



ENVIRONMENTAL LEARNING FOR KIDS
MESSAGING GUIDE, SEPTEMBER 2023

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UNDERSTANDING ELK

ABOUT ELK

Environmental Learning for Kids (ELK) is a local nonprofit that creates a sense of belonging, self-discovery, and adventure in the outdoors for underrepresented young people of color and their families, transforming youth into environmental stewards and trailblazers that promote equitable outdoor access, sustainable practices, and community uplift.

WHAT ELK DOES

ELK programs introduce, immerse, educate, and mentor youth ages 5–25 and their families to Colorado’s natural resources and science-related careers. Most return year after year to join ELK’s community of learners. ELK offers a mosaic of programs that serve as stepping-stones for young leaders and engaged environmental stewards of today and tomorrow.

MISSION

Cultivating a diverse community of leaders and environmental stewards by increasing outdoor equity.

VISION

We envision a world in which all people are caretakers of themselves, each other, and the natural world.

VALUES

JUSTICE, EQUITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION:

We support and partner with the most diverse community in Denver to ensure all have equitable access to become change makers. We design our programs utilizing challenge by choice. We provide the tools and support needed to feel a sense of belonging in all spaces.

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING:

We create a culture that centers on the whole person. We check in with each other and intentionally reflect on our experiences, give positive guidance to youth (as we are trusted adults in their lives), and meet youth and families where they are on any given day.

ACCESSIBILITY TO NATURE:

We remove barriers for participants to explore the outdoors through a new lens and support them in experiencing joy in the natural world. We offer a diverse range of activities/programs to ensure accessibility for everyone.

LIFE-LONG EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

We lay a foundation for exploration and curiosity by connecting our community in holistic, hands-on learning that can be shared for generations. We are committed to continuously evolving, and cherish shared teachable moments. We also value knowing when to unlearn.

THE STORY BEHIND ELK

ELK was founded in 1996 by two wildlife biologists from Montbello who recognized the need to dismantle the systems of oppression that prevent young people and their families to connect with nature and thrive in the environmental and outdoor community. Their goal was to educate youth about natural resources, environmental education, and science-related career paths.

Today, ELK serves some of the most racially diverse neighborhoods in the Denver Metro area. They are also among the City's most impoverished neighborhoods, with a quarter of families living in poverty, which is high compared to the rest of metro Denver. ELK annually serves more than 5,000 underserved youth of color (ages 5-25) and their families year-round, in-school and after-school, and family programs. ELK's approach to serving these challenges over time has helped create a unique set of programs that address the challenges that have existed since its inception.

ELK PROGRAMS

ELK's programs include:

1. **Urban Rangers** – The Urban Rangers are a diverse crew of ELK youth, ages 14–25, who work in the summer to teach science and environmental programs to thousands of youth. This program benefits partners by educating diverse youth in Denver, providing summer employment and leadership opportunities for ELK youth, and expanding educational programming in underserved neighborhoods.
2. **School-Based Programs** – ELK provides a wide selection of science and natural resources programs to community groups and public schools from grades P–12, correlated to Colorado State Academic Standards in 12 partner schools within four school districts.
3. **Denver Youth Naturally (DYN)** – A year-round, multi-year program that immerses youth in hands-on science and outdoor experiences in nature. Mentored by science professionals, DYN youth find the support necessary to succeed in school and life. (Ages 8–14)
4. **Youth in Natural Resources (YNR)** – Offers college mentoring, career exploration, and work experience in the field of environmental science and natural resources. YNR includes college visits, leadership development, scholarship and college application support, and summer employment. (Ages 14–25)
5. **Learning Environmental Activities for Families (LEAF)** – Involves families of DYN and YNR youth in their children's science learning, service projects, and outdoor experiences. LEAF encourages quality family time side-by-side in nature. (All ages)
6. **ELK Education Center and Montbello Open Space Park** – On-site programming and activities provide equitable access to the outdoors, STEM learning, and community building to far northeast youth & families.

BRAND PERSONALITY

Through its rebrand, ELK exudes a fresh identity, embracing personality traits that elevate how it is perceived:

- **Trailblazing:** Leading the way in innovative environmental education and community engagement approaches.
- **Collaborative:** Building bridges between different cultures, backgrounds, and disciplines to create a united force for positive change.
- **Courageous:** Provoking the courage to challenge the status quo, confront environmental issues, and advocate for a better future.

Other associated traits of ELK include: Adventurous, Inclusive, Curious, Empowering, Vibrant, Compassionate, Dynamic, Trailblazing, Collaborative, Courageous, Authentic, Inspiring, and Supportive.

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