



# Education Strategic Alignment Framework

*2015-2017*

## INTRODUCTION

The Wildlife Conservation Society saves wildlife and wild places worldwide through science, conservation action, education, and inspiring people to value nature. Every year, we reach millions of people through visits to our five parks in New York City, outreach activities, and education programs for children, teens, and families. WCS Zoos and Aquarium Education (hereafter referred to as WCS Education) designs every educational engagement to be directly connected to WCS's mission, to connect participants to nature, and to steer our visitors toward conservation advocacy. From teens and college students conducting urban ecology research in New York City, to young families engaging in nature play activities in a zoo, to whole-school partnerships focused on STEM learning for both teachers and students, WCS's educational portfolio includes a range of opportunities designed to inspire a new movement of conservation advocates.

In 2014, WCS Education facilitated a series of intradepartmental planning meetings, dialogue sessions, and visioning exercises. This resulted in the following guiding statement for all Education efforts:

*The goal of WCS Zoos and Aquarium Education is to inspire a movement of conservation advocates. We do this by providing inspiration; connections to animals and nature; science content, skills, and resources; and the confidence necessary for our audiences to act individually and collectively on behalf of wildlife and the environment.*

This document lays out our vision for WCS Education through 2017—the first three years of the *WCS 2020* strategic plan. It is designed to align with the overall priorities of *WCS 2020*, and to generate the types of evidence that are key to meeting WCS's strategic aims. In the pages that follow, four sections lay out details of our approaches and plans.

- ***Principles for Excellence and Education Outcomes*** describes the principles that are the foundation of all WCS Education programs and engagements, and the primary outcome categories these engagements are designed to achieve.
- ***Educational Engagement Framework*** details the six different types of programs and engagements we feature in our parks, along with associated outcomes, metrics, and evaluation foci.
- ***Strategic Alignment 2015-2017*** is a detailed work plan describing our departmental priorities through 2017. This document was specifically designed to align with WCS's overall priorities as laid out in *WCS 2020*.

- ***Monitoring, Evaluation, and Research Strategy*** is an overview of our approach to monitoring, evaluation, and research, along with priority focus areas for these activities through 2017.

Together, these documents form the roadmap for WCS Education over the next three years. As a longtime leader in the zoo and aquarium field, WCS Education is passionate about turning our vision into reality in order to continually improve the visitor experience in our parks and to achieve our goal of inspiring a new movement of conservation advocates.

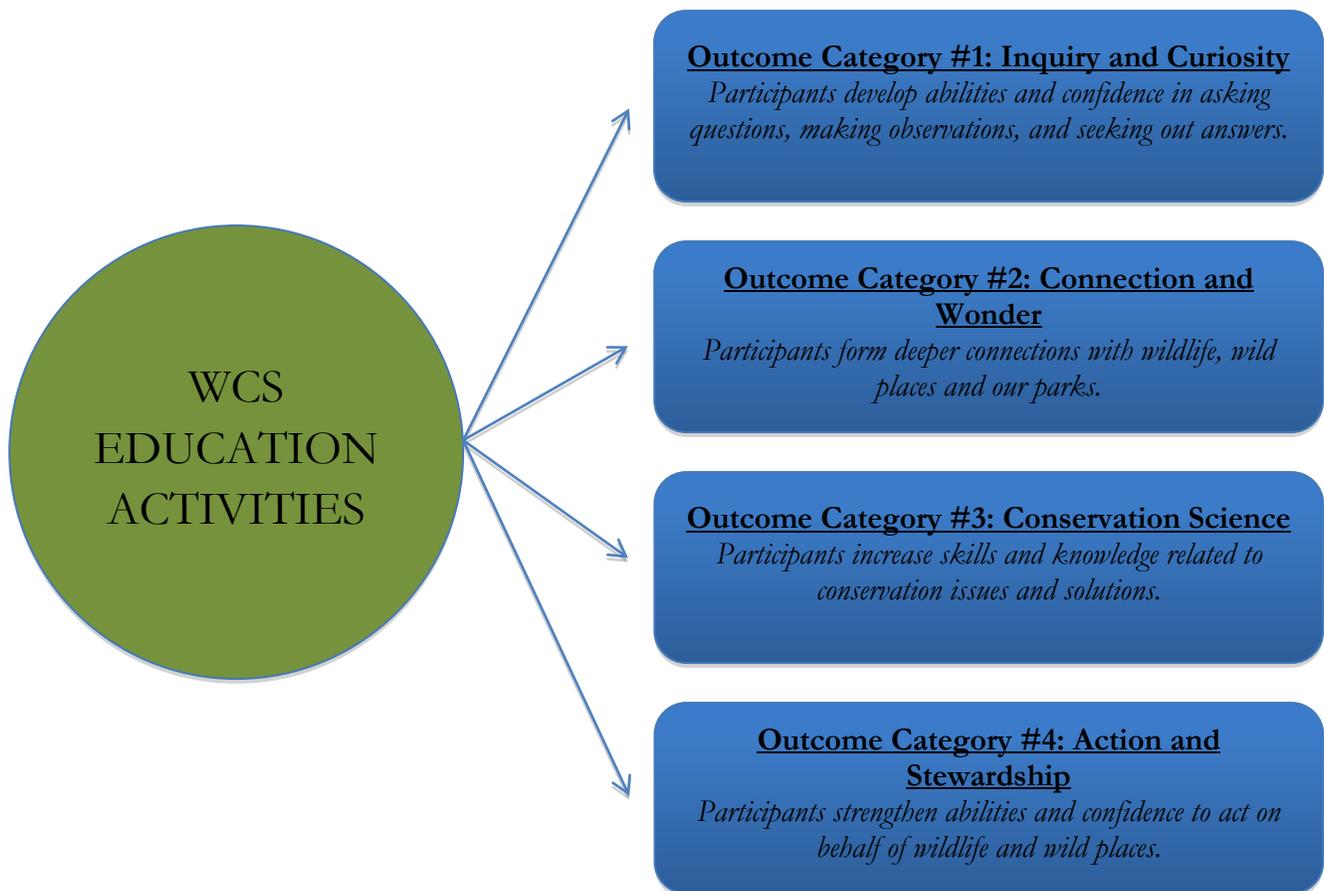
## **Principles of Excellence**

Eight “Principles for Excellence” underpin all WCS Education activities. These are the hallmark features of our education programs and engagements. The eight principles are informed by current research and innovative trends in conservation education and informal science learning.

- **First-hand experience:** Providing opportunities for engagement with live animals and nature.
- **Active participation:** Providing opportunities for learners to create their own meaning and have a voice in the education experience through strategies such as inquiry and experiential learning.
- **Relevance:** Making connections between New York City life and global wildlife conservation.
- **Multiple modalities:** Ensuring that our programs reflect the range of ways that people learn.
- **Sense of wonder:** Connecting people to the wonder and beauty of nature and wildlife.
- **Hands-on science:** Providing opportunities to practice the skills of scientists.
- **Conservation literacy and action:** Empowering people with knowledge and/or skills that encourage action on behalf of wildlife and the environment.
- **Outcomes-based:** Communicating and measuring outcomes that align with departmental and organizational priorities.

## Program Outcomes

Additionally, all WCS Education programs and engagements are designed to achieve outcomes in at least one of four categories. Outcomes are selected based on audience, content, and purpose of the educational engagement.



## Educational Engagement Framework

All education activities at WCS can be categorized as one of six engagement types: live in-park interpretation, school programming, informal programming, youth development, professional training and digital learning. Each of the engagement types is detailed below, along with the relevant outcome categories, monitoring metrics, and evaluation priorities for each.

Engagement Type	Description	Engagement Outcomes	Metrics and Evaluation Foci
Live In-park Interpretation	Efforts and programming that are designed to engage our park visitors with the WCS mission. Strategies for engagement include exhibit interpretation, discovery stations, Wildlife Theater, guest programs, and WCS movement making programming.	Connection and Wonder  Action and Stewardship	<u>Monitoring</u> # of interactions / viewers # of volunteer docent/ Discovery Guide hours # of people who attended Education-led guest programs # of signatures/ drawings collected # of docents, teen Discovery Guides, and paid interpreters  <u>Evaluation Focus 2015-2017</u> What aspects of live interpretation are most effective in connecting our visitors to wildlife, cool science, our parks, and our mission?
School Programming	Efforts and programming that are designed for the formal education audience and are connected to specific learning standards. These include, but are not limited, to on-site and off-site school programs, guided tours, whole-school partnerships, Wildlife Theater, and NYA Community Conservation Connections programs.	Inquiry and Curiosity  Connection and Wonder  Conservation Science	<u>Monitoring</u> # of programs delivered # of program participants % of total schools in each borough % of schools that are Title I % of participants by grade level % of teachers reporting program satisfaction  <u>Evaluation Focus 2015-2017</u> What are the outcomes of the whole-school partnership model? In what ways do these differ from one-off education programs for schools?

<p>Informal Programming</p>	<p>Efforts and programming that are designed for our general audiences such as families, children, and teens. These include, but are not limited to, summer camp, community outreach, overnights, birthday parties, youth and family classes</p>	<p>Inquiry and Curiosity</p> <p>Connection and Wonder</p> <p>Conservation Science</p> <p>Action and Stewardship</p>	<p><u>Monitoring</u>  # of participants  # of programs  # of program hours</p> <p><u>Evaluation Focus 2015-2017</u>  To what extent and in what ways do our informal education programs move participants along the conservation continuum?</p>
<p>Youth Development</p>	<p>Efforts and programming that are part of the youth engagement program. Programs focus on STEM career development, workforce development, and public engagement programming. These include teen programs such as Project TRUE, Visionmaker:NYC, Discovery Guides, the Wildlife Conservation Corps, and Teen Advisory Council.</p>	<p>Inquiry and Curiosity</p> <p>Connection and Wonder</p> <p>Conservation Science</p> <p>Action and Stewardship</p>	<p><u>Monitoring</u>  # of participants  # of programs  # of program hours</p> <p><u>Evaluation Focus 2015-2017</u>  What are the program elements needed to create STEM career paths for underrepresented populations in STEM?</p>
<p>Professional Training</p>	<p>Efforts and programming that are designed to provide professional training to recruited audiences in order to advance the field of conservation education. These include, but are not limited to, teacher professional development programs, Advanced Inquiry Program, Conservation Education Fellows, Discovery Guides and Docents.</p>	<p>Inquiry and Curiosity</p> <p>Connection and Wonder</p> <p>Conservation Science</p> <p>Action and</p>	<p><u>Monitoring</u>  # of hours of training delivered  # of teacher participants  % of NYC schools with at least one teacher participating in WCS PD</p> <p><u>Evaluation Focus 2015-2017</u>  How effective are our Discovery Guide and Docent training programs in preparing them to help our visitors make connections between our visitors and wildlife, cool</p>

		Stewardship	science, our parks, and our mission?
Digital Engagement	Efforts and programming that are primarily delivered through a digital platform. These include, but are not limited to, social media, student blogs, webinars, Google Hangouts on Air, online teacher academy and online engagement activities such as Pablo Python.	<p>Connection and Wonder</p> <p>Conservation Science</p> <p>Action and Stewardship</p>	<p><u>Monitoring</u></p> <p># of webinar and Google Hangout participants</p> <p># of social media interactions</p> <p># of hits to web pages, including Pablo Python Online</p> <p><u>Evaluation Focus 2015-2017</u></p> <p>What types of digital programs are most effective in building connections between WCS and our visitors, as well as between WCS and individuals who are not geographically able to visit our parks?</p>

## Strategic Alignment Framework 2015-2017

One of the products of our departmental planning over the past nine months has been a detailed work plan to guide our departmental efforts over the next three years. The key activities outlined in the Strategic Alignment Framework below have all been chosen to support the priorities outlined by *WCS 2020*. The Education Leadership Team (consisting of all WCS Education directors and managers) meets monthly to review activity progress.

Key Activities	WCS 2020 Alignment
<p><b>1. Expand our reach with high-quality learning experiences for key audiences including schools, teachers, children, teens, and families.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 1.1: Catalog and annually review all education programs and activities according to our Principles of Excellence, intended learning outcomes and audience needs.</li> <li>● 1.2: Revise and/or discontinue programs and activities that do not align with our Principles of Excellence and/or do not have learning outcomes that meet audience needs.</li> <li>● 1.3: Create new programs and activities that align with our Principles of Excellence, the needs of our audience, and WCS campaigns, priority regions, and priority species.</li> <li>● 1.4: Engage in a quarterly reflection exercise (i.e. using Reflecting on Practice) to maintain high-quality learning programs and teaching practices.</li> <li>● 1.5: Meet and surpass annual program participation targets and revenue goals as defined by the Education Leadership Team.</li> <li>● 1.6: Implement new and innovative delivery methods, in particular digital learning, to expand our audience base.</li> </ul>	<p>Discover 4 Inspire 1, 3, 4</p>
<p><b>2. Expand our reach with high-quality public engagement and interpretation opportunities.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 2.1: Collaborate with EGAD and the Animal Department to create and implement a dynamic public interpretation plan across the five parks.</li> <li>● 2.2: Launch and sustain an outreach program to engage local communities in conservation education programming to increase connection to WCS's mission.</li> <li>● 2.3: Develop and implement a plan to maintain a targeted education presence at community events.</li> <li>● 2.4: Train all Education staff in the principles of interpretation.</li> <li>● 2.5: Develop and implement a digital learning and engagement strategy.</li> </ul>	<p>Discover 4 Inspire 1, 3, 4</p>

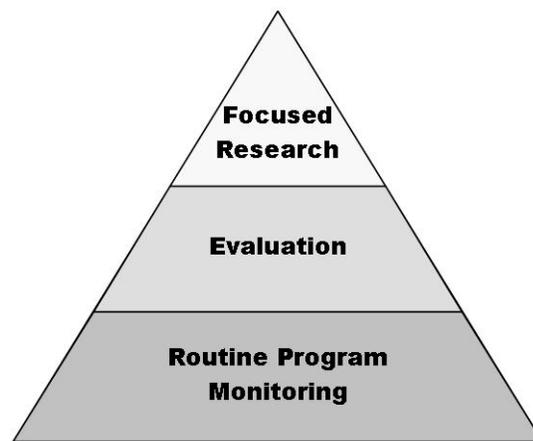
<p><b>3. Continuously evaluate WCS education program outcomes and impacts.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 3.1: Develop and implement an evaluation framework for the Education Department, with annual evaluation priorities aligned with our Principles for Excellence and WCS 2020 impacts and measures.</li> <li>● 3.2: Create logic models for all existing and future education engagement types.</li> <li>● 3.3: Standardize monitoring and evaluation activities and instruments across all parks.</li> <li>● 3.4: Produce an annual monitoring and evaluation report summarizing all evaluation activities across Education.</li> <li>● 3.5: Create a culture of evaluation within Education where evaluation results are used to continuously improve programs and systems.</li> </ul>	<p>Discover 3 Inspire 3</p>
<p><b>4. Maintain an active conservation education research agenda.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 4.1: Ensure that current educational theory informs our practice, and that research into our practice contributes to theory generation.</li> <li>● 4.2: Disseminate our research findings through conference presentations, peer-reviewed publications, and other relevant channels.</li> <li>● 4.3: Create a research strategy with a particular focus on STEM education, informal science learning, and urban education outcomes and impacts.</li> <li>● 4.4: Seek financial support for short- and long-term research from funders such as NSF.</li> <li>● 4.5: Maintain existing and develop new research partnerships with universities and other informal science institutions.</li> </ul>	<p>Discover 2, 3 Leverage (Outcome) 1</p>
<p><b>5. Build a stronger platform.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 5.1: Empower working groups to meet departmental goals and develop solutions to identified challenges.</li> <li>● 5.2: Build a strong community of practice by sharing experiences, ideas, and best practices on a regular basis.</li> <li>● 5.3: Re-envision the role of the Education Leadership Team to focus on strategic initiatives and WCS 2020 alignment.</li> <li>● 5.4: Implement a training and communication system for all education staff that ensures best practices across parks and programs from full-time staff to volunteers.</li> <li>● 5.5: Secure funding to support ongoing and new programs from a diverse range of funders (e.g. government, foundations, private donors).</li> <li>● 5.6: Create a strong Business Development team to streamline departmental practices to become more efficient.</li> <li>● 5.7: Align policies and practices for Education volunteers across all five parks.</li> </ul>	<p>Human Capital 2</p>

<p><b>6. Provide opportunities for connecting to WCS’s conservation activities and taking conservation action.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 6.1: Prioritize conservation activities and actions according to WCS-wide priorities and educational fit.</li> <li>● 6.2: Review all education programs and activities according to priority conservation activities and actions and identify gaps.</li> <li>● 6.3: Create new opportunities along the conservation engagement continuum where we have identified gaps.</li> <li>● 6.4: Support WCS’s movement making strategy.</li> </ul>	<p>Discover 4 Inspire 1, 3, 5</p>
<p><b>7. Leverage partnerships both internally and externally to maximize impact.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 7.1: Build strong partnerships between Education and internal WCS departments to meet WCS 2020 initiatives.</li> <li>● 7.2: Create open lines of communication between Education and Global Conservation to ensure up-to-date conservation stories are incorporated in our programming and messages.</li> <li>● 7.3: Develop strategic partnerships with New York City science, education, and cultural institutions to meet key activity goals.</li> <li>● 7.4: Maintain active relationships and memberships to key associations such as AZA, CEC, and NAAEE.</li> </ul>	<p>Inspire 4 Leverage (Outcome) 1</p>
<p><b>8. Position WCS as a leader in conservation education.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 8.1: Determine where WCS Education fits in the conservation education field and where our specialties lie.</li> <li>● 8.2: Prioritize dissemination avenues, and ensure regular publication submissions and conference presentations.</li> </ul>	<p>Discover 4 Inspire 1, 3, 4 Communications 1</p>

## Monitoring, Evaluation, and Research Strategy

The education landscape has changed dramatically in recent years. Simply having innovative ideas for education programs is no longer good enough to attract the support of funders. We must be able to back up our efforts with evidence of quality and effectiveness. This requires a strategic approach to gathering data about our education programs, rigorously analyzing that data, and using that data to strengthen our programs. WCS Education is implementing a rigorous monitoring, evaluation, and research strategy, which aims to: 1) standardize monitoring, evaluation and research activities across our five parks; 2) engage in regular and ongoing data collection and analysis; 3) use this data to inform our on-the-ground education activities and improve the quality of our programs; and 4) raise WCS's profile even further as a leader in innovative conservation and science education.

We are using a tiered approach to monitoring, evaluation and research. At the base are our monitoring activities. These activities and data are the foundation upon which our evaluation and research activities will be based. Monitoring is day-to-day, routine data gathering against agreed indicators so that we can describe both internally and externally what we are doing and whom we are reaching. From our routine program monitoring will emerge questions or issues for us to investigate through in-depth evaluation. Evaluation focuses on two essential questions: What impacts are we having? And how can we improve our programs? Finally, at the top of the tiered approach sit our research efforts. This placement represents both the specialized nature of our research activities. As a leader in the field, we have a unique opportunity to generate new knowledge and understanding by linking our education activities to larger research studies about the role of zoo and aquarium education in promoting conservation and improving science literacy.



These plans are already bearing fruit. We have implemented a new dashboard for monitoring program and engagement data; put in place systems for tracking visitor interactions; conducted internal evaluations of new and existing programs; and launched two new research studies funded by the National Science Foundation. During 2015-17, we aim to strengthen and expand these systems and efforts across the department.