BRIDGES

More than a decade ago, Diana López basked in the splendor of giant Sequoia trees and the Merced River. In her childhood, family trips to Yosemite were hard to come by. But when the Los Angeles native got to bike, hike and swim in national parks, she treasured every second.

Diana's parents missed out on experiences in nature, but they worked hard to give Diana the exposure they never had.

Diana joined the NatureBridge staff after the Educator Development Program (EDP), a NatureBridge program designed to increase representation of those with historical and systemic barriers to the field of outdoor education and its workforce. Now an active program leader, Diana sees EDP's ability to enhance the cultural diversity of NatureBridge's educators, broadening our ability to connect with students.

"When students have educators who look like them or share similar life experiences, it creates an avenue to forge a connection with our educators and deeper connections with nature."

Diana now serves as a senior educator and diversity, equity and inclusion lead at our Southern California campus. Despite opportunities to work at other NatureBridge campuses, she's elected to remain in Los Angeles to help kids overcome the same barriers she faced. Kids like Pheng Lor.

Pheng, a Hmong teen from Fresno, California, had an entirely different childhood.

Born in an era of war in Laos, Pheng's parents saw natural disasters and an unforgiving environment in Thailand's refugee camps. Pheng was raised to be cautious of the outdoors. His interaction with nature was limited to the neighborhood park.

After being exposed to the outdoors through WildLink, a joint NatureBridge and National Park Service program that engages underserved high school students in wilderness and public lands, a new world opened for Pheng. He applied for and received a NatureBridge scholarship to attend our summer backpacking program in Yosemite. The experience was transformative: "I not only found comfort and self-growth in these wild spaces, I discovered their vast potential for learning, team-building and career opportunities."

Today, Pheng is a third-year Conservation and Resource Studies major at the University of California at Berkeley, a decision he traces to his experiences at NatureBridge. He works with Hmong youth in his community, teaching them about environmental and social justice and guiding them on pathways to higher education.

Representation is powerful. Together, we are increasing access to our public lands so that NatureBridge educators like Diana have the power to inspire students like Pheng.



WITHOUT A NATUREBRIDGE SCHOLARSHIP, THE BACKPACKING PROGRAM WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN POSSIBLE FOR ME. BECAUSE OF NATUREBRIDGE, I INTEND TO BUILD BRIDGES AND CLOSE GAPS WITHIN THE ENVIRONMENTAL AND EDUCATION FIELDS FOR COMMUNITIES THAT NEED IT THE MOST.

BY THE NUMBERS

675+
SCHOOLS

\$1.2 million awarded in scholarship funds

43% of students receive scholarship support

30,000+
STUDENTS



BUILDING

CHARACTER

We teach kids environmental science, but the impact of our programs extends beyond environmental education. Social and emotional learning, and the **development** of well-rounded, empathetic and emotionally strong individuals, has a long-lasting impact on our students.



FROM CAVES TO CHARACTER

Blindfolded and uneasy, a group of fifth graders entered the depths of the Spider Cave in Yosemite. Each kid walked with a degree of uncertainty, guiding each other hand to shoulder. One confident young boy named Henry decided it was up to him to help his frightened peers make it through the challenge. "It's okay, I'm right here," he said reassuringly. "We're almost through."

Known for behavior issues, learning challenges and an isolated nature, Henry's chaperone was awed by his willingness to support his peers. Throughout the trip, Henry held branches back for his classmates, looked out for others and became the honorary 'Mother Hen' of his class.

At NatureBridge, Henry experienced new challenges outside the social norms of a traditional classroom. The rules in nature were different, and he discovered a place where he could thrive.

That's the impact that NatureBridge programs have on kids like Henry.

Alexis Llamas, Program Associate for the S. D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation, witnessed Henry's story. The Foundation is committed to helping young people develop the knowledge, skills and character to grow into caring, informed and productive adults.

IN 2017, NATUREBRIDGE RECEIVED A \$3.5 MILLION GRANT FROM THE S. D. BECHTEL, JR. FOUNDATION TO ADVANCE THE ROLE OF SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING IN ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION.

Through this funding, NatureBridge has gained a better understanding of the social and emotional learning outcomes that our programs have on peer-to-peer relationships. Freed from social norms, trust is more easily

formed, and students feel empowered to take on roles different from those at school.

Henry's loved ones may have never seen this side of him emerge if it hadn't been for his time at NatureBridge. Each year, residential environmental education providers collectively impact nearly one million young people in the U.S. With the support of grants like those from the S. D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation, we aim to learn more about the intersection of environmental education and character development so that, like Henry, every student can discover a new side of themselves in the outdoors.




 STORY FROM THE FIELD:

GOLDEN GATE NATIONAL RECREATION AREA

When you're first meeting your student group you have to figure out who's who. Who's the shy kid? Is there a bully? Is there a kid who is going to be especially slow? It can be humiliating to be constantly identified as holding everybody up but there are some easy tricks to help. Educators can let the slowest kid lead or avoid troublesome trails. One week I wondered how many tools I'd need since, among a fairly fit group, was a wheelchair user. I'll call her Pam.

Pam had a muscular degenerative disease that sapped strength from her legs. At the beginning of the week, she committed to use her crutches on Thursday, the day of our longest hike.

Thursday came and off we went. Different kids led hikes throughout the week so it wasn't strange to have Pam take the lead. Except she didn't stop much. Periodically I'd take a break to teach, but Pam was always ready to forge ahead. At each fork in the road, I'd ask her which way she wanted to go. She'd look, then pick the more difficult uphill path.

Eventually we arrived at a trail I'd never taken before. As a rule, educators avoid unknown trails. But, if Pam wanted to take that path, how could I say no?

So upward we went. We discovered the ruins of WWII-era gun placements and a lookout post. We discovered beautiful wildflowers. But then the path steepened to the summit and Pam decided she couldn't go any further. She was mortal, after all.

Kids forget to drink water on trail so we'll frequently stop and make a toast. Pam's stopping point became a marker on my future hikes where I share Pam's story. I encourage students to be grateful for their ability to explore and discover the park and we toast to Pam.

Several years later, Pam's dad chaperoned his younger daughter's NatureBridge trip. He told me that Pam's disease worsened and she can no longer use her crutches. But he also told me that she still talks about the hike when she led her peers and the experience continues to motivate her to get outside and explore. With or without a wheelchair, Pam is unstoppable.

If Pam's interactions were limited to the classroom, she may not have had those memories. And Pam is just one of thousands of kids who experience NatureBridge. There are kids who believe they're stupid because they have difficulty learning in a traditional classroom, but show their brilliance when they get to learn hands-on. There are the bullies who learn empathy and the shy kids who find their voice. Each child we teach, brilliant in their own way, discovers something at NatureBridge. Often times, they discover themselves.

—JOHN CONANT, NATUREBRIDGE EDUCATOR





DISCOVERING

SCIENCE

Our national park classrooms bring learning to life. Students conduct science investigations, collect data and discover what it means to be a scientist.

REAL SCIENCE, REAL PLACES

For many kids, watching a bean germinate in the classroom is their definition of a science experiment.

But what if those kids became scientists in the field, conducting experiments, analyzing the results and sharing findings with peers?

What if students experienced real science investigations? What impact would it have on their academic performance, confidence and love for science?

Ms. Ingrid Dinter teaches college-level International Baccalaureate courses in Biology and Environmental Systems at Ingraham High School in Seattle. For the past seven years, she's seen the impact of NatureBridge programs on her students while at the Elwha River in Olympic National Park.

Dams built in the early 20th century disrupted the Elwha River's ecosystem for more than

100 years. The dams were removed in 2008, creating an extraordinary restoration project where NatureBridge students conduct science investigations, examine the evolving river system, learn about watershed science and understand ecosystem regeneration.

"My students refer back to the Elwha, to this experience, and constantly provide examples of their learning throughout the school year. Introducing them to field work at NatureBridge makes it much easier to teach in the classroom because they've practiced science hands on."

NatureBridge's Education Advisory Council (EAC) drives the content and instructional strategies of our programs and integrates the latest academic research. Launched by Mary Kiely, Ph.D. in 2008, the EAC is NatureBridge's expert group of Ph.D.-level scientists and researchers who work in the fields of environmental science, program evaluation and environmental education.



Thanks to the EAC and our superb educators, NatureBridge students don't just learn about the ecological landscape of our national parks—they become scientists. This experience can impact test scores and advance interest in the sciences. For some, it can lay the foundation for a career in STEM or a life dedicated to protecting the natural world.



STUDENTS WERE ENGAGED IN PRODUCTIVE TALK, EXPERIMENTING AND CURIOSITY. IT'S AMAZING HOW MUCH LEARNING TAKES PLACE WHEN STUDENTS ARE IMMersed IN THE ACTUAL ENVIRONMENT. COMPUTERS, PICTURES, AND VIRTUAL LEARNING ROOMS CAN'T REPLICATE THIS EXPERIENCE.

**TONDRA ODOM, TEACHER,
SAVOY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**



A DAY IN THE FIELD AT PRINCE WILLIAM FOREST

Every student that visits our Prince William Forest campus in Virginia participates in a hands-on science investigation. Through a water quality monitoring project on Quantico Creek, students collect citizen science data that aids the National Park Service in its Chesapeake Bay watershed monitoring.



9:15 a.m.

Students participate in educator-led games and activities before heading out for a day of discovery and science.



10:30 a.m.

After a short hike, students arrive at their first data collection site. They visit multiple stream sites to measure pH, dissolved oxygen, turbidity and water temperature.



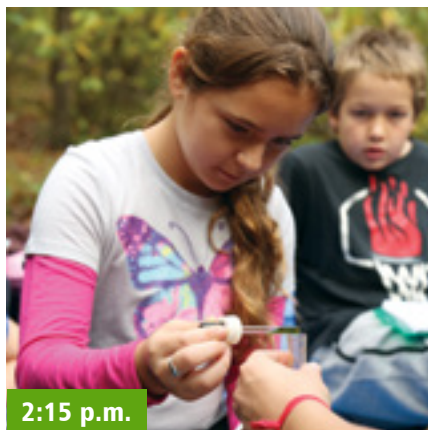
11:30 a.m.

Students collect macro-invertebrate specimens at each site. Some species, like the crayfish seen here, are indicators of creek health. By identifying species and using a pollution tolerance index, students determine water quality.



1:30 p.m.

A student measures dissolved oxygen at the second testing site. Students compare and analyze data collected along different parts of the creek, and educators help students make predictions about water quality in places near their neighborhoods.



2:15 p.m.

A student measures the pH of the water at the third testing site. An abandoned mine in Prince William Forest has led to elevated pH levels in some areas leading to teachable moments about the natural and human history of the park.



3:15 p.m.

Before hiking back to campus, students collect their final data points and evaluate results. Through this hands-on investigation, students practice science process and critical thinking skills.



CULTIVATING

STEWARDS

Developing a new generation of environmental stewards; that was our mission when we opened in 1971 and it remains our mission today.



IGNITING A PASSION

The early 1970s was the golden age of the American environmental movement. The first Earth Day was celebrated and more than 20 million people took a stand for the environment nationwide. The Environmental Protection Agency was established, and the Clean Water Act became law.

For 16-year-old Laurel Rematore, it was a no-brainer to spend her spring break learning about the outdoors at NatureBridge, then the Yosemite Institute, in Yosemite National Park.

Nearly half a century later, Laurel's recollections of NatureBridge serves a testament to its profound impact on her life. She remembers challenge hikes to Vernal and Nevada Falls, gazing at the High Sierra from the top of Sentinel Dome and discovering a frozen ladybug in the snow, just to learn from her educator that the tiny bug was only hibernating and then seeing it come to life in the warmth of her hand.

Laurel's NatureBridge cabin mate remains her best friend 43 years later.

Yosemite became Laurel's go-to place for recreation. Later when she started volunteering for the Yosemite Association (now the Yosemite Conservancy), she found herself wanting to become more involved in what she loved most: the outdoors. She dove in head-first as a volunteer. Ultimately, she joined the staff to lead membership and development efforts. Laurel later spent seven years as the executive director for the Mesa Verde Museum Association in Southwest Colorado.

Today, Laurel serves as CEO of the Great Smoky Mountains Association, supporting the preservation of the park through its active membership of 28,000. Great Smoky Mountains National Park receives more than 11 million visitors each year and is the most visited park in the national park system.

At NatureBridge, Laurel learned that public lands belong to all of us and we each have a responsibility to care for them. She's carried this lesson with her through a career devoted to conservation of the natural world. Over one million NatureBridge alumni later, that lesson is still central to our work.



BECAUSE OF MY NATUREBRIDGE EXPERIENCES, I GAINED THE COURAGE I NEED TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN THE WORLD.



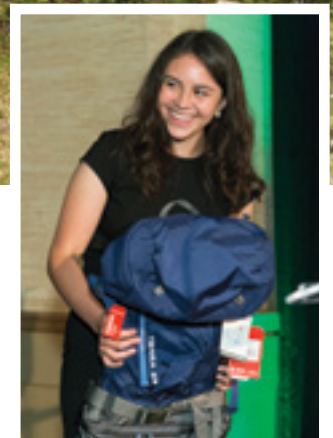
The flames flickered in the campfire as a class of teens at NatureBridge in Olympic National Park stood in a circle, a piece of cedar bark clutched in each hand. One by one, the students symbolically placed their favorite experience of the trip in the fire, watching their piece of cedar crackle and burn in the night.

But for at least one of those NatureBridge students, that flame continued to burn, igniting a passion that would pave the way for a calling she'd never imagined.

Before NatureBridge, 17-year-old Marisa Granados was unsure of her agency in the world. On the path to study architecture, the New Mexico native felt like she was wandering aimlessly. It wasn't until her first NatureBridge trip that Marisa developed an understanding of the natural world.

On a two-week Olympic summer backpacking trip in 2017, Marisa discovered a new side of herself, one with the skills to survive and thrive in backcountry wilderness. Her educator was a pivotal part of her experience, helping her gain confidence, learn about Olympic National Park's landscape and form a deeper connection to nature.

Through NatureBridge, Marisa realized that the natural world was her safe place. She wanted to help others discover their own place in the outdoors and find the passion to protect it. She decided that it was up to her to be a spokesperson for the environment and help others find their own connection to nature.



Marisa Granados at the 2018 NatureBridge Gala in San Francisco.

These experiences directly motivated her to take action in her community. In partnership with the U.S. Forest Service, Marisa developed a handbook and detailed curriculum on how to effectively teach environmental stewardship to middle school students. The handbook is implemented during the eighth grade annual backpacking trip, helping to prepare students for stewardship projects.

Marisa now plans to study environmental engineering and sustainability at Colorado State University and hopes that she can spark a desire to protect the environment in young kids, just as her NatureBridge educators inspired her.

A scenic view of a coastline with a road in the foreground and the ocean in the background. The road is paved and has a metal guardrail. The vegetation is dry and scrubby. The ocean is a deep blue-green color. In the distance, there are some rocky islands or headlands.

LOOKING TO THE

FUTURE

Since 1971, we've served over one million students. But it's not enough to solve the challenges facing our planet today. We envision a society that understands, celebrates and protects the natural world so together we are looking to the future for new ways to innovate, teach and grow.





THE NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE CENTER

In September 2018, we welcome the first students to the phase I launch of the National Environmental Science Center (NESC), our new permanent home on Henness Ridge in Yosemite National Park. This visionary facility will host students, teachers and thought leaders to learn, explore and create new educational benchmarks in one of the world's most iconic national parks.

Designed to meet the highest levels of LEED certification, the center integrates the latest design and energy efficiency concepts to provide a model of sustainability that students can interact with and learn from firsthand. Surrounding trails and movement between buildings are universally accessible allowing all students, regardless of physical ability, to enjoy the beauty of Yosemite National Park. In partnership with the University of California, Berkeley Fire Science Laboratory and National Park Service scientists, we've developed new curriculum, lesson plans and teaching sites on fire ecology and connections to climate change.

The National Environmental Science Center is a declaration that our kids deserve a permanent place to discover, learn and grow in our national parks. It heralds a new era for science-based environmental education, cultivating one million scientists, conservationists and community leaders in its first 50 years alone.



EXPANDING OUR REACH IN THE GOLDEN GATE NATIONAL RECREATION AREA

Every student deserves the opportunity to learn and grow outside, but due to a lack of capacity, our Golden Gate campus in the Marin Headlands is forced to turn schools away.

Supported by the National Park Service and a National Park Centennial Challenge, we launched an effort to expand and enhance our Golden Gate campus in 2017. Through the renovation of historic army barracks, we will increase our reach by 30%. A new science lab will deploy the latest technology to bring science to life for our students as they design hands-on investigations focused on local climate impacts. Improvements to landscapes and teaching spaces, including

the addition of interpretive displays on local history, plants and geologic features, will enhance the student learning experience.

This expansion will enable us to impact the lives of 3,000 additional students per year at our Golden Gate campus, including 1,000 scholarship students. By giving these young people a life-changing experience in nature, we're inspiring them to become stewards of the environment and build a more sustainable future.

To learn more about the NESC and the Golden Gate expansion, please contact Aaron Rich at arich@naturebridge.org.



THIS EXPANSION AT GOLDEN GATE MEANS 3,000 MORE KIDS WILL HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO CONNECT, LEARN AND DISCOVER IN THE MARIN HEADLANDS EACH YEAR. THE EFFECT IS TANGIBLE AND EXPONENTIAL—THOSE STUDENTS WILL CARRY THESE EXPERIENCES WITH THEM FOR THE REST OF THEIR LIVES.

ANNE BAXTER, GOLDEN GATE REGIONAL BOARD

YOU MAKE IT POSSIBLE

Thank you to our donors who gave \$500 and above between July 1, 2016 and June 30, 2017

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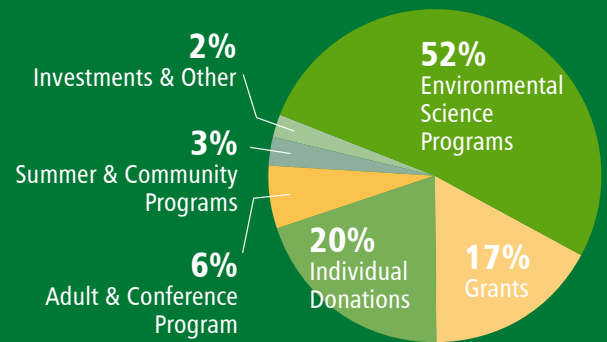
FINANCIALS

REVENUE

Environmental Science Programs	10,159,059
Grants	3,409,399
Individual Donations	3,832,221
Adult & Conference Program	1,182,492
Summer & Community Programs	570,331
Investments & Other	436,039

Total 19,589,541*

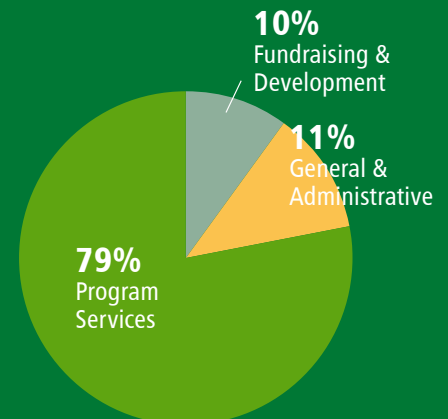
**Total revenue includes \$5,047,398 reserved for construction of the National Environmental Science Center in Yosemite National Park and the Golden Gate campus expansion.*



EXPENSES

Program Services	13,254,402
General & Administrative	1,943,493
Fundraising & Development	1,610,787

Total 16,808,682





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