

**NEW**  
2025

**BEST PRACTICES SUMMARY**  
Traditional Environmental  
Stewardship for  
the Next Generations



Photo by Franklin Velasco Garcia



**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 “*Traditional Environmental Stewardship for the Next Generations*”. This webinar focused on the role of Indigenous and Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) in environmental stewardship, highlighting how intergenerational knowledge transmission and youth engagement contribute to the protection and sustainable management of ecosystems 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 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 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”*

Born in the Lacandon Jungle of Chiapas, **Franklin Velasco García** speaks the Mayan languages, Tzeltal and Tzotzil, and holds a degree in ecological engineering from the University of Sciences and Arts of Chiapas (Universidad Autónoma de Ciencias y Artes de Chiapas – Unicach). For the past four years, he has participated in a range of academic and scientific activities supporting the community. He has also been involved in research workshops on the biocultural knowledge of Indigenous Peoples, conducting consultations in neighborhoods, and systematising the ideas and proposals that emerged from these, as well as organising speaking circles with community Elders to draw on their experiences and knowledge. He is a promoting member of the Strengthening of Territories Agroecological Network (Fortalecimiento de Territorios Red Agroecológicos) collective in Mexico. Franklin has contributed to the logistics of the New Dawn Festival of the Peoples of the Lacandon Jungle (Festival del Nuevo Amanecer de los Pueblos de la Selva Lacandona), as well as in other community projects aimed at developing the Life Plan for Biocultural Reconstitution and Autonomy, which focuses on the management of Indigenous commons territories and their ecological reserves through agroecological and agroforestry models that are based on ancient Mayan cultural traditions, in dialogue with modern science.



## Webinar's Topic

Indigenous and Traditional Ecological Knowledge is an ancient biocultural knowledge system developed through a deep and sustained relationship between Indigenous Peoples and their territories. It is grounded in the systematic observation of natural cycles and in management practices that have enabled the conservation of biodiversity over time. But beyond ecological knowledge, it encompasses systems of values, languages, worldviews and social organization that guide the stewardship of water, soil, fire and the species with which communities coexist.

This webinar highlighted the central role of Indigenous youth in the intergenerational transmission of this knowledge and in its adaptation to contemporary environmental challenges. As inheritors and active carriers of Indigenous and Traditional Ecological Knowledge, youth are uniquely positioned to articulate it as a foundation for environmental transition and socioecological resilience. Throughout the session, speakers shared examples of these practices, including the use of traditional agricultural calendars as tools that integrate ecological, cultural and spiritual knowledge to guide the sustainable management of ecosystems and strengthen community autonomy.

Building on these perspectives, the CEC recognizes Indigenous and Traditional Ecological Knowledge as a cumulative body of knowledge, practices and beliefs about the relationship between living beings and their environment, transmitted across generations through oral traditions.<sup>1</sup> When considered alongside science, this knowledge contributes to an improved understanding of ecological processes and supports more effective environmental decision-making.

Since 2015, this approach has been advanced through the CEC's **Traditional Ecological Knowledge Expert Group (TEKEG)**, the first panel of its kind to contribute to an intergovernmental organization. The TEKEG's commitment is reflected in the CEC's Guiding Principles in relation to TEK,<sup>2</sup> which affirm the rights of Indigenous Peoples to maintain, control, protect and develop their knowledge, as well as the importance of free, prior and informed consent. Within this context, the YEW webinar highlighted the essential role of youth in preserving, prioritizing and advancing TEK as part of broader efforts to address climate change, conserve biodiversity and promote the sustainable use of natural resources.

1 Indigenous Knowledge and Traditional Ecological Knowledge, US National Park Service, 2024.

2 The North American Guiding Principles in Relation to the Incorporation of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK). CEC, 2025.

# Summaries of the Presentations



## Maxim Larrivée & Amélie Grégoire-Taillefer

Montreal Insectarium | Space for Life  
(Insectarium de Montréal | Espace pour la vie)

Maxim and Amélie described the Community Science Program *Les Sentinelles du Nunavik*, an initiative from Insectarium de Montréal | Espace pour la vie that involves youth from Indigenous communities living north of the 52nd parallel, where they monitor insects as indicators of climate change. The program combines TEK with scientific tools in order to improve understanding of climatic impacts in a region that is highly sensitive to temperature fluctuations and ecological cycles. By training youth, the initiative promotes the study of insects as key elements for understanding and interpreting weather phenomena and associated environmental changes, as well as species migration, while also strengthening the intergenerational transmission of knowledge and cultural connection to the land.



*"This project encouraged me to connect with my traditional understandings of the surrounding ecosystems and the environment of Chisasibi which created a space that encouraged a collective responsibility to effectively respond to climate change."*

— HAYLEE PETAWABANO (Sentinel of the Cree Nation)



## Juan Velázquez

Youth Collective of the Maya Region  
(Colectivo Jóvenes de la Zona Maya)

Juan shared his experience as a member of the Maya Region Youth Collective, which is composed of Maya youth who work on managing their territory with an agroecological and community-based approach. The collective bases its work on the diversification of activities and production processes, such as milpa farming, meliponiculture, crafts and the preservation of heirloom seeds. Its work strengthens the local capacities of young people and supports their continued presence in the territory. The collective recognizes Maya grandmothers and grandfathers as "living libraries," and their oral knowledge is systematized and passed on to youth through workshops and community exchanges. These practices are key for the protection of native flora and fauna, agrobiodiversity and traditional food systems, while also emphasizing the importance of maintaining healthy, pesticide-free soils.

*"This exchange of knowledge leads to the strengthening of our identity and culture, as it represents a way to preserve biodiversity."* <sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> This citation has been translated from its original language, Spanish.



# Summaries of the Presentations



## Laylalanai Gocobachi & Tristan Joe

United National Indian Tribal Youth (UNITY)



Laylalanai and Tristan talked about the Earth Ambassadors program, an initiative that aims to empower young Indigenous leaders (aged 14 to 24) through culturally grounded leadership development and environmental advocacy. Laylalanai is one of the selected participants, and her platform is intended to revitalize Yaqui Traditional Ecological Knowledge through the empowerment of Indigenous youth from the United States and Mexico. The program will strengthen youth leadership, promote environmental awareness and foster sustainable solutions that respond to the challenges faced by Indigenous communities. Through guided tours, youth learn the names, uses and cultural significance of various plants as they participate in respectful harvesting practices for the preparation of remedies, food or cultural items. This experience is intended to ensure the transmission of Traditional Knowledge, strengthen cultural identity and foster a relationship of respect, reciprocity and responsibility with the Earth for present and future generations.

*"As Indigenous Peoples, we have been here for generations and we have made it this far, so we have multiple teachings, knowledge, Elders and leaders in our communities that we try to get that knowledge from and pass it along to future generations."*

— LAYLALANAI GOCOBACHI



# Best Practices

Drawing on the experiences and insights shared by our speakers through their work with Indigenous communities and youth-led initiatives grounded in Traditional Ecological Knowledge, the following best practices and recommendations were identified for future work.

## Best Practices for Organizations

- + To involve Indigenous youth in decision-making, recognizing them as key actors and central figures, while respecting their collective rights, knowledge and traditional forms of organization.
- + To design programs that will strengthen the role of youth as agents of environmental transition, supporting initiatives that focus on territory stewardship and the protection of the web of life.
- + To strengthen the organizational capacities of youth, by providing leadership, planning and management tools for the stewardship of their territories.
- + To adapt funding criteria so that emerging organizations are not excluded, and valuing community roots, youth leadership and early-stage processes.
- + To promote youthful autonomy in projects and resource management, avoiding symbolic participation and fostering genuine processes of territorial self-management and the preservation of Traditional Knowledge.

## Best Practices for Youth

- + To engage in knowledge-sharing dialogues with Elders from their communities, recognizing them as Knowledge Holders and fostering intergenerational transmission processes based on respect and attentive listening.
- + To systematize the Traditional Knowledge acquired so that long-term action plans might be developed to benefit communities and their territories.
- + To implement territorial self-management strategies, adapted to youth's local contexts and oriented toward the stewardship and management of their territories.
- + To integrate technological tools with local knowledge in order to document, preserve and share Traditional Knowledge, ensuring that communities maintain sovereignty over their information.
- + To share Traditional Knowledge responsibly, balancing openness to dialogue beyond our communities with respect for the boundaries and agreements established by our Elders.

Photo by Espace pour la vie & Parcs Nunavik

# Personal Reflections

From the perspective of Franklin Velasco García, the facilitator moderating this webinar, the experience was highly meaningful, as it made clear how Indigenous youth and their organizations are deeply connected to the heart of their communities and play a key role in the recovery and preservation of Indigenous collective memory and environmental knowledge. Despite receiving often only limited support, these young people continue learning and driving intergenerational transmission of knowledge and territorial stewardship from within their own realities. The interventions during the webinar reaffirmed that living in Indigenous communities means learning from everyday experiences, inhabiting a shared world and creating one's own narratives that strengthen a collective sensibility for the care of life and the territory.

The contributions during the webinar also made clear that Indigenous youth are leading efforts to protect the environment and their territories in North America. Furthermore, the CEC reaffirmed that it is not enough to simply acknowledge youth's role: it is essential to create real leadership opportunities within existing systems and ensure access to necessary resources so that they can implement concrete changes. In addition, it was emphasized that Traditional Ecological Knowledge lives through the people who practice it and the territory they inhabit. It is a dynamic body of knowledge, built over centuries of experience and youth play a key role in its preservation and future flourishing.





**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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