

# Training the Next Generation



## ANNUAL REPORT

September 2017–August 2018



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# From the EXECUTIVE COORDINATOR

My hands were shaking as I curled the press releases in my hands to make sure the headline was hidden. *“U.S. youth lead mass walk-out of Trump Administration event geared to promote coal and fossil fuels at UN Climate Talks,”* it read. I was sitting in the fifth row of the Trump administration’s only public event at the UN Climate Talks in Germany. This was the first time the administration was facing the world at the climate talks after Trump announced he was pulling out of the Paris Agreement. Security limited the occupants and we didn’t get everyone we needed to inside. I didn’t know if we would pull off what we were planning.

The panel of fossil fuel and nuclear CEOs started, gushing the usual talking points about the need for more fossil fuels around the world. Then I heard Kyle Lemle, a youth delegated with SustainUS, start sing as he stood up and I was filled with relief. All of us who had packed the room stood up and started singing alongside him to the tune of Lee Greenwood’s “God Bless the USA.” *So you claim to be an American / but we see right through your greed / It’s killing all across the world / for that coal money. / And we proudly stand up / until you keep it in the ground. / We the People of the world unite / and we are here to stay.*

Together, we walked out of the panel and left them talking to an empty room while we hosted our own panel, a “people’s panel” right outside of the room with hundreds of supporters at our side cheering. Later, I stood by a bus stop watching the headlines roll in. *The Guardian, Washington Post, The New York Times.* We had done it. We had further isolated the Trump Administration and limited their role in further damaging the Paris Agreement. This was one of the most moving and successful moments of my life. I felt proud of SustainUS and the years of lessons, successes and failures it took to pull off one of the largest protests in the history of the UN Climate Talks.

Without a doubt, we are into a dark time in history. In the past two years, the Trump Administration has relentlessly worked to divide our families, poison our communities, and damage our climate. **Through all the challenges, I’m proud of what SustainUS has accomplished.**

We helped isolate the Trump Administration by leading one of the largest disruptions ever at the UN Climate Talks in Germany last fall, making headlines around the world. We launched two new programs, one to transform how the World Bank invests in fossil fuels and renewable energy, another for young frontline arts-activists to influence decision-making around the Global Climate Action Summit in California. In total, we skilled-up over 60 new youth leaders



in media, action, and team-building skills. We landed and wrote over 200 media articles about our work.

It hasn't all been peachy. We've dealt with internal and external challenges that have forced SustainUS to change significantly in the past year. We shifted to a membership-based model for our organization, increasing transparency in decision-making and improving engagement across our programs. We developed organizational principles, built out teams, and gained clarity on the specific contribution we offer youth-led movements for justice and sustainability. We have increased and maintained a diverse membership, with a majority of our members now identifying as people of color, women, and non-straight. We raised more money than ever before in our history in order to better support our members and leaders financially.

SustainUS is unique because we are a community of young people that bridges local and national organizing for justice and sustainability with global movements. We come together, take action and leverage powerful lived experiences at domestic and international political forums and movement moments, learning through experience to become effective change agents for the long haul.

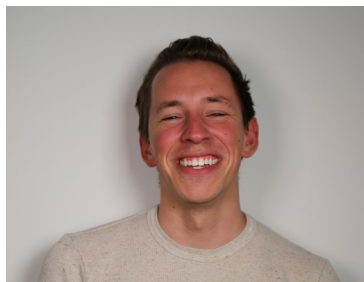
In this dark time in history. I believe SustainUS plays an important role in training the next generation of leaders capable of tackling the most challenging issues of our time.

I am honored to help lead this organization as we strengthen our key programs. I believe we are on the cusp of assuming our true purpose and identity. Together, we can provide a home for developing leaders so they can gain the skills, community, and freedom they need to build a world free from systemic injustice over the coming decades.

With hope and gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Garrett Blad', with a stylized, flowing script.

Garrett Blad  
Executive Coordinator



# 2017–2018 SustainUS COORDINATING BODY



**Garrett Blad**  
Executive Coordinator



**Aly Johnson-Kurts**  
Operations Coordinator



**Gavriela "Gavi" Reiter**  
Development Coordinator



**Morgan Curtis**  
Trainings Coordinator



**Dineen O'Rourke**  
Delegations Coordinator



**Ben Goloff**  
Community Building and  
Partnerships Coordinator



**Christine Woods**  
Communications and Media  
Coordinator

# BOARD of DIRECTORS



**Kyle Gracey**  
Board Chair



**Olivia Angus**  
Director



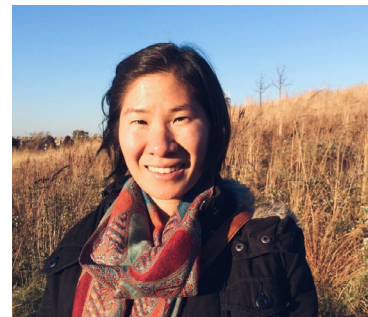
**Jennie Hatch**  
Secretary



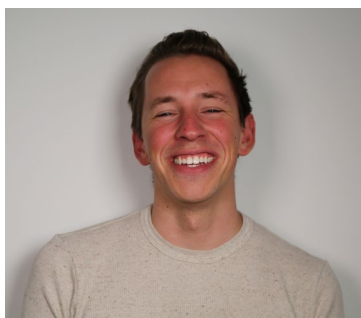
**Krsna Powell**  
Director



**Ellie Johnston**  
Director



**Louise Yeung**  
Branding Committee Chair



**Garrett Blad**  
Ex-officio Member

# ABOUT SustainUS

Young people's lives and livelihoods are threatened by global institutions that prioritize free trade, austerity, and a dominant private sector over state governments. **To combat injustice, we need young people skilled and able to rise up in every hall of power to ensure a just and peaceful future.** However, youth engaged in social movements in the United States lack the freedom, skills, and community to be effective change agents for the long haul. SustainUS provides unique and deep leadership development experiences to young people at the helm of social change.

SustainUS is a nation-wide membership-based organization with over 100 members between the ages of 13 and 29. We believe sound policymaking cements the demands of social movements into law. **SustainUS helps put these demands forward by training youth to disrupt spaces of decision-making through media, creative protests, and policy demands rooted in our identities.** At the forums, members refine their skills through experiential learning and unite to share a compelling story of our generation that further goals of allied social movements. In doing so, we bring the public consciousness to our side, shift the political climate, and rewrite the dominant story towards justice and sustainability.

SustainUS was founded by six American college students in the lead-up to the 2001 U.N. World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, South Africa. The meeting was billed as the greatest opportunity since the Rio Earth Summit to make progress toward sustainable development. The students were scared about their futures and dreamed up bold, creative solutions together to hold U.S. leaders accountable to address issues of global concern. The founders saw a dire need for idealistic youth voices in global policy processes to move the world closer to justice and sustainability.

**SustainUS was founded on the belief that youth possess a powerful force for addressing global challenges.** As a result, SustainUS played a key role in creating the International Youth Climate Movement and obtaining formal youth representation at U.N. climate change and sustainable development negotiations. SustainUS has focused on developing lifelong global leaders ever since. We have trained over 900 young people to hold the U.S. delegations accountable at U.N. conferences on climate change, biodiversity, women, and human rights since our creation. Many SustainUS leaders have gone on to found environmental and climate organizations, assume high-profile roles in government, and become influential in institutions addressing global and national challenges.



**SustainUS has trained more than 900 youth to tell their stories, shape culture, build power, and pass their training on to others.**

# SustainUS PROGRAMS

## 2017–2018

SustainUS delegation programs are dynamic and intensive training opportunities for US youth leaders (18-29) who want to change the world. Our programs train and organize youth to engage as a team at UN conferences and other movement moments.

Since 2004, we have sent over 900 young people to conferences on climate change, sustainable development, social development, women, and biological diversity. SustainUS delegates work with hundreds of young people from across the globe to advocate for robust environmental and social policies.

We train, connect, and empower young leaders to engage strategically in policy fights within the following three broad areas:

- 1. The end of the fossil fuel era:** We seek zero global fossil fuel emissions by 2050, a moratorium on new fossil fuel infrastructure, and a just transition to 100% renewable energy that prioritizes workers.
- 2. Development grounded in justice:** We are coalition partners in hard-hitting national campaigns to stop corporate trade deals, protect human rights, and increase the flows of climate finance to those who need it most.
- 3. An inclusive and vibrant democracy:** We helped establish the formal recognition of young people within the UNFCCC and are working to limit the influence of money in U.S. politics.

Participants of our programs engage in hands-on learning about advocacy and action while working with youth from around the world. From crafting effective media strategies and publishing op-eds to developing rapid-response protests and lobbying government officials, the skills that delegates learn are valuable and long-lasting. SustainUS equips its delegates with the capacity to be effective leaders to push for justice and sustainability at these movement moments and back home in their communities.

In 2017-2018, our main programs will train young people to stand up for justice and sustainability at United Nations commissions, the Global Climate Action Summit in San Francisco, the World Bank Annual Meetings in Indonesia, and the U.N. Climate Talks in Poland.

# UNITED NATIONS

## COMMISSIONS and MEETINGS

In 2017-2018, SustainUS delegates participated in United Nations commissions and meetings around the world. We hosted a series of panels, dialogues, and events to promote awareness of our mission and encourage commitment to climate action.

- **We developed** a new delegation to participate in the World Summit of Nobel Laureates, which took place in Bogota, Colombia. (February 2017)
- **We empowered** delegates to participate in the inaugural Oceans Summit and Indigenous meetings at the UN Headquarters in New York City. (June 2017)
- **We trained** 14 youth delegates to attend the 62nd Commission on the Status of Women at the UN Headquarters in New York City. (March 2018)

### Hosting a global dialogue

SustainUS delegates were selected by the United Nations to host an official side-event “Achieving Sustainable Development through Social and Political Entrepreneurship” where representatives from across sectors, regions of the world, and generations participated in an interactive dialogue and exchange.

### Harvesting global leaders

Zephanii Smith, program coordinator, was nominated as a top 10 candidate for the United Nations Secretary General’s Envoy on Youth, as a result of her work with SustainUS and elsewhere.

# FIRST DELEGATION to the WORLD BANK MEETINGS

In October of 2017, SustainUS launched our first ever delegation to the World Bank Annual Meetings. Every fall, the governing body of the World Bank Group holds Annual Meetings to discuss their work on international economic development and finance. The Annual Meetings offer a chance to engage with delegates from 189 member countries as well as the broader general public. Over 10,000 people attend these meetings, including a substantial number of civil society organizations (CSOs) from around the world. The official governing body meetings were October 13th–15th, but many of these meetings are not open to civil society. Instead, from October 9th–13th a series of panels and roundtables were held to engage civil society and press on the Bank's work.

The 15 delegates advocated for climate justice and more inclusive climate finance, specifically advocating for the World Bank to end investment in fossil fuel infrastructure. They worked with partner Civil Society Organizations to push the World Bank Group to change its policies on climate change and equitable distribution of development finance. Currently there is negligible representation of US youth at World Bank meetings.





## Our demands:

- **Expand Civil Society space.** It is absolutely critical to make space through advisory councils or representatives for the voices of those directly impacted by World Bank decision-making: youth, indigenous nations, refugees, and people with disabilities.
- **Make the dramatic shift to 100% renewable investment that reflects the urgency of recent climatic events.** Slow transitions are tantamount to non-committals to the populations the World Bank is designed to assist if the World Bank does not commit to a 1.5C degree future. This means immediate divestment from energy projects that contribute to climate instability, energy poverty, and population displacement.
- **Evaluate and eradicate the WB's paternalistic structure.** The most successful and enduring projects are those that are owned by communities and which validate traditional and local knowledge. Committing to and prioritizing the needs of the people through Civil Society spaces as well as consultation will deliver positive impacts that resolve issues identified by the communities in question.
- **Create a shift in the operating paradigm by prioritizing cultural loss and mitigation of related damages by developing a mechanism for consent, not merely consultation.** The World Bank must use a framework for evaluating project impact that is based on equity and reciprocity. When sovereign indigenous communities impacted by projects are consulted but do not give consent, the World Bank effectively breaches its political prohibition by siding with colonial oppressors. Sustainable development requires a framework devised to include qualitative elements such as cultural customs, rituals, and priorities. Not creating a shift in the development paradigm further exacerbates systemic injustice and irreversible loss of identity.

During the Meetings, which consisted of both topical panels and open-forum Town Halls, delegates took advantage of open microphones to represent American youth and push the demands above, including directly asking questions to all 12 Executive Directors of the World Bank, as well as World Bank President Jim Yong Kim and IMF Managing Director Christine Lagarde.



Outside of the halls of the Meetings, delegates took pictures with protesters on the street with a white board asking them to complete the sentence: “I want a World Bank that...”. In addition, delegates organized a demonstration with the World Bank to-do list. Delegates also worked alongside other CSOs in the same space, notably The Big Shift.

Delegates were successful in asking provocative questions during the meetings. One big win happened during the Meetings, during which President Jim Yong Kim announced that the World Bank would account for greenhouse gas emissions for all of their projects. However, the biggest win came after the Meetings on December 12th, when the **World Bank announced** it would no longer finance upstream oil and gas infrastructure, directly responding to the demands of the SustainUS delegation and American youth.

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# DELEGATION to the 23<sup>RD</sup> UNFCCC CONFERENCE of the PARTIES

In November 2017, 15 youth climate justice leaders from across the United States gathered at the 23rd UN Climate Talks (COP23) in Bonn, Germany hosted by Fiji.

At COP23, the SustainUS delegation joined the global community as a member of the People's Delegation, highlighting the illegitimacy of oil-soaked US State Department that wrongly claims to represent us and our needs. Along with organizations such as 350.org, the Indigenous Environmental Network, It Takes Roots, and others, SustainUS organized to condemn the lack of U.S. representation at COP23 and create a coalition that represented the real interests of communities across the United States who are largely opposed to the United States' withdrawal from the Paris Agreement and in disagreement with Donald Trump and Rex Tillerson's fossil-fueled agenda.

## **SustainUS joins U.S. People's Delegation to challenge Trump Administration**

On November 7th, SustainUS participated in a press conference announcing the U.S. People's Delegation at Bonn. We demanded a just transition to 100% renewable energy in all cities and states and a halt to all new fossil fuel projects and with an understanding that fossil fuel industry perpetuates the climate crisis, climate denial and ensnares vulnerable communities in impoverished circumstances. Along with the People's Delegation we also engaged in a town hall with local elected U.S. officials who have vowed that "We Are Still In," to ask questions of accountability and what actions they plan to take to uphold the "We Are Still In" commitment.

**“ I feel more rooted in the  
importance of my story as  
a young person taking brave  
and bold action within the  
climate movement, and got  
more practice doing that! ”**

**—COP23 delegate**



## Gov. Jerry Brown: “Still in for what?” action renews energy in California

Led by It Takes Roots and Indigenous Environmental Network, we stood up to false solutions and fake climate leadership when California governor Jerry Brown was honored for being a “climate leader” at the America’s Pledge Launch Event, where Walmart was also being honored as a “climate leader.” Ironically, Brown is notoriously supportive of fracking in California while his carbon trading plans continue to place disproportionate harm on frontline communities. That morning, we interrupted Brown’s speech to ask him, “Still in for What?”

**We made our message clear that if “We Are Still In” means still in for fracking, false carbon market solutions, and ignoring frontline communities, then it is not true climate leadership.** Brown responded by threatening Indigenous leaders among us, “Let’s put you in the ground so we can get on with the show,” revealing violent tendencies to silence frontline voices. News of this event made the Sacramento Bee and other leading publications in the US, spurring a renewed movement in California to push Brown to implement more ambitious and just climate policies ahead of the gubernatorial election to select his successor in fall 2018.



*Eva Malis, SustainUS youth delegate to COP23, stands up for her home state of California by calling out Governor Jerry Brown’s decisions to accelerate oil and gas drilling.*

## Singing crowd walks out of U.S.-backed panel on fossil fuels

On November 13, with the support of Indigenous and youth delegations from around the world, we organized a mass “singing walkout” of the White House event. **More than 100 people — two-thirds of the panel audience — participated in the singing disruption of the event.** Ten minutes into the panel, participants stood as one and turned their backs on the panelists while singing a SustainUS-written adaptation of Lee Greenwood’s “God Bless the U.S.A.” After several minutes, we walked out of the room to join a crowd of hundreds more gathered in the main hall. This was one of the largest unsanctioned protests in the history of the UN climate talks.



*SustainUS delegates Michaela Mujica-Steiner and Michael Charles hold a banner during the White House panel walk-out.*

**The walkout became SustainUS’s biggest mobilization at COP23, generating international media coverage including an above the fold story on the front page of the New York Times, and dozens of other prominent U.S. outlets.** The story also trended #1 for an entire day on reddit, the “front page of the internet,” in addition to reaching hundreds of thousands of users on Facebook and Twitter. In the near-term, SustainUS directed U.S. viewers to join a national “Climate Legacy” Day of Action on Nov. 18, 2017, organized by a coalition of youth-led organizations including Sunrise Movement and the Power Shift Network.

“ I felt like I didn’t take off my “facilitation hat” for nearly 3 weeks. It was definitely tiring, and also pushed me immensely to be more assertive and have clearer communication. I understand more deeply now what it means to be a strong and trustworthy facilitator, and this is a skill that will support me in any direction I go in life. ”

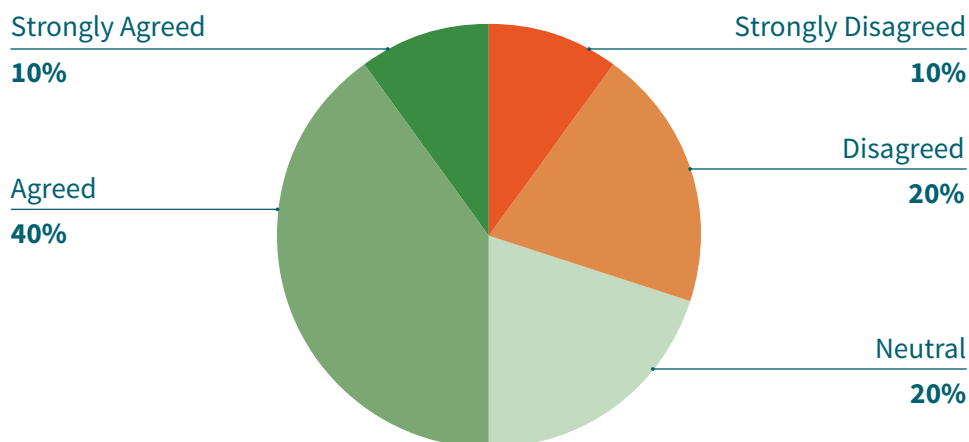
—COP23 delegate





## “I am comfortable engaging with the press”

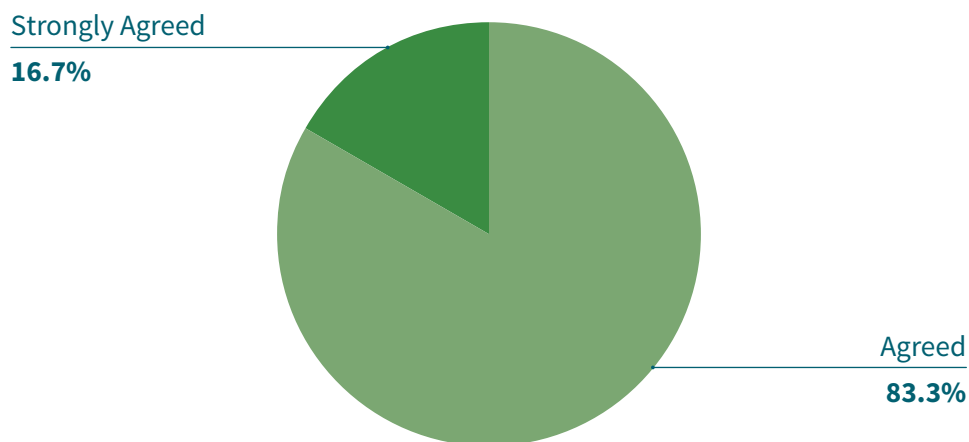
*Before COP*



**Before COP**, 1 delegate strongly disagreed, 2 disagreed, 2 responded neutrally, 4 agreed with the statement, and 1 strongly agreed.

**Following COP**, 5 delegates agreed with the statement and 1 strongly agreed.

*After COP*

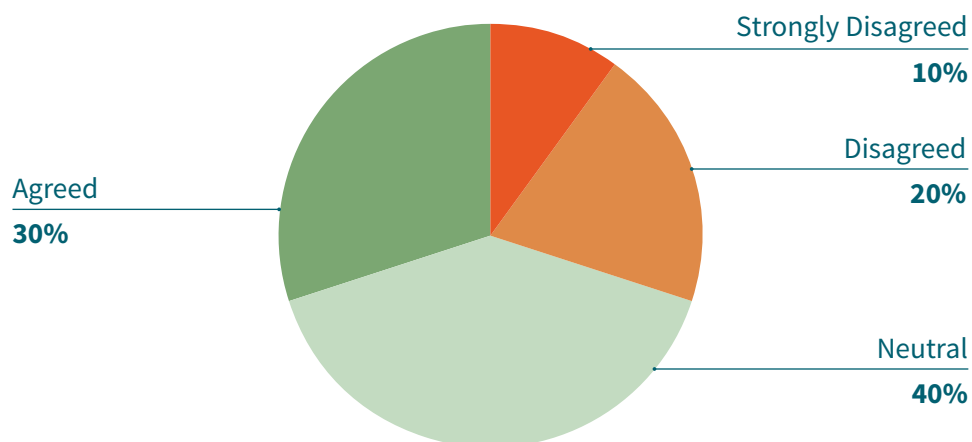






## “I am comfortable talking about national & international climate policy”

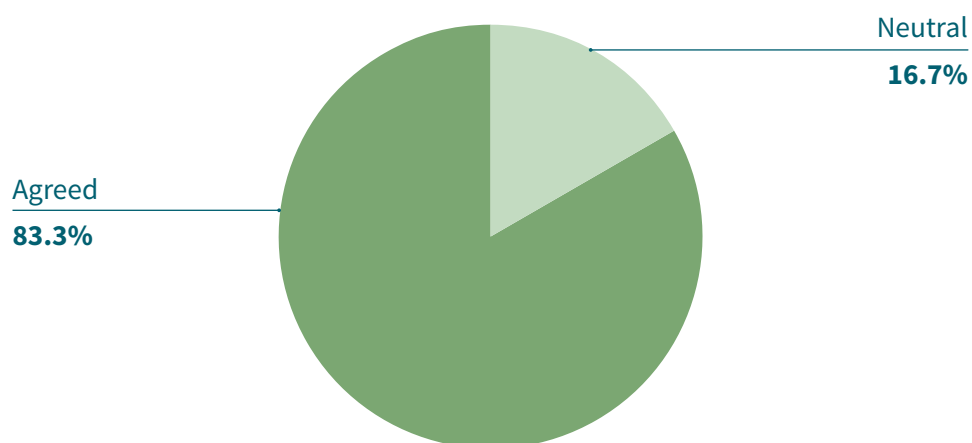
*Before COP*



**Before COP**, 1 person strongly disagreed with the statement, 2 disagreed, 4 were neutral, and 3 agreed.

**Following COP**, 1 delegate remained neutral while 5 agreed with the statement.

*After COP*



# CALIFORNIA ALLEGORY

## YOUTH FELLOWSHIP

In 2018 SustainUS launched the California Allegory Youth Fellowship for California youth climate organizers. The program is housed under three organizations: SustainUS, a youth-run national organization dedicated to climate justice and sustainability; the Beehive Design Collective, a group of artists, activists, and educators who create large-scale posters to communicate social and environmental issues around the world; and Canticle Farm, an urban farm and intentional housing community that incubates healing and restorative work.



*Above: California Allegory Youth Fellows lead a massive escalated sit-in at Governor Jerry Brown's office in Sacramento, CA on August 7, 2018.*

*Right: Group photo of the 2018 Fellows.*





*California Allegory Youth Fellows meet for their second retreat at Canticle Farm in Oakland, CA.*

This 4-month learning journey supported 8 California frontline youth in deepening in their organizing and storytelling skills through immersive trainings, participation in the Beehive California poster design process, and mobilization at the Global Climate Action Summit in September 2018 in San Francisco, CA.

The fellowship is unique by convening eight California youth activists and artists on the frontlines of climate injustice. There are deeply ingrained power dynamics within California, which profoundly affect whose narratives are highlighted and given attention particularly in mainstream media conversations. More often than not, disparities across communities are minimized and frontline communities' demands for justice are not met. **This fellowship, rather than ignore disparities, is committed to centering frontline communities affected by climate change and environmental injustice.** The fellowship's focus on storytelling also seeks to actively center and uplift the knowledge, narratives, and experiences of our most vulnerable communities.

# TRAINING COLLECTIVE

At the Spring 2017 SustainUS Annual Gathering three core strengths of our organization were identified: skill-sharing, active solidarity, and community building. What would it look like to deepen in each of these and their intersections? Thus the idea for a training collective was born: a peer-to-peer support structure for SustainUS members who see one of their core roles in the movement as offering trainings and skilling-up our fellow organizers.

**Our purpose: to support one another to deliver empowering, transformative training experiences for youth activists in line with the SustainUS principles.**

In June 2017 we were able to secure a \$10,000 grant from Kalliopeia Foundation to launch this vision, by way of SustainUS member Morgan Curtis' Spiritual Ecology Fellowship project. With this funding in place, looking forward to 2018 we are excited to be convening trainers within the SustainUS community to both offer trainings under the SustainUS name and through other organizations.

Also in 2018, Powershift Network has hired a Trainings Coordinator and is looking toward launching a trainings program, Sierra Student Coalition is re-launching SPROG, a summer grassroots organizing training for young people, and Sunrise is hosting the inaugural Sunrise Semester, with mass trainings for youth climate activists. With close relationships with all these three organizations on our team, we are excited to see how we can contribute SustainUS knowledge and expertise.



# MEDIA IMPACT

SustainUS continues to have an outsized impact in U.S. and global audiences through traditional, social, and multimedia efforts.

## Earned media coverage

SustainUS earned 145 media hits in 2017, including in The New York Times, the Guardian, The Washington Post and more, reaching 275 million people in the US and around the world.

Coverage of our singing walkout at the UN Climate Talks landed **above the fold on the front page of the New York Times**.

SustainUS delegates published essays in **Teen Vogue**, **Long Island Press**, **Boulder Weekly**, **EcoWatch**, **TruthOut**, and **more**.

**275 million  
reached via  
media hits**

**New York  
Times front  
page**

**Grew FB  
account 38%**

**9,500  
Twitter  
followers**

## Social media

### Facebook

- Grew Facebook account by 38% in 2017, with 4,600 followers as of Dec. 31, 2017
- Reached 800,000 people on Facebook from August 2017 to September 2018
- **We went live on Facebook** during our singing walkout action at the UN Climate Talks in Germany. The video was shared 848 times, spreading our message to over 150,000 people on Facebook alone.

### Twitter

- Reached over 1 million people on Twitter from August 2017 to September 2018
- 9,500 Twitter users follow SustainUS as of August 1, 2018

# FISCAL YEAR 2018 FINANCES

## SEPTEMBER 1, 2017 – AUGUST 31, 2018

### Income

Grants	\$117,580
Donations	\$ 35,700
Miscellaneous (Merchandise, Interest, etc.)	\$ 4,085

<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$157,365</b>
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### Expenses

Programs	\$ 55,130
Fiscal Sponsorship	\$ 27,900
Professional Services	\$ 3,140
Staff	\$ 32,500

<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$118,670</b>
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# LOOKING FORWARD: 2018–2019

2017-2018 was an exciting year for us; a year of many firsts. SustainUS leadership gathered in August 2017 to clarify and articulate our organizational identity and priorities. We solidified **our Principles** and large pieces of **our overall Strategy**. COP23 in Germany rang in strong ongoing collaborations with Sunrise Movement, Power Shift Network, and allied US youth networks when we brought a movement-oriented narrative into COP and organized in coordination with mobilizations in the states around this historic moment. We also deepened relationships with the national It Takes Roots coalition and the Global Campaign to Demand Climate Justice, priming SustainUS to serve as a bridge between US youth and global justice movements.

Looking to the second half of 2018 and to 2019, we are excited to deploy an army of youth climate leaders at the Global Climate Action Summit, the World Bank, and next year's UN Climate Talks in Brazil. We also see potential to engage around the UN Climate Summit announced by UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres to take place in NYC in September 2019.

There has never been a more important time to take a stand and raise our voices on the world stage. Today, as we look to the future, we find hope in our ability to inspire, equip, and empower young leaders at the forefront of our global fights for justice.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## Monthly donors

Daniel Jones | Adam Hasz | Michael Berger | Abigail McGuckin | Ellie Johnston | Hannah Blad | Austin Curtis | Barbara Blad | Louise Yeung | Kathy Johnson | Nick Pavlis | Jeremy Blanchard | Aravinda Ananda | Jim Jubelirer | Judith Stevens | Mylene Curtis | Krsna Powell | Lorenzo Carlisle | Gavriela Reiter | Aly Johnson-Kurts | Ching Yue | Morgan Curtis | Richard Clapp | Dylan Kitts | Charles Curtis | Francine Johnston

## Major Donors

The Ellant Reiter Family | Glenn & Sunny Rosenbluth | Jonathan Major | Thelma Weinberg | Arthur Raines | Daniel Jubelirer

## Organizational Support and Partnerships

US Climate Action Network | The Center for Biological Diversity | Climate Action Campaign | The Wilderness Society | The Union of Concerned Scientists | 350.org

## Foundations

The 11th Hour Project - The Schmidt Family Foundation | The Rose Foundation for Communities and the Environment | Patagonia | Resist Foundation | Lush Cosmetics | Grand Canyon Trust | V. Kann Rasmussen Foundation

**Thank you for  
your support!**