Student PIRGs

2019 Report

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Thank you for supporting youth organizing led by and for young people.

Nearly twenty million people attend our nation’s colleges and universities each year, places where we would hope that young people are taught to become active and effective participants in the democratic process. But getting engaged is daunting to most of our peers. Between the existential threat of climate change and the barriers young people face when voting, we get it; sometimes we find it daunting too.

We need to show students that getting involved works. That’s why we put a premium on strategic campaigns and real results. That’s why we prioritize breaking down partisan barriers and uplifting the voices of our generation on the issues that impact all of us. We want students to know that their petition signature or hour of volunteering, when combined with those of their peers, are changing the future of our country.

This year, the PIRG model of organizing paid off big time. We helped more than 30,000 young people register to vote, made over 1 million GOTV contacts, and protected students’ right to vote at the ballot box, which all contributed to an unprecedented increase in youth voter turnout in 2018.

We turned student interest in the election into year round engagement via thousands of volunteer opportunities on our campaigns after the election. This year, 4,500 students got involved with our campaigns (1,500 more than last year!) and it showed in the difference we made.

Our field team in California channeled the national energy around climate solutions into their SB100 campaign and pushed the largest state in the country to commit to 100% renewable energy. We took the lessons learned from the 2018 election and successfully advocated for same day voter registration and automatic voter registration. We won dozens of local victories with cities and campuses, from banning single-use plastics, and committing to be bee-friendly ecosystems, to taking action to make textbooks and higher education more affordable.

In a democracy, there is no off year. So, THANK YOU for supporting youth organizing led for and by young people. We couldn’t have done it without the backing of our campus communities, our incredible staff and student leadership, or your financial support.

Let’s make the 2019 – 2020 school year even bigger.

Gabriela Colmenares
MASSPIRG Students Board of Directors and 2018-2019 PIRG National Student Network Chair
Student PIRG Board Chairs

CALPIRG Students - Nicolas Riani, UCLA, ’21
CONNPIRG Students - Kyleigh Hillerud, UConn Storrs, ’21
Florida PIRG Students - Isabel Muir, Eckerd College, ’20
MASSPIRG Students - Victoria Ferrara-Lawlor, UMass Amherst, ’21
MaryPIRG Students - Sonja Neve, University of Maryland, College Park, ’20
NCPIRG Students - Christian Lutz, UNC Chapel Hill, ’20
NJPIRG Students - Oriana Holmes-Price, Rutgers University - Camden, ’21
OSPIRG Students - Elizabeth Radcliffe, University of Oregon, ’21
WASHPIRG Students - Nick Schmitt, The Evergreen State College, ’21
The Student PIRG’s mission is twofold: make a concrete difference in our communities, and make sure our generation is ready to be effective agents in our democracy. And when it comes to the most important issues our generation faces, like climate change and affordable education, we need more than just the political science and environmental policy majors to get involved. **We need everyone.**

That’s why we pick campaigns and message them in a way that nearly every student can get behind, and offer every student on campus the opportunity to get involved.

Every semester, our local leadership team surveys their student body, has one-on-one meetings with campus and community leaders about the issues impacting them the most, and reassesses the campaigns they’re prioritizing. We choose issues that the vast majority of students and community leaders agree are problems, and solutions that have broad public support.

Our approach to campaign work not only allows us to recruit students from all walks of life and coalition partners from both sides of the aisle, it also gives us the best chance to win real results for the communities that need it.

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*Nico Gist, University of California, Los Angeles*

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**4,500 volunteers engaged on public interest campaigns**

“I saw from day one with CALPIRG the personal impact I could have on people, telling them about issues they cared about, and giving them an opportunity to make a difference. I’ve seen with SB100, now the strongest global warming law in the country, the impact students can have and how effective we are when we organize together.”

Nico Gist, University of California, Los Angeles
Deep Impact

This year we helped tens of thousands of students get to the polls, secured multiple commitments to 100% renewable energy, transitioned our communities away from single-use plastics, and won an additional $5 million in funding for open textbooks from a divided Congress.

Our program puts a premium on winning real results for our communities with student leaders at the forefront. Communications majors message and market our campaigns while public policy students work with local elected officials, all under the guidance of our full-time professional staff. On top of that, students can receive course credit or transcript notation for their internship with the Student PIRGs.

Between our broad reach and our deep commitment to building up young leaders, it’s no surprise that our alumni can be found in leadership positions across the social change movement.

We won or made significant progress on 77 of the more than 100 campaigns we ran this year.

We graduated 500 student from our leadership development program.

From classroom style overviews on how to work with the press to field modules on managing a massive petition drive, our training program includes everything campus leaders need to win campaigns and build strong organizations.

“Getting involved with PIRG was the first time I felt like I didn’t have to wait to make an impact in my community. Not only that, they gave me the tools to succeed. Before PIRG I never would have seen myself organizing, recruiting, or training people, much less straight up waving at strangers.”

Kyleigh Hillerud,
University of Connecticut, Storrs
Crushing the national average increase in youth voter turnout:

Top 2014 - 2018 turnout increases in student-heavy precincts on the campuses where we worked. We promise these aren’t typos.

537% UCLA
351% Eckerd College
315% UC Irvine
290% University of South Florida
198% Florida State University
173% Florida Gulf Coast University
The New Voters Project

Institutionalizing Voter Engagement

Our dream? To have every high school, college, and university invest in practices that build the culture of civic engagement on campus so that students not only have the tools they need to register to vote and get to the polls, but they graduate with civic values that last a lifetime.

Starting in Fall 2017, we worked closely with student governments and university administrations to get voter registration incorporated into orientation and dorms move-in days, send out all-campus emails to students with our voter registration tool, and build massive campus-wide coalitions.

BOOTS ON THE GROUND
1,000,000 total GOTV contacts
84,000 peer-to-peer GOTV texts
74,000 face-to-face GOTV conversations
15,000 students attended Parties at the Polls

This year we sent organizers to 50 campuses in 11 states to continue our 40 year history of ensuring that young people have the opportunity to participate in our democracy by exercising their right to vote.

All told, the project helped register more than 31,000 students to vote, made more than one million peer-to-peer Get out the Vote (GOTV) contacts, hosted more than 50 Parties at the Polls, and trained thousands of new volunteers in the civic and organizing skills it takes to run large-scale voter registration and turnout drives.

PROFILE: MIGUEL RAMIREZ

Miguel led the New Voters Project at UC Riverside in partnership with Semi Cole, the President of the UC Riverside student government and former CALPIRG Students board member. Thanks to the work of Miguel and Semi, every single freshman was handed a voter registration form when they moved into the dorms!

CALPIRG’s impact on campus extends far beyond the students in our chapters. We engage faculty, student groups, and campus administrators to build a strong culture of civic engagement on campus, and that’s something I couldn’t be more proud of.”

Above: Miguel Ramirez (left) with his campus organizer Mya Ho and UC Riverside student government president Semi Cole.
From top left: When a judge ruled to allow early voting locations on college campuses, Florida PIRG students worked with state and national coalition partners and successfully advocated for early voting locations on five college campuses across the state.

Emily O’Hara, CONNPIRG Board Chair, testifying in support of HJ 161 which would allow for early voting in Connecticut. Connecticut is one of only 12 states without early voting.

MASSPIRG made their state the 13th state to pass automatic voter registration after generating phone calls in to their elected officials offices, hosting lobby days, and demonstrating extensive student support.

After CALPIRG at UC Irvine got a student government resolution passed and sent a letter to the registrars detailing Election Day problems and solutions that included vote centers, the Orange County Registrar is moving to a model that provides vote centers that offer same-day registration.

NCPIRG Students continued to educate their peers about the impacts of gerrymandering and options for gerrymandering reform. Pictured here, a panel discussion at UNC Chapel Hill which featured Ivanna Gonzalez, Deputy Director for Policy & Alignment at Blueprint NC, and UNC Public Policy Ph.D. candidates John Curiel and Tyler Steelman.
The Leadership Pipeline

A big congratulations to all of our graduating seniors who are continuing their work in the public interest next year.

“●● When I joined CALPIRG, I learned things like how to work with people, how to manage my time, and how to be engaged in my community. I decided to join staff as a Campus Organizer with PIRG so that I can give other students those valuable life skills.”

– Sophia Haddad, University of California – San Diego graduate on accepting a position as CALPIRG Campus Organizer

“●● I’ve loved working with NJPIRG Students these past four years and have come to appreciate that the amazing work we all do can only happen with robust financial support. I’m excited to work with the Public Interest Network as a grants associate to expand their capacity to make social change!”

– April Nicklaus, Rutgers – New Brunswick graduate on accepting a position in the Public Interest Network’s Grants Department

“●● The massive increase in voter turnout between 2014 and 2018 at Eckerd College can 100% be attributed to the training and advice that I got from PIRG. I want to make more campuses 2020 ready next year.”

– Meg Neff, Eckerd College graduate on accepting a position as MASSPIRG Campus Organizer
Renewable Energy

It's Lit!
100% Renewable Energy

We all know that burning oil, gas, and coal has polluted our air, water, and land for decades – and now it’s changing the climate even faster than scientists feared it would.

We can have healthier communities right now and a livable future for ourselves and generations to come. But to get there, we must transform the way we produce and consume energy. That’s got to start with a commitment to 100% clean, renewable energy.

We’re excited about all of the youth activism towards climate action that made headlines this year. From the 21 young people suing the federal government over their climate inaction to the media attention the Sunrise Movement has generated, it’s clear that young people are leading the movement towards climate solutions. This year, we leveraged this excitement to push decision makers on campuses, in cities, and in states to make concrete commitments towards 100% clean renewable energy.

Anatomy of a Victory: Getting the Golden State to 100%

Since 2017 CALPIRG Students have worked to educate the public and build support for 100% commitments across the state. As a result of our efforts and the work of our statewide coalition, the University of California system has committed to 100% clean electricity by 2025, the University of California – Berkeley has committed to 100% clean, renewable system-wide energy by 2050, and the entire state of California has committed to 100% Clean Energy by 2045.

With the passage of SB100, California became the state with the strongest global warming law in the country.

200 coalition partner endorsements
20,000 petition signatures delivered
200 students at multiple lobby days in Sacramento

Next stop for California? Clean transit.

Once we secured institutional commitments for clean electricity from the major players in the state, we set our sights on the largest carbon emission sector in California – transportation.

So far, we’ve run a massive social media campaign to encourage the California Air Resources Board (CARB) to pass a resolution that would commit California’s public transportation to be carbon free, and we’ve launched a statewide campaign for bills that would commit CA to 100% clean cars (AB 40) and 100% carbon free public elementary school buses (AB 1418).

With a winning playbook, we’re confident that California will continue setting the standard for strong climate action for the country by committing to 100% clean cars.
WE SUPPORT SB 54 for a PLASTIC FREE OCEAN
Break free from plastics

From extraction to production to disposal, single-use plastics have demonstrated that they’re not worth the convenience. **Nothing we use for five minutes should pollute the planet for 500 years.** That’s why we’re calling on our community and state leaders to ban unnecessary single-use plastics, and working to create sustainable zero waste models that can be scaled economy-wide.

### One item at a time

On many of our campuses, we’ve focused our campaign on shifting public consciousness around one pervasive single-use plastic like the plastic bag or straw. This strategy has been a highly effective organizing tool, serving to educate students about the impacts of single-use plastic without complicating the issue, while also making a tangible impact by getting rid of the most egregious examples of plastic waste and setting the stage for larger scale bans and corporate transitions.

- **CONNPIRG** worked with leaders at Trinity College to make straws available on-demand only, successfully banned single-use plastic bags at UConn - Storrs, which will eliminate 350,000 bags a year, and successfully lobbied state legislators to pass a statewide ban on single-use plastic bags.

- **NJPIRG** worked with the Chancellor and sustainability office to start implementing the Break Free from Plastics Campus Pledge, and they successfully banned the bag in the Dining Halls at Rutgers – New Brunswick.

- **Florida PIRG** at Eckerd College worked with Professors Amy Siuda and Shannon Gowans to assess how pervasive single-use plastics were on campus and advise the president on steps the campus would need to take to eliminate plastics purchasing.

- **NCPIRG** delivered 15,000 petitions to businesses asking them to reduce single-use plastics. At UNC – Chapel Hill, students worked with the Sustainability Director on a plan to shift to more sustainable options.

### Single-use plastics: A problem from cradle to grave

- **Extraction and Transport** – 99% of plastic comes from fossil fuels, resulting in serious impacts on human health and the environment.

- **Refining and Manufacturing** – The plastic production process releases carcinogens and other highly toxic substances.

- **Consumer Products and Packaging** – The prevalence of plastic products in our day to day lives leads to human exposure to high amounts of microplastics with known or suspected carcinogenic, developmental, or endocrine-disrupting impacts.

- **Plastics in the Environment** – Plastic pollution in our environment is shockingly pervasive. It’s been found in 100% of sea turtle species in the world and 44% of sea bird species. This has devastating effects on wildlife.

- **Waste Management** – With China’s new policy of rejecting low quality recyclables, fewer than 5% of plastics are recycled. From incineration to landfilling, plastic waste management practices result in the release of toxic metals, acid gases, and other toxic substances in our land, air, and water.
Holding Big Brands Accountable

Our team took local action to hold corporations accountable for the plastic pollution they produce by participating in an international Brand Audit. Our international Break Free from Plastic Coalition collected and cataloged 187,851 pieces of plastic pollution in 42 countries on 6 continents. Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, and Nestle were found to be the worst plastic polluters worldwide.

https://www.breakfreefromplastic.org/globalbrandauditreport2018

Scaling up the plastic bans

When campuses take action, they build the political energy and local framework for municipalities and states to act.

- **PROGRESS** Our teams in Connecticut, Oregon, and Washington were able to pass their bag, foam, and bag bans (respectively) further through their state legislatures than any previous year after generating sustained grassroots pressure, passing local bans and resolutions, and lobbying their elected officials during statewide lobby days at the capitol.

- **VICTORY!** We were able to capitalize on every campus victory we had this year into a citywide ban on single-use plastics, showing once again that campuses are the laboratories of American democracy.

Students in Connecticut leveraged their campus bag ban to pass a citywide ban in Mansfield, CT. After their dining hall victory, NJPIRG students were also able to get a commitment from the Mayor of New Brunswick, NJ to ban bags citywide. The Eckerd College team successfully testified in support of a citywide straw ban and key polystyrene restrictions in St. Petersburg, FL.

Models for Zero Waste

Getting rid of individual consumer facing items makes an impact on the problem and provides a launching point for organizing towards the end solution to our plastic problem: a zero waste society driven by a circular economy.

After a sustained campaign by our UC Berkeley team and our coalition partners, the Berkeley City Council voted to implement one of the most sweeping Zero Waste ordinances in the U.S. by setting a timeline for all restaurants, cafes, and bars to phase out plastic food containers and utensils. Berkeley students worked to ensure the passage of this ordinance by making public comments at city commission and council meetings, lobbying city council members to advocate for a yes vote, and getting community members to call their city council members urging a yes vote.

This set the stage for a statewide campaign to pass the California Circular Economy and Plastic Pollution Reduction Act (SB 54 and it’s parallel bill AB 1080) which would reduce single-use plastics by 75% by 2030. Our team wrapped up the school year with a statewide media push and grassroots organizing campaign to push that helped push the bill through the state Senate.
2019: A YEAR OF ACTION

127,198 grassroots actions
We’re talking individual petitions, photo-petitions, phone calls, and social media posts calling for change.

2019 campaign highlights

Save the Bees
5 more of our campuses committed to become Bee Friendly Campuses: UNC – Chapel Hill, Lane Community College, Southern Oregon University, UC Berkeley, UC Irvine.

Trouble in Toyland
Last fall, 11 Student PIRG chapters released U.S. PIRG’s 33rd annual Toy Safety report, highlighting potential hazards to the country’s “youngest consumers.” Our report releases were covered by 20 media outlets.

Wells Fargo: Cut the Fees
After being asked to comment on the new PIRG report on oversized fees on college students’ checking accounts, Wells Fargo announced that it would be eliminating some fees on its campus debit cards.
Our national open textbooks coalition now has more than 5,000 faculty, administrators, and student leaders on board.

Left, CONNPIRG Students board chair Kharl Reynado meets Senator Dick Durbin, lead sponsor of the Affordable College Textbook Act.
Affordable Textbooks

Local Action, Federal Victory

Two-thirds of students have skipped buying books because of the high out-of-pocket cost beyond the set price of tuition. Students who don’t buy books repeatedly say they find themselves at a disadvantage in the classroom.

This year, we continued to promote open textbooks on the ground, advocate for federal funding to expand open education resources (OER), and fight publisher efforts to put a stranglehold on the textbooks market via automatic billing contracts on campuses.

LOCAL ACTION: SUPPORTING FACULTY

At the University of Iowa we worked with the student government to triple funding for their OER program. At the University of Massachusetts - Amherst we successfully advocated for an increase in funding for their open textbooks grant program which has already saved students $1.8 million. Additionally, we got the writing department to make a department wide commitment to transition to open textbooks which will save students $7,500 a year. At Rutgers - Camden, President Haddon signed a pledge to promote open textbooks. Students at Salem State University and Trinity College educated faculty about new OER grant programs that we helped to establish last year.

LOCAL ACTION: STOPPING AUTOMATIC BILLING

When our North Carolina team learned that textbook publisher Pearson Education was promoting a program that would automatically sign students up to pay for access codes and textbooks when they enrolled in their courses and would force professors to solely use Pearson textbooks, they took action. Access codes hide homework, tests, and quizzes behind expensive, expiring paywalls. Students need these materials to be successful, but they often can’t afford them.

We collected personal stories and petitions from students across the state, organized faculty to speak out, and worked with student governments to oppose the program. One student wrote: “I care about my education, but I can’t sacrifice funds from my family’s livelihood to do that. I’m already in debt for tuition. I can’t be in debt for books, too.”

We were able to show overwhelming community opposition to this program and stopped it from being implemented at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill!

$10 million for Open Textbooks

In the last two years, we’ve helped secure $10 million in federal funding for Open Textbooks which will help sixteen colleges and universities develop open content in STEM and support two-year college faculty members. We estimate this will turn into $100 million in savings for students over the next few years.

2018 Federal OER Grant Recipients via LibreTexts

University of California, Davis (lead)
Hope College
Saint Mary’s College
University of Arkansas at Little Rock
Prince George’s Community College
Contra Costa College
Diablo Valley College
Los Medanos College
Sacramento City College
American River College
Cosumnes River College
Folsom Lake College

2019 Federal OER Grant Recipients

Arizona State University (lead)
Maricopa Community Colleges
Ivy Tech Community College
Miami Dade College
Chippewa Valley Technical College (lead)
Gateway Technical College
Northeast Wisconsin Technical College
Madison Area Technical College
We did hundreds of hours of service across the country to provide immediate hunger relief.

Hunger and Homelessness

No one should have to worry about whether they will have food on their plate or a roof over their head. But the reality is that hunger and homelessness are widespread problems that affect far too many people.

On college campuses one in five students experience food insecurity. At the same time college campuses create about 142 pounds of food waste per student on campus every year.

Zero Waste, Zero Hunger

America produces more than enough food for everyone. In fact, we produce so much food that we waste about 40% of it. And yet, millions of Americans go hungry.

Facing rising costs in higher education and in many cases dealing with the financial strains of nontraditional status, more and more students struggle to meet their needs while earning their degree. The misconception that most students have parents who can cover all colleges expenses can contribute to an under-appreciation of hunger on campus.

Food insecurity is linked to poorer health, poorer academic performance, and mental health symptoms such as anxiety and depression. Meanwhile, we are literally throwing away solutions to the problem of hunger.

The solution is simple. Know who is hungry on campus and get them the resources they need.

This year we launched our campaign for Zero Waste, Zero Hunger on college campuses across the country. In our inaugural year of the program, we secured over a hundred student group, faculty, administrative, and student government endorsements in support of Zero Waste, Zero Hunger, and we helped establish a pilot meal swipe donation program at the University of Connecticut - Storrs.

EXPANDING SNAP IN WASHINGTON

WASHPIRG Students campaigned successfully to pass a bill expanding SNAP benefits to students. The bill allows work-study students who are capped at working 19 hours a week to apply for SNAP benefits and allows students who use SNAP benefits to use their EBT cards to pay for food on campus.
Conservation

America’s open spaces, waterways, and wildlife are a big part of what makes this country so great. Our conservation program aims to protect our special places, biodiversity, and recreation opportunities for generations to come.

Our public lands face unprecedented challenges, from attempts to eliminate funding to our most successful open spaces program to the potentially devastating impacts of increased offshore drilling.

That’s why the Student PIRGs are bringing young people across the country together to urge our elected officials to make preserving wildlife and precious landscapes a priority.

Defending the Land and Water Conservation Fund

This year we educated 1,522 students in face-to-face conversations and 5,677 members of the public on social media about the important role the Land and Water Conservation Fund has played in protecting our nation’s special places.

No Offshore Drilling

Students across the country opposed proposals to expand offshore drilling by collecting petitions, signing on small businesses, and attending public hearings.

Local Conservation

ORCAS Just 75 Southern Resident orcas remain today – the lowest number in 34 years, and if we don’t act fast, they will be gone forever. WASHPIRG called on their Senators to help save the orcas by supporting breaching the Lower Snake River dams to restore salmon populations in the Sound.

OXYBENZONE CALPIRG Students at UC Santa Barbara worked successfully with the bookstore to transition away from oxybenzone sunscreen to coral reef safe sunscreen.
After our brand new chapter ran our New Voters Project campaign in Fall 2018, more students from our campus precinct turned out to vote than any other election in the last 14 years. I can’t think of a better example of how effective the PIRG model is in getting results.”

- Alexandria Gordon
  Florida PIRG Students at Eckerd College

Above: Alexandria Gordon (right) educating the community.

As a board chair, I oversee everything from budgets to staff, to selecting campaigns for our chapters. For nearly 50 years, the Student PIRGs have been led by young people like me, building sustainable organizations and winning campaigns.”

- Oriana Holmes-Price,
  NJPIRG Students Board Chair,
  Rutgers Camden Chapter Chair
All of the thanks!

All of this incredible work would not have been possible without the generous support of our student members, foundation partners, and individual donors. These funds allowed us to hire organizers in 10 states to work on college campuses with nearly 1 million college students and powered our work to get young people to the polls, fight climate change, and make education more affordable.

POWERED BY STUDENT MEMBERS
We are the nation’s oldest and largest majority student-funded non-profit, and we know we’re doing something right when year after year, students vote to support their campus PIRG chapter with a small fee on their tuition bill. A BIG THANK YOU to the 76% of student voters at UMass – Lowell, Salem State, Middlesex Community College, UMass – Amherst, UConn – Storrs, Eckerd College, Evergreen State College, and the University of Oregon who voted to continue funding our work this year!

FOUNDATION AND PARTNER SUPPORT
Over the last 48 years, we’ve developed a campaign and leadership development model that has trained over a hundred thousand students in effective activism. With the support of these incredible foundations and donors, we were able to serve students on fifteen additional campuses across the country this year.

All Voting is Local
Blueprint NC
Civic Nation
Erin Kinikin
Ettinger Foundation
Florida 501(c)(3) Civic Engagement Table
Foundation for the Carolinas
Hull Family Foundation
Naomi & Nehemiah Cohen Foundation
Non-Profit Vote
Paul M. Angell Family Foundation
Plastic Solutions Fund
Sidney Stern Memorial Trust
Southern Vision Alliance
Students Vote Students Learn Coalition
The James Irvine Foundation
The William & Flora Hewlett Foundation
Weeden Foundation
Young Invincibles
Youth Engagement Fund
Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation

Our FY18 budget reflects the combined income and expenses of the Student PIRGs national projects including our C3 and C4 corporations. It does not include individual state budgets from our state groups.