

Program Summary

The [Wildlife Conservation Network](#) (WCN), the [International Rhino Foundation](#) (IRF), and the [Rhino Recovery Fund](#) (RRF) are launching the first cohort of the Rising Wildlife Leaders - Careers program to focus entirely on rhino conservation practitioners. We are currently accepting applications for this rhino cohort, which will begin in April of 2025. The Rising Wildlife Leaders - Careers program is transforming conservation by empowering dedicated local conservationists with the skills, networks, and opportunities needed for long-term success in the field. The program reduces barriers to employment, fosters career growth, and ensures that conservation leadership remains rooted locally in the regions where it is needed most. By investing in the next generation of rhino conservation leaders, we are strengthening local expertise, enhancing decision-making, and securing a sustainable future where rhinos thrive in the wild and holistic conservation approaches are taken.

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

- **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, workshops, and convenings that directly support their personal goals. (Training support is not available to pursue academic degrees)
- **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. Participants may request a mentor of their choice, or be matched with mentors identified by WCN and Rhino advisors as valuable role models for their individual needs. Mentors and participants work together in pursuit of the participant's Professional Roadmap, with WCN and IRF's support, and meet at least quarterly.
- **Peer Learning**: Participants will receive facilitated networking and learning opportunities with their peers in the Career Program as well as a broader network of conservation professionals and rhino specialists. 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.
- **Financial Support**: Participants are eligible to apply for a small amount of financial aid and project support during the program.

Qualifying Criteria

Applicants should meet the following criteria:

- A local national working in their home country or home region in Africa or Asia. Individuals from underrepresented groups in conservation (i.e. racial, ethnic, gender, income, etc.) are strongly encouraged to apply;
- Focused on conservation work that can be articulated through the lens of protecting rhinoceros species;
- Early- to mid-career with 3 - 10 years of paid conservation experience;
- Currently employed in a position that works toward rhino conservation, either as a staff member or director;

- Hold a bachelor's degree or equivalent experience, with preference given to candidates focused on 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;
- Be enthusiastic, hard-working, collaborative, self-motivated, with a desire and willingness to learn;
- Nominated by an established conservationist within the WCN or IRF network or extended network.

Participant Requirements

- Participants are expected to actively utilize all key program offerings - capacity building, mentoring, and peer networking.
- 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.
- 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.
- Participants must submit an end-of-year report on their previous year's experience as well as participate in pre and post surveys. If financial support is awarded, it will be disbursed quarterly and requires quarterly reporting of financial expenditures and any ongoing needs.

How to Apply

Online applications and nominations are shared with eligible nominators in February and **will not be listed publicly**. Applications must be submitted **by March 30, 2025**. To be considered, a nominator must respond to specific application questions and should be able to speak to the applicant's experience. Each nominator and organization may submit only one nomination. Eligible nominators include:

- International Rhino Foundation's BoD, Team members, Advisory Board, Senior staff of IRF Conservation Partners, Senior staff of IRF Research Grantees, and Senior staff of IRF Rhino Range Expansion Fund grantees
- Rhino Recovery Fund's Leadership Team, Granting Committee, and Senior staff of RRF Grantees
- African Rhino Specialist Group members & Asian Rhino Specialist Group members
- Senior staff of WCN Partners, WCN Wildlife Fund Directors, and Senior staff of Wildlife Fund Grantees

If you **meet the program criteria and have a mentor that meets the qualifications**, please reach out to career-program@wildnet.org to learn more about the application process.



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