



# Youth Advocacy Stories from the Field

# Youth Advocacy

**Moderator:** Ayana Melvan, Aquarium Conservation Partnership and Afterschool Alliance Ambassador Alum for Rhode Island

**Panelists:**

- *Sean den Bok; Fresno Chaffee Zoo*
- *Elliot A. Rivera former Executive Director of Youth In Action, Inc. and Principal Consultant and Founder of Desahogo Leadership*
- *Miguela Marzolf, Seattle Aquarium*
- *Shervin Hess, Oregon Zoo*

**Closing Remarks:** Stephanie Joseph, New York Aquarium, WCS



Washington, DC June 2017 Youth Advocacy Day on the Hill

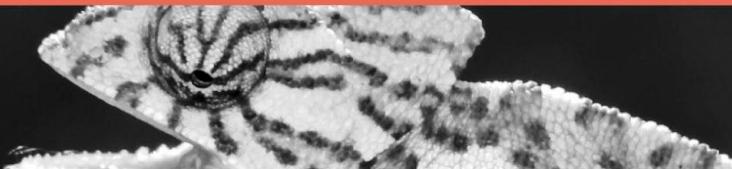


***Moving youth from the field to leadership to advocacy.***



## Exploring Strategies for Co-Creating Advocacy Programs with Youth

**From programs *for* youth → to movements *with* youth**

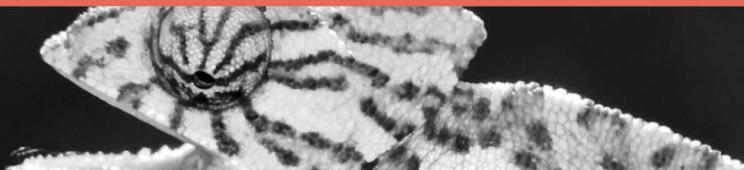


## Stories:

# Youth In Action/ACP & Azul



Aquarium  
Conservation  
Partnership



# Three Foundations to Co-Creating Authentically with Youth



## Power Sharing

Creating genuine partnerships where youth have decision-making authority and their voices are central to program design and implementation.



## Culture & Belonging

Fostering inclusive environments where every young person feels valued, respected, and included to contribute their unique perspectives.



## Resourcing Youth Leadership

Providing the necessary financial, educational, and mentorship resources to equip youth with the tools and support they need to lead effectively.

# Key Takeaways & Next Steps

## Intergenerational Power Through Partnership

Youth are not just beneficiaries or leaders of tomorrow; they are powerful agents of change today. True co-creation unlocks their innovative potential which benefits everyone.

## Investing in the Future

By allocating dedicated resources and fostering inclusive cultures, we build sustainable movements co-led by multi-generations of conservationists, sustaining and deepening impact.

## Actionable Steps

- Review current youth engagement strategies.
- Identify opportunities for shared decision-making and partnering with organizations already doing youth leadership.
- Develop and resource mentorship and advocacy programs for youth leaders that sustain these efforts.



SEATTLE AQUARIUM

# Engaging Youth in Policy Advocacy

August 21, 2025



**Mission: Inspiring conservation of our marine environment.**

# “Reef”-reshing ways to support corals

- Grade: K – 5<sup>th</sup>
- Activity: Coral Conservation Contest



# It's never too early to be an advocate

- **Ages: 6 – 9**
- **Activity: Silent March**

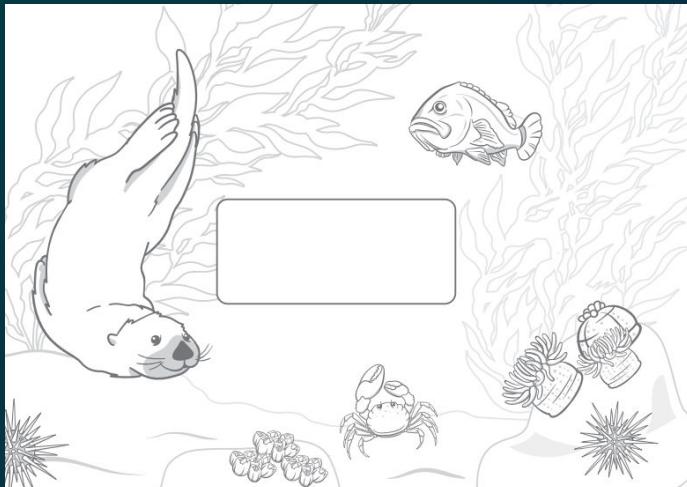
  

- **Ages: 6 – 12**
- **Activity: Zines**



You “otter” know you can always help the ocean.

- **Grades:** 6th - 12th
- **Activity:** Postcards



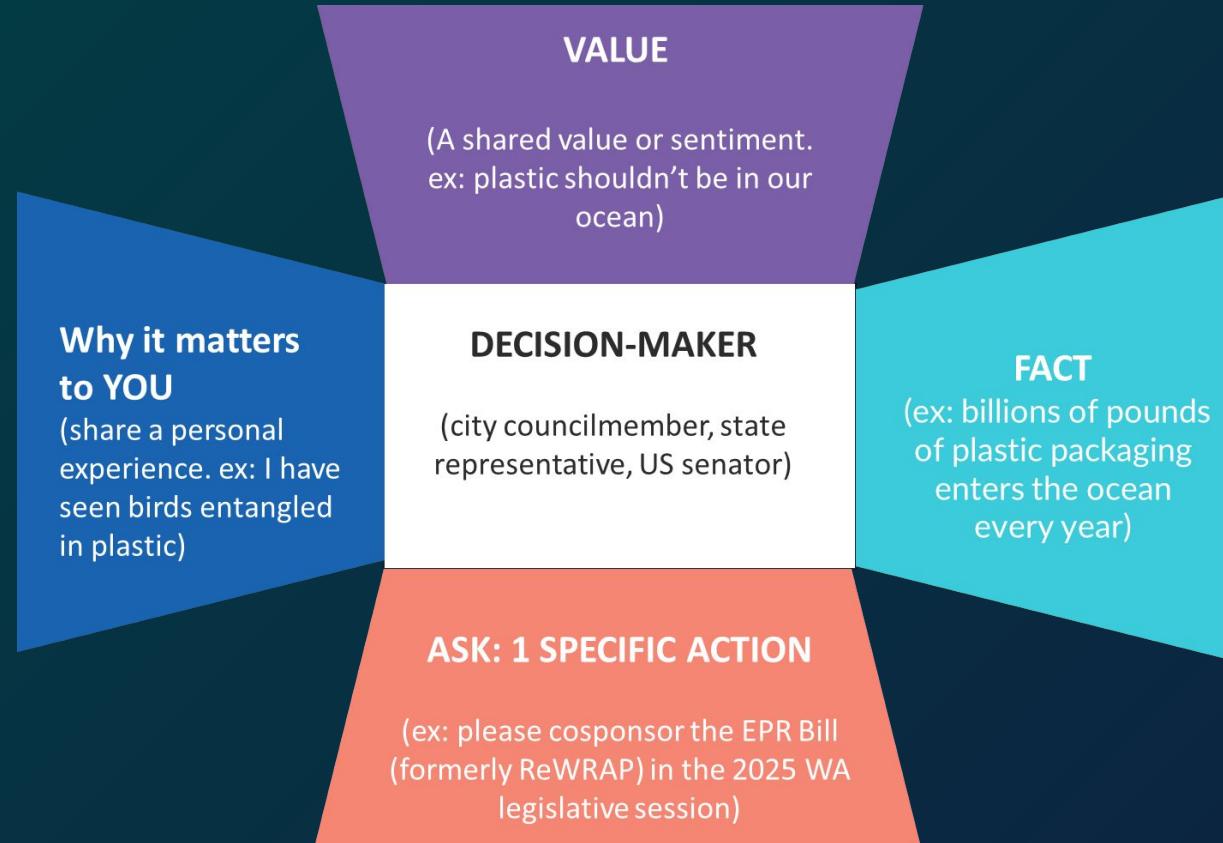
# Youth Ocean Advocates

- Launched in 1994
- Enrolled in grades 9 – 12
- Training
- Volunteer activities



# YOA Poli-SEA Trainings

- Why Policy Matters
- Mock Hearing
- Aquarium Policy Priorities
- Policy Messaging



# Lobby Day

- Annual trip to Olympia
- Meetings with state legislators
- Rally
- Tour
- Hearings



# Use the box but think outside it

- Their voice
- Their media
- Their passion



Letter to Editor (LTE)

To	<input type="checkbox"/> Person	<input type="checkbox"/> Person	<input type="checkbox"/> Person	
Cc	<input type="checkbox"/> Person			
Bcc	<input type="checkbox"/> Person			
Subject	Bull Kelp For Our State Marine Forest (#)			

To the Editor of \_\_\_\_\_

Date,  
Name of Editor,  
Name of Publication,  
Office Address,  
City, State, Zip

Remarkably, Washington State is among the most biodiverse states in the U.S. In the U.S., with ecosystems that are not only rare nationally, but globally. As one of the most prolific and foundational organisms to the marine environment, bull kelp forests hold immense cultural and environmental significance to the health of our oceans. Bull kelp forests are the most productive and biodiverse ecosystems in the world. In addition, with the effects of climate change, is thanks in large part to these incredible and productive underwater forests. In addition, they store carbon at a greater rate than forests, seagrass, and even tropical rainforests! Even though our state's Washington State's kelp forest statewide 27 to 135 metric tons of carbon per day, equivalent to the emissions of between 2,000-10,000 vehicles per year.

The first step in conservation efforts is recognition. Especially by the communities affected. (That means you!) That's why supporting the bill Bull Kelp For Our State Marine Forest (#) is vital for protecting these critical underwater forests. You can help by contacting your representatives and asking them to support this bill. It's important to remember that our oceans are not only vulnerable to these effects. I myself have joined the Keep Our Washington campaign because I want to have the opportunity to make my voice heard. The climate crisis has been happening, and will continue to impact youth. Early involvement is essential, so I'm encouraging all youth to do the same and get involved!

The more than 16,000 miles of land and water from the rocky shores of the San Juan Islands to the mudflats of the South Sound inlets, rely on critical bull kelp forests. With more than 80% of bull kelp forests lost in the last 50 years, legislative recognition is vital, combating the passiveness that conservation efforts often need.

**Bull Kelp Forests For State Marine Forest**

This legislative session, a bill has been proposed to make bull kelp forests a Washington state symbol - but it won't pass without your help. Call or email your representatives in support of **HB 1631!**

To follow this bill, sign up for the Seattle Aquarium's policy email alerts

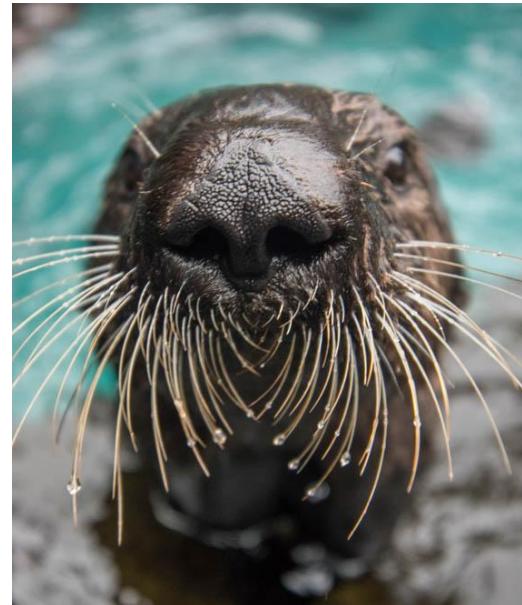


By Sebastian Ford

# Beyond TikTok: Communication Skills for Youth



Generation	Smartphone Ownership	Daily Usage (Avg)	Key Behavior & Concerns
Gen Z	~95–98%	~4.5–6+ hrs/day	High dependency, frequent checks, social media-heavy
Gen Alpha	~94–95% by age 11	3–7+ hrs/day for many	Early immersion, gaming, YouTube, strong parental/educator involvement



# Why originality matters in the age of AI and social media

1. Algorithms prioritize engagement
2. Audience fatigue with sameness
3. Virality depends on novelty
4. Long-term performance



## Tech and style changes, storytelling doesn't

- Structure: Beginning, middle and end.
- Character: Someone or something to root for.
- Emotion: laugh, feel awe, or feel empathy = remembered and shared.



## What else can zoos and aquariums offer?

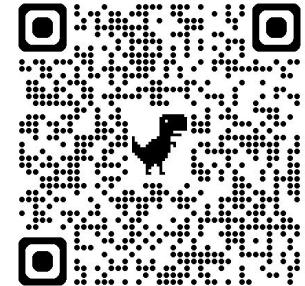
- **Media training** – professional editing, camerawork and production
- **Field visits** – experience conservation where it's happening
- **Elected tours** – make youth programs a stop when electeds visit
- **Media literacy** – navigate info stream, recognize misinformation, engage thoughtfully



## AZA Annual Conference

- CEC Open Session - Monday, Sept. 15  
8:00am-12:00pm
- Youth Advocacy Session at AZA -  
Tues, Sept. 16 2:00-3:30pm
- AZA Open Roundtable in Exhibit Hall -  
Tues, Sept. 16 4:00-5:00pm

Support for  
Youth Advocacy  
Survey Link



AZA | Learn

AZA | Learn

