



BEST PRACTICES SUMMARY

Ripples of Change:
Youth Local Action for
Resilient Communities



Photo by Spark Source Consulting



CEC

Introduction

This 2025 Youth Engagement Week (YEW) Best Practices Summary builds on the reflections, knowledge and lessons shared during the Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC) 2025 YEW webinar “*Ripples of Change: Youth Local Action for Resilient Communities*.” This webinar focused on how youth-led local action, community engagement and intergenerational collaboration contribute to building climate-resilient communities across North America.

The **2025 YEW**, held under the theme “*Youth Breaking Silos*,” featured a three-part webinar series designed to elevate youth perspectives from Canada, Mexico and the United States, highlighting the importance of collaboration between young leaders and the organizations that support them. Each webinar was facilitated by a young leader with experience in one of three focus areas: Indigenous and Traditional Ecological Knowledge, youth intra/entrepreneurship and community resilience. Alongside these facilitators, youth speakers and representatives from youth-supportive organizations shared their lived experiences and reflected on the role of youth-led initiatives in advancing environmental protection and sustainable development.

This summary synthesizes key messages and takeaways drawn from the facilitator’s experiences, the speakers’ contributions and the dialogue with the public. It also highlights best practices for youth engaging in this field, as well as for organizations seeking to support and collaborate with them. Through these activities, the CEC seeks to ensure that the voices, experiences and priorities of youth meaningfully contribute to North American environmental conversations.



Facilitators

To ensure that each session was grounded in lived experience and youth leadership, the CEC launched an open call to select the facilitators for the 2025 YEW webinar series. In collaboration with the CEC, facilitators selected speakers through an open call, helping to ensure diverse perspectives from across North America. As well as moderating the discussions, they also played a key role in shaping the content, fostering meaningful intergenerational dialogues and contributing to the development of this summary.

The three outstanding facilitators were:



Léla Eromobor
Webinar facilitated:
“What Businesses Need to Know: Young Innovators Shaping Business”



Franklin Velasco García
Webinar facilitated:
“Traditional Environmental Stewardship for the Next Generations”



Ana Valeria Medina López
Webinar facilitated:
“Ripples of Change: Youth Local Action for Resilient Communities”

Ana Valeria Medina López is an environmentalist with experience in scientific communication, education and data analysis. She is passionate about building bridges between the scientific community and the general public to promote informed decision-making and strengthen environmental awareness. Ana Valeria Medina López holds a master’s degree in natural resources management from the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry and a bachelor’s in environmental sciences engineering from the *Instituto Tecnológico de Sonora* in Mexico. Her work integrates research, education and policy with experience spanning biodiversity monitoring, climate reporting and outreach with organizations such as the Ecological Society of America and the US National Park Service. Currently based at the Pocono Environmental Education Center, she designs and delivers educational programs, outreach events and community engagement initiatives that connect people of all ages with nature. Ana Valeria Medina López is dedicated to fostering inclusive, intergenerational environmental dialogue and bringing American perspectives to global conservation efforts.



Webinar's Topic

This webinar focused on environmental community resilience through the lens of youth participation, community action and intergenerational collaboration. Across North America, this concept is commonly understood as a community's capacity to prevent, respond to, adapt to and recover from disasters and extreme events,^{1,2} while protecting and restoring essential ecological services and reducing future risks and vulnerabilities.³

In the context of the ongoing climate crisis, building resilient communities requires the active involvement of local actors. Youth have demonstrated a strong capacity to lead initiatives that address climate impacts, bringing fresh perspectives and energy that drive local action with the potential for broader impact. Ensuring access to appropriate tools, support and mentorship is therefore essential to amplify the role of youth in shaping resilient communities, one of the central objectives of this webinar.

Building on these insights, the CEC recognizes that a key characteristic of resilient systems is diversity, which is why the meaningful inclusion of youth in grassroots movements and community organizing has proven to generate lasting and sustainable impact on issues that matter most at the community level. This approach is reflected in the CEC's work on community resilience, including initiatives that center solutions developed by communities and for communities. Through various efforts, the CEC aims to strengthen community capacity, foster trilateral collaboration and build networks of environmental leaders and academics who can support local action.

- 1 National Strategy for Resilient Communities (ENCR), Government of Mexico, 2022
- 2 National Adaptation Strategy: Community resilience and risk reduction, Government of Canada, 2024
- 3 National Resilience Guidance: A Collaborative Approach to Building Resilience, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), 2024



Summaries of the Presentations



Alyssa Obrand

Finance Engage Sustain (FES)

Alyssa is the Executive Director of FES, a fully youth-led organization that supports young people in designing, funding and scaling sustainability and climate initiatives across Canada. Drawing from her experience as part of the youth community, she shared that youth leadership often involves learning in real time, without established pathways or guarantees of success. She highlighted that while this process can be challenging, it is also a key strength of youth-led work, allowing participants to adapt, grow and improve over time. Founded in 2012, FES addresses gaps in traditional funding systems, particularly for Indigenous, Black and racialized youth, by offering flexible and unrestricted support.

"You have to fail forward."



Mariana Dávalos & Alan Calzada

Biznaga A.C.

Mariana and Alan represent Biznaga A.C., a youth-led nonprofit based in San Luis Potosí, Mexico, focused on community-centered conservation and the management of natural protected areas. They advance conservation through continuous, trust-based action rooted in local and intergenerational collaboration. Biznaga promotes Areas Voluntarily Designated for Conservation (AVDCs), aligned with Indigenous and community stewardship, which places communities at the center of decision-making. In the Huasteca Potosina region, their work includes community biodiversity monitoring, water quality protection and the development of nature-based tourism, demonstrating how youth leadership can translate motivation into lasting environmental and social impact.

*"Effective resilience depends on adaptive, long-term efforts."*⁴

– MARIANA DÁVALOS



Christopher Dipnarine

4MyCiTy Inc.

Christopher is the founder of 4MyCiTy Inc., an organization operated primarily by youth in Baltimore, Maryland, that has worked since 2018 to reduce the environmental impacts of organic food waste while improving access to food for local families. Emphasizing social harmony, economic prosperity and environmental stewardship, 4MyCiTy engages youth through mentorship, workforce training and community service, to achieve measurable impact and collective responsibility, with an emphasis on intergenerational dialogue.

"When every voice is valued and every generation is included, we don't just build programs, we build a united path toward long-term, sustainable change."

⁴ This citation has been translated from its original language, Spanish.



Best Practices

Drawing on the experiences and insights shared by our speakers through their work with youth-led environmental community resilience organizations, the following best practices and recommendations were identified for future work.

Best Practices for Institutions, Funders and Supporting Organizations

- + Recognize that the primary challenge for youth is not their awareness or ability to act, but rather limited access to funding and sustained support.
- + Update funding mechanisms to be just, flexible and adaptable to different project scales and contexts.
- + Design programs to achieve long-term impact rather than short-term outputs.
- + Provide consistent structures, mentorship and capacity-building opportunities to support youth leadership.
- + Emphasize trust, dialogue and shared understanding as the bases for lasting impact.
- + Address structural barriers within funding systems, particularly those affecting Indigenous, Black and racialized youth.
- + Engage youth and communities to see themselves as equal partners rather than as passive beneficiaries.

Best Practices for Youth Leaders and Youth-led Initiatives

- + Highlight your potential to drive cultural change, political will and broader societal impact.
- + Commit to consistency and long-term engagement to create meaningful impact.
- + Lead by listening and be open to learning from local knowledge and lived experience.
- + Engage in open, respectful dialogue and adapt to diverse community contexts.
- + Practice inclusive leadership that values diverse perspectives and backgrounds.
- + Use tools that make impact visible and measurable.
- + Work with communities to co-design initiatives that build shared ownership and relevance.
- + Value youth perspectives while learning from the wisdom of older generations.

Personal Reflections

From the perspective of Ana Valeria Medina López, the facilitator moderating this webinar, one idea that resonated throughout the webinar was the power that youth possess in shaping resilient communities, through their ideas, their energy and their unique abilities to mobilize change. Yet young people often lack the support needed to fully act on this potential. Tools like this webinar are essential for making youth-led impact visible, for identifying gaps in policy and resources and for fostering collaboration across North America. By connecting youth, organizations and institutions, these dialogues help transform ideas into meaningful action while also encouraging ways to better support a

population that plays a critical role in mitigating changes in climate and in working toward an improved quality of life.

Building on these reflections, the discussions also reaffirmed that community resilience can only be built and strengthened when environmental initiatives go beyond sustainability objectives and are placed with the pressing needs of local communities and individuals at the forefront of their priorities. The CEC recognizes that addressing climate challenges effectively requires approaches that are rooted in lived realities and responsive to community-level concerns.





As part of the CEC Youth Engagement Strategy, the Youth Engagement Week is a recurring event designed to embrace youth perspectives in North America by fostering their active participation in the CEC's work. The YEW aims to create an enabling environment for youth from Canada, Mexico and the United States to engage in meaningful dialogues, contribute to environmental discussions at the regional level and collaborate on innovative solutions to address pressing environmental challenges. Through workshops, consultations and collaborative projects, the CEC Youth Engagement Week supports the development of an intergenerational network committed to sustainability and environmental stewardship.



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