

Training Extension Educators to Develop Climate Stewards to Establish Local Climate Programming

Climate change poses significant risks to communities across New York State. Although the State's Climate Smart Community Certification Program (CSCCP) incentivizes local climate action by providing benefits and recognition to participating municipalities, local governments frequently cite limited staff time and funding as significant barriers to climate action. By training and empowering local volunteers to start climate-related programming, New York communities can prepare for the impacts of climate change and reduce their carbon footprints.

To build community-level capacity for climate action, New York Sea Grant (NYSG) worked with Cornell University and Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE), researchers, students, and partners through a rigorous three-year (2018-2021) process to develop a Cornell Climate Stewards Program. In 2020, NYSG extension expertise helped develop climate-focused, science-based curricula. In early 2021, NYSG held the first train-the-trainer program with CCE educators from six counties in preparation for conducting a pilot program with community participants in the fall of 2021. A second train-the-trainer program was held in the fall of 2022 for an additional seven counties, bringing the total number of county extension offices trained to deliver the program to 13. NYSG taught multiple modules, including climate science and impacts, climate mitigation, community adaptation, and science communication.

During the 2021-2022 training of Climate Stewards at the county level, 52 individuals completed the 12-week program and designed projects to support climate action in their respective communities based on interests, abilities, and community need. Volunteers from these six counties have contributed more than 550 hours towards local projects, including planting trees in Rochester, developing an illustrated booklet about trees in Western NY, creating a seed library, starting an initiative to recover refrigerants, building two pollinator gardens, and organizing four climate-focused educational events.



*The 2022 cohort of Climate Stewards Extension specialists after a day of train-the-trainer activities.
Photo: Katherine Bunting-Howarth/NYSG*

*NYSG Climate Stewards Training Program:
<https://climatestewards.cornell.edu>*

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- Cornell University • Cornell Cooperative Extension
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The Sea Grant Focus Area for this project is Resilient New York Communities and Economies.

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