



# Project Submission Guidelines for Funding in 2024

## ACA Grants in Biodiversity

At **Alberta Conservation Association (ACA)**, we believe it is our responsibility to join and support the collective effort to conserve, protect and enhance Alberta's fish, wildlife and habitat. In addition to delivering conservation programs throughout the province, we administer a fund that has been awarding biodiversity grants since 1995. Funded by the province's anglers, hunters, and other conservationists, in partnership with Syncrude, the ACA Grants in Biodiversity Program for graduate students ultimately aims to conserve, protect, and enhance Alberta's fish, wildlife, and natural habitats.

These Guidelines contain information to help you apply for funding from the ACA Grants in Biodiversity program.

- Section 1: About the ACA Grants in Biodiversity**
- Section 2: Funding Eligibility**
- Section 3: Application Instructions**
- Section 4: Grant Application Screening & Decision Process**
- Section 5: Contacts and Application Deadline**

**IMPORTANT:** Please read the Guidelines carefully and ensure you are applying to the correct program.

*Conserving Alberta's Wild Side*

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## Section 1:

### About the ACA Grants in Biodiversity

The **ACA Grants Program** aims to aid Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) in the delivery of its mission. Grants made to partners are intended to enhance and supplement ACA activities.

The **ACA Grants in Biodiversity Program** supports graduate student projects to:

- Increase knowledge of Alberta's living resources, notably flora, fauna, and habitats.
- Attract graduate students and their supervisors to conduct biodiversity research in Alberta.
- Promote the development of highly qualified, Alberta-based conservation biologists and managers.
- Support ACA's mission to promote conservation of Alberta's resources.

#### Who Can Apply?

The criteria for eligibility to apply is as follows:

- The applicant must be a graduate student (master's or Ph.D.) associated with a university.
- The applicant can come from any university in the world as long as the proposed research is being done in Alberta (i.e. field work or subject of the research is in Alberta).
- Applicants may only apply for support for only one project per year.
- Graduate students are not eligible for more than one award for each degree-granting program.
- Graduate students must provide proof of acceptance in a graduate program including date of entry (see Application Instructions for acceptable proof).
- Priority will be given to master's students in the first two years of their program and Ph.D. students in the first three years of their program.
- Applications from students not yet in a graduate program will be considered but must be accompanied by a letter from the prospective graduate supervisor verifying that the research proposed is part of the proposed thesis research and that the applicant is in the process of being accepted. Proof of acceptance in a graduate program must be provided by the date outlined on the Deadlines page on the ACA Grants website (generally March of the award year). If that program is to begin September 1 of the award year, research prior to that date will not be supported.
- For projects that span multiple provinces, the ACA Grants in Biodiversity will only fund the proportion of the study that occurs in Alberta; the application should include the whole budget and provide a sub-estimate of the proportion that is Alberta based.
- Although field studies have been more successful in obtaining ACA Grants in Biodiversity, genetics, social science, and lab studies have also been funded.
- The student must write the application, but supervisors are encouraged to advise and review the application before submission.

The ACA Grants in Biodiversity will not support:

- Postdoctoral fellows. These applicants should instead look at the **ACA Research Grants Program**.

- Master's research beyond the third year of a graduate program.
- Ph.D. beyond the fourth year of a graduate program.
- Supervisor-written proposals.
- Students or supervisors who have engaged in the activities outlined in the "Grounds for Disqualification" found on the ACA Grants website.
- **Students who have received any prior funding from ACA, or whose supervisors have received funding for any part of the proposed project, are not eligible to apply. Previous grant recipients may only apply again if they are: (a) in a new degree program, and (b) the research project is totally separate from what was ACA funded in the past.**

## How to Apply?

Read the *Project Submission Guidelines* carefully to determine if your project is eligible for funding prior to preparing a formal submission to the ACA.

Download the ACA Grants in Biodiversity application form from the Grants section of the ACA website, <https://www.ab-conservation.com/> and submit your application by e-mailing it to the ACA by the application deadline outlined in Section 5 and on the ACA Grants website. Ensure that you have followed the Application Instructions and that all sections of the application are complete, clear and thorough. **Be aware of your university's internal processes for grant application review - talk to your supervisor and research/grants office. Allow yourself time to write the proposal, gather documentation, acquire your supervisor's signature, get internal approvals, and assemble your submission. The application must be signed and submitted to arrive at ACA before the deadline.**

Please contact the Grants Coordinator, at the contact information found in Section 5, if you have any questions regarding your application to ACA Grants program.

***IMPORTANT NOTICE: Upon receiving your application, we will send you an acknowledgment receipt by e-mail within 2 business days. It is your responsibility to contact the Grants Coordinator if you have not received acknowledgement of receipt, as the application may not have been received in good order.***

## Deadline for the 2024 Competition?

All applications and supporting documents must be received by the ACA Grants in Biodiversity Coordinator by **the time and date outlined in Section 5 (also found on the ACA Grants website)**. Applications and documents received after this time will not be accepted.

## Section 2:

### Funding Eligibility

#### ACA Grants in Biodiversity are available for:

- Research in biodiversity, conservation biology, ecology, and related social science approaches that relate to flora, fauna and habitat in Alberta at any biological level.
- Research should be directly anchored in the real world. For example, an experimental laboratory study dealing with beetle chromosomes must have a direct linkage to that organism in nature.

Impact-type studies, such as those involving human-induced environmental change and social science will be considered, but such manipulations must be process-oriented and related to flora, fauna, and habitat change.

- Direct research costs – assistants, supplies, travel within Alberta, etc. See Application Instructions.

### ACA Grants in Biodiversity are NOT available for:

- Projects outside of Alberta.
- Overhead costs.
- Travel to conferences and seminars.
- Travel outside of Alberta.

### Important Granting Information:

- **Once an application for funding support has been submitted to the ACA Grants in Biodiversity program, the project will NOT be eligible for consideration in the ACA Research Grants program.** Ensure your supervisor is aware of this if they are thinking of submitting a proposal to the ACA Research Grants program. One of the applications will be disqualified before the review process.
- **Grant term:** 2 years, starting April 1 of your award year. Funded activities must take place during the grant term.
- **Maximum grant amount:** There is no maximum specified, but special justification would be expected if over \$20,000 Canadian was requested from ACA. Average grants are about \$11,000.
- **Cooperative Agreement and COVID:** Successful applicants will be expected to follow the ACA Cooperative Project Agreement (signed on their behalf by their supervisor), which includes the requirement to submit a progress and a final report to the ACA. A copy of the Cooperative Project Agreement can be requested from the ACA Grants in Biodiversity Coordinator). Please check that your organization is willing to sign our Cooperative Project Agreement before applying.
  - The 2023 ACA Cooperative Project Agreement contains the following clause, by applying to the ACA Grants in Biodiversity you are agreeing to this clause.
 

*“**Pandemic:** ACA believes we have the financial stability to weather any future pandemic related crisis and we continue to fund a wide range of conservation related projects. However, owing to the potentially rapidly changing environment, as observed with COVID 19, there is the possibility that in the future ACA may find itself in a situation where significant cost cutting must occur in order to ensure the long-term viability of the organization. By accepting this Cooperative Project Agreement, the Recipient acknowledges and accepts that, due to a pandemic crisis, funding may be terminated with 30 days of notice. All expense incurred as part of the project as of the date of the termination will be covered by ACA. ACA will make all reasonable effort to avoid having to terminate funding.”*
- **Grant payment timing:** Payment of the award is made in one lump sum. Although the grant term starts April 1, the payment can take into mid-summer to be paid due to time it takes to sign and process the Cooperative Project Agreement.
- **Open Access Publications Policy:** Any peer-reviewed journal publications arising from ACA-supported research must be freely accessible within 12 months of publication. This can be done via online repositories or open-access journals. For those indicating interest on their application form, the ACA offers up to \$3,000 to assist with publishing fees where the student is an author.
- **Capital assets** (equipment) are items > \$500 that can be reused on other projects. Capital assets may remain the property of ACA upon project completion.

- **Reporting:** Successful applicants will be required to submit brief scientific reports and research-related photographs at the end of each year of funding. This material may be published in Alberta Conservation Association publications and digital media, with acknowledgment to the creator. The grant recipient's university will provide a financial report upon closure of the grant account with unspent funds being returned to the ACA.
- **Approvals and licenses:** Applicants are responsible for ensuring they have the proper licenses and approvals required to carry out the project and have complied with all the requirements of their organization, such as signature pages, animal care, human ethics requirements, biohazards, etc.

## Section 3: Application Instructions

### General Instructions

The ACA Grants in Biodiversity application procedure involves more than just writing your proposal and budget. Allow yourself time for gathering documentation and getting any approvals required by your institution. Applicants are advised to review the background of this grant program, and the mission and values of the Alberta Conservation Association. Ensure Part A and Part B are fully completed and set to arrive by the deadline.

Your application must fit on the pages provided plus the two freeform pages allowed in Part B (Research Proposal); do not reformat the pages except as allowed below. Part B cannot be longer than 7 pages in total. Ensure your application is in black ink, of letter quality. Typing layout must be single-spaced, with 1" margins. Please use a legible font size, i.e., nothing smaller than Arial size 11. Condensed type is unacceptable - reviewers do not look favourably upon applications that are difficult to read. Applications for the ACA Grants in Biodiversity must be written by students and NOT by their supervisors. Supervisors are encouraged to advise the applicant and review the application, but the application is the work of the student. Submissions not adhering to these standards and those outlined below will be rejected.

Some applicants are using colour fonts, photos and graphs in their applications. This is allowed but note that your application may not stay in colour through the review/adjudication process as they are copied and printed by various people using a variety of machines. Also, please be cognizant of the size of the files you are emailing; we recommend having your attachments come in at less than 3MB (less than 1MB is even better).

Please do not submit any supplementary material, such as resumes, statements as to why the research should be funded, additional pages, etc. This material is not forwarded to reviewers and will not be part of the decision-making process.

If you have applied in the past, do not reference previous applications. Material submitted in previous years is not available to reviewers or the Adjudication Committee.

Applicants are advised to review the background of this grant program, and the mission and values of the Alberta Conservation Association. Ensure the proposal shows a good connection between the possible results and benefit to Alberta citizens, anglers, hunters, and conservationists.

### Part A

#### APPLICANT CONTACT INFORMATION

Please provide the applicant's postal mailing address. For most students, it is best to use your university department mailing address, but if you are studying remotely, another address is acceptable. For the e-mail address, use an address that is checked frequently (at least once a week), preferably even after the project is completed (for final report instructions and follow up surveys).

#### SUPERVISOR CONTACT INFORMATION

Please provide your supervisor's university contact information. If you have a co-supervisor, please provide their name, department/institution, and email as well. Put an asterisk(\*) by the supervisor who will hold the grant funds if your application is successful.

## PROJECT TITLE

Please capitalize the first word and any proper nouns or as required in the rules of scientific nomenclature. Italicize as required. E.g. The effect of habitat connectivity on genetic rescue potential in the alpine butterfly *Parnassius smintheus* Doubleday (Lepidoptera: Papilionidae).

## RESEARCH USING ANIMALS, HUMAN SUBJECTS OR BIOHAZARDS

Researchers who use animals in their research, vertebrates in particular, must adhere to the guidelines for animal care (such as [Canadian Council on Animal Care](#)). You must get CCAC approval for affecting species of higher developmental stage than octopi. Essentially this means all vertebrates, including fish. Degree of disturbance certainly includes capture, tagging, radiotelemetry, trapping, control programs, and nesting studies, but effects may be as slight as observational studies during the breeding season for bird territory estimation, or repetitive approaches to ungulates for behavioral studies. Typically, students will prepare application forms to work with animals with the assistance of their respective university's animal care committee or their University veterinarian.

Similarly, if the project involves human subjects, then appropriate human ethics approvals must be obtained. Proposals that involve observations of human behavior, or direct interviews with human subjects will require human ethics approval. Likewise for projects that will be dealing with biohazards - the appropriate approval must be obtained.

The student's supervisor is accountable for this certification and assurance that animal care and/or human ethics considerations are followed. The award recipient's institution cannot release the grant funds to a project until the animal care, human ethics and biohazard approvals are in place. The ACA does not need a copy of this approval as part of the application process, but the Grant Coordinator will be sending out reminders in March of the award year to those who indicate their approvals are not yet in place at time of application. Please follow the procedures in place at your own institution and ensure that the correct paperwork is submitted on time.

## SUGGESTED REFEREES

Supervisors should get involved here as Biodiversity Grant personnel spend a lot of time trying to get three suitable referees in place. The Program uses a combination of reviewers from our own pool and those provided by applicants in the Suggested Referees section. The application should contain reviewers who are at arm's-length (ie. not be involved in your project or stand to benefit from the funding of your project). from the applicant and the proposed research; reviewers often reject the Program's requests because they feel they are in a conflict of interest with the project. Suggested referees should not be people you have published with or in your research group. Please provide the names, department, institution, city, province (and country if outside Canada) and email addresses of at least four individuals who could provide an independent assessment of the proposal. Ensure the names and contact emails are correct - you would be amazed at how out-of-date your supervisor's rolodex can be! If this Section is not completed appropriately, the application will not proceed to the reviewing stage.

Suggested referees cannot be:

- a member of the applicant's Supervisory Committee
- a former (within the last 3 years), or present, research collaborator of the applicant or his/her supervisor; or
- a departmental colleague of the applicant or supervisor who is working in the same field as the applicant.

You may include someone from your department if they meet the arm's length criteria.

#### SIGNING AUTHORITY (Supervisor's Signature)

Under most university regulations, signing authority may only be granted to a full-time employee of the university. Thus, the graduate student's supervisor or designee will be the designated signing authority and trust account holder for grants to students. The signing authority will ensure that grant funds are used for the purpose(s) for which they were intended.

#### PANDEMIC CLAUSE AWARENESS

The supervisor of a successful applicant and the university's legal representative will be signing a Cooperative Agreement in order to receive the award funds; ACA requires this clause to be in the Cooperative Agreement. You may wish to review this with your university's research office/legal department. This section must be initialed by you and your supervisor.

#### FUNDS FOR PUBLICATION FEES

Grant recipients are required to ensure that any peer-reviewed journal publications arising from ACA-supported research are freely accessible within 12 months of publication. This can be done through online repositories or journals. We know many open access journals charge publication fees (article processing charges) and ACA would like to assist in paying these costs for student-authored articles. If you plan to publish your ACA-funded research, please indicate a dollar amount you would like to have available (max. \$3,000). A few things to note about publication fees:

- These funds will not be part of your award, they will be held at ACA for five years, and you or your supervisor will need to contact ACA directly to submit an expense claim (i.e. a receipt from the publisher) for reimbursement.
- *While publication fees are held separately from an award, they do come out of the pool of money available for the grants and impact the number of applications that can be funded. Do not apply for publication fees if you do not plan to publish or have another means to meet the open access requirement.*

#### RELEVANCE TO ACA STAKEHOLDERS

This section assists ACA staff in communicating the connection between research and the interests of hunters, anglers, and trappers.

#### PROOF OF PROGRAM OF STUDY

The Proof of Program or Proof of Acceptance must include the following:

- 1) the name of the program the applicant is currently in (or will be in when the project begins),
- 2) the month or term and the year when they **started the program** (or plan to start), e.g. "Ms. Applicant will begin her Masters program in the Fall term 2023" or "You have been accepted to the Ph.D. program commencing January 2022."
- 3) some type of **official institutional/university signature**. The signature of a department administrator who can verify that you are in the program and when you started is fine.

The best proof is the applicant's acceptance letter into their program. Other acceptable proof is an official transcript or a signed letter written by the department of study. Photocopies/scans of these documents are acceptable. E-mails showing entry into a program are not acceptable.

Applications from students not yet in a graduate program will be considered, but the application must be accompanied by a letter from the prospective graduate supervisor verifying that the research proposed is part of the proposed thesis research and that the applicant is in the process of being accepted; the applicant can send the formal proof of acceptance later when it is received.



If you have recently transferred from a Masters program to a Ph.D.(without completing your Masters), you may indicate the number of years since you began your Ph.D. program provided you include a copy of an official transcript/documentation showing when you transferred to the Ph.D. program.

## Part B

Part B is the section of your application that is sent to reviewers and adjudicators. Research proposal details begin on page B-2 of the application form and 2 additional freeform pages only are allowed for this section. Please note the typing layout instructions outlined in the General Instructions at the beginning of this section. Condensed type is unacceptable and will result in sections of your proposal being redacted. This is the pagination and order of a complete Part B:

- B-1: Titlepage
- B-2, B-3, B-4: Research Proposal
- B-5: Literature List
- B-6: Budget
- B-7: Additional Budget Information Section

Do not panic if you cannot get your word processor to put the proper page numbers on the bottom. It is most important that your Part B is a maximum 7 pages, in order and the content is on the correct pages. It is strongly advised that you spell-check your proposal and look for typos.

## RESEARCH PROPOSAL

A note on incorporating literature into your proposal: There are no strict guidelines for describing your scope and rationale, but it is advised that you include a mini-literature review. You need to show you are aware of the key research that relates to the proposed project, and how your project will build on or use this existing knowledge. Space is limited, so using a numbered or parenthetical reference system would be advised (see next section, Literature List). Reviewers will look to see if you have considered seminal works and recent developments in developing your project.

Clear hypotheses help reviewers evaluate what is being studied and often increase the likelihood of being funded. The proposal should include what methods you are going to use to get to the end point (to prove your hypothesis) in as much detail as space allows. Also, please consider explaining the rationale for sample sizes in your project. Ensure that your schedule is clear that the expenses will be incurred in the grant term – the Grants in Biodiversity funds cannot be used for expenses incurred before or after the grant term.

## LITERATURE LIST

You may provide a bibliography or reference list on the Literature List page (pg. B-5) to outline the works referenced in your research proposal. We are not particular about what citation style you use, but if you are unsure, use CSE style (a [quick guide is provided by the University of Alberta Libraries](#)). One page maximum. Do not use this page as a continuation of your proposal narrative – it will be redacted before going to the reviewers.

## BUDGET

**We want a detailed budget that deals ONLY with this proposal.** There is no maximum specified, but special justification would be expected if over \$20,000 Canadian was requested from ACA. Funds may be used to pay direct costs of research such as employment of student assistants, travel support within Alberta, rental of equipment, field subsistence, purchase of supplies and incidentals, and other research-related expenses for the student engaged in the research. Funds cannot be used for salary for the grantee. Ownership of capital equipment costing more than \$500 may remain with the ACA when the

project is completed. Adjudicators are on the lookout for bloated budgets and tend to favour prudent financial management. **The ACA Grants in Biodiversity will not pay overhead.**

In preparing your budgets, remember the grant is a one-time payment, but is awarded for a two-year duration. The budget should include expenses expected to be incurred between April 1 of the grant term start to March 31 of the grant year completion (except publication fees as noted in Part A). Also, for projects that span multiple provinces, the ACA Grants in Biodiversity will only fund the portion of the study that occurs in Alberta; the application should include the whole budget and provide a sub-estimate of the portion that is Alberta based. *The budget cannot be longer than one page; empty rows can be deleted if necessary.*

Budgets Must Be Itemized Under the Following Subheadings:

**Costs of Assistants:**

**Proposed Rate:** Grantees may use their grant funds to employ assistants (on a full-time or part-time basis) when they are required to do research for which the grant was awarded. Wages should be reasonable for field assistants and in line with [minimum wage guidelines](#) for the province of Alberta. Put in as much detail as space allows, for example, include the number of weeks/hours in the field and at what rate. Budgets requesting more than one assistant will be subject to extra scrutiny, so ensure the application justifies the need for additional assistants.

**Field Travel and Subsistence:**

Applicants must follow applicable travel and vehicle rental guidelines of their home university. **Reviewers and adjudicators will be assessing your budget for reasonableness.** Include as much detail as you can, for example, the number of kilometres to be driven or number of days you will be renting vehicles. Quote the mileage rate used by your university if using a private vehicle. The [CRA rate](#) is acceptable as well.

The Grant will pay for food in line with your university's policy for field research. This may be a per diem rate if eating out, or an estimate of grocery costs (again, provide your university's per diem rate, number of days, number of people eating).

Fees associated with residence at biological field stations (e.g. University of Calgary Kananaskis Field Station) are acceptable, as well as short-term motel accommodations.

The ACA Grants in Biodiversity will not pay for travel outside of Alberta.

**Materials and Supplies:**

Materials and supplies must be itemized, particularly if amount is high. You decide.

**Other Required Expenditures:**

List other direct research costs that do not fit into other categories. We will not support costs related to attendance at conferences. Do not include potential publication fees here – they belong in Part A.

**ADDITIONAL BUDGET INFORMATION**

**Other Sources of Funds:**

The Adjudication Committee has decoupled scientific merit from budget requests. We fund based on the merit of the submitted proposal, but we do want a context for our contributions and other contributions to the overall project. It strengthens an application to show that other expenses are being funded from other sources; i.e. there should be numbers in that amount column. Self-help is a good thing to show in an application. The applicant should indicate how that money is to be spent versus how Biodiversity funds will be spent. If other research funds have been applied for, then applicants should indicate how those funds would complement Biodiversity funds. If funds have an Applied status, it means an application has been made to another funding source and a decision is pending. Funds with a Held status have definitely been awarded to the project.

Remember the rules regarding funding from multiple ACA programs (not allowed!). Do not include the Grants in Biodiversity application you are submitting – this section is for other funding.

**Additional Support:**

Do not leave this section blank, because that would tend to indicate to us that both your department and supervisor are providing nothing to the proposed research. At the least, applicants might show how the project is linked intellectually and financially to the research program of supervisors or research cooperators.

### How To Submit Your Application

Submit your complete application by email to the Grants in Biodiversity Coordinator at the email outlined in Section 5. Divide your application into two files:

- 1) Part A and attachments. This file will include your signature pages and proof of program. Please scan into one PDF document.
- 2) Part B. This file can be a PDF or Microsoft Word document.

It is helpful if you name your files like: *LastnameF\_ACAGiB\_PtA\_2024* and *LastNameF\_ACAGiB\_PtB\_2024*.

For example: *GretzkyW\_ACAGiB\_PtA\_2024.pdf* or *WickenheiserH\_ACAGiB\_PtB\_2024.doc*

The email must be received by the Grant Coordinator's office before the deadline outlined in Section 5, and it is your responsibility to contact us if you have not received an acknowledgement as outlined in Section 5.

## Section 4:

### ACA Grants in Biodiversity Application Screening & Decision Process

ACA receives funding requests far in excess of our financial resources and often must decline funding to worthy projects and programs. This does not in any way reflect the value of the organization/individual involved.

The ACA uses a two-step process for evaluating applications:

- 1) Every qualified application received will be sent to at least three expert reviewers for grading and commentary. These evaluations are provided to the Adjudication Committee.
- 2) An Adjudication Committee of seven members will then review all the applications and choose the successful applicants and allot the funding pool. Adjudicators may choose to partially fund the research portion of an application. The Adjudication Committee has academic representation from the University of Alberta, the University of Calgary and the University of Lethbridge. There is also representation from the ACA and industry. All adjudicators are experienced researchers.

Applications will be adjudicated based on:

- 1) research merit
- 2) reasonable budget
- 3) ability of the applicant to conduct the proposed project

Applicants will be notified of status of their submission by early April. Successful grant applicants will be expected to follow the ACA Cooperative Project Agreement.

## Section 5:

### Contacts & Application Deadline

Direct all inquiries and Grants in Biodiversity applications to:

Tracy Stewart, Grant Coordinator  
ACA Grants in Biodiversity  
Alberta Conservation Association  
101, 9 Chippewa Road  
Sherwood Park, Alberta T8A 6J7  
Phone: (780) 445-9145\* (Please leave a detailed voice mail.)  
**Email: [tracy.stewart@ab-conservation.com](mailto:tracy.stewart@ab-conservation.com)**

**Application Deadline:** Your emailed application to the 2024 ACA Grants in Biodiversity must be received by the Grant Coordinator's office before the deadline – **4:00pm Mountain Standard Time on Friday, December 1, 2023**. If you have not received an acknowledgement of your application by 9:00am December 5, 2023, you must phone the Grant Coordinator right away (leave a message).

**2024 Competition Grant Term:** The awards will fund work completed between April 1, 2024 - March 31, 2026.

**The competition results will be released by early April.**