



Call for Applications 2025

Photo: Paulina Cerna

Advancing Public Policies for the Conservation of the Mesoamerican Reef

MAR Leadership Program Build & Connect 2025

Oriented toward public officials, legislators, or civil society members who want to design, improve, or accelerate public policies that promote businesses and ventures with a positive impact (BVPI) on the Mesoamerican Reef.

1. The Mesoamerican Reef

The Mesoamerican Reef (MAR) is one of the world's most valuable ecological treasures and is home to the second-largest barrier reef. This unique ecosystem spans over 1,000 kilometers along the coasts of Mexico, Belize, Guatemala, and Honduras, harboring extraordinary marine and coastal biodiversity.





More than two million people directly depend on its resources for their livelihoods and well-being.

The MAR's mangroves, seagrasses, and coral reefs serve vital ecological functions: they act as natural barriers against hurricanes, filter water, and sustain food chains crucial for both marine and human life. However, this ecological balance is severely threatened by a combination of factors. The cumulative effects of climate change—such as coral bleaching, ocean deoxygenation, and declining fish populations—are compounded by unsustainable human activities. These include pollution from wastewater and agricultural chemicals, overfishing that disrupts trophic chains, unregulated tourism that damages coral reefs, and the degradation of mangroves and seagrasses, which are fundamental to coastal resilience and the economic security of local communities.



In this context, BVPI have emerged as key drivers of conservation and sustainable development, providing innovative solutions to address these challenges. Nonetheless, their potential is limited by significant obstacles, such as restricted access to financing, fragmented regulatory frameworks, limited technological innovation, complex permitting processes, insufficient technical

capacities, and a lack of supporting policies. These limitations hinder the expansion of BVPI's operations and diminish their impact on the conservation and sustainable management of the MAR.

Overcoming these challenges requires coordinated action, including cross-sector collaboration, regulatory simplification, capacity strengthening, improved access to financing, and promoting policies that empower BVPI to maximize their contribution to conservation and sustainable development in the region.

2. MAR Leadership Program Build & Connect 2025

The Mesoamerican Reef Leadership Program (MAR Leadership), launched in 2010 by the [Mexican Fund for the Conservation of Nature](#) (FMCN, Spanish acronym) with the support from [The Summit Foundation](#) aims to promote the long-term conservation of the MAR. This program has established itself as a key tool for strengthening local leadership and fostering high-impact initiatives that address the complex environmental and socioeconomic challenges of coastal communities in Mexico, Belize, Guatemala, and Honduras.

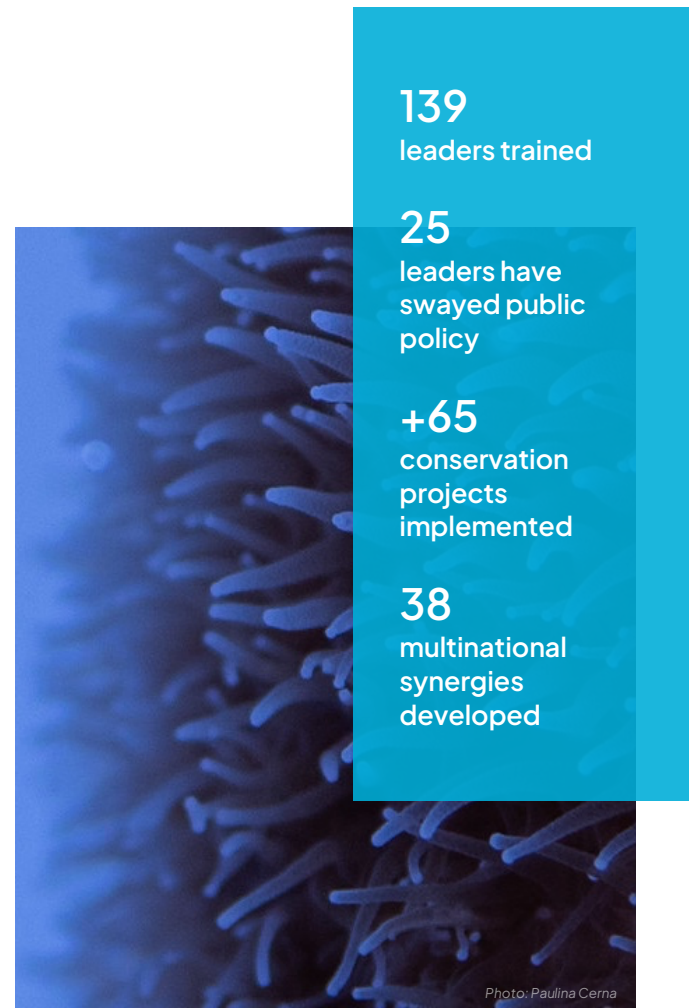


Throughout its 15 years of operation, MAR Leadership has trained 139 leaders from diverse sectors and disciplines in the four countries that comprise the MAR. The program operates through annual cohorts designed around a specific theme, maximizing synergies between participants, strengthening networks, and encouraging the implementation of collaborative projects focused on common goals.

Since 2022, MAR Leadership has been operated by [Sureste Sostenible, A.C.](#), and forms part of [MAR+Invest](#), an ambitious regional initiative led by [MAR Fund](#) with support from the [Global Fund for Coral Reefs](#). MAR+Invest seeks to attract private capital to develop and finance market-driven solutions that positively impact barrier reef conservation, supporting threat reduction, conservation, and restoration efforts across the region's 18 coastal and marine protected areas (CMPAs)¹.

In 2025, the program will work with a total of 15 participants, including national and subnational public officials and legislators, as well as civil society members from the four countries in the region.

To achieve this ambitious objective, the program will provide participants with a comprehensive learning experience, including an intensive in-person workshop, specialized training, and expert



mentorship. This will equip participants with the knowledge, skills, and collaborative networks necessary to achieve their goals. Participants will complete the program after developing a public policy proposal under the guidance of international experts.

¹ List of the 18 selected CMPAs: [MAR+Invest CMPAs map.pdf](#)



3. What Will You Learn and How?

Throughout the program, you will develop key knowledge and learn strategic tools and practical methodologies for designing, validating, and promoting effective public policy proposals. This will be achieved through a hybrid training process that combines in-person and virtual sessions, specialized mentoring, and networking spaces with decision-makers and international experts.

The program's curriculum will include the following topics:

MAR context and obstacle analysis

Understand the environmental and socioeconomic challenges that affect the barrier reef, as well as principal obstacles that BVPI face.

Market incentives and Nature-based Solutions (NbS)

Explore the financial mechanisms and strategies for the conservation, restoration, and sustainable use of marine and coastal resources.

Designing innovative public policies

Understand the cycle of public policies and learn to design innovative strategies using methodologies like Design Thinking and strategic analysis.

Proposal validation and positioning

Put your initiatives to the test within real situations (sandboxing) and learn effective strategies for their adoption and implementation.

Leadership and strategic alliance-building

Develop skills for fostering inter-institutional cooperation, building solid networks, and negotiating agreements that drive impactful projects.

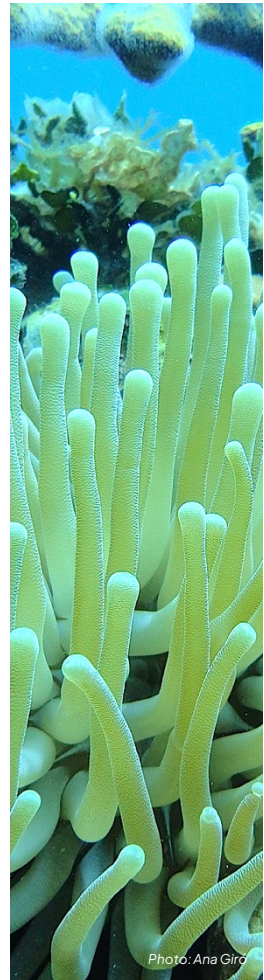
4. Program Structure



In-person workshop

June 23-27

We will meet for a week in Quintana Roo, Mexico. In this workshop, you will strengthen your leadership skills, design the bases of your policy proposal, and establish connections with public officials, legislators, and mentors from other countries. All accommodation and travel expenses will be covered by the MAR Leadership Program.





Virtual training sessions

Starting July 7

We will hold synchronous training sessions taught by international experts once or twice a month. Each session will be recorded, allowing you to view it after in case you cannot attend. The training sessions will tentatively take place on Mondays at a time that will be defined based on the availability of the group majority.



Personalized mentoring

Once a month

Each policy proposal (individual or team) will have an advisory session to perfect the final proposal design.

| June | | | | | | | July | | | | | | | August | | | | | | |
|------|----|----|----|----|----|----|------|----|----|----|----|----|----|--------|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| M | T | W | T | F | S | S | M | T | W | T | F | S | S | M | T | W | T | F | S | S |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | | | | | 1 | 2 |
| 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 |
| 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 |
| 29 | 30 | | | | | | 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 | 31 | | | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 31 | | | | | | |

| September | | | | | | | October | | | | | | | Legend | |
|-----------|----|----|----|----|----|----|---------|----|----|----|----|----|----|--------|---------------------------|
| M | T | W | T | F | S | S | M | T | W | T | F | S | S | | |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | | In-person workshop |
| 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | | Virtual training sessions |
| 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | | Personalized mentoring |
| 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | | Virtual graduation |
| 28 | 29 | 30 | | | | | 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 | 31 | | | |

Between July and October, you will have free weeks every month to advance your policy proposal, devoting an average of two hours per week to the program.

5. What Skills Will You Acquire?

- **Leadership and communication skills.** You will learn to lead multidisciplinary teams and cultivate the talent of your collaborators. In addition, you will acquire tools to communicate effectively, resolve conflicts, and negotiate with key actors.
- **Comparative analysis of public policies.** You will analyze case studies to identify best practices, understand different contexts, and adapt specific solutions to the needs of the MAR.



- **Policy design and sandbox validation.** You will develop a public policy proposal, test it in controlled environments, and receive direct feedback from experts and key actors. This will allow you to adjust and perfect your proposal before implementing it.
- **Monitoring, evaluation, and scalability.** You will design indicators and follow-up mechanisms to measure the impact and ensure the sustainability of your proposal. You will present your results to decision-makers and experts to encourage the implementation and expansion of your solutions.

6. Examples of Public Policy Proposals

Control of illegal fishing and strengthening of fishing communities.

Initiatives to improve the surveillance of marine protected areas and compliance with fishing bans through technology, product traceability, and awareness strategies, ensuring sustainability and transparency in fishing activities.

Control of invasive species through green businesses.

Initiatives that will convert invasive species into sustainable business opportunities (e.g., production of lionfish meal or production of value-added products like biofuel from sargassum), reducing their ecological impact while promoting the local economy under a circular economy perspective.

Restoration of marine ecosystems.

Projects aimed at regenerating coral reefs, either through coral nurseries, mangrove restoration, or seagrass reforestation, with the participation of coastal communities.

Wastewater treatment.

Projects that promote collaboration between environmental authorities, companies, and local communities to establish water quality standards, continuous monitoring, and a certification system that encourages the adoption of good practices such as on-site treatment of domestic wastewater.

To address these and other environmental issues, it is possible to use various public policy instruments that can be applied individually or in combination. Projects may include instruments such as voluntary agreements and certifications, innovative financial mechanisms such as green bonds, improvements in regulatory frameworks, tax incentives, and coordination strategies between different levels of government and operational bodies, among others.



Desirable qualifications include experience working on topics related to environmental conservation, formulating public policies, or sustainable biodiversity management in their countries and/or the MAR.

2. Potential impact of the proposal:

The public policy proposal should align with the program's objectives of reducing the obstacles to BVPI and promoting investments that positively impact reefs.

Proposals covering the program's priority topics—fisheries, restoration, conservation of marine-coastal ecosystems, invasive species management (e.g., sargassum, algae), water treatment, sustainable tourism, and tax incentives for sustainable businesses—will be prioritized.

3. Potential implementation of the proposal:

The applicant must have institutional support and/or the ability to generate synergies with key actors to facilitate the design and implementation of the developed proposal.

4. Availability and time commitment:

The applicant must guarantee their availability to dedicate approximately two to three hours per week to the program and carry out the proposed activities, ensuring a sustained commitment throughout the five (5) months that the program lasts.

5. Diversity and representation:

To ensure a comprehensive and multidisciplinary perspective, people from different sectors and levels of government are encouraged to participate. Gender equity and the representation of diverse groups within the program will be valued.



Photo: Moments by Amaya Juan

10. How to Apply

To apply for the MAR Leadership Program Build & Connect 2025, all applicants must complete the following form:

<https://forms.gle/GKPQgwLLjhK4gqxx9>

The deadline to complete and submit the form is Sunday, April 13, 2025, at 23:30 hrs. (Mexico City time).

The form must include the following documents (in Word or PDF format, in Spanish or English):

1. **Curriculum vitae** (max. two pages)
2. **Letter of Commitment or Letter of Institutional Support**



Letter of Commitment: A personal letter of commitment is required for participants without a hierarchical superior, such as legislators. The letter must guarantee the availability to participate actively in all course activities and the obligation to apply the knowledge acquired in their relevant area of influence. It must be addressed to María Eugenia Arreola, Executive Director of Sureste Sostenible, A.C.

Letter of Institutional Support: A letter issued by the head of the corresponding department or entity is required for participants with a hierarchical superior. This document must confirm institutional support and specify the following:

- Justification for the selection of the candidate and support for participating in all program activities.
- Confirmation of institutional support to attend the in-person workshop and virtual training (including necessary permits).
- Confirmation that the appointed person will remain in their position until December 2025.
- The letter must be addressed to María Eugenia Arreola, Executive Director of Sureste Sostenible, A.C.

11. Important Dates in 2025

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|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Call for applications opens | February 28 |
| Information sessions | March 12–27 |
| Call for applications closes | April 13 |
| Proposals review | April 21 – May 11 |
| Notification of results | May 12–16 |
| Deadline to sign institutional documents and complete the in-person workshop form | May 26 |
| Program/in-person workshop start | June 23–27 |
| Remote work | July 7 – October 26 |
| End of course/graduation | October 27 |

12. Questions?

If you are interested, please join our information sessions via Zoom (Mexico City time).

Sessions in Spanish:

Wednesday, March 12, 2025 | 17:00-18:30 (Mexico City)
Wednesday, March 19, 2025 | 10:00-11:30 (Mexico City)

Sessions in English:

Thursday, March 20, 2025 | 17:00-18:30 (Mexico City)
Thursday, March 27, 2025 | 10:00-11:30 (Mexico City)

Register for the information sessions:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/NDIOJrL1SpWR8ReqfIMt-A>

Contact: info@surestesostenible.org

