



Interested in becoming a CAP community partner?

What is the NRCA Conservation Ambassador Program?

UConn's Natural Resources Conservation Academy (NRCA) [Conservation Ambassador Program](https://nrca.uconn.edu/cap/) (CAP; nrca.uconn.edu/cap/) engages high school students in natural resources and conservation topics and techniques during a **summer field experience**. Then, we support each student as they work on a project to become an **environmental changemaker in their community**.

First, CAP students participate in a weeklong intensive field experience at UConn, where they explore and learn about a variety of environmental topics and techniques used by professionals to address current environmental issues.

Afterwards, each student returns home to carry out a multi-month community environmental action project. The project is tailored to each student's community needs (as identified by the community) and each student's interests. **CAP students receive multi-layered mentorship support by NRCA staff and faculty members and a community partner**. This is where you come in! 😊

Under the guidance of the **community partner and NRCA mentor**, the student will design, develop, and implement their environmental action project between August and March of the following year. The program culminates when students present their work at a state-wide conference in the spring.

Who can become a community partner?

Community partners are anyone that brings specific expertise or resources that can help with the successful facilitation of a community-focused environmental action project. This may include (but not limited to) environmental professionals, community leaders, land use decision makers, conservation commissioners, professionals or volunteers with land trusts, nature centers, non-profits, or other community-related organizations.

What is the role of the community partner?

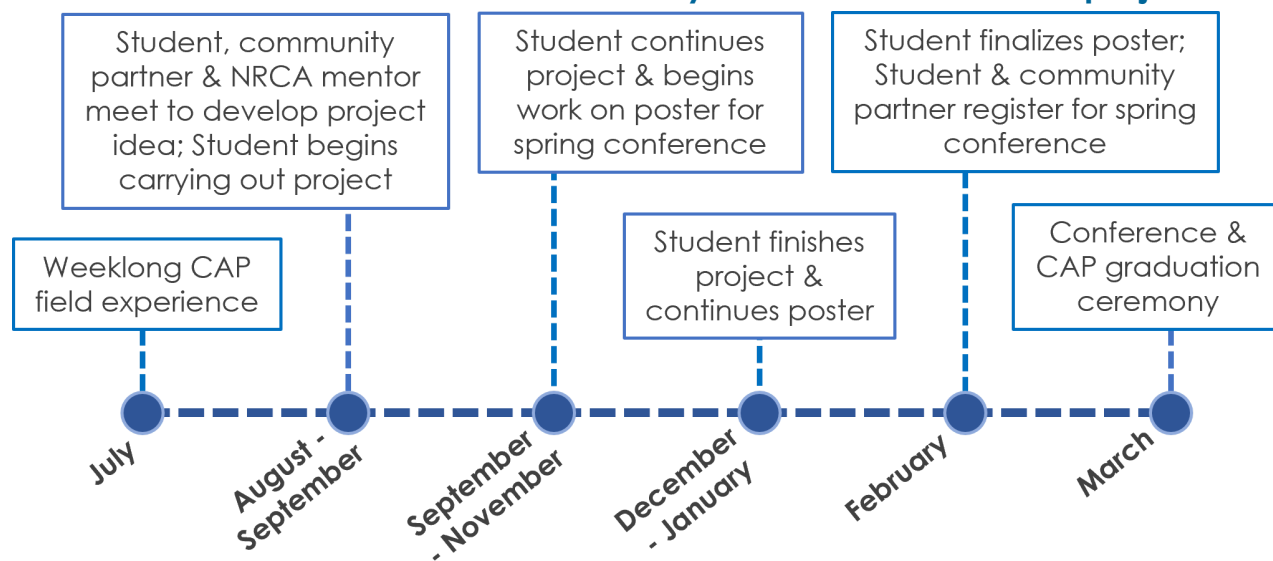
The primary role of the community partner is to **facilitate the student's project through guidance and access to resources** that the student may not be able to obtain on their own, such as access to public or private land, previously collected data or equipment, etc. Generally, community partners **assist with the development of the project idea, provide some guidance on methods or approaches used for the project, and review the student's conference poster** to ensure the content is accurate. The exact role will vary based on the community partner's expertise, the amount of time they can commit to the project and the difficulty of the project. The NRCA mentor and director will also support the student, assisting the community partner wherever and whenever needed. The NRCA mentor will check in with the student at bi-weekly intervals to provide continued support to both the CAP students and their community partner(s).



How much time should community partners expect to spend on projects?

Becoming a community partner does not mean investing a significant amount of time and energy into a project. It does mean facilitating a student's access to resources that they are not able to obtain on their own. The level of involvement of the community partner is also dependent on the difficulty of the project and ability of the student, as students may be able to work independently with simple tasks but may need more guidance with tasks that require experience and practice to ensure accuracy. At a minimum, the partner should expect to meet twice with the student: one time to develop a project and timeline and one time in the field to go over the data collection protocol. In addition to in-person meetings, the community partner should be in email contact with the student on a regular basis to provide guidance when issues arise with the project.

What is the timeline of CAP community environmental action projects?



Do CAP students need community partner supervision during their work?

After students have learned the skills needed and can work independently, community partner supervision of the students in the field is not always necessary (although always welcomed). Nevertheless, students should be accompanied by an adult (e.g., parent or NRCA mentor) for safety. NRCA mentors will attempt to join students when needed; however, this may not always be possible.

Do community partners need special training to work with CAP students?

The NRCA director will provide guidance on **Best Mentoring Practices** for all community partners. Additionally, any community partner who expects to work in person with a CAP student without either a NRCA mentor or parent present, must first become an **Authorized Adult** per [UConn's Minor Protection Policy](#). This process involves completing a **brief online training and criminal background check**.

Who manages the community project: coming up with projects, coordinating, monitoring students in the field, and developing the conference poster?

In general, all of these tasks are **shared by the NRCA mentor, director and the community partner**. At the beginning, the NRCA mentor will work with the community partner and student to develop a project that complements the goals of the community partner organization and is manageable for the student to complete under minimal guidance. NRCA mentors will hold bi-weekly video calls for students to report on their progress, and students will send an update email to their community partner following the call. This process is to ensure students are staying on task and that community partners, teachers, and parents are up-to-date on the progress of the project. Community partners should also check in with students via email to ensure the project is progressing well and to coordinate field visits or other aspects of the project. When possible, the NRCA mentor will join each student in the field, but monitoring and guidance of students in the field will be primarily done by the community partner or parents. Finally, the NRCA mentor will assist significantly with the development of the conference poster; however, community partners will be asked to review content for accuracy.



Student



Support Team:
Community Partner
NRCA Mentor
NRCA Director

What is the duration of the community project and how much time are students expected to work on their projects?

CAP projects are typically initiated at some point after the field experience and culminate in March of the following year when the students present their work at a state-wide conference. Summer and fall months are primarily spent conducting field work or collecting data, whereas winter months are primarily used to complete analyses and prepare the conference poster. There is no requirement for the amount of time students must devote to their community project. Nevertheless, at least 2-4 field visits or data collection periods are often necessary for an acceptable and beneficial project. The remaining time during the multi-month period can be used to analyze data or complete any other necessary aspects of the project (e.g., creating education materials for the public).

What types of projects can CAP students undertake?

CAP projects should address local environmental issues or topics. We encourage creativity and projects that benefit community partner organizations. Visit nrca.uconn.edu/projects to see past projects.

Have additional questions?

Given that community projects are tailored to individual student interests and community partner needs, there is no exact answer to all the questions above. The NRCA director would be happy to discuss how a community project may be tailored to your expertise, time commitments, and community needs. Please contact Dr. Laura Cisneros, NRCA Director, at laura.cisneros@uconn.edu or 860-486-4917.

