BLUE ASCENT PROGRAM | LAS GALERAS, SAMANÁ, DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Blue Ascent
Coral Restoration Initiative

Veterans restoring reefs. Building purpose through ocean stewardship.

Prepared for: Galeras Ocean Beach Foundation for Veterans

1. Executive overview

The Blue Ascent Coral Restoration Initiative is a foundation-led education and conservation program that prepares eligible veterans to become trained reef stewards. Through progressive scuba and marine-science instruction, participants develop knowledge, underwater control, teamwork, and the practical ability to support permitted coral restoration projects in Samaná. The initiative is designed as an ocean wellness and community-service program; it is not a substitute for clinical treatment.

2. Mission and intended outcomes

Mission: To empower veterans through ocean education, safe diving, and scientifically supervised coral reef stewardship, while strengthening long-term conservation capacity in Las Galeras.

- Train veterans in reef ecology, conservation ethics, buoyancy and underwater observation.
- Develop a qualified group of conservation divers ready to work under marine scientist supervision.
- Support approved coral nursery maintenance, reef monitoring and restoration expeditions.
- Build a durable conservation partnership with Dominican authorities, researchers and local communities.
- Offer a meaningful service mission that promotes teamwork and social connection without promising clinical outcomes.

3. Program governance and service boundaries

The Foundation oversees participant selection, nonclinical ocean education, vessel operations, equipment, course funding, conservation volunteering and recordkeeping. EJE MEDIC, where involved through the separate joint wellness agreement, remains solely responsible for medical evaluation, treatment, clinical decisions and medical billing. No scuba-course award or ocean benefit is conditioned on choosing the Clinic or receiving reimbursable treatment. No participant recruitment commissions or patient referral rewards are permitted.

4. Three-phase training pathway

PHASE I — EDUCATION AND DIVER READINESS

Suggested duration: 6-12 weeks, adapted to each veteran's entry-level skills. Delivery: classroom, pool/confined water, and non-contact reef observation.

- Coral reef ecology: coral anatomy, symbiosis, bleaching, disease, reef threats and protection.
- Marine species identification, reef etiquette, conservation ethics and low-impact tourism.
- Scuba prerequisites: Open Water certification or an approved pathway to earn it; swimming and water comfort.
- Precision buoyancy, trim, fin techniques, situational awareness and buddy communication.
- Baseline observations: fixed photo points, simple habitat surveys and data logs, without coral handling.

Phase gate: instructor confirms dive readiness, safe buoyancy and adherence to dive protocols before any conservation task loading.

PHASE II — RESTORATION TRAINING AND QUALIFICATION

Suggested duration: 30 training days after Phase I. Training must be delivered by qualified dive educators and restoration specialists at an appropriately authorized training site.

- Specialty learning: consider PADI AWARE Coral Reef Conservation, Peak Performance Buoyancy and a recognized restoration course such as PADI Reef Rescue Diver, subject to provider availability.
- Hands-on practice: nursery structure identification, cleaning protocols, coral health recognition, underwater documentation and careful tool management.
- Controlled demonstrations of coral propagation and outplanting only when specifically authorized and led by a qualified scientific partner.
- Skills assessment: buddy discipline, zero-contact swimming, underwater task management, data accuracy and stop-work decisions.

Phase gate: training completion and competency sign-off. Certification titles are awarded only by the relevant authorized training agency or instructor; a Blue Ascent completion certificate is not a substitute.

PHASE III — CONSERVATION EXPEDITIONS AND REEF MONITORING

Suggested duration: recurring missions over 6–12 months, contingent on permits, safe conditions, funding and qualified supervision.

- Site reconnaissance and baseline documentation at authority-approved reef locations near Las Galeras.
- Scheduled citizen-science observations: reef photographs, benthic condition, fish observations and disturbance reporting.
- Under scientist direction, permitted coral nursery maintenance and restoration tasks under an approved site-specific methodology.
- Repeated surveys at consistent locations to evaluate trends and submit findings to the project's scientific lead.
- Community presentations explaining reef ecology and conservation results without overstating ecological impact.

No coral collection, fragmentation, movement, transplantation, nursery deployment or anchoring on sensitive habitat shall occur before all necessary Dominican authorizations and written scientific protocols are in place.

5. Illustrative 12-month implementation roadmap

Period	Priority	Deliverable
Months 1–2	Partnerships, baseline planning, legal/permit review	Named scientific lead; draft site and safety plans
Months 3–4	Phase I pilot training	30 veterans trained or advanced toward readiness
Months 5–6	Phase II specialty instruction	Competency and certification records
Months 7–9	Phase III supervised fieldwork	Monitoring visits and standardized reports
Months 10–12	Repeat monitoring, evaluate, refine	Annual conservation and participant report

6. Participant eligibility and inclusion

- Veteran status verified under written foundation criteria; selection independent from medical treatment decisions.
- Appropriate dive qualifications, medical screening and any indicated medical clearance; suitable accommodations considered individually.
- Commitment to environmental ethics, briefings, dive limits, buddy procedures and reporting requirements.

- Non-diving roles available for participants who cannot safely scuba dive: shore-based education, image sorting, data entry, community outreach and conservation logistics.
- Voluntary participation, informed consent and the right to withdraw from an activity without penalty.

7. Staffing and partner roles

Role	Primary responsibilities
Foundation program director	Budget, partnerships, eligibility, reporting, safeguarding
Scientific lead / marine biologist	Methods, approved sites, habitat monitoring, coral handling oversight
Dive operations lead / instructor	Training, dive plans, skills sign-offs, emergency preparedness
Vessel captain and surface support	Marine navigation, passenger safety, rescue support
Veteran peer facilitator	Group support and nonclinical participant experience
Clinical professional (separate)	Medical assessment and treatment only when clinically indicated

8. Safety, environmental protection and permits

- Obtain site-specific determinations and permits from the Dominican Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources and any competent marine/protected-area authorities before restoration works.
- Use conservative dive limits tailored to the work site; require buddy teams, appropriate supervision and clearly assigned surface support.
- Maintain emergency oxygen, communication, first aid, evacuation arrangements, weather thresholds and incident logs.
- Use decontamination and biosecurity protocols designed by the scientific lead to reduce coral disease transfer.
- Avoid coral contact in training until skill and authorization prerequisites are met; no unsupervised coral collection or transplanting.
- Review accessibility, insurance coverage, boat compliance and participant consent before field activities.

10. Impact measurement and reporting

- Participation: enrolled, completed, certified, and retained at 6 and 12 months.
- Safety: incidents, near misses, dive cancellations and corrective actions.
- Conservation effort: monitored sites, survey repetitions, verified nursery maintenance hours, photo records.
- Ecological results: site-specific coral survival/condition measures where a permitted scientific protocol supports them; use baselines and avoid unsubstantiated recovery claims.
- Participant experience: voluntary satisfaction, perceived purpose and community connection; do not describe these as clinical treatment outcomes.

11. Partnership and authorization priorities

The Foundation should seek a scientific partner and initial consultation with the Dominican Ministry of Environment's Vice Ministry of Coastal and Marine Resources, whose official functions include coral reef restoration, coral nurseries and monitoring. The CoralCarib project provides useful policy context, but does not itself establish permission or a partnership. The Perry Institute for Marine Science's Reef Rescue Network provides a relevant training model; local availability and partnership terms require confirmation.

Appendix — Reference resources

Dominican Ministry of Environment, Vice Ministry of Coastal and Marine Resources: https://ambiente.gob.do/viceministerios/viceministerio-de-costeros-y-marinos/

Dominican CoralCarib project: https://proyectos.ambiente.gob.do/coralcarib-18/

Perry Institute, PADI Reef Rescue Diver: https://www.perryinstitute.org/reef-rescue-diver-course/

Perry Institute, Reef Rescue Network: https://www.perryinstitute.org/reef-rescue-network/

Prepared as an operational concept and board-review proposal; not a legal authorization, dive certification, medical treatment plan or environmental permit.