



RESEARCH CODE OF CONDUCT

Wildlife Disease Association

approved by Council, December 9, 2025

The Wildlife Disease Association (WDA) expects a high standard of research ethics, including animal welfare, and integrity from its members. This extends to all recipients of grants awarded by the Association. The Association believes that adherence to high standards benefits research and wildlife health, biodiversity conservation and society more broadly.

RESEARCH GRANTS AWARDED BY THE WDA

Funding proposals which are not consistent with this Code of Conduct, or with insufficiently robust scientific design, may be declined. The Principal Investigator, collaborators, and all project personnel must adhere to the Wildlife Disease Association's Research Code of Conduct for the duration of any projects that are funded by the WDA. Compliance with the Code of Conduct is a requirement of funding and funding may be discontinued if project personnel are found to be in violation of the Code of Conduct.

We encourage proposals which can show a clear positive impact on relevant wildlife communities and ecosystems. The WDA generally will not fund studies which are likely to result in substantial, negative impacts on individual animals (e.g. moderate to severe pain or distress; ongoing injury or disease; euthanasia), unless it can be clearly demonstrated that this is necessary to result in substantial, tangible net benefits for the broader wildlife population, and there are no alternative options to obtain the same outcomes. If pain cannot be avoided due to the nature of the procedure, then relevant strategies to reduce it must be employed, such as analgesia, sedation or anesthesia.

ANIMAL WELFARE

Grant recipients are responsible for ensuring that all study participants adhere to high standards of animal welfare when working with live animals, and that they are appropriately trained to complete the procedures they undertake. Animal welfare should be a priority in all aspects of the research, but consideration should be directed towards areas such as stress minimization, humane capture (including darting and remote sedation), restraint, anesthesia and sedation, marking procedures (e.g. tagging, collaring, tattoos), euthanasia, use of pharmaceutical grade drugs, safe transport, housing and husbandry, and enrichment. In countries where animal ethics committees (AECs)/institutional animal care and use committees (IACUCs or equivalent) exist, approval for all procedures must be obtained, and all work must be conducted in accordance with the approved procedures. Ethics approval must be obtained before funds are released for the work. If it is not possible to provide an animal ethics approval for the work suggested, the outlined procedures will be assessed for acceptable animal welfare standards by the award review committee. Applications that are not consistent with a high level of animal ethics and human safety will not be eligible for a WDA award.

WORKING WITH HUMAN PARTICIPANTS AND INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATIONS

In countries where Human Ethics approval (also known as Institutional Review Board approval, or similar) is required for work with human subjects, this must be obtained and

close attention must be paid to relevant cultural awareness. Research that involves Indigenous people and local communities must be conducted with respect, transparency, and accountability.

Researchers are encouraged to co-design studies with Indigenous communities, uphold participatory research principles, and actively pursue opportunities to build local capacity. Where research is conducted in a country other than that of the Principal Investigator, an additional Principal Investigator, co-investigator or mentor based in that country should be part of the research team.

HUMAN SAFETY

The health and safety of all participants is of utmost importance, and appropriate risk assessments must be conducted and provided as part of the application for all work proposed, taking into consideration occupational health and safety legislation of all countries where the research occurs and/or researchers are based. This should include consideration of vulnerabilities of different life stages, e.g. pregnancy. Applications that outline work which is not consistent with a high level of consideration for human safety may be deemed not to be eligible by the Awards Committee. Researchers are expected to carefully consider how to safely dispose of sharps, chemicals and biohazards and to maintain appropriate records of drug use and recover chemical immobilization darts while working in the field.

PERMITS

Prior to commencement of activities, relevant permits, as stipulated by local and international permit requirements, allowing for animal capture, handling, collection, and import or export of samples should be obtained.

RESEARCH INTEGRITY

Intellectual property theft and plagiarism in verbal or written form are not permitted, and appropriate credit must be given to the work of others, be they collaborators or not.

Researchers must not engage in scientific fraud, including fabrication, misrepresentation, falsification or suppression of results. Publications should adhere to currently accepted standards for use of artificial intelligence (AI) in research. The use of Artificial Intelligence tools for proposal creation, data analysis, data interpretation, or manuscript preparation must be clearly disclosed in project documentation and acknowledged in any resulting publications or reports. Any conflicts of interest should be declared clearly and appropriately resolved.

Funds obtained through the WDA should only be expended for the work that was approved by the review committee in the application. Such funds should not be used for activities that are illegal in the country where research is conducted.