



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Gardens Collaborate to Diversify STEM Workforce and Mentor the Next Generation of Scientists

Research program focused on expanding opportunities for individuals interested in botany, plant science, and conservation

San Diego, Calif. (January 2024) – Four public gardens, including [Atlanta Botanical Garden](#), [California Botanic Garden](#), [San Diego Botanic Garden](#), and [The Morton Arboretum](#), are collaborating to diversify the STEM workforce through a paid training and mentorship program for individuals who have completed a bachelor's degree.

Now in its second year, the Rare Plant RaMP (Research & Mentoring for Post-baccalaureates in Biological Sciences) network was developed to investigate the unprecedented global decline of plant biodiversity while also broadening the experience of individuals who were not able to participate extensively in research during their undergraduate studies. The program consists of yearlong immersive opportunities to work alongside science teams at participating botanic gardens. It is specifically intended for first-generation college students, individuals from low-income households, and those from groups historically excluded from STEM.

“My RaMP experience has afforded me the opportunity to work on vital skills that are essential to my academic career goals,” said Erica Fontanez, current mentee at California Botanic Garden. “I have been able to gain field, lab, and coding experience, as well as communications skills. I feel privileged to have been chosen for an opportunity in which I have seen places and plants that I otherwise would not have seen, and have met like-minded people that will have a lasting impact on my life.”

Funded by the National Science Foundation, the innovative network empowers mentees to perform both independent and collaborative research to advance their careers. In the first year of the program, eight total mentees from across the country were selected to work on a myriad of hands-on projects focused on plant conservation, botanical surveying, seed banking dynamics, ecology, genetics, and more to help safeguard rare and endangered plants against threats like habitat destruction and climate change.

“RaMP is so valuable because of its real world contribution to research driven conservation projects at world class botanic gardens,” said Gavin Salas, a current mentee at The Morton Arboretum. “Taking on an independent research project has immensely improved my technical and professional skills, including communication, teamwork, data management, and computer coding, making me well equipped for further training at the graduate level.”



Examples of mentorship project opportunities at each institution include:

- **Atlanta Botanic Garden:** Assessing species boundaries in the North American carnivorous plant group, with a focus on the sweet pitcher plant (*Sarracenia rubra*).
- **California Botanic Garden:** Conducting a population genetic study to develop tools that aid in the protection of succulent plants currently being targeted by poachers.
- **San Diego Botanic Garden:** Analyzing rare medicinal plants such as yerba santa (*Eriodictyon*) for treatment of neurodegenerative diseases and *Artemisia* for antimalarial compounds.
- **The Morton Arboretum:** Assisting in the creation of conservation groves for threatened oaks in the Southeastern U.S.

In addition to first-hand research experience, RaMP mentees participate in activities to foster professional development and networking opportunities, including bi-weekly meetings with peers from participating gardens; exchange visits and workshops at other academic, government or industry labs; and attendance at the annual Center for Plant Conservation (CPC) conference to present research alongside their peers. A yearly stipend with benefits, including travel expenses to attend conferences and workshops, is provided.

Applications are now open through March 15, 2024. Program eligibility applies to individuals who are first-generation college graduates, individuals from low-income households, or those from groups historically excluded from STEM. Participants must have completed a bachelor's degree before participating in the program (applicants must apply to the program before or within four years of graduation, with extensions allowed for family, medical leave, or military service). Individuals cannot be currently enrolled or accepted into a graduate program and must be U.S. citizens, U.S. nationals, or permanent residents of the United States.

For more information about the program and applications, visit the website [here](#).

About the Partner Institutions

Atlanta Botanical Garden:

The mission of the Atlanta Botanical Garden is to develop and maintain plant collections for display, education, research, conservation and enjoyment. Its Southeastern Center for Conservation is a hub for regional partners engaged in collaborative plant conservation research. The Garden is located at 1345 Piedmont Ave. NE, Atlanta, GA 30309. For information, visit atlantabg.org or phone 404-876-5859.

California Botanic Garden:

California Botanic Garden is dedicated to California native plants, promoting botany, conservation and horticulture to inspire and educate the public and scientific community



about California's native flora. The Garden is a living museum with curated collections of more than 22,000 California native plants, some of which are rare or endangered. Spread across 86 acres in Claremont, California, CalBG displays about 2000 taxa of California plants and includes those native to the California Floristic Province. Garden staff are also active in research, conservation, and restoration programs across Southern California. More info: www.calbg.org.

San Diego Botanic Garden:

Established in 1970, San Diego Botanic Garden (SDBG) is a 37-acre urban oasis located in Encinitas, California, just north of San Diego. The Garden's four miles of trails and 8,000 square foot glass conservatory display more than 5,300 plant species and varieties. A premiere institution for botanical science and conservation, SDBG is actively involved in conservation horticulture, botany, and applied plant sciences to address our biggest local and global challenges, from biodiversity loss to climate change, food insecurity to environmental degradation. SDBG has the largest public bamboo collection in North America; gardens representing different regions and flora of the world; and demonstration gardens showcasing fruits and vegetables, water-smart ornamentals, and native plants. Through an array of educational programming, events and activities for both children and adults, the Garden aims to create, share, and apply plant wisdom to the world. Learn more at sdbg.org. | FB [@SDBotanicGarden](https://www.facebook.com/SDBotanicGarden) | Instagram [@sandiegobotanicgarden](https://www.instagram.com/sandiegobotanicgarden) | Twitter [@SDBGarden](https://twitter.com/SDBGarden) | TikTok [@sandiegobotanicgarden](https://www.tiktok.com/@sandiegobotanicgarden)

The Morton Arboretum:

The Morton Arboretum is an internationally recognized tree-focused botanical garden and research center near Chicago in Lisle, Illinois. Its 1,700 acres include specialty tree and plant collections, 9 miles of roads and 16 miles of hiking trails, a central Grand Garden, Children's Garden, educational programs and a Visitor Center. Additional information about the Arboretum's scientific work and how it contributes to a greener, healthier world for future generations can be found at mortonarb.org.

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