



RUSSELL E. TRAIN
EDUCATION
FOR **NATURE**

WWF Conservation Futures Fellowship

The connections of Indigenous peoples and local communities to species, ecosystems, lands, and waters—and their deep knowledge and stewardship of them—are critical for enhancing biodiversity conservation outcomes. Community-led approaches to conservation can enhance ecosystem restoration, improve livelihoods, and support effective responses to climate change. However, the success of these efforts is often undermined by the historical and ongoing marginalization of Indigenous peoples, local communities, and traditional resource users (e.g., small-scale fishers, smallholder farmers) in the definition and practice of modern conservation. Although there is growing recognition of the contributions of Indigenous peoples and local communities as stewards of conservation knowledge, science, and practice, significant barriers remain to effective implementation. These include inadequate recognition of rights, limited integration of local knowledge, insufficient collaboration in governance, and a lack of sustainable financing.

The Conservation Futures Fellowship builds on WWF's longstanding commitment to advancing more inclusive conservation leadership by prioritizing research projects that promote the active engagement of Indigenous peoples and local communities in conservation efforts at local grassroots, national, and regional levels. This competitive fellowship seeks to strengthen research capacity and develop thought leadership within countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America by supporting both emerging and experienced researchers, practitioners, and leaders in pursuing graduate-level studies (master's and PhD). Supported research will advance understanding of key topics related to inclusive conservation while strengthening the knowledge, skills, and capacities of Indigenous peoples and local communities.

In addition, the fellowship supports individuals committed to fostering genuine partnerships where local voices play a central role in conservation research and outcomes. Fellows are expected to promote the co-creation of knowledge, engagement tools, and solutions with communities, while emphasizing the value of local and traditional knowledge in the development of place-based conservation strategies.

Throughout the fellowship and beyond, selected fellows will become part of an expanding global community of conservation leaders within WWF's Russell E Train Education for Nature (EFN) Program working alongside Indigenous peoples and local communities. As a coordinated fellowship, it will support sustainable and innovative research approaches grounded in the principles of service learning and community engagement and will emphasize close collaboration with community leaders and community-based organizations in WWF's priority areas.

Applicants may apply for funding for up to two years for master's degree programs and up to three years for PhD programs, with awards up to USD \$30,000 per year. Funding may be used to support tuition and fees, living expenses, books and materials, and research costs. Final award amounts will be determined based on the scope and needs of each proposal.

Notifications of acceptance will be communicated in July 2026.

FELLOWSHIP GOALS

- ▶ Foster thought leadership and research capacity in the human dimensions of inclusive conservation.
- ▶ Strengthen community engagement and participatory approaches to address critical knowledge gaps and enable integrative monitoring and analysis of trends in biodiversity and ecosystem services, including their interrelationships, underlying drivers, and opportunities for collective action to reverse biodiversity loss.
- ▶ Identify and reflect on the diverse value systems that shape how stakeholders engage with biodiversity and ecosystem services, as well as their shared visions for safeguarding them.
- ▶ Analyze and develop inclusive governance options and instruments—economic, social, regulatory, and legal—through participatory dialogue and co-creation processes, that support biodiversity conservation and the sustainable use of biodiversity.
- ▶ Collaboratively develop and explore transformative pathways that bring shared visions to life by integrating cultural, political, economic, and technological dimensions, while advancing the leadership of Indigenous peoples and local communities as key agents of change.
- ▶ Strengthen and sustain collaborations between WWF and communities in WWF's priority areas.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

Applicants must meet all of the following criteria to be eligible:

- ▶ Citizenship or residency: Applicant must be from an eligible country. This fellowship is open to applicants from eligible countries within WWF-US priority areas who are already enrolled in, or interested in, enrolling in a PhD program. Eligible countries include *Belize, Bhutan, Bolivia, Brazil, Cambodia, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chile, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ecuador, Fiji, French Guiana, Gabon, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Indonesia, Kenya, Laos, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mozambique, Myanmar, Namibia, Nepal, Paraguay, Peru, Republic of Congo, Suriname, Tanzania, Uganda, Vietnam, and Zambia*.
- ▶ Professional experience: Applicant must have at least two years of conservation-related work, research, or academic experience.
- ▶ Commitment to conservation: Applicant must demonstrate a clear commitment to working in conservation in an eligible country.
- ▶ Academic status: Applicant must be enrolled in, admitted to, or have applied to a master's or PhD program anywhere in the world. Preference will be given to candidates studying in their home countries or regions, as this provides opportunities to work closely with communities.
- ▶ Program start date: Applicant must plan to begin your studies no later than January 2027.
- ▶ WWF affiliation: Applicant must contact the EFN team if you are a current or former WWF employee, consultant, or previous EFN grant recipient to determine eligibility.
- ▶ Application completeness: Applicant must submit all required application materials by the stated deadline of April 15, 026, at 11:59 PM US Eastern Time.

THEMATIC AREAS

The fellowship thematic areas are designed to bridge academic and research excellence with conservation practice and policy. They emphasize hands-on learning and applied research conducted in close collaboration with Indigenous peoples and local communities. Applicants should ensure that their proposed research is not only theoretically and methodologically rigorous but also practical, policy relevant, and responsive to real-world conservation challenges faced by these communities.

Proposed research topics span a wide range of issues, including—but not limited to—the following thematic areas:

THEME 1: DRIVERS AND TRENDS IN ECOSYSTEMS AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

This theme focuses on research related to species, ecosystems, lands, and waters, with an emphasis on understanding how these systems are used, managed, and sustained. It highlights the role of Indigenous peoples and local communities in the stewardship of natural resources and the application of their knowledge to protect biodiversity and maintain ecosystem health. Research proposals may leverage existing ecological and social data to examine successful community-based conservation models, identify best practices and enabling conditions, and assess how such approaches can be adapted or scaled to other contexts. Topics may include, but are not limited to, human-wildlife conflict, biodiversity loss, climate change and adaptation strategies, and the impacts of shifting human populations as drivers of ecosystem change.

THEME 2: VALUATION, VALUES, AND VALUE SYSTEMS

This theme invites research that explores various methodologies for assessing the value of biodiversity and ecosystem services, integrating social, cultural, and economic dimensions that influence conservation outcomes. Proposals should examine how Indigenous peoples and local communities interact with their environments and the implications for biodiversity conservation. Applicants are encouraged to articulate long-term goals and aspirational visions that support a sustainable future for both nature and people. Research should advance conservation approaches that uphold the right to a healthy environment, safeguard cultural identity, and incorporate value systems into effective conservation practices and policies.

THEME 3: ENGAGING YOUTH IN CONSERVATION

This theme examines strategies for meaningfully involving youth in conservation initiatives, with a focus on education, outreach, and leadership development. Research proposals may explore innovative approaches to empowering young people as agents of change and fostering long-term commitment to environmental stewardship within their communities.

THEME 4: TECHNOLOGY AS TOOLS FOR ENGAGEMENT AND CO-CREATION

This theme investigates the role of technological advancements—such as artificial intelligence, remote sensing, geographic information systems, and citizen science—in addressing environmental challenges that affect people and nature. Proposals should emphasize how data and technology can enhance data collection and analysis and support co-creation of knowledge and solutions.

THEME 5: GOVERNANCE AND TRANSFORMATION

This theme explores governance mechanisms and transformative pathways that promote biodiversity conservation and ecosystem resilience while supporting community well-being. Research proposals should examine sustainable management approaches, including community-based conservation, and emphasize the integration of Traditional Ecological Knowledge with contemporary conservation science and practice. Proposals must include strategies for actively involving local communities throughout the research process, ensuring their perspectives inform and shape conservation practices and policies.

SELECTION CRITERIA

Finalists for the Conservation Futures Fellowship will be identified through a competitive selection process and evaluated against criteria aligned with the fellowship's objectives. These criteria include, but are not limited to, the following:

- ▶ Academic and professional contributions and potential: Assessment of the applicant's commitment to academic and professional development in conservation. This includes prior achievements and demonstrated alignment with the fellowship's emphasis on integrating Indigenous and local knowledge into conservation research and practice.
- ▶ Strength and quality of the research proposal: Evaluation of the originality, relevance, and rigor of the proposed research topic. Proposals must present a clear and coherent action plan that demonstrates a strong understanding of the fellowship's objectives and addresses real-world conservation challenges. Key elements to consider include:

- ▶ Conceptual relevance and contribution: The proposal should address pressing conservation challenges or opportunities and offer innovative perspectives that advance understanding in the field, with clear relevance to Indigenous peoples and local communities.
- ▶ Robustness of research design: The proposal must include clearly defined research objectives, feasible methodologies, and a coherent analytical framework that collectively addresses the research questions.
- ▶ Engagement with Indigenous peoples and local communities: Proposals must outline strategies for meaningful engagement with Indigenous peoples and local communities throughout the research process, including trust building, inclusive participation, and integration of traditional knowledge and practices into the research framework.
- ▶ Cultural sensitivity and ethical considerations: The proposal should demonstrate cultural awareness and ethical rigor, including approaches to consent, data ownership, equitable benefit sharing, and respect for local customs, traditions, and values.
- ▶ Project measurability: The proposed research must include clearly defined, measurable outcomes and outputs to enable assessment of progress and evaluation of success throughout the fellowship period.
- ▶ Feasibility and budget realism: Proposed activities must be achievable within the proposed timeline and budget, with adequate allocation of resources for community engagement activities and participatory research. Timelines should reflect the time required to build relationships and conduct collaborative research.
- ▶ Anticipated outcomes and impact: The proposal should clearly articulate expected short- and long-term outcomes and impacts of the research, including strengthened conservation capacity, improved resource management, and enhanced community resilience.

- ▶ Individual and collective impact: Assessment of the applicant's potential for leadership in conservation research and leadership, including the likelihood of generating lasting outcomes and impacts beyond the proposed academic or research timeframe. Proposals should demonstrate inclusive stakeholder engagement, attention to gender equity and mainstreaming, and the ability to build and sustain partnerships with communities, academic institutions, and practitioners.
- ▶ Collaborations: Evaluation of the applicant's capacity and willingness to strengthen partnerships beyond the immediate scope of the fellowship, including collaboration with diverse actors in conservation.
- ▶ Letters of recommendation: Letters of recommendation should provide concrete examples of the applicant's past work, commitment to conservation, and potential for future research and contributions, in accordance with the fellowship's specified requirements.

APPLICATION PROCESS

The call for applications will close on April 15, 2026 by 11:59 PM US Eastern Time. Applicants can access the online application and guidelines at www.worldwildlife.org/efn. Applicants may apply in English, Spanish, French, or Portuguese.

- ▶ April 15: Deadline for submissions of applications in the portal
- ▶ April–June 2026: Selection process
- ▶ July 2026: Successful applicants informed
- ▶ August–September 2026: Contracts signed, and grants issued

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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