Sustainability Projects Fund Policy

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# **1. Introduction**

**1.1 Background Information**

The AMS is the student society of the UBC Vancouver campus. Its mission is to improve the academic, social and personal lives of UBC students. The AMS supports student initiatives, makes student voices heard through advocacy and offers a wide range of student services. You can learn more about the AMS at ams.ubc.ca.

Information about the Sustainability Projects Fund (SPF) is available at ams.ubc.ca/the-nest/sustainability/#!/tab/ams-sustainability-projects-fund/ The website provides up to date information including the background and purpose of the fund, quarterly reports outlining funding allocations, information on previously funded projects, application deadlines, subcommittee membership, funding guidelines, criteria and procedures, frequently asked questions, and all relevant application forms.

**1.2 Policy Revision**

The SPF Policy has been updated and combined with the previous SPF guide to consolidate all information into one comprehensive document.

The SPF application process has also been updated to reflect the evolution of sustainability since the SPF started in 2011. We’ve heard from students that the application process was laborious and inaccessible compared to other funding opportunities on campus, and that it disadvantaged projects without clear material or quantitative results, even if they still had a significant impact in creating social change. The application process also failed to consider crucial aspects of meaningful sustainability project development, including systems thinking, environmental justice, interdisciplinarity and critical thinking.

Key changes in this revision include:

1. **Project types:** Applicants are now required to explain what “type” of project they fall under, from a list of six. This change recognizes that there are a wide range of strategies used to advance sustainability, and that projects should not be expected to align with every single one of them. The AMS Internal Code of Procedures has also been updated to widen the scope of SPF-funded projects to include advocacy-related initiatives and projects that build partnerships beyond campus.
2. **Sustainability competencies:** Applicants are now required to demonstrate application of sustainability competencies in their projects. This requirement drives applicants to develop more effective projects and obtain skills that are important for creating meaningful change.
3. **Criteria:** The evaluation criteria have been simplified and updated to align with the application questions.
4. **Project sizes:** Small and large projects are now clearly differentiated by a dollar amount. Small and large projects now also have separate application forms.
5. **Funding restrictions:** Funding restrictions have been updated and clarified. There is now a limit for honoraria and prize money, and the SPF will no longer fund eco-friendly materials for non-sustainability-related events.

# **2. Fund Guidelines**

**2.1 Fund Background**

The AMS Sustainability Projects Fund (SPF) was established in September 2011, when UBC students passed a successful referendum to support student-initiated sustainability projects through a $2.25 per student fee each year. The fund currently has a replenishing amount of >$100,000 per year.

**2.2 Purpose of Funds**

The AMS recognizes its responsibility to reduce the negative social and ecological impacts of its operations and activities, as well as the responsibility to actively improve the social and ecological environments of our campus and engage our student community in this work. The SPF funds student-led projects that contribute to these goals. Projects funded by the SPF should help advance the goals and principles outlined in the [AMS Student Driven Sustainability Strategy](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=4&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwjY9KqG--zhAhXHup4KHRRBCfcQFjADegQIAhAC&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.ams.ubc.ca%2Fwp-content%2Fuploads%2F2018%2F09%2F341-18-Student-Driven-Sustainability-Policy-2.pdf&usg=AOvVaw2FcOOdIhNtnSNWdkNr_OQk) and the [AMS Environment and Climate Change policy](https://www.ams.ubc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/E-2-Environment-and-Climate-Change-Policy.pdf).

The AMS Internal Code of Procedures (Section IX B Article 6(5)(k)) states that “The purpose of this Fund shall be to provide funding to Active Members for environmental, social and economic sustainability projects that enhance opportunities in:

1. student empowerment related to sustainability;
2. reduction of the Society’s ecological footprint and the ecological footprint of UBC Vancouver;
3. education, outreach and community organizing related to sustainability;
4. the environmental, ecological and socially sustainable operations of the Society and UBC Vancouver;
5. sustainability-related advocacy initiatives;
6. info-sharing and partnerships with the broader community beyond UBC Vancouver.”

**2.3 Allocation of Funds**

The financial commitments of the SPF will not exceed the total annual budget[[1]](#footnote-1) plus any surplus from the previous years. To ensure this, the VP Finance (or AVP Finance) will be responsible for informing the SPF subcommittee of the total remaining funds, at the beginning of each meeting. Small projects are those under $1000, while large projects are those over $1000. No more than $15,000 will be committed to any single project.

Up to 25% of SPF funding may also be allocated to student groups to fund their annual costs through short term Memoranda of Understanding (MOU). Groups that have a primary function of coordinating student-led projects at UBC and have received funding from the SPF at least 3 times in the previous year are eligible to apply for an MOU. Interested groups should check the SPF section of the AMS website and contact the SPF Administrator for more information about application procedures.

**2.3 Funding Restrictions**

Expenses that can be funded by the SPF are restricted as follows.

1. No student salaries/wages/coop fees shall be reimbursed by SPF funds.
   1. Professional services with receipts are acceptable, but the SPF does not provide honoraria to project leaders.
   2. However, the SPF will fund honoraria for speakers at a maximum of $250 per application.
   3. The SPF will also fund prize money up to a maximum of $250 per application.
2. No travel or accommodation for students will be funded.
   1. However, the subcommittee will consider funding travel and accommodation for non-student speakers.
3. Catering/food costs will be funded only at under $25/person per meal and only for events, not team meetings.
   1. It is recommended to use AMS affiliated sustainable catering options:
      1. [AMS Catering](https://www.nestcatering.com/catering/)
      2. [Sprouts Catering](http://www.ubcsprouts.ca/catering)
   2. Events where food education is the main focus can be exempt from this limitation, and the amount of funding will be at the discretion of the SPF subcommittee.
4. No alcoholic beverages or liquor licenses shall be reimbursed through SPF funds.
5. No conference registration fees shall be reimbursed through the SPF funds. Students will be referred to other sources of funding available on campus.
6. The SPF will not fund the cost of eco-friendly materials for an event that is not related to sustainability. Groups looking for this type of funding are encouraged to apply to the [Student Environment Centre](https://secubc.com/funding-application/) instead.
7. The SPF generally funds projects and events, but operational expenses that support multiple projects/events to happen will also be considered.
8. The SPF cannot fund projects retroactively. Project leaders should submit their application well in advance to ensure it can be reviewed before the project start date.

**2.4 Fund Administration**

Administrative support for the SPF is provided through the AMS Sustainability Projects Fund Administrator and the Vice-President Finance of the AMS. Funding decisions are made by the AMS SPF subcommittee, with approval from AMS finance committee.

The Sustainability Projects Fund Administrator facilitates an SPF Information Session for students at the beginning of each term; ensures that the SPF webpage is up-to-date; chairs the SPF subcommittee meetings; maintains a database of applications and their status; arranges SPF subcommittee meetings; receives receipts for reimbursement; submits them to the VP Finance for approval; and communicates with the SPF subcommittee and with applicants (with particular attention to sharing comments and suggestions with successful and unsuccessful applicants).

The VP Finance attends meetings of the SPF subcommittee, approves the SPF budget and signs off on reimbursement requisitions.

# **3. Submission Process**

The following are guidelines for receiving and accepting project proposals and the procedure for concluding funding of projects.

**3.1 Applicant Eligibility**

Eligibility guidelines are as follows:

1. All applicants must be registered UBC students (a.k.a. active members of the AMS).
2. Applications will be accepted from students, student groups or clubs.
3. Applications will NOT be accepted from faculty members, staff or off-campus organizations.
   1. However, they may apply towards the fund in coordination with an active member as a secondary applicant. If a faculty, staff or community member is part of the project team, they should be listed as the secondary applicant. This is so that they can be contacted in case the project continues after the student lead graduates.

**3.2 Differentiated Application Process**

The application form and process depend on the size of the project, as well as whether it has been funded before.

1. Small and large projects will complete separate application forms. Small projects will complete a shorter application form, while large projects will be asked for more details.
2. Projects over $5000 are required to present their application at the subcommittee meeting, either in person or in video format. Smaller projects are encouraged to present to the subcommittee.

**3.3 Submission**

The SPF subcommittee meets biweekly and evaluates all applications received before each meeting. Applicants should expect to hear back from the subcommittee within 3 weeks of submitting their application and should thus submit early enough to allow for sufficient time before the project start date. Applications should be submitted via email to the Sustainability Funds Administrator ([sustainadmin@ams.ubc.ca](mailto:sustainadmin@ams.ubc.ca)). Only a correctly completed application will be presented to the subcommittee. The SPF Administrator holds the discretion to advise or request a resubmission before considering the application.

# **4. Project Guidelines**

**4.1 Project Types**

Projects must fall under at least one project type, and applicants must explain how their project advances the objectives under the project type description.

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| **Criterion** | **Description** |
| Student Empowerment | The project empowers students by offering leadership opportunities, training and/or mentorship. Students will gain skills and knowledge. The project enables student leaders to continue to make change in the realm of sustainability following project completion. |
| Education & Awareness | The project raises awareness of sustainability issues and solutions, including information that is beyond common knowledge. The project may involve traditional education, publicity, outreach campaigns or other methods. Education should be evidence-based but artistic and/or creative expression is also welcome. |
| Community Organizing | The project grows the sustainability movement – or a sustainability-related movement – by engaging UBC community members, equipping them to act and growing the network of individuals dedicated to a cause. The project may target individuals that do not already identify as part of the movement and/or help people already interested in sustainability in building skills and growing their networks. The project helps build a sense of community. |
| Operations | The project improves the environmental, ecological and/or socially sustainable operations of the AMS and/or UBC Vancouver. The project should ideally connect to sustainability and wellbeing planning efforts or goals already underway at UBC. |
| Advocacy | The project advocates for an institution (e.g. the AMS, UBC, city, province, etc.) to adopt a policy or make a commitment that aligns with environmental, economic and/or social sustainability. The initiative should align with the priorities laid out in the [AMS Student Driven Sustainability Strategy](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=4&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwjY9KqG--zhAhXHup4KHRRBCfcQFjADegQIAhAC&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.ams.ubc.ca%2Fwp-content%2Fuploads%2F2018%2F09%2F341-18-Student-Driven-Sustainability-Policy-2.pdf&usg=AOvVaw2FcOOdIhNtnSNWdkNr_OQk) and/or the [AMS Environment and Climate Change policy](https://www.ams.ubc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/E-2-Environment-and-Climate-Change-Policy.pdf). The project builds community support to achieve the goal. |
| Info-sharing & Partnerships | The project expands the impact of initiatives already underway on campus by sharing information, models and results with off-campus stakeholders and communities. The project builds collaborations with off campus sustainability organizations and/or communities that would benefit from sustainability support. |

**4.2 Sustainability Competencies**

Sustainability competencies describe specific attributes that are critical for creating meaningful change and advancing a sustainable future. The following sustainability competencies have been adapted from the key competencies outlined in the UNESCO Education for Sustainable Development Goals Learning Objectives.[[2]](#footnote-2) These competencies are recognized by the United Nations as necessary for achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Applicants must show how they have demonstrated at least one of these competencies in developing their projects and explain how they will employ that competency throughout project implementation. Applicants only need to demonstrate one competency but are invited to discuss more if they so wish. The purpose of this section is to encourage applicants to think about how they can make their projects most effective and avoid unintended negative impacts.

*Only large projects will be assessed on whether they demonstrate sustainability competencies, but small projects are strongly encouraged to think about them too.*

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| **Competency** | **Description** |
| Systems thinking competency | Systems thinking is the ability to recognize the various systems involved in any one problem and consider the interactions between whole systems and their individual components. Systems thinking involves examining different domains (e.g. society, ecology, economy, culture, politics, science, etc.) across different scales (e.g. local, regional, global).  Projects that embrace systems thinking will consider the broad, complex systems under which the issue they are tackling falls, and will recognize the interconnections between relevant domains, systems and structures. |
| Critical thinking competency | Critical thinking is the ability to recognize the assumptions underlying our knowledge, worldviews and opinions and to question our norms and current practices.  Projects that employ critical thinking will challenge the status quo, embrace risk taking and offer new lenses to think about sustainability. They may also embrace new viewpoints that run contrary to the dominant political, cultural and social discourse. |
| Ethics competency | The ethics competency is the ability to consider the ethical impact of sustainability projects and use this understanding to develop solutions that are ethical for people and the planet. This competency recognizes that multiple issues must be considered when developing solutions and that sustainability intersects with other principles like justice, human rights, accessibility and community building.  Projects that invoke the ethics competency will critically consider the impacts of the project on environmental, social and economic justice. They should help build a more just future, for example by empowering marginalized communities, promoting social equity or addressing the interconnections between environmental and social issues. |
| Collaboration competency | The collaboration competency is the ability to work together with different stakeholders. It involves learning from others, understanding and respecting their needs and developing solutions that integrate different perspectives.  Projects that embrace collaboration will bring together stakeholders from a variety of disciplines and/or backgrounds to share their perspectives and develop holistic solutions together. |
| Strategic competency | The strategic competency is the ability to analyze various options and determine the most effective and impactful solutions. It involves proposing innovative solutions, thinking outside the box and overcoming constraints.  Projects that embrace the strategic competency will find leverage points within the institutions they are working in and take advantage of these leverage points to create change. They will also be sure to avoid redundancy with other initiatives. They may choose to focus on solutions that address gaps in sustainability efforts. |

**5. Project Evaluation**

**5.1 Evaluation Process**

The SPF subcommittee will meet biweekly to evaluate projects and make funding decisions. The subcommittee guidelines are outlined in the [SPF Subcommittee Terms of Reference](https://www.ams.ubc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/227-19-Sustainability-Projects-Fund-SPF-Subcommittee-Terms-of-Reference.pdf). The subcommittee is comprised of five voting members (the AMS SPF Administrator, AMS VP Finance, AMS AVP Sustainability, a Finance Committee member and a student at large) and two non-voting members (a staff person from each of SEEDS and the UBC Sustainability Initiative). The subcommittee meetings are open to the public, and the times are posted on the SPF webpage. For more information, please contact the SPF Administrator.

**5.2 Criteria**

The subcommittee will consider the following criteria in determining whether to approve funding for a project. Projects should meet each criterion to some extent in order to be approved.

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| **Criterion** | **Description** |
| Student engagement[[3]](#footnote-3) | Are students highly involved in implementing the project? Does the project heavily impact and engage students? This could entail either a high depth of impact (deep engagement with a small number of students) or high breadth of impact (shallower engagement with many students). |
| Alignment with project type | Does the project align well with and advance the goals of at least one project type? |
| Budget and scope reasonableness | Is the project reasonable in its budget and timeline? Could the project be done for cheaper? Is the project likely to run over budget or over time? Do the anticipated outcomes of this project seem reasonable? |
| Value | Is the expected impact of this project on sustainability worth the amount of funding requested? |
| Longevity/potential growth  **(for large projects only)** | Is there a plan for the future of the project beyond the completion date? How long will this project’s effects be felt? Will this project set a precedent for more impactful change? |
| Sustainability competencies **(for large projects only)** | Does the project clearly demonstrate the application of at least one sustainability competency? |

# **6. Accepted Projects**

**6.1 Notification of Funding Offers**

The SPF administrator will email applicants within a week of the subcommittee meeting to inform them of the status of their project.

1. Approved projects will be informed of the amount awarded, instructions for accessing funds, any conditions for funding, and any suggestions from the subcommittee. In some cases, the SPF administrator may wish to clarify small details with the applicants before awarding funding.
2. Rejected projects will be informed as to why the application was not successful.
3. Some unsuccessful projects may be offered the opportunity to resubmit an application to clarify major details or rethink aspects of the project. Applicants can resubmit at the next funding cycle.

**6.2 Acceptance of Funding**

Should funding be accepted, the primary and/or secondary applicant must sign a letter of acceptance. This letter confirms that they agree to write a final report for submission to the SPF Administrator. The letter of acceptance should use the standard format which includes the following elements: indication of the date of approval and the date of signature; indication of the maximum amount allowed for reimbursement; any relevant conditions under which the funding is contingent (for example the clarifications of ownership of the end product or tools used in a project); and the signature.

**6.3 Reimbursement Process**

All payment reimbursements are receipt-based and must be accompanied by a completed SPF invoice form and submitted to the SPF administrator. If the applicant(s) cannot cover all project costs upfront, the SPF Administrator can ease this financial burden by reimbursing individual expenses at a time. Receipts should clearly indicate an itemized payment. Credit/debit transaction records with no mention of the actual item paid for will not be accepted. The SPF Administrator holds the right to reject all invoices that are not accompanied by a formal receipt. However, in some circumstances a procedure for missing receipts can be made.

To simplify the administrative procedures, only the primary and secondary applicants will be directly reimbursed. Please make sure that your primary and secondary applicants are the ones that will be paying for the expenses at first. If there are many different people involved that need to claim expenses, the SPF Administrator has the right to reimburse the combined amounts to only the primary or secondary applicant and allow them to handle the distribution of reimbursements to each member of the project.

Projects have two months after their project’s stated completion date to file receipts. The SPF Administrator holds the right to reject reimbursement if it is too far past the projects slated completion. However, discretion is applied with regards to project extensions and special circumstances as they arise.

**6.4 Final Report**

A final report submission is required after project completion and applies to all projects. Large projects are expected to submit longer final reports of 2-3 pages maximum, while smaller projects can submit reports of 1-2 pages maximum. Projects that are events must include the approximate number of attendees in their report. If a project fails to submit a final report, it is at the discretion of the Sustainability Funds Administrator to withhold fund reimbursements until the reports are submitted. Final reports will be posted to the SPF website.

**6.5 Expiry of Funds**

Project completion dates vary depending on the size and scope of a project, but projects should *not take more than 12 months* to complete. The AMS Sustainability Funds Administrator will not continue to reimburse funds for a project past the 12 months deadline, starting from initial approval of the project (i.e. when the project lead has signed the acceptance letter). The AMS Sustainability Funds Administrator will be required to send each group a notification 2 months in advance of their funds expiring and again on the day of expiration. This rule ensures that the SPF subcommittee can allocate excess funds to other projects after sufficient time has passed for project completion.

Funds can be renewed by completing the Funding Extension Request Form from the AMS Sustainability Funds Administrator, which will keep the initial funding active.

**6.6 SPF Feedback**

An optional survey is sent out to all applicants to provide feedback on the SPF process. In January each year, the feedback is compiled by the SPF Administrator and recommendations are considered by the subcommittee for implementation by the end of April.

1. The actual amount of the annual budget depends on student enrollment and can only be estimated at the start of each academic year. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *Education for Sustainable Development Goals: Learning Objectives* (Paris: UNESCO, 2017), 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Priority will be given to on campus projects, but off campus projects that significantly engage UBC students will be considered. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)