

In March 2018, a re-imagined [Strategic Research Plan](#) was launched, in conjunction with the implementation of the Athabasca University [Imagine: Transforming Lives, Transforming Communities Strategic Plan](#). The Strategic Research Plan sets the direction for investments in research, scholarship and creativity for the next five years and focuses on nurturing research excellence and enriching the social, environmental and economic relevance of research conducted by our researchers, alongside theoretical and basic academic research.

The Academic Research Fund supports the attainment of these goals by providing funds to support smaller-scale research initiatives, some of which may lead to pursuit of funding from external agencies. The Academic Research Fund is funded primarily by Athabasca University. Additional funds are derived from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) and the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC) General Research Funds. Recent changes to the SSHRC Institutional Grant (SIG) have resulted in the creation of SSHRC Explore Grants. These funds comprise the annual Academic Research Fund budget and are administered by the Academic Research Committee.

Recipients of Academic Research Fund Grants, including SSHRC Explore Grants, should acknowledge the funding in related publications and presentations.

ETHICAL APPROVALS AND REQUIRED CERTIFICATIONS	
Ethics Certification (where applicable) must be obtained prior to the release of funds from the Academic Research Fund and SSHRC Explore Grant.	
Research involving humans and animals	
1) Research involving humans requires approval of the Athabasca University (AU) Research Ethics Board (REB) prior to commencement of the research, regardless of the source of funding (if any) or the location of the research, if the research is being conducted by a member of the AU community or under the auspices of AU.	
2) Animal-based research , teaching, or testing requires animal ethics approval, in accordance with the AU Animal Ethics Policy and related Procedures.	
Research involving human or animal pathogens or toxins and environmental impacts	
1) Researchers who plan to conduct a research study that involves human, or animal pathogens or toxins must notify the Athabasca University Biosafety Offer at sciencelab@athabascau.ca to discuss biosafety protocols.	
2) Researchers who plan to conduct a research study that involves potential environmental impacts must notify the Research Centre at research@athabascau.ca .	

APPLICATION DEADLINES AND NOTIFICATIONS	
Academic Research Fund, including SSHRC Explore Grant applications Normally two times per year	February 1, April 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ If these dates fall on a weekend or statutory holiday, the deadline shall be the next business day. ▪ Grant notification normally occurs within 21 business days of the application deadline.
Academic Research Fund Publications Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Applications may be submitted at any time and will be subject to an expedited review. ▪ Grant notification normally occurs within 14 business days of submission of the application. ▪ If the application is denied, the publication expenses shall be the responsibility of the applicant.
Juried/Solicited Creative Works Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Applications may be submitted at any time and will be subject to an expedited review. ▪ Grant notification normally occurs within 14 business days of submission of the application.

VALUE OF GRANT

- 1) Normally, Academic Research Fund grants, including SSHRC Explore Grants shall not exceed \$6,000 CDN.
- 2) Funding grants to an individual to support juried/solicited creative works and/or publication charges shall not exceed \$2,500 CDN per fiscal year.
- 3) Applicants shall acknowledge receipt of an Academic Research Fund grant or SSHRC Explore Grant in dissemination activities related to the proposed research study. An exception to this is a grant related to publication charges, which is not normally granted until after a manuscript has been formally accepted for publication.
- 4) Grants cannot be transferred to any other application or research study.
- 5) Unused funds shall be returned to the Academic Research Fund or SSHRC Explore Grant.

ELIGIBILITY – Academic Research Fund Grants, excluding SSHRC Explore Grant

- 1) Full-time, part-time and term Athabasca University Faculty Association (AUFA) staff members are eligible to apply as Principal Investigator(s) (PI) or Co-Investigator(s) (Co-I).
- 2) Term AUFA staff members must complete the proposed research prior to the end of their term appointment.
- 3) Non-AUFA staff members may be named as Co-Investigator(s) but may not hold an Academic Research Fund grant as Principal Investigator.
- 4) Applicants may be named as Co-Investigators in other Academic Research Fund applications; however, the different research studies cannot be directly related.
- 5) Applicants may submit two applications within a 12 month period, not for the same research study.
- 6) Applicants may not hold a subsequent Academic Research Fund grant until a fully complete expense claim, with original receipts, and final report have been submitted for the previous grant.
- 7) Academic Research Fund Publications - appropriateness of AU's financial contribution in relationship to authorship status
 - a) Full reference citation for article(s) as it appears/will appear in the publication, and explanation of authorship placement, in relation to the funds requested, if non-AU authors have not/will not be covering a percentage of the publication charges must be provided.

ELIGIBILITY – SSHRC Explore Grant only

- 1) **SSHRC-eligible**, full-time AUFA academic staff members, at any career stage, for whom research is a required component of their workload, are eligible to apply as Principal Investigator(s) (PI).
- 2) Applicants must commit to submitting a SSHRC grant application (e.g., Insight; Insight Development; Connection; Engage; or other) within the next 12 to 18 months from receiving the Academic Research Fund and/or SSHRC Explore Grant.
- 3) Applicants may hold one SSHRC Explore Grant and one Academic Research Fund grant within the same 12 months.
- 4) Applicants may submit two applications within a 12 month period, but not for the same research study.
- 5) Applicants may not hold a subsequent SSHRC Explore Grant or Academic Research Fund Grant until a fully complete expense claim, with original receipts, and final report have been submitted for the previous grant.

PURPOSE OF ACADEMIC RESEARCH FUND AND SSHRC EXPLORE GRANT

Grants from the Academic Research Fund, including SSHRC Explore Grants are intended to:

- 1) Extend the research opportunities of grant recipients.
- 2) Foster research creativity and innovation.
- 3) Support smaller-scale, short-term research studies, including preliminary investigations or pilot studies prior to the submission of an application for external funding.

- 4) Provide support for data collection and analysis, including the conduct of formal or scoping systematic literature reviews.
- 5) Facilitate the acquisition of research tools (e.g., small equipment, data management/analysis software, encrypted storage devices).
- 6) Enable researchers to hire students at any level to participate in their research study.
- 7) Complement resources available from external funding agencies, including supporting the completion of studies for which other resources have been fully expended.
- 8) Encourage the development of research in collaboration with Indigenous peoples and communities as well as research that applies Indigenous ways of knowing or non-traditional approaches.
- 9) Provide support for research that falls outside the normal eligibility criteria of external funding agencies or merits other special consideration.
- 10) Help defray the costs of (1) dissemination of research findings in print and/or online open access peer-reviewed publication and (2) dissemination of juried/solicited creative works (e.g., exhibits, performances).

SUBMISSION OF APPLICATIONS

- 1) Applications to the Academic Research Fund, including for a SSHRC Explore Grant, shall use the existing Academic Research Fund application forms. Applications must be submitted through the Athabasca University [Research Portal](#).
- 2) Only completed applications, including applicable appendices, will be considered for review by the Academic Research Committee. Late submissions to the posted application deadline will not be accepted.
- 3) Applicants are encouraged to use non-technical/lay language throughout their application so it can be readily understood and evaluated by others who may not be familiar with the technical language used in their discipline or field. Define acronyms and explain any topic specific terminology.
- 4) Consider formulating longer text responses in a separate document and proofreading before cutting/pasting into the online application form as there is no spellcheck or formatting available within the online application form.
- 5) Not all the questions on the Academic Research Fund application form may be applicable to a particular research study. In such cases, the applicant is encouraged to provide sufficient other relevant information that will allow the reviewers to assess the application.
- 6) Applications will be reviewed in accordance with these guidelines.

ELIGIBLE EXPENSES

If you have incurred expenses prior to the Academic Research Committee's review and approval of an application, funds to cover the retroactive expenses will not be approved.

Examples of eligible expenses supported by the Academic Research Fund and SSHRC Explore Grants include, *but are not necessarily limited to the following*:

- 1) Travel costs directly related to conducting the research.
- 2) Accommodation (normally to a maximum of 21 days).
 - All claims must be consistent with the [Athabasca University Expense Reimbursement Policy](#).
- 3) Hiring of Research Assistant(s).
 - Refer to the Athabasca University [Hiring Research Assistants Policy](#) for additional information about expectations of Research Assistants and rates of pay.
 - Refer to the [SSHRC Guidelines for Effective Research Training](#) for additional information about how to maximize the impact of training and investments in training, regardless of the research discipline.
- 4) Materials and Supplies.
 - Allowable expenses include, for example, postage, long distance telephone charges, and data management/analysis software that is not otherwise normally available at AU, encrypted data storage and backup, paper, computer ink cartridges, photocopying and printing.

- Microfilms/fiches or digital scans of archival materials.
- 5) Translation of research tools into other languages.
 - 6) Incentives for participation in the research, as appropriate. The value of the incentives must be justified.
 - 7) Costs of using resources of other AU faculties, centres or departments.
 - 8) Costs of externally contracted services and/or equipment.

Academic Research Fund Juried/Solicited Creative Works

- 1) Materials required to exhibit/perform the work.
- 2) Travel costs (transportation, accommodation, meals) incurred by the applicant to/from the venue where the work is being exhibited or performed.
- 3) Co-applicants (maximum of two) may be funded if both have an active role in the Juried/Solicited Creative Works.

Academic Research Fund Publication

Publication costs (peer-reviewed print scholarly journal or peer-reviewed open access scholarly journal).

ACADEMIC RESEARCH FUND AND SSHRC EXPLORE GRANTS DO NOT SUPPORT

Examples of **activities not supported** by the Academic Research Fund or SSHRC Explore Grants include, *but are not necessarily limited to the following*:

- 1) Funding for expenses incurred for the research study before review and approval by the Academic Research Committee.
- 2) Sequential or multi-phase studies that comprise a long-term research program.
- 3) Payment of a salary or stipend to the Principal Investigator(s) or Co-Investigator(s) or to research study team members who hold a full or part-time academic or professional (or equivalent) appointment within AU or at another institution.
- 4) Conducting a preliminary literature review for a subsequent study.
- 5) Research conducted to fulfill the requirements of a bachelor's, master's or doctoral degree programs.
- 6) Travel, relocation, or other personal expenses associated with Research and Study Leave.
- 7) Travel expenses, honoraria, or other gifts for visiting scholars.
- 8) Dissemination activities funded by the Academic and Professional Development Fund or by a SSHRC Exchange Grant.
- 9) Cost of preparing a manuscript for publication (e.g., designing, editing, indexing).
- 10) Publication costs of a book or monograph.
- 11) Translation of materials into another language for the purpose of dissemination.
- 12) Purchase of reprints of a published article.
- 13) Purchase of books.
- 14) Course development and/or revision.
- 15) Course and/or program evaluation.
- 16) Creation of Open Educational Resources (OER) or other learning resources/tools.

ARF Juried/Solicited Creative Works

- 1) Exhibits designed to fulfill requirements of a bachelor's, master's or doctoral degree programs.

- 2) Payments of a stipend, honoraria or other fee.
- 3) Translation of the juried/solicited creative work into another language.
- 4) Preparation of a manuscript based on the juried/solicited creative work.

Academic Research Fund Publication

- 1) Subvention funds/funds towards editing, publishing, copyright costs or costs of preparing a manuscript for publication (e.g., designing, editing, indexing, etc.), including costs that are based on the scholarly journal's publication requirements.
- 2) Translating the publication into other languages.

EVALUATION CRITERIA – ACADEMIC RESEARCH FUND AND SSHRC EXPLORE GRANT APPLICATIONS

The [Academic Research Committee](#) normally adjudicates all Academic Research Fund applications, including SSHRC Explore Grant applications. Consultation may be sought from other individuals possessing specific expertise (e.g., methodological) as required.

The Academic Research Committee is expected to:

- 1) Demonstrate rigorous judgement through their written reviews, and explanatory verbal comments.
- 2) Offer meaningful feedback to applicants on improving their applications to benefit the advancement of research.
- 3) Ensure consistent, respectful, and fair reviews.
- 4) Maintain reviewer accountability and transparency of the research funding process.

Funding decisions are based peer review; the internationally accepted standard for determining excellence in scientific research. A peer view process will determine the scientific rigor, significance of the problem being studied, appropriateness of methodology, and potential for the study findings to lead to publication and/or further funded research.

EVALUATION CRITERIA AND SCORING

Although the ARF program (merit review rubric) primarily emulates the criteria SSHRC uses, the ARF program does receive applications from all disciplinary areas, therefore, the rubric aims to blend the best pieces of Tri-Agency evaluation into an AU specific evaluation schema.

Challenge (50%) - weighting for all Scholars	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Originality, significance, and expected contribution to knowledge. b) Appropriateness of the literature review. c) Appropriateness of the methods and/or theoretical approach, framework. d) Quality of training and mentoring to be provided to students, emerging scholars and other highly qualified personnel, and opportunities for them to contribute. e) Excellence in research design is evident, where principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion have been considered throughout project development. f) Potential for the project results to have influence and impact within and/or beyond the social sciences and humanities community.
Feasibility (30%) – weighting for all Scholars	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Appropriateness of the proposed timeline and probability that the objectives will be met. b) Expertise of applicant and team (if applicable) in relation to the proposed research. c) Appropriateness of the requested budget and justification of proposed costs, including other financial and/or in-kind contributions (if applicable). d) Quality and appropriateness of knowledge mobilization plans, including for effective dissemination, exchange, and engagement with stakeholders within and/or beyond the research community where applicable.
Capability (20%) – weighting for all Scholars	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Quality, quantity, and significance of past experience and published and/or creative outputs of the applicant and any co-applicants, relative to their roles in the project and their respective stages of career. b) Evidence of other knowledge mobilization activities and inputs.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> c) Evidence of contributions to the development of talent. d) Equity in research practice is evident, including the promotion of diversity in team composition and trainee recruitment, fostering and equitable, inclusive, and accessible research work environment; and highlighting diversity and equity in mentoring, training, and access to development opportunities. e) Potential of applicant/co-applicant to make future contributions.
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SCORING TABLE

To ensure consistency, ARF/SSHRC Explore grant applications are ranked using the following rating scale:

Descriptor	Point Value	DEFINITION
Excellent	1	The application excels in most or all relevant aspects. Any shortcomings are minimal.
Good	0.5	The application excels in many relevant aspects, and reasonably addresses all others. Certain improvements are possible.
Unsatisfactory	0	The application fails to provide convincing information and/or has serious inherent flaws or gaps. Major revisions are required.

Resources - Related to equity, diversity, and inclusion in research grant applications (provided by the Tri-Agencies)

[Guide to Addressing Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Considerations in Partnership Grant Applications \(SSHRC\)](#)

[NSERC guide on integrating equity, diversity and inclusion considerations in research](#)

[Best Practices in Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in Research \(NFRF\)](#)

EVALUATION CRITERIA – ACADEMIC RESEARCH FUND PUBLICATION APPLICATIONS

Academic Research Fund Publication applications are evaluated on the following criteria:

- 1) Journal identified as either being a peer-reviewed print scholarly journal or peer-reviewed open access scholarly journal.
- 2) Confirmation that the article is/will be published.
- 3) Confirmation of publication costs (may be listed as USD or CDN funds).
- 4) Full reference citation.
- 5) Authorship placement, in relation to the funds requested, and if applicable, explanation of why other authors/institutions have not/will not be covering a percentage of the publication charges. **Priority is given to first and second author Athabasca University faculty and students.**
- 6) Rationale for choosing the scholarly journal and steps taken to assess its credibility.
 - There has been an increase in the number of deceptive, predatory and low-quality journals. Applicants must provide a rationale for choosing the scholarly journal that includes:
 - a) Journal peer-review process, reputation, aims and scope, including other rubrics used to assess the journal's credibility (e.g., age of journal, restrictions, similar articles, membership of editorial board, [Beall's List of Predatory Journals and Publishers](#), [ABDC Journal Quality List](#), or other list(s)/other criteria).
 - b) Explanation of how the journal fits with the topic and why the journal was chosen in relation to all other journals that might also fit with the topic.
 - If a scholarly journal is named in a journal list that is accepted by the applicant's faculty, (e.g., ABDC Journal Quality List, etc.) this does not automatically obligate the Academic Research Committee to approve funding, as the committee will consider other factors in its overall assessment (e.g., reputation, authorship placement, other applicants, relative impact factor, etc.).
- 7) Impact factor (used to measure the quality of a scholarly journal)
 - Impact factors vary by faculty and/or discipline and some journals may have a relatively low impact factor but are still considered very "high quality". Impact factors vary on several dimensions and scores themselves cannot be considered in isolation from other factors. The Academic Research Fund Guidelines do not have a "clear-cut" acceptable impact factor threshold, therefore, it is up to the applicant to provide details about the journal:

- a) Identify current and historical journal impact factors.
 - b) Explain where the journal stands relative to impact factors of other journals in the applicant's faculty and/or discipline.
 - c) Defend their decision to publish in the journal, despite the impact factors and rankings, and the threshold for what is deemed to be an acceptable impact factor, in addition to other rubrics used in assessing the journal's credibility. This may also include new scholarly journals, which currently have no impact factors.
- It is at the discretion of the Academic Research Committee to assess and evaluate low impact factors to determine if a journal is low in quality, which will assist in determining if funding from the Academic Research Fund Publications is warranted.

RECONSIDERATION OF DECISION

- 1) Applicants may request the committee reconsider a decision.
- 2) Requests for reconsideration must be submitted within ten (10) business days from the date of the original decision.
- 3) Requests for reconsideration will be reviewed by the Academic Research Committee within ten (10) business days from receipt of the request.
- 4) Decisions of the Academic Research Committee will be final.

DURATION OF GRANT

If funding is conditionally approved, all conditions must be met within thirty (30) business days from the date the conditional approval memo is received, otherwise, from a timeline and budget perspective, the file will be considered inactive, and the file will be closed. Applicants will be required to resubmit a new application to the next application deadline.

Grant recipients are obliged to abide by the conditions governing these grants, conduct/publish the research as proposed, and adhere to all relevant Athabasca University [Research Policies](#) and related procedures in so doing.

Academic Research Fund grant recipients:

If the research will not be completed within 12 months of approval, the grant recipient may request a maximum of a one-year extension. Extension requests must be submitted via the Research Portal at least 30 days prior to the original end date.

SSHRC Explore Grant recipients:

Funds granted must be expended within 12 months of approval; no extensions shall be granted.

CLOSING OUT OF GRANT

Academic Research Fund and SSHRC Explore Grant recipients:

- 1) All expense claims, invoices and/or Research Assistant timesheets must be submitted by the end date of the research study.
 - Any unspent funds will be returned to the Academic Research Fund or SSHRC Explore Grant at the end of the 30-day period and any unclaimed expenditures will become the responsibility of the grant recipient.
- 2) Within 30 days after the end date of the research study and/or publication of the research, a final report must be submitted via the Athabasca University [Research Portal](#) and must demonstrate that the research was conducted in accordance with the approved application and related budget, should also indicate the number of trainees engaged in the research study, and the number and type of research outputs either completed or in progress (e.g., peer-reviewed publications, other reports, conference presentations, other outputs).