



YOUNG AMBASSADORS

Class of 2026

Graduation: May 12, 2026, at 7:00 PM



Pennsylvania
Department of Transportation

A program of Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful, sponsored by PA Department of Transportation.

Agenda

Welcome, Introductions, and Closing Remarks:

Kylie McCutcheon, Young Ambassadors Coordinator, Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful

Young Ambassadors 2025 ~ A year in Review:

- Nathaniel, 11th grade, Pike County
- Lily C, 12th grade, Butler county
- Evangelia, 12th grade, Delaware County
- Laurel, 11th grade, Fayette County
- Ryana, 11th grade, York County

Guest Commencement Speakers:

- Larry Shifflet, Executive Deputy Secretary, Pennsylvania Department of Transportation
- Phoebe Coles, Chair, Keep PA Beautiful Board



Young Ambassador Program Goals

Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful will:

1. Guide Ambassadors through a six-step process to implement change in their community.
2. Provide education and training on such topics related to the impact of litter on roadways, litter prevention, waste management and recycling, civic engagement and related public policy, volunteer management, and social media marketing.
3. Provide networking opportunities to not only build a sense of community within the program, but also to promote professional development of the individual Ambassador.



Young Ambassadors Class of 2025-2026



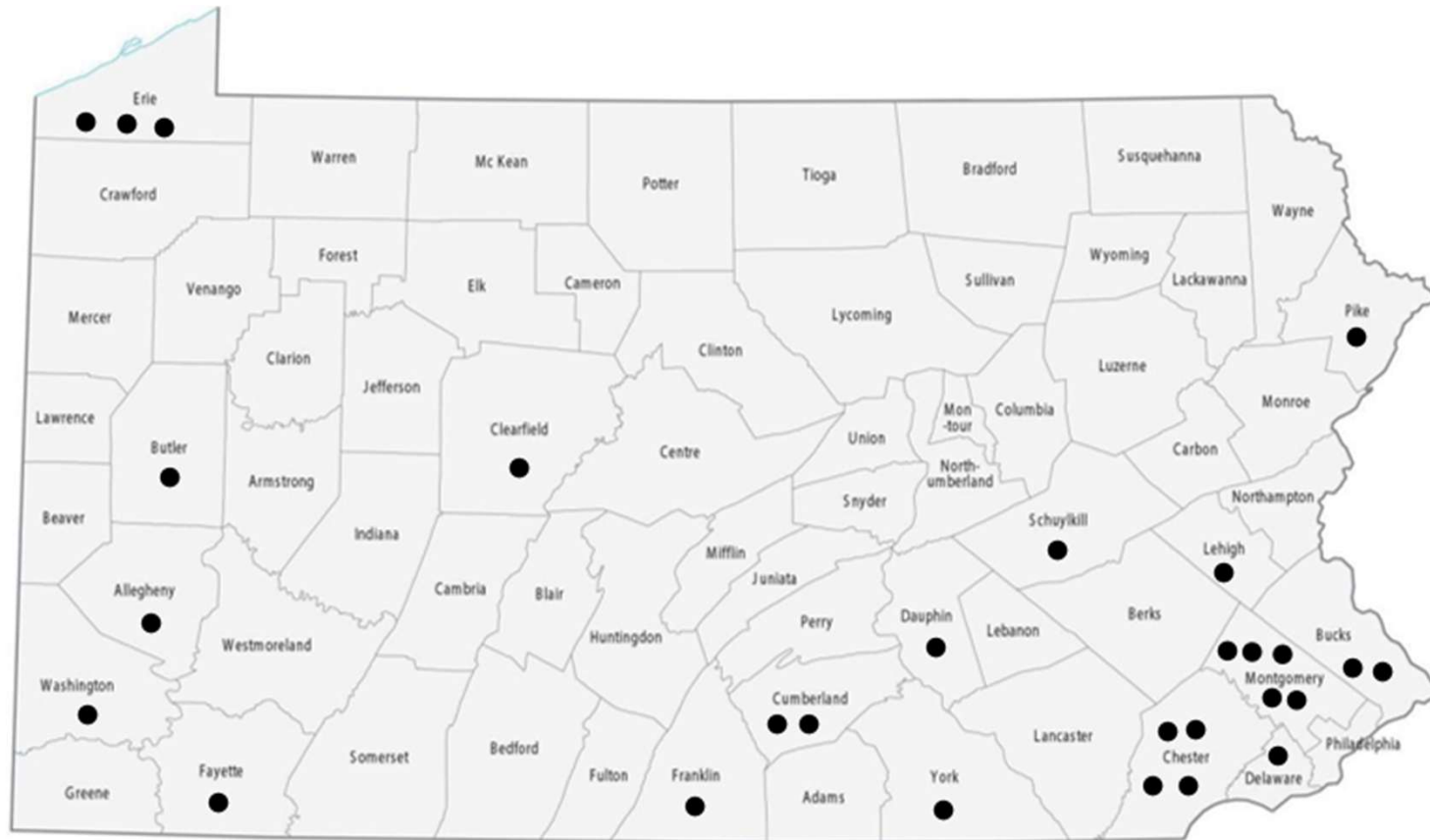
Young Ambassador Program Requirements

Young Ambassadors will:

1. Attend six virtual workshops.
2. Conduct a Community Assessment and make a slideshow showcasing it.
3. Conduct and report on one community cleanup.
4. Conduct and report on one community education event or activity.



2025-2026 Class of Young Ambassadors of PA, 28 students across 17 counties



Sample Learning Objectives and Assignments

Sample Learning Objectives:

1. Understand the Five Step Change Management Process.
2. Learn how to Conduct a Community Assessment.
3. Understand the Benefits of Outdoor Environmental Education and age-appropriate activities.
4. Learn how to organize and lead community events.

Assignments:

1. Conduct a Community Assessment
2. Conduct a Community Education Event
3. Conduct a Community Cleanup
4. Contribute to our Graduation presentation



Trainings and Guest Speakers

Orientation

- Kylie McCutcheon, Young Ambassadors Program Manager
- Marisa Balanda, Deputy Policy Director, Pennsylvania Department of Transportation

Conducting a Community Assessment & Environmental Education

- Shannon Reiter, Executive Director, Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful
- Rachael Stark, Keep Northeastern PA Beautiful, PA Environmental Council

Professional Networking

- Dong Yoon Kim, Southeast Regional Office Environmental Justice Coordinator, PA Department of Environmental Protection
- Celina Seftas, Director of Sustainability, Juniata College
- Katie Felberg, Education & Outreach Manager, Keep America Beautiful

Cleanup Safety Training and Sustainability initiatives at NiSource and Dow

- Michelle Dunn, Program Coordinator, Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful
- Anya E. Ritchie, Manager, Natural Resources Permitting, NiSource Environmental
- Will Anderson, Natural Resources Permitting, Columbia Gas of Pennsylvania and Maryland
- Julia Cepis, Natural Resources Coordinator, NiSource, Columbia Gas of Pennsylvania
- Meghan Leinhauser, Corporate Volunteer Manager, Dow



Trainings and Guest Speakers

Leave No Trace Overview and networking with Texas and Virginia Young Ambassadors

- Kylie McCutcheon, Young Ambassador and Affiliate Coordinator
- Corinne Pierce, Affiliate and Youth Programs Manager, Keep Texas Beautiful
- Cristi Lawton, Executive Director, Keep Virginia Beautiful
- Megan Hamilton, Program Assistant PalmettoPride South Carolina

Policy and Practice

- Marisa Balanda, Deputy Policy Director, Pennsylvania Department of Transportation
- Alex Teplyakov, Executive Director, House Communications & Technology Committee, Majority Chairman Joe Ciresi
- Shannon Reiter, Executive Director, Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful

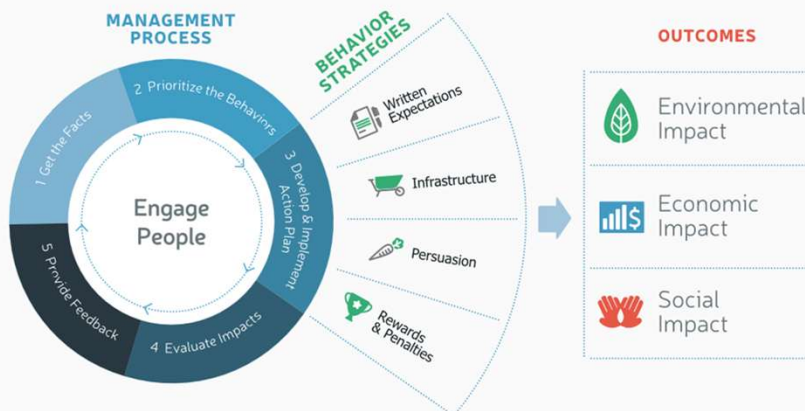


We Learned About and Conducted Community Assessments

Through a Community Assessment, Young Ambassadors began the five-step process of bringing about change in their communities. The first steps in the process is **ENGAGE PEOPLE** and **GET THE FACTS**.

Keep America Beautiful Model for Change

An Integrated Approach to More Beautiful Communities



Academically developed with decades of validation in the field, our behavior change system engages people at every step and results in sustainable change for the greater good.

Sample Community Assessments:

- **Beautify Black Rock Park, Preserve Green Space from Development, and Manage Litter Problems** ~ Arun Ghanta, 10th grade, Montgomery County
- **Street Litter After Garbage Day** ~ Connor 12th grade, Clearfield County
- **KPB Community Assessment** ~ Laila, 12th grade, Allegheny County
- **The Susquehanna River, Pollution and Water Quality in Central Pennsylvania**~ Leah, 11th grade, Cumberland County



We Presented and Accepted Feedback on our Community Assessments from Policy Professionals

Policy Professionals

- **Marisa Balanda**, Deputy Policy Director at Pennsylvania Department of Transportation
- **Shannon Reiter**, Executive Director, Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful
- **Alex Teplyakov**, Executive Director, House Communications & Technology Committee, Majority Chairman Joe Ciresi

What did we Learn?

I really liked the community assessment because it allowed me to research something I am passionate about and apply it directly to my community and home. I now feel more aware of how my actions and my community's actions affect our world and ecosystem. - Lily C

I was very inspired by my fellow ambassadors when listening to their community assessment presentations. It was amazing to see the effort that everyone put into their projects and the variety of different issues we were able to bring awareness to as a program. -Willie



Community Assessment Example

Plan of Action

We can reach out to stakeholders within the community to spread information on websites as well as during community events. We can educate students at local high schools who can then inform their families and friends of how light pollution affects us and what we can do to help cut back on it.

Our stakeholders that manage parks are community locations and look for shielded light sources to implement, rather than unshielded. We can also post fliers and posters around these parks.

1. Educate!
 - a. If we educate our community about the effects of light pollution we can gain traction towards a solution. If we start educating in schools through simple announcements or posters, students would naturally spread the message to their families and friends.
2. Switch to motion lights!
 - a. Motion activated lights provide the safety of a lit area at night while not being on all the time. They use less electricity and cause less light pollution while still serving their purpose.
3. Be aware!
 - a. When it gets dark outside, if we start to turn off artificial lights in our homes that are unnecessary, close our blinds, or switch to shielded light sources, we could be able to have a significant effect on reducing light pollution. By doing these simple things, we could make a real difference.

Key Stakeholders

Since light pollution is not a very looked at issue, there are no specific jobs that monitor light pollution. However, there are still people in our community that can help!

Sheryl Kelly

-Environmental Specialist for Butler County since 2000

-Preserves farmland from urban development and Directs the Butler county Department of Recycling and Waste Management

Doing Well:

-Near Butler County, DarkSky Pittsburgh works to educate the public about light pollution and its effects through fun events and social gatherings.

-Local parks such as Butler Memorial Park utilize a timer-based lighting system, meaning that lights are only on when necessary and are not on all the time.

-Butler has many parks that are far enough away from artificial light sources that the night sky is able to be seen well and wildlife is largely unaffected by light pollution.

Light Pollution in Butler County-By Lily

keepabeautiful.org



We Had Two Specific Networking Opportunities

- Professional Networking with industry leaders in Pennsylvania
- Leave No Trace/ Peer Networking Session with Ambassadors from Texas, Virginia, and South Carolina

The “Networking with Career Professionals” was extremely beneficial. Between Dong Yoon Kim, Celina Seftas, and Katie Felberg, it was really cool to see their roles in environmental projects and how they were able to get themselves in that position today. - Colin

I was so inspired by all of the speakers and even fellow ambassadors for how much energy they put into educating and learning about the environment and how we can further protect it. –Lily G

I learned a lot from the “Leave No Trace” meeting. I was able to see and learn about the impacts that seemingly regular human activity had on nature. What I appreciated is that I was also taught strategies on how to be more respectful and supportive to our surrounding environment. - Gabriella



Environmental Education Training Prepared Us for Our Events

I learned that planning and anticipating the response of your audience can be important when presenting them with new information. I was honestly surprised by how well my 1st graders responded to educational game, and I had so much fun teaching them! - Lily C

Our “how to host an education event meeting” with Rachel Stark helped me find out what audience I needed to gear to for my event. It also showed me different ideas that I could use during my event and how to plan it. - Madison S

Ms. Stark expanded my mindset for how to educate local people on litter. I assumed that I’d teach children because of how flexible their minds are, but she gave me good ideas for how to educate them and different activities I could do with them. - Ryana



Lessons Learned from Conducting Education Events

I learned about time management and how much planning goes into organizing a community cleanup. Collaborating with others also taught me a lot about teamwork skills while coordinating the event. -Twisha

Trial and Error: The day was beautiful and sunny in the 50s, but the wind was a huge challenge. We started with flimsy trash bags that kept ripping and blowing around, so we had to upgrade to heavy-duty 30-gallon bags to handle the weight and the weather. Having litter grabbers was a lifesaver for getting into the thorns and woods safely. - Arun

It actually isn't that difficult to become involved with the community! It really helps to know someone who knows someone, but once that connection is jumpstarted, the rest goes smoothly! -Evangelia





Cleanup Training Prepared Us to Host Safe Events

Through planning and hosting my cleanup, I found out that there are lots of people my age who are open to helping with events like this. It made me feel very happy and supported to know that I'm not alone in my efforts, but joined by many who are just looking for someone to lead them to a solution. - Quinn

I was really happy with my cleanup event and the whole experience was very peaceful to me; being outside, making a public space beautiful, and spending time with my friends. - Lily C

Erie weather strikes again with surprise rain! Midway through our cleanup it started pouring, so we had to take shelter under a park pavilion. Unfortunately, our donuts could not be saved, however we were able to continue on with the cleanup 20 minutes later. - Chloe



Lessons Learned from Hosting Cleanup Events and How We Felt Afterward

When all of those who signed for the cleanup came to the lobby, I felt proud seeing the small community that I had formed. All of these people from different clubs and homerooms came together for the same reason, and it was nice to know that I was one of the people behind it! - Ryana



I learned that lots of people in my community are willing to lend a hand and make a difference in making our communities more sustainable and beautiful. All they needed was the opportunity to do so - Nathaniel

Being able to develop my leadership skills via safety discussion and crewing a group of individuals was quite formative for me, and I felt satisfied with my ability to be the reason that 25 bags of trash were collected in my community. - Connor



Cleanup and Education Event Statistics

Cleanup events:

- Volunteers Engaged: 201
- Number of Bags of Litter Collected: 204
- Number of Tires Cleaned Up: 6
- Number of Appliances Cleaned Up: 17
- Number of Greens Planted: 25
- Number of Invasive Species Removed: 15



Education events:

- Number of People Educated: 2,272



We Made Connections in Our Communities

My Eco-Club from school joined me at both my cleanup and education events. I also expanded my network within the York County Parks by working with a lead naturalist to organize my education event. - Ryana

I connected with a local Girl Scout Brownie troop to run an environmental education event where the girls earned their “Eco Friend” badges by learning about Leave No Trace principles, sustainable campfire practices, and ways to be kind to others while outdoors! - Madeline W

I connected with the local Environmental Advisory Council for my clean up event in a park where there would be an educational event the following week! We ended up cleaning up a bunch of trash and big branches from trees! At the event we learned about the iNaturalist app and planted some trees. - Evangelia



We Partnered with Many Different Community Organizations

Education Event Partners

- The Children's Aid Society
- The York County Parks
- POWER (a program that supports South Asian and American women and encourages them to achieve their goals.)
- Green Hill Cemetery
- Groundwork Erie
- UP township Parks and Recreation
- PA Youth Vote

Cleanup Event Partners

- Upper Providence Township
- Adopt a Highway
- Downtown DuBois Incorporated
- The Lansdowne Environmental Advisory Council
- Erie City Planning
- Keep Erie Country Beautiful
- Matamoras Borough Parks and Recreation Board
- Matamoras Borough Council
- National Honor Society
- PENNDOT
- Dallastown Area High School's Eco-Club
- POWER Women- Kalpana Mary Doppalapudi



What's Next For Us

I got accepted to the Wildlife Leadership Academies Wildlife Ambassadors program! I get to go to a summer camp training in state collage. Where I get to learn about Brook Trout along with being trained to be a wildlife ambassador! - Laurel

I will be studying Environmental Policy at Santa Clara University starting in the Fall! I plan to engage in environment-focused research while on campus and work with their Sustainability Department to support their efforts across campus. - Madeline

I am attending the University of Pennsylvania where I intend to study Health and Societies! I am interested in the way urban planning and environmental factors contribute to an individual's wellbeing. - Connor

I have a high school internship lined up for me this summer with the York County Parks! I will be working alongside park rangers, naturalists, and continuing to volunteer. I also got into the PA School for Excellence in the Agricultural Sciences at Penn State to expand my education in the environmental sciences! – Ryana

I am assisting my aquaponics teacher with planting a native garden on my school's campus. Our end goal is to inform our community about the importance of native plants to support our local wildlife. - Leah

Since I've connected with the EAC, I now have a contact within the council where volunteer environmental opportunities will always be available to me to help with my community! - Evangelia



Opportunities

I was able to network with others who were involved in higher positions through the program. I also was able to talk with others who shared common interests as me. It also allowed me to be seen as a person who could be taken more seriously when advocating for environmental issues (ex: at my school for bringing in beehives and running clothes drives). Not that I have been hired by anyone yet, but it also will be nice to have on my resume, showing that leadership and initiative to hiring managers. -Ryan

I was contacted by a reporter of our local newspaper, we made a date to meet up and I had an interview with her that lead to a front page article about myself and being a KPB Youth Ambassador. This then lead to me being contacted by a few other people in our community to learn more about KPB and my involvement with it. - Quinn

I got contacted by my local chamber of commerce to speak about my program involvement. - Laurel



Job Shadowing with DOW

Max met with employees from Dow and the Perkiomen Watershed Association to explore the wide range of environmentally related jobs available to them and learn about various environmental projects happening across Pennsylvania.

My job shadowing at DOW was incredibly beneficial and helped me see a whole new side of a company that is right in my backyard! I live only a few minutes away from DOW in Collegeville, but if you asked me what went on there before my job shadowing, all I could have vaguely answered was “work with chemicals.” But now, thanks to a fantastic experience with Mr. Land, I recognize all of the sustainability and environmental initiatives that go on behind the scenes. Whether it’s combining all of Dow’s global environmental impact data, launching an effort to protect the ecosystem of the jaguar in Mexico, or just contributing to a cleanup in a local park, there are so many ways to work in my field of interest at a company like Dow. I’m so grateful to have had this experience! - Max



Job Shadowing with Columbia Gas, a NiSource Company

Logan and Leah met with Environmental Coordinators and Engineers and visited active work sites.

The NiSource Job shadow day was great! Being able to converse to with so many different people working in the energy field, with the same goals for environmental protection, was amazing. I had the pleasure of shadowing Julia Cepis, an environmental coordinator, and she taught me a lot about what you should expect from an energy company. The most interesting part, for me, was seeing how the environmental coordinator works on projects every step of the way to ensure the project has minimal environmental impacts. - Logan

The job shadow provided me an opportunity to observe the daily routine of an Environmental Coordinator and gain insight to the role they play within the larger corporation's efforts to ensure the operations at the worksites are consistent with industry and government guidelines. What I found interesting was they were able to collaborate with their peers nationwide to discuss and resolve challenges. - Leah



Young Ambassador Scholarship

The Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful Young Ambassador Scholarship celebrates and honors one current Ambassador and one graduate who demonstrates a strong commitment to environmental, social, and economic sustainability through academic pursuits to positively impact their community. Each recipient is awarded a \$1,000 merit-based scholarship.

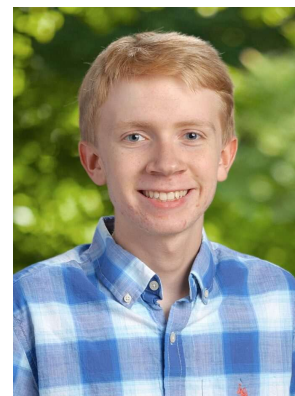
Eligibility Criteria:

- Current Young Ambassador planning to enroll in a continuing education program.*
- Young Ambassador alum planning to enroll or currently enrolled in a continuing education program*.

**Continuing education programs include college, technical schools, certifications, and professional development programs.*

Awardees:

- Current Young Ambassador: Nathaniel, 11th grade, Pike County
- Young Ambassador Alum: Sonya, Chester County, YA program year 2025, Currently attending the University of California, San Diego



Quotes to live by

The best thing you can do is talk to people,
and the worst thing people can do is say no.

- Mariya

The first step to solving a problem
is always education.

- Quinn

You are really bound by nothing.

Don't let anything stop you from just trying!

-Laurel





Congratulations Young Ambassador Class of 2026 and all the best for the future!



- Laila, 12th grade, Allegheny County
- Vidhi, 12th grade, Bucks County
- Nitasha, 12th grade, Bucks County
- Lily C, 12th grade, Butler County
- Lily G, 12th grade, Chester County
- Ryan, 11th grade, Chester County
- Connor, 12th grade, Clearfield County
- Leah, 10th grade, Cumberland County
- Twisha, 11th grade, Cumberland County
- Evangelia, 12th grade, Delaware County
- Mariya, 10th grade, Erie County
- Chloe, 10th grade, Erie County
- Logan, 10th grade, Erie County
- Laurel, 11th grade, Fayette County
- Quinn, 10th grade, Franklin County
- Arun, 10th grade, Montgomery County
- Max, 12th grade, Montgomery County
- Gabby, 10th grade, Montgomery County
- Willie, 12th grade, Montgomery County
- Madeline W, 12th grade, Montgomery County
- Nathaniel, 11th grade, Pike County
- Colin, 11th grade, Schuylkill County
- Maddie S, 11th grade, Washington County
- Ryana, 11th grade, York County

