

## **White House Champions of Change for Climate Education and Literacy Place-Based Education Discussion**

The place-based education discussion was one of three side event sessions held in conjunction with the White House Champions of Change celebration to honor 8 champions working in the area of climate education and literacy. Participants included place-based education specialists from Federal and state agencies, non-governmental organizations, and universities. The White House was represented by Michael Boots, Acting Chair of the White House Council on Environmental Quality.

Brief introductory comments from Federal agencies provided context on place-based education—experiential learning that draws upon people’s sense of place to provide experiences that increase participants’ retention of content, development of stewardship ethic, ability to weigh consequences, and likelihood to take action. Such learning activities may include citizen science programs, volunteer and stewardship experiences, the application of sustainable practices, and interpretive programs – at parks, wildlife refuges, forests, and other public lands and waters, and in nature centers, museums, cultural sites, zoos, aquaria, and arboretums across the country.

The discussion centered on the following questions: 1) What makes place-based education uniquely and powerfully suited for educating the public about climate change? 2) What is needed in order for practitioners to apply best practices in place-based education? 3) What are some examples of place-based products, programs, techniques, and messages that have been effective in engaging the public on climate change?

Take-home messages and ideas emerging from the discussion included the following:

- Place-based education is a catalyst for change, engaging learners both emotionally and intellectually, often via immersive experiences, through which personal meaning and relevance about climate change is made apparent, thereby motivating individuals to take action.
- Citizen science and community activities provide a means for enhanced and sustained engagement, extending the learning experience in space and time. People want to be included in documenting change and developing solutions for their communities.
- Support is needed for developing graduated, hands-on apprenticeships based upon experiential learning to equip the next generation of climate champions with necessary skills to address climate change.
- There is a need to grow the place-based education community and to build and maintain cohesive, sustained efforts and partnerships across sectors (Federal, state, local, non-governmental, private, academic, philanthropic) in order to sustain this work over the long term.
- The place-based climate-education community needs a more unified community of practice, served by a centralized clearinghouse of information resources. The community needs a mechanism for a national network, through which to share best practices, knowledge, and experience; this could be virtual, in-person (e.g. through a standing forum or conference), or both.