

NOLS and STEP Celebrate 20 Years of Empowering Arizona Youth Through Outdoor Education and Experiences

Collaboration has resulted in more than 450 STEP students participating in NOLS courses, with a 100% high school graduation rate and 96% earning college degrees

LANDER, Wyo. – June 20, 2024– The [National Outdoor Leadership School \(NOLS\)](#) and the [Student Expedition Program \(STEP\)](#) are pleased to announce the 20th anniversary of the partnership that has empowered Arizona youth since 2004. This partnership between the two pioneering organizations fosters youth development through education and leadership opportunities. Over the past two decades, this collaboration has made a significant impact, serving more than 450 young STEP students. Remarkably, every participant has graduated high school and an impressive 96% have earned college degrees.

“For 20 years, our partnership with NOLS has been fundamental to STEP’s mission of fostering self-advocacy, initiative, and discipline in our students. Together, we’ve empowered hundreds of young people to develop essential life skills and confidence through transformative, challenging experiences. I am immensely proud of the life-changing opportunities we’ve created, helping students navigate future challenges and realize their potential,” said Tracy Baynes, President and Founder of STEP.

Baynes founded STEP in 2004. It equips highly motivated low-income Arizona high school students with the knowledge, confidence, and self-advocacy skills needed to enroll in and graduate from college. With a firm belief that learning in an unfamiliar and challenging environment is a transformative experience, STEP and NOLS partnered and led their first outdoor leadership expedition program in 2005.

“We appreciate our partnership with STEP over the past two decades,” expressed Lynn Petzold, NOLS Custom Education Senior Account Manager and Instructor. “Our NOLS Alaska staff looks forward to having STEP students on campus each summer. For many instructors, the opportunity to teach and mentor these teenagers is a highlight in our NOLS careers. We thank each of these students who came on a NOLS wilderness expedition full of uncertainty and adversity and faced it with curiosity and courage. We are excited to have such thoughtful, vibrant, and motivated students in our NOLS community, and we look forward to the amazing accomplishments that are part of their bright future journeys. A big thanks to Tracy Baynes and the STEP staff for their relentless hard work and partnership as we collectively help shape future leaders whom we would be proud to follow.”

The partnership between STEP and NOLS has been successful in educational outcomes and has fostered a community of empowered young leaders prepared to tackle future challenges. As both organizations celebrate this milestone, they remain committed to empowering youth through innovative programs and unparalleled outdoor experiences.

MEDIA IMAGE GALLERY | [LINK](#)
VIDEO | [LINK](#)

Please visit these websites for more information about [NOLS](#) and [STEP](#).

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About NOLS

Established in 1965, the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) is the leader in wilderness education. What began in a small cabin in Wyoming's Wind River Mountain range has evolved into a global, multifaceted nonprofit school offering a proven leadership curriculum through expedition courses, wilderness medicine certifications, risk management training, and custom education solutions for organizations. Today, NOLS operates 14 campuses worldwide and provides classroom instruction in over 40 countries. The NOLS community includes over 930 active instructors who teach various outdoor skills, from mountaineering and sailing to wilderness medicine that empower students to step forward.
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About STEP

STEP currently works with over 300 underserved Arizona high school students each year. 99% of our students are the first generation in their family to seek a college degree. 90% qualify for free or reduced lunch, and 91% identify with an ethnic minority group. Tracy Baynes founded STEP in 2004, bringing her 25 years of teaching and expedition leadership experience. With a firm belief that learning in an unfamiliar and challenging environment is a transformative experience, she began what would become an evolving mission to help high school students broaden their horizons and consider college options beyond only the ones they had heard about from people in their spheres of influence. STEP offers an exceptional, personalized, focused, and proven approach that empowers our low-income students to prepare for selective college admissions. We introduce students to educational institutions that will most likely provide the resources (personal, academic, and financial) to make them successful. STEP's unprecedented success is due to the focused and comprehensive guidance we provide our students through the entire college preparation and application process. This focused guidance is what sets STEP apart from other college-access nonprofits. For additional information, please visit our website or our blog. Media are welcome to visit the STEP [online Press Room](http://www.stepexpedition.org/pressroom) at www.stepexpedition.org/pressroom. Follow us on Instagram: @stepcollegeprep. Like us on Facebook: @STEP College-Prep Program. Connect with us on [LINKEDIN](#). #stepcollegeprep #STEPSuccessStory #STEPPERSInAction

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