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communities
move forward



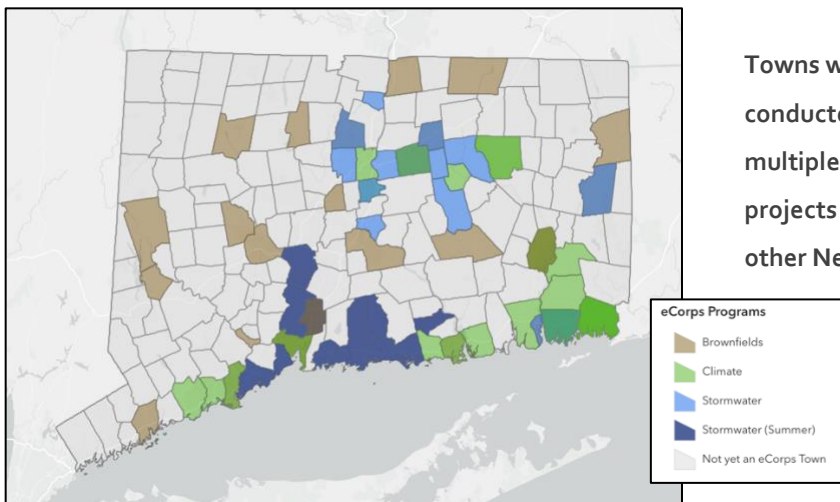
A study of the impact of UConn
Environment Corps student projects
in our partner communities

December, 2023

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E-Corps in the Community

The [Environment Corps](#) (E-Corps) is a multi-college collaboration at the University of Connecticut implementing a novel model of undergraduate STEM education that combines classroom instruction, service learning, and Extension outreach. Currently, there are three courses - climate resilience, brownfields redevelopment, and stormwater management - each focusing on the local aspects of a critical environmental challenge. In an optional second semester, student teams conduct projects in partnership with local communities and/or organizations. As of Spring 2023, UConn students had completed 140 projects with 80 communities or organizations.



Towns where E-Corps students have conducted projects. Many towns have multiple projects. About 20 of the 140 projects have been conducted in NY or other New England states.

Improvements to the E-Corps model, and research into its impacts on faculty, students, and the university, are currently funded by a grant from the National Science Foundation. As part of this effort, in summer 2023, the project's evaluation partner Horizon Research, Inc. conducted a follow-up study with representatives of E-Corps partner communities from Academic Year 2017-2018 to AY 2021-2022. A total of 58 community representatives were sent an invitation to complete a survey. 32 survey responses were received (a 53% response rate). In addition, 6 of the respondents underwent a follow-up interview. This document summarizes the findings of that study.

E-Corps student projects are being used.

Asked whether the E-Corps project in their town was being or had been used, 63% of the survey respondents said YES. 28% said NO, principally citing lack of funds and/or time for follow up. 9% were unsure. Only 2% of the respondents who said the project was not being used cited concern about the quality of the project.

E-Corps projects are being used for a variety of important tasks

Community partner representatives who reported that projects had been used were presented with a list of possible impacts or contributions that E-Corps projects were having, or would have, on their communities. Almost all of the respondents indicated that the project was used to support or contribute to town plans, policies, or projects. 80% said the project helped to improve and expand public awareness of the environmental issue being addressed.

Our E-Corps Project was used to:	Percent of Survey Respondents* (N = 20)
Support/contribute to town/organization plans or policies	95
Support/contribute to town/organization projects (with data, research, mapping, etc.)	90
Improve/expand public outreach and awareness	80
Address a previously unaddressed environmental problem or need	74
Support town/organization grant applications	61
Help town/organization to comply with federal or state regulations	39
Improve town infrastructure (e.g., new construction, conservation practices, new signage, green stormwater infrastructure installations, etc.)	37
Other	33

* Percentages add to more than 100 because respondents could choose more than one category.

E-Corps is viewed positively, and highlights the value of partnership with UConn

Community representatives expressed an overall positive view of partnering with E-Corps to address environmental issues. Nearly all reported that working with E-Corps raised awareness of how partnerships can make progress solving community problems. They also reported becoming more aware of, and thus more likely to seek out, the type of assistance provided by E-Corps. Additionally, interviewees described the benefits of E-Corps for both the students and the communities learning and working together. Finally, all interviewees indicated that they would work with E-Corps in the future if they had the opportunity.

Just the feel-good thing, knowing that there were so many different partners—one, of course, being UConn. I've used that and expressed this so many times to the mayor, to the city council when I've had to go before city council; I've written reports; it was in the applications; we did the presentation at an EPA conference. It's been helpful to show that nobody's an island of itself, that it takes the village. It's a perfect example. The kids in the [E-Corps] program were definitely part of the big picture.

(Brownfields Corps interviewee)

This report was created with information from the 2023 [Community Impacts Study Report](#) of [Horizon Research, Inc.](#) Environment Corps is supported by the University of Connecticut, private donors, and a grant from the [National Science Foundation Division of Undergraduate Education/Improving Undergraduate STEM Education \(IUSE\) Program](#), Award #1915100. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation. More information about E-Corps can be found on the project website at <https://ecorps.initiative.uconn.edu/>

