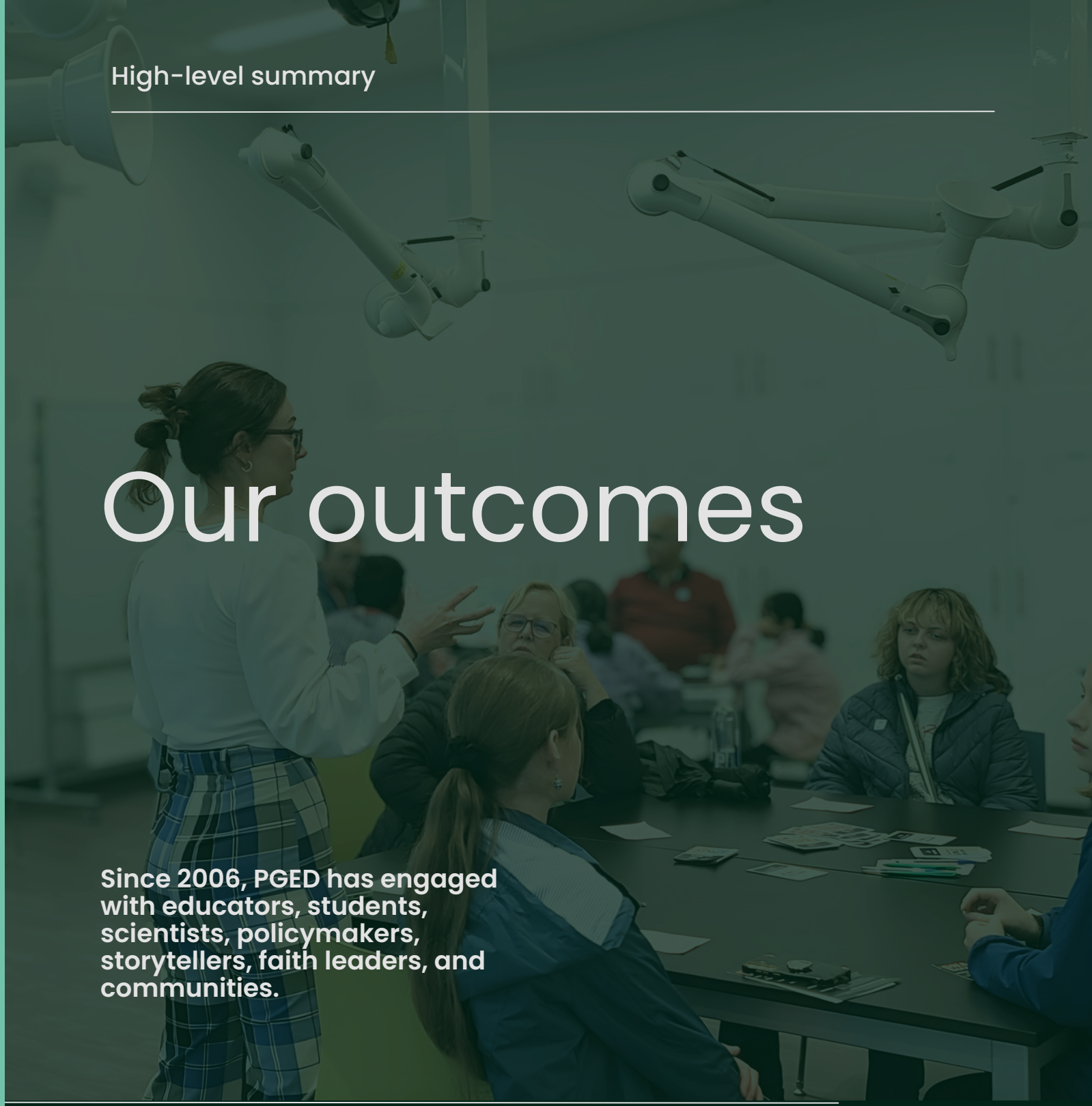
PERSONAL
GENETICS
EDUCATION &
DIALOGUE

2025

Impact Report

We promote awareness & dialogue about emerging genetic technologies across communities.



Our outcomes

Since 2006, PGED has engaged with educators, students, scientists, policymakers, storytellers, faith leaders, and communities.

In 2025, with a lean team and a challenging funding environment, PGED:

Expanded our reach of engagement

Reached 3,054 people through 56 events in communities, public libraries, and science centers.

Sparked cross-sector engagement

Organized a “Venture Beyond the Horizons” Forum that brought together 80 participants —including scientists, biotech leaders, educators, Hollywood storytellers, and faith leaders— at Harvard Medical School to discuss their visions for a better future for people and the planet.

Launched a new flagship resource

Piloted with 160 participants across 24 sites, we officially launched “Share Your Stance on Personal Genetics”, a conversation game now being used by hundreds of people in classrooms, communities, and online.

Deepened high school education impact at the systems level

Launched a district-wide professional development series with Worcester Public Schools in Massachusetts, piloting a scalable model to bring personal genetics education to entire school systems.

Boosted the genetics field’s culture of public engagement

Collaborated with the Genetics Society of America (GSA) to host a Community Forum and public engagement workshops, and contributed to national convenings such as the AAAS Annual Meeting and GSA’s Drosophila Research Conference.

Bridged science, faith, and storytelling

Brought genetics dialogue to faith communities, science fiction and fantasy conventions, and the Sundance Film Festival, meeting people where they already gather to consider the potential benefits and implications of genetic advances.

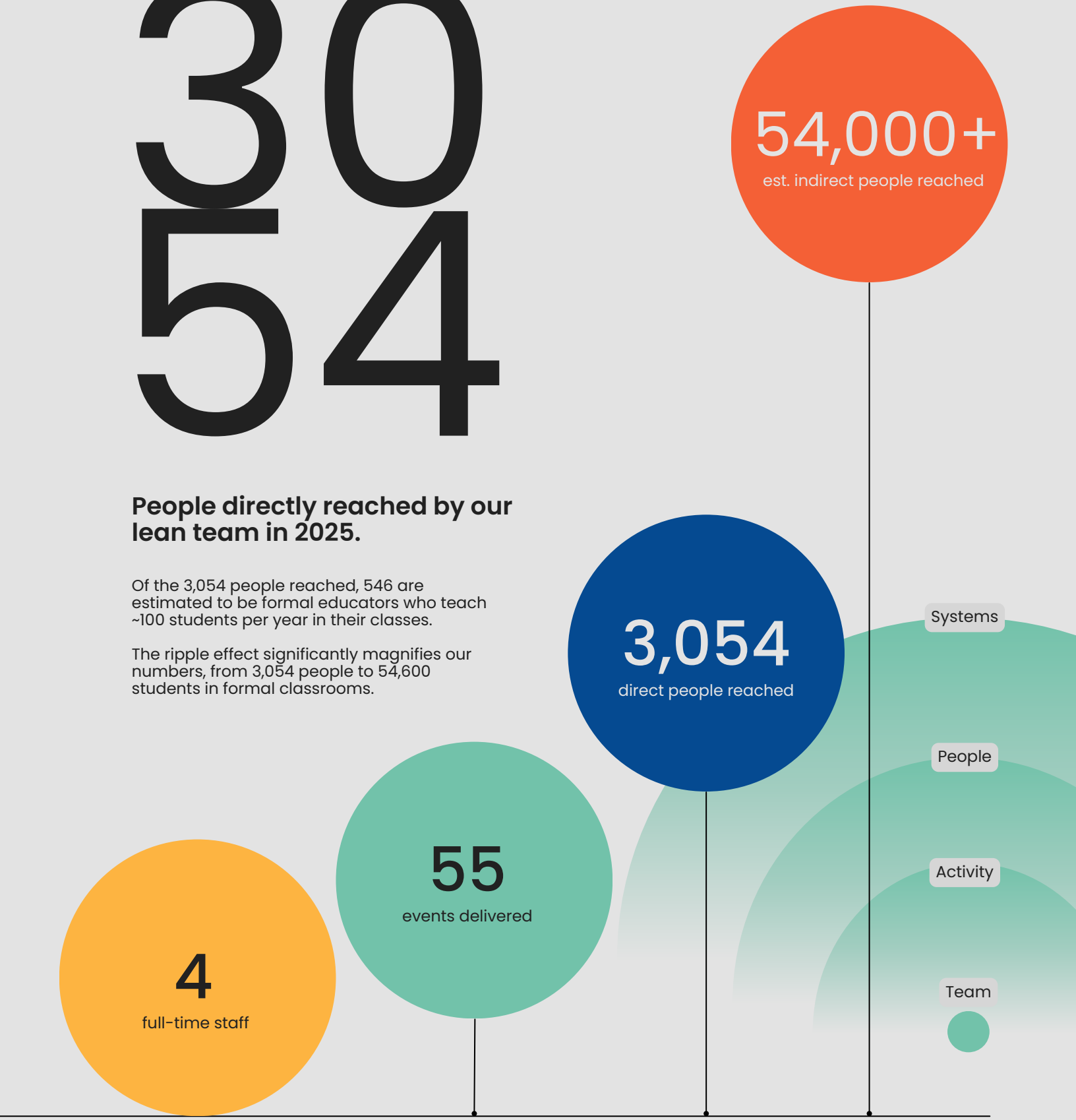
By the numbers

3054

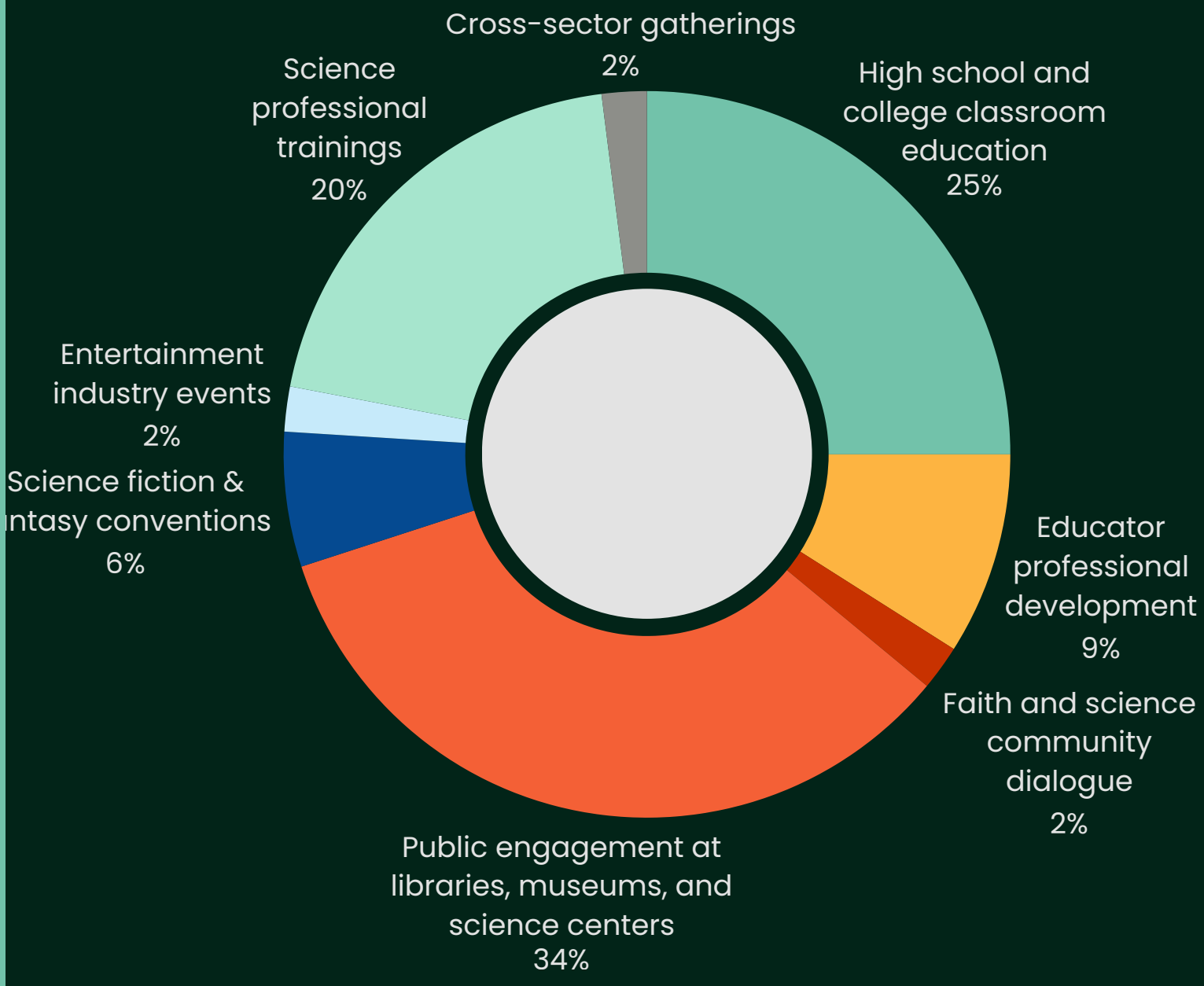
People directly reached by our lean team in 2025.

Of the 3,054 people reached, 546 are estimated to be formal educators who teach ~100 students per year in their classes.

The ripple effect significantly magnifies our numbers, from 3,054 people to 54,600 students in formal classrooms.



By the numbers



Program types

Stories of impact

Educator & scientist professional development

PGED equips educators and scientists with tools to bring nuanced, community-informed genetics engagement into their own classrooms, labs, and outreach efforts.

Education: classrooms & campuses

PGED partners with high schools, colleges, and graduate programs to create interactive sessions where students explore personal genetics and its social implications.

Faith, community, & public spaces

PGED meets people in trusted spaces—faith communities, libraries, museums, and science centers—to explore how genetics intersects with personal values, spirituality, and daily life.

Sponsored projects with national reach

These projects extend PGED's impact far beyond the rooms we directly enter.

Storytelling, media, & entertainment

Stories move people. PGED collaborates with TV and film storytellers, podcasters, and science fiction communities to embed thoughtful genetics narratives into pop culture and to spark dialogue with fans.

Cross-sector convenings

On November 7th, 80 participants—including academic researchers, biotechnology industry leaders, high school teachers, storytellers, and faith leaders—gathered at Harvard Medical School (HMS) to Venture Beyond the Horizon in Genetics. Organized by the HMS Department of Genetics and the Wyss Institute at Harvard, the Forum focused on advancing science and seeding a better future for people and the planet.

My voice matters.

We visited several high schools, including:

- Horace Furness High School **| Philadelphia, PA**
- Options Employment and Educational Services **| Hartford, CT**
- Boston Day & Evening Academy **| Boston, MA**

At Boston Day & Evening Academy, PGED staff facilitated a session where students were invited to share their perspectives on the uses of genetic technologies. A teacher reflected:

> *"[PGED's visit] sparked in my students in ways I hadn't seen before. They were communicating with scientists, and their opinions were important and valued. They realized that their voice matters and people want to hear it."*

This is what we aim for in every classroom: students seeing themselves as active participants in shaping the future of science and health, not just as recipients of information.

Preparing the next generation to engage thoughtfully with science.

We also met with college and graduate students, including:

- Genetic counseling students from Boston University, Rutgers University, Sarah Lawrence College, the University of Maryland, and the University of Pennsylvania
- Undergraduates in Science & Religion at Shippensburg University
- Undergraduates in Civic Biology at Tufts University
- Graduate students studying Social Issues in Biology at Harvard Medical School

"I would love to use these resources during community outreach events or when working with high school students! I believe this is a great way to engage thoughtful conversation and start interest in the topic in a high school population."

-Genetic Counseling Student

Educator & scientist professional development

Through our Genetics Society of America partnership, PGED co-hosted a community forum and workshops that invited scientists to reflect on their role in "science in society."

Many participants expressed that, for the first time, they had concrete tools to talk about genetics with their own communities, beyond slides and lectures—transforming them from content experts into bridge-builders.

In 2025, we saw that hands-on tools like Share Your Stance increased comfort and ease of engagement for both educators and scientists. In 2026, we are integrating these tools more systematically into our workshops, with opportunities identified to develop tailored toolkits for different professional audiences.

Scientists are bridge-builders.

We led and facilitated numerous professional development workshops and trainings in 2025, including:

Collaborated with state and national education organizatinons.

A series of professional development workshops with all 55 biology and biotechnology teachers in the Worcester Public Schools, the second-largest district in Massachusetts.

Skype-A-Scientist livestream.

The Jackson Laboratory's Teaching the Genome Generation program for high school teachers.

The Amgen Biotech Experience for Massachusetts high school teachers.

Presented trainings and workshops for national networks of scientists and science professionals.

Science Communication and Outreach for Public Engagement (SCOPE) (webinar)

The Genetics Society of America (forum and workshops on genetics, culture, and community engagement)

The American Society of Human Genetics (webinar on "Meeting the Moment")

The New York Academy of Sciences (online workshop for scientists and educators)

The Genomics Education Partnership's National Meeting (keynote and workshop)

Faith, community, & public spaces

Genetics intersects with personal values, spirituality, and daily life.

We led community events.

In public libraries from Connecticut to Maryland, community members attended free talks on topics like DNA use in law enforcement and ancestry testing. After a session with their patrons, one enthused librarian from North Haven, CT, encouraged other CT libraries to contact us about our programming. This outreach sparked a statewide library tour for our CT-based staff member, visiting seven libraries over a few months.

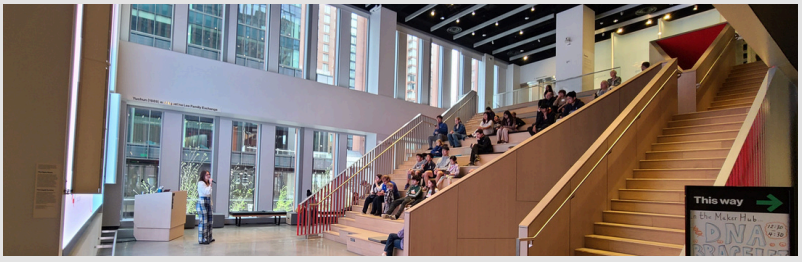
For many, this was their first structured space to ask questions about how genetics might affect their privacy, sense of identity, or interactions with law enforcement—demonstrating how accessible public institutions can be as powerful entry points into conversations about science, technology, and ethics.

We engaged with faith communities.

Academy of Jewish Religion course on "Scientific Literacy for Future Clergy" (invited speaker) & the Interfaith America Faith-Health Fellowship.

Leading community events at libraries and bookstores, including talks on ancestry testing, DNA and law enforcement, and introductory personal genetics across multiple library systems.

Events at museums and science centers in Massachusetts (MIT Museum) and Maryland (Rockville Science Center, Morgan State STEMExpo, MD STEMFest BioTech Expo, and the Baltimore Underground Science Space).



Storytelling, media, & entertainment

Fandom as a pathway for public engagement.

Sundance Film Festival

PGED's Director, Ting Wu, spoke alongside Cristina Costantini (Director, SALLY), Nicole Perlman (writer), Cady Coleman (retired astronaut), in a panel moderated by Wendy Calhoun (writer, producer, director) and supported by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation.

Science fiction & fantasy conventions

Awesome Con (Washington DC's ComicCon), Balticon (Baltimore's Science Fiction Convention), and Capclave (literary speculative fiction convention).

At conventions like Awesome Con and Balticon, fans of speculative fiction enthusiastically engaged in discussions about gene editing, equity, and future societies. These spaces, where imagination is already in high gear, became laboratories for ethical exploration, illustrating how popular culture can play a meaningful role in shaping public perspectives on genetics.

Podcast interviews

Science and Spirituality for the Curious – "Genetics, CRISPR, and Ethics"

Belief in the Future (in post-production)

Twinning Strategy – "Science Meets Society: Closing the Genetics Knowledge Gap"

Human Origins: The Story of Us – "Why Science Communication Matters: Dr. Rob O'Malley on Bridging Research and Society"

Our community

Collaboration is vital to our work.

Faith leaders, educators, students, and community members are co-creators, not just audiences, shaping our program topics, formats, and key questions.

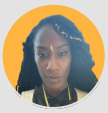
Our Spotlights series highlighted 9 members of PGED's community, including students, educators, faith and health leaders, and business leaders, whose work inspires us.

Biology Students

Trey Lawrence
Massachusetts

Guy Gottlieb
Massachusetts

Biology Educators



Fabienne Mondesir
Massachusetts

Madelene Loftin
Alabama

Genetics Educators

Vida Mingo
South Carolina

Christina Vallianatos
Connecticut

Business Leader

Richard Lumb
United Kingdom

Suzanne Watts Henderson
North Carolina

Faith & Health Leader

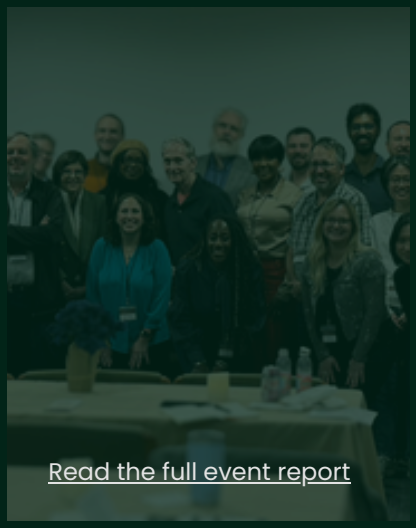
Diane Smith
Connecticut

Special Education & Science Educator

Cross-sector convenings

Meeting the moment.

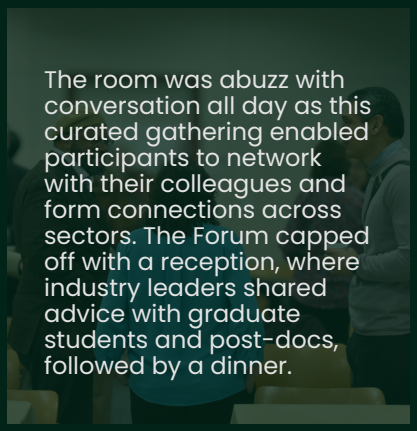
On November 7th, 80 participants—including academic researchers, biotechnology industry leaders, high school teachers, storytellers, and faith leaders—gathered at Harvard Medical School (HMS) to Venture Beyond the Horizon in Genetics. Organized by the HMS Department of Genetics and the Wyss Institute at Harvard, the Forum focused on advancing science and seeding a better future for people and the planet.



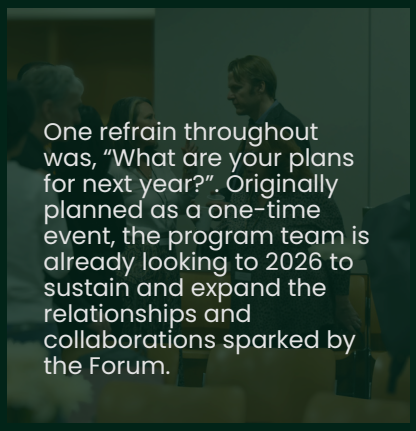
Read the full event report

PGED's Director of Programs, Marnie Gelbart, kicked off the Forum by recognizing the rare opportunity of convening three groups: scientists driving foundational discoveries, industry leaders translating discoveries to address pressing challenges, and leaders engaging our communities. Together, these groups can enable the future of science in service to society.

A highlight of the forum was the "Ignite Talks", spotlighting the exciting ideas and visions of early-career researchers. The speakers were selected from a department-wide Ignite the Future of Genetics competition, which attracted 39 submissions from 19 laboratories. Thanks to an anonymous donation to the Department, the four awardees each received $50,000 to pursue their proposed projects.



The room was abuzz with conversation all day as this curated gathering enabled participants to network with their colleagues and form connections across sectors. The Forum capped off with a reception, where industry leaders shared advice with graduate students and post-docs, followed by a dinner.



One refrain throughout was, "What are your plans for next year?". Originally planned as a one-time event, the program team is already looking to 2026 to sustain and expand the relationships and collaborations sparked by the Forum.

HMS Genetics faculty members showcased work spanning a wide array of research areas and envisioned the world 25 to 50 years from now. Throughout the day, science was interwoven with remarks from eight special guests, all long-time PGED collaborators and invited colleagues, who emphasized the priority of public engagement alongside the scientific process.

Take a peek at the program →

Cross-sector convenings

Opening Remarks

- Marnie Gelbart, PGED Director of Programs, HMS
- Cliff Tabin, Chair of Genetics, Harvard Medical School

Solutioning for People & the Planet

- Steve Elledge, Gregor Mendel Professor of Genetics & of Medicine, HMS
- Brielle Ferguson, Assistant Professor of Genetics and Neurology, HMS
- Monica Colaiacovo, Professor of Genetics, HMS
- Doyle Karr, External Affairs Strategist, DOYLExt LLC

Interfaith panel:

- Imam Dr. Khalil Abdur-Rashid, Harvard Muslim Chaplain; Lecturer, Harvard Divinity School & Harvard Kennedy School of Government
- Rabbi Getzel Davis, Director of Interfaith Engagement; Lecturer, Committee on the Study of Religion, Harvard University
- Reverend Matthew Potts, Pusey Minister in the Memorial Church, Plummer; Professor of Christian Morals in the Faculty of Divinity, Harvard University
- Marnie Gelbart*, PGED Director of Programs, HMS

Ignite Talks (Part 1)

- Indiana Olson & Hannah Grunwald (Laboratory of Matt Harris)
- Daniel Stadtmauer (Laboratory of Cliff Tabin)

The Dark Matter of the Genome

- Julia Li, Assistant Professor of Genetics, HMS
- Scott Kennedy, Philip and Aya Leder Professor of Genetics, HMS

AI & the Future of Humanity

- Fabienne Mondesir, Science Teacher, Boston Day & Evening Academy, Boston Public Schools
- George Church, Robert Winthrop Professor of Genetics, HMS; Founding Core Faculty, Wyss Institute

From Academia to Industry

- Don Ingber, Founding Director and Core Faculty, Wyss Institute; Judah Folkman Professor of Vascular Biology, HMS and Boston Children's Hospital

Frontiers of Cancer Biology

- Kamila Naxerova, Associate Professor of Genetics, HMS

Ignite Talks (Part 2)

- David Cheek & Foivos Chatzidimitriou (Laboratory of Kamila Naxerova)
- Himani Galagali (Laboratory of Gary Ruvkun)

Storytelling & Genetics

- Wendy Calhoun, Writer/Executive Producer, Edgewood Place Entertainment
- Victoria Gray, Patient Advocate, Victoria Gray Speaks
- Nicole Perlman, Screenwriter, Uncanny Valley Films, Inc
- Robin Bowman*, PGED Director of Education & Engagement, HMS

**Moderator*

Federal awards

These projects extend PGED's impact far beyond the rooms we directly enter.

National Institutes of Health

Teaching the Genome Generation

An 11-year collaboration serving high school teachers throughout New England via an annual summer course on molecular biology, bioinformatics, and bioethics, supported by two NIH Science Education Partnership Awards.

with The Jackson Laboratory for Genomic Medicine

National Science Foundation

Culture Change: Building a relational & inclusive discipline through genetics engagement

A 2-year pilot project to build community through co-created programming that shifts the mindset from "science and society" to "science in society."

with The Genetics Society of America & The Reclaiming STEM Institute

National Science Foundation

Piloting an impact accelerator model for cultivating equity & ethics in genetics innovation

An 18-month pilot project examining a process of cross-sector engagement model for enhancing understanding and yielding insights to foster an equitable genetics future through participatory design of public engagement resources.

The NSF supports the Responsible Design, Development, and Deployment of Technologies program with partners including the Ford Foundation, Patrick J. McGovern Foundation, and Siegel Family Endowment.

Other sponsored projects

Howard Hughes Medical Institute

HHMI BioInteractive

PGED's collaboration infused social issues and equity into curricula that reach tens of thousands of high school and undergraduate life science classrooms, including a module on screening for sickle cell in college athletics.

Interfaith America

Faith-Health Fellowship

Supported an 18-month project with faith leaders, including a first conference, two podcast episodes, and an event at Boston's Museum of Science.

Massachusetts Life Sciences Center

Biology Teacher Professional Development

PGED is collaborating with the Worcester Public Schools, the second largest public school district in Massachusetts, on a 1-year project to train all 55 high school biology teachers in the district.

with the Worcester Public School District

Resilience

Challenge

Federal funding terminations threatened the continuity of our free programming and ultimately impacted our ability to maintain prior staffing levels.

Opportunity

PGED prioritized high-impact programs, leveraged long-standing partnerships, and focused on developing scalable resources, like Share Your Stance, that scientists, educators, and community leaders can use in their own contexts.

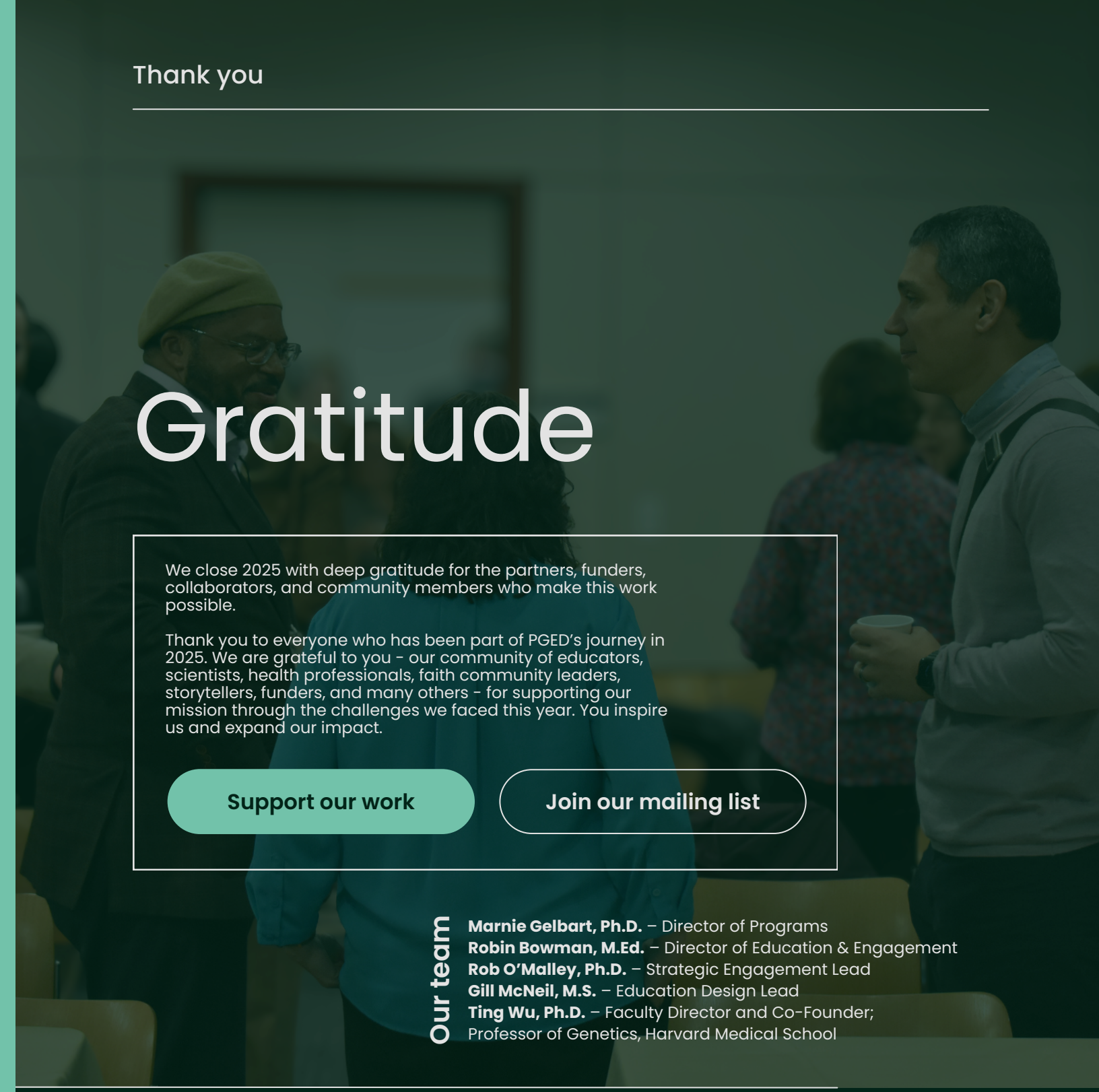
In 2026, PGED seeks philanthropic support from foundations, corporate partners, and individual donors to:

Expand district-wide educator professional development across Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Colorado, where our staff members are based.

Sustain and scale the impact of our free educational resources.

Inform policymakers on Capitol Hill through a series of educational briefings that draw from both sides of the aisle.

Grow partnerships with faith communities and community institutions in Boston.



Gratitude

We close 2025 with deep gratitude for the partners, funders, collaborators, and community members who make this work possible.

Thank you to everyone who has been part of PGED's journey in 2025. We are grateful to you - our community of educators, scientists, health professionals, faith community leaders, storytellers, funders, and many others - for supporting our mission through the challenges we faced this year. You inspire us and expand our impact.

Support our work

Join our mailing list

Our team

Marnie Gelbart, Ph.D. – Director of Programs
Robin Bowman, M.Ed. – Director of Education & Engagement
Rob O'Malley, Ph.D. – Strategic Engagement Lead
Gill McNeil, M.S. – Education Design Lead
Ting Wu, Ph.D. – Faculty Director and Co-Founder; Professor of Genetics, Harvard Medical School

Our hearts are full of appreciation and hope for what we can collectively accomplish in 2026.