



IT GETS BETTER[®]

50 STATES

50 GRANTS

5000
VOICES

SEASON TWO
IMPACT REPORT

Since launching our partnership in 2017, the generous support and investment of American Eagle Outfitters continues to make a great impact on It Gets Better, leading to the sustainability and introduction of new, innovative programs that have uplifted, empowered and connected LGBTQ+ youth around the globe. In 2022, It Gets Better launched *50 States. 50 Grants. 5000 Voices.*, providing \$10,000 grants to youth-informed and youth-led projects across the United States. The resounding success and impact of the program was the catalyst for expansion for season 2

to include *Youth Grants* in collaboration with our affiliate, It Gets Better Canada, which awarded grants across the territories and provinces across Canada. **Between Season 1 and Season 2, nearly \$1.2 million has been awarded** to support projects that are empowering LGBTQ+ youth to create a positive impact in their communities.

The following report details promotional activities, funding allocations, a budget summary, and grantee showcases highlighting the significant impact of Season 2 of *50 States. 50 Grants. 5000 Voices.*

GRANT MAKING

The heart of our program lies in the incredible LGBTQ+ student leaders, educators, and allies who dedicated their school year to transforming their schools (and communities) for the better. **For the 2023-2024 cycle, we distributed 67 grants up to \$10,000 – 53 projects representing 38 of the United States, and 14 projects representing 9 provinces and territories in Canada.** This impressive group of grantees took on a diverse range of initiatives, aligning with four primary focus areas:

COMMUNITY SPACES

Creating affirming and safe environments where LGBTQ+ students can connect and build a sense of belonging. This included establishing gender-affirming closets, dedicated LGBTQ+ centers and rooms, and strengthening GSA networks.

EDUCATION

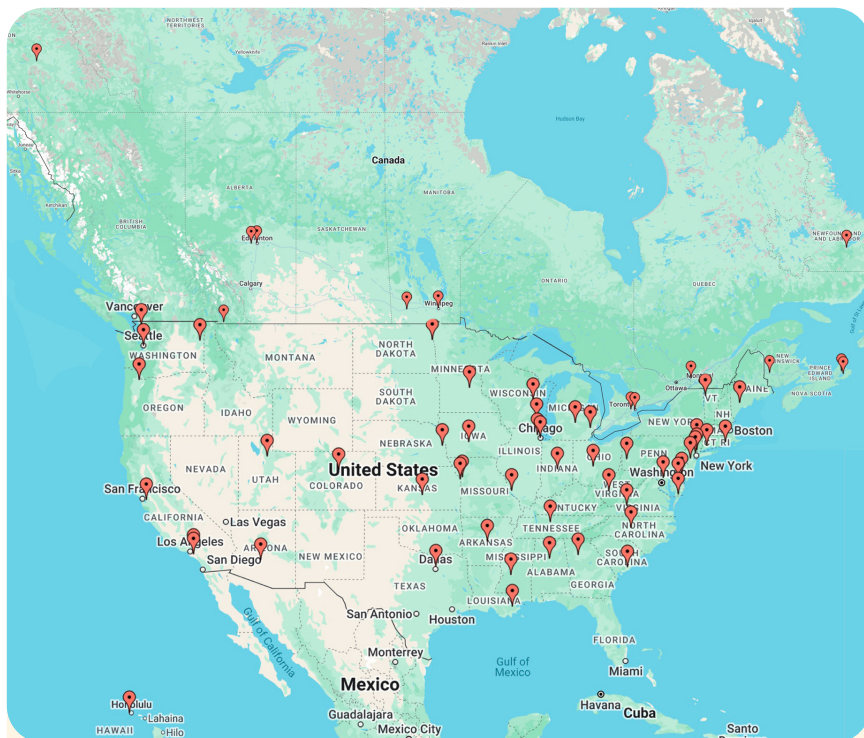
Providing students and educators with the tools to become informed and confident advocates. Initiatives included developing educator resource hubs, mental health awareness campaigns, and even an opportunity for students to present at the United Nations.

EVENTS

Organizing joyful and educational events that resonate with LGBTQ+ students. Projects featured youth empowerment summits, Pride celebrations, and LGBTQ+ proms, all designed to celebrate and uplift the community.

ART & BOOKS

Offering diverse and meaningful outlets for LGBTQ+ youth to express themselves and see their representation in media. Projects included after-school art programs, author mentorship workshops, community murals, and even a theater project.



The map above shows the distribution of our grantees across North America.

In Season 2, our grantees served over **40,000** students through their diverse and empowering projects. These students got to experience joy, pride, and hope in a political and social climate that has taught them not to. Their projects fostered resilience and a sense of community, providing a beacon of support and encouragement to LGBTQ+ youth in challenging times.

	# of Projects/Schools	Students Served
United States	53	37,036
Canada	14	5,229
Total	67	42,265



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SEASON TWO GRANTEE SHOWCASE

We are proud to spotlight eight outstanding grantees from the 2023-2024 grant cycle whose remarkable work exemplifies the impact and importance of *50 States. 50 Grants. 5000 Voices.* Each of these initiatives reflects a deep commitment to fostering safe, supportive, and vibrant spaces for LGBTQ+ youth.



LOUISIANA

This project is an absolute triumph, a pure expression of queer resilience and joy in 2024. Following the tragic loss of a GSA member, the group channeled their grief into ambitious goals. They inaugurated the Q-Center, a welcoming space for students to engage with queer literature, resources, and access gender-affirming clothes, and organized a Day for Queer Youth, collaborating with local LGBTQ+ organizations like the ACLU and Trans Queer Youth NOLA to celebrate and educate. Additionally, they partnered with The Tectonic Theater to present original theater pieces on the state capital steps, inviting legislators to witness their power. On the steps of the capital, student leader Ava said “Belle never got the chance to grow old, but other queer kids could. Please fight for us. Choose empathy. We’re all beautifully human. Everything around us is transitory, and there’s so much beyond our control. Please don’t waste time trying to control aspects of our identities that not even we can control.”



CONNECTICUT

This project fully embraced the “empowered” aspect of our mission. Students from five schools were chosen for a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to present at the United Nations headquarters in New York. They enjoyed tours, a gourmet lunch, and presentations on international LGBTQ+ rights. The students prepared insightful questions for the speakers, addressing the treatment of queer individuals both abroad and within the United States. This experience allowed them to deeply understand and articulate the significance of these issues. The trip concluded with the students presenting their collective document of resolutions for a better world to the youth ambassador at the United Nations.



MISSISSIPPI

In response to growing anti-LGBTQ+ sentiment in their state and the high stress experienced by LGBTQ+ youth in response, this project created a welcoming space through the OPEN ARTS after-school program. In surveys conducted, they found that there are many students who don't even know where to turn if they have questions about coming out, or what to do in a crisis. The OPEN ARTS program is an afterschool program where any student can come create, relax, and feel connected to others. A special initiative this year involved creating an illustrated comic book guide for LGBTQ+ teens, which was showcased at a local gallery, along with other student pieces, that attracted approximately 1,500 visitors.



BRITISH COLUMBIA

In a GSA meeting, LGBTQ+ students started joking that they should just make their own dance since none of them felt comfortable attending their school events due to queerphobia. Their club facilitator said that dances aren't very fun when you don't know anyone and a beautiful idea was born. They created monthly community-building events to help potential attendees get to know each other. By the third meeting, they outgrew the original venue and had to find a new, larger space. Events included movie screenings, speed-friending, and "genderbread" cookie decorating. The events helped participants create friendships and allowed student leaders to discuss problems with their clubs and communities. The queer dance itself was magical. The atmosphere was a truly queer space, not just LGBT-friendly.



VIRGINIA

This grant project achieved remarkable success despite facing negative backlash experienced by a nearby prospective grantee. They transformed their school into a welcoming environment. The AP Literature class successfully acquired a set of novels by LGBTQ+ authors, overcoming significant challenges in the current political climate. GSA leaders created a calming safe room for students, collaborating with the school board, counselors, and psychiatrists to design this sanctuary, which is now a daily refuge located in the library. Over the year, they also partnered with local museums to provide passes for students and their families. A standout moment was when the local history museum displayed memorabilia of LGBTQ+ community members from the past and included items from the GSA, such as details about how they won the grant and utilized the funds. "We will literally go down in history!" Additionally, they expanded their school's mentor program to include the GSA, pairing high school students with elementary schoolers for a variety of crafts, parties, and field trips. This initiative proved to be an invaluable experience for everyone involved.



NORTH CAROLINA

Despite initial resistance from the school board, this project successfully collaborated with a local youth group at a First United Methodist Church to secure the grant, a beautiful collaboration between faith groups and LGBTQ+ youth. Their GSA was finally able to be created and opened educators' eyes to how many students were not out to their families, and the discord that created. When attending the club was an obstacle, students actively connected with one another via social media. They launched the Small Town Open Hearts Project to support local youth independently of school restrictions. A highlight was a 15-minute original dance called Resonance, created with a choreographer to address themes of identity, acceptance, love, and friendship. The performance, featuring four dances and one theater piece, captivated an audience of 250 people.



WASHINGTON

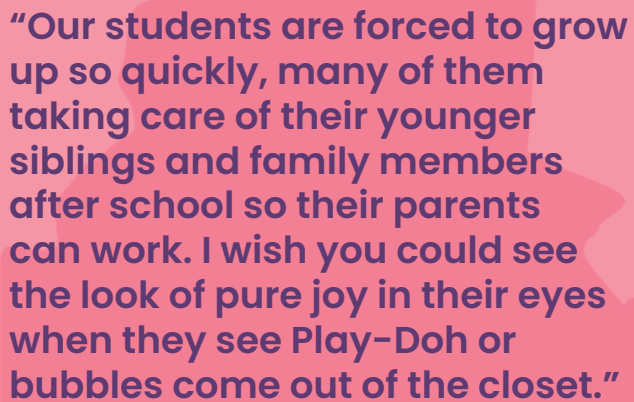
Seattle Public Schools hosted a transformative “Community and Culture Conference” tailored for LGBTQIA+ students, with a special focus on queer and trans youth. This dynamic event brought in students from nearly every high school in the district, featuring workshops led by LGBTQIA+ community members, exhilarating drag and ballroom performances, and valuable resources including a queer-centered resource fair and a gender-affirming clothing swap. The conference showcased a variety of workshops on topics from mental health to queer arts, involving over 30 LGBTQ+ community members. The conference created a vibrant and safe space for youth to connect with the wider queer community, highlighting the crucial role of student involvement.



OREGON

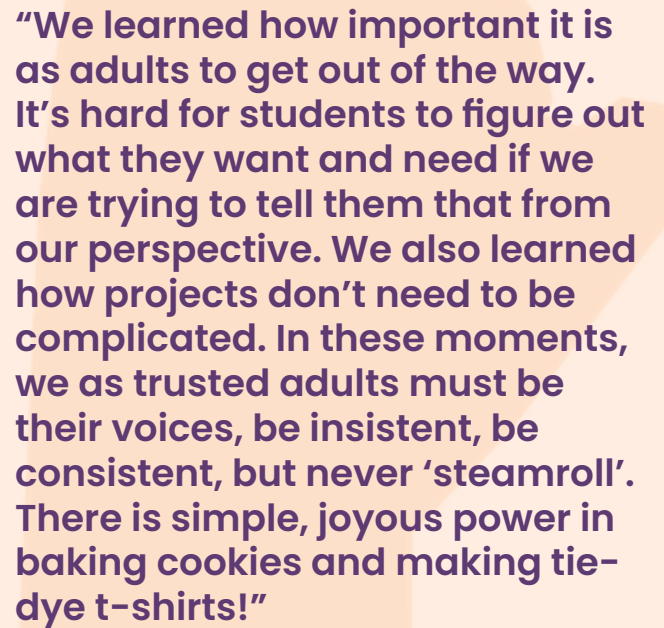
This project looked to improve the lives of their students through the implementation of two major projects. First, they are renovating school bathrooms to be fully gender-neutral, further supporting a welcoming environment for all students. Second, they introduced the “History Unerased” curriculum to boost LGBTQ+ representation and foster empathy among all students, aligning with our EduGuides. Over 40 staff members were trained, and K-8 teachers began incorporating the curriculum into their lessons. A notable example is a “hero” paper an elementary student wrote about Sylvia Rivera, which sparked crucial discussions in the community about inclusivity, ultimately leading to a broader understanding of creating an inclusive environment. “Despite some initial pushback, we’ve all learned from each other, no one left the school, and we continue to teach our LGBTQ+ inclusive curriculum.”





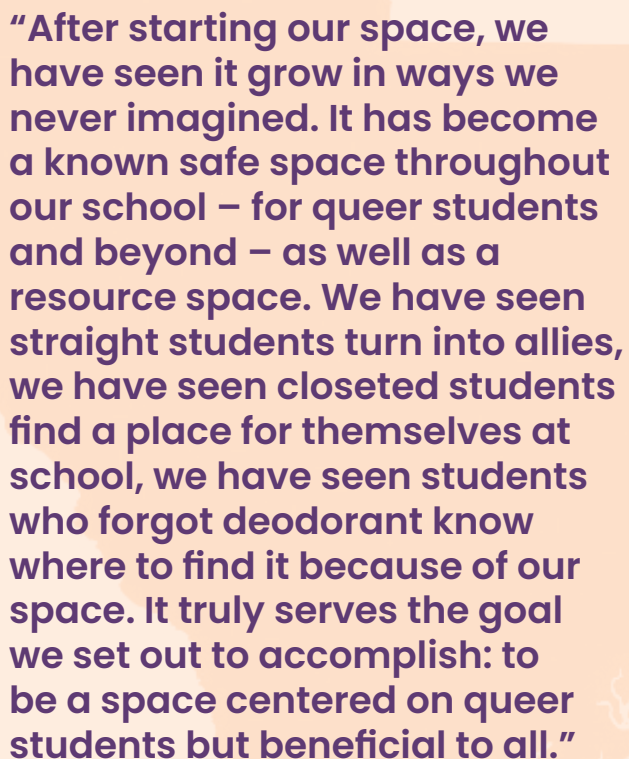
"Our students are forced to grow up so quickly, many of them taking care of their younger siblings and family members after school so their parents can work. I wish you could see the look of pure joy in their eyes when they see Play-Doh or bubbles come out of the closet."

- Maine



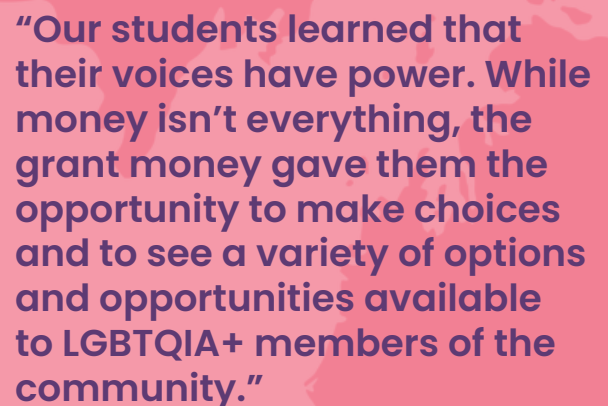
"We learned how important it is as adults to get out of the way. It's hard for students to figure out what they want and need if we are trying to tell them that from our perspective. We also learned how projects don't need to be complicated. In these moments, we as trusted adults must be their voices, be insistent, be consistent, but never 'steamroll'. There is simple, joyous power in baking cookies and making tie-dye t-shirts!"

- Manitoba



"After starting our space, we have seen it grow in ways we never imagined. It has become a known safe space throughout our school – for queer students and beyond – as well as a resource space. We have seen straight students turn into allies, we have seen closeted students find a place for themselves at school, we have seen students who forgot deodorant know where to find it because of our space. It truly serves the goal we set out to accomplish: to be a space centered on queer students but beneficial to all."

- South Carolina



"Our students learned that their voices have power. While money isn't everything, the grant money gave them the opportunity to make choices and to see a variety of options and opportunities available to LGBTQIA+ members of the community."

- Michigan

MARKETING & PUBLIC RELATIONS

To support Season 2 of *50 States. 50 Grants. 5000 Voices*, It Gets Better ran a multi-channel marketing campaign designed to highlight the impact of previous grantee projects and drive an increased interest in the application pool for grant opportunities in the United States and Canada.



Photo from Season 2 Grantee - Texas

50 States. 50 Grants. 5000 Voices Landing Page

The main campaign site (<https://www.50states50grants.com>) served as a hub for interested applicants to learn more about the initiative and gain inspiration for their own projects.

Visitors - 139,000 (June 2023 - June 2024)

Press Pick-up

On June 21, 2023 It Gets Better officially announced the Season 2 recipients via press release ([Link](#)), which included a [link](#) to the full list of grantees. AP News published an article ([Link](#)) showcasing the impactful work of our Louisiana grantee, who is harnessing the power of art for social change right on the steps of the state capital. The Washington Post ([Link](#)), Fox News ([Link](#)), Advocate.com ([Link](#)), and more covered our season two grantees, with media coverage reaching a potential 1 billion UMV.

It Gets Better Blog Highlights

To inspire the next generation of LGBTQ+ youth activists and leaders, It Gets Better showcased some of the recipients of the 2022-2023 *50 States. 50 Grants. 5000 Voices* opportunity on the It Gets Better blog in the ramp-up to the Season 2 application window. From featuring the significant changes made by students at Hackensack Middle School ([Link](#)) to learning about the crucial role of the grant award in sustaining the Q-Center at Benjamin Franklin High School ([Link](#)), *50 States. 50 Grants. 5000 Voices* blogs garnered over 3,600 views. Additionally, we celebrated five remarkable grantees on [Instagram](#) and recently published a blog summarizing their impressive achievements ([Link](#)).

SOCIAL MEDIA

To complement our outreach efforts, It Gets Better engaged a multi-channel approach, including Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

Throughout the promotional period, the 45 published posts garnered:

- 287,118 Impressions
- 6,415 Engagements
- 1,211 Post Link Clicks



Photo from Season 2 Grantee - Wisconsin

"I feel this has succeeded in strengthening our local queer community, particularly for youth. In doing this, I am reminded once again that joy is a powerful act of resistance."

- British Columbia

"It meant hope. Hope that, in spite of the cruel legislative decisions, there can be a brighter future for our LGBTQ+ students if they and their allies do not stop fighting and do not stop celebrating these young people and this community for all of their gifts and all of their joy."

– Iowa



Photo from Season 2 Grantee – Maryland

Line Item (Description)	Allocation (\$)
Grantmaking – United States	\$488,860.56
Grantmaking – Canada	\$115,503.59
Personnel	\$101,311.68
Other Program Costs	\$237,704.72
TOTAL	\$943,380.55

BUDGET OVERVIEW

In 2022, American Eagle's generous investment, driven by corporate philanthropy and a robust consumer register round-up campaign in support of It Gets Better, which was allocated as shown to the left.

CONCLUSION

We are honored to continue the life-changing work of 50 States. 50 Grants. 5000 Voices. for a third season. In our ongoing mission to reach LGBTQ+ youth in all 50 states, we are proud to announce that we have reached Florida and Idaho for the first time this grant cycle, meaning we have had at least one grant project in 47 states. **By the end of Season 3, we will have distributed more than \$1.3 million in grants** to dozens of middle and high schools and local nonprofits, ensuring that communities nationwide are safe and supportive for LGBTQ+ students. We've heard from hundreds of students about how these grants have empowered them to build fully realized, authentic, and proud communities. Supporting LGBTQ+ youth across the country is a dream come true for our organization. Together, we are truly creating a world where it gets better.



Photo from Season 2 Grantee – Louisiana

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