



Valuing the Past,
Understanding the Present,
Preparing for the Future



ANNUAL REPORT



President's Message

The Timbuctoo Climate Science and Careers Summer Institute creates fresh opportunities for high school students, and there's no better place to host some of these opportunities than on ESF's Adirondack properties. We are grateful for the support of Governor Hochul, Chancellor King and the leadership of the BPHA Caucus in the State Legislature. At a special place like ESF, where experiential learning and field work are what we do best, Timbuctoo presents an opportunity to teach and shepherd curious minds, and to remind the great state of New York that our resources are right here to explore, learn from, and protect. The design of this institute is central to our mission to act both locally and globally to #ImproveOurWorld. Thank you to everyone who works to make Timbuctoo a reality. The power of this highly experiential program is immeasurable.



Joanne M. Mahoney
President, SUNY College of
Environmental Science and Forestry

Director's Message

Often, what we envision is not necessarily what we achieve. Timbuctoo is no exception. When we launched in 2023, we were excited about providing an exceptional experiential opportunity for our participants. We achieved that, but what we never envisioned was the incredible connections we would develop, short and long term, with the amazing individuals who have created the heart of what makes Timbuctoo so much more than anything we could have envisioned: our students, our program providers, our partners, and all our fantastic staff.



Paul Hai
Director of the Timbuctoo Institute



A group of diverse young people, identified as Timbuctoo students, are participating in a hands-on composting activity. They are wearing white t-shirts and brown aprons, and using long-handled tools to mix organic material in a blue wheelbarrow. The setting is an outdoor area with lush green trees and a clear sky. In the background, the Freedom Tower is visible. The text 'OUTSIDE ENVIRONMENT' is printed on the back of one of the students' shirts.

Timbuctoo students learning about the process of composting hands-on with Earth Matter on Governors Island.

The Timbuctoo Institute is Focused on Creating Awareness, Access, and Opportunity

TIMBUCTOO: NOW MORE THAN EVER

Timbuctoo's commitment to exploring the science that helps us understand our changing world, while revealing the historic and current conditions that drive inequality, is more relevant and vital than ever before. Our students embrace it, and our society needs it.

Many of the lessons we learned in the Adirondack Mountains were learned through fun and interesting activities.

Testimonial, 2025

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Lasting Connections

The bonds we build with participants extend well beyond each session. The Institute is committed to being more than a two-week summer experience, instead aiming to foster lasting connections. We engage alumni through local opportunities, facilitate continued contact with summer peers, and host events that unite alumni and former staff around camaraderie, content, and career development.

TIMBUCTOO REUNIONS

 **2**
REUNIONS

 **82**
PARTICIPANTS

ALBANY EXCURSION

 **2**
EXCURSIONS

 **48**
VISITED
THE STATE CAPITAL

 **18**
ELECTED LEADERS
MET WITH ALUMNI

Valuing Time Too

Many students use summer break to earn money for college. The Timbuctoo Institute values that important effort and so provides a stipend to participants who complete the program, time they could have instead been working. The stipend of \$1,280 for 40 hours in two weeks matches the minimum wage rate for New York City.



Adirondack Program

Participants are exposed to geographically diverse spaces, spending one week traveling around the state and another immersed in the Adirondacks.

Brooklyn |

- Medgar Evers College, Crown Heights
- Newtown Creek Alliance, Greenpoint

Kingston |

- YMCA Kingston Farm
- Sojourner Truth Monument, Town of Esopus
- Shaupepeak Ridge, Town of Esopus
- Pine Street African Burial Ground

Syracuse |

- ESF campus
- SU campus
- I-81 Corridor walking tour



Newcomb |

- ESF Newcomb campus, field sites
- ESF Newcomb campus, Goodnow Mountain
- The Wild Center, Tupper Lake
- John Brown Farm, Lake Placid
- Paddle trip, Rich Lake to Hudson River (5 miles)



46

STUDENTS
ATTENDED



31

DIFFERENT
HIGH SCHOOLS



MAKING CONNECTIONS
AROUND THE STATE

Adirondack program by the numbers



“

I met some fabulous people and enjoyed learning about all the fields of occupation and the outdoor activities.

Testimonial, 2025

NYS Dept of Transportation toured Timbuctoo students through a section of the Community Grid Project, which will remove the decaying I-81 viaduct through downtown Syracuse.

Brooklyn Program

Each day, participants visit at least one partnering organization, with the final day of each session spent on Governors Island. There students visit Earth Matter learning about the process and importance of composting. The students also visit the Billion Oyster Project learning about oyster habitat restoration and the goal of transforming water quality in New York City's harbor.



Brooklyn

- Medgar Evers College, Crown Heights
- Lefferts House, Prospect Lefferts Gardens
- Weeksville Heritage Center, Crown Heights

Bronx

- Association for Energy Affordability, Port Morris

Queens

- Newtown Creek Alliance, Hunters Point

Manhattan

- Earth Matter, Governors Island
- Billion Oyster Project, Governors Island



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Being able to expand the program and reach new students has been very fulfilling. I look forward to continuing to share the program with students across New York state.

Julia LoTempio,
Program Coordinator, 2025



 **85**
STUDENTS
ATTENDED

 **50**
DIFFERENT
HIGH SCHOOLS

 **MAKING CONNECTIONS**
AROUND THE CITY

Brooklyn program by the numbers



Joined by SUNY Chancellor John King, and BPHA
Caucus Chair Assemblymember Michaelle Solages,
Timbuctoo students identify marine life in NY harbor.

“

I was working not just for knowledge,
but also gaining financial independence
and confidence.

Testimonial, 2025

This opportunity was very helpful towards my future. I met people who showed me the light towards my path.

Testimonial, 2023

“

At the historic Lefferts House in Prospect Park, Timbuctoo students explored the intersection of art and history as an expression of social justice themes.

Timbuctoo Institute Research Program

The Timbuctoo Institute Research Program (TIRP) complements the Institute's work by providing monitoring and evaluation support to assess the program's effectiveness on our participants, partners, and staff. In keeping with the Institute's mission to provide and support professional development opportunities, TIRP supports academic and non-academic research through a collaborative and inclusive framework. This includes supporting directed graduate student projects, providing additional levels of access, awareness, and opportunity.

The TIRP designs research projects that seek to advance our understanding of how different experiences of places and culture informs the Institute's success inspiring participants to expand their personal and professional goals. Through our program evaluation we are better able to understand participants relations with, and perceptions of, land, community, environment, and governance structures within the context of social equity, inclusion and justice, and awareness of career pathways.

“

Knowledge creation and inquiry drive innovation and I'm honored to be a part of this statewide initiative that is exposing our youth to different vantage points for understanding their own histories, environment, and potentials for future success.

Emme Christie, Systems Manager and
Research Coordinator, 2025



Research Projects

CURRENT

Assessing Partnerships within the Timbuctoo Ecosystem

Researcher | Madeline Squarcia, MS Student

This project seeks to understand how partnerships with the Timbuctoo Institute impact the planning and delivery of environmental and related content by program providers and educators within the Timbuctoo ecosystem.

Research Question | How is partnering with the Timbuctoo Institute influencing the content and methodologies of programming partners, and influencing their approach to their work in the climate and social justice fields?

PLANNED/FUTURE

Longitudinal Assessment of the Impact of Participation on Timbuctoo Alumni

Researcher | To be determined

This project seeks to determine if, and how much of an impact, Timbuctoo has on the educational and career trajectories of Timbuctoo alumni. This is done through evaluation of the program on participants' decisions about education, careers, and involvement in environmental and climate action in the years following their enrollment.

Research Question | Are the educational and career choices of Timbuctoo alumni attributable to their participation in the program?



Ongoing Research

Program Evaluation of the Timbuctoo Institute Summer Programs

Researcher | Alexandra Walls, M.S. '25

The goal of this project was to develop an evaluation program to assess impacts to participants' climate, environmental, and social justice knowledge as well as awareness of career pathways.



What was done | Surveys have been administered at the beginning and end of each session for each year of the program. These surveys include questions about knowledge of climate science and social justice careers participants were exposed to, and how participants' identities might be impacted.

What we learned | In year two, the total mean knowledge score increased from before to after the program, with the percentage of correct responses nearly doubling for all justice-focused knowledge questions. The survey responses also indicate significant changes in how the participants see themselves as part of nature.

Why this is important | We are able to see from this data that we are impacting the participant's knowledge in the areas of climate and justice, broadening their understanding of possible career pathways, and identifying positive changes in the participant's environmental identity and behaviors. These findings indicate that the Timbuctoo Institute is delivering on its mission and goals to provide a learning environment within a broader transformative experience. The findings also suggest the environmental literacy and climate commitments of NYS would benefit greatly from including environmental, climate and social justice in the core education curriculum.

Overall, the Timbuctoo Institute hopes to have a positive influence on educational opportunities in New York state, which will see the broadening of participation of historically oppressed groups in higher education and environmental careers.

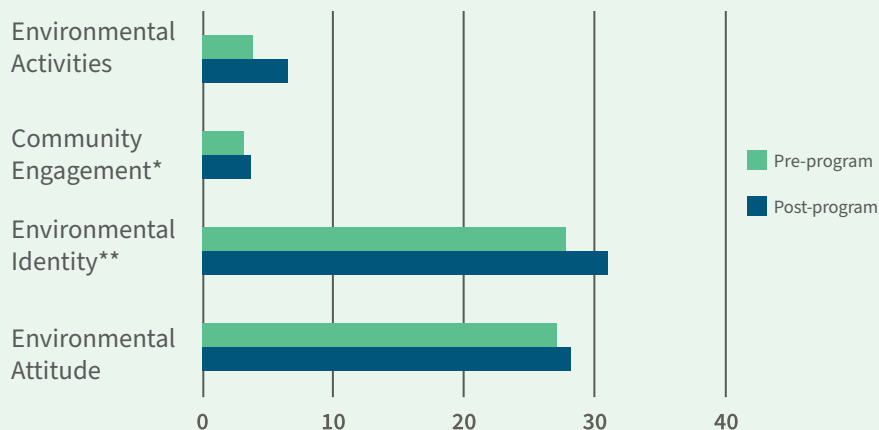


Before the program



After the program

Change in environmental activities, community engagement, environmental identity and environmental attitudes



*Statistically significantly different, pre-program vs. post-program; $p < .05$ (non-parametric Wilcoxon Signed-rank Test)

**Statistically significantly different, pre-program vs. post-program; $p < .001$ (non-parametric Wilcoxon Signed-rank Test)



It has been a gift to be a part of the evaluation and the experience for the participants the last three years.

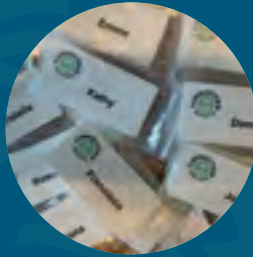
Alex Walls, Associate Director, 2025



Building the Timbuctoo Team

Our staff are at the heart of creating an outstanding student experience. Each team member brings energy and insight from their lived experiences, creating a space where students feel free to engage in meaningful conversations and build lasting peer connections.

This summer, we welcomed four returning staff in new roles and two Institute alumni who came back to contribute. We are grateful to the young adults who were inspired by the Institute and chose to make it what it is and help shape its future.



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Playing volleyball was much more fun at Timbuctoo than in other settings because the staff were so positive and I did not feel as embarrassed when I missed the ball or messed up.

Testimonial, 2025



2025 summer and professional staff.

Forming lasting connections with not only the [participants] but also with the numerous program leaders.

Summer staff, 2025

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Program Partner Profiles

John Brown Farm |

Students learned about the history of Timbuctoo with John Brown Lives!. Students rode bikes provided by a Black-owned local bike shop. Many learned to ride a bike for the first time here!

YMCA Kingston Farm |

Students worked with peers at the farm, met a local elected official, and visited the Pine Street African Burial Ground, owned and operated by Harambee of Kingston.

New York City |

Participants in the Brooklyn Program visited different sites around the city exposing them to various local organizations and unique hands-on opportunities. They met professionals who live and work in their backyard.



 **21**
TOTAL PARTNERS

 **9**
BROOKLYN

 **16**
ADIRONDACKS

 **4**
PARTICIPATED
IN BOTH

Partnership by the numbers

It meant a lot for us to be a part of Timbuctoo. It's a unique program and a group that we otherwise would have limited opportunity to meet and teach.

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Program provider, 2025

OUR PARTNERS



Expansion Plans

The Timbuctoo Institute represents an idea, a need, and an action: that students will broaden their understanding of the world around them and the breadth of potential futures they can create for themselves as a result of engaging, hands-on direct experiences alongside likeminded peers, led by content providers who reflect their own experiences, communities, and culture.



What is so powerful about this mix of ideas, need, and action, is that it is not limited to just one location. The Timbuctoo Institute can benefit students across New York state because studying the environment, climate, and equality and justice are relevant across our state. Evidence shows that students are searching for experiences like what the Institute offers, and are motivated to explore climate, environmental, and social justice topics.

The Timbuctoo Institute is excited about bringing the experience we have gained building the Adirondack and Brooklyn Programs to other communities across New York City and New York State. The Institute is already building relationships and laying the foundation for expansion to communities within the Five Boroughs and beyond Syracuse into Western New York.



**Timbuctoo exceeded my expectations,
I met some fabulous people and
enjoyed learning about all the fields of
occupation and the outdoor activities.**

Testimonial, 2025



Timbuctoo students hiking with ESF Forest Properties staff through an applied forest management research stand within the 15,000 acre Newcomb Campus. Students learn about silviculture and forestry from professionals in the field.





Adirondack Program '25



46

PARTICIPANTS



11,730

MILES DRIVEN
IN 3 VANS



248

ICE CREAM
CONES



Endless
SMILES





Brooklyn Program '25



85
PARTICIPANTS



12
NYC FERRY
TRIPS



132
ICE CREAM
CONES



**Endless
SMILES**





FURTHERING CONNECTIONS

The Timbuctoo Institute is committed to ensuring everyone who aspires to create positive change and improve our world has access to academic and professional careers preparing them to be the next generation of critical thinkers, problem solvers, and leaders. As we reflect on three years, our participants and their experiences guide us forward as we design the Institute's pathway to a broader future.



FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO GET INVOLVED | www.esf.edu/timbuctoo | timbuctooinstitute@esf.edu