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FONSECA LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

*Scaling up Capacity for Local
Conservation Leadership*

Deadline: December 18, 2025

11:59 PM US Eastern Time

While progress has been made to address the shortfall of adequate conservation expertise and education in many countries, locally led, practical and culturally relevant solutions are still needed to address biodiversity challenges at institutional, country, and regional levels.

WWF, through the Russell E. Train Education for Nature Program (EFN), provides funding support to current and aspiring conservation researchers, leaders, and practitioners to gain the knowledge, expertise, skills, and leadership critical in developing conservation interventions to address challenges to people and nature across the globe.

The Global Environment Facility (GEF) is dedicated to enhancing the capacity of developing countries and economies in transition to addressing environmental and sustainable development challenges.

EFN is pleased to launch the competitive Fonseca Leadership Program supported by the GEF. The program is designed to scale local and regional conservation leadership in Latin America by providing funding support to the current and next generation of researchers and practitioners to pursue graduate-level studies (master's and PhD). The Fonseca Leadership Program aims to create opportunities to conduct research on applied conservation-related topics which will be critical in the design and implementation of conservation actions in the region. Fellows will also have an opportunity to join the expansive global community of EFN alumni to enable knowledge exchange and collective success.

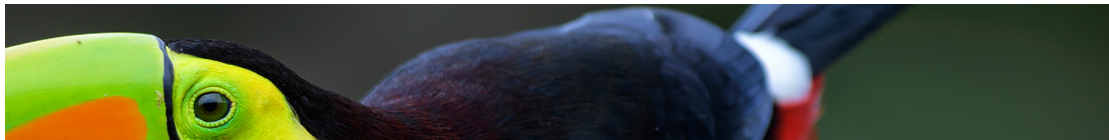
Applicants may apply for up to two (master's) and three (PhD) years of funding and request up to \$30,000 per year. The amount of funding approved will vary. Accepted applicants will be notified by June 2026.



Eligible Countries

The fellowship is open to applicants from eligible countries within WWF-US and the GEF priority areas, who are already enrolled/are interested in enrolling in a master's or PhD program:

- Belize
- Bolivia
- Chile
- Colombia
- Ecuador
- French Guiana
- Guatemala
- Guyana
- Honduras
- Mexico
- Paraguay
- Peru
- Suriname



Eligibility Criteria

Applicants must meet all the following criteria to be eligible.

- You must be an applicant of an eligible country.
- You must preferably have at least two years of conservation-related work or research experience.
- You must be enrolled in or admitted to a master's or PhD program in-country, across the region, or internationally.
- You must plan to begin your studies no later than January 2027.
- You must contact EFN if you are a WWF or GEF employee, consultant, or previous EFN grant recipient to determine eligibility.
- You must submit all required documents by the application deadline (**December 18, 2025 by 11:59 PM US Eastern Time**).

Focus Areas

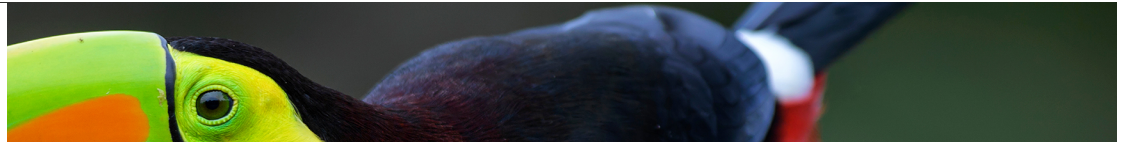
The Fonseca Leadership Program is open to the current and next generation of researchers and practitioners in Latin America to pursue graduate-level studies (master's and PhDs). The research topics may cover the following areas/themes, but examples are not limited to this list:

- Focus applied conservation – specifically courses of study and research that ground students in 'real world' conservation challenges therefore providing training that will be critical for the early career researchers to design and implement conservation action.
- Focus on ecological and socioeconomic context of biodiversity conservation and why the proposed work is needed at local, national, and regional levels.
- Build on partnership and active engagement with local communities, academic research, and practitioners.
- Consider human dimensions in conservation and sustainable development: community-based conservation and science, Indigenous peoples knowledge systems, emphasis on enhancing local expertise, skills, and knowledge.

Selection Criteria

Finalists will be identified through a competitive selection process and scored based on a set of criteria including, but not limited to the following areas:

- Academic and professional contributions/potential: applicant's commitment to their academic, research, and professional development.
- Strength and quality of the research proposal: uniqueness of proposed topic, relevance, and detailed plan of action. The proposed work demonstrates the fellowship's rationale - Focus applied conservation and that the proposed research work highlights the intent to explore solutions that address 'real world' conservation challenges in Latin America and the Caribbean; the proposed activities are feasible within the proposed work plan and realistic budget.



- Individual and collective impact: the applicant's ability to succeed in conservation research and leadership; short and long-term impacts as well as lasting conservation outcomes beyond proposed academic/research timeframe. The proposed work aims to engage diverse stakeholders, including gender mainstreaming and involvement of local and Indigenous communities. The applicant demonstrates potential to build partnerships and active engagement with local communities, academic research, and practitioners.
- Project measurability: the proposed research has measurable outcomes and outputs.
- Collaborations: the applicant's demonstrated potential to enhance partnerships beyond the proposed objectives and timeframe.
- Recommendation letters: the applicant meets the specific criteria for the fellowship with specific examples which demonstrate the applicant's abilities.

Application Process

The call for applications will close on **December 18, 2025 by 11:59 PM US Eastern Time**. An overview of the grant timeline is below.

- December 18, 2025: Due date for submissions of applications in the portal
- January-April 2026: Selection process
- June 2026: Successful applicants informed
- July-August 2026: Contracts signed, and grants issued

How to Apply

Applicants can access the online application and guidelines at www.worldlife.org/efn. Applicants may apply in English, Spanish, or Portuguese. The application deadline is **December 18, 2025 by 11:59 PM US Eastern Time**.

For More Information

Please e-mail EFN at efn@wwfus.org or visit www.worldlife.org/efn for more information.

A Note About the Fonseca Leadership Program

WWF and the GEF are pleased to honor the late Dr. Gustavo Fonseca, a renowned tropical scientist and GEF's long-standing Director of Programs. Dr. Gustavo spent his career committed to working across sectors and borders to address biodiversity challenges. Dr. Fonseca will be remembered as an agent for positive change through his professional and personal contributions.