Acknowledgements


The views, findings, conclusions or recommendations expressed in this publication do not necessarily represent those of the Institute of Museum and Library Services or any other funder.
The WCS Career Lattice supports young people using a three-pronged approach:

CONNECT and recruit in local, historically under-resourced communities through outreach and partnerships

DEVELOP through support services, programming, work experiences, and skill-building workshops

ADVANCE professional journeys through leadership training and tiered professional opportunities

OVERVIEW

WCS Education is committed to inspiring a diverse and inclusive movement of conservation advocates and STEM professionals. Our work with youth is a centerpiece of this mission. Each year, the WCS Career Lattice supports 1,900 youth ages 14 to 24 who participate in volunteer, internship, and employment opportunities across our five parks. This integrated career pathway initiative aims to ensure that youth from historically under-resourced communities gain expanded entry points to opportunities at our parks and access to a suite of professional services and supports.
LATTICING OVER THE YEARS
The Career Lattice has grown and developed since its inception in 2018.

**Number of Youth**
The Lattice supported 677 youth in Education Department positions in 2018, growing to over 1,900 youth across the organization today.

**A New York City Focus**
In 2018, 83% of Lattice youth lived in NYC, which has grown to 92% today because of focused recruitment and community partnerships.

**Breadth of Experience**
The Lattice now supports youth exploring careers in animal care, science communication, research, operations, administration, hospitality, and many other areas that are integral to WCS’s mission.

**Strong Mentoring**
We built a variety of supports for supervisors working with youth. Now, dozens of supervisors participate in training and coaching each year.

**Career Exploration**
The number of youth who lattice into new roles has grown each year, reflecting the increased variety of experiences we offer and our focus on advancing youth into new positions.
**IMPACT IN 2023**

- **1,900** young people ages 14 to 24 held job, internship, and volunteer positions at WCS' parks.
- **92%** lived in New York City's five boroughs.
- **$5M** earned in stipends & wages.
- **76%** would like to work for WCS in the future.
- **60%** planned to pursue a science career.
- **304** youth moved into new roles at WCS between April 2023 and March 2024.
- **87%** of youth felt appreciated at WCS.

*“This has been an incredible opportunity. My internship team was so gracious, kind, and supportive - everyone went above and beyond to welcome me and make sure I was in the loop and constantly learning. I hope to work for the WCS again in the very near future!”*  
- 2023 Intern

WCS volunteers and interns hail from 300 schools, including 146 NYC public high schools.

In spring 2024, we hired an additional 507 youth, including advancing into elevated positions and exploring different opportunities. We call this "latticing in action."
82% of youth identified as people of color compared to 69% of NYC residents

32% of youth were first generation college students

31% of youth age 18+ identified as LGBTQ+

Youth spoke 46 languages other than English.

Spanish was the most common, with 26% of youth speaking this language at home.

*The Other Identity category includes American Indian or Alaskan Native, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, and write-in responses.
In 2023, WCS hosted 419 interns. This is 86 more than in 2022, representing an increase of 26%.

A year full of growth:

More internship opportunities, including new positions in exhibit design, marine research, and advocacy, among others.

Expanded internships in live interpretation, human resources, and ecology research to support more youth.

MORE TO COME IN 2024
Increased support for supervisors with a new training curriculum covering topics like positive youth development.

Internships by department

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Intenships</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Services</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Resources</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“I’m an art student and visiting museums has made me interested in cultural history. My internship includes making historical records accessible to the public, which we need for showing people how the Bronx Zoo has changed over time. I’d like to do something with art in the future, but I’m more and more interested in how we manage our cultural knowledge. This position has given me more lived experience in what those options are.”
Kaylene Crespo

Queens, NY

“I hope to be a conservation veterinarian, working with animals that need more protection. This experience helped me understand how the direct work that we’re doing in the field – the data we collect and interpret – affects how we create policy and make laws and changes. I’m really interested in making sure that the research matters. We’re not doing this if it’s not going to help. We need to act on the data we generate.”

— NYA Intern Supervisor

A leader in the field

WCS’s Internship Initiative received the Angela Peterson Excellence in Diversity Award at the 2023 Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) Annual Conference. We also shared best practices in three presentations attended by youth development professionals. Separate from the conference, we are shaping the future of the industry by leading a proposal submitted with AZA and nine zoo and aquarium partners to study the equitable design and impact of animal care internships.
Over 950 youth work in our zoos and aquarium each year. Part-time jobs are often youths’ first entry into the workforce and these positions are designed to support young people at the beginning of their career journeys. The work experience and resources provided through the Career Lattice ensure that our part-time employees have the skills and social capital necessary to advance into full-time, permanent positions at WCS and other organizations.

What inspires me to keep coming back is the welcoming environment at the Bronx Zoo. Being a Discovery Guide helped me become more knowledgeable about the animals and the environment we live in. This experience helped me break out of my shell and become more confident when interacting with other people in my later positions, as well as in my day-to-day life.

In 2023, part-time staff facilitated 65 tours for 386 new employees. These tours orient new staff to the Bronx Zoo’s 265 acre landscape and WCS’ mission. In 2024, the program will expand to the New York Aquarium.

Youth training youth

Working across different WCS locations and departments has given me career opportunities and learning experiences that I don’t think I could’ve gotten anywhere else. I’ve been able to apply my knowledge and experience to my jobs here and be appreciated for it, as well as build my career with each opportunity I am given. With the networks I have built, I hope to stay with WCS in the future!
As a child, I would visit the zoos and the AMNH all the time for fun. I wanted to be a zookeeper or a paleontologist, but those ideas dropped out of the spotlight for a while. When I started the Discovery Guide program, I remembered how much I missed science activities and my passion to pursue a science career was reignited.

“"I noticed that I’ve become more confident speaking to people in general. For example, my high school had an open house and I was able to speak to every family that came to the school. If this had happened before I was a Discovery Guide, I most definitely would have been too scared to speak up.”

In 2023, youth volunteers facilitated 600K+ interactions with zoo & aquarium visitors.

Each year, the Discovery Guide volunteer program trains 500 youth to communicate about science with the public. Youth volunteers learn about conservation and lead science activities with zoo and aquarium visitors to build their interpretation skills.

Youth Spotlight: Latticing in Action

Desiree Rojas

Bronx, NY

- BZ Discovery Guide, 2022
- BZ Discovery Guide Leader, 2022-2023

Youth Spotlight: Latticing in Action

Anthony Ragone Moletteri

Brooklyn, NY

- CPZ Discovery Guide, 2020
- CPZ Discovery Guide Leader, 2020-2022
- CPZ Retail Sales Associate, 2023

“"As a child, I would visit the zoos and the AMNH all the time for fun. I wanted to be a zookeeper or a paleontologist, but those ideas dropped out of the spotlight for a while. When I started the Discovery Guide program, I remembered how much I missed science activities and my passion to pursue a science career was reignited.”
JIVE

Every year, WCS kicks off the recruitment season with the Job, Internship, and Volunteer Expo (JIVE). This day-long event allows youth to learn about a variety of WCS opportunities, spruce up their resumes, attend career panels, and connect with hiring managers. JIVE provides a welcoming and inclusive space for young people to build the skills and connections that are essential for launching their careers. As of April 2024, 81 JIVE registrants have been hired for positions at WCS. We anticipate this number will grow as we enter our busy season.

In its 8th year, JIVE continues to reach new audiences.

- 800 in-person attendees
- 1400 digital participants

87% were first-time JIVE attendees, and 80% were new to WCS.
- Three-quarters were middle or high school students representing 130 schools.
- One-quarter were college students representing 39 colleges and universities.

YOUTH SPOTLIGHT: LATTICING IN ACTION

Tahsan Latif

Bronx, NY

BZ Discovery Guide, 2024

“It felt really good to get hired at WCS after JIVE. Before attending I knew I wanted to apply for the DG Program and Project TRUE, but only knew the basic aspects of each role. At JIVE, I was able to learn way more about each program and get excited about them.”

85 young people participated in financial literacy workshops, which covered topics like saving, loans, and debit and credit cards.

“At JIVE I learned how to budget my money efficiently. Overall, the financial literacy workshop was a wonderful learning experience.”

— JIVE Attendee
BUILDING COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

We hosted 39 interns from Bronx partner colleges last year and trained many more through part-time jobs.

We continue to build new roles specifically designed for students from our Bronx partner colleges.

We are developing partnerships with a number of Bronx colleges to connect students with opportunities at our parks.

- CUNY Bronx Community College
- CUNY City College of New York
- CUNY Lehman College
- CUNY Hostos Community College
- Fordham University
- SUNY Maritime College

Connecting Classroom Learning with Careers in Animal Research

Our collaboration with the Garden State – Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation and Northern New Jersey Bridges to Baccalaureate aims to support undergraduates pursuing STEM careers. WCS educators mentor students as they design and conduct animal behavior research projects at the Bronx Zoo. This practical exposure allows students to apply theoretical knowledge in a dynamic real-world environment.
Skill Building Workshops & Career Talks

Career Lattice youth have access to a variety of skill building workshops and career talks to support their professional growth. Two 2023 highlights included a tour of WCS’s Wildlife Health Center led by the veterinary team and the new Resume Roadshow series, which was hosted at all five parks. Over 100 youth attended these events, leaving with new career insights, a larger WCS network, and tools to use in their next career steps.

83% of youth indicated that they developed essential workplace skills
93% of youth indicated that they learned about science & conservation topics
81% of youth reported that they increased their ability to inspire people to take action to help the environment
Launching Careers
Years later, WCS alumni apply lessons learned.

Sharon Ferguson
Research Associate in Conservation Policy, The Center for American Progress
- BZ Merchandise Associate, 2016
- WCS Future Leaders Program Intern, 2016-2018
- BS in Animal Science from Cornell University, 2022
- Research Associate in Conservation Policy at The Center for American Progress, 2023-present

“...I always wanted to work with wildlife, but in high school I wasn’t sure how. During my zoo internship, I met a wildlife inspector from the Fish and Wildlife Service! That kind of meet-and-greet was so valuable because I could ask questions about how they ended up where they were. My internship granted me the clear self-image I needed to turn my enthusiasm for wildlife conservation and natural resource management into a career.”

Zainab Farooqi
Fulbright Scholar (English Language Arts Teacher), South Korea
- WCS CUNY Cultural Corps Intern, 2020
- BS in Psychology from CUNY Queens College, 2022
- Fulbright Scholar teaching English Language Arts in South Korea, 2023-present

“My internship really helps in my current job. At WCS, I created lots of social media posts and helped design educational materials for students, which has now truly enabled me to make engaging and exciting content for the students in my classroom.”

Youth Networking Nights
Our June event at Treetop Adventure and November event at Holiday Lights offered opportunities for youth to practice networking and expand their professional connections. Fun, inclusive activities and conversational prompts allowed youth to connect with their peers and experienced professionals and build their social capital. Nearly 170 youth participated.
304 youth moved into new positions. This number grows each year as more youth build connections within WCS.

**LATTICING IN ACTION**
April 2023-March 2024

**2018**
CPZ Project
TRUE Field Research Intern

**2019**
NYA Discovery Guide Leader

**2021**
CPZ Admissions Associate

**2022**
BZ Wild Encounters Team Leader
NYA Sharks Intern

**2023**
NYA Animal Keeper (full-time)

**YOUTH SPOTLIGHT: LATTICING IN ACTION**

**Heily Grisales**
Wild Animal Keeper, New York Aquarium

Brooklyn, NY

“I am eternally grateful to WCS, the people I have met, and the wild journey I have been on since I was a kid. Over the years, I have had a variety of experiences across WCS programs and parks: teaching visitors about conservation as a volunteer, researching fish in New York’s salt marshes, helping families get into the parks through admissions, connecting guests to our animals at Wild Encounters, caring for sharks, and so on. Now I have my dream job: I am a shark keeper. I have a feeling this is only the beginning. There’s so much more for my career with WCS.”
"I often reflect on my time as a WCS volunteer when I’m working with youth today. Many of our youth have their first experiences with public speaking and customer service here—knowing how nerve-wracking this was for me makes me more empathetic. As I aim to help them improve their skills, I also make sure to highlight what they’re excelling at. Recognizing their successes and hard work builds their confidence and motivates them to become better in the future."

Cayla Turner
Youth Development Coordinator, New York Aquarium
Brooklyn, NY

Youth Spotlight: Latticing in Action

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2020</th>
<th>2021</th>
<th>2022</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PPZ Discovery Guide Volunteer</td>
<td>NYA Behavioral Husbandry Intern</td>
<td>NYA Visitor Engagement Associate</td>
<td>NYA Youth Engagement Asst. Coordinator</td>
<td>NYA Youth Development Coordinator (full-time)</td>
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</table>

126 volunteers became interns
36 interns became part-time employees
25 youth became full-time employees

126 volunteers became interns
36 interns became part-time employees
25 youth became full-time employees
New Voices in Science Research:

PROJECT TRUE

Project TRUE (Teens Researching Urban Ecology) is a research mentoring program designed to engage new voices in ecology and empower youth with an understanding of the threats to NYC’s precious green spaces and how to address them. We partner with Fordham University and recruit undergraduate mentors through their Collegiate Science and Technology Entry Program (C-STEP).

55% spoke a language other than English at home
82% identified as Black or Hispanic
32% will be first generation college students

5 undergraduate mentors
25 high school juniors & seniors
100% of high school student interns lived in the Bronx

What They Did:

- Fordham undergraduates completed one month of training in mentorship and science research.
- High school student – undergraduate teams developed ecology projects with personalized research questions.
- Youth conducted three weeks of data collection at the Bronx Zoo.
- Teams analyzed their data and created scientific posters describing their findings.
- Youth presented their work to hundreds of guests at the Bronx Zoo.
"My favorite part is going out in the field with mentees. I was worried that they wouldn’t be as excited about my tree project as I was, but that wasn’t a problem, which made me even more excited. Project TRUE has helped me to think about careers broadly and I tell my mentees that they’re so lucky that they’re having this experience early because they have years to keep exploring."

Transition to a Multi-Season Program

This year, we extended Project TRUE beyond the summer, with four undergraduates and 15 high school students continuing into the fall program. Youth used open-source data and longitudinal data collected by previous Project TRUE cohorts to dive deeper into their research topics, culminating in poster presentations and a science project submission to the GENIUS Olympiad, an international competition for high school projects on environmental issues.

Bronx Science Consortium Poster Symposium

In January 2024, we hosted the annual student poster symposium at the Bronx Zoo, showcasing the scientific projects of 62 researchers. Four teams of Project TRUE youth were joined by student researchers from CUNY City College, Albert Einstein College of Medicine, SUNY Maritime, local high schools, and more. A keynote address by WCS Uganda Community Liaison Officer, Ernest Oniba, was followed by the poster session in which students shared their findings with peers, family, and science professionals.

Explore the 2023 research projects and scientific posters here
New Voices in Conservation Action:

YOUTH OCEAN ADVOCATES

Youth Ocean Advocates (YOA) is a conservation advocacy internship. Youth use their collective voice and the WCS network to engage thousands of New Yorkers in conservation activities and raise awareness about ocean conservation.

The 2023 cohort included 15 high school students. We recently onboarded 17 youth into the 2024 cohort.

KEY TRAINING TOPICS

- Climate Change
- Campaign Communication Strategies
- Environmental Advocacy

What they do:

- Participate in 80 hours of training and gain first-hand experience in marine conservation advocacy.
- Table at community events, like It's My Estuary Day at Kaiser Park on Coney Island.
- Host public events at the New York Aquarium, including World Oceans Day and a Youth Conservation Summit.
- Research conservation issues to inform their advocacy.
- Attend UN Climate Week, advocacy days with elected officials, and public hearings to meet change-makers and discuss new policies.
We Expanded!

Based on the YOA program model, we launched a Youth Environmental Advocate (YEA) internship at the Queens Zoo in November 2023. The first cohort includes 21 high school students who will learn to advocate for conservation action in their Queens communities. YEA interns will collaborate with their YOA peers throughout the year, including co-hosting the Youth Conservation Summit at the New York Aquarium in spring 2024.

Left: YEA and YOA interns at an experiential visit to the Climate Museum (Dec 2023)

Youth Advocacy Days

Youth Ocean Advocates are part of WCS’s larger effort to make sure youth have opportunities to share their perspectives with government decision-makers. In the last year, 55 youth interns traveled with WCS staff to the US Capitol Building in Washington DC, the NY State Capitol Building in Albany, the United Nations Headquarters in NYC, and more.

Right: WCS youth in the chamber of the NY State Capitol Building after meeting with elected officials to advocate for continued support of the Environmental Protection Fund. (March 2024)

YOUTH SPOTLIGHT: LATTICING IN ACTION

Sofia Solimine

Brooklyn, NY

- NYA Discovery Guide, 2022
- PPZ Discovery Guide Leader, 2023
- NYA Youth Ocean Advocate, 2023

“I’ve benefitted from connecting with other youth who share the same passions as me and with WCS to influence change. YOA has given me a better understanding of how talking to and learning from other people is part of taking action for the environment and I’m becoming more confident in taking those steps.”
New Voices in Climate Action:

CLIMATE SOLUTIONS INTERNS

The Climate Solutions Internship (CSI) is a cohort-based internship designed to empower Bronx college students to think creatively and extend climate action into their communities. Recruitment targeted students across academic majors, recognizing the importance of a variety of perspectives in combating climate change.

YOUTH SPOTLIGHT: LATTICING IN ACTION

Chelsea Gomez
Bronx, NY

WCS Climate Solutions Intern, 2024
WCS Eco-Vivencias Intern, 2024

“I first felt a bit of imposter syndrome about whether this internship was meant for me because of my lack of STEM knowledge. However, after speaking with a supervisor, I felt relieved and welcomed; I was told that I would offer a new perspective and that my voice mattered.”

What they do:

- Participate in 40 hours of training to understand the global impact of climate change through a scientific and social lens.
- Connect with professionals across industries to explore how NYC is working to mitigate the effects of climate change.
- Identify a climate-related social research question of their choice and investigate using ethnographic research methods.
- Design resources that their focal communities can use to become more climate resilient.

Coming Soon: Eco-Vivencias Internship

In May 2024, 15 Bronx-based college students will go on a paid, 10-day experiential learning trip to Puerto Rico. Under the mentorship of staff from WCS and Para la Naturaleza, a local environmental non-profit, interns will gain first-hand insight into ecological restoration, monitoring, and conservation efforts. They will visit reintroduction sites for the Puerto Rican Crested Toad recovery program to see the descendents of tadpoles that were raised at the Queens Zoo.
SYEP

The Summer Youth Employment Program is the nation’s largest youth employment program, connecting NYC youth ages 16 to 24 with career exploration opportunities and paid work experience each summer.

77 SYEP youth worked in various roles in July and August. 39% continued in a new WCS role after SYEP ended.

WCS also led the effort to place an additional 65 SYEP youth in internships at SCI Network NYC partner institutions, including The New York Botanical Garden, Wave Hill, and Staten Island Zoo.

SYEP YOUTH CONTRIBUTED TO FIVE AREAS OF ZOO & AQUARIUM OPERATIONS

- retail sales
- grounds and visitor services
- food service
- VIP animal experiences
- administration

YOUTH SPOTLIGHT: LATTICING IN ACTION

Shaylan White
Bronx, NY

“I have worked with SYEP during previous summers, however, this summer was different because I was at the zoo. I met people from all over the world and was exposed to new ideas, which made me want to continue working here after the summer ended.”
Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) Education Department

The mission of WCS Education is to inspire a diverse, inclusive movement of conservation advocates. We do this by sparking connections with animals and nature, enhancing scientific literacy through hands-on investigation, and engaging constituents in stewardship and action to conserve wildlife and wild places. WCS Education is headquartered at the Bronx Zoo and has teams that operate out of our four zoos and aquarium in New York City.

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