

**Overview:** In alignment with Athabasca University Faculty Association (AUFA) Collective Agreement – Article 13.4 Academic Research Fund 13.4.1, which calls for the establishment of the Academic Research Fund for the purpose of encouraging and assisting research activities by Staff Members. 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 Fund (GRF). Funds from AU's SSHRC Institutional Grant (SIG) help support SSHRC Explore Grants. These funds comprise the annual Academic Research Fund budget. Monies from this fund shall be allocated and administered by the Academic Research Fund Committee.

## PURPOSE OF ACADEMIC RESEARCH FUND

The [AU Strategic Research Plan](#) (2018-2022) sets the direction for investments in research, scholarship, and creativity on campus 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 the SRP goals by providing funds to support smaller-scale research initiatives, leading to the pursuit of funding from external agencies. This can include activities such as:

- 1) Provide support for data collection and analysis, including the conduct of formal or scoping systematic literature reviews.
- 2) Facilitate the acquisition of research tools (e.g., small equipment, data management/analysis software, encrypted storage devices).
- 3) Enable researchers to hire trainees at any level to participate in a research project.
- 4) 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.
- 5) Provide support for research that falls outside the normal eligibility criteria of external funding agencies or merits other special considerations.
- 6) Complement resources available from external funding agencies, including supporting the completion of studies for which other resources have been fully expended.
- 7) 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).

## APPLICATION DEADLINES AND NOTIFICATIONS

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| <b>Academic Research Fund</b><br>Normally two intakes per year | February 1, April 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ If these dates fall on a weekend or statutory holiday, the deadline shall be the next business day.</li> <li>▪ Grant notification normally occurs within 30 business days of the application deadline.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Publications</b><br>Ongoing                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Applications may be submitted at any time and will be subject to an expedited review.</li> <li>▪ Grant notification normally occurs within 14 business days of submission of the application.</li> <li>▪ If the application is denied, the publication expenses shall be the responsibility of the applicant.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Juried/Solicited Creative Works</b><br>Ongoing              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Applications may be submitted at any time and will be subject to an expedited review.</li> <li>▪ Grant notification normally occurs within 14 business days of submission of the application.</li> </ul>   |

## VALUE OF GRANT

- 1) Normally, Academic Research Fund grants shall not exceed \$6,000 CDN.
- 2) Grants to support Publication and Juried/Solicited Creative Works shall not exceed \$2,500 CDN per fiscal year.
- 3) Applicants shall acknowledge receipt of an Academic Research Fund grant in dissemination activities related to an approved research project or publication.
- 4) Grants cannot be transferred to any other application or research project.
- 5) Unused funds shall be returned to the Academic Research Fund.

## ELIGIBILITY

- 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) Non-AUFA staff members may be named as Co-Investigator(s) but may not hold an Academic Research Fund grant as Principal Investigator.
- 3) Term AUFA staff members must complete the proposed research prior to the end of their term appointment.

### Academic Research Fund applicants:

- 1) Must commit to submitting an external grant application (e.g., SSHRC Insight; CIHR Project Grant, NSERC Discovery Grant; or other) within 12 to 18 months from receiving an Academic Research Fund grant (no commitments to submit an external grant application must be well justified in Section 2 of the Academic Research Fund application form).
- 2) Are eligible to hold one Academic Research Fund grant as a Principal Investigator and may be named as a Co-Investigator in another Academic Research Fund application; however, the research projects cannot be directly related
- 3) May submit up to two applications within a 12-month period but all aspects of the previous grant (e.g., submission of Research Assistant timesheets, invoices, expense claims, final report) must be completed prior to holding a subsequent Academic Research Fund Grant (as Principal Investigator)

### Academic Research Fund (Publication) applicants:

- 1) May submit multiple applications within a fiscal year, however all grants combined shall not exceed the maximum eligible amount.
- 2) Must include, where possible, the full reference citation for article(s) as it appears/will appear in the publication.
- 3) Must explain authorship placement in relation to the funds requested. If non-AU authors have not/will not be covering a percentage of the publication charges, confirmation of this must be clearly articulated in the application form.

### Academic Research Fund (Juried/Solicited Creative Works) applicants:

- May submit multiple applications within a fiscal year, however all grants combined shall not exceed the maximum eligible amount.

## ELIGIBLE EXPENSES

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

- 1) Travel costs that directly relate to conducting the research.
- 2) Accommodation (normally for 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.

- 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/provided by 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 well 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 (Publication)**

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

## **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 DOES NOT SUPPORT**

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

- 1) Expenses incurred for a research project before review and approval by the Academic Research Fund 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 project 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 project.
- 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.
- 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) for teaching and learning resources/tools.

## 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.

## Academic Research Fund (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.

## SUBMITTING AN APPLICATION

- 1) Applicants shall use the existing Academic Research Fund application form(s) submitted through the Athabasca University [Research Portal](#).
- 2) Only complete applications submitted via the Research Portal, including applicable appendices, will be considered for review by the Academic Research Fund 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(s) as there is no spellcheck or formatting available within the online application form(s).
- 5) Not all the questions on the Academic Research Fund application form may be applicable to a particular research project. In such cases, the applicant is encouraged to provide sufficient and other relevant information that will allow the reviewers to assess the application.
- 6) Applications will be reviewed in accordance with these guidelines (see Evaluation Criteria below).

## EVALUATION CRITERIA – ACADEMIC RESEARCH FUND

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

The Academic Research Fund 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 on 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 project findings to lead to publication and/or further funded research.

- 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.

## EVALUATION CRITERIA – PUBLICATION

- 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, including a full reference citation.
- 3) Confirmation of publication costs (costs not listed as CDN funds must show evidence of currency conversion) (e.g., USD, EURO).

- 4) 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.
- 5) 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](#), [Think Check Submit](#), 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 Fund 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.).
- 6) 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 in 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 accessing 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 Fund 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.

## EVALUATION CRITERIA – JURIED/SOLICITED CREATIVE WORKS

- 1) Description of the juried/solicited creative work.
- 2) Explanation on how the juried/solicited creative work was selected (e.g., competitive application process, invitation to submit, etc.) and how it will be disseminated.

## RECONSIDERATION OF DECISION

- 1) In alignment with Tri-Agency policies, an appeal of a funding decision must be based on a compelling demonstration of a procedural error in the review of the application (e.g., an undeclared or unaddressed conflict of interest, a failure by staff to provide required information to the review committee). The Academic Research Fund Committee will not accept appeals on any aspect of the peer review process stemming from a peer reviewer's assessment of an application, the applicant(s), or the proposed research, or to the duration and level of grant.
- 2) The onus is on the applicant to demonstrate that a procedural error was made in the review of the application.
- 3) Applicants may request the committee reconsider a decision. Requests for reconsideration must be submitted within ten (10) business days from the date of the original decision. To submit a request for reconsideration, applicants should email the Academic Research Fund Committee Secretary with a copy to the Academic Research Fund Committee Chair, attaching a detailed explanation as to why the decision should be reconsidered based on the grounds outlined above.
- 4) The Academic Research Fund Committee will review requests for reconsideration within ten (10) business days from receipt of the request. Decisions of the Academic Research Fund Committee are final.

## MANDATORY ETHICS APPROVAL

The Academic Research Fund Committee will evaluate response(s) primarily on the soundness of the scientific merit of the research, not on the grounds that the recruitment process might raise ethical concerns.

Ethics approvals (if applicable) must be obtained prior to the release of Academic Research Fund grant funds. Researchers who plan to conduct a research project that involves human, or animal pathogens or toxins are encouraged to initiate the AU Science Laboratory risk assessment before submitting an ARF application. Contact the AU Bio-Safety Officer at [<sciencelab@athabascau.ca>](mailto:sciencelab@athabascau.ca) to discuss bio-safety protocols.

Research involving humans and animals:

- 1) [Research involving humans](#) requires approval of the Athabasca University (AU) Research Ethics Board (AUREB) 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 project that involves human, or animal pathogens or toxins must notify the Athabasca University Biosafety Officer at [sciencelab@athabascau.ca](mailto:sciencelab@athabascau.ca) to discuss biosafety protocols.
- 2) Researchers who plan to conduct a research project that involves potential environmental impacts must notify the Research Centre at [research@athabascau.ca](mailto:research@athabascau.ca).

## DURATION OF GRANT

- 1) If funding is conditionally approved, all conditions must be met within thirty (30) business days from the date the conditional approval memo is received. If this deadline is not met, the file will be considered inactive, and will be closed. Applicants will be required to resubmit a new application to the next application deadline.
- 2) 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.
- 3) Academic Research Fund grant recipients who cannot complete the research within 12 months from the date of the release of funds may request a maximum of a one-year extension. No further extensions will be permitted.
- 4) Extension requests must be submitted via the Research Portal at least 30 days prior to the original planned end date.

## CLOSING OUT OF GRANT

- 1) Within 30 business days after the end date of the research project, publication of research and/or juried/creative works, all Research Assistant timesheets, expense claims and/or invoices must be submitted via the Chrome River Expense Management System ([HR and Finance Portal](#)).
- 2) Any unspent funds will be returned to the Academic Research Fund at the end of the 30-day period and any unclaimed expenditures will become the responsibility of the grant recipient.
- 3) A final report must also be submitted via the Athabasca University [Research Portal](#) and must demonstrate that the research, publication and/or juried/creative works was completed in accordance with the approved application and related budget.