THE U-CAN MISSION

To inspire the next generation of diverse leaders by igniting a deep-rooted and lasting passion for conservation anchored in science, arts, and culture.

Through this opportunity, youth leaders are given tools empowering them to take action in their communities to promote the ideals of healthy lifestyles, sustainable practices, and environmental stewardship.

U-CAN provides these young ambassadors with a culturally sensitive atmosphere, support through mentorship, and fosters self expression and growth.

This environment enables students to enhance emotional intelligence, navigate adversity, build personal resilience, and find the strength in themselves that is necessary to protect our resilient natural world and its limited resources.

ABOUT U-CAN

U-CAN grew from a vision of AFC+A Founder and Director, Irene Vilar, to create a youth congress that focused on engaging minorities through an environmental curriculum anchored in arts and culture. Launched in partnership with the US Forest Service, AFC+A hosted the first annual U-CAN Youth Congress August 15th-19th, 2017.

Over 100 inspiring nominations from around the country and Mexico were submitted for the first U-CAN. 25 8th-12th grade students were invited to join us at Rocky Ridge Music Center near Estes Park, Colorado. The diversity of the students was integral to the success of this first Congress, with each student bringing their own unique story, background, and culture.

The students represented 7 different states across the country (9 Out-of-State, 16 from Colorado, and over 80% of the students were minorities.

A UNIQUE ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

The curriculum for the first U-CAN Youth Congress was organized around 3 Pillars:

1 - Forestry, Conservation, Restoration, & Health
2 - Verbal, Visual, & Sound Arts
3 - Community & Culture

While the majority of the workshops were in Forestry, Conservation, Restoration, and Health the entire program was anchored in arts and culture to enhance the significance, connections, and impact of the concepts taught and allow students to identify with themselves, each other, and their culture.

Keynote speakers were central to building the culture and community of U-CAN. Highlighting the success of culturally relevant work allowed students to identify with the speakers, relating their stories to work they may want to pursue. Each keynote transitioned directly into a Community Circle, building off the theme of accepting the highs and lows of one’s life story. Community Circles were designed to allow students to see that no matter the hardships they have faced in life, they have the support to pursue any of their dreams.

“How can we be expected to heal something without healing ourselves first.”
- Cinthia Cantu, 2017 U-CAN Student Mentor
MODEL FOR MENTORSHIP

The foundation of U-CAN was set by the team of student mentors, faculty and core staff, all from diverse cultures and backgrounds themselves. Student mentors (ages 19-23) acted as the first level of support to the students - staying in the cabins and participating in workshops and community circles with the students. Professionals in forestry, fish and wildlife, and water joined artists and community leaders as U-CAN faculty and special guests to teach the workshops. The AFC+A core team helped facilitate the week.

Throughout U-CAN there were multiple tiers of mentorship that occurred, making the congress a transformative experience for all who attended. Students, student mentors, faculty, and core team had opportunities to connect and find personal and professional mentors in each other.

A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

We are currently working to make U-CAN 2018 an amazing experience for all. We are excited to announce the addition of a 4th Pillar to our curriculum: food! Workshops will cover topics including food safety, farm to table, food sovereignty, and slow food. A larger focus will be placed on body movement and health, including through performance arts. Additionally, a greater focus will be placed on indigenous ties of Latin American and Native American students and the history and culture of these communities.

The 2nd annual U-CAN Youth Congress will take place in early summer in Colorado. In a second session in late summer we are excited to launch of our first U-CAN Community Restoration Expedition to Puerto Rico. This will include hands-on community work focused on restoring and rebuilding hurricane ravaged communities by helping to develop sustainable farming practices and other community service projects.

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

The success, ability to offer this opportunity to students, and the continuation of U-CAN depends on the generous support of our partners and sponsors. To help ensure the future of U-CAN consider showing your support by:

- **Nominating a Student:** If you know a young leader in your community who is interested in natural sciences, arts, and the outdoors, you can nominate them for a chance to attend the 2nd Annual U-CAN Youth Congress the summer of 2018. Nominations can be submitted at americasforconservation.org/u-can.

- **Making a Commitment:** Donations are tax deductible and can be made to Americas for Conservation + the Arts 501(c)(3). All personal donations to U-CAN will go directly to our scholarship program to ensure no student misses the opportunity to attend the youth congress because they cannot afford it.

- **Becoming a Partner:** If your goals align with the mission of U-CAN, we are always open to discussing ways to partner to make this youth program as impactful as possible. Partnerships are available at different levels and carry recognition benefits. Contact us to discuss how we can work together to achieve our common goals.

- **Sharing with your Networks:** The success of U-CAN can be enhanced with your help. If you know others who may be interested in nominating students, donating to U-CAN, or partnering with AFC+A to continue making this opportunity available to diverse young leaders across the Americas, share this information with your networks.

Together, we can.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Visit americasforconservation.org/u-can or contact us at UCAN@americasforconservation.org

“Building a more inclusive generation of environmental stewards”