MERITO Foundation

2019 Annual Report

Multicultural Education for Resource Issues Threatening Oceans

A WORD FROM THE BOARD & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

During the course of 2019, our Southcoast Region experienced the effects of climate change as we witnessed communities around the planet face their own. Meanwhile, a young Greta Thunberg inspired millions of youth to march and demand action from corporations and governments to curtail the impacts of climate change.

The MERITO Foundation empowers over 3,000 underrepresented students every year to better cope with environmental issues by providing ocean, climate and environmental education, hands on experiences in research and conservation, and the skills to find solutions to lower the carbon footprint at home or on their school campuses. Additionally, we raise the capacity of over 48 teachers every year to integrate STEM environmental sciences in their instructional day, which has an ongoing and long-lasting effect on future cohorts of students. Greta is not the only young person who is concerned about the future of our planet, our local students also want to take action and be heard, and we at The MERITO Foundation are committed to providing them tools they need to think, act and live in an environmentally sustainable manner.

Rocio Lozano-Knowlton

Founder & Executive Director

ABOUT THE MERITO FOUNDATION

MERITO stands for Multicultural Education for Resources Issues Threatening Oceans. We are a 501 (c)3 tax-deductible grassroots organization. Our vision is a healthy ocean cared for by diverse coastal communities who live in an environmentally responsible manner regardless of native language, economic status, cultural beliefs, or ethnic background. Our mission is to protect the ocean through education, hands-on conservation, and scientific research and to empower and inspire the next generation of ocean and environmental stewards.

2019 ACCOMPLISHMENTS SUMMARY

Thanks to support of our financial donors, volunteers and partners, during the 2019-2020 school year, the MERITO Foundation provided in-depth education, conducted field-based citizen scientific data collection and presented informative bilingual outreach to the teachers, students and communities and organizations we serve. We support teachers with NGSS-aligned professional development and meaningful classroom and field experiences. Our programs support the development of student-authored projects, provide incentives through cash prizes at our annual EECCOA Awards Challenge and help build the capacity of our future workforce through partnerships with multiple local, regional, state and federal partners. We strive to build stewardship for the coastal and marine resources of the Santa Barbara Channel region among traditionally underrepresented communities.

Accomplishments

3,505 students educated

Students 4th-12th grade involved in the MERITO Academy, Blue-Green Schools Project, and EECCOA programs

48 teachers trained

3.5 days of teacher training

31 in-class presentations and trainings

on coastal and Channel Island resources, scientific monitoring, and green building

7 cities

in Ventura and Santa Barbara Counties

100 student environmental projects

2 Student-Authored Projects Implemented on 2 campuses

$7,200

in cash prizes awarded to the best project proposals

Diverse Demographics

73.1% Latin American
20.2% Caucasian
2.5% Multiracial
2.1 % Other
1.3 % African American
0.8% Asian

>400 pounds of marine debris removed

removed by participating youth from local waterways during field trips

73 field experiences

with school groups to 8 coastal sites and to the Channel Islands

57 species of birds recorded

in wetlands along the Santa Barbara Channel region

Average 34%

increase in student's knowledge based on professional independent evaluation of pre & post surveys

1,116 pieces of trash

collected from Ventura County Beaches and identified using NOAA's protocols

Started monitoring changes on our coast line at 5 local beaches

using USC Grant beach profile protocols

8 community outreach events

Earth Day in 3 cities, Latino Business Expo, World Oceans Day Festival, and others.

Community partner and presenter

at Environmental Literacy's the NGSS Rollout Eventorganized by Ventura County Office of Education

Featured in the Ventura Breeze

Cubambiente 2019

MERITO participated and presented with 19 other U.S. delegates at international conference in Havana, Cuba.

Multiple radio appearances

Interview Live 805 with Tom Hilton
Daily appearances on La M 103.7 FM during the summer

Won "Dancing with Our Community Stars"

A dancing competition and fundraiser at the Oxnard Salsa Festival

1% FOR THE PLANET — MEMBER —

PROGRAMS

MERITO ACADEMY & BLUE GREEN SCHOOLS PROJECT FOR 4TH - 7TH GRADE LEVELS

The MERITO Academy seeks to connect the school campus and local community with our coastal and marine habitats. Having reached over 16,000 students since 2004, the MERITO Academy has been MERITO's signature program. During the 2019-2020 school year, the Academy launched the Blue-Green School Project (BGSP). This project adds an advocacy element that promotes beneficial behaviors and empowers students to actively mitigate our region's drought, flood, and wildfire risks through projects that conserve natural resources and prevent pollution on their school campuses.

Through the MERITO Academy's program and Blue-Green Schools Project, the MERITO Foundation was able to:

- Involve 1,153 students from Title 1 schools in earth and ocean science stewardship activities.
- Introduce 4-7th grade students to the coastal and marine resources of the Santa Barbara Channel Region and the Channel Islands through 20 introductory bilingual in-class presentations.
- Train school groups on the implementation of NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries Long term Monitoring and Experimental Training of Students (LiMPETS) protocols for sandy and rocky intertidal habitats.
- Instruct 34 school groups during 21 field experiences to local wetlands, beaches, estuaries, and the Channel Islands.
- Provide 2 full days of Professional Development & access to NGSS-aligned and Common Core curricula to 30 teachers enrolled in the MERITO Academy and BGSP from 8 schools.

PROGRAMS

ENERGY EFFICIENCY TO MITIGATE CLIMATE CHANGE & OCEAN ACIDIFICATION (EECCOA) PROGRAM FOR 8TH-12TH GRADE LEVELS

EECCOA is a project-based science education program that provides supplemental, NGSS aligned energy, climate, and ocean literacy to 8th - 12th grade teachers and their students. It empowers students to address climate change and ocean acidification by providing them the tools to research, design, promote, and implement projects to help mitigate climate change by increasing energy efficiency, water conservation, and reducing waste on their school campuses. Alternatively, students can develop ocean acidification awareness campaigns to inform their communities about this issue and its relation to climate change.

The EECCOA program's most important accomplishments and milestones in 2019:

- 2,357 students mainly from STEM underrepresented minorities (>75%) were immersed in ocean, climate, and energy science, and stewardship activities on their school campus, local watersheds, and coastal environments.
- 8 introductory presentations and school energy, waste and water audits during the spring of 2019.
- 11 meaningful field experiences with 700 students to collect environmental data and restore habitats along the Santa Barbara Channel Region.
- 16 teacher enrolled in the EECCOA Program received 3 Professional Development training days.
- Two environmental projects authored by students are being implemented at their respective school campuses (Jonata MS and Anacapa MS).
- EECCOA students presented to the Ventura County Board of Supervisor about their project ideas, which proposed to decrease the environmental footprint of their school campus (pictured below).

EECCOA CHALLENGE & AWARDS EVENT

The EECCOA Challenge is the culmination of the EECCOA program that involves a student competition supported by the community. Students develop projects to mitigate climate change, ocean acidification, reduce their school's utilities costs, and reduce the carbon footprint of their schools. Students are taught skills that help them grow their environmental entrepreneurship abilities. EECCOA projects are authored by teams of 3 to 5 students in one of four tiers: Energy Efficiency, Water Conservation, Waste Reduction, or Ocean Acidification Outreach.

- **101 student teams** developed projects for the EECCOA Challenge 2019
- **Over 200 students, teachers, parents, school administrators, volunteers, and partners** attended the EECCOA Challenge on May 31, 2019
- A team of **15 STEM and business professionals volunteers over 120 hours** to review and select the best projects authored by students.
- **15 teams of students received a total $6,900,** in cash prizes & over $1000 in in-kind awards.
- **Ventura County Board of Supervisors, Steve Bennett opened the award event** with gracious and inspiring words
- **Community businesses** and agencies supported the event through sponsorships.

Photo Credit: Cliff Rodriguez

Ventura County Supervisor, Steve Bennett addresses and audience of over 200 people during the EECCOA 2018-2019 Challenge and Awards event emphasizing the importance of environmental science education in public schools on May 31, 2019 at Museum of Ventura County

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

Anacapa Middle School students spearhead a project to lower their school's energy use. A project proposed by a team of students in Ms. Mendez's class has been implemented as a part of Ventura Unified School District's ongoing commitment to sustainability. During the 2018-19 school year, students in Ms. Mendez's class who participated in the EECCOA Challenge 2019, calculated potential electricity savings by installing sensors for the classrooms that automatically shut off the lights when not in use. Students returned to class this fall to find that over the summer, maintenance staff had installed the devices identified in their project proposal.

Concerned students implement a plastic bottle recycling program on campus. EECCOA Challenge 2019 1st Prize winners "Bottles for Profit," from Jonata Middle School in Buellton are excited to be implementing their project this year. Students identified a business opportunity that reduces the number of plastic bottles ending up in the trash by recovering the CRV value at a local redemption center. Students from the previous year had already raised enough funds to implement the project last June before moving on to high school. In 2019-2020, a new group of students are implementing the project and expanding it to include collection throughout the entire campus.

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.
-- Margaret Mead

CITIZEN SCIENCE

We facilitate the youth's participation in scientific research by integrating citizen science protocols in our field studies with students. We collaborate with scientists, educational institutions and governmental agencies. Volunteers, educators and students participating in our programs are trained on how to collect scientifically sound data, which is recorded in databases used by scientists worldwide. In 2019, 73 school groups participated in field experiences in the Santa Barbara Channel Region and collected data on water quality, wetland bird species, marine debris, microplastics, beach topography, and NOAA LiMPETS Program.

Some of our outcomes:

- 73 school groups participated during our field studies in the Santa Barbara Channel Region and collected scientific data that contributes to ongoing scientific research projects including water quality, aquatic bird species abundance and distribution, marine debris, microplastics, monitored sandy beach and rocky intertidal habitats and beach topography.
- Our students removed and sorted > 400 pounds of marine debris and identified the source of 1,116 pieces of trash from Ormond Beach and Surfer's Knoll in Ventura County
- 57 species of birds were recorded in wetlands along the Santa Barbara Channel Region with the highest diversity at Snoopy Pond by the Water Reclamation Facility (likely the most important breeding ground for Green and Night Crown Herons in the region)
- Initiated monitoring of coast line changes by following USC Sea Grants beach profile protocols at Gaviota, Surfer's Knoll, Buenaventura, County Line, and Leo Carrillo State Beaches
- With assistance from Algalita and initiated a micro-plastics monitoring program and database for sandy beaches along the Santa Barbara Channel region

BILINGUAL OUTREACH

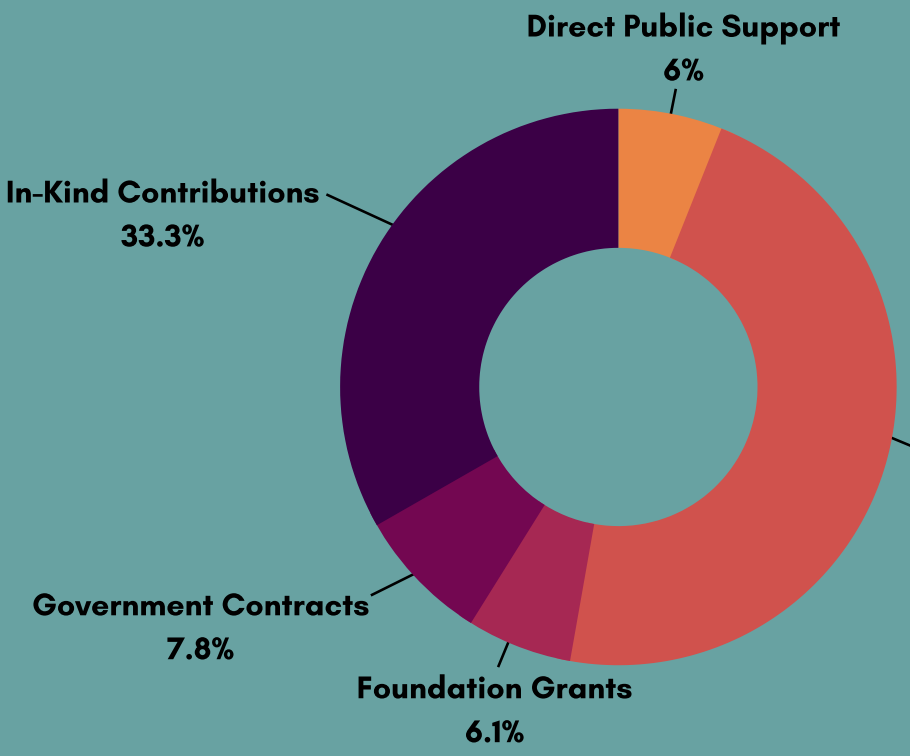
We build stewardship for coastal and marine resources of the Santa Barbara Channel region to the general public, and also to traditionally not included audiences. Our information includes issues concerning our watersheds, our coast and the Channel Islands. In 2019, we provided bilingual (English and Spanish) information on environmentally sound practices, ocean protection and natural resource conservation through public outreach events, conferences, STEM fairs for youth, social media campaigns, local radio, traditional printed publications and less traditional events including Oxnard's Salsa Festival during the 'Dancing with the Community Stars;. Our outreach reaches communities in typically underserved media markets. The MERITO Foundation participated in 8 community events including Earth Day Oxnard, Santa Barbara, Eco-Fest Ventura, Climate Marches, and many more outreach events directly engaging with community members in their own neighborhoods.

The youth that participates in our programs also educate the public. A good example are the students of Montalvo Elementary, whose marine art with environmental messages was exhibited for over a month in one of Ventura's newest and most exposed buildings off Victoria Ave.

A new partnership was established with the California State Parks in the 2018-2019 school year, which resulted in 5 restoration events to the Kalorama Wetland adjacent to the Ventura Pier. Students had the opportunity to perform ecological restoration and monitoring activities. Pictured on the left, Environmental Scientists from the California State Parks introduce students to the Kalorama Wetland in the Spring of 2019.

2019 FINANCIALS

The MERITO Foundation is a public charitable organization under the 501 (c) 3 tax code. The condensed financial statement information presented in this Annual Report is derived from draft audited financial statements. The MERITO Foundation's audited financial statements are available upon request by contacting us at info@meritofoundation.org.



Total Income:
$255,190.77

In-Kind contributions are from volunteers and teachers' time instructing curricula.

Fiscally responsible > Cost-effective > Community Asset

Sponsors

NOAA B-WET
Ventura Water
C.I. Harbor Fnd.
Island Packers
Sea Forward
Wishtoyo Fnd.
CA Coastal Conservancy

Effective

$215 average cost per student
Training, support and curriculum at no cost to eligible Title 1 schools

Proven

Professional, independent audit of student and teacher acquisition of knowledge and behavior change.

Partnerships

Channel Islands Nat. Marine Sanctuary
CA State Parks
Ventura Water
Algalita
USC Seagrant
CoAST SB- Seagrant
Pelagios Kakunjá
1% for the Planet Member

CONNECT WITH US:

How Can You Help?

Donate

Your tax-deductible donation directly supports youth educational and field experiences. It costs $215 dollars per child per year to provide the services and resources offered by MERITO Foundation. Our programs have a direct impact on the lives the students, their families and teachers participating in our programs. Moreover, collectively, our programs make a difference in the quality of the environment in the communities we serve.

Advocate

With your help, we can transform students' educational experience by publicly supporting and calling for programs that foster a sense of responsibility to care for our bioregion, to encourage our school districts to invest in inquiry/place-based education that inspires our youth to pursue STEM careers. Take the time to inform your local city council member, your state senator or congressperson about our programs.

Volunteer

The MERITO Foundation leads on average 8 field trips per month with 4th through 12 grade students from Santa Barbara and Ventura counties. Assist with field trips to local beaches and estuaries, water treatment facilities, recycling centers and other places where students get to learn more about surrounding environment, STEM and public sector careers in resource conservation. Volunteer to be a judge at our annual Awards competition or bea a guest speaker in the classroom on an environmental topic. To volunteer, contact info@meritofoundation.org with VOLUNTEER in the subject line.

Follow

Sign up to receive our newsletter to keep updated on our activities. Join our social media pages and share them among your peers to help spread the word about MERITO's work. To join the newsletter, email info@meritofoundation.org with NEWSLETTER in the subject line.

Sponsors, Supporters & Partners

Platinum ($50,000 & above)
NOAA BWET
Gold ($25,000 - $49,999)
U. S. EPA
Silver ($10,000 - $24,999)
Sea Forward
Channel Islands Harbor Foundation
Ventura Water
Bronze ($2,500 to $9,999)
NEEF
Wishtoyo Foundation
Pearl ($250 to $2,499)
Clinicas del Camino

In-Kind Sponsors
Jeff Newton/ Coastal Vineyard Care Associates
Jean Michel Cousteau Ocean Futures Society
Ventura Breeze
Betty's Belts
Island Packers
Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary
Copa Cubana Restaurant
Mavees Albhorn
Surfrider Foundation
Radio La M
Ventura County Energy Alliance
Bank of America
Leashless Brewery
The Refill Shoppe
WinCo Foods
Harvest Cafe

Ocean Ambassadors
Clifford Rodrigues
Martin Duran
Martin Ramírez

Ocean Stewards
Lynne Mersfelder-Lewis
Jim Knowlton
Jill Santos
Clinicas del Camino Real
Dan Redden
David Lantrip
Jennifer Eggertsen
Ventura West Marina
Duke Lyskin
Fernando Elizondo
Jose Montano

Ocean Friends
Judy Willens
Catherine French
Kristen Hislop
Lida Pardisi
Michael Murray
Patino Restaurants
Searle Creative Group LLC
Eduardo Arredondo
Vern Novstrup
Amy LeVan
Lili Sosa
Lois DuBois
Mark Friedman
Scharden Eggertsen
Ehler Family
Jose Arellano
Yukari Muller
Maria Ornelas
Laura Oergel
Samantha Hill

Partners

CUS Sea Grant
CA State Parks
Algalita
U.S. Fish and Wildlife
COAST SB Sea Grant
CSUCI
Sierra Club
805-Startups
Western Foundation Vertebrate Zoology
Buellton, Ventura, Oxnard, Hueneme &
Simi Valley school districts
Ventura County Office of Education
Los Angeles Maritime Museum

MERITO FOUNDATION

Our Mission is ocean protection through education, conservation, citizen science, and to inspire the next generation of environmental professionals.

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