

A Decade That Matters: Leading the Way in Social Innovation

Ten years after its founding, Designmatters is making a difference within and beyond Art Center.

by ALEX CARSWELL

"This University is not maintained...merely to help its graduates have an economic advantage in the life struggle. There is certainly a greater purpose, and I'm sure you recognize it."

— JOHN F. KENNEDY / October 14, 1960, speaking to students at the University of Michigan.

As he campaigned for the White House, John F. Kennedy challenged America's younger generation to use their talent not just to better themselves, but also to somehow make a difference in the world. Shortly after taking office in 1961, President Kennedy formed the Peace Corps, a transformational government agency that celebrated America's core values, galvanized our national will and has facilitated service in support of that "greater purpose" for more than half a century.

Forty years later, Art Center students were surveyed on their desire to have some sort of curricular "Peace Corps-type" opportunity. The overwhelmingly positive response set the wheels in motion for what would soon become Designmatters at Art Center, the College's innovative social-impact initiative. In addition to the Peace Corps model, the brain trust that conceived and developed Designmatters also had other influences. Erica Clark—then Art Center's senior vice president of International Initiatives—had investigated a number of socially engaged design programs at

European institutions. And here at Art Center, "Community Workshop" was already a popular graphic design class that engaged students in projects with local social-impact objectives.

"There had also been a film class that made public service announcements," says Mariana Amatullo, who along with Clark co-founded Designmatters. "And there was a particularly inspiring product design class that had engaged with the Centers for Disease Control to design water containers that would help stem the spread of cholera in developing countries."

Amatullo was tasked with conceiving educational programming that embraced social impact design and "connected the College globally." With the support of then-Art Center President Richard Koshalek, a task force with College-wide representation was convened to explore how to formalize and integrate this new curricular emphasis. "Early on," notes Amatullo, "the task force proposed that we work locally, nationally and internationally, and defined the mission of the program—which remains the same today: To engage, empower and lead an ongoing exploration of art and design as a positive force in society through research, advocacy and action."

Four thematic pillars were proposed and evolved as a framework for study and outreach—Sustainable Development, Public Policy, Global Healthcare and Social

Entrepreneurship—and in Fall 2002 the first two Designmatters projects (addressing homelessness in Los Angeles and colon cancer prevention) were incorporated into the curriculum. In the decade since, Designmatters has participated with dozens of local, national and international partners in more than 50 projects that seek to effectively improve the human condition, and create better designers in the process.

That decade also saw Designmatters grow from offering two funded projects per term to as many as five per term today. Additionally, many more projects are somewhere in a pipeline that starts long before a class is offered, with incubation and coalition building, and finishes long after, when documentation of the process is published. What was an initiative became a standalone educational department in 2009. And in 2010, with ever more incoming students citing the initiative as, according to Amatullo, "a clear differentiator" in their choice of school, Art Center launched a formal Designmatters concentration.

"Hearing that from students provided strong motivation to serve them with a robust set of educational offerings and to build a curricular trajectory toward careers in these important areas," says Amatullo, now Art Center's vice president overseeing Designmatters. "And this year it laid the groundwork for our introduction



of Artmatters—a complementary and parallel concentration in the Fine Art Department that will add a new dimension to questions of art and social engagement."

The Designmatters Department also is overseeing a joint curricular Field track in Media Design Practices, built around a yearlong project conducted in the field. "Students in this track will design in a real-world context where social issues, media infrastructure and communication technology intersect," says Media Design Practices Chair Anne Burdick. The inaugural project partner is UNICEF's Innovation Lab in Uganda, where students will do their fieldwork.

AWARDS, ACCOLADES AND RICHES

Since its founding, Designmatters projects have produced dozens of award-winning results—from Student Clios and Cannes Young Directors distinctions to Red Dot and Core 77 awards. And in May, based on the Department's entire body of work, co-founder Amatullo received the inaugural Dell Social Innovation Education award. As an initiative, Designmatters itself has received accolades unparalleled in the academic sphere: In 2003, in recognition of Designmatters' service to society, Art Center became the first (and remains the only) art and design school granted Nongovernmental Organization (NGO) status by the United Nations. In 2005, Art Center became the first art and design school affiliated as a Civil Member of the Organization of American States (OAS), and also earned NGO status with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

Designmatters, with its innovative model for participatory design and community

engagement that uniquely enhances student skill sets, gives designers tools to generate more resonant and insightful outcomes—in any context. It also provides priceless advocacy and tangible assistance for the subjects of its diverse portfolio of projects. Yet the richest outcome of any Designmatters effort is always the feeling of accomplishment in the students. Maria Moon GMDP 08, a graphic designer whose first involvement with Designmatters came as a fourth-term Graduate Media Design student, voices a common sentiment when asked about her experiences. "The projects that I have participated in have been immensely rewarding on a personal level, and have contributed significantly to my career and outlook on design."

Now a senior user experience designer for Samsung Design America, Moon lives in New York but has remained involved with Designmatters as an alumna. In her most recent project, she collaborated on "Uncool," an anti-gun violence campaign created and planned for implementation in the Los Angeles Unified School District within the next year. As for why she maintains ties to Designmatters after graduation and from across the country, Moon is unequivocal: "Once you understand that you can make a difference through your work, the challenge to have a positive impact in the world is too strong to ignore."

Those are welcome words to Elisa Ruffino, who began working with the Designmatters team early on, first as coordinator and later as project producer. Now she is the Department director, with a unique perspective on this decade of growth, as well as on what the future holds.



"Over the last 10 years, we've had a laser-like focus on the student experience," says Ruffino. "Working within Art Center's model of transdisciplinary studios, involving the talent of some of our highest-caliber faculty, and building a record of intensive engagement in this space over a decade has been unique and rewarding. But looking ahead, we will be building a bridge to the strong community of recent graduates and alumni who value this type of work, not just as a satisfying educational exercise, but as a professional calling."

Ruffino plans to work closely with Alumni Relations Director Kristine Bowne to connect with alumni who are working in this space—noting that many have been doing so since before Designmatters existed—in order to extend the reach of the program and foster its goals. But she is confident that even without a formal architecture, because of their involvement at Art Center, Designmatters veterans will continue to pursue responsible, innovative and human-centered strategies that organically expand the web of social impact design.

"For many students," says Ruffino, "these experiences take art and design practices beyond what they have meant before. It becomes like a light switched on, and many students become so intensely focused that from then on they only want to practice design in this context."

Perhaps because, as President Kennedy believed, they have recognized design's—and their own—greater purpose.



FACING PAGE: Faculty member La Mer Walker consults with students and UN Population Fund partner Christian Delsol.

ABOVE: Vice President Mariana Amatullo gives feedback in an educational studio.

LEFT: Director Elisa Ruffino reviews student presentations in the USGS Wildfires studio.

Designmatters Timeline and select highlights of student work

2001

School-wide survey assessing student interest in "Peace Corps-type" opportunity.
Launch of Designmatters Taskforce.

2002

Designmatters mission established: "To engage, empower and lead an ongoing exploration of art and design education as a positive force of society through research, advocacy and action."

FOUR THEMATIC PILLARS

- Public Policy
- Sustainable Development
- Global Healthcare
- Social Entrepreneurship

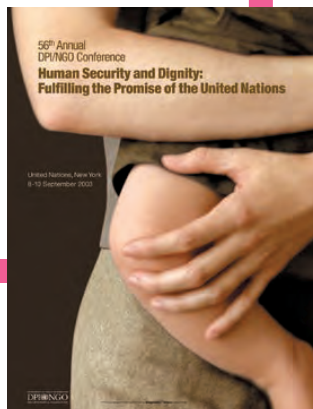
2003

Art Center becomes the first art and design school to be granted Nongovernmental Organization (NGO) status with the United Nations.

Graduate Media Design class designs the first interactive conference website at the UN Department of Public Information and attends the NGO Conference.

2003 PROJECTS

- 1 The Nyumbani Village Project
 - 2 UN DPI/NGO Conference graphic identity
- UN DPI/NGO Conference media platform



Art Center Dot
FEATURE

2004

2004 PROJECTS

- 3 Western Justice Center Toys as Tools for Peaceful Conflict Resolution
 - 4 What If? PSA for the UN Millennium Goals Campaign
 - 5 UNFPA gender equality PSAs
- UNIFEM anti-violence PSAs
 - American Cancer Society anti-smoking PSA



2005

Art Center becomes the first art and design school to be affiliated as a Civil Member Organization with the Organization of American States (OAS).

Granted NGO status with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

First student-created PSA campaign for UNFPA receives worldwide broadcast distribution on CNN International.

Designmatters and Transdisciplinary Studios expanded across educational departments at Art Center.

2005 PROJECTS

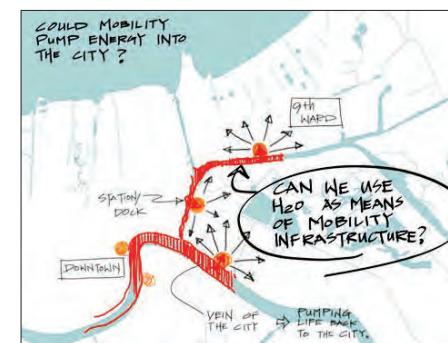
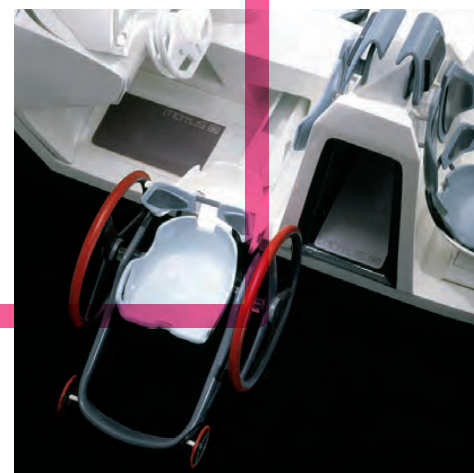
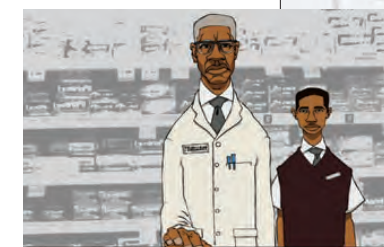
- 6 Johnson Controls Project: The Driven Environment
- 7 PAHO tobacco and alcohol awareness PSAs
- 8 Rebuilding New Orleans



2006

2006 PROJECTS

- 9 American Cancer Society Awareness Campaign
- 10 Stigma LA Department of Mental Health Campaign
- 11 YouOrleans branding of the Katrina Furniture Project
- 12 International Organization for Migration Animated PSAs



Project Awards

2003
Young Directors Award, Cannes Film Festival
Second Place: *Prelude #2*, PSA directed by Hoku Uchiyama

2004
Adobe Design Achievement Award
Second Place, Print Collaboration Category: Nyumbani Village Concept Cards, developed as part of the Nyumbani Village project.
Students: Delna Balsara, Nikolai Corneli, Guilhem De Castelbajac, Humberto E. Flores, Patrick Kiruki, Brody Larson, Nathan Lewis II, Shawn Randall, Thasdao Donna Salazar, Susheela Sankaram, Caitlin Smith, Sonia M. Spragg and Jonathan Nazareth Zabala

2006
Summit Creative Awards, PSA Video Category
Gold Status: *My First Experience*, PSA directed by Cody Heller
Bronze Telly Awards
Video Category: *My First Experience*, PSA directed by Cody Heller

2007
Mobius Award
Student Category, Television: *Moving Day*, PSA directed by Gregg Casson

2008
Silver Spark Award
World-Changing Category: *Images Speak*. Publication developed as part of the Mpala Project
Students: Ching-Ching Cheng, Andrew Behr, Melissa Galaviz Rocamora, Rawn Trinidad and Sara Hofmann

Southern California World Water Forum College Grant
Agua Pura Solar water purifier designed to provide access to clean water in rural Guatemala
Students: Armie Pasa and Gabe la O

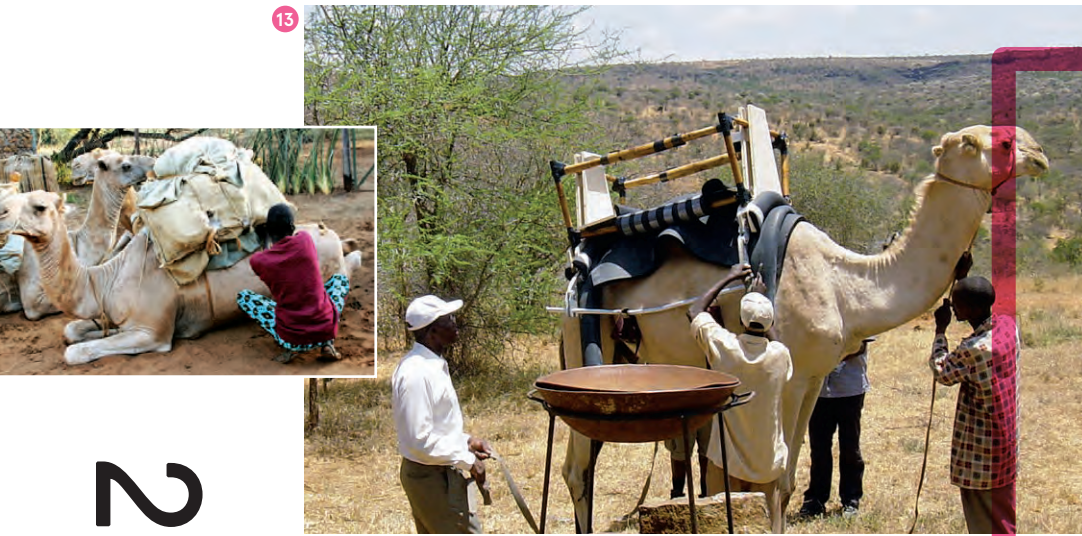
Bronze Industrial Design Excellence Award
Color Guard Mosquito Net. Developed in GE Healthcare Anywhere studio
Students: Eric Burns, Alex Chou, Karen Han, Eren Hebert, Young Kim and Roel Punzalan

Academy of Television Arts & Sciences' College Television Award
First Place, Outstanding Commercials Category: *Blowing Smoke*, PSA directed by Jonas Mayabb

Clio Award
Student Category, Television/Cinema/Digital: *Moving Day*, PSA directed by Gregg Casson

Art Center Dot
FEATURE

2007



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Finalist at the World Bank Global Marketplace Competition: MPALA Project, Kenya.
 Designmatters Fellowship Program launched.

2007 PROJECTS

- 13 Mpala Camel Clinic Project
- 14 GE Healthcare: Healthcare Anywhere
- 15 UNFPA Safe Motherhood Campaign



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2008

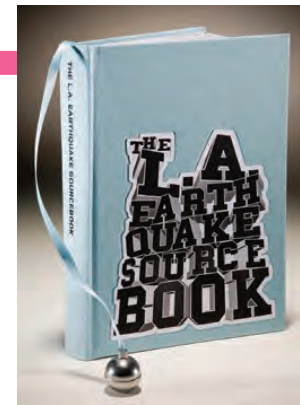
Number of Designmatters projects increases to 3-5 funded per term.



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2008 PROJECTS

- 16 Images for Human Rights Exhibition
- 17 The Los Angeles Earthquake: Get Ready Initiative
- 18 UNFPA: Campaign Celebrating Population and Development ICPD+15
- 19 Climate Change PSA series
- 20 UNICEF from Hi-Fi to Lo-Fi
- Advanced Micro Devices (AMD) Open Architecture Challenge: Namaste – A Telemedicine Center in Nepal
- The Ark Project: A Winter Storm Campaign for USGS
- Research for a Gender-Based Violence Prevention Campaign in the Asia-Pacific Region
- The Organization of American States: Rebranding Project
- GE Healthcare: Future Healthcare Solutions for the Aging
- Flintridge Operating Foundation: Gang Violence Prevention Campaign
- Project Concern International: Tijuana Mobile Health Outreach Clinic
- Designing Water's Future



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Silver ADDY Award
 Student Category, Los Angeles City Level:
Moving Day, PSA directed by Gregg Casson

Three Bronze Telly Awards
 Commercial Category: *Moving Day*, PSA directed by Gregg Casson

Silver ADDY Award
 Student Category, Los Angeles City Level:
The G.G. Meeting, PSA directed by Alice Park

Gold ADDY Award
 Student Category, District Level: *The G.G. Meeting*, PSA directed by Alice Park

National ADDY Award
 Finalist: *The G.G. Meeting*, PSA directed by Alice Park

Bronze Telly Award
 Commercial Category: *The G.G. Meeting*, PSA directed by Alice Park

Shortlist, Cannes Film Festival Young Director Award
 Non-European Film School Category: *The G.G. Meeting*, PSA directed by Alice Park

2009
 Corbis Creativity for Social Justice Award
Images Speak, Publication developed as part of the Mpala Project

Students: Ching-Ching Cheng, Andrew Behr, Melissa Galaviz Rocamora, Rawn Trinidad and Sara Hofmann

Art Directors Club Award
 Silver Cube: *Images Speak*, publication developed as part of the Mpala Project
 Students: Ching-Ching Cheng, Andrew Behr, Melissa Galaviz Rocamora, Rawn Trinidad and Sara Hofmann

Art Directors Awards
 Broadcast Advertising Category, Merit Award:
Blowing Smoke, PSA directed by Jonas Mayabb

ID Magazine Annual Design Review
 Award of Distinction, Student Work:
Blowing Smoke, PSA directed by Jonas Mayabb

2010
 Spark Award
 Multiple Bronze, Silver, Gold and Spark Awards:
 Design Team for Safe Agua
 Students: Elizabeth Bayne, Jackie Black, KC Cho, Ramon Coronado, Narbeh Dereghishian, Stella Hernandez, Erica Li, Nubia Mercado, Stephanie Stalker, Will Tang and Diane Wei

ID-Mag.com
 Best in Category: Es Tiempo
 Students: Phillip An, Mark Brinn, Tracy Hung, Haelee Kang, Chris Lack, Lucia Loiso and Camille Ontiveros

2011
 How Self-Promotion Design Awards
 Category of Student Promotions, Merit:
 Safe Agua
 Students: Elizabeth Bayne, Jackie Black, KC Cho, Ramon Coronado, Narbeh Dereghishian, Stella Hernandez, Erica Li, Nubia Mercado, Stephanie Stalker, Will Tang and Diane Wei

Core 77 Design Awards
 Category of Design for Social Impact, Professional Notable: Safe Agua
 Students: Elizabeth Bayne, Jackie Black, KC Cho, Ramon Coronado, Narbeh Dereghishian, Stella Hernandez, Erica Li, Nubia Mercado, Stephanie Stalker, Will Tang and Diane Wei

ICSID World Design Impact Prize
 Finalist: Safe Agua
 Students: Elizabeth Bayne, Jackie Black, KC Cho, Ramon Coronado, Narbeh Dereghishian, Stella Hernandez, Erica Li, Nubia Mercado, Stephanie Stalker, Will Tang and Diane Wei

Designmatters designated as full Educational Department.

2009 PROJECTS

- 21 + 22 Safe Agua Chile
- Es Tiempo: Cervical Cancer Prevention Among Latinas
- Family Plz: Mayo Clinic Cancer Prevention Campaign
- Vato Verde
- The Organization of American States: Centennial Rebranding Project



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2009



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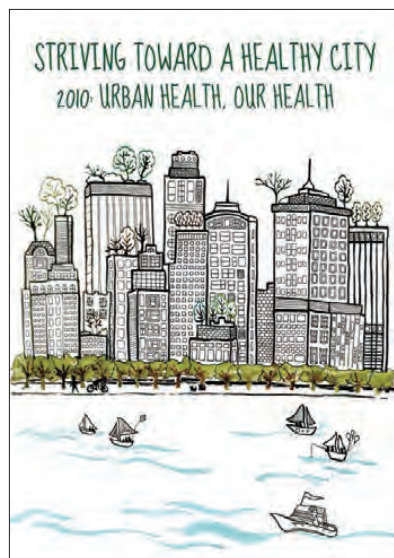


2010

Designmatters Concentration in Art and Design for Social Impact launched.

2010 PROJECTS

- 23 Nonprofit Photography Studio: Pasadena Partnerships
- 24 World Health Day 2010: Urbanism and Healthy Living
- 25 PCI 50th Anniversary Campaign
- 26 Aging Desires: Designing for Transition
- 27 USGS Wildfire Prevention Campaign
- PCI Rebranding Project
- NCIA Guatemala: Creating Social Value Through Design
- Para Nuestras Hijas
- Case Studies for Social Change



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2012



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2011



2011 PROJECTS

- 28 Safe Agua Peru
- 29 Teen Art Park: A Place for Artistic Expression
- The Graying of AIDS: Off the Wall
- Aquarium of the Pacific: Project Coastal Crisis
- The ARKstorm Initiative
- Sustainable Health Enterprises: Awareness Campaign Directions
- Safe Agua—Exhibitions



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- Rethinking the Food Label with UC Berkeley + News21
- Project U HIV-AIDS Awareness Campaign with LAUSD
- Friends of the Bad Weather Shelter Campaign
- UnCool: The Anti-Gun Violence Initiative



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Co-founder Mariana Amatullo receives inaugural Dell Social Innovation Education Award.

Graduate Media Design Practices: Field track launched.

2012 PROJECTS

- 30 ICPD: We Are Youth Campaign
- 31 Living Home India with Ashoka
- 32 UnCool: The Anti-Gun Violence Initiative
- 33 Goodwill Project
- USGS Tsunami Preparedness Campaign
- Change in the Street: Pasadena Homelessness Studio



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AIGA 365: Design Effectiveness Award
Category of Digital Motion Design: *The Harry Gota Story / Safe Agua Chile*
Students: Ian Abando, Elsa Chang, Gürkan Erdemli, James Kim, Micael Klok, Nadia Tsuo and Jason Yeh

Industrial Designers Society of America (IDSA) International Design Excellence Award (IDEA) Category of Design Strategy and Management
—Bronze: Safe Agua
Finalists: ReLava Kitchen Workstation, Safe Agua, KC Cho and Jackie Black / Duchá Halo Portable Shower, Safe Agua, Jessica Yeh and Narbeh Dereghishian

Art Directors Club Award
Interactive Division, Online Content Category
—Gold Cube: Produced for the PCI 50th Anniversary Campaign, *Voices From the Field*
Students: John X. Carey, Kyle Murphy and Jeremy Jackson
Book Design Category—Merit Award: Safe Agua Chile Book
Students: Pei-Jeane Chen, KC Cho, Evangeline Joo, Karen Ko, Giancarlo Llacar, Eric Mathias and Ping Zhu
Motion Design Category—Merit Award: *The Harry Gota Story / Safe Agua Chile*

Students: Ian Abando, Elsa Chang, Gürkan Erdemli, James Kim, Micael Klok, Nadia Tsuo and Jason Yeh

Design Ignites Change Awards
Category of Implementation: Duchá Halo, Safe Agua, Jessica Yeh and Narbeh Dereghishian

2012 Red Dot Design Awards
Best of the Best: Balde a Balde, Safe Agua, Kimberly Chow / GiraDora, Safe Agua, Alex Cabunoc and Ji A You

Core77 Awards
Runner Up: Balde a Balde, Safe Agua, Kimberly Chow
Notable: GiraDora, Safe Agua, Alex Cabunoc and Ji A You

Cannes Film Festival Young Director Award
Shortlist: *Hands in the Mist*, Safe Agua Peru documentary directed by Erik Anderson

Dell Social Innovation Awards
Outstanding Leadership in Social Innovation Education: Mariana Amatullo
Finalist: VitAmigos, Safe Agua, Cora Neil and Thomas Kong

IDSA/IDEA Awards
Gold: Balde a Balde, Safe Agua, Kimberly Chow
Gold: GiraDora, Safe Agua, Alex Cabunoc and Ji A You
Finalist: Soap Buddy, Safe Agua, Carlos Vides / Caja del Tesoro, Safe Agua, Viirj Kan and Seth Weissman / Clean + Smart, Safe Agua, Mariana Prieto and Alexandra Yee

Spark Award
Spark! Highest Award: GiraDora, Safe Agua, Alex Cabunoc and Ji A You
Gold: Balde a Balde, Safe Agua, Kimberly Chow
Bronze: VitAmigos, Safe Agua, Cora Neil and Thomas Kong
Finalist: Soap Buddy, Safe Agua, Carlos Vides / Caja del Tesoro, Safe Agua, Viirj Kan and Seth Weissman / Clean + Smart, Safe Agua, Mariana Prieto and Alexandra Yee

Design Ignites Change Awards
Category of Implementation: Duchá Halo, Safe Agua, Jessica Yeh and Narbeh Dereghishian

The Tech Award
Young Innovators Award: GiraDora and Balde a Balde, Safe Agua, Alex Cabunoc, Ji A You and Kimberly Chow