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# EarthEcho International Youth Leaders Convene in Washington DC

by Hannah MacDonald

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This past August, EarthEcho International brought together 32 young leaders from their Youth Leadership Council (YLC) and Water Challenge AmbassadorS (WCA) programs, ages 13-22, from across the world to Washington D.C. for the annual Leadership Summit!

The EarthEcho YLC is an outstanding group of environmental advocates and problem solvers who are committed to inspiring and empowering others to take action. Throughout the year, they work tirelessly to develop new programming with EarthEcho's staff to ensure our programs authentically

engage with young people as advocates and leaders. A core belief of EarthEcho International is that young people are the hearts and minds, not just the hands and feet, of the environmental movement.

The EarthEcho WCA represents a new initiative developed by the YLC. These young people hail from communities across the U.S. and have committed to taking action around water quality in their home communities. The WCA are participating in professional development to prepare them to lead



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water monitoring events in 20 communities across the U.S. on Water Monitoring Day on September 18th.

The Leadership Summit provided an opportunity for these young leaders to work together to develop youth-led EarthEcho initiatives for the coming months, gain skills to help support their efforts and personal conservation work, and build connections with their peers and the EarthEcho team.

Prior to the Leadership Summit, YLC and WCA members were surveyed to determine their needs and interest in different professional development opportunities. Accomplished professionals in the fields of marketing, communications, advocacy, and diversity were brought together to provide comprehensive professional development for EarthEcho youth. YLC and WCA members gained skills to expand their work, strengthen their messaging, and promote EarthEcho programs as well as their own initiatives. Specific session topics included:

- Communications training
- Interview practice
- Event and campaign marketing
- Integrating inclusion and diversity
- Political advocacy
- Expanding work beyond community
- Social media branding
- Networking and career building

Each YLC committee worked alongside staff to develop an action plan for the coming year. Following planning sessions, committees shared their progress with the full YLC defining the steps and resources that were needed to move forward. Below highlights each of the committees' action plans.

### Water Challenge Committee

The Water Challenge Committee will continue their work on the "Water Challenge Ambassador" initiative. Thus far, the YLC committee has onboarded an inaugural class of 20 Water Challenge Ambassadors (WCA), created online content and blog posts, and has established mentor relationships between YLC mentors and WCA mentees. During the convening, the WC committee assisted WCA with planning and preparing for events held in their local communities on World Water Monitoring Day - September 18, 2018. Through World Water Monitoring Day, the WC committee plans to continue mentoring, update and finalize event plans, and create social media content. Following World Water Monitoring Day, the Water Challenge Committee will host professional development webinars for WCA including water policy and a career panel. In addition, the committee will develop a formal structure for the 2019 WCA program to onboard additional WCA members as



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TOP: Professional Development BOTTOM: Water Challenge Committee

appropriate.

### STEMExplore Committee

The STEMExplore YLC committee has taken leadership on the video contest component of the 2018 STEMExplore program expansion. The video contest will be written by youth, for youth and will allow girls the opportunity to further research a STEM career that inspires them and create a multimedia project highlighting their interests. EarthEcho International will provide the winning submission(s) - selected by the YLC members - with a scholarship prize of up to \$2,500. The committee is currently developing content to promote this contest to an audience of girls ages 13-18. YLC committee members will promote the video contest, recruit STEM Mentors, seek corporate sponsors for prize contributions for the video contest, and promote

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virtual field trips.

### Expedition Committee

The Expedition YLC committee began working toward developing a tool or guide to reducing single use plastics as their project for the upcoming year. This guide will include examples that will empower youth to live a plastic free lifestyle. While the format for this guide has not been determined, it will be released concurrently with the teacher materials and films from EarthEcho Expedition: PlasticSeas in January 2019. Following the plastic-free guide launch, the committee will create a campaign and contest that promotes reducing single-use plastics use. The first draft of the Guide and a Social Media Toolkit are slated for release in October. The committee hopes that this type of tool will be developed annually with each EarthEcho Expedition.

### Washington D.C. Excursion

WCA and YLC members explored and experienced Washington, D.C. by a bike tour, a trolley ride or a comedy show at the Kennedy Center. Members were able to see monuments, establish friendships and enjoy an evening of fun.

We appreciate each YLC members' hard work, dedication and willingness to travel to Washington, D.C. for the Leadership Summit. The work that the YLC accomplishes each year in person sets them up for success for the rest of the year. Through the support of our generous sponsors at - The Curtis and Edith Munson Foundation, Northrop Grumman Foundation, and Dr. Lyndon Haviland, EarthEcho was able to connect 31 youth from four countries with the programs that engage them in taking action now for a sustainable future. We are grateful for their support.

#### ABOUT EarthEcho International

**EarthEcho International** is a nonprofit 501c3 organization founded by siblings Philippe and Alexandra Cousteau in honor of their father Philippe Cousteau Sr., son of the legendary explorer Jacques Yves Cousteau. Philippe Sr.'s belief in "a world where every single child can breathe fresh air, drink clean water, and walk on green grass under a blue sky" reflects EarthEcho's mission to inspire young people worldwide to act now for a sustainable future.

EarthEcho International empowers youth around the world through dynamic platforms that inspire action and positive change. Using 21st century tools and interactive resources, they are equipped to identify and solve environmental challenges starting in their own communities.

**For More Information:** <http://earthecho.org/>  
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TOP: STEMExplore Committee CENTER and BOTTOM: Washington DC excursions