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Educating Urban Stewards: Water and Energy Conservation through Community Partnerships

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Abstract:

Through existing partnerships with water conservation specialists, extension volunteers and teachers in Phoenix and Tucson, we are engaging both children and adults in school and home audits of water and energy use. Community stewardship through conservation is the cornerstone of the Urban Stewards Program, which is specifically designed to impact urbanized areas where it is often difficult for people to see the direct impact of their actions on the environment. Because water and energy are inextricably linked, focused efforts to conserve water should also aim to conserve energy. Although the Urban Stewards Program has a primary focus on water conservation, we realize the critical importance of helping participants understand the water-energy link and implement conservation practices to reduce water and energy use in their community. Student-parent involvement is the first step toward making positive and permanent change to conserve resources at the household level. By training students to measure baseline data, test for leaks and install simple retrofit devices, they can bring this knowledge, enthusiasm and skills home to their parents. The goal of these home audits is to interest adults and students alike in understanding more about their water and energy supplies and issues relevant to these interdependent resources, as well as the connections between water and energy conservation, water quality and ecosystem health. Students and adults educated in this program are engaging in relevant, real-life, action education in a manner that fosters stewardship and results in actual water and energy savings. These Urban Stewards are making changes on an individual scale that will lead to large-scale cumulative impacts.

Impact Statement:

Partnerships include middle schools and conservation specialists from local municipalities. Project outputs include recruitment and professional development of teachers; recruitment and training of Extension volunteers; school water/energy audits with teachers, students, parents and volunteers and the education of students. In order from short to increasingly long-term, project outcomes are increased access to and use of water and energy conservation curricula and environmental education resources; increased knowledge about water and energy resources and conservation; establishing baseline water and energy uses for school and homes; conservation retrofits are implemented to reduce water and energy use; increased knowledge of local water, energy and sustainability issues and learn skills to decrease water and/or energy use; corps of trained volunteers is established in Phoenix and Tucson metropolitan areas; water and energy use decrease and utility bill savings are realized within targeted communities, at school and in homes; students and parents make decisions and take actions to improve their environment and communities through additional conservation practices; improved water literacy related to water and energy conservation; increased stewardship leads to civic responsibility for water and energy conservation, environmental protection, habitat preservation, and pollution prevention.

Category: Human Dimensions

Type of Presentation: Poster Presentation