



ECOLOGY PROJECT  
INTERNATIONAL

# The Current

FOSTERING TOMORROW'S LEADERS • SUMMER 2021

## From the Tablet TO THE FIELD



BY BRANT WARREN  
EPI Executive Director

EPI IS INNOVATING TO BRING OUR FIELD EXPERIENCES INTO MORE CLASSROOMS USING NEW ONLINE PLATFORMS

When I succeeded EPI founder Scott Pankratz as Ecology Project International's Executive Director, the transition in leadership commemorated

a milestone in our organization's history—and indicated a willingness to tackle change and welcome avenues of growth to keep step with an ever-changing world.

For 21 years, EPI's community of alumni, staff, instructors, and supporters (more than 100,000-strong!) have united to advance common values of inclusion, lifelong learning, and care for our natural world. Our mission and vision are rooted in a belief that immersive experiences with nature are key to fostering these passions in our students and forging a path toward healthy communities.

These in-field group experiences have been the pillars of our programs since the beginning, and last spring, we surveyed 20 years of EPI alumni to better understand how our programs have impacted those lives long-term.

**The results were conclusive: EPI programs, and especially those that provide prolonged leadership opportunities to our students, have had a profound and lasting impact on our alumni.**

We see this most notably in our local programs, where students remain connected to EPI through

workshops, internships, and other opportunities—long after their first course experience. The data supported the basis of our EPI student pathway: sustained connection is key.

So, how does an organization that's built a foundation on immersive student group experiences continue to provide those connections even when those students haven't yet, or might be unable to join us in the field? Or, what if there's a global pandemic that halts travel and in-person gathering completely? At EPI, we're meeting this challenge by supplementing our world-class field-based programs with online opportunities.

Our donors and supporters have proven in an overwhelming and humbling way that they trust EPI will not only withstand the crisis that the COVID-19 pandemic posed, but that we'll catalyze the experience to enhance our immersive experiences, evolve to meet the needs of our teachers and students, and ultimately grow.

With your support in the coming years, we're developing ways to convert the nature-inspired avenues of EPI's education framework to strengthen our alumni networks. Through academic and professional development opportunities, both in the field and across the web, we'll increase our alumni's access to sustainability-focused initiatives, and I hope you'll join us in this exciting journey.



# Expanding EPI's Model

CELEBRATING OUR PAST AND INVESTING IN OUR FUTURE

For 21 years, EPI's immersive field courses have synthesized student leadership and project-based learning to inspire students and teachers across the Americas. In tandem with this broadening of students' minds, we nurture and support their connection to one another, and to nature. The care and empathy that this creates is powerful when combined with their expanding intelligence, inspiring them to cherish the natural world and steward it thoughtfully, as well as to seek to understand others' perspectives. In today's world, the deepening of social-emotional learning is critical in allowing us to move into a peaceful and collaborative building of our future.

We adapt to and embrace best practices in science education—meeting the shifting needs of our partner educators. This next evolution—EPI Online—employs a hybrid model that deepens students' and teachers' connection to EPI in their classrooms before they've ever participated in a course. And after our core field experience, EPI Online will continue expanding and enriching our traditional field experiences. By leveraging the technology, research, and interactive tools that teachers desire, we're increasing students' curiosity and science abilities, allowing them to apply these skills to engage their communities.

## Who Will Benefit from EPI Online?

**Field Participants** - The ~1,000 US participants who attend programs each year will expand their understanding of environments and skills they'll apply during their experiences and post-course extensions will include ongoing applications of experiences and curiosities fostered during the course through access to resources and technology not available in the field.

**Chaperones and Professional Development Participants** - EPI Online will support broader integration of EPI's programs into classrooms through student-centered, nature-focused multimedia resources related to EPI program conservation issues, authentic research data, and science phenomena.

**Students & Teachers** - EPI Online will improve our ability to connect to a vast audience of students and teachers who EPI hasn't yet reached. For many, EPI Online may serve as the introduction point to EPI and life-long change.

Our staff are investing in this opportunity to foster deeper connections to our participants through these online initiatives and we look forward to celebrating these innovations with supporters like you.

“ I LEARNED A LOT ABOUT LEATHERBACK TURTLES AND LEARNED TO WORK AS A TEAM. WHAT I LIKED THE MOST ABOUT THE EXPERIENCE IS THAT IT HELPED ME UNDERSTAND THAT TO CARRY OUT SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH YOU NEED MORE THAN A SCIENTIFIC APPROACH, WE MUST ALSO USE TECHNOLOGICAL TOOLS SUCH AS APPLICATIONS THAT HELP US EXPLORE IN OUR OWN HOME.

-ASHLEY

GIRLS FOR A STEAM FUTURE PARTICIPANT

## Bringing EPI Online

Although the past year resulted in a dramatic reduction in our field-based courses, EPI persevered – continuing to connect to our students, even when in-person courses were unavailable. These opportunities allowed us to see, in real time, the power and reach that online programming would allow us.

### NURTURING CONFIDENCE IN COSTA RICA



In 2020, **EPI Costa Rica** created a virtual program focused on developing STEAM skills and introducing career and education opportunities in science-related fields. The program, **Empowering Girls for a STEAM Future**, allowed participants to appreciate nature, identify environmental research problems, and develop innovative solutions to communicate their results to the general public. Twelve schools were selected to participate in the program and 300 girls, aged 14 to 19, from communities in Limón and Los Santos were invited to be part of the experience.

### HEALTHY COMMUNITIES IN MEXICO



Mexico's Central Region and Neovolcanic Axis contains 36 Natural Protected Areas and is home to 41 million people facing socio-environmental challenges. These communities additionally possess deep local knowledge and practices based in traditions. **EPI Mexico's** Biodiversity & Community Health Project, funded by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), is creating 12 lessons, based on zoonosis and public health for primary, secondary, and high school students. Through the use of printed guides, Google classroom, and a WhatsApp Chatbot, this program will reach 50 environmental educators and youth volunteers, 600 teachers, and more than 18,000 students in 200 regional public schools. This will guarantee access to inclusive and equitable education and expand EPI's impact to new regions of Mexico.





## ECOLOGY PROJECT INTERNATIONAL

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Ecology Project International inspires youth with nature and empowers them with science,  
fostering tomorrow's leaders.



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At 21, EPI has certainly come of age since our first field course in 2000. Each year, we engage more students and celebrate the exciting trajectories of those alumni's futures. We're empowering students to think critically about how they can impact the larger social, political, and environmental health of their communities and we sew these seeds of change by connecting students to nature. After a collaborative process involving staff and members of EPI's Board of Directors, we're excited to announce new mission and vision statements that embrace EPI's capacity to transform the world.

**EPI's Mission:** We inspire youth with nature and empower them with science, fostering tomorrow's leaders.

**Our Vision:** We envision a diverse movement building communities that cherish and restore the ecosystems that sustain them.



Will you support future EPI initiatives by making a gift at [ecologyproject.org/FutureforEPI?](http://ecologyproject.org/FutureforEPI?)

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