

## 2026 Zoological Medicine and Wildlife Health Research Grant Program

Last updated: 11.5.2025

### **Background:**

In 2012, The American Association of Zoo Veterinarians (AAZV) established the Zoological Medicine and Wildlife Health Research Grant program which is funded by the [Wild Animal Health Fund](#) (WAHF). The intent of the 18 month research grants is to support the AAZV mission to empower our members to advance our profession and enhance zoo and wild animal health, welfare, and conservation. Investigators are expected to disseminate their findings via peer-reviewed publication and any other relevant outreach efforts. Typically, AAZV receives 40-60 grant proposals each year, from which 15-20 grants are awarded per year.

Two categories of funding are available: the standard grant (maximum \$20,000 USD) and small grant (maximum \$7,500 USD). Small grants are intended to foster innovation and training in research, and are often trainee-led projects, pilot studies, or opportunistic additions to an ongoing research effort. Small grants may be narrower in scope than standard proposals but must meet the same scientific standards. The application process is identical for the two categories. A total of \$150,000 in grants can be funded in the 2026 Grant cycle.

One grant per year can be awarded to an investigator working outside the US and with international collaborators and will be selected by the Research Grant Committee for recognition as the **Dr. Rob Hilsenroth Global Reach Award**. This designation is in honor of Rob Hilsenroth, DVM who served as the Executive Director of AAZV for nearly 20 years. Rob was instrumental in creating the AAZV Wild Animal Health Fund as he recognized the critical role of research in advancing wild animal health and conservation. He was also dedicated to promoting global outreach and accessibility of AAZV through the creation of the AAZV Developing Nations Limited Membership. With the Dr. Rob Hilsenroth Global Outreach Award, AAZV will pay homage to Rob's passion for supporting wild animal health research across the globe, as we continue to diversify the animal health research community.

### **2026 Grant Timeline:**

Call for applications: November 1, 2025

Submission deadline: December 15, 2025

Expected award announcement: May 15, 2026

Awarded Grant Project Start date: June 1, 2026

Awarded Grant Project End date: December 1, 2027

**2026 Grant Proposal Requirements:**

- At least one **Principal Investigator** must be a current AAZV member in good standing. Not having an AAZV member listed as a Principal Investigator will disqualify your application. A Co-Investigator or Collaborator will **NOT** count in this eligibility requirement. The member must maintain their AAZV membership during the duration of the grant if awarded funding. If you are not currently an AAZV member but would like to join, click [HERE](#).
- Grant Proposals must be submitted to the on-line Grants Management Platform on or before the submission deadline of December 15, 2025. Paper or emailed applications will not be accepted.
- Late or incomplete submissions, late-arriving addenda, and proposals not conforming to the guidelines will not be reviewed.

**Cost for Submission:** \$0 (free)

**2026 AAZV Grant Proposal Content:**

The 2026 Research Grant Proposal application is divided into several parts: background information, eligibility requirements and Awardee expectations, Authors and Institutions represented, Executive Summary and the Full Proposal including research background, objectives, methodology, budget, literature cited, supporting documentation. All aspects of the application must be filled out to be considered for evaluation.

Throughout the application process it is important to remember to describe the background, objectives, and methodology of the study in a succinct and organized fashion. Document the investigators' expertise and institutional capabilities, and discuss the scientific merit, feasibility, and anticipated impact of the study. Highlight the study's relevance to the AAZV mission to advance our profession and enhance zoo and wild animal health, welfare, and conservation. Studies relying on pharmacology, imaging, pathology, diagnostic test development, or other specialized data will benefit greatly from inclusion of an expert in that field as a Co-Investigator or Collaborator. Studies relying on an outside laboratory or facility for specialized work, particularly if assistance with data interpretation is expected, are encouraged to include a letter of support or a Collaborator from that facility. For managed species, and particularly for studies relying on recruitment from multiple holding institutions, a letter of support from the relevant managing group (e.g., SSP, EEP, TAG) is strongly recommended.

**2026 Evaluation Criteria:**

Scientific merit (background; hypotheses and/or objectives; study design and methods; animal use)

Impact and relevance (AAZV mission; expected benefit to target species or ecosystem)

Feasibility (personnel; facilities; attainability of objectives; preliminary data if applicable)

Finances (appropriate expenses; adequate justification; proportion of funding from WAHF)

Technical writing (coherence and clarity; grammar and typography; literature review)

### **2026 Evaluation Process:**

The AAZV Research Grant Committee (RGC) evaluates and selects proposals for funding. The RGC is composed of a minimum of 8 AAZV members spanning a wide range of expertise in zoo and wildlife medicine and pathology, as well as ad hoc subject matter experts as needed.

Proposal evaluation involves several phases:

1st Stage-Adherence to guidelines and eligibility; noncompliant proposals are disqualified without review

2nd Stage- RGC Review of Executive Summary; proposals are selected for full 3rd Stage review by RGC vote

3rd Stage- Full RGC Review of selected proposals; assigned reviewers score the proposal and present their evaluation to the RGC body for discussion

Ranking of reviewed 3rd stage proposals by all RGC members, for standard and small grants separately

Compilation of average rankings in each category, and determination of the cutoff for funding the highest-ranking grants based on available funds

Recommendation of a final list of funded grants to the AAZV Executive Committee for approval

### **Award and Compliance:**

#### Grant-in-Aid Agreement and Funding:

Following the selection of funded grants, AAZV will contact the Primary Principal Investigator to establish a Grant-In-Aid Agreement with the investigator's institution. It is

recommended that the Primary Principal Investigator (the first Investigator/Author listed) is authorized by their institution to sign the Grant-In-Aid Agreement.

Documentation of animal use approval is required prior to funding disbursement. Documentation of permit approval is required when permits are received, and prior to completion of the study. Inability to provide required documentation in a timely fashion may result in forfeiture of the grant.

A layperson summary is also required, consisting of a brief paragraph summarizing the study and its importance in easy-to-understand terms suitable for use in AAZV publicity and development communications. 3-5 background pictures of the species or science being studied are required and will be used in AAZV/WAHF marketing and news.

The initial funding disbursement is 75% of the research funds, payable by June 1st provided the grant agreement is fully executed between AAZV and the institution representing the PI.

The final 25% of the research funds will be disbursed after completion of the study and approval of the final report.

Publication funding, if selected during the application process, is not included in the research grant disbursements, and will be disbursed via a separate request at the time of publication as detailed below.

#### Publication Funding:

WAHF is committed to supporting the dissemination of funded research through publication in the scientific literature. Publication cost support may be requested exclusively by Principal Investigators who do not have access to institutional or other funding for publication expenses. When approved, these funds are issued separately from the main research award, as described below. Funding does not guarantee publication; manuscripts must be submitted directly to the journal and are subject to editorial and peer review per each journal's policies.

Publication funding is separate from the research grant but must be selected and an amount specified at the time of grant proposal submission. Publication funding is not restricted to a specific amount or percentage of the research grant budget. However, the JZWM Manuscript Processing and Page Publication Fees, and all costs associated with non-JZWM publication, count toward the maximum small or standard grant (\$7,500 or \$20,000) and reduce the allowable amount for research costs. To promote the enhanced accessibility of open access publication, investigators choosing to publish in JZWM may

request the Open Access Publication Fee in addition to the maximum small or standard research grant amount. Information on JZWM open- and closed-access publication and current costs may be found on the AAZV website (<https://www.aazv.org/page/JZWM>).

In the proposal application investigators must select one option, and specify the total expected publication costs as noted below:

- No publication funding requested
- JZWM open access
  - Manuscript Processing Fee for the corresponding author's AAZV membership status
  - Page Publication Fees estimated for the expected manuscript length
  - Open Access Publishing Fee – does not count toward maximum grant limits
- JZWM closed access
  - Manuscript Processing Fee for the corresponding author's AAZV membership status
  - Page Publication Fees estimated for the expected manuscript length
- Non-JZWM publication
  - Costs may include submission, publication, page, image, and/or open access fees, or any other charges as specified by the target journal

On a case-by-case basis, funding may be approved for posters, pamphlets, or other outreach efforts

Publication funding is not included in the initial and final research grant disbursements. To access publication funding the PI will submit a request at the time of publication, including documentation of actual costs, to the AAZV Program Director through the on-line Grants portal. Disbursement of publication funding may be requested during the research grant period, or after closure of the grant within 3 years of approval of the final report.

Publication funding may not be reallocated to other research costs, and funds for JZWM open access publication in excess of the maximum grant amount may not be reallocated to publication in another journal. Any publication funds remaining unused 3 years after final report approval will be forfeited.

#### Progress Reports:

The PI is required to submit brief updates on study progress every 6 months within the active grant period through the online Grants portal. Progress Report information needed

will be similar to the document Progress Report Template that is used for Grants awarded prior to 2026. These reports should also provide an updated layperson summary and 3-5 photographs with sentence long captions suitable for use in AAZV marketing and development communications.

#### No-Cost Extensions:

If the study cannot be completed within 18 months of the original start date, June 1, 2026, the PI may request a no-cost extension (NCE) of the grant period. This request must be made promptly through the online Grant portal when the delay is first identified. The PI must list specific reasons for the delay and a proposed timeline adjustment. No-cost extensions are typically awarded for 6 months, however a 12 month NCE is possible.

#### Budget Reallocation and Method Changes:

Any changes in the study's budget allocations, procedures, objectives, or investigators must be approved in advance by the RGC. This request must be made promptly when the issue is first identified by submitting a request through the online Grant portal. For reallocation of up to 25% of the total grant amount, the PI must submit a progress report on the study with specific reasons for the requested budget changes. For major reallocation of funds, greater than 25% of the total grant, the PI must submit a progress report including a proposal of revised or new objectives and methods, with timeline adjustments if necessary. Reallocation of funds without prior approval may result in forfeiture of the final funding disbursement and/or ineligibility for future AAZV Grant funding.

#### Final Report and Disbursement:

The PI must submit a final report within 2 months of study completion through the online Grant portal. This final report summarizes the outcomes of the study, lists any submitted or planned publications, and provides a final budget, including actual costs in each category of the proposed budget. Publication is not required prior to the final report, but the study must be complete with preliminary results and conclusions available. Once the report has been reviewed and approved by the RGC, a disbursement will be issued for the remaining 25% of the research funds.

#### Results Dissemination:

Investigators are expected to disseminate the results of their study via peer-reviewed publication, preferably to the Journal of Zoo and Wildlife Medicine (JZWM) if appropriate, submitted within 1 year of completion. Conference presentations and any other relevant outreach efforts are also encouraged. Wild Animal Health Fund funding should be

acknowledged in publications and presentations with a statement such as: “Funds were provided by the American Association of Zoo Veterinarians’ Wild Animal Health Fund.” The PI should report when any publication or presentation has been accepted by documenting the publication/presentation using the online Grant Portal.

### **Commonly Asked Questions:**

Q: As a PI, may I submit two separate proposals (each involving different projects/species)?

Yes, a PI may submit multiple proposals for different studies in one grant cycle

Q: If all we need is funding for transportation, would an AAZV grant be appropriate?

No, travel funds are limited to 25% of the total grant amount requested. Funding would need to be found elsewhere.

Q: What is the difference between a Principal Investigator, Co-Investigator, and Collaborator? Who should be included in the project’s personnel?

The Principal Investigator (PI) is the person primarily responsible for conducting the study and communicating with AAZV. Multiple PIs may be listed in the case of shared primary responsibility; this situation is particularly common when one PI is a trainee, and their advisor serves as an additional PI.

Whenever the PIs will be relying on active participation of another expert, they should be included as a Co-Investigator or Collaborator. For example, pharmacokinetic/pharmacodynamic studies should include a pharmacologist; imaging studies should include a radiologist; etc. The PI(s) themselves may be those experts; if not, the person performing that role should be named as a Co-Investigator or Collaborator. While a board-certified specialist is not necessarily required, the person performing the work should have a demonstrable record of publication in the field.

The distinction between Co-Investigators and Collaborators is somewhat arbitrary, but typically depends on the expected level of responsibility for the study as a whole. Co-Investigators are usually extensively involved in study design and execution, whereas Collaborators may provide a specialized service or consultation but are not responsible for the direction or execution of the study. The expected contribution of a Co-Investigator or

Collaborator should be stated in the Personnel section of the grant proposal or in a letter of support attached at the end of the proposal.

Q: In what situations is a letter of support beneficial?

Letters of support are important when resources or contributions from an individual or institution not represented as a Co-Investigator or Collaborator are essential to the study. One of the most common examples is when samples will be obtained from various institutions that are not the home institutions of the investigators; in such cases letters of support from the participating institutions confirm their intent to provide the requested samples. Other situations may include specialized work to be performed at an institution other than the PI's home institution; fieldwork occurring on private land; or non-commercial lab analyses being performed by a researcher outside the home institution. For studies conducted on managed or endangered species, see the question below on letters of support from species advisory groups.

Q: Should I have a letter of support from the SSP/EEP/TAG/etc. for my species of interest? What if I study the free-ranging population?

A letter of support from a species advisory group is most relevant for studies conducted on the managed population, to provide assurance that the group supports the study as a priority for the population, is willing to provide data or input as requested by the investigators, and will encourage other holding institutions to participate if the study is a multi-institutional design.

For studies on free-ranging populations of vulnerable/endangered species, letters of support from any relevant organization such as an IUCN specialist group or the relevant wildlife authority in the range country may be beneficial, again to provide assurance that the study is recognized as a priority for the population and the organization is prepared to offer support within its typical role or capacity.

Q: Is a hypothesis-driven study necessary or preferable? Are exploratory studies permitted?

Exploratory studies driven by well-considered and well-justified objectives are permitted, and have been successful for funding in the past. All proposals are evaluated using the same criteria for scientific merit and impact, including evaluation of the quality of their

objectives and/or hypotheses. In some cases, it may be harmful to attempt to frame a study as hypothesis-driven when in reality it is not. For instance, “we hypothesize that development of reference ranges for this diagnostic test will enable better care for this species” is likely not testable within the scope of an 18-month grant period, and therefore the study as proposed lacks scientific merit. Unless addressing a specific question of expected difference from previously obtained data, a reference interval study may be better framed as an exploratory design.

Q: How detailed should the budget be? What budget justification information is needed?

A well-considered budget and justification demonstrates that the investigators are familiar with the costs required for the work to be performed, as well as potential variabilities and pitfalls, and have determined that the requested funds will be sufficient to conduct the proposed study. The level of detail in the proposal budget will depend on what can reasonably be predicted, which differs among studies. The budget table may group related estimated costs, such as “sample collection,” but it is beneficial to summarize the included components in the budget justification. The budget justification must list sources for all funding not provided by the AAZV Research Grant, as well as the intended recipient of any stipend or travel funding. Indirect costs will not be covered by Wild Animal Health Fund. Investigators are also encouraged to consider contingency plans if a substantial portion of the anticipated study cost has yet to be secured from another source.

Budget Item	Requested From AAZV (\$)		Other Sources (\$)		Remaining Balance (\$)
	Total Costs (\$)				
Sample Collection	\$250.00	\$250.00	0	\$500.00	
4WD vehicle rental	0	\$500.00	0	\$500.00	
4WD fuel	\$200.00	0	0	\$200.00	
Laboratory analysis	\$1,000.00	500.000	\$1,500.00		
Student travel	\$400.00	0	\$400.00	\$800.00	
Total	\$1,850.00	\$1250.00	\$400.00	\$3,500.00	

- Sample collection (disposable gloves, alcohol swabs, sterile vials, storage bags, marking pens, travel cooler, ice packs) estimated \$5/animal x 100 animals
- Additional funds for fieldwork provided by XYZ Foundation grant to PI

- Laboratory analysis \$15/sample x 100 samples; matching funds from Home University Faculty Research Fund
- Student travel funds for travel by graduate student to and from study site, estimated \$400 round trip airfare for each of two field seasons; an application for the remaining cost is pending from Home University Graduate Studies Travel Fund; if unsuccessful, this cost will be covered by PI's laboratory operational funds

Q: What are considered "travel expenses"?

Travel expenses relate to travel of study personnel to or from study sites, or to disseminate study findings. Besides transportation fare (air, train, boat, car, etc.), costs associated with lodging, meals, and other needs while away from home are included in the travel category and count toward the 25% limit. Funding may only be requested for travel by short-term technical assistants or students hired for the study, and for undergraduate or graduate student or clinical trainee (intern/resident) Principal Investigators or Co-Investigators. Costs directly related to fieldwork, such as necessary rental or fuel for an expedition vehicle, may be requested without counting toward the 25% limit.

Q: What is the difference between "capital equipment" and "durable equipment"?

Capital equipment is expected to have a service life of many years, is generally >\$5000 in cost, and is often large or permanently installed. Examples could include an MRI or CT scanner, cabinetry or other building infrastructure, any vehicle purchase, an ultra low freezer or other large appliance. WAHF funds may not be used for any percentage of capital equipment purchases.

Durable equipment has a limited practical lifespan and requires replacement within several years, is generally <\$5000 in cost, and is often portable. Examples could include a computer or tablet, a camera, a scale or other small field equipment, a glucometer or other point-of-care analyzer. WAHF funds may be used for durable equipment necessary for completion of the proposed study, up to 25% of total requested funds.

Q: What payments to study personnel are allowed? Can a student/trainee PI or Co-I be paid a stipend?

WAHF does not provide "salary relief." Funding may not be used for any percentage of regular income for Principal Investigators, Co-Investigators, or Collaborators, including

graduate student or clinical trainee (intern/resident) investigators. Stipends are allowed for short-term technical assistants or students hired for the project, or for consultants providing fee-for-service work. As a rule of thumb, stipends may be paid to personnel with restricted roles, not involved in the overall direction or execution of the study. The total amount of stipends cannot exceed 25% of total requested funds.

Q: Can I include publication costs in my proposal? How do I get the additional allocation for JZWM open access publication?

WAHF encourages investigators to utilize institutional funding and other sources for publication costs, to maximize the WAHF funding directly supporting research activities. If no or limited support is available, publication funding may be included as a line item in the proposal budget, with no limitation to a percentage of the total grant.

For proposals with budgeted direct study costs that are at or near the maximum standard or small grant amount without publication funding included, WAHF allows investigators with no other available support to include an additional budget allocation of up to \$2,500 specifically to fund open-access publication in the Journal of Zoo and Wildlife Medicine (JZWM).

This additional allocation will result in total funding of up to \$22,500 for the standard grant or \$10,000 for the small grant.

This offer does not guarantee publication in JZWM; manuscripts must be accepted via the standard submission and review process.

If the PI elects not to submit to JZWM, or their manuscript is rejected, this additional funding is forfeit and may not be used for any other journal or reallocated to other study costs.

Q: Why is JZWM the preferred journal for publication of WAHF-funded studies?

The WAHF recognizes that many factors impact the choice of publication venue for any given study, and that investigators will select a target journal which is most appropriate for the subject of the study, intended audience, and benefit of the species or ecosystem of interest. WAHF and the Journal of Zoo and Wildlife Medicine (JZWM) are two entities within AAZV, with interrelated mission and financial support. Therefore, WAHF strongly encourages investigators to publish in JZWM and is generously allocating additional

funding to support open-access publication in JZWM. However, a stated choice of a different target journal has no impact on a proposal's evaluation and selection for funding.

Q: Does the WAHF support operating costs for conservation organizations?

While AAZV recognizes the importance of conservation activities, WAHF only funds research proposals with clearly stated hypotheses or objectives and cannot be used for operational costs of conservation-related facilities or organizations.

Q: Can my animal study include a terminal component?

Proposals for terminal animal research will be considered. Terminal studies are reviewed by all Research Grant Committee members, with a heightened attention to animal welfare considerations, expertise of the investigators, and the expected value of study outcomes.

Q: Do I have to have an IACUC for animal research? Does the protocol need to be approved at the time of proposal submission?

All studies using animals or samples from animals must include an assessment of animal welfare in the proposal. If the institution at which the study will be conducted has an IACUC or equivalent animal welfare committee, then IACUC approval or documentation of exemption is required for any study using animal subjects or animal-derived samples. If an IACUC protocol has been submitted but not yet approved at the time of proposal submission, documentation of approval must be received prior to disbursement of grant funds. Note that pending IACUC approval may be taken into account when assessing feasibility of the study in the proposal evaluation process. If the institution has no formal IACUC or welfare committee, a letter of support from the institution's director must be included, ensuring that animal welfare aspects of the proposed study were reviewed and approved.

Q: My research requires a permit. Is it OK if the permit has not yet been obtained at the time of proposal submission?

Permits are not required for proposal submission but pending permits and expected approval timeline are considered when assessing feasibility of the study in the proposal

evaluation process. Documentation of approval must be submitted to the online Grant portal when received and must be received prior to final disbursement of the grant funds.