

# CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

## Mesoamerican Reef Leadership (MAR Leadership)

2021 Program: Strategies for improving the health and resilience of the MAR ecosystem, with a focus on addressing nutrient pollution and contributing to a sustainable recovery from the impacts of COVID-19.

### Selection and Application Process

If you think that you or your team meet the call's requirements and can support the 2021 program theme, follow these steps:



1. Contact María Eugenia Arreola to request the application format. ([maria.arreola@fmcn.org](mailto:maria.arreola@fmcn.org))



2. Complete **one format** per team and send it with each participant's documents included.

You will receive an email confirming that your documents have been received.



Incomplete or late applications will NOT be considered.

**Deadline: October 15, 2020**



3. **First interview** with qualified individuals or teams by phonecall or Skype.  
**Second interview** with finalist individuals or teams.



4. Official **acceptance** of selected leaders by email.

NOVEMBER  
2020

Program **begins**.

JANUARY  
2020



#### Documents for each participant: (Word or PDF format, Spanish or English)

- CV with contact information (email, cell phone number, office phone number, and Skype ID)
- Two letters of recommendation from professional colleagues with whom you have worked
- An endorsement letter from your current supervisor
- A letter of motivation (max. 800 words) or a three-minute video that describes:
  - Your education and current profession, the reason for which you'd like to be a MAR leader and the importance of your project.
  - How the idea of your project will help your professional development and how it will help your organization reach its objectives.
  - If you require financial support for the program and why.



Virtual workshops:  
January - June, 2021

In-person workshop:  
Second semester of 2021



## 2021 CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

### Mesoamerican Reef Leadership Program

Deadline to apply: October 15, 2020

The Mesoamerican Reef (MAR) ecoregion encompasses the largest coral reef in the Atlantic Ocean. It is part of the interconnected system of coastal habitats and currents that extends throughout the wider Caribbean. Its coastline stretches for 1,000 kilometers from the tip of the Yucatan Peninsula in Mexico to the Bay Islands in Honduras, passing through Belize and Guatemala.

Conserving and sustainably managing this ecosystem is essential not only for protecting the region's outstanding biodiversity but for contributing to the wellbeing of coastal communities and to the economies of Mexico, Belize, Guatemala, and Honduras. This need is all the more urgent as the region, like the world, grapples with the impacts of the global pandemic.

To help meet this need, the Mesoamerican Reef Leadership Program (MAR-L) aims to advance long-term conservation of the MAR by equipping a critical mass of local leaders with the knowledge, tools, and networking opportunities they need to initiate and implement high-impact conservation projects. The program will consider both long-standing threats to the reef ecosystem and the additional immense challenges and potential opportunities created by the novel coronavirus. Due to the travel restrictions necessitated by the global pandemic, the 2021 program will be conducted at least initially via the Internet.

The many challenges in the MAR include climate change and a wide range of unsustainable human activities, including those related to coastal development and fishing. Protections for the ecosystem, such as an adequate network of marine reserves and effective conservation of critical habitats such as coral reefs, mangroves, and seagrasses, fall short of what is needed. It is increasingly clear that the MAR is also threatened by pollution, including from untreated or inadequately treated sewage and poorly managed agriculture practices. To these threats now are added new ones arising from the devastating effects of the global pandemic. As the region's governments develop and implement plans to rebuild their economies, there is a risk that rebuilding efforts will fail to recognize the crucial importance of a healthy MAR in supporting a sustainable economic recovery and improving the health and resilience of coastal communities. But this challenge also presents an opportunity to "build back better" from the pandemic, and put in place more sustainable, equitable, and just conservation and management strategies.

The MAR Leadership Program is now inviting individuals or teams of three early or mid-career professionals who live in the Mesoamerican Reef System (MAR) to apply with a project designed to help restore the natural resilience of the region's marine and coastal ecosystems, ensuring the sustainability of their productive activities and the conservation of their natural resources. As noted in the 2020 Healthy Reefs Initiative Reef Health Report Card, nutrient pollution from inadequate sewage treatment and agricultural run-off are an increasing threat to the MAR. Thus projects tackling an aspect of this problem are particularly welcome, although projects focused on any threat to coastal and marine ecosystems will be considered. Given the impacts of COVID-19, preference will be given to projects that explicitly consider how the work may contribute to the recovery from the impacts of the global pandemic.

The MAR-L Program offers training and project incubation opportunities to emerging leaders from all relevant sectors as long as their professional activities and interests directly connect with the health and environmental sustainability of the region. Given that the 2021 program will be delivered virtually for at least the first few months, and maybe for its entire duration, applicants must have access to reliable internet and the ability to participate in videoconferences.

## ABOUT THE MAR LEADERSHIP PROGRAM



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To contribute to the long term conservation of the MAR ecoregion and guarantee the environmental services that it provides, in 2010, the Mexican Fund for the Conservation of Nature and the Summit Foundation launched the Mesoamerican Reef Leadership Program (MAR-L). MAR-L develops the capacities and potential of young conservationists in the region to design and implement high impact conservation projects, providing them with mentoring opportunities, leadership tools, and the chance to connect through networks and become agents of change in the region.

In the ten years of operation, MAR-L has trained 103 leaders from the four countries and incubated more than 60 conservation projects. More than 60 leaders have advanced to positions of greater responsibility, and 25 leaders have influenced public policies in their country. From the relationships developed in the Program, 28 multinational synergies have emerged, and 27 leaders have received funding from the MAR Fund to implement their projects and carry out consultancies.

MAR-L operates based on "cohorts" of practitioners (Leaders) from a variety of backgrounds and professions (lawyers, biologists, architects, communication experts, environmental engineers, tourism entrepreneurs, and community leaders) and different sectors (academic, local, state and federal governments, civil society and business organizations).

Each year, the Program selects a theme to maximize synergies among Leaders, facilitate group networking, and encourage project design around a common goal. Past topics and projects that Leaders continue to advance throughout the region include the following:

2010	Sustainable Coastal Development and Tourism
2011	Promotion of Sustainable Fisheries and Establishment of Marine Protected Areas
2012	Establishment of a Network of Multi-functional Marine Reserves
2014	Solid Waste Management
2015	Conservation and Valuation of Mangroves
2016	Promotion of a Blue Economy Approach
2018	Sustainable Fisheries and Community Development
2019	Sustainable Fisheries and Community Development

MAR-L also promotes interaction and cooperation among members of each cohort as well as between distinct cohorts. Such interaction fosters a network of supportive professionals and provides Leaders a holistic perspective on how to resolve complicated environmental conservation issues.

**Thematic approaches for the 2021 cohort:**

**Strategies for improving the health and resilience of the MAR ecosystem, with a focus on addressing nutrient pollution and contributing to a sustainable recovery from the impacts of COVID-19**

Since the emergence of COVID-19 in Asia last year, the virus has rapidly spread worldwide with extensive social and economic effects. People lost jobs and income, with no way of knowing when normality will return. Coastal communities heavily dependent on tourism, have empty hotels and deserted beaches. Small-scale fishers also face negative implications, including complete shutdowns of some fisheries, knock-on economic effects from market disruptions, increased health risks, exacerbated vulnerabilities to other social and environmental stressors, and increased illegal fishing (COBI, 2020).

On the other hand, climate change is expected to have continued, significant impact on the MAR, with effects ranging from coastal flooding linked to rising sea levels, to increased mass coral bleaching due to warming seas, to reduced body size of fish due to reduced oxygen and sea temperature related distribution changes. These impacts will accelerate the decline of ecosystem health. In addition to climate impacts, the health of the coral, mangroves and seagrass which make up the ecosystem are stressed and threatened by human activity including deforestation, sedimentation and pollution, untreated wastewater disposal, overfishing, unsustainable aquaculture, various unsustainable coastal development activities associated with tourism and recreational infrastructure growth, demographic expansion, the provision of public services, dredging, and mineral extraction. According to the 2020 Healthy Reefs Report Card, most of the 286 sites monitored (46%) now rank poor vs. 37% two years earlier. Of the thousand kilometers of coast that span from Quintana Roo to Honduras, only the reef portions of Belize and Cozumel present a favorable condition.

The Mesoamerican Reef Leadership Program (MAR-L) invites individuals or teams of three earlier or mid-careers who live in the Mesoamerican Reef System (MAR) to apply with a project designed to improve the health and resilience of the MAR ecosystem, thus improving the ecosystem’s ability to sustain livelihoods and contribute to the resilience of coastal communities and national economies. Prospective applicants

must demonstrate their interest in developing innovative concrete activities, scaling up existing efforts or adapting successful strategies to address both long-standing threats to the health and resilience of the region's marine or coastal ecosystems, with a focus on environmental and livelihood needs of coastal communities, and the additional immense challenges and potential opportunities created by the novel coronavirus, such as projects that:

- Restore marine and coastal ecosystems as a strategic response to COVID-19 and climate change impacts (e.g. restoration of corals, mangroves, and seagrasses).
- Promote improved food security through more sustainable use of marine and coastal resources and/or through regenerative economies or value chains (barter products from the Mayan forest for products from the ocean).
- Promote livelihood diversification by conserving marine and coastal natural resources through the search for new value chains (e.g. sustainable tourism, sustainable fisheries and aquaculture).
- Improve operational capacity to scale the production of marine and coastal goods and services, improving people's income.
- Strengthen the organization of collectives, cooperatives, and local markets (collectives, etc.) relating to coastal and marine resources.
- Develop new technologies to improve water and sanitation services that will increase resilience to climate change.
- Promote wastewater legislation, either through the ratification of the Cartagena Convention and its Protocols, or regional legislation applied by each country for the MAR watersheds.
- Promote economic valuation studies of hydrological services of the MAR watersheds as a tool for integrated watershed management. (e.g. quantify the economic losses of the reef, tourism, and fisheries due to water pollution).
- Launch environmental education campaigns at the local and regional levels promote understanding the impacts of water pollution on the MAR, human health, the wellbeing of coastal communities, and important industries (e.g. sustainable tourism).

## FELLOW APPLICANT PROFILE

We invite individuals or teams of three early-mid careers to apply to this Call. Teams made up of members from different sectors (government, civil society organizations, academic institutions, community organizations, and private sectors) and professions (lawyers, economists, and finance, biologists, engineers, chemists, administrators) will be more likely to be selected. MAR leaders from previous cohorts are encouraged to join the prospective teams. Team members should meet the following eligibility requirements:

- Be a resident of the Mesoamerican Reef ecoregion, which includes locations within Belize, the Caribbean basin of Guatemala and Honduras, and the State of Quintana Roo in Mexico;
- preferably be at the early to mid-career level;
- minimum three years of experience working on environmental (ideally coastal and marine resource related conservation) issues through community work, school, university or work experience;

- understanding of the local ecosystems and the connection between watersheds and the coral reef;
- experience working with local community groups and/or initiatives;
- be passionate and capable of generating change;
- have regular access to the internet to participate in video conferences, email exchanges, activities, and experiences from a remote location;
- references from colleagues and supervisors.

Before applying, ask yourself the following questions:



¿Are you interested in...?

... working as a member of a team and as part of a collaborative Conservation effort?

... developing and implement new ideas for solutions to environmental problems?

... creating change in social behaviors that are harmful to natural ecosystems?

... finding creative and innovative solutions to challenging environmental and community development problems?

## WHAT WILL LEADERS GET FROM THE MAR LEADERSHIP PROGRAM?

The MAR-L Program will allow leaders to gain real-world, hands-on experience and develop personal, professional, and environmental conservation leadership skills. These skills will enable Leaders to become frontrunners in protecting the Mesoamerican Reef and associated marine ecosystems and lead efforts to conserve, protect, and restore marine ecosystems in their communities, countries, and regions.

**Personal Leadership Skills** – To develop personal and professional leadership skills, Leaders will:

- Communicate effectively through various forms of media and to multiple audiences;
- Improve his/her ability to collaborate with people from different sectors and cultures;
- Identify his/her strengths, weaknesses and leadership styles;
- Build a foundation of tools and resources that can be used beyond this Program.
- Become influential opinion leaders and advocates with strong positions and great ideas/solutions.

**Professional Leadership Skills** – To advance career development, Leaders will learn to:

- Think in a systemic way; see the general panorama and understand the social, legal and political landscape to achieve conservation success and long-term impact;

- Scale-up existing successful projects and conceptualize new projects to promote coastal and marine conservation, social welfare and equity;
- Use capacities, abilities, tools, and knowledge of coastal ecosystems to achieve future higher-level positions;
- Build relationships, negotiate, and develop funding opportunities;
- Learn about the state of the art on integrated source to reef management, community development, sustainable tourism, blue economy, and project design to promote coastal and marine conservation, social welfare, and equity.
- Collaborate with government agencies, non-profits, local communities, and other stakeholders to build long-term collective capacity for marine conservation through the MAR-L Network.

## TIME COMMITMENT AND FELLOW RESPONSIBILITIES

The training cycle of the 2021 cohort lasts 12 months. During this period, Leaders will carry out regular work responsibilities; however, they are committed to implement a team project and dedicate approximately 90 days over a year to MAR-L Program activities.

The training cycle of the 2021 cohort includes:

- Six webinars of at least two hours each on topics related to the cohort theme and selected projects (January-June 2021).
- A two-week workshop (15 days total, including travel time) will take place in Quintana Roo, Mexico during the second half of 2021 if the COVID-19 contingency allows. During this workshop, Leaders will be trained by international experts on integrated watershed management, climate change, ecosystem-based adaptation, community development successful models, public policy advocacy, storytelling, resource mobilization, negotiation and conflict resolution, personal development and leadership styles.
- Networking opportunities with leaders of other cohorts.

## SPONSORSHIP

The maximum capacity of the 2021 cohort is 20 people.

**MAR-L will offer 12 fellowships** that include participation in six webinars, training fees, materials, air and land travel, food, and accommodation costs to attend the workshop in Quintana Roo. Besides, mentoring throughout the year from international experts and MAR-L Net-work participation.

**Eight (8) spots will be available for candidates sponsored by their organization.** The sponsorship cost is USD 2,500 per fellow that includes participation in six webinars, the 15-day workshop in Quintana Roo, mentoring throughout the year from international experts, and involvement in the MAR-L network activities.

The MAR-L Program does not offer any individual remuneration or salary for Fellow participation. It is hoped that selected Leaders have full-time jobs at the time of acceptance in the Program and that participation in the Program will enhance capacity for improved job performance and professional development.

### MORE INFORMATION

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