

POPULATION CONNECTION



**CELEBRATING 50 YEARS OF
POPULATION EDUCATION**

President's Note

John Seager
john@popconnect.org




“Development and distribution of educational materials [about the momentum of population growth] we would place very high on ZPG’s list of priorities — and efforts to introduce the concept of demographic momentum into school curricula are particularly important.”

– Paul and Anne Ehrlich, 1978

Nearly a half-century after Paul and Anne Ehrlich’s strong recommendation, Population Connection’s Population Education program is the only nationwide one of its kind. Actively used by teachers in thousands of K–12 classrooms across Northern America, our materials are carefully researched, rigorously secular, and custom-designed to meet the needs of educators at all levels.

We train over 10,000 teachers annually and provide curriculum materials that encourage students at every grade level to think for themselves as they make connections between

population challenges and everything from the environment to the economy to the complexities of society itself. Slogans and tweets can’t and won’t provide the pathway to a better, safer, less-crowded future. Education can and will.

Writing just 10 years after our founding in 1968, Paul and Anne Ehrlich pronounced that “ZPG members must realize that they are in for a long battle [...] But the game will be worth the candle.” Of course, the Ehrlichs were and are scientists, not soothsayers. But their words have proven prophetic. 



In memoriam: Duff Gillespie, 1942–2025, was a friend and mentor. During many years as a dues-paying member and as a board member of Population Connection, he unfailingly provided excellent counsel derived from his six decades of experience dealing with the most complex population issues. Over the course of 30 years at USAID, Duff served as Director of the Office of Population and helped create its Global Health Bureau. He then went on to an equally distinguished career as a Professor in the Department of Population, Family, and Reproductive Health at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Health. Duff always cut to the chase with clarity and good humor. I am just one of countless millions around the world who benefited from his life’s work.

Quotes by Paul and Anne Ehrlich from “ZPG: Where to Now?” *ZPG National Reporter*, Vol. 10, No. 4 (1978).

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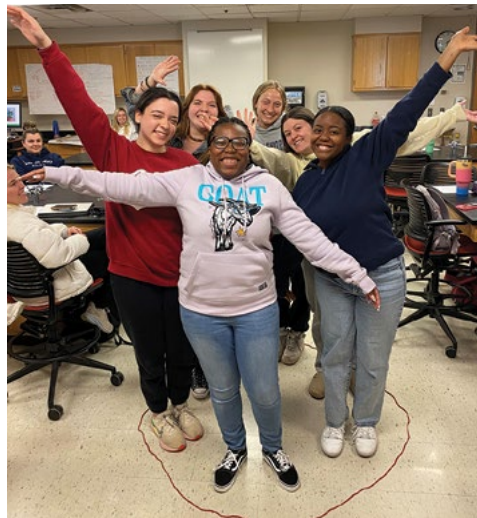
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Cover image: Students in an Elementary Science Methods course at Indiana University role play flowering plants in the Population Education (PopEd) activity Crowding Can Be Seedy, in March 2024 | Photo by Carol Bliese, Senior Director of Teacher Programs

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Editor's Note

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Population Education lesson plans didn't reach me in Maine when I was growing up. In fact, I don't believe I had ever considered the size of the human population before 1999, when I was a senior in high school and the world reached the 6 billion milestone. When I was going through an old storage bin last winter, I came across a paper I wrote for the occasion and wasn't surprised to see that my perspective on "overpopulation" at 18 wasn't all that different from what it is now, over a quarter-century later. I approach the issue with more nuance now than I did as a teenager, but my general stance remains the same: Continued population growth is an obstacle to advancing gender equality, improving public health, and achieving sustainable development initiatives, and it could be resolved by empowering people to make more educated and informed choices.

We confirmed in our YouGov survey earlier this year that Americans tend to struggle to accurately identify population sizes and trends. The majority of our 2,000 respondents made guesses that were more than 50% higher or lower than the actual population, both domestically and globally.

Having a reasonable awareness of population data and dynamics is important for understanding many of the environmental, economic, health, and development challenges we experience and how to best address them. Educating young people about the impact of our numbers and consumption patterns helps them become more thoughtful future professionals, parents (if they choose to have children), consumers, and voters.

Despite the importance of population literacy, however, our Population Education (PopEd) program — which turns 50 this year — is the only remaining one of its kind in the United States. With a staff of 13, a volunteer network of nearly 700 teacher trainers, and approximately 50,000 educators using our curriculum materials in their classrooms, we reach about 3 million K–12 students each year. Because of our carefully crafted and time-tested lesson plans, many millions of young people have learned about population challenges when they otherwise wouldn't have.

Part of what keeps the program operating so effectively is the lengthy tenure of its leaders. Pam Wasserman, Senior Vice President for Education, is our longest serving staff member — she came here as a new college graduate in 1988! You can read her responses to questions about the history of the program in the interview beginning on page 22. Carol Bliese, Senior Director of Teacher Programs, has 19 years with PopEd under her belt, and Lindsey Bailey, Education Network Director, has been with us for 15 years. The dedication of these three staff members is invaluable to the organization and to the professors and pre-service educators they work with each year.

The high school seniors who will witness the 9 billion milestone are currently in kindergarten or first grade (depending on when in 2036 the milestone occurs and whether this UN medium projection is accurate). May they all receive Population Education in the meantime. 

Letters to the Editor

Thank you for publishing Samuel Miller McDonald's article about the "panic" over lower fertility rates. I've seen stories presenting declining fertility rates as a problem, and it makes me really angry. We should be rejoicing about declining fertility rates. We have been destroying this planet because there are too many of us. Habitat destruction, extermination of wildlife, pollution, climate change, poverty, starvation, unemployment, competition for resources, and even war are all byproducts of overpopulation.

I've heard some overpopulation deniers worrying about a shrinking workforce and fewer workers paying into Social Security, etc. This is a very narrow view in my opinion. And this attitude that humans are more important than other animals has got to go. We are all part of the ecosystem, and the sooner people figure that out, the better for the whole world.

Barry Ulman
Bellingham, WA

The population challenge requires collaborative effort. If the trend of human population growth is left unchecked, it will lead to great environmental impact on future generations. This is the right time we acted on it.

Peter Joel Chisangwi
Malawi, Central Africa

I read every issue of *Population Connection* magazine and recommend each one to my friends and sometimes in my weeklies on climate. The September 2025 issue is a most welcome contribution to your campaign to stop and reverse population growth. Your publication of Samuel Miller McDonald's article, "There Are Many Threats to Humanity. A Low Birth Rate Isn't One of Them," reinforced by your president's and editor's notes, will sharpen and widen the campaign.

Several years ago, enthusiasm for the campaign was blunted by the publication of *Too Many People? Population, Immigration, and the Environmental Crisis* by Ian Angus and Simon Butler which, according to the publisher, "provides a clear, well-documented, and popularly written refutation of the idea that 'overpopulation' is a major cause of environmental destruction, arguing that a focus on human numbers not only misunderstands the causes of the crisis, it dangerously weakens the movement for real solutions."

But McDonald makes the case that human population became catastrophically imbalanced with the rest of life. I hope *Population Connection* will enlarge McDonald's arguments to counter the Angus/Butler book and other books and articles that promote their disastrous arguments, until human population growth and the decline and extinction of other species have been reversed.

Dick Bennett, PhD
Fayetteville, AR

Letters to the Editor, continued

I'd like to add another perspective to Konrad Kumkli's thoughtful comment about the connection between religion and human population. I doubt a "religion gene" will ever be found in our genetic code but I do think the genetic wiring in humans contains the foundations for religion. As a hypothesis (oversimplified and not to be taken too seriously), humans probably developed traits for strengthened social structure and cooperation that were based on being able to accept behavioral norms and survival techniques that relied on correlations we would describe today as irrational superstitions. Nevertheless, religion (and proto-religion) is, and was, a powerful force that helped make humans the most successful species on Earth.

Furthermore, humans with genetically based predispositions toward what became religious belief (whether true belief or manipulated by alpha leaders) would have been selected for, as religious groups would have had a strong competitive advantage over humans with weaker organizing drives.

We can debate whether this theory is plausible, but the important point is that confronting challenges related to population means dealing with our powerful genetic baggage and not just hoping that rational arguments will carry the day.

George Redden
Idaho Falls, ID

You are quite mistaken in your claim on the cover of the September issue that "humans are not threatened with extinction." Humans are indeed threatened with extinction. Regardless of what we do, we have sufficiently poisoned and abused the air, land, and water that we will be extinct within 100 years.

Kendrick Miller
Salisbury, NC

If you'd prefer to read the quarterly *Population Connection* magazine online, please visit our website at popconnect.org/magazine to see archives going back to 2020. The digital version of each issue contains links to sources, staff authors' email addresses, and suggestions for further reading.



EDITORIAL EXCERPTS

The
Economist

On a long time-scale, exponential [population] shrinkage looks astonishingly fast. However, during the initial phase, which is when societies must grapple with the problem, the speed of change ought to be manageable.

[...] In a 41-country sample, a 70-year-old in 2022 had the same cognitive abilities as a 53-year-old had in 2000. Perhaps such progress will end. But as long as it continues, it will slow the shrinkage of labor forces, giving societies crucial extra decades to adapt. Countries that waste human capital may find ways to waste less of it, by feeding and educating young minds better, and removing barriers to women working. [...]

Governments have a role in making life easier for families, but trying to pay people to have more children than they otherwise would is either staggeringly expensive or does not work. [...]

Shrinking, and thus aging, populations will eventually require big economic and social adjustments. The very old will need caring for (even if they are no costlier than the young, who often spend two decades needing support). The old are more likely to vote, so their views will shape politics. That could make it harder to raise pension ages in line with life expectancy, but sooner or later governments will have to.

Adapting to an emptier planet will not be easy, but it will be doable. None of the predictions of demographic disaster seems plausible this century, and 2100 is so far away that forecasts beyond it seem pointless. [...]

– September 11, 2025

Chicago Tribune

A new NBC News Decision Desk poll found a stark partisan divide between men and women ages 18 to 29.

[...]

Gen Z men are increasingly conservative, while Gen Z women are becoming more progressive. This growing divide has fueled an interesting narrative. The worry follows: If this gap persists, could it strain not only politics — but personal relationships, too? Fears of a complete population collapse abound in some corners of the internet.

We say: Let's wait and see. The members of this board were once 20-somethings, too, navigating ambition, identity, and external pressures. These impulses shape us all, and versions of this generational tension have appeared across the decades. And the gender gap isn't novel.

The ebb and flow of public opinion often coincides with major life changes: entering the workforce, starting families, managing bills. These forces can realign priorities and soften ideological extremes. So let's not rush to despair over the future when our history shows generational or gender gaps often converge over time.

Mars and Venus have coexisted — sometimes awkwardly, sometimes harmoniously — for generations. If history is any guide, they'll find a way on this one too.

– September 10, 2025



IN THE NEWS

By Olivia Nater, Communications Manager

Population Connection mourns the death of legendary conservationist Jane Goodall

Our team at Population Connection was deeply saddened by the passing of beloved ethologist and conservationist Dr. Jane Goodall at the age of 91 on October 1. Through her decades-long field research on chimpanzees in Gombe National Park, Tanzania, she brought to light key behavioral insights that changed the way the world perceives animals. A trailblazer, Dr. Goodall was one of the first female field researchers, defying adversity in a discipline that was heavily male-dominated at the time. Through her work with her non-profit, the Jane Goodall Institute, Dr. Goodall went on to become one of the most tireless and inspirational messengers for environmental protection, empathy, and hope of our time.

Having witnessed first-hand the alarming impact of rapid deforestation on chimpanzee habitat, Dr. Goodall was also

a champion for the progressive population movement. At the 2020 World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, for example, she told world leaders that “we cannot hide away from human population growth, because it underlies so many of the other problems.” Dr. Goodall was a powerful advocate for empowering population action, frequently highlighting the critical role women’s and girls’ empowerment plays in protecting the environment.

Seventh of nine planetary boundaries breached

A worrying new report published by the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research reveals that humanity has breached the seventh of nine critical planetary boundaries, with severe consequences for Earth’s life support systems.

The Planetary Boundaries Framework identifies nine processes that have been scientifically proven to play a key role in regulating the stability, resilience, and life-sustaining functions of the Earth’s

systems. For each of the nine planetary boundary processes, the framework identifies a “safe operating space” in which the conditions on Earth will remain reliable and hospitable for generations to come. When available evidence indicates that we have left this safe operating space, the boundary is considered to have been breached.

According to the report, *Planetary Health Check 2025*, the newly breached planetary boundary is ocean acidification, caused by excess carbon dioxide from fossil fuel emissions. The other six boundaries that had already been breached are climate change, biosphere integrity (biodiversity loss), land system change (particularly deforestation), freshwater use, biogeochemical flows (including agricultural pollution), and novel entities (such as synthetic chemicals and plastics). All seven breached boundaries show worsening trends. The only two processes that remain in the safe zone are ozone depletion and aerosol loading (air pollution).

First climate tipping point crossed

A similar but separate report, the *Global Tipping Points Report 2025*, published by the University of Exeter, concluded that the world has already crossed the first climate tipping point — a threshold at which catastrophic and potentially irreversible planetary changes are triggered. The authors found that warm-water coral reefs have passed their thermal tipping point due to rising ocean temperatures. This is resulting in unprecedented dieback, which threatens ocean ecosystems and the livelihoods of hundreds of millions of people who depend on them.

Scientists believe we will officially exceed 1.5°C of global warming within the next few years, a level at which several other key systems likely have a tipping point. These include land permafrost, the Greenland and West Antarctic ice sheets, and the sub-polar gyre. Other systems are thought to have a tipping point around 2°C, including mountain glaciers, boreal forests, and the Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (AMOC), the collapse of which would devastate global ecology and food and water security, and plunge northwest Europe into severe winters.

The authors warn that “to minimize the magnitude and

duration of global temperature overshoot above 1.5°C, global anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions need to be halved by 2030 compared to 2010 levels, reach net zero by 2050, and then net greenhouse gas removal needs to occur.” Currently, global greenhouse gas emissions are still increasing.

Fewer than one in five Sustainable Development Goals on track


This year’s progress report on the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) found that only 18% of targets are on track to be met by their 2030 deadline. Alarming, the same proportion of targets have gotten worse relative to 2015, while the remainder are either stagnating or progressing much too slowly.

The SDGs are a set of 17 goals designed to accelerate sustainable development and bring about wellbeing for all on a healthy planet. They were unanimously adopted in 2015 by all 193 UN member states (at the time). Each goal contains a set of targets, and every year, the UN publishes a report on the progress (or lack thereof) that has been made toward each target based on a set of indicators.

The 2025 report points out some serious data gaps due to lack of monitoring, primarily as a result of funding shortfalls. Some of

the critical goals most relevant to Population Connection’s work, for example, don’t have enough data availability to determine global trends. These include Goal 5 (gender equality) and Goal 13 (climate action), for which less than 30% of countries have trend data available.

In a shocking statement at a UN conference earlier this year, a US government spokesperson said that the US “rejects and denounces the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and will no longer reaffirm the SDGs as a matter of course.”

Trump’s devastating foreign aid cuts have put these words into action — while it is too early for the latest report to reflect the impacts of his second term, we can safely assume the 2026 report will be an even more dire read. 

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Willie Newton
Evelyn Nguyen
Michael Niebling
Rodney A. Norman
James P. O'Callaghan
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Paul Olson
Frederick & Anne Osborn
William J. Otto
Julie Ouimet
James Owen
Darby Brewer Packie
S. Page
Michael Pahs & Mary Miller
Ronald G. Parker
William Parker & Elisabeth Wells Parker
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Anthony J. Pasquarello
David Passage
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Michael Paul & June Bente
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Michael Peabody
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William Peppler
Dan Petersen
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Dean G. Petrich
Bob Pettapiece
Frank & Judy Pezzanite
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Margaret M. Phillips
William A. Phipps
Robert L. Pickering
Gloria Pierce
Jo Lynn Pine & William Seabridge
Linda M. Plein
James J. Podanowski, Jr.
Kevin Possin & Ann Lavine
William J. Potvin
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Gladys Powers
Carl & Becky Prather
Virginia S. Preston
Colin Price
Penelope G. Purtzer
Judith Queen
Fred B. Radebaugh
Alfred M. Rail
Ralph W. Raines, Jr.

Katherine N. Redder
Marianne Reichert
Frederick J. Retzlaff
Peter & Mary Rhode
Barbara Rice
Curtis C. Ridling
Frederic M. Rizzo
Jane U. Robbins
Edward E. Roberts
Linda L. Roberts
Carrie Robertson
Charles & Dianne Robertson
Phil & Marilyn Rockey
Larry & Alice Rodgers
Barb Roeber & Larry Black
Tobias W. Rosenblatt
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Timothy K. Rossiter
Monica Roy
Deborah L. Rozanski
Peter Ruch
Robert Ruether
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Nancy G. Ryder
Denis Rydjeski & Betsy Eldredge
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Rizolania S. Saverio
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Virginia K. Schilz
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Hermann F. Schmid
Betty J. Schmucker
Richard & Sharon Schoech
William Schoene
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Robert Schreiber
Ralf E. Schubert
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Angie Sieffert
Leon G. Siegel
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Lowell & Elyse Smith
Morton Smith & Mary Rexford
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Irwin Spiegelman
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David Sprowls
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Bella Starmountain-Sweet
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Richard Stein
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Ronald G. Stevens
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Lorraine Sumner
Lorilee Sutter
William Swahlen
Elizabeth A. Swain
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Merrily Swoboda & Jeff Lesak
Martha Ann Swoope
T.K. Sylvester

D. Marian & Thomas Szebenyi
 Alina Szmant
 Linda B. Tabor-Beck
 Donna L. Talbott
 Gabriela Taylor
 Gregg W. Taylor
 John B. Taylor
 Steve Taylor
 Peter Temin
 George & Jennifer Tempest
 Melody K. Tennant
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 Jennifer A. Thiermann
 Catherine Thompson
 William & Joy Thwing
 Elizabeth Timpson-Clark
 Brian A. Tinsley
 Mark Tipperman & Lorna Williamson
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 Lane Tracy
 Dakkota Troy
 Steven R. Truax & Kathleen J. Mintert
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 John R. Turner, Jr.
 Barry Ulman
 Ray C. Unrath
 Dinah Utah & Carolyn Joyce
 Doug & Bonnie Van Der Voort
 Yann M. van Heurck
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 Mary Van Slooten
 Elizabeth Vancisin
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 Irene J. Wakeland
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 William G. Wegener
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 Rebecca H. Weiner
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 Lisa M. Wersal
 Jay R. West
 Joylene Westphal
 Kevin J. Whaley
 Jo Lynne Whiting
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 Eugene Wigglesworth & Grace E. Teigen

Stephen Wight
 Sharon Marie Wilcox
 Cheryl Wilfong & Williams McKim
 Stephen & Elizabeth Willey
 Arnold R. Williams
 Burton D. Williams
 Christopher Williams & Lorrie Lagasse
 Don V. Williams
 Geoffrey F. Williams
 Thomas Williams
 Robert Wills
 Arlene D. Wilson
 Kurt & Chris Wimberg
 Alice Wolfson
 Robert & Ellen Wolitarsky
 Anne S. Wolpert
 William H. Wolverton
 Lucille M. Wood-Trost
 Marti F. Worth
 Kenneth & Virginia Wright
 Roger B. D. Wright
 Wayne & Veronica Wright
 Janet Wygle
 Van Yasek
 Ann M. Young
 Douglas N. Young
 Robert Yount
 Cheryl D. Zabinski
 Edna R. Zappa
 Lawrence Zimmer & Thaddeus Perzanowski
 Joel Zimmerman
 Lynn M. Zoch

What will your legacy be?

If you aren't yet a member of the ZPG Society, have you considered becoming one? The simplest way for you to ensure that your dedication to Population Connection's mission continues well into the future is through a gift in your will or trust. You can add just one sentence to make your wishes known. Another simple way is to make Population Connection the beneficiary of your retirement or other financial account. Contact us to find out more!

Sample Gift Language:

After fulfilling all other provisions, I give, devise, and bequeath ___% of the remainder of my estate [or \$___ if a specific amount] to Population Connection (Tax ID #94-1703155), a charitable corporation currently located at 2120 L Street NW, Suite 500, Washington, DC, 20037.

For more information, contact Victoria Wright at legacy@popconnect.org or (202) 974-7756.

Everyone needs a will! We've partnered with FreeWill so that you can draft your will online at no cost, in just 20 minutes. Visit freewill.com/populationconnection today!





By including Population Connection in her will, Rebecca chose to invest in the future and ensure this essential work continues until we achieve our goal: a people and planet in balance. We are honored to include Rebecca in our ZPG Society!

*Rebecca Weiner,
ZPG Society Member,
and her husband, Mike,
in the Black Hills
of South Dakota*

PLAN FOR YOUR LEGACY

By including a gift to Population Connection in your will or trust, you can ensure our work continues as long as overpopulation threatens our world. After providing for your loved ones, you might consider designating a remainder gift, or a percentage, to Population Connection. Make your legacy one that protects people and our planet well into the future.

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We're partnering with FreeWill to provide this free, legal service.
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POPULATION EDUCATION

Population Education (PopEd) Found Its Feet 50 Years Ago

By Pam Wasserman,
Senior Vice President
for Education

In 2025, PopEd is the only remaining program of its kind in the United States, preparing educators to teach about human population growth and its effects on the environment and human wellbeing. But, in 1975, when Zero Population Growth (ZPG), the founding name of Population Connection, launched PopEd, universal, K-12 population education had the backing of state and national policymakers and teacher associations.

This widespread support for teaching American students about population challenges existed thanks to the environmental movement of the 1960s and 1970s. In 1970, 20 million Americans gathered for the first Earth Day to protest polluted air, river fires, and industrial chemicals poisoning wildlife and drinking water. The public outcry produced dramatic results. In rapid succession, Congress and the Nixon administration created the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and passed bipartisan legislation to ensure clean air and water, protect endangered species, and fund environmental education.

The Environmental Education Act of 1970 set up the US Office of Environmental Education (OEE) within what was then the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, to promote

and fund environmental education programs, teacher training, and curriculum development. The Act defined environmental education as the “educational process dealing with man’s relationship with his natural and manmade surroundings, and includes the relation of population, pollution, resource allocation and depletion, conservation, transportation, technology, and urban and rural planning to the total human environment.”

Advisors to President Nixon went even further, specifically addressing the need for population education. The President’s Commission on Population and the American Future in 1972 proposed the passage of a Population Education Act to “assist school systems in establishing well-planned population education programs so that present and future generations will be better prepared to meet the challenge arising from population change.” While the recommendation was never taken up by Congress, it may have contributed to a growing interest in population studies. Five states (Delaware, Florida, New Jersey, New York, and Washington) acted on their own, mandating the development of teaching materials on population.

Major teacher organizations encouraged the inclusion of population education in school curricula, including the National Education Association, the American Home Economics Association, the National Association of Biology Teachers, and the National Council for the Social Studies.



Teachers represent birth and death rates as the 'Stork' and 'Grim Reaper' in a 1976 PopEd workshop

Baltimore adopted population education as part of the social studies curriculum for all grade levels after hosting a series of well-received workshops for the city's teachers. Those workshops and lessons became the basis of ZPG's first teaching materials. In 1975, the OEE provided a grant of \$27,216 to ZPG to begin conducting population education teacher workshops during the 1975–76 school year. Staff coordinated with state departments of education, university faculty, and environmental organizations to host one- and two-day training sessions for school principals and teachers in Delaware, Florida, Maryland, New Jersey, and Ohio. ZPG's Population Education program was off and running.

A different approach for ZPG

While ZPG had previously published materials to educate the adult public, these were all part of the organization's advocacy efforts to pass policies to stabilize global and US population. The new PopEd program needed to take a different approach, in line with best practices in "value-fair" instruction for K–12 students. That approach has been recommended by educational leaders for



decades. We want students to use critical thinking skills and inquiry to guide their learning around population issues, rather than being told what or how to think.

Elaine Murphy, the first director of the program, explained in a 1978 issue of the *ZPG National Reporter* (the precursor to this magazine):


“Beyond political and legal reasons, there are philosophical reasons — based on beliefs about learning — for avoiding a preachy approach. [...] I believe that long-lasting change comes from a person's own involvement with issues, weighing information and research findings and finally integrating such learning into one's own set of values. That is why ZPG workshops are blends of information and involvement activities that permit participants to draw their own conclusions.”

The scope of the curriculum would include activities to understand population dynamics, how people use finite resources and impact ecosystems, and the social and economic factors that influence population growth in different regions of the world.

The *ZPG Population Education Resource Kit*, published in 1976, was PopEd's first collection of

teacher materials. It included math riddles to illustrate exponential growth and the magnitude of a billion (world population had just reached 4 billion). A global simulation game, Food for Thought, divided the class into world regions to compare data on population growth, wealth, health, energy use, and women's roles. In The Stork and the Grim Reaper, students used different sized measuring cups and bowls of water to demonstrate how birth and death rates change the population. Those activities are all still in use today, along with a dozen more that have stood the test of time.

Sustaining PopEd

The OEE shuttered years ago, and experiments in mandated population education at the state level were short-lived. Fortunately, private funders (ZPG/Population Connection members and foundations) built on that very first government grant in 1975, enabling PopEd to continue developing curricula and hosting workshops. Over the last five decades, PopEd staff and volunteers have trained hundreds of thousands of educators, who have engaged tens of millions of students, in activities for a sustainable future. 



A "Dot" Video for the Ages



Before there was even a PopEd program, there was *World Population: A Graphic Simulation of the History of Human Population Growth*, a short film developed by the ZPG chapter at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale.

Produced in 1972, the film showed the exponential growth of the world's population since 1 CE, with the addition of stick-on dots on a world map, each dot representing 1 million people. The early stop-motion animation was powerful, especially with a soundtrack of a heartbeat, growing louder and faster as the population increased. At the time, the global population was approaching 4 billion people — less than half of what it is today. When ZPG launched PopEd three years later, the "dot video" became a staple of teacher workshops and was soon sold through school suppliers as a 16mm film. It remained on a film reel until our staff developed a new version for VHS in 1990. Global population had just surpassed 5 billion people, and the video projected a 2050 population of 8 billion (28 years later than the actual date that milestone was reached). In 1991, *World Population* took home the prize for Best Ecology Video from an international science film competition in Spain.

Over the next decade, the video's use expanded beyond classrooms to reach a wider audience at museums and science



centers around the world. These included a traveling exhibition hosted by the Smithsonian Institution and National Geographic, and permanent placement in the Hall of Biodiversity at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City.

The “millennium” edition of *World Population* was released in 2000, first on VHS, and later as a

DVD. It was produced by Scott Vance, a graphic designer and longtime ZPG member, who also worked with Seattle’s Woodland Park Zoo to install the video in a new kiosk, linking population growth to habitat loss. Another Seattle landmark, the Starbucks headquarters, licensed use of the video for their new employee training.

Beginning in 2015, a new version streamed from its own microsite, WorldPopulationHistory.org. This edition was produced in multiple languages and is interactive, enabling site visitors to stop the animation at any point and learn more about the populations of different areas, from ancient civilizations to modern megacities. In 2019, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) added the video to its data visualizations playing on Science on a Sphere, a 6-foot, 3D globe with 175 locations around the world. And, of course, it’s still viewed in thousands of classrooms every year.

Plans are underway for a new update to be released in 2027. 🌍



Pam Wasserman and Scott Vance at Seattle’s Woodland Park Zoo *World Population* kiosk in 2002



World Population playing on the traveling exhibition hosted by the Smithsonian Institution and National Geographic in 1996

Empowering Educators for Half a Century

The Volunteers Behind PopEd's Success

By Lindsey Bailey,
Education Network Director

The Population Education (PopEd) program would not be what it is today without the hard work of our trainers. Since the formation of the Population Education Trainers Network (PETNet) in 1987, volunteers have been facilitating PopEd workshops with educators in their local communities, training thousands of teachers on how to cover population issues. We are forever grateful for their commitment that allows our program to thrive.

As we celebrate 50 years, we're looking back at how the network has changed over time, reflecting with some of our longest serving members, and shining a light on the integral role our volunteers play in the success of the PopEd program.

A brief history of the PETNet

We began recruiting educators to become PopEd trainers in the spring of 1987. That first year, just a handful of trainers presented nine workshops. Since then, the PETNet has had a total of over 1,300 volunteer trainers. There are currently nearly 700 educators in the network, representing 46 US states, two US territories, the District of Columbia, and five Canadian provinces.

“This has been one of the most engaging and fun workshops that I have been to.”

We owe much of the growth of our network to the passion of current trainers, who recruit others. Upon joining the network, trainers are invited to attend a train-

the-trainer Leadership Institute, where they learn to lead workshops in their local areas. Since 1990, we've hosted 55 Leadership Institutes, adding hundreds of new volunteers to our network.

To date, our volunteers have facilitated 9,789 workshops, an average of 258 per year, and over half of all PopEd workshops ever led (16,626), enormously contributing to our program reach. Thanks in large part to them, we have trained 330,000 teachers since 1985!

Training educators to teach PopEd

During workshops, trainers lead PopEd lessons as if they were in a K–12 classroom, with teachers participating as if they were students. Trainers showcase best practice pedagogy, model questioning techniques, and ensure that PopEd lessons are relevant to their audience by connecting to state standards and local issues. The feedback we receive about our trainers after workshops is consistently positive.

Each workshop requires a commitment of both time and expertise. In a measure of just how much our volunteers give, we calculate over \$5 million of in-kind contributions of time over the past 20 years, an average of roughly \$240,000 annually.

Volunteers also support our program in other ways. Trainers help to write and review new lesson plans, serve as judges for our annual World of 8 Billion student video contest, co-present webinars with our staff, and advise on the ever-changing education landscape.

Reflections from four long-serving volunteer trainers

We are fortunate to have many volunteers whose dedication to PopEd has been unwavering over the years. Through shifts in environmental policy, evolving curriculum standards and testing, and the more recent politicization of science-backed topics like climate change, many in our network have continually brought PopEd into their communities in effective ways.

I had the pleasure of talking with some of these remarkable educators to get a better understanding of what drives them to stay involved, how their workshop presenting has changed over the years, and what they love most about PopEd.

Susan Schleith

Program Director of K12 Education
FLORIDA SOLAR ENERGY CENTER



Since joining us in 1995,

Susan has trained 680 educators via 30 presentations.

Through her role at the Florida Solar Energy Center, Susan links population growth to growing global energy demand and our changing

climate. She has used PopEd’s “dot video” in many of the Center’s educational materials over the years to make a powerful visual link between growing human numbers and the need for more sustainable energy sources. “To me, energy is everything. Everyone needs energy to survive, and the more people there are on the planet, the more energy we use. That’s why we have climate issues, and we’ve got to do something.”

A favorite lesson of Susan’s is Food for Thought, which takes a critical look at energy inequities around the world. She has also enjoyed sharing one of our newer activities, People and Climate Change: The Data Is In, where students analyze data on CO₂ emissions, warming global temperatures, land ice melt, and sea level rise. On teaching topics like climate change over the years, especially in her home state of Florida, Susan said, “The pendulum swings, and you learn to still convey the facts, just using different words.”

Asked why she’s been a volunteer for so long, Susan expressed her deep belief in the PopEd mission, adding, “PopEd has created engaging, relevant activities that have impact. I appreciate having access to such good, solid material that is science-based, and that’s why I do it.”

Michael Bentley

Retired Associate Professor of Science
and Environmental Education

UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE, KNOXVILLE



Michael has always had a passion for population studies. He taught a population biology course to high school students for many years, and read Paul Ehrlich's *The Population Bomb* as soon as it came

out. He joined us in 2003, and has trained over 1,200 teachers and counting.

Michael's favorite 'hook' in workshops is to share that since his birth in 1946, the global population has more than tripled. He also likes to introduce the concept of carrying capacity using the lesson The Stork and the Grim Reaper, which uses water to show the relationship between birth and death rates.

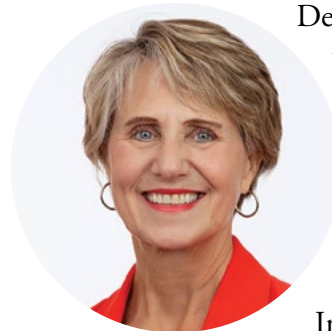
I asked Michael if he's noticed any changes over time in how educators react to PopEd lessons. "I have always found teachers very receptive to the activities because they are not complicated and they use readily available materials," he said. "They are engaging, and the lesson plans are so clear about what the teachers need to do."

Michael's passion for population and the environment is one of the reasons he's stayed engaged with PopEd for over 20 years. He monitors population and climate statistics around the world and noted that it's important to focus on climate mitigation and resilience: "We've already crossed so many boundaries, so the real effort has to be in mitigation and resilience. We have to get the message across to people who will be teaching."

Deb Gallagher

Retired Professor of Math and Science
Education

BOWLING GREEN STATE UNIVERSITY, OHIO



Deb first learned about the PopEd program when she attended a workshop at Bowling Green State University in the late '90s. Since attending a PopEd Leadership Institute in 2002, she's

led 58 workshops and

reached over 1,100 educators.

Deb's passion is middle-childhood education, especially in math and science. One of her favorite PopEd lessons is Measuring a Million, which teaches students about the scale of millions and billions to help them understand just how big our global population is. She also gravitates to lessons like Power of the Pyramids that use real-world data to explore global issues.

She shared that teachers have always loved the lessons, but that there is now more rigidity in what they must cover in classrooms. When presenting today, she's careful to emphasize how PopEd lessons "are not just fun, they really do align and are a great way to teach [state education] standards."

When asked why she's volunteered for so long, Deb responded that the data is always current and reputable, and she appreciates the support of PopEd staff in planning workshops. But ultimately, she said, seeing the enthusiasm of the teachers she trains is the most rewarding, and she loves to hear their stories later on about how they've used PopEd lessons.

Helen de la Maza

Science Specialist with the IRVINE
UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT; Lecturer at
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, IRVINE



Helen attended a Leadership Institute in Long Beach in 2001 and has been a go-to trainer in southern California ever since, reaching over 1,200 educators through 66 workshops.

When asked about her favorite lessons to present, Helen said, “Any that focus on sustainability and awareness raising; the idea that we, especially here in the United States, have access to resources and we can make choices about how we use and interact with those resources.” She shared that one of her favorite lessons is For the Common Good, where students compete for shared resources in a commons, noting that “it really shows what people are motivated by and how people think.” She also loves Who Polluted the Potomac, and has adapted the interactive story to reflect pollution of the San Diego creek over time.

When talking about why she’s stayed committed to the volunteer network, she pointed to the steady leadership of Pam Wasserman, Senior Vice President for Education, and the way support from our team allows her to feel “backed” and “empowered.” She also appreciates how PopEd has adapted to increased technology use in classrooms, mentioning her love of our WorldPopulationHistory.org microsite and the set of digital tools that now accompany PopEd activities.

ON SUSAN SCHLEITH:

“The facilitator was energetic and engaging throughout the whole workshop. It was obvious that she is passionate about the topic.”

–Pre-service student at University of Central Florida

ON MICHAEL BENTLEY:

“Loved the commitment of the presenter. Easy to understand and do. I will recommend. Made the numbers talk.”

–Participant at Virginia Science Teachers Association conference

ON DEB GALLAGHER:

“Great energy and passion for her material.”

–Participant at Ohio Middle Level conference

ON HELEN DE LA MAZA:

“Helen was very detailed, perfectly paced, and easy to understand. Great presentation.”

–Participant at CA STEAM Symposium

We know that the sentiments of these four longtime volunteers are echoed among the hundreds of trainers in our network. If we could, we would feature every single one of our PETNet trainers for the amazing work they do with teachers on the ground and for tirelessly lending their expertise to build a stronger PopEd program and a more just and sustainable world. 🌍

An Interview with PopEd's Longtime Leader, Pam Wasserman

Intro and questions by Marian Starkey,
Vice President for Communications

Pam Wasserman, Senior Vice President for Education, is the longest-serving employee of Population Connection by several years. She joined the professional staff with a passion for reproductive rights and environmental preservation in 1988, when the organization was still called Zero Population Growth, or ZPG (and when the world population was only 5 billion!). She came here soon after completing a fellowship at the Population Institute, which she did after earning a degree in American Civilization with a focus on American Education from Brown University.



Pam has seen talented colleagues come and go, has worked with dozens of dedicated board members, and has observed Americans' awareness of and attitude toward population challenges ebb and flow.

It's hard to say where the Population Education program would be without Pam's steadfast leadership over the past few decades. She and her staff have improved and expanded the curriculum and have ensured its continued relevance in a rapidly changing world. The result is a one-of-a-kind program used by about 50,000 teachers to reach 3 million K-12 students each year.

How has the PopEd model changed since the early days of the program? Is there any aspect of it that has remained the same or similar?

There are many aspects of the early model that are the same. Workshops are still built around hands-on activities — games, group simulations, demonstrations, and problem-solving activities — that are designed to be memorable and to motivate students to be responsible global citizens. At least 15 of the earliest activities are still in use (and have been updated as needed). That's because the basic concepts of



Pam facilitates a population estimation activity at a Leadership Institute in Arkansas in 2017

population dynamics and the interdependence of people and the environment are still relevant.

From the time we started our Population Education Trainers Network (PETNet) nearly 40 years ago, volunteers have been an important way we expand our outreach to more current and future teachers. Over half of our workshops each year are for pre-service teachers (college students who are getting

certified to teach). That's been a target audience for PopEd since the 1980s.

Our workshops have evolved technologically. We've come a long way from the old film reels and overhead projectors. All our materials are digital, and, in addition to in-person workshops, we now facilitate many virtual workshops. This started of necessity during the pandemic, but is now an integral part of how we meet

teachers and student teachers where they are.

Part of the program's growth has been driven by teachers. They've asked for materials adapted for specific student populations such as English language learners and gifted students, which we've eagerly developed. We also align our materials to changing curriculum standards in all 50 states and 10 Canadian provinces, to make it easier for teachers to include PopEd in their course plans.



Participants at the 2025 PopEd Leadership Institute in Los Angeles (Pam in green at bottom right)

Have the evolving demographic and environmental challenges and successes of the past half-century affected the content or framing of the teaching materials?

Absolutely. One of the earliest activities, Food for Thought, gets updated every two to three years as the data changes around global demographics, energy use, and gender equality. It's been heartening to see many of the trends moving in a positive direction, such as an increasing percentage of girls in school, a growing middle class, declining child mortality rates, and rising life expectancy.

Creating and analyzing population pyramids has been part of our secondary curricula for many years, and we've seen the shape of those pyramids change for most countries as fertility rates have fallen and populations have aged.

Fifty years ago, climate change wasn't on most people's radar screens, let alone in school curriculum. We began including activities on global warming in our 1990 high school materials, long before it was a standard topic for the K–12 science classroom. In more recent years, we've added activities on

ocean health, e-waste, aquifer depletion, and megacities, and have linked our activities to the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

You mentioned some health and development indicators that have improved. What about environmental indicators — has there been improvement to any of those?

There has. Air and water quality have improved tremendously in the US and many other parts of the world. We've successfully tackled ozone depletion in the atmosphere and reduced emissions that cause acid rain. The use of renewable energy has soared in recent years, so those are all good news stories for us to share with teachers and students. But they also need to know that progress can only be maintained if the public presses politicians to uphold laws and international agreements.

Have any of the lessons needed to be updated because health and development indicators have gotten worse?

There was a drop in life expectancy during the pandemic. There's also been backsliding on the childhood vaccination rate because of the interruption in health services

during the pandemic and also because of misinformation making more parents hesitant to vaccinate their children.

For the most part, global health trends have been positive, but in some areas, including maternal mortality and food security, we haven't made as large a gain as many had hoped. One of our activities compares a variety of health indicators for countries around the globe, so we're regularly updating those numbers.

It's remarkable that the US once had an Office of Environmental Education, which gave PopEd its founding grant, and that educators across the country are now facing attempts by some in power to censor lessons about climate change and other environmental crises. How has this changing educational landscape affected PopEd, if at all?

It's also remarkable, by today's standards, that environmental education had broad, bipartisan support back in the 1970s. By the mid-1990s, a right-wing anti-environmentalism movement emerged, claiming that school children were being brainwashed by "environmental extremists." This was a

precursor to today's anti-science disinformation.

While climate science has become part of most states' adopted science education standards over the past 10–15 years, politicians have started censoring textbooks and lesson plans. Last year, Florida outright banned textbooks that mentioned climate change. So, our volunteer trainers around the country advise us on what they can and can't include in the PopEd workshops they present.

Fortunately, there are bright spots. Two popular Advanced Placement (AP) courses, Environmental Science and Human Geography, are offered in many high schools, and both courses include entire units on human population dynamics and connections to the environment.

How do these challenges compare to what you see happening in education in Canada, where PopEd also works?

The provincial curriculum in Canada tends to be more globally focused, and geography education is emphasized more by our northern neighbors. That provides an opening for including PopEd resources. There's also more uniformity in the curriculum within and

between provinces, so not as much of a patchwork as you find with what is taught in US schools.

Why hasn't PopEd ever gotten involved in sex education? Is it just because the field was already full, or was it more of a conscious decision to focus on population and environmental studies over reproductive health?

From the start, the PopEd program defined itself as being separate from sex education. At the time, quality materials and teacher training were available from other organizations, such as Planned Parenthood, that specialized in teen reproductive health.

Sex education is primarily included in middle and high school health classes. PopEd curricula was developed to be integrated into social studies and science instruction. It was conceived (no pun intended) to make the connections between population trends, natural resource use, food security, ecosystem health, and human wellbeing around the globe. We also present many workshops for K–5 teachers who teach all subjects, so we make sure our activities also bring in math and language arts.

Is there any topic the PopEd program is newly covering or plans to begin covering in the near future?

We're trying to keep up with the very rapid changes in artificial intelligence (AI), especially in terms of how teachers find us in their digital searches for curriculum. In updating our high school curriculum this year, we included a new case study reading on two very low-fertility countries (South Korea and Mauritius) so students can explore the different conditions that contributed to those trends. Zoonotic diseases are part of a secondary activity on how infectious diseases spread. So, yes, we're always trying to stay current. When choosing the topics for our student video contest each year, we also ask teachers and students for the issues on their minds.

What prompted the introduction of the World of 7 Billion (now the World of 8 Billion) student video contest in 2010? Why did you want to work directly with students?

Student contests have been part of PopEd's program for several decades. Before the video contest, we challenged students with writing and art projects.

In 1998, we hosted the Pop TV Contest, in which students had to write a plot treatment for a current TV show that included content on population. I remember winning entries for *Seinfeld* and *The Simpsons*. In 2002, we received close to 5,000 entries for a radio PSA contest titled “And Now ... a Word From Our Planet.”

When we were approaching the 7 billion milestone, we decided to change up the media to video since so many students had access to smartphones and small camcorders. It was meant to be a one-time event. When we didn’t host it the following year, we heard from lots of teachers asking us to bring it back. It’s been a part of our program ever since. We’ve had 55,000 students from all 50 states and 105 countries participate. We launched our 15th video contest this fall!

If you could lift one barrier or change one policy or trend that affects PopEd, what would it be?

The biggest barrier to expanding our outreach to more teachers is the decline of young people entering the teaching profession. Over the past 15 years, the number of students enrolled in teacher preparation programs has dropped by




Staff in 2002 read entries to “And Now ... a Word From Our Planet”

more than a third. It’s a high-stress job, and teachers aren’t paid what they’re worth. More censorship and less teacher autonomy have turned many schools into stifling workplaces. Over half of our PopEd workshops are for pre-service teachers, but those university class sizes have been shrinking. If policymakers care about building an educated electorate and workforce, they’d do more to elevate the teaching profession in the US.

Lastly, do you think there will still be a place in K-12 education for

PopEd 50 years from now?

Everything is shifting so quickly in our world that it’s difficult to make predictions for a year from now, let alone 50 years!

PopEd stays viable as long as we keep it current. According to the UN medium projection, in 50 years, the global population will be nearing its peak. But there will always be a need for education on the delicate balance of people and the environment, and on the benefits of raising living standards and providing equal opportunities everywhere. 

GLOBAL PARTNERS

Wuqu' Kawoq (Maya Health Alliance)

By Marian Starkey, Vice President for Communications

This unique organization, headquartered in Tecpán, Chimaltenango, in the Central Highlands of Guatemala, was co-founded by American cultural anthropologist Anne Kraemer. Anne fell in love with Guatemala when she visited in 2003 and then returned as a Fulbright Scholar in 2007 to perform an ethnography on the effects of NGOs on rural Guatemalan communities. She and leaders in the Maya Kaqchikel town of Santiago, Sacatepéquez, established Wuqu' Kawoq (also known as Maya Health Alliance) that year, at the request of the community, and Anne has served as Executive Director/CEO since 2009. The following article draws from presentations Anne gave during Population Connection virtual events in 2023 and 2025.

Reaching the country's most marginalized people

Although recent data isn't available, family sizes in Indigenous communities are observably larger than in Ladino (the Guatemalan term for Spanish-speaking people of mixed Indigenous and European ancestry) communities. Higher fertility — in a country that already has one of the highest fertility rates in Latin American — is one reason that Mayan women are three times as likely as non-Indigenous women in Guatemala to die from preventable pregnancy-related causes. Each pregnancy and delivery presents its own risks, and when pregnancies occur

too early or without adequate spacing in between, those risks multiply.

Another reason for poor maternal health outcomes among Indigenous women is that most providers in Guatemala speak only Spanish, leaving them and their patients without a fluent way to communicate with one another. Many Indigenous women report that they would rather die at home than be treated in a hospital where they might be ignored, misunderstood, or mistreated.

Wuqu' Kawoq therefore places great emphasis on employing people who share the language and culture of their patients. Nearly all (95%) of the 130-person staff

are Guatemalan, and 80% are Indigenous Maya. Over 30 nurses and community health workers deliver linguistically and culturally appropriate care in nine Guatemalan departments, in seven languages, and only at the invitation of the community. Nurses are either from the very community they're serving or from another one nearby.

Recognizing that some patients will inevitably require advanced medical care during their pregnancies, Wuqu' Kawoq midwives co-designed an app that monitors and detects problems and then helps Indigenous providers translate and coordinate care for women who need to go to a hospital. This makes a

stressful situation a little less traumatic for patients and their families and providers.

Reducing physical and cultural barriers to health care

Wuqu' Kawoq is always looking for ways to reach patients where they're most comfortable. One way they achieve this is through home-based health education classes that teach attendees about sexual and reproductive health and health throughout the

life cycle. After they have taken part in these classes, participants are offered the full range of contraceptive methods — they can have a long-acting method inserted or implanted or a short-acting method injected or given in the form of pills or condoms. This home-based approach reduces barriers related to distance, cost, and patient-provider trust. Those who request a permanent method (tubal ligation or vasectomy) are referred to WINGS

Guatemala, another Population Connection Global Partner. *Machismo* is an important cultural barrier that women often struggle to overcome when they are interested in beginning to use a contraceptive method. Many women are worried about their husbands' reaction to them wanting to delay or prevent pregnancy. Knowing this, Wuqu' Kawoq employs men who go out into communities and speak directly with other men about family planning, reproductive health, and healthy family relationships. Getting men on board with family planning increases contraceptive uptake and leads to longer and more consistent use of methods.

A worthy investment

The majority of funding for Wuqu' Kawoq comes from individuals and foundations in the US, Canada, and Europe. All services are provided completely free to patients. In 2024, over 10,000 patients received primary care and services related to women's health, maternal health, child malnutrition, diabetes, and complex care at nearly 36,000 care visits. Close to 2,000 women received testing for cervical cancer, the second deadliest cancer among women in Guatemala, and over 3,900 women received family planning methods. 🌍

Visit wuqukawoq.org to learn more!



Glendy, a community health worker with Wuqu' Kawoq, checks a patient's contraceptive implant, which had been inserted a couple weeks earlier | Photo by Hannah Evans, March 2025

VIRTUAL EVENTS

Guatemalan Global Partners Series

By Natalie Widel, Director of Digital Marketing

Did you know that we host virtual events open to all Population Connection members and supporters every month of the year? Topics and guests vary — we may be celebrating Earth Day, discussing a nonfiction publication as part of our Page Turners book club, or featuring an expert from an organization we respect and admire.

Over the summer and fall, we hosted a special series of virtual events moderated by Senior Analyst Hannah Evans. Earlier this year, Hannah traveled to Guatemala to visit several of our Global Partners. During her site visits, she met with staff and local people who volunteer with and benefit from the programs these organizations provide, gaining an up-close look at the impact these small but mighty organizations are having on their communities.

Seeds for a Future

This organization provides long-term training and support to rural families and communities in Guatemala, enabling them to grow their own healthy and sustainable food. Their initiatives combat malnutrition, lead to more reliable food security, and increase families' incomes when they grow a surplus that they can sell to community members. Executive Director Leilani Yats joined Hannah to discuss the founding of Seeds, describe how the organization has grown, and share stories from families who have participated in their programs.



"My favorite part is growing the seeds, learning how to put them in the soil, and eating healthy food. I know that the seeds are nutritious and healthy, organic, without contaminants. I also love teaching other people how to grow healthy food like this."

**CARMENINA, FIELD TEAM MEMBER
SEEDS FOR A FUTURE**

Wuqu' Kawoq

Also known as Maya Health Alliance, Wuqu' Kawoq provides high quality health care services in rural regions of Guatemala. Their community-based approach is rooted in

communicating with patients in their own Indigenous languages and respecting local cultures to overcome barriers to care and improve maternal and infant health, chronic disease outcomes, and

women's health throughout the lifecycle. Co-founder and CEO Anne Kraemer described the organization's founding mission and key programs and how they fit within Guatemala's existing — and sometimes lacking — health care system.

WINGS Guatemala

From expanding access to family planning in remote communities to empowering adolescents and adults with vital health education, WINGS is making a profound difference for thousands of people in Guatemala. During this session, Executive Director Eleanor Unsworth and Programs Director Erik Pocasangre joined Hannah to discuss the organization's programs and why their work is so important to the communities they serve.

Manos Abiertas

Asociación Manos Abiertas (AMA) delivers holistic, rights-based reproductive



**DIANA, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
MANOS ABIERTAS**

"If you have resources, quality care is widely available. Patient-centered care, however, is not widely available — it's not really a concept that has arrived here yet. As midwives, though, patient-centered care is just how we do it."



**GLENDY, COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKER
MAYA HEALTH ALLIANCE**

"Everything we do here at Maya Health Alliance is important. We provide family planning services and cancer screenings, and we educate women about their health so that they can make their own decisions about their bodies."



**ERIK, PROGRAMS DIRECTOR
WINGS GUATEMALA**

"For me, the work that WINGS does is that it's giving the power back to the women and giving the power back to the communities, so at the end, whether they decide that they want to have a [family planning] method or not, just making sure that they can decide what happens to their bodies for themselves gives their power back."

health care to vulnerable populations in Guatemala. AMA has grown to employ an all-women team of midwives and nurses, most of whom are of Mayan descent. During this event, Hannah shared

testimonials from interviews with AMA staff that shed light on reproductive health care challenges faced by Guatemalan women. Midwife and Executive Director Diana Freiwald described the organization's programs, and emphasized the role of midwives in providing compassionate and high-quality pregnancy, labor, and delivery care. 🌍

Recordings of each of these events are available at popconnect.org/virtual-events/2025-virtual-events-archive/. We hope you'll join us for more exciting events in 2026!

Trump Administration Continues Relentless Attacks on Reproductive Health and Rights

By Brian Dixon, Senior Vice President for Governmental and Political Affairs

Administration plots massive expansion of Global Gag Rule

Rumors of a planned expansion of the Global Gag Rule have been circulating for weeks. While nothing official has been released by the State Department, news reports suggest that the policy will be applied to all non-military foreign aid — it will be attached to assistance provided to multilateral agencies, foreign governments, and US-based NGOs that have previously been exempted because of First Amendment protections. In addition, the restrictions will likely be expanded to prohibit work on “gender ideology” and DEI.

The news of the planned expansion closely follows the State Department’s release of the America First Global Health Strategy, which proposes to push NGOs out of the delivery of health care. It also suggests that the administration will largely withdraw from Africa and

focus assistance instead on Latin America and Asia, despite the fact that African nations have the highest need.

These new policies will compound the harm of the administration’s previous work to eliminate aid to family planning programs — and many other global health efforts — around the world. They seem designed to press other governments to adopt American right-wing positions on these policies, and will force many agencies to choose between US foreign assistance and assistance from other countries.

Evidence from decades of the Global Gag Rule show unequivocally that this policy inflicts real harm. It causes massive shortages in contraceptives, the elimination of community health outreach, and the closure of clinics. It also results in significant increases in unsafe abortion. Its expansion, when it should instead be outright repealed, is disgraceful.

Contraceptives remain warehoused

Nearly \$10 million worth of taxpayer purchased contraceptives remain stuck in a Belgian warehouse. These were acquired by USAID for distribution in sub-Saharan Africa prior to the Trump administration’s elimination of the aid agency. The State Department is threatening to incinerate these desperately needed pills, injectables, and implants, but Belgian law prohibits the destruction of usable medications without special approval and a fee. While the commodities are still usable as of now, a recent estimate suggests that, due to nearing expiration dates, some \$3.5 million worth of these commodities will no longer be usable by mid-2026.

Multiple NGOs and foreign governments have offered to purchase the contraceptives but have been rebuffed by the State Department.

The Saving Lives and Taxpayer Dollars Act, introduced by

Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH) and Brian Schatz (D-HI) in the Senate and Gregory Meeks (D-NY), Grace Meng (D-NY), and Lois Frankel (D-FL) in the House, would prevent the destruction of these contraceptives and other commodities purchased as part of US international assistance efforts. The legislation was offered as an amendment to the annual State Department funding bill in the House Appropriations Committee, where it was rejected. Every Democrat present voted in support, and every Republican in the room voted “no.”

In addition, 83 members of the House sent a letter to the State Department Inspector General on July 31, demanding an investigation into the destruction. “Incinerating contraceptives that are viable, with no rush and clear demand, is the equivalent of lighting US taxpayer dollars on fire,” they wrote. They added, “This pattern of intentional incineration at the expense of the US taxpayer is financially wasteful, morally bankrupt, and an attack on the American humanitarian tradition. These actions place ideological beliefs and politics above a faithful commitment to US law, contracts, and humanitarian agreements.”

“This pattern of intentional incineration at the expense of the US taxpayer is financially wasteful, morally bankrupt, and an attack on the American humanitarian tradition. These actions place ideological beliefs and politics above a faithful commitment to US law, contracts, and humanitarian agreements.”

On September 11, Senator Shaheen said, “Incinerating these life-saving supplies is inhumane, wasteful, and out of step with American values.”

White House uses shutdown to shutter domestic family planning program


The White House Budget Director is attempting to use the ongoing government shutdown to eliminate thousands of federal employees. On October 10, nearly every staff member in the Department of Health and Human Services’ Office of Population Affairs, which oversees the \$286.5 million Title X (ten) domestic family planning program, was laid off.

Title X was created in 1970 by President Richard Nixon to provide contraceptives and reproductive health care to lower-income Americans.

In 2023, an estimated 2.8 million Americans received Title X subsidized care. The program is an essential part of

community preventive health in this country.

The layoffs are just the latest effort to cripple Title X. Earlier this year, the administration froze \$35 million in grants, causing clinics serving patients who rely on the program to close. In conjunction with massive cuts to Medicaid and the exorbitant increase in the cost of health insurance premiums coming as a result of the budget bill passed by Congress, this move threatens to put contraceptives and other reproductive health care out of reach for millions of Americans.

In other news from the Department of Health and Human Services, the Secretary is calling for a “review” of the FDA’s approval of mifepristone, which occurred a quarter-century ago, in 2000. If this review is like the other “studies” promoted by RFK Jr, we can expect it to be deeply flawed and filled with misinformation and crackpottery. 

FIELD + OUTREACH

Introducing Our New Organizing Manager, Isabel Song

By Rebecca Harrington, Senior Director of Advocacy and Outreach

Isabel Song got “bitten by the organizing bug” in 2015 during her freshman year at the University of California, Berkeley, after a friend invited her to a debate watch party. One of her earliest field wins was coordinating a group of students to canvass for Bernie Sanders in Reno, in advance of the 2016 Nevada caucus. While she describes this as her most stressful time in college, she was invigorated by her efforts to recruit 40 students to join the canvass, fundraise to transport them from Berkeley to Reno, secure housing (they all slept in the Reno campaign office their first night in town), and coordinate door knocking efforts with the Bernie campaign. It was cold, and there was still snow on the ground, but Isabel thought to herself in those moments that this was something she wanted to do again and again.



Isabel started college on a pre-med track, with hopes of becoming a pediatric oncologist. She realized though that she was much more motivated by advocating for access to health care than eventually providing services herself. (She also realized she hated studying chemistry and physics.) So, during her third year of college, she switched her major to political science.

She organized on campus throughout the first Trump administration, running phone banks, coordinating volunteer events, and helping local campaigns and initiatives around housing and food access. Isabel is an organizer to

her core. She loves connecting with people, recruiting them, and then watching as they grow into volunteer leaders.

Her first professional organizing job was as a field organizer with Elizabeth Warren’s 2020 presidential campaign, crisscrossing the huge district in Los Angeles County that she was assigned. There was a volunteer in her turf who opened up her house to Isabel, allowing her to host phone banks there, and offering her a place to take a break or eat dinner. She would send Isabel home after each visit with a bag of citrus from her own trees and a parental reminder to “get [her] vitamin C and not get sick.”

“I’m excited to join the #Fight4HER because everyone deserves access to reproductive health care, regardless of where they live in the world. Organizing is about building a better world for all of us.”

– Isabel Song

Another volunteer asked his parents if their garage could be used as a staging area. From there, huddled over a space heater, Isabel launched door knocking canvasses and hosted phone banks while her volunteer’s parents brought out warmed orange slices to keep them energized. During her time on the Warren campaign, Isabel cultivated an impressive 178 volunteers who knocked on 4,359 doors across the district.

Days after Senator Warren suspended her campaign for president, the world shut down due to the pandemic. Just as Isabel had gotten confident in her professional advocacy skills, she had to learn a whole new way of organizing, when she started her next job as a youth constituency organizer for Katie Porter’s successful congressional re-election campaign.

By the time Isabel got a job as a campaign organizing director for the Democratic Congressional Campaign


Committee (DCCC) in 2021, she was a well-seasoned leader who was ready to manage other organizers and push volunteers up the ladder of engagement. As Isabel was building her field team, she knew that she “wanted [her] volunteers to leave as organizers” and worked hard to meet that goal. Isabel and her team partnered with down-ballot Democratic candidates so voters wouldn’t only prioritize the top of the ticket. They knocked on 125,000 doors, made more than 680,000 calls, and sent more than 290,000 peer-to-peer texts.

In 2023, Isabel began working as the DCCC West Regional Organizing Director. In this position, she managed organizing programs in competitive congressional districts across Washington, Oregon, and California, where she and her teams successfully flipped four Republican seats in 2024, while keeping Democrats in control of the seats they already held. They

also participated in multiple weeks of ballot curing in California — the process of reviewing ballots to correct minor errors that are usually the result of voter signature issues with mail-in ballots. This task kept Isabel and her teams busy until their last race was called in December, highlighting the importance of talking with every voter and carefully reviewing every ballot.

Isabel was drawn to working at Population Connection from a desire to resist the dismantling of reproductive rights here in the US and around the world. After multiple cycles of electoral organizing, in which work with volunteers ends on Election Day, she was also interested in cultivating volunteers for a long-term effort like the #Fight4HER campaign.

Isabel is a voracious reader — she has already devoured 217 books this year, mostly in the science fiction and romance genres. She’s also a proud Swiftie (fan of Taylor Swift) and has been fortunate to see her perform live three times in Los Angeles.

Despite the awful political times we’re living in, Isabel remains firmly committed to field organizing. Her talent, creativity, and dedication to global reproductive health and rights are a huge asset to our team. We are delighted to have her join us and are excited for all the great work she’ll do in 2026 and beyond. 

CARTOON



“I remember when it was all enchanted forest around here.”

Cartoon by Len Hawkins, courtesy of CartoonStock.com



We are honored to include Julian and Kathy Donahue in our ZPG Society. In addition to having included Population Connection as a beneficiary of their trust, the Donahues have given through their IRA by making a **qualified charitable distribution** to Population Connection.

Contact us or your IRA administrator to find out if a QCD is right for you!

*Kathy and Julian Donahue
ZPG Society Members*

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To learn more visit popconnect.org/support, email giving@popconnect.org, or call **202-974-7756**.



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As the end of the year approaches, you might consider a tax-advantageous gift to Population Connection.

You may wish to consider:

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- Designating a gift through your donor-advised fund
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