

## IUCN SSC Bear Specialist Group: Criteria for Membership

Specialist Groups (SGs) are composed of a wide range of global experts who volunteer their time to represent and conduct work on behalf of the IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC). These groups operate quite independently and as such can vary in their form and function (although adhering to the SSC's vision, mission, policies, etc). The appointment of members of a SG is at the discretion of the Chair (or Co-Chairs), and there is some degree of flexibility around these appointments which typically reflect the context and objectives for the group's focus. As a result, different SGs may select members based on different criteria to meet the needs of the group (but these must align with the broader guidelines of SSC membership (see [here](#) for more details) .

Bear Specialist Group (BSG) members serve in one or more Expert Teams, each of which focusses on a single species or topic. As such, members are invited and appointed by the BSG Chair(s) in consultation with appropriate BSG Expert Team Co-chairs. Members are selected based on their expertise, conservation-related activities, representation within the bear range countries, and whether they have the time and inclination to collaboratively contribute to activities of the BSG. Members serve a 4-year term, coincident with the term of the elected SSC Chair, and can be reappointed depending on their level of engagement within the BSG and Expert Team over this period.

BSG membership is not an honorary position: members are expected to actively and voluntarily contribute to the BSG's goal of conserving bears in their natural habitats across their worldwide distribution. Members can contribute by gaining, synthesizing and disseminating information; aiding, promoting and supporting conservation initiatives; providing technical assistance and building capacity of those involved or interested in bear conservation; and becoming directly involved in issues that reduce threats and foster the conservation of any of the 7 species of terrestrial bears. More specifically, contributions often involve: sharing information or ideas in group discussions; filling out surveys; attending virtual meetings; attending and presenting webinars; writing an occasional article for the newsletter; responding to requests for information; and participating in ongoing projects of their Expert Team(s).

The BSG strives for membership diversity as a key to advancing conservation. We seek diversity in the broadest sense, including geographic representation; species representation; in-situ and ex-situ expertise; government, academic, NGO, zoo, and other affiliations; gender; age; etc. We also seek a diversity of expertise on specific topics that contribute to conservation (e.g., human–bear conflicts; population monitoring; trade in bear parts; human/social dimensions; captive bears; etc.).

The BSG has no specific limit on number of members, either in total or within each Expert Team; however, our aim is to grow strategically so we can carry out our activities efficiently and effectively. Expert Team Co-chairs may limit membership so as to create a practical-size working group, where each member can contribute and feel valued. Within Expert Teams, we especially seek a balance of

geographic representation. This means that membership for countries or regions having many bear experts may be more restrictive than for countries with few bear experts (i.e., candidates from countries that are poorly represented on the team may be given higher priority).

The BSG aims to increase the capacity of its members, to enhance their individual careers thereby enhancing their effectiveness in conserving bears. However, given that Specialist Groups are, by definition, composed of specialists/experts, members should have demonstrable expertise useful to the goals of the BSG when they are invited to join.

Because the number of bear experts and their level of expertise varies considerably among countries and species, we do not have a strict set of criteria for membership. However, the following general guidelines are applicable (and evidence of these is used to evaluate applicants):

1. BSG members should have a record of accomplishments in some arena of conservation and/or the strong potential for such accomplishments in the near future.
2. BSG members do not need to be bear specialists or even bear experts, per se. However, their work should clearly aid bear conservation (even as a by-product), and/or their expertise and network should be a valuable resource that can support the BSG's efforts toward bear conservation.
3. Specific advanced degrees or a certain number of peer-reviewed publications are not required for BSG membership, although both may be helpful in demonstrating a certain level of expertise and commitment. We also encourage BSG membership for young professionals (e.g., graduate students) who have demonstrated experience/expertise in an aspect of bear conservation. However, we ask prospective student members to consider how the demands of their studies (especially long periods in the field) can be balanced with actively contributing to the work of the BSG.
4. BSG members should be enthusiastic and committed to conserving bears in a science/evidence-based framework, and in collaboration with members from other countries across the bear range.
5. In order to collaborate with other members of their Expert Team (and sometimes across teams), BSG members must be able to understand and communicate in English. However, we also greatly value that individual members can speak other languages, used to communicate in their own countries (with government officials, other scientists and conservationists, indigenous groups, etc.)
6. BSG members should be willing to spend time engaging in BSG activities, even if these are beyond the normal scope of their other work.