



Armstrong Scholars Program, July 12 - July 25, 2026

Application Information

Overview

The Armstrong Scholars Program brings selected participants together for an educational adventure in the spectacular Sierra Nevada Mountains of California. This extraordinary program seeks to inspire all young women, ages 15-18, to reach their highest potential and develop a stronger sense of self, community, and connection to the natural world. There are many ways to identify as a woman and all of those ways are welcome on this program.

Individuals from different cultural, ethnic, racial, religious, LGBTQIA+, and socioeconomic communities come together to embark on a 12-day wilderness backpacking expedition that demands participants to challenge themselves both physically and emotionally. Participants hike 5 to 10 miles a day with a backpack that may weigh up to 50 pounds, over challenging terrain such as rugged trails, boulder fields, high mountain passes, and snow slopes. The self-transformation of each participant through these challenges is well-supported by our curriculum and highly-skilled educators.

During this 14-day adventure, participants of the Armstrong Scholars Program spend one day at our Yosemite campus (the National Environmental Science Center, NESC), 12 days backpacking in the High Sierra, and one evening back at the NESC, conditions allowing. While trekking through the wilderness, participants in this young women-centered program explore topics such as identity and strength of women, communication and leadership, wilderness skills and natural history, social, racial and environmental justice.

This program is inspired by and in memory of former NatureBridge environmental science educator, Joie Armstrong. Joie had a tremendous enthusiasm for life and teaching along with a desire to give of herself for the betterment of the world. NatureBridge established the Joie Armstrong Memorial Fund in 1999 to honor her. The memorial fund sponsors the Armstrong Scholars program, providing a \$2,400 scholarship to each student to cover the majority of the costs. Students pay \$150 to participate in the program. Additional scholarships are available to reduce this cost when needed. Basic backpacking gear is available for loan during the program. Participants are responsible for their own transportation to and from the NESC in Yosemite, though a free shuttle is provided to and from Fresno International Airport for those arriving by flight.

Thirteen individuals will be selected to participate in the program. We are seeking applicants from a variety of cultural, ethnic, racial, religious, LGBTQIA+, and socioeconomic communities. Participants from past years found the diversity of life experiences represented in



the group to be a significant strength of the program. Demonstrated academic success is less important than a clear sense of how the program will truly benefit the individual.

Don't doubt yourself! It doesn't benefit you and in the end you'll realize that it was pointless to begin with. You are so much more capable than you believe yourself to be and that becomes evident on this Yosemite trip. Christopher Robin said it best, "You are braver than you believe, stronger than you seem, and smarter than you think." ~Ella, 2019 Armstrong Scholar

Sample Day

6:00 am Wake up/cook breakfast
7:00 am Eat, stretch, and pack
8:00 am Depart camp with loaded backpacks
Hiking discussion based on the day's theme, "We are part of something bigger"
Lunch on the trail, fix blisters, get water from a mountain stream
Travel over a steep mountain pass at 11,000 feet in the afternoon
5:00 pm Set up camp, journal, group discussion
6:00 pm Prepare and eat dinner
8:00 pm Evening meeting: share high and low moments, expectations for the next day, and a game, song, or reading
9:00 pm Go to sleep under the stars or in shelters you have carried with you

Illness

- Please monitor yourself for illness symptoms prior to the program. To attend, participants must be symptom-free for at least 24 hours prior to the start of the program.

Application Process

Please submit the following items no later than 12 p.m. on Monday, April 13, 2026. Selections will be announced by Monday, June 1, 2026.

- A brief biography including, but not limited to, name, age, email address, current address, phone number, and your outdoor experience.



- The name, phone number, and email address of at least one of your parents or your legal guardian (also include their physical address if it is different from yours).
- The [Registration, Health Screen and Participant Agreement](#), completed and signed by a parent or guardian (pages 1-7). A medical professional should complete and sign the Medical Examination form for you (pages 8-10). Please submit all ten pages of the Registration, Health Screen and Participant Agreement with your application. If it is not possible to secure a medical appointment before the application due date, please contact us for alternative arrangements.
- Two recommendations from community leaders in your area who can speak to your qualifications for this program. They may include a letter with the [recommendation form](#).
- Typed or printed concise responses to the following questions. Please limit your total responses to no more than two double-sided sheets of paper. If there is a different medium that better allows you to express your responses, you are welcome to submit your answers in that format instead, as long as you address each of the questions.
 1. What attracts you to the Armstrong Scholars program?
 2. What draws you to a wilderness-based program in particular?
 3. Please share why you want to be a part of this young-women's affinity space, what you hope to gain, and what you hope to offer.
 4. What unique perspective might you bring to the group?
 5. What skills or strengths might you contribute to the group?
 6. How might all you gain from Armstrong Scholars benefit you in the future?
 7. What else would like us to know about you?
 8. Would you like us to contact you about additional scholarship opportunities to help offset the cost of the program?

Please submit application materials via the [online application form](#) or email them **as a single PDF** to: armstrongscholars@naturebridge.org. **Penned or legal electronic signatures are required on signature lines within the application materials.**



Alternatively, you can mail your application to:

NatureBridge

Attn: Armstrong Scholars Application

% Kim Laizer

PO Box 194

El Portal, CA 95318

Still not sure if Armstrong Scholars is for you? For more information, visit our website at naturebridge.org/programs/armstrong-scholars or contact Kim Laizer at armstrongscholars@naturebridge.org.

Applications should be received by 12 p.m. Monday, April 13, 2026