



Bronx River Alliance Education Program Plan Executive Summary, 2020–2022

As the Bronx River Alliance neared completion of River House—an environmentally-sustainable building with an indoor/outdoor classroom, boathouse, community meeting space, and direct river access—it embarked on a strategic visioning process for its Education program. This six-month process engaged approximately 35 partner organization staff members, teachers and school administrators. The goal was to maximize use of River House by and for surrounding communities, including augmenting the work of local schools and community-based organizations. The Education Program Plan was presented to the Alliance’s Board of Directors at its December 2019 meeting. Staff began implementation in January 2020 with a three-year pilot planned through 2022.

Mission

The Bronx River Alliance Education program works with schools and community-based organizations to provide engaging, hands-on opportunities for youth and educators to use the Bronx River watershed as an outdoor classroom and make connections with local and global issues. We serve as a bridge to connect youth from environmental justice communities to career opportunities in environmental fields. We do this by offering high-quality interactive STEM programming, professional development support for educators, and access to equipment and materials to investigate the rich resources of the Bronx River.

Our programming aligns with educational standards and allows middle school and high school students to apply what they learn in the classroom to environmental issues facing our urban river, communities, and world. The Education Program opens doors for youth from underrepresented communities who face disproportionate environmental health and safety hazards to authentically engage in science, environmental policy, education, and advocacy. This work acknowledges the rich history of the Bronx River watershed, including its advocates.

Through this work, the Bronx River Alliance seeks to:

- bring science alive through hands-on learning and exploration of the river;
- deepen environmental awareness and an understanding of the impact of our own actions;
- create healthier, more livable communities; and
- serve as a conduit for young people who want to be at the forefront of this change, including opening up environmental career opportunities.

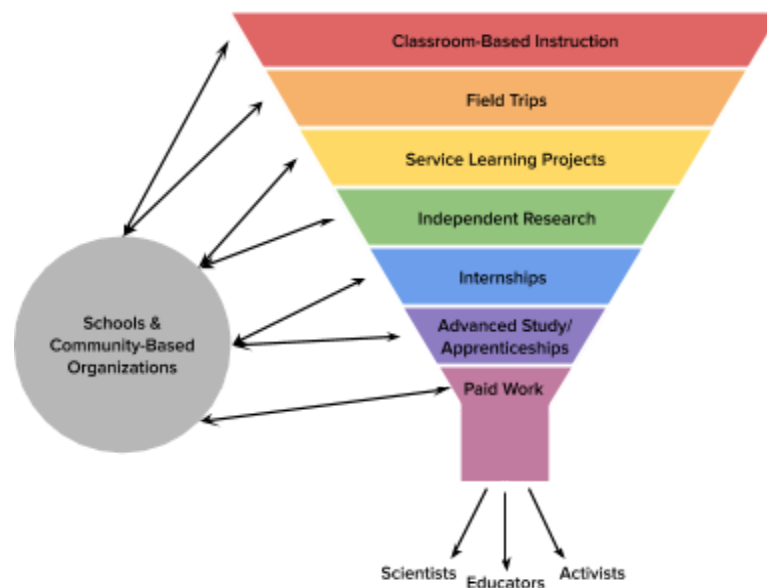
Strategy

The Bronx River Alliance Education program takes a four-pronged approach to achieving its mission:

1. Educator Support, including professional development workshops, materials and equipment for self-guided teaching, and a network of other educators.
2. Hands-on Learning that uses the river as an outdoor laboratory, including interactive field trips, canoe trips, workshops, service learning projects, and inquiry-based instruction.
3. Community Science, including creating protocols and programs that are being replicated by other organizations and compiling and sharing data sets with legislators and other decision makers at the local, state, and federal levels.
4. Nurturing Environmental Leadership by creating a bridge between youth from environmental justice communities and the river and surrounding watershed, exposing them to environmental career opportunities.

The Alliance is part of a rich ecosystem of schools and community-based organizations in the Bronx working to address youth development, social/environmental justice, and environmental education. Through these partnerships and its own programs, the Alliance seeks to create connections for young people seeking deeper engagement at any stage.

Framework for Deepening Engagement



Low-income communities of color continue to be disproportionately affected by the repercussions of environmental policy and practice—including climate change—while people of color remain underrepresented in the environmental field and in places where environmental decisions are made. For these reasons, the Alliance prioritizes working with middle school- and high school-age youth and educators in environmental justice communities within the Bronx River watershed. Hand in hand with this prioritization, the Alliance examined the types of young people its education programming does—and should—serve. While some of the more advanced programming will, by its nature, engage with high-achieving students, the Alliance strives to reach a broad audience, including those young people whose learning styles may best be engaged outside of the classroom.