

Toyota and Jane Goodall's Roots & Shoots: Year Two of Inspiring Young Environmentalists

May 19, 2025

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Toyota expands support to six Roots & Shoots events in 2024 to build excitement for kids to work for a cleaner, healthier planet.

In a world increasingly aware of environmental challenges, building awareness in young people to start small and tackle the issues they care about most can make a big, positive difference, according to the Jane Goodall Institute. It is a belief that Toyota agrees with and why the company has been supporting the institute's youth-action program, Roots & Shoots, since 2023. The combined effort helps to provide local school groups with opportunities to participate in projects that support the environment, finding ways they can take personal actions to improve the planet – and the number of program events is expanding here in the United States.

The idea isn't just to get kids out of the classroom and into nature – although that's part of it. The Roots & Shoots program offers tools and curriculum to teach students that small things they do today to help humans, animals and the environment can add up. Using tools like the 4-Step Formula, the program encourages participants to imagine positive actions, such as community-service projects that will help them connect with each other, projects they can carry out with their friends, classmates, and larger community.

“We show kids how they can take something they're interested in, find ways they help address a problem, and then be part of the solution,” said Nikki Tanzer, environmental engineer at Toyota San Antonio. “I've never seen a bored kid at one of our events.”

During the first year of Toyota support, there were four combined events in the U.S., which received positive feedback from participants. In 2024, Toyota's support expanded to sponsor six Roots & Shoots events across the U.S. in collaboration with local agencies and schools. Students in Dallas, San Antonio, Kentucky, West Virginia, Tampa Bay, and Los Angeles learned about local plants, animals and environmental problems. They were challenged to come up with small ways to make a big difference. They walked away energized and more aware of their communities.

“We see a lot of light-bulb moments at our events,” Tanzer said. “It's important for us as a global leader to work with our local communities. It's just part of our DNA to care about our environment where we work and where we live.”

Here's a rundown of some highlights from Roots & Shoots events supported by Toyota this past year:

Founded in 1991, Roots & Shoots started when Goodall met a group of 12 students in Tanzania who felt helpless about environmental problems in their communities. One of those students went on to become Tanzania's Environment Minister. The program now has chapters in all 50 U.S. states and in more than 75 countries. Millions of students have worked on Roots & Shoots projects over the past 35 years.

In a 2023 interview with former Toyota Regional Environmental Sustainability Director Kevin Butt last year, Goodall explained that Roots & Shoots is a way to help build hope for young people and get them involved in constructive change while there's still time.

“You get the young mind thinking in the ways they need to think if we're going to change the direction we're headed in now,” Goodall said. “The young people who are in these programs who understand nature, they become passionate defenders of nature.”