



ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGEMAKERS SHOWCASE

Connecticut Science Center April 24, 2026

9:00-9:10	Welcome & Introduction <i>Maximilian E. & Marion O. Hoffman Foundation Science Theater</i>
9:10-10:00	Keynote Panel with STEAM Professionals <i>Maximilian E. & Marion O. Hoffman Foundation Science Theater</i>
10:05-10:40	Presentations Round 1 <i>The Science Hall, Level 2 North (accessible via stairs & elevator in Science Alley, directly across from the exhibit entrance)</i>
10:40-11:15	Presentations Round 2 <i>The Science Hall, Level 2 North (accessible via stairs & elevator in Science Alley, directly across from the exhibit entrance)</i>
11:20-12:00	Certificate Ceremony <i>Maximilian E. & Marion O. Hoffman Foundation Science Theater</i>
12:00-12:45	Lunch <i>Subway</i>
12:45-4:00	Explore the Science Center!

Speakers

Maximilian E. & Marion O. Hoffman Foundation Science Theater



Shanelle Thevarajah is a PhD student in the Department of Natural Resources and the Environment at the University of Connecticut. Shanelle is passionate about involving historically underrepresented groups in the natural resources field. Her dissertation research will focus on understanding educational and workforce barriers for members of the Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) community. She has gained valuable experience through education, interpretation, and mentoring positions at the Denver Zoo and Environment for the Americas (in partnership with the National Park Service).



Sydney Barnwell is a strategic communications leader and environmental justice advocate working at the intersection of climate policy, narrative strategy, and community engagement. A proud University of Connecticut alumna, she has led statewide advocacy campaigns and coalition communications efforts that center frontline voices in environmental and economic justice spaces. Sydney specializes in translating complex policy issues into accessible, community-centered storytelling that mobilizes public engagement and influences decision-makers. She believes environmental justice requires more than legislative wins, it demands narrative power, resource equity, and community leadership in implementation. Through strategic messaging, partnership building, and digital engagement, she helps organizations advance equitable, community-driven climate solutions.



Ashley G. Benítez-Ou is a Puerto Rican public servant and PhD student in Geography at UConn who is passionate about using data and maps to help communities understand challenges, opportunities, and the systems that shape our everyday lives. She is currently a GIS Coordinator at the Connecticut Office of Policy and Management (OPM), where she works on statewide initiatives that support planning and access to geographic information for all residents. Previously, she worked at the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) in the Office of Climate Planning, where she contributed to efforts addressing climate change and environmental policy. In her graduate studies, she explores how governments and communities work together to address climate and environmental risks. Ashley hopes to inspire the next generation to seek knowledge from many fields, such as science, technology, policy, and the social sciences, as ways to improve communities and tackle real-world challenges.



Don "Q" Quijada is the founder of Crooked Smile Production Services & Casting Agency, with over a decade of hands-on experience across hundreds of productions, including feature films, commercials, music videos, and short-form content. A driving force in New England's film ecosystem, Q has built a reputation for connecting productions with high-level talent, crew, and resources at scale. As President of the Connecticut Film & TV Alliance, he continues to champion the region's creative community while working to expand opportunities and infrastructure for filmmakers across the state.

CAP Presentations

The Science Hall

Round 1: Poster Presentations

1. **Rooted in Risk: Mapping Invasives Against Flood Risk**, *Nishka Desai*
2. **The Housatonic's Past, Present and Future: Field Study and Curriculum Building**, *Shanaya Duprey*
3. **Saving the Hemlocks: Community Restoration After Hemlock Woolly Adelgid Damage**, *Anson D'Alleva-Bochain*
4. **Food Share Tables In Schools: Policy & Practice**, *Kristal Lebron Romero*
5. **A Study of Attraction in African Fig Flies Using Scent-Based Traps**, *Soleil Acosta*
6. **Watershed Health Indicators in Webb Mountain CT**, *Shane Marks*
7. **Biodiversity: Survival Through Education**, *Tomas Gutierrez*
8. **Community Gardening & Testing for Lead in Soil**, *Destinee Velazquez*
9. **Protecting the Avian Dinosaurs**, *Demetrius Diaz*
10. **Safe Lovely Project: Designing & Proposing Protected Bike Lane Infrastructure Across Three Towns**, *Mehmet Gokalp Gokcen*
11. **From Streets to Streams: Tracking Pollutants in Bristol's Urban Park Ponds**, *Esha Osioh*



Round 2: Poster Presentations

1. **Designing a School-Based Pollinator Garden to Support Local Bee Populations**, *Serenity Cooper*
2. **Trout of this World: Art & Science for Fish Conservation**, *Nolan Varas*
3. **Technology in Conservation Education**, *Mayky Sanchez-Tineo*
4. **Connecting Students to Environmental Issues Through Environmental Role Models**, *Jizelle Gonzalez*
5. **Yellow Mill Channel: Enjoy Your Walk**, *Cassidy D'Andrea*
6. **Restoring the Bluffs**, *Vaida Staffy*
7. **Surveillance of *Borrelia in Ixodes scapularis* and *Dermacentor variabilis* in Connecticut, U.S.**, *Yibin Lin*
8. **Eradication to Education: Tackling Japanese Knotweed**, *Bibhuti Marasini*
9. **Bunches of Buzzing: Planting for Biodiversity**, *Cal Massirio*
10. **We're Wasting Our Waste: Growing Solutions for Food Insecurity**, *Arlianis Lopez*

EDS Presentations

The Science Hall

Round 1: StoryMap Presentations

Cold Frames & Garden Beds

A chance to give back to the community through food

Sunbridge Reimagined

Improving pathways to start the school day

Healthy Minds, Healthy Mouths

Creating a more peaceful setting for school lunch



Round 2: StoryMap Presentations

Green Guardians

Cleaning up Colt Park

Compost & Community Gardens

Turning food waste into fresh vegetables

Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts High School

Teachers: Andrew Reardon & Russell Ford

Students: Taylor Battle, Elan Cockrell, Rachel Davis, Antoinette Declaybrook, Clifton Dixon, Chanel Echevarria, Yeliah Figueroa, Zsian Fulton, Alexander Graziano, Mel Jandreau, Enid Lee, Arlianis Lopez, Aiden Maisonet, Mariangely Melendez, Kamila Pabon, Alexander Perez, Maya Porter, Tyena Rivera, Amariliz Rodriguez, Jayanna Rodriguez, Fabian Rosario-Rolon, Camylle Roberts-Gage, Dialis Salgado, Adrianna Walton, Johnathin Wilcox, Rochel Winifred, and Da'Nyla Woolford



Scan to see all the StoryMaps!

Special thank you to NRCA near-peer mentors Benjamin Baby, Mary Ferguson, Haley Jordan, Megan Ng, Rachel Palmer, Shanelle Thevarajah, and Lily Walowitz

Visit nrca.uconn.edu to learn more!