Teen Urban Tree Corps
Summer 2020 Report

SPEAK FOR THE TREES
Boston
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Our 2020 Summer: A Letter

16 November 2020

Our second summer of the Teen Urban Tree Corps program was, like so much of the past 8 months, not normal. In February, 2020, as we were planning and starting to hire for the summer, COVID hit. Like most organizations, running an in-person program no longer seemed feasible. We quickly decided that our program would be entirely remote. As a nonprofit organization focused on space, community and trees, meeting digitally felt at odds with our values. How would we create a meaningful experience for the teens while also continuing to dig into issues that face Boston and our larger society?

After several months of conversations, outreach, and planning, we had developed a plan. We weren’t sure it would work out or how the teens would take to it. Would they trust the process? Would the program last the summer? How would racial issues so prevalent in public discourse play into their work? Although we had an idea for the summer, we had more questions than answers.

We’re proud to share with you all that our summer not merely “worked”, but that it succeeded - in many ways beyond our wildest dreams. In this report we share with you the goals of our summer, the activities teens participated in, and the learning outcomes of the program. We’re very proud of what our teens and our team accomplished.

But, perhaps the most impressive result is not in the pages of this report. Instead, it’s in the teens’ work and words. If you haven’t yet seen their work, before you read this report, we urge you to go to our TUTC website at http://sfttbos.org/tutc and watch their videos, follow their Instagram posts, and read their reports. It's their hard work and their voices that carry the story. They leaned in and asked hard questions, pushing us all to think more critically about our past, our present, and our future.

At times the challenges we face as a city and as a society feel overwhelming and daunting. We’re confident, after you get to know these teens, you’ll feel more hopeful and invigorated in our shared future together.

I wanted to take a moment to thank all of the individuals and organizations who supported this work, whether in development and planning or in lending time to share their stories with the teens. A special thank you to Ellen Menounos, Program Director, who worked on developing the curriculum early on and to the staff at American Forests, especially Eric Candela, Maisie Hughes, and Eboni Hall, who helped us think through issues of Tree Equity and its relation to racial and environmental justice. And of course, our amazing staff, including Ashley Hoffman who returned to us for a second year, and Edward Alexander and Lariona Jacobs, our two amazing Team Leaders. In addition, staff from EmVision and Everyday Boston provided immense support throughout in giving teens skills and a framework for storytelling.

And, of course, our teens. Thank you for taking a risk, for asking tough questions, and for engaging so deeply.

David Meshoulam, PhD, Executive Director
Section 1: Program Overview

History of Teen Urban Tree Corps Program

The goal of Speak for the Trees’ (SFTT) “Teen Urban Tree Corps” (TUTC) program is to empower Boston youth to become advocates and stewards for their communities and environments, to better understand the state of Boston’s urban forest, and to develop a platform for future advocacy and stewardship work related to urban trees. Over the course of the 2 month program, teens learn about the urban forest as a component of building healthy and resilient neighborhoods. The program was modelled after Trees for Watertown’s Teens for Trees program.¹

TUTC first ran in 2019, receiving support from the Boston Youth Engagement and Employment SuccessLink program and the Private Industry Council. SFTT employed 9 Boston teenagers to learn about the importance of Boston’s urban forest. These youth spent the majority of their time inventorying trees in Dorchester and Roxbury using a method and measurement criteria that SFTT had developed in partnership with Boston’s Department of Parks and Recreation. The data included information on sidewalk width, dimensions of tree wells, surrounding infrastructure (such as wires and tree fences), and the size and species of each tree. Teens collected information on nearly 4,000 street trees and 600 empty planting sites. A subset of these sites were checked by program staff. Data by teens were over 92% accurate for 6 out of 7 variables and 86.5% accuracy for the seventh variable.² Data are freely available online at OpenTreeMap: opentreemap.org/boston.

In addition to collecting data of street trees, teens connected with local leaders and became active civic and environmental ambassadors for the health of Boston’s urban forest. Through field trips and conversations, they connected their understanding of urban trees to climate change, resiliency, and environmental health. They took messages of why “Trees Matter” back to their friends, families, and neighborhoods, expanding the message of the importance of the urban forest to a wider audience. Perhaps most importantly, the program challenged the teens to think of trees as more than just pretty window-dressing on streets: “Prior to having this job, I didn’t know how important trees are in the city. Now that I’ve had this experience, I’ll always have a lot more appreciation for the trees that are all around us.”

2020: A Summer of Challenges and Changes

Due to the uncertainty presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, in April SFTT staff determined that developing and supporting an in-person summer program would not be tenable. With no independent meeting space, the risks of exposure were high, and the requirements for isolation were not possible. By May, in consultation with partner organizations, staff decided to develop a remote program that would also include activities for independent experiential outdoor engagement for participants. The program also pivoted to frame issues of urban forestry against the backdrop of an unfolding pandemic and public demands for racial justice.

¹ http://tfwteensfortrees.org
Staff spent the two months leading up the start of the program mapping out the activities and goals of the program. This included developing a curriculum, solidifying partnerships, and reaching out to speakers who could share their expertise on the various issues related to urban forestry, such as equity, racial history, economic issues, public health, and resilience. What emerged was a structure that engaged youth in exploring their local urban forest through the lens of the past, present, and future. Teens took walks, learned how to interview neighbors, and developed multimedia stories and written reports to share their findings. The products of their work can be found online at http://sftbos.org/tutc.

This is our final report on the 2020 summer program: the daily and weekly structures, the process and products, and a detailed analysis of learning and growth outcomes. We thank everyone who participated and supported this group of sixteen teens over the summer.

Section 2: The 2020 Program

Daily Schedule

In the summer of 2020, sixteen teens explored the past, present, and future of their neighborhood forests. Six weeks of research, outreach, and creativity culminated in a series of multimedia storytelling projects that shared their understanding of their community forest.

The group met on Zoom every morning Monday through Friday from 9am to 10am. This provided a consistent framework and allowed for program staff to begin each day with clearly stated goals. The TUTC Program Coordinator facilitated the sessions, and attendance was required. An outside observer characterized the morning meeting as follows: “The morning zoom meeting is a check-in, an activity, and a way to guide youth through their work and their other activities to take place during the day. The one hour meeting included two transitions, the use of breakout rooms, and some organizational updates.” After the morning meeting, teens worked an additional 3 to 4 hours per day on additional activities, either independently or in teams.

Each week focused on a different theme. The start of the week introduced thematic concepts, the middle of the week invited guest speakers and included workshops to demonstrate real-life application of these themes, and the end of the week was about assimilation of the concepts towards a final product.

![Figure 1: The structure of a typical day and week](image)
Weekly Curriculum

In April and May, SFTT staff developed a framework for the program, with each week focusing on a theme related to urban forestry. Although the substance of the activities and final products remained unclear, Table 1 was created as a curricular framework for the summer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 1</th>
<th>July 6 - July 10</th>
<th>Introduction // Equity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 2</td>
<td>July 13 - July 17</td>
<td>Storytelling and Trees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 3</td>
<td>July 20 - July 24</td>
<td>Trees in the Urban Ecosystem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 4</td>
<td>July 27 - July 31</td>
<td>Economic &amp; Workforce Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 5</td>
<td>Aug 3 - Aug 7</td>
<td>Resilience &amp; City Planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 6</td>
<td>Aug 10 - Aug 14</td>
<td>Final Presentations // Wrap up</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: TUTC 2020 Weekly themes.

- In week 1, staff incorporated ideas from American Forests’ model of TreeEquity\(^3\) to foreground issues of equity in its multiple forms: environmental, racial, social, and economic. Centering equity early in the program would allow teens to draw from this language and perspective for the duration of the program.

- In week 2, Storytelling was explored as a tool to leverage personal connections and each teen’s unique Boston experience. Teens were asked to sharpen their skills of inquiry, practice interviewing, and amplify voices in their community.

- In week 3, Trees in the Urban Ecosystem served to review tree ecological function, the history of the canopy, and the condition of the canopy today.

- In week 4, Workforce Development examined careers in urban forestry, as young people are thinking about their futures, and they are looking to build work experience.

- In week 5, Resilience & City Planning looked at our changing climate, and discussed how our decisions impact future generations.

As staff gained clarity on the program goals and scope, Table 2 was created to help clarify thinking and to assist in outreach efforts to invite guest speakers to join and share their expertise.

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\(^3\) [https://www.americanforests.org/our-work/urban-forestry/](https://www.americanforests.org/our-work/urban-forestry/)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WEEK 1: EQUITY</th>
<th>WEEK 2: STORYTELLING</th>
<th>WEEK 3: TREES &amp; URBAN ECOSYSTEM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teens will frame equity as it relates to issues of race, climate resilience, environmental justice, and trees.</td>
<td>Teens will learn about the power of narrative, and how to craft a story. Questions teens will explore include: What is the role of a story? Who is a keeper &amp; teller of stories in your community? What stories are not being told? When we interview and research, how do we know if we’re asking the right questions? As youth participants embark on an exploration of their community and its trees, this week should equip them with ideas and skills to research, interview, collect and create stories, with an eye to crafting a story of their own about their local forest.</td>
<td>Nature is not somewhere ‘out there’ confined to conservation land! Important natural processes exist in cities, and we take advantage of these processes for cooling, recreation, stormwater capture, and respite. This week teens explore how trees function in our city. What role do trees play in Boston? How might community health and resilience depend on these natural processes? Emerging from this week, teens will have a deeper understanding for their local trees. They should be able to describe the benefits that trees provide in their community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some guiding questions include: How do we define equity, and how is it different or similar to equality? What does equity mean to you, and how have your views shifted over time? How, in our work, do we actualize equity? The goal is for youth participants to expand their own thinking about this topic and have access to language and framings that will lay the groundwork for the rest of the program.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WEEK 4: ECONOMY &amp; JOBS</td>
<td>WEEK 5: RESILIENCE &amp; CITY PLANNING</td>
<td>WEEK 6: FINALE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban forests require special attention, care, and maintenance. Urban trees don’t grow from seed—they need to be planted by trained individuals in special ways. Trees also need to be cared for through watering and pruning. What are the various jobs required in caring for an urban forest? From planning to planting to removals, who takes care of our urban trees? Through this conversation, teens will learn about potential career paths, appreciate the complexities involved in caring for our urban forest, and build connections within the field.</td>
<td>Climate change is changing the lives of peoples and communities. Trees help cities adapt to our new environment by providing economic, environmental, and social benefits, including cooling the air, strengthening community networks, and absorbing carbon. Teens explore the role of the urban forest and the importance of a long range vision. We identify examples of leadership in urban forestry and its relationship to city planning. How do we assess what we have? How do we identify and agree on next steps? These practicalities will support our vision for the future of our neighborhoods.</td>
<td>During this final week, youth participants will weave together &amp; share their stories. These narratives will incorporate teens’ findings into a dynamic and engaging final project. We will host an event and invite a wide audience of leaders, stakeholders, and residents to learn about teens’ work and our shared community of trees. The stories they have gathered and the final projects they have created will spur conversations around why urban trees matter and how communities can move forward to learn about and care for their local trees. We invite you to join! Details will be forthcoming.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In addition to the weekly themes, the program added another two dimensions: place and time. Teens were divided by neighborhood into five groups of 3 or 4 teens. The neighborhoods were determined by where teens lived; they included North Dorchester, South Dorchester, Hyde Park, Roslindale, and West Roxbury. Special efforts were made to have teens work in the neighborhoods where they live.⁴

The final axis was time. Within each neighborhood group, each teen was assigned a temporal lens: past, present, or future. So each week, while studying the weekly urban forestry theme, each teen had a specific focus: a given neighborhood and a given period of time. These guidelines allowed teens to focus and engage meaningfully with the spaces and people around them.

To facilitate and guide teens’ work, staff developed guidelines that assigned a multimedia component and a brief written report. Teens were asked to develop a narrative linking trees to larger issues of health and equity. Each team answered three questions for a specific neighborhood:

- What has been the history of trees in this neighborhood?
- What is the current status of trees and people’s relationship to trees in this neighborhood?
- What are future possibilities for this community’s trees?

The results are publicly accessible multimedia projects and reports, which serve as entry points into deeper conversations about Boston’s trees. These documents and artifacts are housed on Speak for the Trees’ Teen Urban Tree Corps website: sfttbos.org/tutc.

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⁴ Even though Dorchester residents don’t identify as being from North or South, for purposes of this project, North Dorchester is defined as the area north of Fields Corner; South Dorchester area is the area to the south.
Participants & Staff

The group consisted of sixteen youth participants (ages 15-18), two youth Team Leaders (ages 19-24), and the Program Coordinator. The Program Director and the Executive Director were often present at the morning meeting as well.

Youth participants reflected Boston’s diversity across multiple axes.

Youth participants came from 8 different Boston neighborhoods: 5 from Dorchester, 2 from Hyde Park, 2 from Roslindale, 2 from West Roxbury, 1 from South End, 1 from Allston, 1 from Jamaica Plain, and 1 from Back Bay/Bay Village.

Highest level of parent education also ranged: with 4 having graduate school degrees, 4 having college degrees, 3 having high school degrees and 1 having some primary school education. Two participants were not sure.

Staffing included two Team Leaders, George Edward Alexander and Lariona Jacobs. Edward, hired through the City of Boston’s Successlink program, is a native Californian working towards a Master’s Degree of Public Health at Boston University. Lariona, hired through a grant from the Greening Youth Foundation in Atlanta, is a native of Jamaica Plain, who recently returned to Boston to pursue a Master
Degree in Criminal Justice at Suffolk University. Edward and Lariona worked directly with teens in their neighborhood groups.

Ashley Hoffman returned to serve as Program Coordinator for the second year in a row. Ashley is a PhD candidate in Geography at Clark University, where she studies forest dynamics and large-scale forest disturbances. She gracefully pivoted from the TUTC Year 1 format (walking all over Boston doing tree inventory) to the Year 2 format (facilitating online meetings via Zoom). Ashley developed curriculum, coordinated morning meetings, and ensured that teens and Team Leaders remained on track for their final projects.

Beginning in January, Ellen Menounos served as Program Director with funding from Massachusetts Clean Energy Center (MassCEC.) Ellen has a decade of experience in horticulture and landscape design, and she recently earned a Master’s in Environmental Education from Antioch University New England. She helped to develop an online curriculum for TUTC 2020, and she handled onboarding and payroll this year. Additional program support came from two of our key partners, Everyday Boston and EmVision Productions.

Cara Solomon from Everyday Boston is an experienced journalist who ran several workshops with teens to help them develop interview questions and skills. Cara encouraged them to ask interviewees about universal life experiences. (Who is the first friend you made? Tell me about a big risk you took. Tell me about a time when you felt alone. Tell us about a moment of pure joy.) She encouraged teens to ‘Go big and go bold’ with their questions, striving for scenes, chapters, moments, characters, relationships, and journeys.

Tariana Little, Jonas Meyer, and staff at EmVision Productions ran workshops on social impact storytelling and video production. They covered everything from the conceptual (story angle, shotlist) to the artistic (workflow, music, neighborhood architecture) to the technical (iMovie, Voice Memos, etc.) They also encouraged teens to think about the afterlife of their work—be it a film fest, part of a social media campaign, or part of a job application. As a result of these workshops, teens grew to see their smartphones as hand-held storytelling and advocacy machines!

Guests

One of the goals of the TUTC 2020 program was to provide participants with social capital that they could leverage for the rest of their careers as students and professionals. Community interaction also brought attention to the program and garnered support throughout the city. During the program, teens made connections to the world of urban forestry through a range of guest speakers. Weekly forums were held during Wednesday morning meetings. Teens had a chance to hear, learn, and ask questions from practitioners in a range of fields including landscape design, government, journalism, and environmental stewardship. A list of weekly guests is included in Table 3.
Table 3: TUTC 2020 guest speakers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Week and Theme</th>
<th>Name of Guest</th>
<th>Title &amp; Organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 1: Equity</td>
<td>Michelle Wu</td>
<td>Boston City Councilor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maggie Owens</td>
<td>Planner, Boston Parks &amp; Recreation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 2: Storytelling</td>
<td>David Abel</td>
<td>Journalist, The Boston Globe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Miriam Wasser</td>
<td>Journalist, WBUR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nigel Jacob</td>
<td>Co-Founder, Mayor's Office of New Urban Mechanics</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Christine Carmichael, PhD</td>
<td>Founder/Principal Fair Forests Consulting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 3: Trees in the Urban Ecosystem</td>
<td>Nathan Philips</td>
<td>Earth &amp; Environment Professor at Boston University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nadinè Galle</td>
<td>CEO &amp; Cofounder of Green City Watch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>David Corbie</td>
<td>Greenovate Boston Outreach Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 4: Economic &amp; Workforce Development</td>
<td>Eboni Hall</td>
<td>American Forests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gretchen Rabinkin</td>
<td>Landscape Architect, BSLA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Daniela Coray</td>
<td>Landscape Architect, Boston Architectural College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Greg Mosman</td>
<td>Arborist, City of Boston</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nayeli Rodríguez</td>
<td>Technologist for the Public Realm, City of Boston</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 5: City Planning &amp; Resilience</td>
<td>Stephanie Hsia</td>
<td>Reed Hildebrand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yael Nidam</td>
<td>MIT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Christopher Cook</td>
<td>City of Boston</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maisie Hughes</td>
<td>American Forests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 6: Conclusion</td>
<td>Danielle Perry</td>
<td>Mass Audubon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nia Keith</td>
<td>Mass Audubon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dr. S. Atyia Martin, CEM</td>
<td>All Aces, Next Leadership Development Corp</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Four weeks in, when we asked the teens “What would you say is the best part of the program?” 71% of respondents identified guest speakers as the best part. One teen remarked: "The quality of guest speakers is incredible; they are greatly helpful to our understanding of how to equitably improve the urban tree canopy.” Another wrote that they liked "learning more about community activism, and how other people have gotten to where they are in their careers in the environmental field."
Figure 5: Zoom morning meeting with guests Maisie Hughes from American Forests, Chris Cook from the City of Boston, Stephanie Hsia from Reed Hildebrand, and Yael Nidam from MIT.

Workshops were offered to support participant development in greater depth. The Interviewing and Storytelling workshop (taught by Cara Solomon) and the Video Production workshop (taught by EmVision) held the keys to unlocking the final multimedia projects.

Reverend Mariama White Hammond was a favorite guest from TUTC 2019 who returned to lead a workshop on Community Activism & Resilience. She recalled how Hurricane Katrina was a turning point for her. She described Boston as being similar to a lot of other cities, with Environmental folks working on one side and Social Justice folks working the other. Hurricane Katrina exposed this false dichotomy. She spoke of Environmental Justice (or Climate Justice) as the intersection where environmental issues meet social ones. Mariama had always worked on issues like violence and voter suppression. In her discussion, she engaged the group on questions like “How do we engage people of color in the environmental movement?” and, “Are we putting the needs of the most vulnerable people first?”

Figure 6: Reverend Mariama White-Hammond sharing with teens her work on community activism and resilience.

Raquel Jimenez taught a workshop on GIS mapping and her work with SFTT in creating a TreeEquity map. Our own Team Lead, Edward, conducted a workshop on redlining on his second day of work, which was a key reference point for teens for the rest of the program.
Independent Work

Every day after the morning meeting, participants were sent a worksheet with their Independent Work for the day. Independent Work might be individual or collaborative. The idea was to extend and apply the concepts that had been introduced in morning meetings. Individually, participants were encouraged to utilize their own network. For example, they could photograph their local park, they could interview a family member, etc.

The teens used this time to prepare for upcoming activities, such as the community forums. Researching a person’s professional background, preparing questions, and engaging in group conversations are all valuable job and interview skills. Independent work evolved over the course of the program. In the beginning, assignments allowed teens to get comfortable on the platforms, and with one another. For example, Write a short bio of yourself; Take pictures of your local street trees, Record observations in your neighborhood with sensory nature journaling.

Figure 7: Anna Pham, with one of her local street trees.

‘I smell the scent of food coming from the many different restaurants on Centre Street, each with their own distinct aroma. Every bodega I would go to growing up has their own distinct scent, and whenever I go back, it smells just how I remembered it even if it was years since I had been. On the other side of my neighborhood, I smell the scent of the Orange Line station, and the fresh air, walking along the Southwest Corridor Park, which is lined with trees. Further down, I smell the freshly cut grass of a field.’

Figure 8: Writing excerpt from nature journal by teen participant Alejandro Velez

Table 4: TUTC 2020 workshop themes and leaders.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Workshop Topic</th>
<th>Presenter</th>
<th>Title &amp; Organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>History of Redlining</td>
<td>George Edward Alexander</td>
<td>MPH Candidate, BU School of Public Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewing and Storytelling</td>
<td>Cara Solomon</td>
<td>Founder of Everyday Boston</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video Production for Social Impact</td>
<td>Tariana Little and Jonas Meyer</td>
<td>Founder of EmVision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Activism &amp; Resilience</td>
<td>Reverend Mariama White-Hammond</td>
<td>Bethel Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TreeEquity Map Workshop</td>
<td>Raquel Jimenez</td>
<td>BU URBAN</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
By the end, assignments produced outputs which would become pieces of a larger project. For example, Create an interview template; Prepare three questions for this week’s guest speakers; Create a shotlist (sequence of images) for a video about your neighborhood trees. In other words, teens went from finding their voice and learning, to reaching out in their communities, creating media, and advocating for local trees. (For final multimedia projects, see Section 3.)

Teens recorded their time and activities in a daily log. They answered the following prompts: Describe what you did today; What is one thing you learned? What are you still curious about? What would you like to explore tomorrow? What places did you visit today (if any)? The responses added up to 500 daily log entries. Teen participants worked an average of 4 hours per work day this summer. Teens logged almost 2000 hours learning and advocating for urban forestry in Boston. (For more detail on the daily logs, see section 3.)

Team Work

Participants were divided into 5 teams. Each team was assigned to a specific Boston neighborhood. Whenever possible, individuals were assigned the neighborhood where they live. The following teams were created: Hyde Park, North Dorchester, South Dorchester, Roslindale, and West Roxbury.

Each week, the teams would examine their neighborhood through the lens or theme of the week. They often divided the work with one participant examining ‘past’, one person ‘present’ and one person ‘future.’ Each team was responsible for daily and weekly outputs and presentations.

Over the 6 week TUTC program, teens were assigned to create a piece of media and a written report about the past, present and future of trees in their assigned neighborhoods. They collected information about their communities in a variety of ways (such as taking video with a phone, conducting an interview, or recording a voiceover), and these smaller steps would add up to an ‘end product’ of their own design.

The teens drew heavily on skills they practiced in TUTC workshops to create these multimedia projects. Team meetings were coordinated by the teens themselves, with support from Team Leaders and the Program Coordinator. Staff was there to break down barriers and help the teams move their end products along.
Bridges To and From the Community

One of the central goals of the program to empower teens to share personal stories from their lived experiences. In a virtual setup, this proved challenging. Interviews and journaling encouraged teens to take concepts covered in the Zoom meetings back to their families, neighborhoods, and schools. This bridge allowed teens to bring the program into participants’ lives. Teens worked closely with Cara Solomon from Everyday Boston and staff from EmVision to develop tools to capture local stories through interviews, images, and videos.

Teens then brought these stories back to the larger group to inform and shape large group and small team conversations. Staff created and scaffolded safe virtual spaces in which the stories could be shared. This then helped inform the scope and structure of team meetings, allowing the curriculum to be reactive and cognizant of teens’ different experiences.

This connective, iterative loop between program and community is modeled in Figure 10. This approach centered teens’ voices and, especially in a remote program, provided the structure and flexibility to allow for authentic and meaningful connections to be made.

Figure 10: Teens, community and program
Section 3: Teens’ End Products

End of Program Products

By the end of the program, three neighborhood teams created videos, one team created an Instagram account, and one team created an infographic. These projects were dedicated to the people and trees of Boston’s neighborhoods. All teams submitted a written report to describe their process and final products. Use the links in Table 5 to see their work.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Neighborhood</th>
<th>Link to website</th>
<th>Direct link to report</th>
<th>Direct link to multimedia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North Dorchester</td>
<td><a href="https://www.sfttbos.org/northdot-tutc">https://www.sfttbos.org/northdot-tutc</a></td>
<td>North Dorchester Report</td>
<td>North Dorchester Video</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roslindale</td>
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<td>West Roxbury Report</td>
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*Table 5: TUTC 2020 end products.*

*Figure 11: Example of a South Dorchester team Instagram post.*
End of Program Event

The evening of August 20, SFTT held a celebration of the program, providing teens with an opportunity to share their work. A wide audience of leaders, stakeholders, and residents were present at the event, to learn about our work and our shared community of trees. Neighborhood teams had been asked to create multimedia projects in the spirit of community outreach. At the event, teens presented dynamic and engaging final advocacy projects that were truly their own. The stories the teens gathered and the final projects they created will continue to serve as an entry point into deeper conversations about Boston's tree canopy, why urban trees matter, and how communities can better care for their trees.

Teens Products Post-Program

Although the program ended in August, the teens’ work continues to be incorporated into Speak for the Trees’ outreach, education and advocacy work. The videos, collateral materials, and reports are housed on the organization’s website where they are available and shared. The videos have appeared on social media, in staff meetings, and at educational events.

The Teen Urban Tree Corps program has even continued into the fall season, with a grant from American Forests and Bank of America. Four teens—Jason Senecharles, Anna Pham, Isabel Grajeda, and Angelica Pham—are part of the first TUTC Fall Cohort. These participants are expanding their work by organizing a tree giveaway in East Boston, interviewing residents about their feelings towards trees, and developing further outreach collateral and educational materials. Finally, the videos will serve as a template for organizational outreach and program development in future years.

Section 4: Successes and Challenges

Program Evaluation

Being able to evaluate and assess the program is critical to be able to measure successes and areas of growth as the program continues to develop. Working off the baseline survey design from 2019, in 2020 the program expanded its assessment suite so that it could better understand how well the objectives were met and where areas for improvement lie for future iterations. The program included internal evaluations and external evaluators as well as formative and summative assessments. This included:

1. Daily logs by teens
2. A mid-program check-in survey at Week 4
3. A pre/post survey with 40 questions
4. Independent evaluation from Boston Beyond
5. Solicitation of stories from staff on program impacts

Daily logs

Teens filled out a daily log so that staff would know how teens were spending their time doing Independent Work and Team Work. Time tracking was very helpful when it came time for teens to submit hours for the week. The daily log also served as a type of formative evaluation that helped staff adapt their work to meet teens’ needs. This was one more channel of communication, where teens could make a comment or raise an issue that perhaps they were not comfortable saying out loud in the larger group
meeting. Word clouds captured the most often mentioned words and concepts from the daily logs. This word cloud was generated from the teens’ daily log responses for ‘one thing you learned’.

![Word Cloud Image]

Figure 12: ‘One thing you learned’ word cloud.

Check-in Survey, Week 4

Week 4 was the halfway mark of the program. Participants filled out a survey to help program staff assess areas where the program could adapt. We asked teens to reflect on the following six topics:

1. Their satisfaction with their summer job;
2. Their satisfaction with TUTC staff;
3. Which weekly theme they had enjoyed the most so far;
4. Their favorite part of the program to date;
5. One or two things that they liked about the program
6. One or two changes staff could make to improve the program

Teens reflections helped guide the remainder of the program. For example, all of the teens were satisfied with their job, with 29% saying that they were Extremely Satisfied, and 71% they were Somewhat Satisfied and 100% were “Extremely Satisfied” with TUTC staff. Themes resonated with teens in different ways: an equal number of participants (4 of each) favored Storytelling, Urban Ecosystem, and Workforce Development. While two participants favored the Equity theme. One pleasant finding was that a large majority of the teens, 71%, said that they had most enjoyed the guest speakers

In their reflections, teens spoke how they enjoyed the independence of the program: “I liked that the program is more independent work than zoom calls. We spend a relatively short amount of time on zoom and all the team leads and Ashley and everyone are very understanding of our lives.” Another spoke of how they enjoyed being outdoors: “like when we go out and walk around to appreciate and observe the trees in our neighborhood.” Finally, workshops were helpful in building new skills. According to one teen, “I enjoyed the workshops because they helped think about and develop important skills.”
Teens suggested several ways for the program to improve: two requested less time on Zoom and two requested that the morning meeting be held later. One of the more useful requests came in relation to the final projects, with three teens requesting more clear directions on final projects. For example, one teen wrote that the program staff should clarify “the goal of the project / how its supposed to be shared could be a little more clear”. Two teens suggested that the program make more connections with other organizations: “Would be great if we could go through the process of how Boston residents can obtain street trees and maybe collaborate with other environmental organizations dedicated to increasing the tree canopy/ increasing amount of local parks in future projects.” Another wrote: “Maybe helping connect us to more climate organizations within our neighborhoods?” Being on zoom was clearly trying for many teens, with three participants commenting on how it was difficult to get to know each other and make meaningful connection: “I think it would be a good idea in the beginning of the program to have some time for the interns to just talk to one another so that people feel more comfortable talking in front of everyone in the big zoom calls….my other internship this summer does "lunch groups" once a week and changes the people that you’re eating with every week.”

The suggestions by the participants were incorporated into the program. For example, staff spent time developing clearer expectations for the final project and began to do more targeted outreach to local community organizations that could help support teens’ work. In addition, more social activities were developed to help build a sense of camaraderie and community.

Pre/Post Survey Results

In order to gauge changes in teens’ knowledge of and affect towards trees, the program implemented a pre/post survey that had been developed in 2019. A link to this survey can be found here.

Some highlights of the survey results are explored below:

1. Teens were asked to list some of the many individuals, groups, and organizations involved with caring for Boston's street trees. In the pre-survey, teens listed very few examples, in fact 9 individuals responded ‘Not sure’ or ‘I don’t know’, and three people listed Speak For the Trees.

   In post-survey, teens listed collectively 27 different individuals and organizations, including nonprofits, neighborhood groups, and City of Boston departments. This change can be attributed to the TUTC program’s focus on connecting teens to a host of organizations and individuals through guest speakers, community forums, and workshops.

2. Teens were asked: “What is one major challenge facing Boston's urban forest? What could be done about it?” The pre-survey included many good answers. Five responses mentioned spatial constraints such as sidewalk width. Other responses included gas leaks, maintenance challenges, outdated urban infrastructure, and resident apathy.

   The post-survey included a much wider range of responses, which conveyed an understanding of the complexity and interplay of environmental, social, and economic issues. Post-survey responses included tree equity, long term maintenance, tension between trees/open space and the need for housing, policy challenges, the value of mature trees vs newly planted trees, trees as a public health requirement, ecological value of trees versus lawns, and public engagement.
3. The teens were asked to rate the frequency of their conversations as “never, sometimes, and often” on the following topics

- The benefits of street trees;
- The challenges that street trees face;
- Why are trees important?
- How to request a tree on your street;
- Why you are involved with TUTC;
- Climate change & current environmental issues.

As noted in Figure 13, teens were engaging in these types of conversations much more by the end of the program. The TUTC program is driving and shaping conversations among youth in Boston.

![Figure 13: Teens’s Response: Rate Your Frequency of conversations on the tree-related topics, with 0 = never, 1 = sometimes and 2 = often.](image)

4. The teens were asked to rate their level of confidence engaging in conversation with someone they don't know (same topics as previous question.)

There was an increase in conversational confidence in every question. Where we had multiple “Not Confident” responses in the pre-survey (How to request a street tree, Understanding the challenges trees face), responses moved towards “Somewhat Confident” or “Very Confident” in the post-survey. The lowest confidence was on How to request a street tree (pre and post.)
5. Finally, we asked teens to rate their interest in various career fields, including plant science, landscaping, forest management, parks and recreation, communication, government / nonprofit management, and STEM.

Teens showed little change in interest or knowledge of most fields. ‘Landscaping’ and ‘Forest Management’ are two fields where interest did grow somewhat. This presents an opportunity for the organization to re-think workforce development models for future summer programs, emphasizing possible employment pathways for teens, especially for those focused on technical careers.
External Evaluation: Boston Beyond

This was the first year that Speak for the Trees worked with Boston Beyond, a free external evaluation service that assessed the program through observation and teen surveys. This service provided the organization with metrics and insights, in comparison with other summer programs throughout the city of Boston. The two components included an observation, Assessment of Program Practices Tool (APT) by a trained Beyond Boston staff member, and a Survey of Academic and Youth Outcomes - Youth (SAYO-Y). These standardized instruments not only allow the organization to compare itself to other organizations, but will allow staff to track changes of the program over time.

A full tabulation of the results are included in Appendix B. A summary of several survey questions are on the following page. For the most part, internal and external evaluations had the TUTC program just below average or just above average on several metrics, including items such as Level of Youth Participation, Staff Promote Engagement and Stimulate Thinking, Opportunities for Leadership and Responsibility, Youth Enjoy and Feel Engaged, Youth Feel Challenged, and Youth Have Choice and Autonomy. TUTC scored slightly higher than average on Supportive Adults Present and Supportive Social Environment.

One area where youth felt as though the program fell short was in helping them academically (1.62 for TUTC, 2.68 for all programs). As a non-academically focused summer enrichment program, this lower average did not come as a surprise.

Impacts on Staff

The program undertook a TUTC staff post-survey for the first time. Although program scope and structure will likely shift from year to year, capturing details about impacts on staff can help in recruitment and staff
development for future years. This survey also helps gauge overall program impacts, as staff are often students and are learning and growing alongside the teens. The staff were asked to reflect on three questions: what they most enjoyed, how they grew, and what they learned.

What staff most enjoyed:
Staff who had close proximity to the teens in daily meetings most enjoyed just being with the participants, listening to them and watching them learn and grow. One wrote how they enjoyed “Being next to them [the teens] as they grew into really believing in the work they were doing and understanding how important their voices are in this moment but in all moments.” Another described how “It was amazing to see them take a topic that we learned about and apply it to their projects. I also loved watching them confidently presenting their work to the community and advocating for their urban trees.”

How staff grew:
Two of the staff members mentioned that learning to give up some control was challenging but necessary. One described that she grew by “sitting back and letting our teens take on the difficult tasks and questions. I tend to want to help them respond, but I found they had great ideas all on their own and didn’t really need my help having conversations with the community.” Another staff member wrote that he grew to understand the importance of trees to a healthy functioning Boston: “I think I grew into seeing the ways that the multitude of environment and environment-adjacent careers connect. My capacity for seeing the interconnectedness of all of the pieces of our environment grew.”

What staff learned:
Two staff mentioned learning about Boston or seeing Boston with new eyes. One staffer was reminded of “the depths of wisdom and intention teenagers have” and another mentioned how she learned a lot about “how to effectively teach remotely,” which is a skill in high demand these days!

Final reflections:
All survey responses reflected warmly on the time spent together during the challenging summer. One Team Leader wrote how it was “Really powerful to think about how that group of teens and us as a staff were able to accomplish so much in the midst of this summer that seemed to never end and never stop trampling on the world's collective spirit.” The Program Coordinator noted: “I loved how we tied in urban trees, environmental justice, and equity into our program this year. I'm still so proud of our teens.”

Conclusion
Despite the pandemic, the Teen Urban Tree Corps program evolved to meet the challenge of the time. It provided a group of 16 Boston teens with a meaningful leadership and learning experience, one that provided creative outlets to share personal and community stories. Through a combination of workshops, guest speakers, and activities, teens deepened their understanding of the importance of urban trees in their neighborhood through the lens of the past, present, and future. They captured stories in ways that felt authentic and meaningful. Their work continues to help Speak for the Trees engage residents in thinking of the important role that Boston’s urban forest plays in building a more just, resilient, and equitable future.
Acknowledgements

We’d like to thank the many partners who helped us in thinking through and implementing the second year of our Teen Urban Tree Corps program. Their support was instrumental in ensuring that these 16 teens would have a meaningful summer of growth and learning.

Partnerships

Financial Support

And the many many speakers, guests, and volunteers who provided us with time, expertise, and opportunities to think through the challenges of running a completely virtual summer program.
Appendix A: APT Observation Write Up and Feedback Form

The following are the results of the Assessment of Program Practices Tool (APT), designed to measure program quality. This was conducted by Boston Beyond for 101 sites. A trained, certified observer visits the program, and observes and rates program practices such as social-emotional environment and engagement.

(SAYO-Y Youth Surveys = End-of-program survey about youth experience)

Program Site: Speak for the Trees - Teen Urban Tree Corps Program

Observation Date: 8/4/2020

Brief Description of Activities: Students participated in a one hour zoom meeting that included program updates and a small group activity.

1. Generally, what were your findings regarding:

   a. Structure of program (e.g., scheduling, transitions, space)

   The morning zoom meeting is a check in, an activity, and a way to guide youth through their work and their other activities to take place during the day. The one hour meeting included two transitions, the use of breakout rooms, and some organizational updates.

   b. Organization and nature of activities in program

   Speak for the Trees is working to improve the size and health of the urban tree canopy in Boston. Students focused on activities related to climate resilience and public health. Much of the informal chat was tree-related. The virtual format faced some typical challenges like periods of silence and students remaining muted until called upon.

   c. Staff and their role in promoting youth engagement, stimulating thinking, and positively guiding youth behavior

   Staff person Ashley was positive and energetic which moved the program along with some sleepy teen students logging in for a 9 AM check-in. Staff Edward was a steady positive support and helped focus student discussion. Together the staff provided a good balance and kept students engaged throughout the hour.

   d. Relationships between staff and youth

   Youth were responsive to staff questions and activity prompts. Many or all of the youth are paid employees.

   e. Youth participation in activity time and peer relations between youth
Youth led an independent, unsupervised activity in breakout rooms. Youth conversed with each other and completed the activity. After they completed the activity, there were five minutes where they did not speak to each other until they waited to return to the main room.

2. Overall, what are some strengths of the program?
The program has adapted well to an all online format with activities pre-planned. Keeping the meeting time to one hour is a strength. Having all staff present for the initial check in, then reducing to the program staff gives a sense of continuity across the organization. Youth are employed by the organization.

3. Overall, in what areas could improvements be made?
The overall, long-term goal of the program was not clear to me from this observation. The youth are working, but I did not see or hear the goal or anticipated outcome of their work this summer. Staff should supervise conversations in breakout rooms, even if not participating in the student conversation.
Engagement in Activities & Learning

SAYO-Y
Youth Future Plans & Expectations

**The SAYO-Y was updated in Fall 2019 with new questions and response values, which will be reflected for previous historical data.**