



Young Masters for Heritage Conservation

2026 Call for Applications

I. Background

Youth are key custodians of heritage and vital agents in shaping its sustainable future. As a direct expression of the interaction between human civilization and nature, historic gardens bear witness to cultural values, aesthetic traditions, and the spirit of their times. With their architecture and landscape environments inseparably intertwined, they embody vitality, creativity, and artistic originality, underscoring the importance of their continued protection, transmission, and adaptive management.

In recognition of the growing importance of historic gardens as living heritage systems that integrate nature, culture and community, the UNESCO Regional Office for East Asia and the World Heritage Institute of Training and Research for the Asia-Pacific Region, Suzhou Center (WHITR-AP Suzhou) are pleased to launch the 2026 Call for Application for the “Young Masters for Heritage Conservation” program on the theme “Historic Gardens: Living Heritage Conservation and Public Engagement.”

Building on the success of previous editions, the 2026 call aims to identify, support, and promote innovative, youth-led practices in the stewardship, conservation and public engagement of historic gardens, fostering new approaches that enhance their relevance and accessibility in contemporary society.

The 2026 program seeks to:

- Recognize and highlight outstanding contributions by young professionals in conservation and management of garden heritage;
- Promote innovative and replicable approaches to the conservation, management, and sustainable use of historic gardens;
- Foster interdisciplinary dialogue and regional exchange on historic gardens conservation across the Asia-Pacific region and beyond;
- Strengthen the role of youth in advancing integrated approaches that link heritage conservation with sustainable development, biodiversity conservation, and community well-being.

Selected participants will be invited to take part in a regional workshop in Suzhou, contributing to a dynamic platform for knowledge exchange, peer-learning, collaboration, and enhanced professional visibility.

II. Organizing Institutions

Hosts

UNESCO Regional Office for East Asia

Suzhou Municipal Bureau of Gardens and Landscaping

World Heritage Institute of Training and Research for the Asia and the Pacific Region under the auspices of UNESCO

Organizer

World Heritage Institute of Training and Research for the Asia and the Pacific Region under the auspices of UNESCO, Suzhou Centre

III. Time and Location

- Application: 1 May to 30 June 2026
- Evaluation: 1 July to 15 July 2026
- Announcement of results and workshop registration: 16 to 22 July 2026
- Workshop in Suzhou (China): End of August/early September 2026

IV. Format and Content

Submissions are invited in accordance with the scope and criteria outlined below. All applications will be reviewed by an expert committee, and selected candidates will be invited to participate in the “World Heritage Young Masters for Conservation Workshop” to be held in Suzhou.

The workshop will focus on:

- Conservation and integrated management of architectural and landscape components of historic gardens;
- Integration of traditional knowledge, craftsmanship, and skills with contemporary garden practices;
- Cultural interpretation, creative activation and public engagement strategies of historic gardens as living heritage.

During the workshop, participants will present their work, engage in thematic discussions, and contribute to a curated exhibition showcasing innovative practices in historic garden conservation. Upon completion of the workshop, participants will be presented with a “Young Masters for Heritage Conservation” certificate.

V. Selection Scope

(1) Target audience

Applicants may include:

- Conservation architects, traditional building engineers, landscape architects and garden designers;
- Heritage conservation professionals, site managers, and practitioners working on historic gardens and related cultural landscapes;
- Professionals from creative industries whose work engages with, interprets, or revitalizes historic garden heritage.

(2) Eligible projects

Eligible projects should relate to historic gardens and may include, but are not limited to:

- Conservation and restoration of historic gardens and their architectural and landscape elements;
- Integration of traditional knowledge, craftsmanship, and sustainable practices;
- Climate resilience and biodiversity conservation in historic gardens;
- Public participation and innovative approaches in integrating historic gardens to contemporary urban life;
- Creative approaches linking historic gardens with design, art, or cultural programming.

Projects should have been completed within the last 10 years and demonstrate tangible outcomes and impact. They do not need to be located within World Heritage sites.

VI. Selection Criteria

Applications will be evaluated by the organizers based on the following criteria, which will inform the final selection and recognition of "Young Masters for Heritage Conservation":

For candidates:

- (1) Demonstrated commitment to the values of peace, cultural dialogue, international cooperation, and free from political bias;
- (2) Proven leadership and/or significant contribution to projects related to historic gardens;
- (3) Strong commitment to heritage conservation, sustainability, and innovation;
- (4) Capacity and willingness to actively contribute to knowledge exchange, peer learning, and regional collaboration.

For projects:

Submitted projects should address, but are not limited to, the following aspects:

(1) Integration of culture and nature

Projects should demonstrate integration approaches to the conservation of cultural and natural values, in alignment with the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, including in relation to climate resilience, biodiversity conservation, and sustainable resource management.

(2) Conservation and transmission of knowledge

Projects should reflect a solid understanding of traditional garden design principles, craftsmanship, horticultural practices, and any other heritage values, while exploring innovative approaches to their safeguarding and transmission.

(3) Innovation and creativity

Projects should demonstrate innovative and creative methods in design, conservation, interpretation, or management, including the appropriate use of contemporary practices, digital tools, or artistic interventions.

(4) Social impact and public engagement

Projects should foster community participation, enhance public awareness, and promote shared stewardship of garden heritage.

(5) Relevance and replicability

Projects should demonstrate strong relevance to local cultural context while offering potential for adaptation or replication in other heritage settings, contributing to broader regional and international dialogue.

VII. Evaluation Committee and Selection Process

(1) Evaluation Committee

The Evaluation Committee is composed of renown experts in cultural heritage protection, selected for their high level of expertise and regional representation. Members are invited by the UNESCO East Asia Regional Office and the WHITR-AP Suzhou Centre.

(2) Selection process

The Evaluation Committee will review the submitted cases, verifying the accuracy and completeness of the submitted materials. Projects that meet the requirements will advance to the evaluation phase. Using the established selection criteria, the Committee will conduct a comprehensive assessment and may request additional materials if necessary. After the evaluation, the shortlisted candidates will be announced.

VIII. Application Process

(1) Application period

Applications must be submitted to the organizer's email (jgzx_gjjl@hotmail.com) by 30 June 2026.

(2) Application requirements

Applicants must be the primary participants in the submitted projects. Each applicant may submit up to two innovative projects in one application.

(3) Copyright statement

All submitted materials will not be returned. By submitting the application, applicants grant UNESCO and WHITR-AP Suzhou the right to use, publish, display, or disseminate the materials without compensation.

(4) Required materials for application

Each application should include the following documents:

- a. World Heritage Young Masters Application Form
- b. Project(s) description (with text and images, in PDF format)
- c. (If available) Recommendation letter from an institution or expert (confirming the applicant's primary role in the project, with official seal or signature.)
- d. Drawings (A3 format), photos (minimum 150 dpi), published papers, research reports, videos, etc.
- e. (If available) Copies of relevant qualifications (e.g., professional titles, skill certificates, project awards, etc.)

Incomplete applications will not be submitted to the Evaluation Committee.

IX. Related Costs

The WHITR-AP Suzhou Center will cover the costs of accommodation, meals, insurance, and local transportation for participants during their stay in Suzhou. UNESCO Regional Office for East Asia will cover participants' travel expenses to and from Suzhou.

X. Contact Information

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