



IMPACT REPORT

2025-2026





A NOTE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

On a warm Spring evening this past May, one of our students from Angevine Middle School in Lafayette, CO climbed to the top of a large hill in the mountains just west of Boulder and was immediately impacted by the impressive view.

He was filled with joy and excitement and during a moment of silence was inspired to yell out: "I'm on top of the woorld!" Everyone chuckled, but felt the exact same way.

Moments like these are priceless and why we do what we do. Many of our students have never been camping before and we have the honor of creating magical moments outdoors like this that stick with folks for a lifetime.

While experiences like this are rewarding, they come at a cost at a time when grants and funding for nonprofits is anything but certain. While our programs will always remain free for the students and families we serve, our costs continue to rise as we invest in the food, gear, transportation, insurance, training, and professional staff and instructors who make our programs possible and life-changing.

Despite these challenges, we have cultivated a strong community of partners and supporters the past 22 years that have lifted us up and have allowed us to continue to have an impact for over two decades. To those that partnered with us and who donated, thank you! You showed up and it means a lot.

Ford Church
Founder & Executive Director



PS: If you are not a current monthly donor and you want to help our students feel "on top of the world" all year long, please join our Seedling Monthly Donor Program. \$25, \$50, \$100, or \$250 per month goes a long way to help invest in inspiring views and priceless experiences for our students!



**SCAN THE QR CODE TO
BECOME A MONTHLY DONOR**

565

Participants across
five Colorado
communities

29,743

Hours of
programming

15

Program partners

WHAT YOU MADE POSSIBLE THIS YEAR

Of participants surveyed:

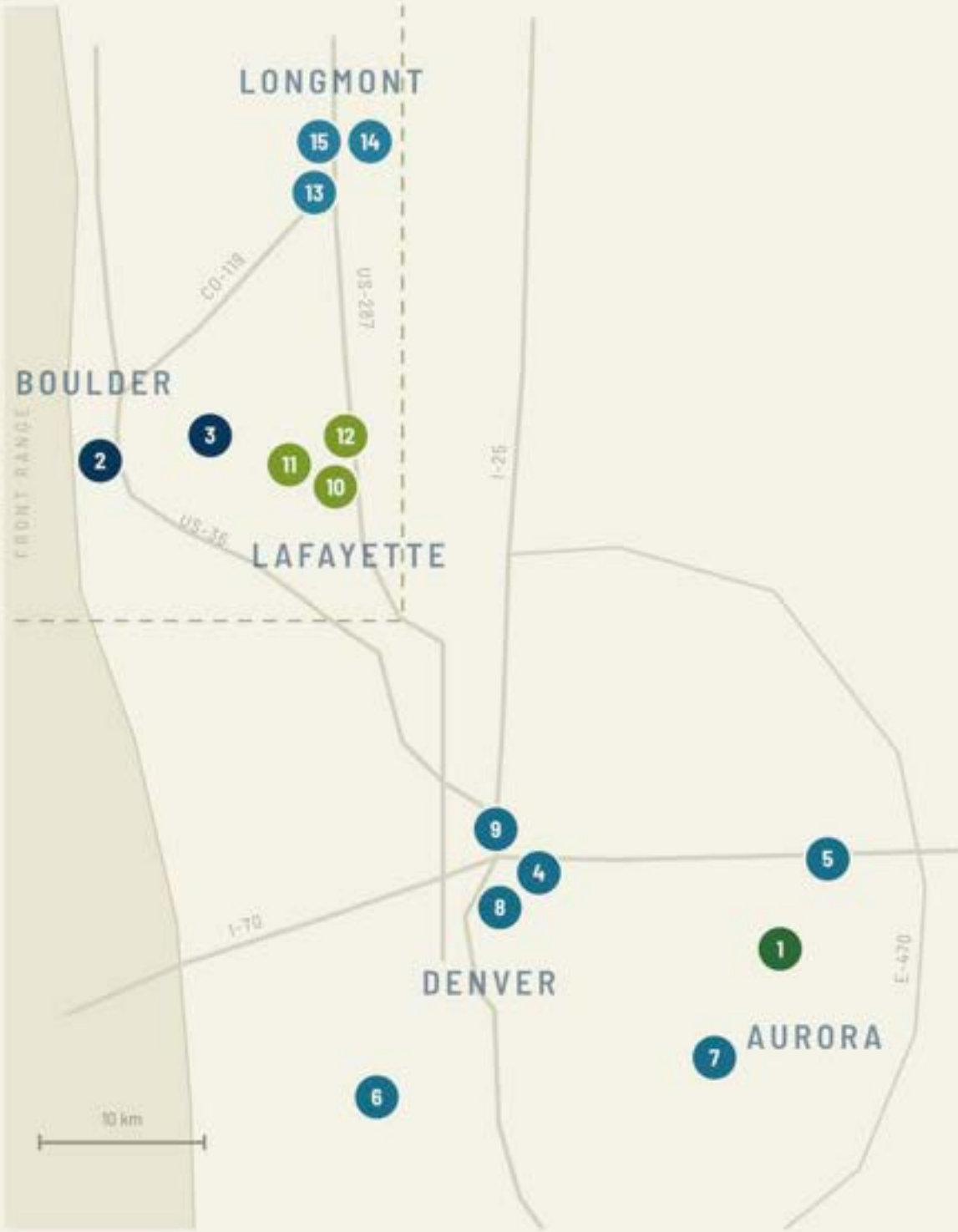
- **76%** had never or rarely been camping before a Cottonwood program
- **94%** feel more comfortable exploring the outdoors
- **89%** now believe their own actions can help their community
- **92%** are proud of what they accomplished through their Cottonwood program



WHO WE ARE GROWING WITH

15

program partners throughout
five communities



Pins mark each partner's location, plotted to scale. Longmont, Boulder, and Lafayette are all in Boulder County.

AURORA

- 1 **AXL Academy**
CAP Class and Summer Watershed Project

BOULDER

- 2 **New Vista High School**
CAP Class
- 3 **APEX**
Seal of Climate Literacy Field Lab

DENVER

- 4 **Colorado High School Charter**
CAP Class
- 5 **Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Early College**
Explore Outside
- 6 **Horizons at Colorado Academy**
Explore Outside and Colorado Wildfire Project
- 7 **Sims-Fayola Foundation**
Fishing and Climbing Workshops
- 8 **Confluence Colorado**
Watershed Workshops and Watershed Project with AXL
- 9 **Environmental Learning for Kids**
Career Day

LAFAYETTE

- 10 **Angevine Middle School**
CAP Class
- 11 **Peak to Peak Charter School**
Leadership and Advanced Explore Outside
- 12 **Thorne Nature Experience**
Lafayette Explore Outside / Lafayette Exploramos Afuera

LONGMONT

- 13 **Casa de la Esperanza**
Familias Unidas en la Naturaleza (F.U.N.) Program
- 14 **Longmont Youth Center**
Explore Outside
- 15 **City of Longmont Parks, Recreation and Open Space**
Backyard to Backcountry Workshop



WHERE COLLECTIVE IMPACT THRIVES

10 years ago we joined something we did not yet know how to build...

In 2016, we became one of six lead partners in Nature Kids/Jóvenes de la Naturaleza in Boulder County. Over 10 years, we learned how to make a coalition of providers work successfully. This past year, we brought that learning to three more communities.

Celebrating 15
years of
partnership
with Casa!

With Thorne Nature Experience and other local organizations, we are helping support an expansion of the Nature Kids coalition into Longmont. Our Lafayette Explore Outside/Lafayette Exploramos Afuera (LEO/A) program is returning for the second year, offering a full school year of workshops and field days to students in the area. Our Familias Unidas en la Naturaleza (F.U.N.) Program in partnership with Casa de la Esperanza also serves multigenerational participants from families in the coalition community.

Longmont

Aurora

In January we helped launch the Aurora Nature Coalition (ANC) with Bluff Lake and Cal-Wood. In Aurora, 74.6% of public school students qualify for free or reduced lunch, and the barriers to getting outside are real: cost, transportation, gear, and the quiet message that these places are not for them. The ANC was built to disrupt that, based on what Aurora school leaders, students, and families told us they need. Rather than isolated, one-time experiences, we are designing a free, intergenerational pathway that meets families where they are. Stay tuned as our Aurora coalition develops!



This year we joined the Youth Exploring Stewardship (YES) Coalition, along with more than ten Colorado organizations! We will help support the YES Coalition's Career Exploration Day in January, which draws on the event outline, resume workshops, and paid student steering committee model we helped build with Environmental Learning for Kids. We have also gone after outside funding together and, in October, we will help run the YES Conference at Cal-Wood.

YES Coalition



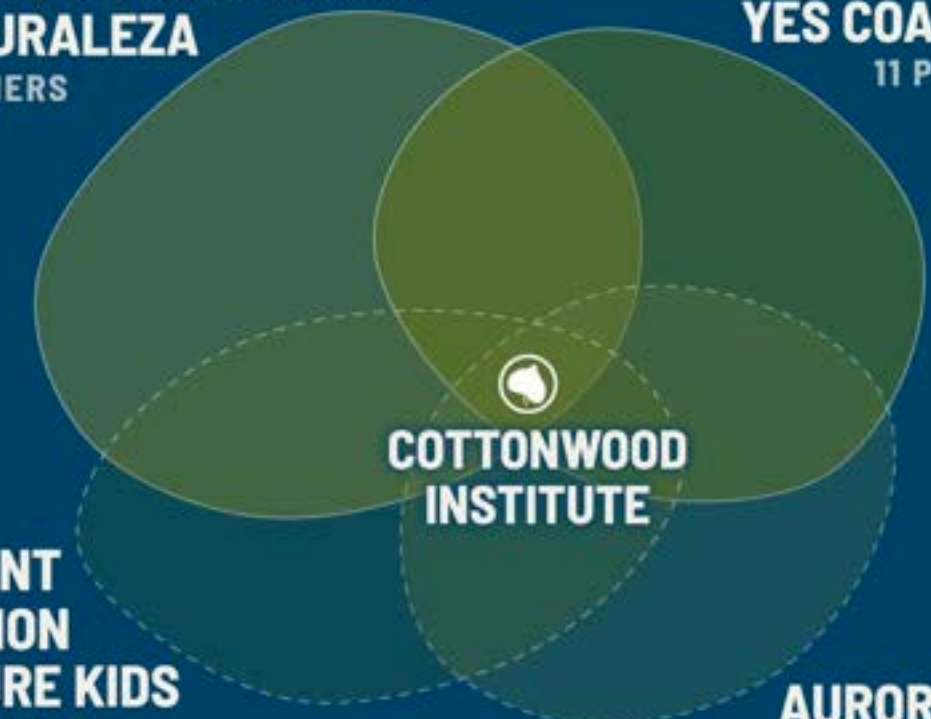
THREE COALITIONS, FOUR COMMUNITIES, ONE NETWORK

**NATURE KIDS/JÓVENES DE
LA NATURALEZA**
50+ PARTNERS

YES COALITION
11 PARTNERS

**LONGMONT
EXPANSION
OF NATURE KIDS**
IN DEVELOPMENT

**AURORA
NATURE COALITION**
IN DEVELOPMENT
3 PARTNERS CONFIRMED



WE SHOWED UP!

We attended 30+ Community Events connecting with ~460 community members – a big part of what collective impact work looks like!

- Co-hosted Mothapalooza with the CU Museum of Natural History, DarkSky Colorado, and People and Pollinators
- Taught tracking, spoon carving, and backpacking basics at Becoming an Outdoors Woman
- Chaperoned student ambassadors to the Wind River Reservation with Longmont Sister Cities
- Tabled at Community Nonprofit Night at Patagonia in Boulder, dressed in costumes just before Halloween
- Served on the City of Longmont Parks Advisory Board and the Red Rocks Community College Outdoor Education Advisory Board

WHAT STUDENTS ARE SAYING

"KEEP DOING WHAT YOU'RE DOING. YOU HAVE MADE ME MORE COMFORTABLE IN THIS CLASS AND IN NATURE." -CAP STUDENT



"I REALLY GOT TO CONNECT WITH MY FRIENDS AND PEERS IN A WAY THAT NO OTHER CLASS HAS COME CLOSE TO. I STARTED THIS CLASS WITH ONE FRIEND AND I FINISHED WITH A WHOLE FRIEND GROUP WITHIN THE CLASS."
-CAP STUDENT



"TODO ES UNA MUY BUENA EXPERIENCIA, SALIR DE TU ZONA DE CONFORT." -CAP STUDENT



"CAMPING WAS FUN IN CLASS BECAUSE I NEVER GOT TO DO SOMETHING LIKE THIS IN MY LIFE WITH FRIENDS." -CAP STUDENT

COLORADO WATER EDUCATION EXEMPLAR FOR 2026

Our Colorado Watershed Project program was named **Colorado Water Education Exemplar for 2026** by the Colorado Watershed Assembly! Judged against the Guidelines for Excellence in Environmental Education.



Our watershed students:

- Built a watershed model at CSU Spur
- Tested water quality on the Arkansas River with River Watch of Colorado
- Ran Class 4 and 5 rapids through Browns Canyon

Among water program participants surveyed:

- **92%** understand water issues and solutions
- **96%** would recommend our program
- **100%** said their instructors cared about them

“IT WAS INTERESTING AND INTERACTIVE. I THINK EVERYBODY COULD BENEFIT FROM LEARNING ABOUT WATER ISSUES.”

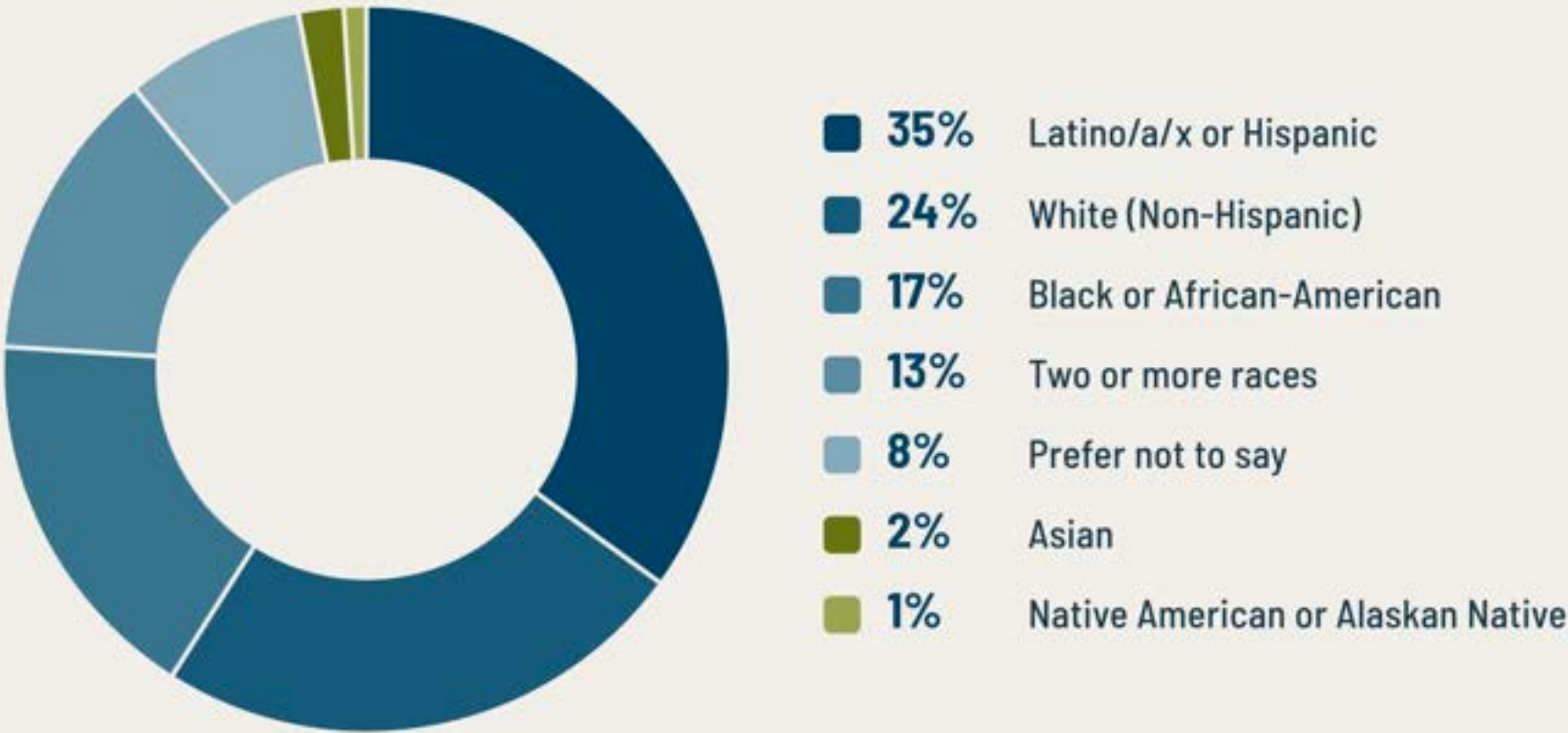
-SEAL OF CLIMATE LITERACY FIELD LAB STUDENT, WINTER 2026

Thank you to Walton Family Foundation for investing in our water education programming!

WALTON FAMILY
FOUNDATION

WHO WE SERVE

Of participants who shared their race and ethnicity, **73%** self-identified as Non-White



AND THE TRAIL AHEAD

For the next year, we are prioritizing:

- 10 additional Explore Outside Field Days for AXL Academy!
- Building the Aurora Nature Coalition and Alumni programming in Aurora
- 11 CAP Classes at Angevine Middle School, New Vista High School, AXL Academy, and a new partnership with Colorado High School Charter, which launched last Spring and is running again this Fall!
- 1 year-long Changemaker Outdoor Leadership Corps in Boulder, with a second community ready when funding allows
- 1 Seal of Climate Literacy Field Lab this winter with APEX, Boulder Valley's career and technical center

STUDENTS KEEP COMING BACK!



CHANGEMAKERS OUTDOOR LEADERSHIP CORPS

A program for high school students who want to stay involved. This year, they:

- Repaired trails on a three-day service trip with Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado
- Earned Wilderness First Aid certifications through Backcountry Pulse
- Built quinzees and slept in them at 10,000 feet in the Indian Peaks Wilderness
- Hosted the Ancestral Skills Gathering at Ollin Farms, teaching 105 community members knife safety, felting, mending, navigation, and friction fire
- Co-hosted Career Day with Environmental Learning for Kids (ELK)

ALUMNI PROGRAM

This year, we continued building something for the alumni who came before, so they could stay connected.

They:

- Spent the day after Thanksgiving hiking Eldorado Canyon
- Climbed to Panorama Point on the solstice and cooked stew in a hollowed-out pumpkin
- Worked the MLK Parade in Denver as safety volunteers
- Spent four days backpacking on Mt. Sopris in May

STUDENT TO INSTRUCTOR PATHWAY

FROM PARTICIPANT TO INSTRUCTOR, COOPER WINS ROOKIE OF THE YEAR!



Cooper Perrine joined us in 8th grade. He came back for the Changemaker Outdoor Leadership Corps, spent his senior year as an Assistant Instructor, and this summer led trips as a first-year instructor while studying at the University of Utah. We named him Cottonwood's Rookie of the Year!

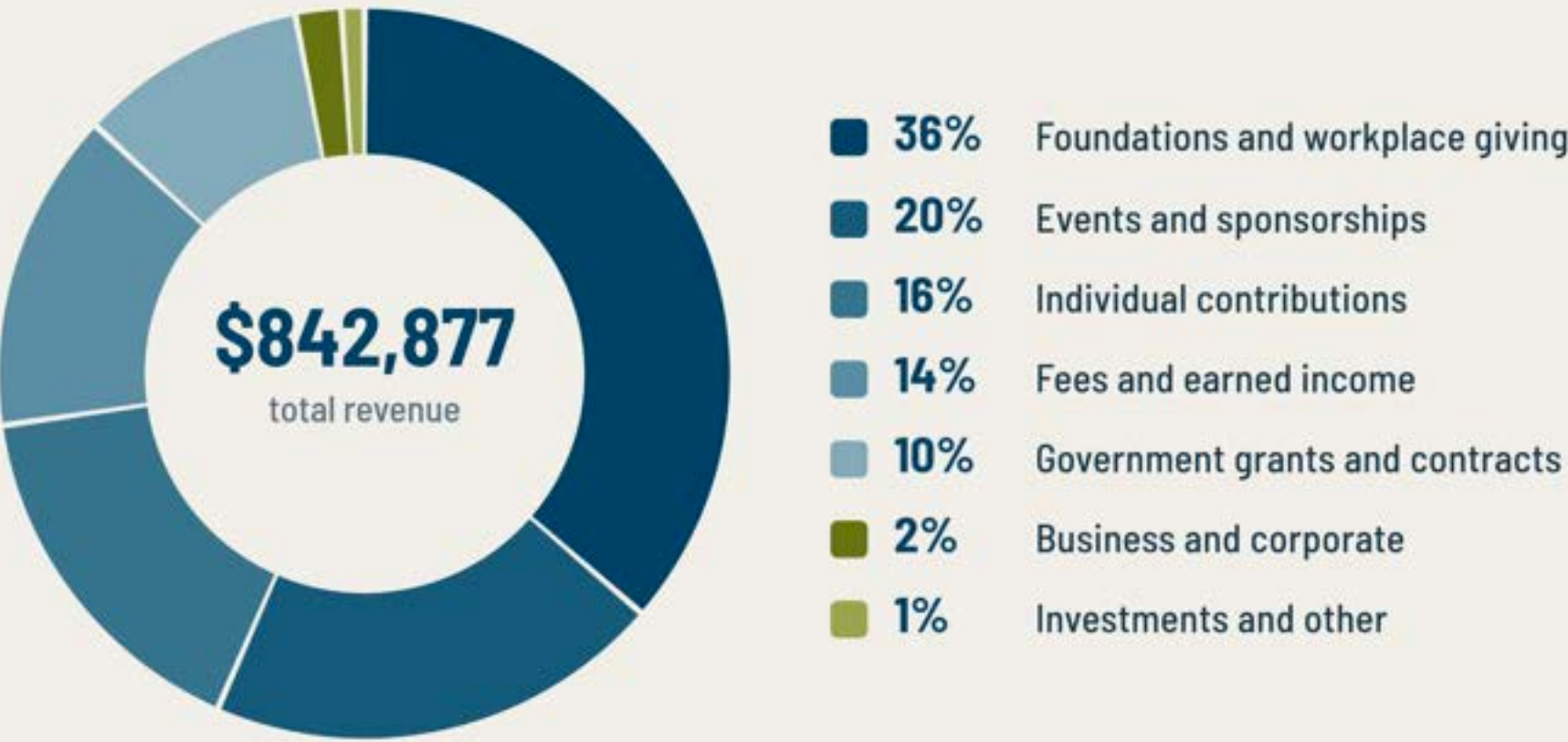
One day he wants to build his own program, combining dance, nature, and the outdoors.

“HE SHOWS UP WITH GRACE, CALM, WARMTH, AND UNDERSTANDING. HE'S FUNNY, KIND, AND UNAPOLOGETICALLY HIMSELF.”

-COTTONWOOD INSTRUCTOR

WHERE OUR FUNDING CAME FROM

Total revenue, October 1, 2025 to July 31, 2026



Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

**Our programs are free for students and families,
and we intend to keep it that way.**

A full year of programming costs about \$1,500 per student. Our school and program partners are under real budget pressure and they still find money for our programs, but what they can contribute does not cover the full cost. That difference is the distance we have to close.

DONATE TODAY



SEE ALL OF OUR FUNDERS





COTTONWOOD RECOGNIZED NATIONALLY!

This year, Ford Church, our Founder and Executive Director, was a recipient of the **Garden Club of America's Elizabeth Abernathy Hull Award** for his contribution to the field of Environmental Education.

SUPPORT ANOTHER AWARD-WINNING
YEAR OF IMPACT



KEEP UP WITH COTTONWOOD INSTITUTE!



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