

San Antonio Water System—IMPACT Youth Education Program

TEEA 2016 Winner: Education



Hands-on experience develops youth into environmentally conscious civic leaders.

The San Antonio Water System’s vision includes being a good steward of water resources. SAWS believes that building the water literacy of its citizens should be the driving force to a sustainable future.

SAWS implemented the IMPACT youth-education program to provide opportunities for local youth to develop environmentally conscious thinking. IMPACT is an innovative, extra-curricular program that uses water as a catalyst to promote science and civic responsibility amongst high school students and teachers.

To date more than 2,500 San Antonio–area high school students have participated in IMPACT, which kicks off in the fall with a one-day summit and runs throughout the school year. The summit, which is appropriately named *Flow*, features inspirational speakers and training to help students brainstorm issues and develop ideas for projects to be carried out throughout the course of the program. Ranging from just a few students to more than 100, IMPACT Teams are established to design and facilitate water-related projects chosen from one of three focus tracks—Community (traditional service learning), Creative (entrepreneurial), or Career (water industry). The teams allow the students to highlight their individual strengths and build professional confidence to apply classroom knowledge to complex social and environmental issues.

Depending on the chosen track, teams have the opportunity to work closely with various local businesses, organizations, and colleges. SAWS partners with local businesses, which affords students opportunities to attend workshops where they learn entrepreneurial skills and develop their own

water-related products. Students use new technologies such as 3-D printers to develop prototypes of new-to-market products they conceptualize and design. Teams can also work with a local college instructor in advanced water treatment to complete a college-level water quality project which trains them in the technical aspects of water conservation, such as water sampling and laboratory analysis.

After projects are complete, they are showcased at a one-day water conference called Confluence. This professional conference is the capstone event for the IMPACT program. It brings students from all parts of the city together to learn about water issues that are facing us today and gives the IMPACT Teams an opportunity to share what they have learned and inspire their peers.

Across San Antonio, IMPACT has motivated thousands of participating students to take ownership of their community and work together to improve the water environment of Bexar County. The program is about more than just learning in a classroom—it is about cultivating the confidence in students to apply their newfound knowledge of environmental issues to complex social problems. The confidence that the San Antonio Water System instills in IMPACT participants is an amazing example of an organization making a lasting impact on the leaders of tomorrow.