

MARINE EDUCATOR COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

SUMMARY REPORT

Community engagement, capacity building, and education have been pillars of The Ocean Foundation's work for the past 20 years.

We have been reaching out to underserved populations, promoting international dialogue, and cultivating relationships since the organization's inception. Across all our programs, we have consistently seen that conservation is most effective when driven by the local community and that education is a vital component. On World Ocean Day 2022, The Ocean Foundation announced the launch of a new initiative, and our first to focus specifically on marine education and ocean literacy: the Community Ocean Engagement Global Initiative (COEGI). COEGI is dedicated to supporting the development of marine education community leaders and empowering students of all ages to translate ocean literacy into conservation action.



To achieve COEGI's vision of creating equitable access to marine education programs and careers throughout the world, it is imperative that we understand the needs of the community that we intend to serve, including the opportunities, resources, and barriers that affect workforce development for marine educators. We are committed to hearing the community's perspective on how COEGI can support job preparation and employment for early-career and aspiring marine educators, especially for individuals who have historically been underrepresented and excluded from this career pathway, as well as influencing measurable behavior change and conservation outcomes through marine education programming. As we continue to expand our work in Latin America and the Caribbean, we hope COEGI will reflect the broad array of coastal and ocean perspectives, values, voices, and cultures that exist in this region and around the world.

From June through September 2022, The Ocean Foundation conducted a needs assessment of target communities to help reveal opportunities and resources to support workforce development for marine educators, as well as the barriers that may hinder career advancement in this field. We collected input from individuals working in various educational professions in Puerto Rico, Cuba, Mexico, and other parts of the Caribbean region. The results of this assessment are summarized on the next page.

Educators overwhelmingly agree about the power of mentorship.

On average, 92% of participants agreed that having a mentor is important for career advancement, professional growth, networking, skills development, building a sense of community, and fostering long-term collaboration between peers. Of participants who had access to a mentor, 82% are still in contact with their mentor today and most of these mentors are either University Professors (35%) or Program Leaders (35%).

Educators unanimously agree that conference involvement contributes to skill development.

100% of participants agreed that presenting at a public exhibition, conference, or event helps to develop public speaking, networking, and/or leadership skills. Four out of five participants also agreed that having access and opportunities to present at a public exhibition, conference, or event is important for career advancement. In addition, nine out of ten participants agreed that early in your career it is important to have collaborative support throughout the presentation development and exhibition process.

Educators cite minimal job opportunities as the primary barrier to entry for this career path.

The most prevalent barriers to entry educators faced when entering this career path were minimal job opportunities (72%), financial hardship (66%), and access to networking opportunities (48%). Participants identified free learning resources, access to mentors, and marine educator training or certification as important tools to facilitate career development. Programs that are locally-focused, culturally-relevant, and community-led were identified as key ways to increase diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice in this field.

There is a high level of interest among educators in further discussing these topics and continuing their own education.

59% of participants agreed to further engage through a follow-up interview with our staff. Additionally, 76% of participants agreed that professional certification programs are important for career advancement. Anecdotal evidence indicated that educators perceive a lack of available training in strategic communications and behavior change, funding is a persistent challenge, and measuring program success, impact, or behavior change is complex or not readily understood. Despite these challenges, many participants reported wanting to continue in their current position because they feel the work is important.

While there is still much to be learned about how COEGI can best support early-career and aspiring marine educators in the Caribbean region, this initial assessment sheds light on how stakeholders can come together to leverage existing opportunities and break down barriers to support workforce development in this field. To stay apprised of the continued development of COEGI, please [visit our website](#).

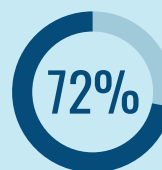
92%

agree a mentor is important for career growth, community, skill building, and collaboration

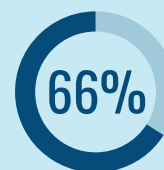


agree opportunities at exhibitions, conferences, or events are important for career advancement

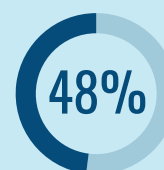
The most prevalent barriers to entry educators in this career face are:



MINIMAL
OPPORTUNITIES



FINANCIAL
HARDSHIP



NETWORKING
ACCESS

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