Why an Urban Ecology Center?
An Urban Ecology Center invites people in cities to connect with nature and each other. These centers provide places for families and people of all ages to play and explore. Centers provide a model of an environmental community center that--once activated in an urban neighborhood green space--inspires an explosion of volunteerism. In our experience, it can raise the value of neighborhood and city property, contribute to crime reduction in adjacent parks, increase academic achievement of students, create new jobs and job training, and lead to an influx of community resources and engagement.

These things can take time, but the model here demonstrates these results! An Urban Ecology Center restores the ecology of the land, instills a love of nature, improves a neighborhood’s environmental awareness, and provides a catalyst for social change.

The branches of the Urban Ecology Center in three distinctive neighborhoods in Milwaukee--from the founding Riverside Park location to the pioneering Washington Park reinvention to the brownfield-restoring Menomonee Valley branch--have all experienced the same results. This is good news that can happen in your city too.

“The Urban Ecology Center has transformed the greenspace around the Milwaukee River into the best urban wilderness in the world. It connects the people of Milwaukee to flowing water, to the seasons, and to each other.”

-Milwaukee Alderman Nik Kovac
“As more and more children are growing up in cities, teaching land stewardship and nature conservation to children and their families is critical. I am excited by Urban Ecology as it puts forth a practical blueprint for how to do this well. Urban Ecology shares the story of a model that has been perfected in three unique urban neighborhoods in Milwaukee, is being modeled in other cities in the United States, and is beginning to spread to cities across the globe.”

Jane Goodall, PhD, DBE Founder-the Jane Goodall Institute & UN Messenger of Peace

Why attend the Intensive?

We built the curriculum for the Intensive from Ken Leinbach’s book, Urban Ecology: A Natural Way to Transform Kids, Parks, Cities, and the World. Ken, the Center’s Executive Director, wrote the book for people looking to make a change in their neighborhoods and communities. When you visit Milwaukee, we will share with you customized options for engaging a neighborhood in a very practical way by guiding you through the activities at our environmental community centers set up across the city. There are more layers of transformation embedded in the Urban Ecology Center—many more. You will see examples of the programming and details of our operations model, along with insights into leadership development and team building that will serve you and your organization starting the moment you get home.
Why not just read the book?
The book is just the starting point. The Intensive provides much more of the experience that can help you transform your city. Over the course of four and a half days, you will benefit from our 20+ years of experimentation, where we have faced major challenges and disappointments, as well as success and sustainable growth. This is not a one-size-fits-all model. Its transformational power comes from a process of exploring possibilities and building partnerships around a shared vision of ecologically and socially restored urban spaces.

"I loved the book because it was almost a manual for me on how to build my non-profit even though our cause has nothing to do with ecology."  
Ashley Schneider, founder of Milwaukee non-profit MS run the US

"Ken, I just finished reading your book. Wow! What you are doing in the non-profit field is badly needed in the for-profit field as well! What if we started to see doing business as symbiotic relationships where whole ecosystems of business, suppliers, and consumers grow in a sustainable win-win way? Your wording ‘secret sauce’ is a beautiful way to capture the unique culture of UEC. This ‘secret sauce’ was dripping from the book beginning to end."
Dolf Van Den Brink, CEO of Heineken Mexico

Can you give me a hint about the “secret sauce” of the Urban Ecology Center?
As a systems thinking and learning organization, the Urban Ecology Center has been built from the ground up by a team with a unique and incredibly effective way of role modeling and teaching.

Ken Leinbach is an inspirational speaker and consultant, and a nationally recognized science educator and leader. He has won multiple awards, including the National Nature Educator of the Year Award from the Roger Tory Peterson Institute and the Thomas Jefferson Medal for Outstanding Contributions to Natural Science Education for Virginia. Ken also leads systems change workshops through Society of Organizational Learning (SOL). He coaches professionals in a variety of fields through the Academy for Systems Change, an international NGO dedicated to the development of leaders across the globe.

Beth Heller has a B.A. in biology and education from Lawrence University and earned her MBA from the University Wisconsin-Milwaukee. She has been awarded the Business Journal Forty under 40 Award for Community Leadership; the Blanche Hornbeck Award from the Roger Tory Peterson Institute of Natural History for Leaders in Nature Education; the Business Plan Award for Best in New Ventures for the UEC’s Washington Park Branch; and has been named Conservation Educator of the Year by the Wisconsin Conservation Congress.

Why it is important to visit

When people visit us, the possibility and power of the Urban Ecology Center model clicks--the overall impact is greater than off of its pieces. In fact, the sense you get when you walk into one of our buildings is part of ongoing studies in behavior and management. And when you are here, YOU become part of the community that is learning and sharing the particular challenges we face together, and the solutions we can find in our collaborative partnerships with one another.

“Thank you again for such a wonderful and inspiring visit last week.... I’m enjoying reading Ken’s book, and just like being at the Urban Ecology Center in person, there are beautiful stories and experiences. Those stories resonate with me here in Chicago, which is reaffirming. I also really appreciated learning about new educational resources, business models, ideas, and authors that support the work with communities, teaching, with each other and how it can encourage and cultivate growth. All of this certainly helped shape and give me new perspective.” Visitors from Chicago Parks District
Why bring a team to the Intensive?

Setting up an Urban Ecology Center is no small feat. It requires a team effort to build both the program and the support needed to make it fly. While personal learning will happen within the context of the intensive, the goal is to successfully catalyze and inspire the formation of Urban Ecology Centers in other cities. Our experience tells us it will require a team effort. For this reason we have priced the workshop to attract teams of people from different cities, rather than individuals. Political, park, educational, and other community leadership is necessary.

A Note about Cost

For some potential participants, the Intensive will seem expensive. For others, it will seem like a great value. It depends on your basis for comparison. The price is set with intention, for four reasons:

1. **We have invested in our model for over 20 years.** The instructors have been doing this work for many years (decades in some cases) and will be teaching from this practical experience. The Intensive experience is crafted by master teachers who will maximize learning from a number of well-researched modalities. In short, you are getting the best instructors in the field of urban environmental education.

2. **We want you to make an investment in this work too.** We are looking for people who are serious about the potential of establishing a center. We want participants to learn from each other as much as from our instructors. Joining this Intensive is a commitment – a commitment that will only add to the quality of experience for all involved. Individuals’ acceptance will be based on the seriousness of their commitment conveyed through their application.

3. **We will help you become inventive and skilled in raising funds for your ideas.** Creating a center is an entrepreneurial venture and requires a whole menu of creative methods to take it from an idea to a reality, and this learning starts now! It is a process of engaging with resources beyond your current reach. With this in mind, we are here to help. When you apply, share the state of your fundraising with us. If fundraising may be a challenge, we are sharing advice from experiences we
have had in funding programs like this one from within your community. We work from a philosophy of abundance. It works.

4. **We will show you how the model will help your community thrive economically.** If you are invested in learning at the Intensive, we think your learning – from topics regarding raising money to strategic partnerships – will multiply its financial value to you. Your learning will support your vision. Since its inception, the Urban Ecology Center model in Milwaukee has conservatively brought more than $40 million in investment dollars to the city’s parks. During this same time approximately $32 million (and counting) has been raised from the community to support the jobs associated with the Center. We know how to do this work. Attend the Intensive, and you will too.

Worth noting are some ways to keep the costs down. First, flying into Milwaukee’s Mitchell International Airport (MKE) is easy and generally not too expensive. Flying into Chicago’s O’Hare (ORD) can be even cheaper, and buses can bring you to Milwaukee conveniently.

We also have several housing options for the week, including homestays, hostels, and hotels that hit price points to match your financial limits or personal preferences.

*Questions we haven’t answered? Please reach out to intensive@urbanecologycenter.org*