



Guidelines and Process for Biosphere Reserve Nominations – Canada

October 2024

Contents

1.0	Introduction	3
2.0	Roles & Responsibilities	5
3.0	Communications and Timeline	6
4.0	Resources	8

Abbreviations

BR	Biosphere Reserve (known as Biosphere Region in Canada)
CBRA	Canadian Biosphere Regions Association
CC-MAB	Canadian MAB Committee
CCUNESCO	Canadian Commission for UNESCO
IACBR	International Advisory Committee for Biosphere Reserves
MAB	Man and the Biosphere Programme
MAB-ICC	Man and the Biosphere Programme International Coordinating Council
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WNBR	World Network of Biosphere Reserves

1.0 Introduction

Biosphere Reserves (BRs) are sites designated by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO's) Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme that find creative, effective ways for people and nature to thrive together. There is a rigorous application process to achieve this prestigious UNESCO designation.

[What are biosphere reserves?](#): Biosphere reserves are 'learning places for sustainable development'. They are sites for testing interdisciplinary approaches to understanding and managing changes and interactions between social and ecological systems, including conflict prevention and management of biodiversity. They are places that provide local solutions to global challenges. Biosphere reserves include terrestrial, marine and coastal ecosystems. Each site promotes solutions reconciling the conservation of biodiversity with its sustainable use.

Biosphere Reserves involve local communities and all interested stakeholders in planning and management. They integrate three main functions:

- **Conservation** of biodiversity and cultural diversity
- **Economic Development** that is socio-culturally and environmentally sustainable
- **Logistical support** underpinning development through research, monitoring, education and training.

These three functions are pursued through the Biosphere Reserves' three main zones:

- **Core areas:** They comprise a strictly protected zone that contributes to the conservation of landscapes, ecosystems, species and genetic variation.
- **Buffer zones:** They surround or adjoin the core area(s), and are used for activities compatible with sound ecological practices that can reinforce scientific research, monitoring, training and education.
- **Transition area:** The transition area is where communities foster socio-culturally and ecologically sustainable economic and human activities.

Find out more in the [Technical guidelines for biosphere reserves](#).

Biosphere Reserves consist of both a geographically defined area and the people who live in that area. The BR "convener organization" plays a crucial role in facilitating collaboration between different local stakeholders and rights holders, including local government and municipalities, regional and federal government, non-governmental organizations, the private sector, academia, and Indigenous peoples. They act as the leader and focal point for the BR governance structure and are integral to fulfilling the mandate of the MAB Programme within their region. The UNESCO designation does not come with any legislative or regulatory authority. The convener organization may or may not have regulatory powers depending on whether or not the BR convener organization is also the local authority.

In Canada

In Canada, Biosphere Reserves are known as **Biosphere Regions** due to the negative connotation of the word “reserve” associated with the colonial impact of the [1876 Indian Act](#) reserve system. The deliberate choice of terminology is out of respect for Indigenous communities in Canada.

A useful document summarizing the processes involved in becoming a Biosphere Region can be found [here](#). The document summarizes the relative roles and responsibilities of the organizations involved in the nomination process, the timelines, and Canada-specific requirements.

It is important to note that within the Canadian context, a nomination document will not be recommended for submission to the MAB Secretariat at UNESCO by CCUNESCO unless the aspiring Biosphere Regions can demonstrate that they are acting according to the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s Calls to Action](#), the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#), and [UNESCO’s Policy on Engaging with Indigenous Peoples](#). For example, Indigenous rights holders and stakeholders should be involved in the governance and management of the proposed biosphere reserve from the project’s inception¹.

The United Nations General Assembly proclaimed the period between 2022 and 2032 as the [International Decade of Indigenous Languages](#) (IDIL 2022-2032) to draw global attention on the critical situation of many Indigenous languages and to mobilize people and resources for their preservation, revitalization and promotion. There are over 70 Indigenous languages spoken by First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples across Canada and as such, the IDIL is a priority for CCUNESCO. Aspiring Biosphere Regions are strongly encouraged to contribute, for instance, by working with local Indigenous communities to incorporate place names in their region. Learn more about CCUNESCO’s work to implement the IDIL [here](#).

¹ According to articles 41 and 42 of UNDRIP, all specialized agencies of the UN (including UNESCO) shall contribute to the full realization of the [UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples \(UNDRIP\)](#). [UNESCO’s Policy on Engaging with Indigenous Peoples](#) underlines UNESCO’s commitment to implementing UNDRIP across all program areas. The principles of UNDRIP are also embedded in the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s Call to Action](#).

2.0 Roles & Responsibilities

The key actors involved in the nomination process in Canada are the “convener organization” of the proposed BR, CCUNESCO, the Canadian MAB Committee, and the reviewers. Each has a different role and responsibility.

Proposed Biosphere Region or the “Convener Organization”

The convener organization is responsible for garnering local and regional support for the proposed Biosphere Region, including support measures to ensure its long-term sustainability.

It contacts the Programme Officer for Natural Sciences at CCUNESCO to communicate its intent to become a Biosphere Region and provides annual reports to CCUNESCO on progress made as an “aspiring Biosphere Region”. When deemed ready, it submits a Letter of Intent to CCUNESCO indicating that it will begin the process to submitting the nomination documents. It is then responsible for preparing all the documents to be submitted to UNESCO, via CCUNESCO.

Canadian Commission for UNESCO

The Programme Officer for Natural Sciences at CCUNESCO acts as the liaison between the convener organization, the Canadian MAB Committee (CC-MAB), the reviewers, and UNESCO’s MAB Secretariat.

The Programme Officer reviews annual reports and provides feedback to the aspiring Biosphere Region, working with the BR and CC-MAB to decide when they are ready to prepare the nomination documents. They work with CC-MAB to select reviewers to assess nomination documents. Based on the reviewers’ recommendations, the Programme Officer provides feedback to the aspiring BR to indicate whether the nomination documents are ready for submission to the MAB Secretariat.

Once deemed ready for submission, the Programme Officer makes a recommendation for approval by CCUNESCO’s Executive Committee and submits the nomination documents to the MAB Secretariat.

Canadian MAB Committee

The Canadian MAB Committee (CC-MAB) is an advisory committee to CCUNESCO that guides and governs the implementation of the MAB Programme in Canada. Composed of experts and key stakeholders, its mission is to govern the technical aspects of the MAB Programme and ensure that Canadian BRs uphold a level of excellence towards government agencies, on the international level and towards UNESCO.

In the nomination process, CC-MAB works with CCUNESCO to select reviewers and provide advice on the progress of aspiring BRs.

Reviewers

Two external reviewers are selected by CC-MAB as volunteers. A combination of academic qualifications, practical BR experience and understanding of the MAB programme are sought, either for each individual reviewer or among the reviewers’ team. The reviewers will evaluate the nomination documents for completeness, provide feedback on its content, and make recommendations to CCUNESCO regarding the quality of the proposed Biosphere Region.

3.0 *Communications and Timeline*

The main point of contact for the convener organization throughout the nomination process is the Programme Officer of Natural Sciences at the Canadian Commission for UNESCO. The convener organization is encouraged to seek advice from existing Biosphere Regions in Canada. They should not contact the UNESCO MAB Secretariat directly.

When the convener organization determines that they are 2-3 years away from being ready to submit their nomination document to UNESCO, they submit a Letter of Intent to CCUNESCO's Secretary General. The purpose of the letter is to declare their intention to develop a Biosphere Region project and to provide an overview of the project. The Programme Officer will review the proposed project with CC-MAB and recommend whether the convener organization is ready to become an "aspiring Biosphere Region". From that point on, the convener organization must ensure that it "acts as a Biosphere Reserve," which means:

- Demonstrating in annual reports that they are emulating the official BR model, and that governance structures are in place.
- Connecting with the Canadian Biosphere Regions Association (CBRA) and via the Association, seeking mentorship from an existing Biosphere Region.

After two or more years, CCUNESCO will assess with CC-MAB whether the aspiring BR is ready to prepare and submit nomination documents. The convener organization liaises with CCUNESCO throughout the process of preparing the nomination documents. CCUNESCO will submit the final nomination documents to the MAB Secretariat by September 30th.

The MAB Secretariat will review the submission for completeness and then transmit the documents to the International Advisory Committee for Biosphere Reserves (IACBR), which usually meets in February. The IACBR will review the nomination and make a recommendation to the MAB International Coordinating Council (MAB-ICC). The MAB-ICC meets in June and makes the final decision as to whether the aspiring BR meets the [Statutory Framework of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves](#) (Article 4) of the MAB Programme.

The recommendations of both the IACBR and MAB-ICC will be communicated to the aspiring BR via CCUNESCO. Sometimes, the IACBR will request additional information to be sent to the MAB Secretariat before the MAB-ICC meeting.

Summary of the nomination process:

Steps	Actions
1	The applicant sends a formal <u>Letter of Intent</u> to CCUNESCO.
2	The applicant gets the “Aspiring Biosphere Reserve” status and must act like a BR for at least two years.
3	The applicant contacts CBRA and asks it to designate a “Mentor BR” to support them along the nomination process.
4	The Aspiring BR sends annual updates to CCUNESCO.
5	The Aspiring BR meets all the internal criteria established by CCUNESCO.
6	After two years acting as a BR, CCUNESCO recommends the Aspiring BR to complete the <u>nomination form</u> .
7	The Aspiring BR sends the <u>nomination form</u> (or application dossier) to CCUNESCO.
8	The <u>nomination form</u> is forwarded to expert reviewers who provide a recommendation to CC-MAB and CCUNESCO on whether the application dossier is ready to be sent to the MAB Secretariat or if further project development is required.
9	CCUNESCO makes an official recommendation to its Executive Committee to approve the submission of the Aspiring BR’s application dossier to the MAB Secretariat. Once approved, it is sent to the MAB Secretariat in Paris (digital and a hard copy).
10	The MAB Secretariat reviews the application dossier for completeness and transmits it to the IACBR.
11	The IACBR makes a recommendation to the MAB-ICC (and may request additional information).
12	The MAB-ICC makes the final decision as to whether the project meets the Statutory Framework for designation as a UNESCO BR. MAB-ICC informs CCUNESCO of the decision, and CCUNESCO informs the Aspiring BR.

For more information, please contact:

Zoe Compton
Programme Officer, Natural Sciences, Canadian Commission for UNESCO
150 Elgin Street, P.O. Box 1047, Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5V8
Tel: 613.790.2163
zoe.compton@ccunesco.ca

4.0 Resources

Nomination form:

<https://en.unesco.org/biosphere/designation>

Statutory Framework of the World Network:

<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0010/001038/103849Eb.pdf>

A new Roadmap for the Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme and its World Network of Biosphere Reserves: MAB Strategy (2015-2025), Lima Action Plan (2016-2025) and Lima Declaration:

<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002474/247418E.pdf>

A guide to being a Biosphere Reserve:

<https://biospherecanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/BRBookENG.pdf>

UNDRIP:

<https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/declaration-on-the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples.html>

UNESCO Policy on Engaging with Indigenous Peoples:

<https://en.unesco.org/indigenous-peoples/policy>