



Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Accessibility

# IDEA 2024 REPORT





# Ithaca Children's Garden

**2024**

## Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility (IDEA) Report

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# Introduction

Ithaca Children's Garden (ICG) is a three-acre public garden in upstate New York, designed to inspire children and families through nature-based exploration and learning. With a mission to cultivate environmental stewardship, play-based experiences, and community engagement, ICG welcomes more than 70,000 visitors annually. We strive to ensure that all children, regardless of background, have access to meaningful outdoor experiences.

In 2024, Ithaca Children's Garden made significant strides in advancing our efforts around inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility (IDEA). Key milestones include creating the Outreach and Inclusion Manager position, which played a pivotal role in prioritizing and facilitating IDEA work across ICG; co-hosting the George Washington Carver Community Gardens Project, a partnership that fostered cross-community collaboration and centered Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) children and families in the growing and sharing of food; participating in the IDEA Center for Public Gardens' annual cohort program, where we developed an inclusive bereavement policy and set the stage for future improvements in ICG's staff benefits and policies; and developing a set of IDEA priorities that will guide ICG's work over the next 2-3 years.

This inaugural IDEA Report is intended to document and communicate the progress we've made on our IDEA journey, while acknowledging the work that remains. It includes demographic data from our programs, insights into various projects and partnerships that advance our IDEA goals, and a framework for ICG's ongoing initiatives. The report is designed to offer a comprehensive overview of our efforts and will link to more detailed information on individual projects and programs as relevant. We intend to continue refining and strengthening our IDEA practices, ensuring that all community members can engage with and benefit from ICG's offerings.

## ICG's Adoption of the Term IDEA

ICG adopted the term IDEA in 2024, following the lead of the American Public Gardens Association (APGA), an organization of which ICG is a member. The term was chosen because it more accurately reflects ICG's priorities, especially the addition of "A" for accessibility — a key focus not fully captured by the previously used "DEI" acronym.

In 2024, ICG deepened its commitment to inclusion, education, and sustainability. This report highlights key initiatives, community partnerships, and measurable impacts achieved throughout the year.

## **Staffing**

ICG experienced significant staffing changes in 2024. One notable change was the restructuring that allowed the creation of the Outreach and Inclusion Manager Role.

### **Outreach and Inclusion Manager Role**

Amid leadership transitions at ICG, the team identified the opportunity to strengthen their commitment to IDEA work by developing the Outreach and Inclusion Manager role. Observing that one of the key challenges with accomplishing IDEA work had been ensuring that the organization set aside dedicated time for the work, the new role would ensure that someone with interest, experience, and expertise could advance ICG's progress on its IDEA work.

The creation of this role aimed to focus on outreach (30%), IDEA efforts (30%), education support (30%), and other duties (10%). The position, filled through the promotion of Program Administrator Trey Ramsey, overlaps with various functions, particularly outreach and IDEA work.

As part of this shift, some Program Administrator tasks were redistributed to the Outreach and Inclusion Manager, Education Director, Lead Educators, and Operations Manager.

## **Staff IDEA Working Group**

Starting in September 2022, ICG began holding DEI working group meetings, in which staff members convened to discuss IDEA-related topics such as training and professional development, scholarship outreach, and emerging IDEA needs. In 2024, these became monthly meetings, with the term 'DEI' changed to 'IDEA' (Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access). By the end of the year, the staff collectively decided to make these meetings mandatory (unless staff were absent or had urgent conflicts) to increase engagement with IDEA topics across the organization.

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## **Demographics**

*Note: See Appendix A for full data in table form, including charts and analysis.*

The latest Census Data for Tompkins County and the City of Ithaca (December 27, 2024) were referenced for comparison. A table with relevant data can be found in the appendix.

In 2024, we made a concerted effort to collect demographic data across all registered ICG programs, aiming for a comprehensive analysis at year's end. In previous years, while summer camp data was consistently collected, other programs — including those for the 2023-2024 school year — showed more variability in what information was gathered. The last formal analysis of race, ethnicity, and binary gender data occurred in 2017, and data collection since then has been inconsistent. Establishing the Outreach and Inclusion Manager role in 2024 allowed for dedicated time to ensure data collection consistency. By collecting and analyzing demographic data over time, ICG will be better able to understand who we are serving in our programs and where there are gaps in our audience compared to the local community.

Our 2024 data efforts revealed several areas for improvement. Going forward, we will summarize demographic data at the end of each program, ensure consistency across programs in demographic questions and answer choices, and refine our questions to capture race/ethnicity data more accurately.

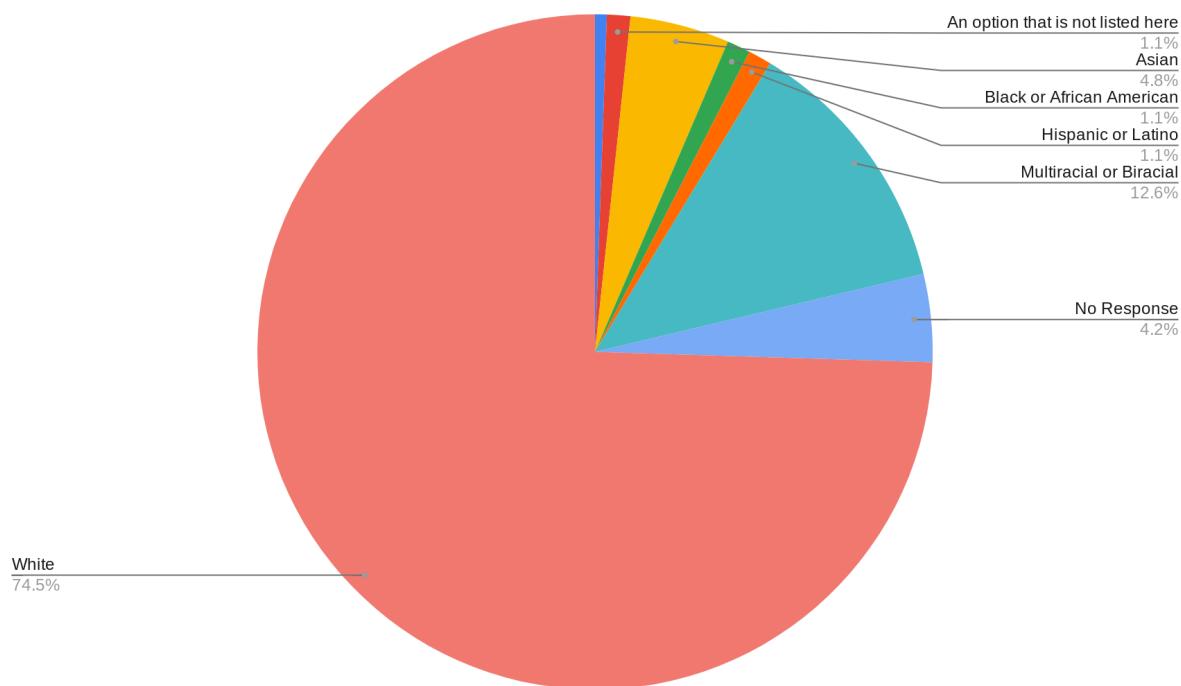
For comparison, we referenced the most recent Census data for Tompkins County and the City of Ithaca (December 27, 2024). A table with relevant data can be found in the appendix.

## **Race and Ethnicity**

Approximately 75% of ICG program participants identify as white, 21% as BIPOC or multiracial, and 4% did not respond. About 27% of scholarship recipients identify as BIPOC or multiracial. This is compared to 20% of Tompkins County residents and 35% of City of Ithaca residents identifying as BIPOC or multiracial. While the racial diversity of ICG's programs does not yet match that of the City of Ithaca, it exceeds that of the county as a whole. Notably, ICG's proportion of bi- or multi-racial participants (~13%) significantly exceeds both Tompkins County (~4%) and the City of Ithaca (~8%).

We intend to continue integrating race and ethnicity questions with an inclusive approach, including Hispanic/Latino heritage within a single question and offering self-identification options to avoid responses such as "an option not listed here."

Program Participants by Race

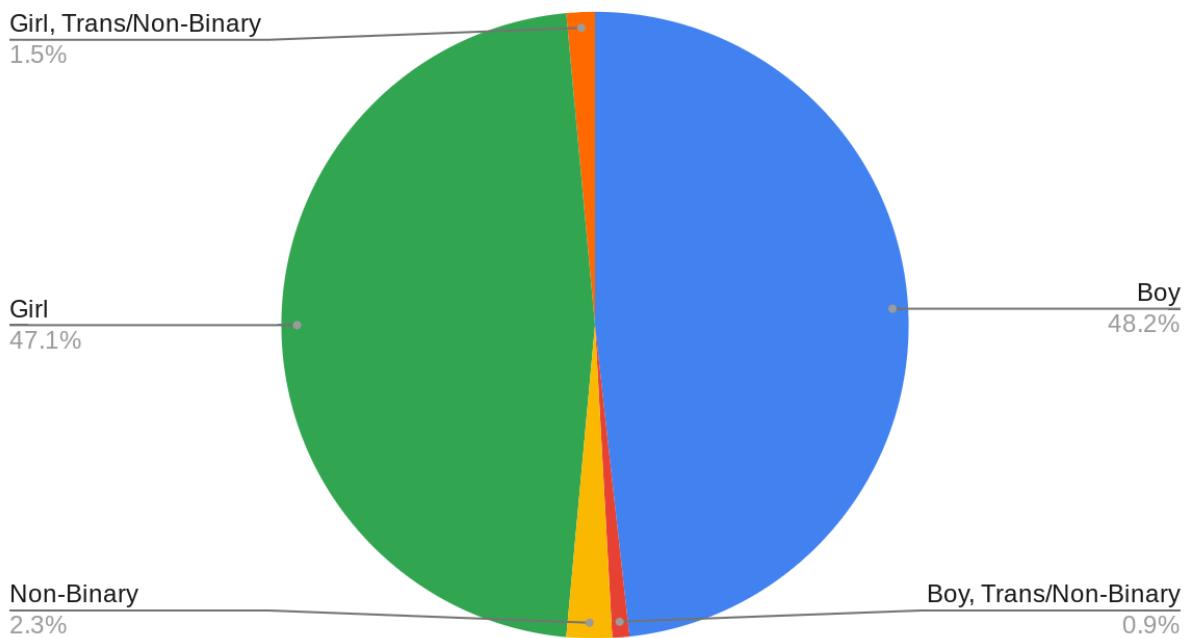


## Gender

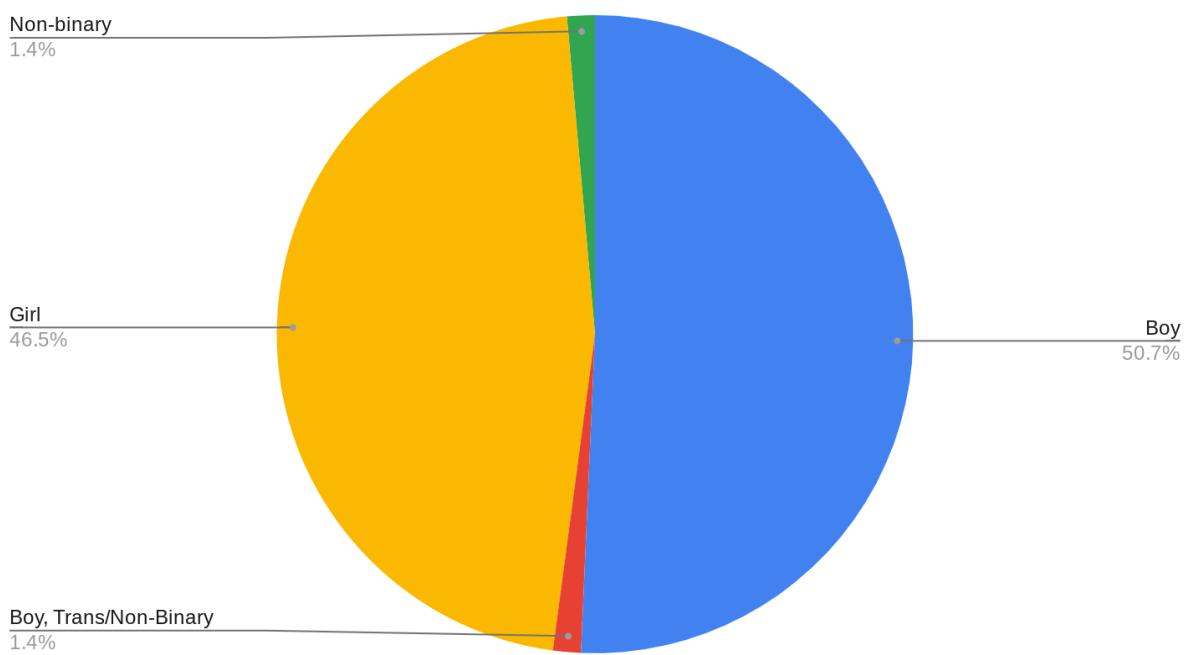
ICG simplified gender identity categories for program participants by grouping terms like "genderqueer," "gender-fluid," "gender non-conforming," and "non-binary" into a single "non-binary" category. However, if participants selected a binary gender response (boy or girl) alongside these or "transgender," they were placed in a separate category to avoid erasing binary transmasculine or transfeminine identities.

Approximately 5% of program participants identified as trans or non-binary, with about 3% of scholarship recipients falling into this category. While census data does not provide a direct comparison, we plan to include relevant comparisons in the future.

## Program Participants by Gender



## Scholarship Recipients by Gender

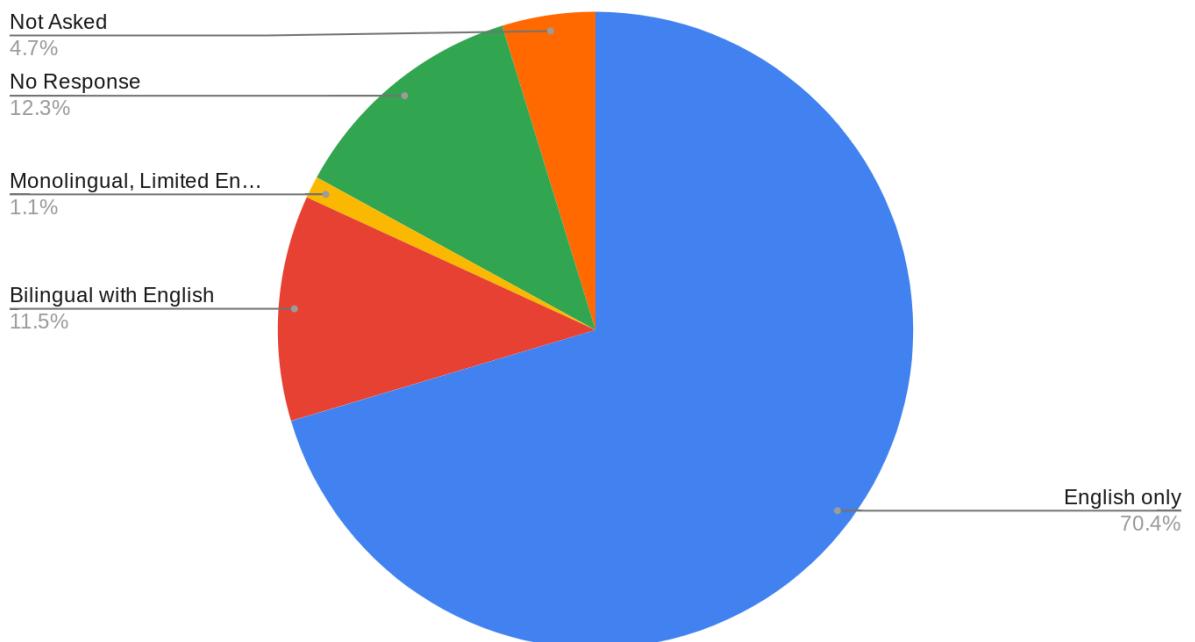


## **Languages Understood/Spoken**

We primarily ask program registrants about languages spoken to better prepare educators for working effectively with each child. This information also provides key demographic data to better understand and respond to the needs of the communities we serve.

- Approximately 12% of program participants identified as multilingual, though proficiency varied.
- 1% of participants spoke limited English, and all of them received scholarships (6% of all scholarship recipients).
- 17 languages were represented, including American Sign Language, Ukrainian, Spanish, and Mandarin.
- Spanish (4%) and Mandarin (2%) were the most commonly spoken languages after English.
- The language question had the lowest response rate (12%), possibly due to its open-ended format rather than multiple-choice options.

## Program Participants by Language

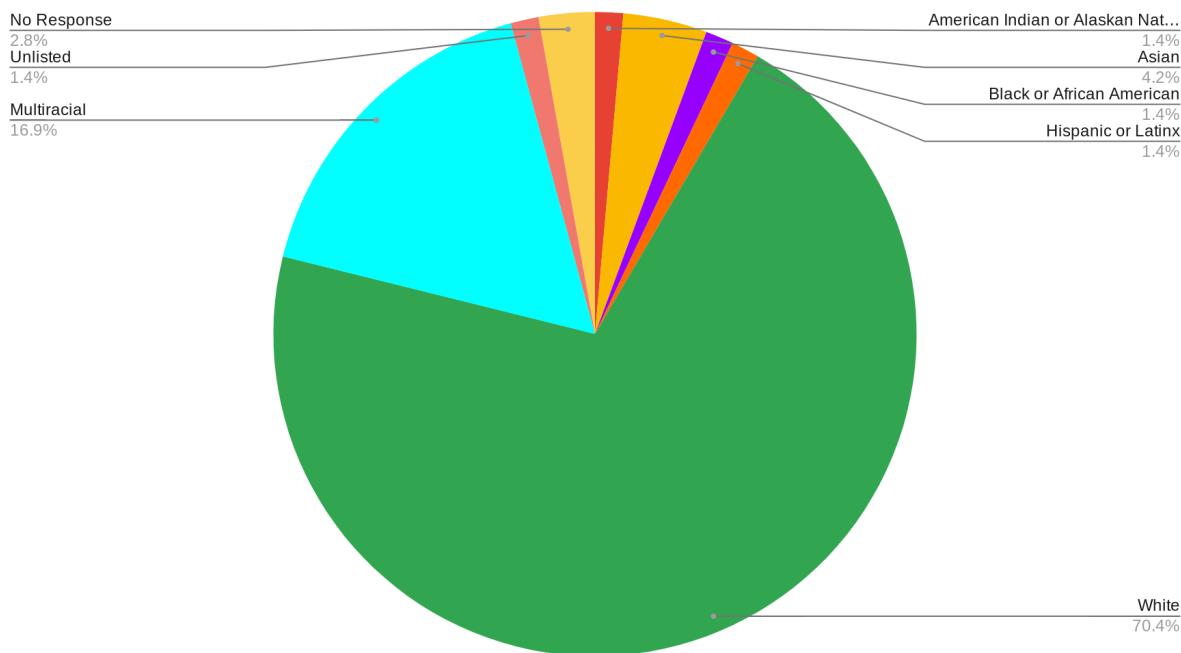


## Scholarships

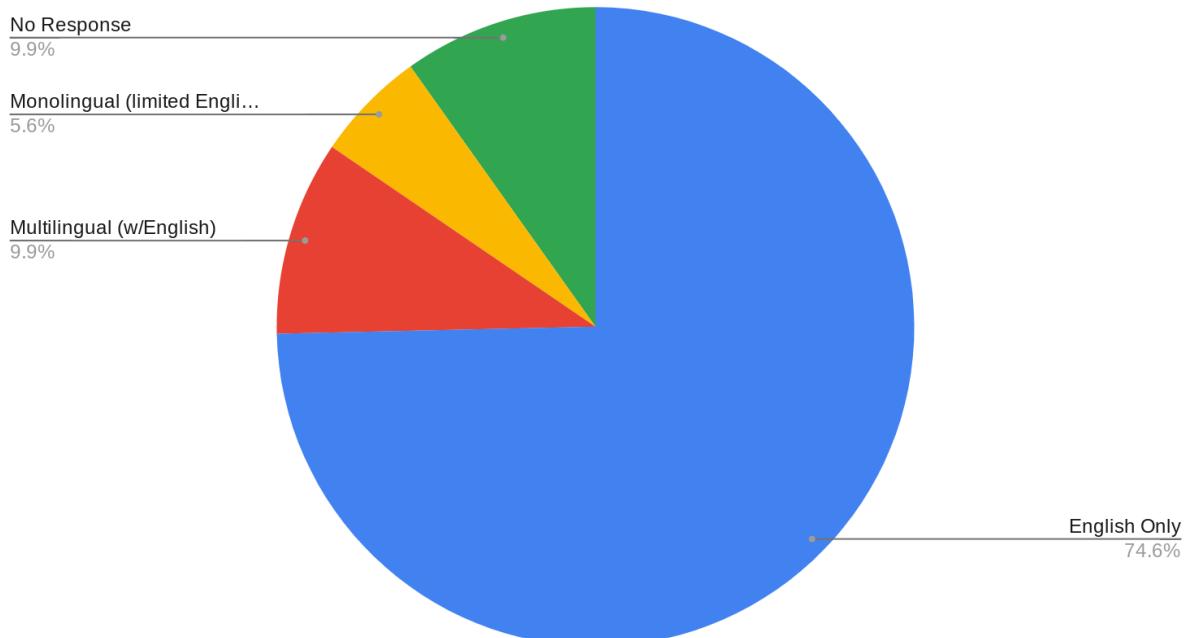
ICG remains committed to ensuring financial barriers do not limit access to our programs. For details, please refer to the [2024 Scholarship Impact Report](#). The charts below highlight the demographics of scholarship recipients, including race and languages spoken.

Another important aspect of our scholarship program is [ICG's partnership with Ithaca Welcomes Refugees](#), described in the next section.

Scholarship Recipients by Race



### Scholarship Recipients by Language



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## Community Partnerships

### George Washington Carver Community Gardens Project

ICG collaborated with [The Learning Farm \(TLF\)](#) and [Children's Reading Connection \(CRC\)](#) to launch the George Washington Carver (GWC) Community Gardens Project, securing a \$20,000 award from the APGA and United States Botanic Garden (USBG) Urban Agriculture Resilience Program (UARP).

#### Project Goals & Focus

- Centered on Dr. George Washington Carver's agricultural legacy, with an emphasis on regenerative agriculture and food justice.
- Prioritized BIPOC engagement, particularly within Black communities.
- Highlighted culturally significant crops such as sweet potatoes, collard greens, okra, peanuts, and black-eyed peas.

- Support small-scale produce production in Ithaca, including in various community gardens and by building ICG's high tunnel greenhouse.



*Children digging up sweet potatoes with help from adults at The Learning Farm's GWC Harvest Festival.*

#### Community GWC Gardens

ICG helped establish multiple George Washington Carver (GWC) gardens across Ithaca, including:

- Ithaca Children's Garden
- The Learning Farm
- Adamo Bellus Farm

- Belle Sherman Elementary School
- Loving Farms
- Southside Community Center



*Volunteers and ICG's Facilities Manager, Jason McCleish (center-front), in ICG's Hoop House/High Tunnel.*

#### High Tunnel Hoop House and GWC Garden at Ithaca Children's Garden

- Built to extend the growing season and support heat-loving crops.
- Used primarily for growing sweet potatoes in raised beds and pots.
- Additional outdoor GWC garden space was planted with collard greens and black-eyed peas.

- Excluded plants: Okra plants were lost to animal browsing, and peanuts were omitted due to allergy concerns.

#### Food Distribution Impact

- 150 lbs of sweet potatoes distributed through ICC's community programs and events.
- 175 lbs of sweet potatoes distributed by The Learning Farm.
- 250 collard green seedlings and sweet potato slips distributed in grow bags with soil and care instructions.
- 600 additional plants distributed by The Learning Farm.

#### Events & Educational Programs

- GWC Project Launch (June 8, 2024): 103 attendees, featuring plant giveaways, nature journaling, and a community reading.
- Juneteenth at Southside Community Center: Engaged 100 attendees with planting activities and book giveaways.
- GWC Harvest Celebration (October 5, 2024): 67 attendees, hosted by The Learning Farm, featuring sweet potato harvesting and West African dishes.



*Photo of event organizers reading from the walk-along version of In the Garden with Dr. Carver at the opening event for the project at ICG, featuring Brigid Hubberman from Children's Reading Connection (back left) and Christa Nunez from The Learning Farm (second from the right).*

## **Project Innovation Partnership**

ICG partnered with Ithaca City School District's Project Innovation, which provides students with hands-on, real-world learning experiences.

- ICG provided on-site programming at Belle Sherman Elementary, including herb potting, vegetable planting, and guided nature walks.
- ICG hosted field trips for five Project Innovation classes, integrating ICG's Kitchen Garden and animal interactions into the curriculum.
- ICG serves on the Project Innovation Advisory Board, ensuring garden-based learning remains a key component.

## **Ithaca Welcomes Refugees Partnership**

Ithaca Welcomes Refugees (IWR) works to foster a welcoming and fair environment for refugees and at-risk immigrants in our region. ICG and IWR have been partnering for a number of years to provide accessible childcare and programming to resettling families in Ithaca and Tompkins County.

- Partnered with Ithaca Welcomes Refugees to provide full scholarships for 10 refugee children attending summer camp.
- Conducted trauma-informed care training for camp staff, which was so well-received that it will become a recurring part of staff development.

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## **2023-2024 IDEA Center for Public Gardens Cohort**

In May 2023, ICG was selected for the IDEA Center for Public Gardens' second annual cohort program, which included monthly workshops and a collaborative project.

As a primary focus of the cohort project, ICG focused on enhancing staff-supporting policies, particularly around bereavement. This work led to the successful adoption of a new, more inclusive bereavement policy, which was developed through a collaborative process involving staff and board leadership. The process of creating the policy was carefully documented and shared with the cohort as a model for other public gardens. A case study detailing the project is [available here](#).

Looking ahead, ICG is committed to further strengthening staff policies and benefits. These improvements are central to [our articulated IDEA priorities](#) for 2025 and beyond. This focus on staff well-being is integral to ensuring a supportive and inclusive environment at ICG.

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## **Professional Development and Membership Organizations**

In 2024, ICG staff deepened engagement in professional development and leadership through local and national membership organizations that support IDEA and public garden excellence.

### Diversity Consortium of Tompkins County (DCTC)

ICG has been an affiliate of DCTC since 2018. DCTC promotes diversity and inclusion through education, awareness, and a supportive network for local employers. ICG regularly attends programming, networking, and board meetings.

In 2024, DCTC resumed its biennial Roundtable event, focusing on DEI topics. ICG staff attended sessions on land acknowledgements and neurodiversity, bringing insights back to ICG to inform future IDEA efforts.

#### American Public Gardens Association (APGA)

ICG has been a member of APGA since 2018. APGA advances public gardens as leaders in plant conservation and appreciation. The APGA IDEA Committee promotes IDEA across the public garden field through professional development and networking events, which ICG has actively participated in

In 2023, the Committee transitioned to a direct board committee and launched the IDEA Community in 2024. Trey became the inaugural Vice Chair, and later Chair, empowering ICG to not only deepen our staff's professional development, but also to deepen our leadership on IDEA topics across the broader public garden sector.

At the 2024 APGA Annual Conference in Boston, ICG was represented through two sessions presented by Trey:

- *Queering the Garden and Growing Beyond Binaries: LGBTQ+ Inclusive Programming in Public Gardens*
- *Getting to the Other Side of Barriers and Challenges (Panel Discussion)*

Additionally, relevant APGA resources on IDEA work are being compiled and organized to be most useful for continuing learning among ICG's staff.



A photo of the 2024 APGA Garden Scholars and some of the program's sponsors, including ICG Outreach and Inclusion Manager, Trey (center-right of the photo, green shirt and glasses).

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## **IDEA (Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility) Priorities and Projects**

In late 2024, ICG Staff identified four primary areas to focus IDEA efforts. Those categories, along with key areas, specific projects, and rationale within each, are summarized below. Specific projects and priorities can and will evolve as needs arise, projects progress, and our knowledge grows.

### **Accessibility and Disability Inclusion**

- Rationale: Training through the IDEA Cohort and APGA underscored areas of disability access that ICG has considerable opportunity to improve in order to

not only meet but exceed requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

- Key Areas:
  - ICG Accessibility Policy: Update ICG's accessibility policy to better reflect its purpose, be more welcoming to visitors with disabilities, and ensure ICG is providing appropriate accommodations.
  - Physical Garden Site Accessibility: Ensure that ICG is as physically accessible as possible to guests with mobility-related disabilities. In addition, address sensory sensitivity concerns with the Sound Garden.
  - Transportation to ICG: Work to improve access to ICG for families who rely on public transportation.
  - Accessibility of ICG's website and other communications: Ensure that the website and other communications follow best practices regarding accessibility (contrast, screen reader compatibility, etc.). In addition, communicate more effectively about ICG's accessibility on the website.

## **Hiring, Training, and Professional Development**

- Rationale: Professional development and training on IDEA have been long-expressed needs of ICG staff. By ensuring our staff is informed and prepared to advance IDEA work, we can better serve the community.
- Key Areas:
  - Staff Training: Find and implement individual and group training, free and paid, as appropriate and possible. Improve onboarding training as it relates to IDEA and ongoing programs for staff.
  - Hiring and Employee Support: Continue implementing inclusive hiring practices and ensure that employees feel supported throughout their time at ICG.

## **BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) Inclusion**

- Rationale: BIPOC inclusion in green spaces is an identified need, based on historic and continuing systematic racism and exclusion<sup>1</sup>.
- Key Areas
  - Indigenous Inclusion: Work to better engage local indigenous communities, include indigenous knowledge in our education efforts, and more.

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<sup>1</sup>

<https://www.americanbar.org/groups/crsj/resources/human-rights/2024-october/right-to-nature/>, <https://PMC10521987/>,  
<https://www.pps.org/article/public-space-park-space-and-racialized-space/>?

- Scholarships: Ensure that ICG's generous scholarship program reaches all families who may need it, increasing the number of BIPOC families served.
- Community Partnerships: Expand work with organizations that primarily serve families of color and who focus on racial justice.

## **LGBTQ+ Inclusion**

- Rationale: After an incident in 2024 with a program family who expressed transphobic sentiments, it became clear that ICG needs to continue to actively pursue LGBTQ+ inclusion work. In addition, between 2017 and 2021, and again in 2025, the Trump Administration implemented sweeping policies restricting transgender youth rights, including withdrawing federal recognition of transgender identities and directing schools to prohibit instruction and practices affirming gender identity. These actions have made safe participation in public life more challenging for trans youth. As a public space dedicated to welcoming all, ICG's steadfast and explicit efforts to be welcoming to LGBTQ+ youth are paramount to our value of inclusion.
- Key Areas:
  - Communication: Make ICG's commitment to LGBTQ+ youth clear.
  - Programming: Consider implementing specific programming for LGBTQ+ youth and ensuring that LGBTQ+ inclusion and education are better woven into other programs.
  - Community Partnerships: Work with other organizations in the community to better serve LGBTQ+ youth and families.
  - Organizational Culture: Strive to ensure that ICG is an ever-more-welcoming environment for all LGBTQ+ people, including staff, volunteers, children, and families.

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## **Strengthening Communication around Inclusion Values**

This summer, ICG was presented with a challenge that highlighted the importance of proactively and clearly communicating our values — especially regarding inclusion — with program families and our broader community.

## Background

- An age-appropriate book, *Not He or She, I'm Me*, was read to children during an ICG program. Following this activity, one family chose to withdraw their child and criticized ICG on social media.

## Reflection and Response:

Reflection and Response ICG responded by:

- Engaging a local LGBTQ+ inclusion expert to support and guide staff.
- Informing program families to reaffirm ICG's commitment to LGBTQ+ inclusion clearly.
- Offering immediate withdrawal without penalty.
- Adding a clear policy statement on inclusive literature to the parent handbook.
- Expanding LGBTQ+ inclusion efforts within our IDEA priorities.

What We Learned This experience underscored that our commitment to justice and inclusion must be communicated not only through our actions but also through proactive, transparent dialogue with families. As a result, we:

- Added a clear policy on inclusive books to the parent handbook.
- Expanded our LGBTQ+ inclusion efforts within our IDEA framework.
- Reaffirmed that fostering a supportive environment means preparing our community for what inclusion looks like in practice.

## Lesson

Proactively communicating our inclusion values builds trust, reduces misunderstanding, and strengthens our ability to live out our mission with integrity and clarity.

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## Conclusion

As Ithaca Children's Garden continues to grow and evolve, our commitment to inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility (IDEA) remains central to all of our efforts. The data presented here underscores the progress we have made in representing a

broad range of communities, particularly in terms of race and ethnicity, and highlights areas where further engagement is needed. Our efforts to increase the representation of historically marginalized groups are a critical component of our mission to make the outdoors accessible to everyone. This is evident in our scholarship distribution, partnerships with community organizations like Ithaca Welcomes Refugees, and the inclusive programming we offer across a variety of backgrounds.

Despite notable strides, the demographic data also reveals gaps, such as the underrepresentation of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) families within certain programs. We are committed to refining our outreach strategies to better serve the diverse population of Ithaca and Tompkins County. For example, the demographic breakdown for Ithaca City School District (ICSD) indicates that about 35% of the student population identifies as BIPOC, while only 21% of ICG program participants do so. This disparity is an opportunity for us to explore deeper community outreach and engagement to ensure our programs reflect the vibrant diversity of the City of Ithaca.

Looking forward, ICG will continue to prioritize IDEA work, ensuring that our programs remain welcoming and accessible to all. This will include expanding our outreach efforts, refining our demographic data collection to include a wider array of identities, and further developing partnerships that enrich the community fabric. We recognize that our journey is ongoing, and we are fully committed to creating a space where all children and families feel a sense of belonging.

The lessons learned from 2024, combined with continued community input and collaboration, will inform our strategies in 2025 and beyond. By staying true to our core values of inclusion and justice, we can foster a more connected and diverse community that celebrates the benefits of nature and play for everyone.

## Appendix A: Demographic Data

Notes: “All Program Participants” only counts participants once, regardless of how many programs they participate in during the calendar year. Information reflects their most recent registration (e.g., if a child was enrolled in After School all year and was in 2nd grade in spring 2024 and 3rd grade in fall 2024, they are counted as a 3rd grader in this data).

Table 1: Ages of All Program Participants

Age	Number of Program Participants	Percentage of Program Participants
2	6	1.68%
3	17	4.75%
4	33	9.22%
5	29	8.10%
6	58	16.20%
7	58	16.20%
8	47	13.13%
9	39	10.89%
10	23	6.42%
11	16	4.47%
12	16	4.47%
13	5	1.40%
14	6	1.68%
15	3	0.84%
16	1	0.28%
Unknown	1	0.28%
Total Responses	358	

Table 2: Grade of All Program Participants

Grade	Number of Program Participants	Percentage of Program Participants
Not in school	49	13.69%
Kindergarten	36	10.06%
1st	65	18.16%
2nd	58	16.20%
3rd	52	14.53%
4th	32	8.94%
5th	23	6.42%
6th	15	4.19%
7th	14	3.91%
8th	6	1.68%
9th	5	1.40%
10th	2	0.56%
11th	1	0.28%

Table 3: Race of Program Participants: Consolidated Responses

Race	Number	Percentage
American Indian or Alaska Native	2	0.56%
An option that is not listed here	4	1.12%
Asian	17	4.75%
Black or African American	4	1.12%
Hispanic or Latino	4	1.12%
Multiracial or Biracial	45	12.57%
No Response	15	4.19%
White	266	74.30%

**Table 4: Genders of Program Participants:****Consolidated Responses**

Gender	Number	Percentage
Boy	165	46.09%
Boy, Trans/Non-Binary	3	0.84%
Non-Binary	8	2.23%
Girl	161	44.97%
Girl, Trans/Non-Binary	5	1.40%
No Response	16	4.47%

**Table 5: Languages of Program Participants:****Consolidated Responses**

Language(s)	Number	Percentage
English only	252	70.39%
Bilingual with English	41	11.45%
Monolingual, Limited English	4	1.12%
No Response	44	12.29%
Not Asked	17	4.75%

**Table 6: Ages of Scholarship Recipients**

Age (years)	Number	Percentage
2	2	2.82%
3	5	7.04%
4	9	12.68%
5	5	7.04%
6	5	7.04%
7	10	14.08%
8	11	15.49%
9	8	11.27%
10	4	5.63%

11	2	2.82%
12	5	7.04%
13	2	2.82%
14	3	4.23%

Table 7: Grades of Scholarship Recipients

Grade	Number	Percentage
Not in school	14	19.72%
Kindergarten	6	8.45%
1st	6	8.45%
2nd	13	18.31%
3rd	13	18.31%
4th	3	4.23%
5th	4	5.63%
6th	4	5.63%
7th	4	5.63%
8th	2	2.82%
9th	2	2.82%

Table 8: Race/Ethnicity of Scholarship Recipients:  
Consolidated

Race	Number	Percentage
American Indian or Alaskan Native	1	1.41%
Asian	3	4.23%
Black or African American	1	1.41%
Hispanic or Latinx	1	1.41%
White	50	70.42%
Multiracial	12	16.90%
Unlisted	1	1.41%
No Response	2	2.82%

**Table 9: Gender of Scholarship Recipients**

Gender	Number	Percentage
Boy	36	50.70%
Boy, Trans/Non-Binary	1	1.41%
Girl	33	46.48%
Non-binary	1	1.41%

**Table 10: Languages of Program Participants:  
Consolidated**

Language	Number	Percentage
English	53	74.65%
Multilingual (w/English)	7	9.86%
Monolingual (limited/no English)	4	5.63%
No Response	7	9.86%

**Table 11: Demographics for Tompkins County and the City of Ithaca**

Demographic Category	Tompkins County	City of Ithaca
White alone, percent	80.70%	65.10%
Black alone, percent (a)	4.70%	6.60%
American Indian and Alaska Native alone, percent (a)	0.50%	0.30%
Asian alone, percent (a)	10.10%	15.10%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone, percent (a)	0.10%	0.10%
Two or More Races, percent	3.90%	8.20%
Hispanic or Latino, percent (b)	6.50%	9.20%
White alone, not Hispanic or Latino, percent	75.90%	62.80%
Median household income (in 2023 dollars), 2019-2023	\$73,012	\$48,617
Per capita income in past 12 months (in 2023 dollars), 2019-2023	\$42,505	\$32,133

Persons in poverty, percent	15.70%	28.40%
Persons under 5 years, percent	3.30%	1.80%
Persons under 18 years, percent	13.90%	7.70%
Female persons, percent	50.90%	49.00%