
Program Summary

The Rising Wildlife Leaders - Career Program is an initiative from the [Wildlife Conservation Network](#) (WCN) aimed at reducing barriers to long-term employment in conservation and retaining talented, passionate, and committed individuals in the field, particularly those native to the region they work. By removing barriers to early career financial and experiential support, more local conservation practitioners will continue in the field as key decision-makers and ensure that wildlife conservation stewardship is rooted locally for the long term. The program currently focuses on African conservationists, though we aim to expand the geographic scope in the future.

To support conservationists' growth journey, WCN will provide program participants with up to 3 years of tailored support, through:

1. **Individualized Capacity Building**: Each participant will develop a "Professional Roadmap" tailored to their individual career trajectory to guide their growth over the three-year program. They will receive up to \$4,000 annually to attend select courses and convenings that directly support their Roadmap goals. (Training support is not available to pursue academic degrees)
2. **Professional Mentorship**: Each participant will be paired with a professional conservationist to serve as their mentor for the duration of the program. Mentors have demonstrated success in the field, particularly in the participant's region and/or areas of interest. Mentors and participants work together in pursuit of the participant's Professional Roadmap, with WCN's support, and meet at least quarterly.
3. **Peer Learning**: WCN provides participants with facilitated networking and learning opportunities with their peers in the Career Program as well as a broader network of conservation professionals. These opportunities may be provided virtually and/or in person in order for participants to develop peer and professional networks that support and promote successful long-term collaborative conservation careers.
4. **Financial Support**: Participants will receive up to \$10,000 annually depending on individual needs. This financial support is intended to reduce financial stress and uncertainty, a major barrier to career sustainability in conservation. Participants will be asked to share a description of how they plan to spend their funding (i.e. project expenses, living expenses, supplies/ equipment, etc). Participants will maintain a current budget and report on funding use. The continuation of this support will be assessed on a quarterly basis following meetings with WCN staff and mentors.

Qualifying Criteria

Applicants should meet the following criteria:

- A local national working in their home country or home region in Africa (strong preference for Black & Indigenous People of Color);
- Early- to mid-career with 3 - 10 years of paid conservation experience;
- Currently affiliated with a conservation organization, either as a staff member or director;
- Hold a bachelor's degree or equivalent experience navigating community-based conservation efforts;
- Intend to practice active in-situ conservation solutions anchored in a community-based approach, rather than purely research without an applied component;
- Focused on conservation work that can be articulated through the lens of protecting threatened wildlife species;

- Be enthusiastic, hard-working, collaborative, self-motivated, with a desire and willingness to learn;
- Nominated by an established conservationist within the WCN network or extended network.

Selection Criteria

The selection committee reviews and selects participants based on how well their application shows the following:

- Demonstrated commitment to a long-term career in wildlife conservation;
- Need for career development opportunities;
- Benefit from the full range of Career Program offerings;
- Current or future leadership potential.

Participant Requirements

- Participants are expected to actively utilize all key program offerings - capacity building, mentoring, peer networking, and financial support.
- Selected participants must be available to attend virtual onboarding, be paired with a mentor, and work with WCN's program manager to develop a Professional Roadmap in the first three months of the program.
- Participants must be able to commit to participating in at minimum two capacity-building opportunities each year of the program, these could be virtual or in-person.
 - Those who are predominantly field-based, with little connectivity, will be required to develop a plan on how they will utilize the training/skill-building allocation.
- Participants are expected to actively engage with their mentor throughout the program and are required to meet with their mentor and WCN program manager at least quarterly to share updates, discuss progress toward their goals, and address career guidance needs.
- Financial support is disbursed quarterly based on preapproved budgets. Participants must report quarterly on their financial needs and their past expenditures, and submit an end-of-year report on their experiences of the previous year.
- Participants should plan to join virtual calls with their program peers for skills training, leadership development, and networking discussions. They should act as supportive peers, and mentors towards newer program participants, and should aim to share their gained knowledge and experience with other aspiring and early-career conservationists.

Application Requirements

Online applications and nominations are shared with eligible nominators each September and will NOT be listed publicly. Applications are **accepted each year in October**. Selected participants **will be notified in December**. If you are an interested candidate who meets all the above eligibility criteria, please email career-program@wildnet.org for more information on how to apply. Note, for your application to be considered **a nominator is required** to submit responses to specific application questions. Nominators should be able to speak to a participant's experience and potential in the field of wildlife conservation. Examples of eligible nominators include an academic advisor, supervisor, or an established leader in conservation who knows the applicant well. We will accept only one nomination per nominator and per organization.



If you have any questions about the Career Program please email career-program@wildnet.org.