



UCLA
Center for
the Developing
Adolescent



**2024
ANNUAL
REPORT**

Working to improve adolescent health, education, and well-being through developmental science

TABLE OF CONTENTS

From the Executive Directors	1
CDA Staff	2
Advisory Board.....	2
Advancing Adolescent Science, Knowledge, and Research	3
Informing Youth Policy and Practice	7
CDA in the News	10
Changing the Public Narrative Around Adolescence	11
Prominent Citations	14
Thank you to our supporters	15

About the UCLA Center for the Developing Adolescent

The UCLA Center for the Developing Adolescent (CDA) was founded in 2015 with a mission to make the science of adolescent development useful and accessible to policymakers, youth-serving professionals, parents, and young people themselves, and to advocate for equitable policies, programs, and practices based on that science. We host the National Scientific Council on Adolescence (NSCA), a group of U.S.-based scientists with broad expertise who work to integrate and disseminate scientific knowledge about adolescent development to policymakers, practitioners, and the general public. We also host the Youth Scientific Council on Adolescence (YSCA), a group of young people who work with CDA staff and the NSCA to inform and communicate the science of adolescence to broader audiences.

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS

Dear friends of the UCLA Center for the Developing Adolescent,

We are excited to share with you our annual report. This past year has been our busiest yet, and we want to highlight the wide range of activities, projects, and partnerships we undertake in our ongoing work to use science to better support youth throughout the country.

The impact of our work depends on the efforts of all those building better policies and programs or working directly with adolescents. In 2024, our activities included cited [testimony about adolescent brain development and decision-making](#) in an opinion by the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts, collaboration with creators at Ted-Ed on [a new minisite](#) and a series of animated videos on adolescent brain development, and workshops about the developmental needs of adolescents for educators and other local leaders in California and Pennsylvania. We closed the year meeting with youth policy leaders in Washington, D.C., to introduce our new online tool—[STEPS \(Science to Enhance Policy Success\) for Youth](#)—which provides resources tailored to some of the systems and issues that affect young people.

We also work in partnership with scientists across the country who are members of the National Scientific Council on Adolescence (NSCA) and with young people on the Youth Scientific Council on Adolescence (YSCA). This past year, we were proud to share publications from the NSCA on [early adolescent mental health](#) and on [elections as opportunities for youth civic engagement](#), as well as podcast episodes from the YSCA called “[Our Youth’s Perspective](#).”

Behind all of this work is our fierce belief in the opportunity of adolescence. Our combined decades of research into adolescent development have given us a lasting appreciation for the adaptability, resilience, and innovation of young people. We continue to be inspired by adolescents as we try new approaches, learn from the outcomes, and refine how our organization contributes to the efforts of those working to better support our young people.

We are grateful for generous support from the Bezos Family Foundation, Spring Point Partners, the Stuart Foundation, and the Annie E. Casey Foundation, as well as funds provided by the Funders for Adolescent Science Translation (FAST), a consortium that includes the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Bezos Family Foundation, the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative, the Ford Foundation, Hemera Foundation, the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, Hopelab, Pivotal Ventures, Spring Point Partners, the Stuart Foundation, and Raikes Foundation. Our work would not be possible without them.

As we begin the new year, we look forward to continuing our collective work to improve the way we support the health, education, and well-being of our young people. The future of our communities, our society, and our world depends on how we support our young people on their path toward a thriving adulthood.

Sincerely,

Andrew Fuligni & Adriana Galván
Co-Executive Directors

Our Mission

Our mission is to improve adolescent health, education, and well-being through developmental science. We do this by communicating the opportunities of the adolescent years and sharing the science in ways that positively impact policies and practices that serve young people.

CDA STAFF



Andrew Fuligni, PhD
Co-Executive Director



Adriana Galván, PhD
Co-Executive Director



Elise Brumbach, JD, MPP
Policy & Practice Director



Meghan Lynch Forder, MA
Communications Director



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Xochitl Arlene Smola, MA
YSCA Facilitator

ADVISORY BOARD

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Founding Director, Center on the Developing Adolescent

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Managing Director, Bezos Family Foundation

Zoë Stemm-Calderon, EdLD
Senior Director, Raikes Foundation's Youth Serving Systems



Advancing Adolescent Science, Knowledge, and Research

30+

CDA PRESENTATIONS AND EVENTS

25

NSCA AND YSCA MEMBERS

35,000

NEW WEBSITE USERS IN 2024

In our work to make the science of adolescent brain and social development relevant and accessible to those working to support adolescents, we convene researchers at events, compile insights from the science of adolescence for broad audiences, and curate new research for our scientific and professional communities.

“After being raised in a widespread culture of adolescence being equated to immaturity, it was powerful to receive and internalize the CDA’s message that adolescents deserve to be heard and that we are capable of contributing to meaningful action if given the opportunities to do so.”

—NAMRATA POOLA, FORMER MEMBER, YOUTH SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL ON ADOLESCENCE

National Scientific Council on Adolescence

The UCLA Center for the Developing Adolescent is proud to host the National Scientific Council on Adolescence (NSCA), a group of internationally known U.S.-based scientists with a broad range of expertise in adolescent development who work to integrate and disseminate accurate scientific knowledge about adolescent development to policymakers, practitioners, and the general public. Their efforts are essential to the CDA's mission to improve adolescent health, education, and well-being through developmental science.

Co-Directors (2024)

Anthony Burrow, PhD
Cornell University

Jennifer Pfeifer, PhD*
University of Oregon

Members

Rhonda Boyd, PhD
Children's Hospital of Philadelphia; University of Pennsylvania

Adriana Galván, PhD
UCLA

Candice Odgers, PhD
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Linda Wilbrecht, PhD
UC Berkeley

Ron Dahl, MD
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Leslie Leve, PhD*
University of Oregon

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Andrew Fuligni, PhD
UCLA

Allyson Mackey, PhD
University of Pennsylvania

Stephen Russell, PhD
University of Texas at Austin

Carol Worthman, PhD
Emory University

Jacqueline Nesi, PhD
Brown University


*2025 NSCA Co-Directors

“Accurately and accessibly communicating the science of adolescence is essential to helping the world recognize this developmental period as rich in opportunities and worthy of investment.”

—JENNIFER PFEIFER, PHD, NSCA CO-DIRECTOR




In addition to participating in workshops, webinars, articles, interviews, and podcast episodes, in 2024 the NSCA released two new resources on adolescent development:



NATIONAL SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL ON ADOLESCENCE
RESEARCH BRIEF


Early Adolescence: A Window of Opportunity for Educators to Support Positive Mental Health
RESEARCH-BASED RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MIDDLE-SCHOOL EDUCATORS TO PROMOTE POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH FOR EARLY ADOLESCENCE



EARLY ADOLESCENCE – A WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY FOR EDUCATORS TO SUPPORT POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH

This brief provides research-informed recommendations for middle-school and other early-adolescent educators to help promote positive mental health.

[READ THE BRIEF →](#)



NATIONAL SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL ON ADOLESCENCE
NOTE NO. 1

Elections as Opportunities for Positive Adolescent Development

INTRODUCTION

Elections are powerful historical moments that can leave lasting impacts on youth and offer unique opportunities for growth and self-reflection. Only some youth in high school are eligible to vote, yet elections can still fuel thinking about their own identities and futures, including their roles within their communities and how they can contribute to societal change. The uncertain, high-stakes, collective events that elections represent can afford rich opportunities for adolescents to meet their core developmental needs through civic engagement. Here we describe these opportunities and how adults can support high-school-aged adolescents in four key areas.

DEFINITIONS


Civic engagement refers to both actions and psychological commitments (like beliefs or values) that benefit or address particular issues within a community.

Different types of youth civic engagement include:

1. Helping and service to communities, including in school-based service-learning projects
2. Voting and participating in elections
3. Activism and organizing, which can extend beyond political causes to broader social actions

HOW ELECTIONS CAN SUPPORT POSITIVE DEVELOPMENT FOR YOUTH

1. Meaningful contexts to explore sense of purpose and identity
2. Opportunities to regulate emotions and manage uncertainty
3. New ways to learn and exercise agency
4. Chances to connect with family, peers, and broader community



ELECTIONS AS OPPORTUNITIES FOR POSITIVE ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT

This note offers ways that adults can support positive development for young people during and after elections by promoting key developmental needs.

[READ THE NOTE →](#)

More NSCA Publications


Over the last several years, NSCA produced a series of reports on adolescent development:



NATIONAL SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL ON ADOLESCENCE

THE INTERSECTION OF ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT AND ANTI-BLACK RACISM



COUNCIL REPORT #1

NATIONAL SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL ON ADOLESCENCE
COUNCIL REPORT NO. 2


Engaging, Safe, and Evidence-Based

WHAT SCIENCE TELLS US ABOUT HOW TO PROMOTE POSITIVE DEVELOPMENT AND DECREASE RISK IN ONLINE SPACES FOR EARLY ADOLESCENTS

NATIONAL SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL ON ADOLESCENCE
COUNCIL REPORT NO. 3

Cultivating Purpose in Adolescence



RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS



SPRING RESEARCH ROUNDUP

This roundup provides an overview of research showcasing the protective role of positive lifestyle factors for mental health, the benefits of continuing contribution, an effective intervention to support positive racial-ethnic identity exploration, synchronized brain activity between parents and youth, and the importance of timing in parental support.

[READ THE ROUNDUP →](#)



SUMMER RESEARCH ROUNDUP

This compilation provides a summary of recent research about adolescent development that highlights the importance of support from parents and peers, the effects of neighborhood environments, the impact of racial and ethnic discrimination on sleep, and the trajectories of mental health and gender identity in youth.

[READ THE ROUNDUP →](#)



WINTER RESEARCH ROUNDUP

This roundup provides an overview of research into adolescent development that examines the importance of parents' ethnic-racial identity, the benefits of a mindfulness intervention, the link between agency and sense of purpose, the association between brain development and resilience to stress, and the link between heart rate variability and mental health.

[READ THE ROUNDUP →](#)

EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

2024 ADOLESCENT BRAIN DEVELOPMENT SYMPOSIUM

Our 2024 symposium convened researchers, policymakers, youth-serving practitioners, and young people for a discussion focused on “The Impact of Civic Engagement in Adolescence.”

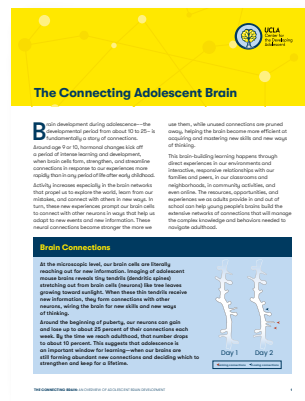
[WATCH EVENT SESSIONS →](#)



THE CONNECTING ADOLESCENT BRAIN FACT SHEET

In May 2024, CDA released a new fact sheet, which gives an overview of adolescent brain development and explains how access to resources, opportunities, and meaningful relationships during adolescence can build connections within our brains and with the world around us that support us into adulthood.

[READ THE FACT SHEET →](#)



Informing Youth Policy and Practice

40+

FEDERAL AND STATE LEGISLATIVE OFFICES BRIEFED

200+

YOUNG PEOPLE SERVING LIFE SENTENCES NOW ELIGIBLE FOR PAROLE AS A RESULT OF THE COMMONWEALTH V. MATTIS DECISION

35

NEW RESOURCES CURATED FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE GROUPS

To have wide-reaching impacts on all young people, CDA works to inform regional, federal, and state-level policies and programs that affect youth where they are: in families, schools, workplaces, and our communities. We do this by briefing agencies, legislators, and national organizations; curating the science of adolescence for policy and practice settings; and training practitioners on the science of adolescence; and hosting cross-sector events that encourage dialogue around using developmental science to support young people.

“Many of the legislators and faculty in the room expressed ‘a-ha’ moments from your session. We really appreciate you taking the time to share your expertise with us.**”**

—HEATHER WILSON, MSW, NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF STATE LEGISLATURES (NCSL), REFERENCING NCSL'S YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULT POLICY FORUM

FEATURED HIGHLIGHT

In October, CDA launched STEPS for Youth (Science To Enhance Policy Success), a new online tool providing developmental science to policymakers and youth-serving organizations to allow them to create more effective policies and programs that support young people. STEPS for Youth provides resources with actionable insights from the science of adolescent brain and social development to help youth-focused professionals apply research-based approaches within their policy and practice work.

[READ PRESS RELEASE →](#)



Commonwealth v. Mattis

This year, the highest court in Massachusetts made the state the first in the country to eliminate life sentences without the possibility of parole in any circumstance for “emerging adults,” citing the research and testimony of our Co-Executive Director Adriana Galván. The court released its opinion in **Commonwealth v. Mattis**, holding that sentencing individuals to life imprisonment without the possibility of parole for a crime committed when they were 18- to 20-years-old violates the Commonwealth’s constitution, noting that “updated” science indicates differences between this age group and older adults in impulse control, risk taking in pursuit of reward, peer influence on risky behavior, and capacity for change. Due to the ruling, more than 200 young people in Massachusetts serving life sentences are now eligible for parole.

[READ PRESS RELEASE →](#)



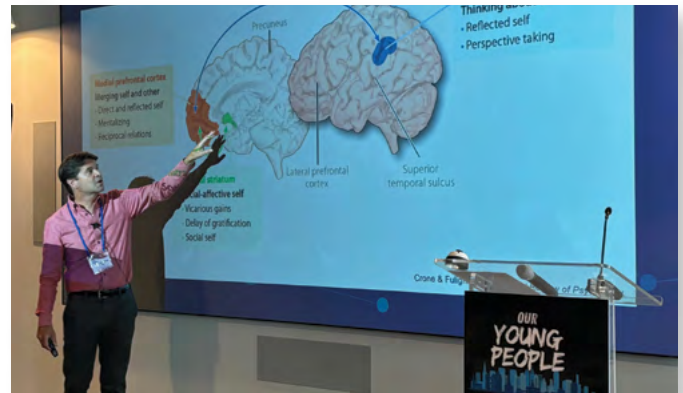
EVENT HIGHLIGHTS



WHITE HOUSE YOUTH POLICY SUMMIT

Co-Executive Director Adriana Galván presented her research at the federal interagency [Youth Policy Summit](#) convened by the White House titled, "Cultivating Possibilities." This event brought together 90 young people and representatives from seven federal agencies, including Secretaries of Education, Labor, and Health and Human Services.

[WATCH THE PRESENTATION →](#)



COMMUNITY-WIDE CONVERSATIONS: OUR YOUNG PEOPLE

In partnership with Spring Point Partners, CDA met with over 400 young people, practitioners, policymakers, and philanthropists to teach them about adolescent brain science and discuss how the science can be used to support young people in Philadelphia, where one out of every five Philadelphians is an adolescent.

[LEARN MORE →](#)



SCIENCE TO ENHANCE POLICY SUCCESS: ALIGNING YOUTH POLICY WITH DEVELOPMENTAL SCIENCE

After the launch of STEPS for Youth, CDA held a convening of over 25 leaders in the youth policy ecosystem in Washington, D.C., to discuss how developmental science, including the STEPS resources and check-in tool, can be used to enhance policy design and positively impact young people.

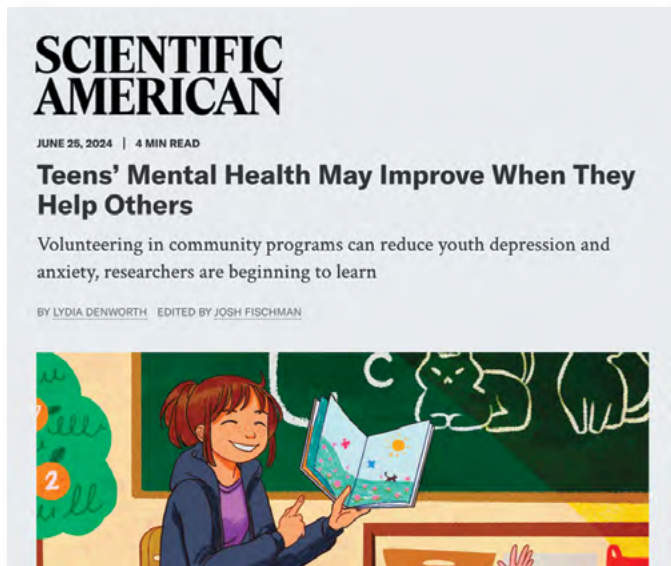
[VISIT STEPS FOR YOUTH →](#)



NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF STATE LEGISLATURES (NCSL) YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULT POLICY FORUM

In Boston on June 4 through 6, Co-Executive Director Adriana Galván presented at NCSL's second, biennial Youth and Young Adult Policy Forum which convened 20 legislators from 15 states. After the forum, legislators expressed that Galván's session, *Aligning Policies and Programs with the Science of Adolescent Brain Development*, was one of the event's most valuable sessions.

CDA IN THE NEWS



“TEENS’ MENTAL HEALTH MAY IMPROVE WHEN THEY HELP OTHERS,” SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN

Quoting Co-Executive Director Andrew Fuligni



“LEVERAGING THE OPPORTUNITY OF ADOLESCENCE TO REDUCE CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM,” PACE

Written by Co-Executive Director Andrew Fuligni and Policy and Practice Director Elise Brumbach



“DON'T JUST BLAME SOCIAL MEDIA FOR KIDS' POOR MENTAL HEALTH—BLAME A LACK OF SLEEP,” EDUCATION WEEKLY

Quoting Co-Executive Director Andrew Fuligni



“IS ‘CRISIS’ THINKING ABOUT YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH DOING MORE HARM THAN GOOD?” EDSURGE

Quoting Co-Executive Director Andrew Fuligni



Changing the Public Narrative Around Adolescence

11,175

PODCAST DOWNLOADS

2.3M+

VIEWS ON CDA AND CDA-SUPPORTED VIDEOS

1,750

MONTHLY SUBSCRIBERS

This year, CDA partnered with researchers and organizations to communicate the science of adolescence to more accurately reflect the opportunity of this period of development. We strive to challenge misconceptions about the teenage years and highlight the remarkable growth, learning, and connection that make this time frame a critical period for supporting positive outcomes for young people.

“What I find most empowering about the YSCA is the idea that adolescents are working together to disseminate the science of adolescence alongside researchers and other professionals. This dynamic makes the information feel more authentic since it is coming from adolescents themselves.**”**

—LIAM GARCIA, MEMBER, YOUTH SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL ON ADOLESCENCE, & FORMER SUMMER RESEARCH BOOTCAMP PARTICIPANT

FEATURED HIGHLIGHT

TED-Ed Video Series

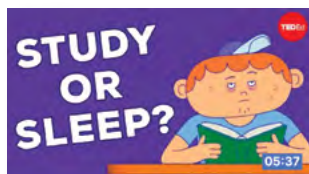


In partnership with the Bezos Family Foundation, CDA worked with TED-Ed to create a new video series and minisite about the science of adolescence.

[VIEW THE SITE →](#)

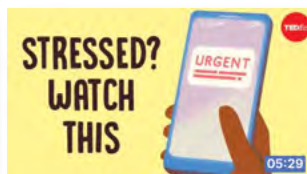
TED-ED VIDEOS

Learn more about sleep, stress, and friendship during adolescence with these new TED-Ed videos:



What staying up all night does to your brain

[WATCH THE VIDEO →](#)



How to manage your stress more effectively

[WATCH THE VIDEO →](#)



How some friendships last — and others don't

[WATCH THE VIDEO →](#)

TED SALON TALK

In addition to the TED-Ed videos, Co-Executive Director Adriana Galván gave a talk at TED Salon to explain what adolescents can teach us about embracing uncertainty, challenging the status quo, and taking strategic risks.

[WATCH THE VIDEO →](#)



ADAPTIVITY PODCAST

This year the *Adaptivity: The Science of Adolescence* podcast brought youth perspectives to listeners with episodes about:



PARENTING STYLES

[LISTEN →](#)



CULTURAL UPBRINGING

[LISTEN →](#)



SIBLING RELATIONSHIPS

[LISTEN →](#)

EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

Annual UCLA Summer Research Adolescent Boot Camp

Each year, CDA supports local high school students in attending the labs of Andrew Fuligni and Sandra Graham for an Annual UCLA Summer Research Adolescent Boot Camp. At each camp, students learn about adolescent brain development, and developmental science, and explore topics like sleep, friendship, and diversity. Read more from the students themselves about what they learned at the 2024 boot camp in their blog posts:



STUDENT SOLUTIONS FOR BETTER SLEEP—SHARK TANK INNOVATIONS

At the 2024 Summer Research Boot Camp, high school students came together to learn what makes the adolescent brain so unique. One topic investigated was why sleep is crucial to healthy brain development. Students write about their solutions for better sleep.

[READ MORE →](#)



EQUIPPING ADOLESCENTS WITH INSIGHTS INTO ADOLESCENT BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

Students who attended the 2024 UCLA Summer Research Boot Camp share what they learned about their brain development and how this information can foster spaces, policies, and relationships that better support the needs of youth.

[READ MORE →](#)



Meet the Youth Scientific Council on Adolescence

- Stephany Cartney
- Madison Cheungsomboune
- Sebastian Gaytan D’Amico
- Liam Garcia
- Merlot Ghadoushi
- Abril Rodriguez Martell
- Jaleon Nocentelli
- Benjamin Olaniyi
- Brynn Santos
- Emily Zhu

PROMINENT CITATIONS

The work of CDA and the NSCA has been cited in multiple resources from departments and organizations dedicated to supporting the positive development of young people:



U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory, "[Social Media and Youth Mental Health](#)." (June 2023)



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Population Affairs report, "[Take Action for Adolescents—A Call to Action for Adolescent Health and Wellbeing](#)." (October 2023)



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children & Families 'Dear Colleague' letter, "[Strengthening Support for Adolescents and Young Adults in ACF Programs](#)." (February 2024)



Federal Kids Online Health and Safety Task Force report, "[Online Health and Safety for Children and Youth: Best Practices for Families and Guidance for Industry](#)." (July 2024)



American Institutes for Research report, "[An Opportunity to Do Better: Youth Pathways to Thriving](#)." (August 2024)



Hopelab and the Center for Digital Thriving report, "[Demystifying Youth-Engaged Research: Practical Insights and Lessons Learned from Two Case Studies](#)." (September 2024)



Stuart Foundation resource, "[Adolescents in California: Creating the Conditions for Thriving](#)" (October 2024)



Center for Scholars & Storytellers at the University of California, Los Angeles report, "[Reality Bites: Teens and Screens 2024](#)." (December 2024)



Thank you to our supporters

The UCLA Center for the Developing Adolescent is generously supported by the **Bezos Family Foundation**, the **Annie E. Casey Foundation**, **Spring Point Partners**, and the **Stuart Foundation**. Major funding is also provided by the **Funders for Adolescent Science Translation (FAST)**, a consortium that includes the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Bezos Family Foundation, the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative, the Ford Foundation, the Hemera Foundation, the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, Hopelab, Pivotal Ventures, Spring Point Partners, the Stuart Foundation, and Raikes Foundation.

Thank you to our supporters and funders for helping us advance equity in adolescent growth and development. Our work would not be possible without you. If you are interested in helping fund our work, please contact Ann Nguyen at annnguyen@ucla.edu.

“As we strive to deepen our understanding of adolescence, supporting organizations like CDA is more important than ever. CDA cultivates collaboration between leading researchers, creating a hub for innovation and community-building while translating fresh insights into accessible, actionable knowledge for all.”

—CHRIS PLUTTE, MANAGING DIRECTOR AT BEZOS FAMILY FOUNDATION



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