



Wildlife Conservation Society

# CAREER LATTICE

Final Report 2025-2026



NEW YORK AQUARIUM



BRONX ZOO



CENTRAL PARK ZOO



QUEEN'S ZOO



PROSPECT PARK ZOO





# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The WCS Career Lattice is generously supported by the New York City Council, New York City Speaker, Charina Endowment Fund, Inc., Gray Foundation, The Pinkerton Foundation, Con Edison, RBC Foundation USA, Citizens Philanthropic Foundation, Judy and Jamie Dimon, Julia Dimon and Joseph Romeo, Gail and Michael O'Neill, and numerous other foundation, corporate, and individual funders.





## The WCS Career Lattice supports young people using a three-pronged approach

### Connect



and recruit local youth for career opportunities through outreach and partnerships.

### Develop



their knowledge and skills through hands-on work experiences, professional development, and mentorship.

### Advance



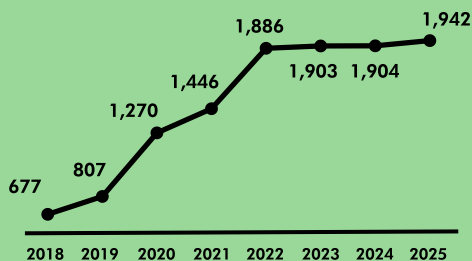
their careers through leadership training and tiered professional opportunities.

WCS Education is committed to inspiring the next generation of conservation leaders and STEM professionals. Our work with youth is central to this mission. Each year, the WCS Career Lattice supports over 1,900 youth ages 14 to 24 in volunteer, internship, and employment opportunities across our five parks. This integrated career pathways initiative provides youth with expanded entry points to our opportunities and access to workforce development services. These early professional experiences help WCS to prepare the next generation to build meaningful careers, expand their networks, and contribute to conservation efforts that benefit both people and wildlife.



# LATTICING OVER THE YEARS

## Connect



### Growth over Time

In 2018, the Lattice supported 677 youth in Education Department positions. The initiative has grown to support over 1,900 youth today, spanning all zoo and aquarium departments.

### Local Connections

We partner with many local organizations and institutions, including the City University of New York, to recruit NYC youth. This year, students from 16 of the 18 CUNY colleges participated in WCS volunteer positions and internships, which prepared students for careers in informal education, science research, animal care, and human resources. CUNY students represent 41% of WCS's college interns.

## Develop

### Breadth of Experience

The Lattice originally specialized in science education career development. Today, we support youth exploring careers in animal care, operations, hospitality, administration, research, and other areas integral to WCS's mission.

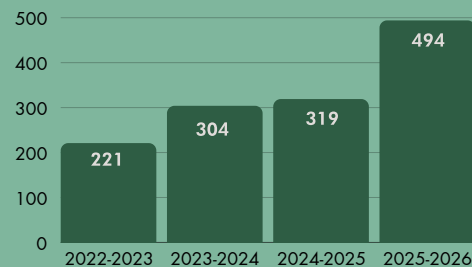
### Strong Mentoring

This year, we expanded our support for supervisors working with youth, facilitating a custom-designed six-session training program for 45 staff members who supervise interns. Trainees improved their confidence connecting interns to WCS's mission, providing feedback, and serving as a mentor, among other skills.

### Building Workforce Skills

We increased the number and variety of events for interns and part-time employees, including behind-the-scenes sustainability tours at the New York Aquarium, career talks with professionals from across zoo and aquarium specialties, and networking events with fun activities to spark connections.

## Advance



Each year, the number of youth who advance into new positions at WCS grows. Between April 2025 and March 2026, 494 youth "latticed" into new positions.

### Professional Identities

Our research on the professional identity development of WCS interns who work with animals found that they identify with an occupation (e.g., wildlife vet), but also with more general professional interests (e.g., animal careers) and specializations (e.g., fish). Youth are drawn to career values – not just jobs – emphasizing the need for the varied career education opportunities offered by the Career Lattice.

# IMPACT IN 2025

# 1,900+

young people ages 14 to 24 participated in volunteer positions, internships, and part-time jobs at WCS's zoos and aquarium



# 494



laddered into new positions from April 2025 to March 2026

# 67%

planned to pursue a science career

# 87%

felt appreciated at WCS

# 94%

lived in one of NYC's five boroughs



# \$5.5M

in total earnings

At the end of their position...

# 100%

of volunteers felt confident in their ability to inspire others

# 91%

of interns felt that they can make an impact on the environment

# 81%

of part-time employees would like to work for WCS in the future



Volunteers & interns attended

# 319

schools  
(including 155 NYC public schools)



We intentionally develop opportunities for WCS youth to move into new roles. From creating stepped positions to coaching youth looking for their next opportunity, our latticing strategies are working. We have seen a **55% growth in latticing** from last year.

# Latticing

# 494

youth moved into a new WCS position from April 2025 to March 2026, including:

**20** youth who moved into full-time jobs

Lattice pathways vary. Here are several that we deliberately cultivated this year:

# 118

 volunteers became interns

The most common pathway in our **science communication program** is when Discovery Guide volunteers become Discovery Guide Leader interns.

Analyzing latticing allowed us to identify a gap at the next step in this science pathway: alumni of our Discovery Guide Leader program had mastered the basics of science communication, but were not yet competitive for part-time jobs in informal education. We created a new track for the internship – live interpretation – to fill this gap.

# 5

 alumni of our internship program became live interpretation seasonal employees

# 5

 seasonal employees became interns

Seasonal jobs are the most numerous and accessible opportunities at our zoos and aquarium. These entry-level jobs help youth learn skills, explore interests, and widen their networks. For some, these roles can be important **springboards into career exploration** opportunities like internships.

The Career Lattice allows youth to explore fields through **lateral movement** in addition to linear career progression.

# 95

 youth latticed into a different department

# 21

 of these youth joined an animal care department

Animal care jobs are some of the most iconic and sought after zoo and aquarium positions. Experience gained through other WCS roles supports youth pursuing their animal care ambitions – and supports animal care teams in recruiting full-time keepers.



Early career opportunities at WCS serve as a starting point for many youth who have gone on to careers in science and conservation, including at our zoos and aquarium.

# Launching Careers

## Nuno Peixoto

🏠 Queens, NY

QZ Bridging the Gap\* Intern (2013-2014)

*\*Bridging the Gap was a NSF-funded program that worked with underrepresented high school students to build interest and capacity in STEM careers through internships, mentoring, and workshops.*

St. John's University,  
BS in Childhood Education (2014-2018)  
MA in Literacy Education (2019)



Queens Elementary School,  
Lead Teacher,  
(2019-2023)

WCS Education,  
Coordinator of  
Professional Development  
(2024-Present)



Teaching at QZ

*"Bridging the Gap sparked my love of science (especially biology and zoology) and inspired me to pursue teaching and working with children. Returning to WCS and discovering that I'd be working alongside colleagues who were also my mentors early in my career felt like a full-circle moment. It has been one of the true highlights of my professional journey and a reminder of how meaningful growth and connection can be within this organization."*

## Eva Guo

🏠 Queens, NY

QZ Discovery Guide and  
Discovery Guide Leader  
(2018-2019)

QZ Quest Leader  
(2021)



NYA Sea Cliffs  
Intern (2022)

CPZ Animal Care  
Intern (2023)



CPZ Keeper  
(2024 - Present)

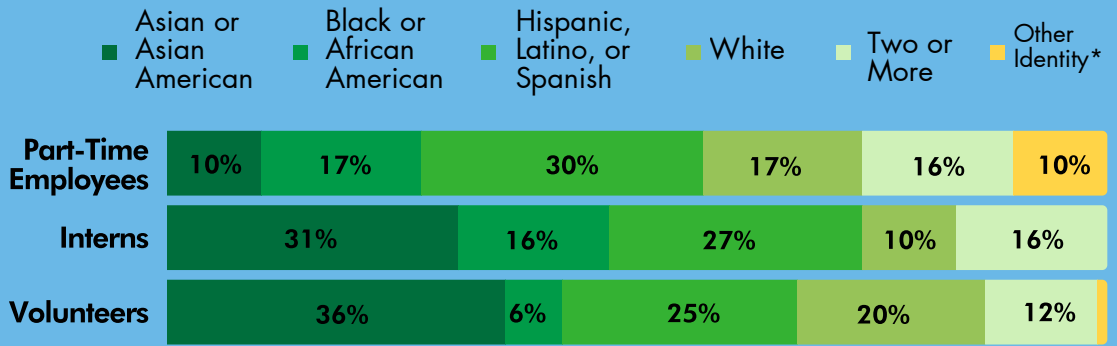
*"My intern supervisor really encouraged me to ask a lot more questions and be more vocal about things that I was interested in seeing and experiencing. You'd be surprised at how much you'd be able to learn just by asking a simple question, and that can get you very far in your career."*

# WHO ARE WCS YOUTH?

part-time employees  
**892**

interns  
**490**

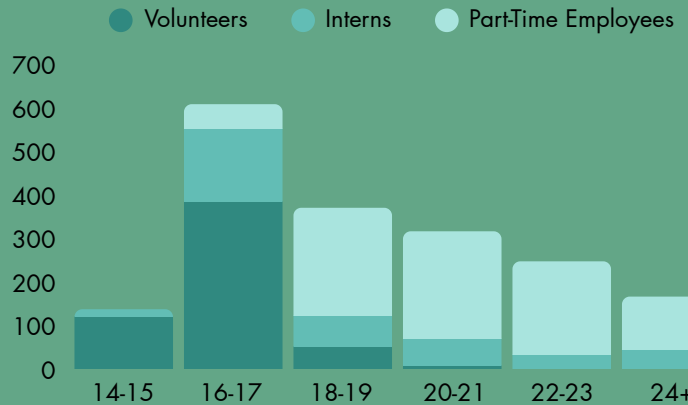
volunteers  
**560**



\*The Other Identity category includes American Indian or Alaskan Native, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, and write-in responses.



Youth speak 44 languages other than English.  
23% of youth speak Spanish at home.



Our three position types attract youth of different ages. Volunteers are typically in high school. About half of interns are high school students and half are older, including in college. Part-time employees can join WCS starting at 16, though the majority are 18 and older.

**37%**

are first-generation college students

**55%**

identify as Black or Hispanic

**88%**

live in a low-income zip code

**25%**

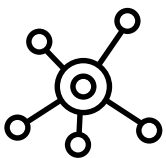
identify as LGBTQ+

# WCS as a Third Space



We create a **culture of belonging** for youth, serving not only as a place of learning but also as a “third space” outside of home and school. In third spaces, youth can connect with each other, build community, and fully be themselves.

## WE ACCOMPLISH THIS THROUGH



Networking and collaboration that introduce youth to the work of various WCS teams, including conservation teams in the field.



Traditions and celebrations that build community among peers.



Individual check-ins that allow supervisors to get to know each young person, including their career goals and aspirations.

**91%** of interns identify their supervisor as a mentor

**84%** of youth feel appreciated at WCS

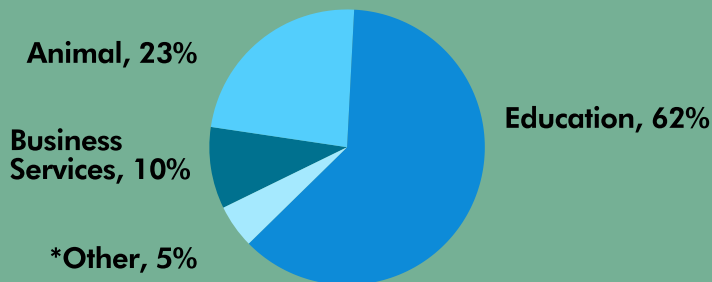
**81%** of part-time employees want to work at WCS again in the future

*“In the beginning of the internship, our supervisor talked to us about the importance of a third space. The zoo has definitely been very good at providing that. Everybody's together for the same reason. You can go and trust that however you naturally are there, that's gonna work. And I think that makes it super cool.”*

– WCS Intern

# INTERNS

## Internships by Department



\*Other departments include Human Resources, Library & Archives, Exhibit Design, Public Affairs, Buildings & Grounds and more.

We are proud to provide compensation to all WCS interns. Nearly three-quarters said that the stipend enabled them to participate in the internship.

In the last year, we hosted

# 490 interns

## LEARNING WITH PEERS

Many of our education internships bring together youth in cohorts, providing a built-in community of peers. This collaborative environment not only deepens interns' skills and motivation, but also helps them form lasting connections that support their growth well beyond the internship. For example, the Youth Environmental Advocates work together on projects like dune grass replanting.



Dune grass replanting to support coastal resilience for extreme weather events

**NEW**

**IN 2025!**

We piloted an Advance & Earn internship with the NYC Department of Youth and Community Development. Our two Advance & Earn interns worked in the Maintenance Department - which has not historically hosted interns - while earning an hourly wage and completing their high school equivalency. This program allowed us to reach a new audience: out-of-school and out-of-work youth. Advance & Earn interns complete professional certification requirements, positioning them to move into full-time jobs.

## YOUTH SPOTLIGHT



## Allison Lam

- PPZ CUNY Intern (2025)
- PPZ Discovery Guide Leader (2023)
- PPZ Discovery Guide (2022 - 2023)

Brooklyn, NY

*"Having the opportunity to be an Education Assistant Intern at PPZ through CUNY Cultural Corps helped me to gain insight into the different aspects of educational programming. I loved seeing the look of wonder and excitement on the kids' faces when they were able to extract DNA with a Q-tip and examine it on a petri dish!"*

## MARINE RESEARCH INTERNSHIP

Marine Research Interns work with WCS's New York Seascape Program to learn about the marine wildlife of the New York Bight. WCS introduces them to conservation research methods, marine policy, and community engagement to see how science informs the protection of local species and habitats.

YOUTH SPOTLIGHT



### Zohar Almani

Marine Research Intern (2025)

🏠 New York, NY

*"I was most excited to learn the different technical skills. I got to work with the acoustic receivers and the shark tags, and do the coding on the computer for them. It was just really nice to be able to actually work on it, hands on. It felt good, going out on the boat and dropping in my own receivers, knowing that I literally coded this."*

## AVICULTURE INTERNSHIP

Animal Care Internships offer a unique opportunity to learn the ins-and-outs of caring for animals in a zoo or aquarium, including diet preparation, exhibit and life support maintenance, record keeping, and the fundamentals of animal observation, training, and enrichment.

YOUTH SPOTLIGHT



### Liliana Campuzano

- BZ Aviculture Intern (2025)
- NYA Behavioral Husbandry Intern (2025)

🏠 Brooklyn, NY

*"It's important to take a moment to take it all in, especially for fleeting moments – like feeding a sea lion or a macaw! Getting to work with and learn from the amazing keepers at the WCS parks are at the core of each and every memory."*

# INTERNS



Intern observes a shark training session

## BUILDING CONFIDENCE

Our research found that WCS interns showed significant increases in self-efficacy, or confidence that they could achieve goals. They demonstrated growth in self-efficacy for specific tasks, such as choosing a career and making an impact on the environment, but also the general feeling that they can achieve what they set out to do.

## COMING SOON!

In May 2026, our second cohort of Eco-Vivencias interns will spend 10 days in Puerto Rico learning about field conservation and zoo-to-field connections. Interns will meet with local conservation groups and visit reintroduction sites for the Puerto Rican crested toad, which Queens Zoo helped bring back to the island.

# Supervisor Training

Since launching the WCS Internship Initiative in 2021, we have created a variety of resources to support intern supervisors. We realized, however, that supervisors wanted more individualized support and launched the **WCS Intern Supervisor Training program**. This custom-designed program brought together groups of supervisors for reflection, skill development, planning, and practice.

## THE CURRICULUM



Fundamentals of Leading Interns



Inclusive Leadership Communication



Communicating for Performance Management



Growth Mindset and Relationship Management



Building Your Emotional Intelligence



Action Planning

## THE PARTICIPANTS

**45** supervisors in three 15-person cohorts

Representing all **5** parks

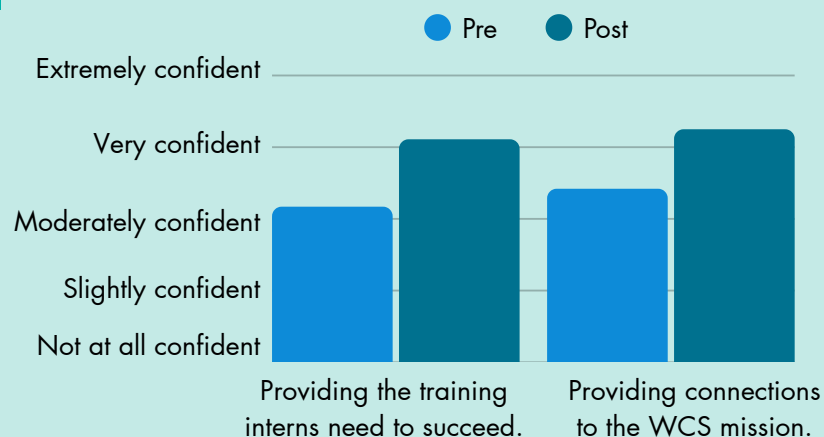
And many departments:  
Animal, Business Services, Human Resources, Library & Archives Education, Wildlife Health, and more.



## IMPACT

Supervisors reported **significant gains in self-efficacy** across all core areas, such as providing feedback, mentorship, and designing internships for learning. The largest gains were in providing the training interns need to succeed and connecting interns to WCS's mission.

The program fostered **cross-departmental connections**, encouraged more intentional internship design, and helped supervisors rethink their roles as mentors. Supervisors showed strong intent to apply what they learned, with many already beginning to change their practices.



*"The specific action plan items we wrote about in each session have helped me not lose track of all my great ideas, so this showed me how important it can be for the interns to also document for themselves and their progress in learning."*

– WCS Intern Supervisor

# SCINetworkNYC

WCS leads SCI Network NYC, a consortium of eight science-based cultural institutions in NYC that collectively support 1,100 interns across 60 types of internships. These positions include opportunities in animal care, horticulture, research, science communication, and more. The internships are career launchpads, building our city's next generation of STEM professionals.

## Network Goals:

- Build pathways for New York City youth to pursue STEM internships.
- Provide training for internship supervisors.
- Share our work, impact, and ideas to advance the field.



SCI Network supervisor training at Wave Hill

# WCS Leading the Field

## ASSOCIATION OF ZOOS & AQUARIUMS

The Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) is the accrediting organization for over 250 zoos and aquariums. Each year, AZA institutions host 7,000 interns, including 3,000 animal care interns. Since 2021, we have worked with AZA colleagues to standardize internships and make them more accessible and learning-focused.

In March 2026, we co-lead a session titled, “**Building the Next Generation of Animal Care Professionals**” at AZA’s Mid-Year Conference. Over 100 attendees joined to learn how to shape a more inclusive, prepared, and resilient workforce. WCS ran a workshop on performance management for youth, providing the only formal training on this topic for many animal care professionals who often gain their first leadership experiences by supervising interns.



## SPOTLIGHT: RESEARCH



### Youth Perceptions of Climate Change:

We studied interns' thoughts about climate change and youth environmental anxiety. Youth saw climate-related flooding as “normal,” but the politicization of climate change as frustrating and distressing. Youth saw climate change as having multiple impacts on their conservation education experiences, making these programs more critical than ever. We will present these findings at the American Educational Research Association conference in April 2026.



### Sharing Best Practices:

We use a design-based research (DBR) methodology to create, implement, evaluate, and research the Career Lattice. We describe how we use four principles of DBR – researcher-educator partnerships, iterative design, mixed methods data, and big research questions – in a [2025 article in the Journal of Museum Education](#) to support other cultural institutions in embedding DBR in their programming, evaluation, and research.

# EMPLOYEES

Our part-time and seasonal employees are the face of WCS's zoos and aquarium for the 3.5 million visitors who come through our gates each year. They work in a variety of roles, building expertise in customer service, communication, and connecting the public with WCS's mission.

In the 2025 season

**892**  
youth worked across  
**44** teams



## Youth Employees by Department

**34%** Admissions & Parking

**20%** Restaurants

**14%** Education

**13%** Merchandise

**6%** Animal Care

The remaining 13% worked in: Events & Rides, Maintenance, Horticulture, Administration, and Visitor Services.

## YOUTH SPOTLIGHT



## Linabel Castillo

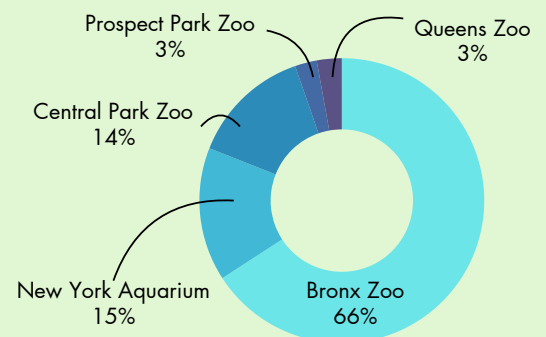
BZ Admissions Associate  
(2022-2025)

Bronx, NY

"I'm studying public administration, and I probably want to work in a government agency in the future. This is my first job, and I've learned a lot about teamwork, patience, and time management. I've also learned how to balance having a job with being a student."



## Youth Employees by Park



# EMPLOYEES



Feedback on visitor surveys shows how **part-time and seasonal employees** shape the visitor experience.

*“Two young staff members who **presented the puppet show** were excellent! They engaged the audience, performed well, and really deserve special recognition.”*

*“The staff was wonderful, especially the **staff member in the gift shop!** He really seemed to want to do whatever he could to make sure we got what we needed, knew everything we wanted to know about the Queens Zoo, and made sure we were prepared for our future visits to the NY Aquarium and the Prospect Park Zoo.”*



Since April 2025, seasonal and part-staff have received

# 450+

shout-outs in visitor surveys.

*“Respectful and friendly staff. Loved the **narrators at the sea lion show.** Incredible energy - they made the show fun yet informative, and they kept the audience engaged.”*

*“Our **monorail guide** delivered a most informative and delightful repartee. In addition, the **restaurant staff** were each the most polite and friendly. The several employees in the park who guided us along our way were gracious and cheerful. They made the day a memorable one for us.”*



# VOLUNTEERS

# 560

Discovery Guides

The Discovery Guide volunteer program is the earliest entry point to the Career Lattice

Discovery Guides lead fun activity stations to educate zoo and aquarium visitors about the animals at our parks, our global conservation work, and how to take conservation action.

Discovery Guides complete:

**40** hours of training

**80+** hours of in-park science communication practice

Since April, Discovery Guides facilitated over

# 600,000

interactions with zoo and aquarium visitors.

# 95%

are high school students

# 83%

attend a NYC public high school

## LOCAL CONNECTIONS

# 70%

live in the same borough as the park where they volunteer



Prospect Park Zoo Discovery Guides

# VOLUNTEERS

YOUTH SPOTLIGHT



**João Machado**

PPZ Discovery Guide, 2025

🏠 New York, NY

*"One highlight was the pure joy and thrill of informing people about the impacts that they can have on the environment and the many ways that they can help out in conservation. I've talked to people who initially seemed disinterested, but who've come out with stars in their eyes and new ambitions for environmental safety, which always fills me with a sense of hope."*

YOUTH SPOTLIGHT



**Vada Bank**

CPZ Discovery Guide, 2025

🏠 New York, NY

*"I have learned how to communicate with people of different ages and the large variety of zoo-comers made teaching and working the stations extremely fun. A memorable moment would be any moment I was able to have fun with the other Discovery Guides. Everyone was kind and I gained friendships which made my time at Central Park Zoo extremely enjoyable."*

## SPOTLIGHT: HUDSON CANYON CAMPAIGN

Discovery Guides connect visitors with WCS's advocacy campaigns. This year, Discovery Guides engaged park visitors of all ages in WCS's campaign to create a marine sanctuary at the Hudson Canyon, an underwater canyon about 100 miles off the coast of NYC, which is home to hundreds of species of marine animals. Visitors learned about Hudson Canyon wildlife, **11,000 signed the petition**, and **80,000 contributed to 19 murals**, which were mailed to government officials.





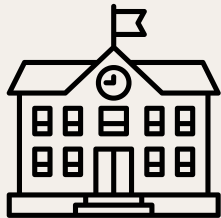
# JIVE

In February, **over 500 youth attended** the 10<sup>th</sup> annual WCS Youth Jobs, Internships, and Volunteer Expo (JIVE).

Hiring managers representing one dozen departments from Admissions to Wild Encounters spoke with youth about their opportunities. Youth also attended workshops on financial literacy and WCS careers, and applied to positions at our application station.

Over **300** applications submitted by JIVE attendees that weekend

**212**  
schools represented



**230** NYC public high school students

**60** CUNY/SUNY Students



**91%** saw positions they were interested in and eligible for

**87%** of attendees were new to WCS

**37%** learned about new positions



WCS employees from Admissions, Animal Care, and Education discuss their career paths

# Workforce Development

In addition to the learning that happens in their positions, WCS invites all youth to a variety of additional workforce development opportunities.

**30+**  
events and experiences

**400+**  
youth attended

**Career Exploration Sessions** provide exposure to science, conservation, and zoo and aquarium careers.

Because of their time at WCS:

- Interns gained confidence in their **ability to choose a career.**
- Youth **learned about new careers** of interest.

**NEW** IN 2025!

**Sustainability Tours** bring youth behind the scenes, including under the Coney Island Boardwalk, to learn about climate resiliency and sustainability efforts at the Bronx Zoo and New York Aquarium.

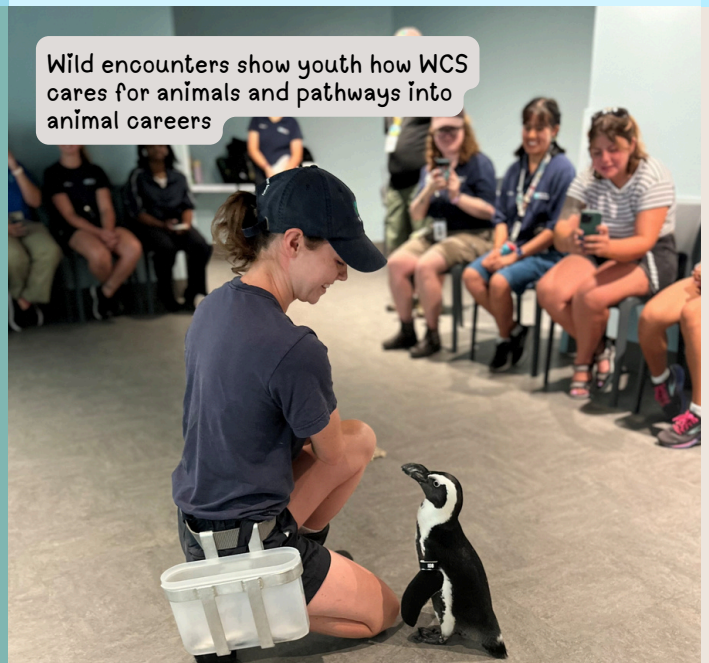
**Professional Skill-Building Sessions** train youth in resume writing, networking, professional communication, and creating elevator pitches.

- 90 youth attended the Resume Roadshow to receive resume feedback and support.
- Cohort-based programs and camp counselors participated in over 3,000 hours of additional skill-building sessions through their regular program.

*"I realized that I'm going to be applying to a lot of internships and job opportunities. I added skills to my resume that I didn't know should be there, like Google Suite, and I feel I now have a stronger chance."*

– Safiyah Jollah, NYA SYEP Intern

Wild encounters show youth how WCS cares for animals and pathways into animal careers



**Peer networking events** build connections across departments, supporting youth in learning about other opportunities.

# Workforce Development



Individualized resume feedback

## BECAUSE OF THEIR TIME AT WCS:

**55%** of volunteers said they were better able to teach about science and conservation

**58%** of youth said they gained general workforce skills like communication, patience, and public speaking

**83%** of youth in animal care internships said they gained targeted professional skills needed to pursue jobs in the field

# 78%

of interns said they gained confidence in their ability to successfully complete tasks at work

*"I'd say the biggest impact has come from learning patience, especially when handling other people's frustrations. I learned to stay calm, listen, and respond thoughtfully, which has helped me both at work and outside of it. The ability to stay composed under pressure is a skill that's valuable in any job or life situation."*  
- BZ Group Sales Employee

## FINANCIAL LITERACY WORKSHOPS

Together with our corporate partners, we offer financial literacy workshops that provide youth with practical skills in credit, banking, taxes, and other core financial concepts.



Financial literacy workshop

## EVENT FEATURE: CAREER TALKS



Staff from WCS's Exhibits and Graphic Arts Department share their career stories

*"The more time I spend here, the more I learn about every department. The animal curator highlighted in her talk that you go to a zoo and think this is only where zookeepers work, but there's so much more you can do here."*

- Arielle Davis, Youth Engagement Assistant Coordinator

# Building Community Connections

We develop partnerships with NYC colleges and community-based organizations to connect youth with opportunities at our parks.

We hosted **73** interns from the **City University of New York** and **16** students from the **State University of New York**, two renowned higher education institutions that pride themselves on providing a high-quality public college education for New Yorkers.



## SUMMER YOUTH EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM (SYEP)

SYEP is the nation's largest youth employment program, connecting NYC youth ages 14 to 24 with career exploration opportunities and paid work experience.

We hosted **77** SYEP interns

who gained experience in customer service, administration, and teaching.

Over 10% of SYEP interns moved into seasonal jobs at the end of their internships.


We supported an additional 30 interns in finding placements at three other science-based cultural institutions through our SCI Network NYC coalition.

## Nadia Ali

YOUTH SPOTLIGHT

- QZ Admissions Associate (2025)
- QZ Admissions Intern (2025)
- QZ Discovery Guide Leader (2024)
- QZ Youth Environmental Advocate (2023-2024)
- QZ Discovery Guide (2023)



 New York, NY

*"I've learned how to navigate the space between being a professional and being your authentic self. That's a skill I continue to use on a daily basis."*



## LOUIS STOKES ALLIANCES FOR MINORITY PARTICIPATION (LSAMP)

This year, the Bronx Zoo partnered with the NYC LSAMP program at CUNY to support students interested in animal behavior. In January 2025, 19 CUNY students completed a course on animal observation and scientific research.

This summer, eight alumni joined WCS as research interns, developing and conducting independent research projects on animal behavior, which culminated in a virtual poster symposium. Evaluation showed the course **significantly promoted content knowledge** in ecology and animal research topics and interest in scientific research.

# Youth Advocacy



Our **year-long youth advocacy internships** bring together high school students to learn about conservation issues, meet with WCS's government affairs and policy teams, and advocate on behalf of the environment.

## 17 YOUTH OCEAN ADVOCATES



at the New York Aquarium focus on marine biology, ocean policy, and human use of our coastal waters

## 19 YOUTH ENVIRONMENTAL ADVOCATES



at the Queens Zoo focus on urban ecology, environmental justice, and community leadership

**87%** of interns felt confident in their ability to make an impact on the environment by the end of their internship

*"Before this, I was definitely more negative. If you would have talked to me about environmental issues, I would have been like, 'Yeah, nothing would happen.' But now I know that there's people working on legislation to change these sorts of things. And then there's people like us who are educating others about it, and educating ourselves about it too."*

- YEA Intern



## GUEST SPEAKER HIGHLIGHT

Jessica B. Goldstein, Assistant Counsel to Governor Hochul, visited NYA to discuss her career path and work to solve environmental and energy issues in New York State.

Youth asked questions about environmental policymaking and shared findings from their WCS projects, including advocating for Hudson Canyon's designation as a National Marine Sanctuary.



## COMING SOON!

In April, YOAs and YEAs will host 100 NYC high school students at the **Youth Conservation Summit** at the New York Aquarium. Attendees will learn about conservation work and careers and take action together to clean up the beach.

# Youth Advocacy

Interns represent WCS at local, state, and national events to advocate for conservation policy.

## YOUTH LOBBY DAY

Twelve youth traveled to Albany to meet with state representatives and share their personal experiences, WCS's work and impact, and how civic engagement is integrated into the work they do every day.

**75%** of youth indicated that the trip increased their confidence that they could protect habitats and save animals from extinction

**83%** of youth said they were more likely to vote or contact their elected representatives because of their trip



WCS interns met with NY State Senator Pete Harckham, Chairman of the NY State Senate Committee on Environmental Conservation.

### YOUTH SPOTLIGHT



## Christina Huang

- Youth Lobby Day (2026)
- Youth Ocean Advocate (2025-2026)
- NYA Discovery Guide Leader (2025)
- NYA Discovery Guide (2025)

 Brooklyn, NY

*"One memorable moment from my Albany trip was the conversation we had with Carissa O'Donnell (a policy advisor at the NY State Senate). She went out of her way to tell us about the impact that the youth have on potential policy, which really resonated with me. That experience, the privilege of witnessing Elton the turtle's release into the Atlantic Ocean, and the international coastal cleanup day at Kaiser Park where my group collected over 88 pounds of trash, all made me realize just how much of an impact community and youth participation can make for conservation."*

\*Elton, a rescued Kemp's ridley sea turtle, was rehabilitated and released at Coney Island in August 2025.



## COMING SOON!

In April, four youth will attend the Association of Zoos and Aquariums' Capitol Hill Advocacy Day in Washington, DC. They will attend advocacy trainings with zoo and aquarium professionals from across the US, meet with elected officials on Capitol Hill, and attend a Congressional Reception to advocate for wildlife rescue legislation and zoo and aquarium appropriations funding.

Project TRUE (Teens Researching Urban Ecology) brings teams of Bronx high school students and Fordham undergraduates together to research urban ecology at the Bronx Zoo.

# Project TRUE

**This summer, five teams of high school interns led by Fordham undergraduate mentors collected and analyzed data on urban forest health, and bird, turtle, eel, and spotted lanternfly populations in the Bronx.**

Project TRUE interns also engaged with local stewardship and scientific communities, gaining real-world research knowledge and networking experience. They presented their work to their peers and the public in a youth symposium at the American Museum of Natural History.



This year, interns visited the Calder Center, Fordham University's biological field station in Armonk, NY.



## **NEW** IN 2025!

Environmental DNA (eDNA) technology allows detection of a particular species – such as a virus, microbe, plant, or animal – in a habitat without direct contact, instead using trace amounts of DNA in a sample of soil, water, or air. This year, interns studying turtles collected water samples and worked with Dr. Tracie Seimon at the Bronx Zoo's Molecular Lab to process them using eDNA protocols. Their results indicated higher presence of native species than expected, prompting follow-up research this fall.



In the fall, Project TRUE interns developed new research questions that expanded on their original projects. Interns analyzed publicly-accessible NYC datasets, comparing and contrasting findings with their summer field data. They presented their research at the Bronx Science Consortium Poster Symposium at the Bronx Zoo.



# Project TRUE

## YOUTH SPOTLIGHT



### Maria Morel

Project TRUE Intern (2025)

🏠 Bronx, NY

*"I couldn't believe my group managed to catch a common snapping turtle and a red eared slider in the same trap. It was super surprising to see that happen."*

\* All turtles are released after capture.

## YOUTH SPOTLIGHT



### Brendan Shiu

Project TRUE Intern (2025)

🏠 Bronx, NY

*"The symposium that we did in the summer was really meaningful. We went to the AMNH and presented to so many different internships, family members, and friends."*

**5** undergraduate mentors

**25** rising high school juniors and seniors

**100%** live in the Bronx

## Who are Project TRUE Youth?

**62%**

identify as Black or Hispanic

**63%**

speak a language other than English at home

**29%**

will be first-generation college students



## ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT



### Lucinda Royte

NYBG Manager of Urban Conservation Data, Tools, and Outreach (2024-Present)

Alumnus of Project TRUE (2016)

🏠 Brooklyn, NY

*"At the end of the Project TRUE experience, we presented our research findings about the benefits of green roofs in a symposium at Fordham University. I vividly remember feeling proud of the work we had done. All those hours in the sun collecting data, developing hypotheses, and analyzing our data culminated in an awesome moment of sharing our insights. **Project TRUE solidified my desire to pursue a career in STEM** and it's guiding my next steps into graduate school, where I'll focus on urban planning, environmental sustainability, and climate-resilient design."*

Central Park Zoo's new Climate Solutions Internship supported 16 CUNY and SUNY students learning about the effects of climate change on NYC communities and pathways to green careers.

# Climate Solutions Internship

This one-semester program provides undergraduate and trade school students with an opportunity to learn about the climate crisis and join WCS in connecting NYC communities to climate education and action. Interns spent Saturdays in the fall attending lectures, going on field trips, and using research skills to learn about careers, climate issues, and solutions.

# 100

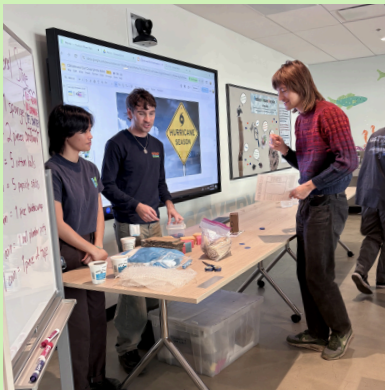
hours of training per student



## SEMINARS

Instructors provided an overview of climate change science, misconceptions, and how climate change impacts life in NYC.

## HANDS-ON EXPERIENCES



Interns practiced climate adaptation and mitigation strategies. In the lab, they selected and tested tools to clean up simulated watersheds and in the field, they used kits to conduct water quality testing.



## PROJECTS

Interns completed research projects, in which they investigated a local climate issue and designed solutions to mitigate the negative environmental impacts.

EXAMPLE PROJECT:  
Climate and Housing  
Policy Access in Harlem

Intern created a web hub for Harlem residents to learn about their housing rights, including energy use and assistance.

Home About The Problem Your Rights Get Help Take Action Resources

## Harlem Climate & Housing Hub

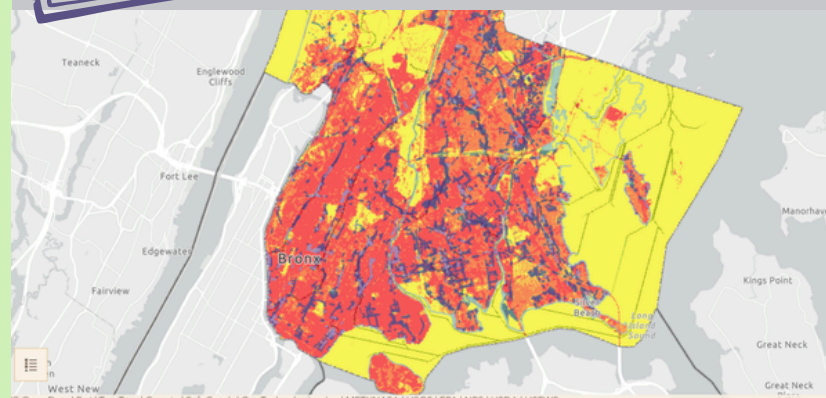
Know Your Rights • Access Resources • Take Action

You have the right to a safe, comfortable home. This guide helps Harlem residents understand climate and housing policies, access energy assistance programs, and enforce tenant rights. Whether you're dealing with no heat, high energy bills, mold, or other housing issues —everything you need to know is here, in one place.

Get Involved

EXAMPLE PROJECT:  
Flooding, Runoff, and Green  
Infrastructure in the Bronx

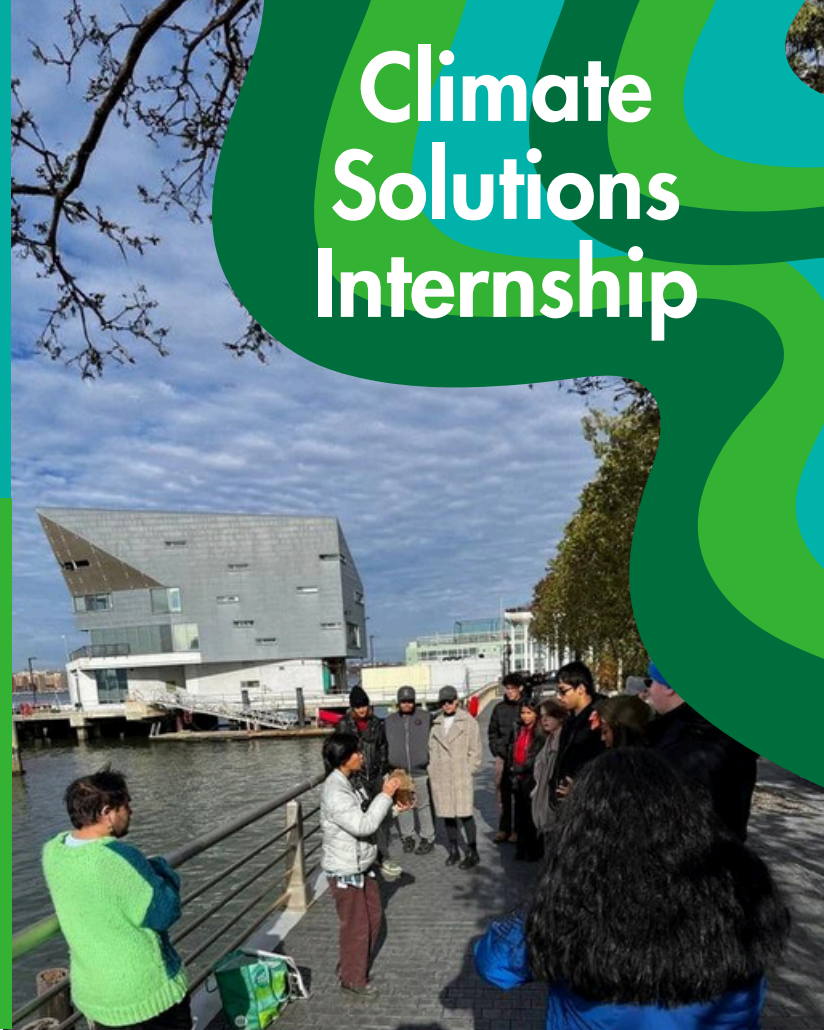
Intern created a website that mapped flooding hotspots and identified flood mitigation strategies.



**Career Talks:** Interns met with professionals, including WCS colleagues from the Exhibits and Graphic Arts Department and NY Seascope, and professionals from external organizations, such as Scenic America and the Hudson River Park Trust. The speakers talked about their career trajectories and their jobs connected to climate change.

**Field Trips:** Interns visited the Bronx Zoo to help with habitat restoration of an underused green roof, working together with other WCS teams to pull invasive plant species and prepare the green roof for planting. They visited the Hudson River Park Trust to learn about nature-based climate resilience strategies being used in NYC, like oyster reefs, salt marshes, and tide pools.

# Climate Solutions Internship



**4**  
alumni  
latticed

This program prepares youth for other internship opportunities at WCS. In the few months since the end of the internship, four CSI interns have been accepted to other WCS internships.



Animal Care Internship

Eco-vivencias Internship





# WCS Education

## 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.



**Bronx Zoo**



**Central Park Zoo**



**New York Aquarium**



**Prospect Park Zoo**



**Queens Zoo**



## Contacts

Karen Tingley, *Vice President of Education*  
ktingley@wcs.org

Erin Prada, *Asst. Director of Youth Development*  
eprada@wcs.org

### Authors

Su-Jen Roberts, PhD, *Director of Educational Research & Evaluation*  
Tess Gavrielle Levinson, PhD, *Curatorial Science Fellow*  
Emily Stoeth, *Senior Manager of Youth Development & Internships*

### Design

Shuli Rank, *Research & Evaluation Manager*

### Photos

WCS, Nadia Ali, Zohar Almani, Vada Bank, Liliana Campuzano, Eva Guo, Allison Lam, João Machado, Christine Peralta, Nuno Piexoto, Lucinda Royte