# ENVIRONMENTAL DISPUTE RESOLUTION FUND

**What does the EDRF fund?**

The EDRF is an environmental legal aid fund that enables residents of British Columbia to hire a lawyer, expert professional or mediator to help them take legal action on significant environmental challenges in their communities. The EDRF program is made possible by generous support from the Law Foundation of British Columbia.

**Who is eligible?**

Any person, community group, organization or First Nation facing an environmental challenge that is of public interest in terms of environmental protection, sustainability, or development of environmental law, is eligible.

**How much do we fund?**

The EDRF pays lawyers and experts at an hourly rate aligned with the Province of BC’s median legal aid rate at the time that a grant is made. As of May 1, 2025, the EDRF funds up to **$135.46** per hour toward legal and expert fees (plus taxes), up to the total grant amount awarded. Where supervised by a lawyer, the EDRF funds up to **$96.76** per hour for the fees of articled students.

**How much can I apply for?**

The EDRF offers two types of grants:

1. **Stage 1 Grant**

This initial grant supports a person, community group, organization, or First Nation in developing an understanding of legal options to address an environmental protection issue and taking initial action with assistance from a lawyer. Most applicants to the EDRF will begin by applying for a Stage 1 grant.

In Stage 1, you may apply for a grant of up to **$3,800.**  In your application form, please tell us about how a lawyer can help you, as well as how you intend to use other strategies such as political and market pressures, community organizing, or public education alongside the legal work. You can use a Stage 1 grant to obtain information on your legal options, send letters to decision-makers or enter into negotiations.

1. **Stage 2 Grant**

This type of grant supports a more extended legal course of action, such as more complex or extended negotiations, court, or tribunal work.

In Stage 2, you may apply for a grant of up to **$19,700** at a time. In your application form, please tell us about your efforts to build a base of support and any other strategies and actions you are taking to complement your legal work. Stage 2 applicants are encouraged to raise a minimum of 30% of the budget and demonstrate their ability to raise funds.

The maximum funding that a single applicant may receive from the Fund, in total, in respect of a single matter is **$50,000**.

**Lawyers and Experts**

Lawyers taking on cases with the EDRF program are expected to negotiate fees with their clients. We do not place a cap on the rates lawyers negotiate with their clients. The EDRF encourages lawyers taking on public interest environmental cases to offer a *pro bono* contribution towards the cases, based on the hourly rate. The table below is a suggested guide:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | $200/hr or less | $201 to $300/hr | $301-$400/hr | >$400/hr |
| Pro Bono Contribution | 15% of case hours | 20% of case hours | 25% of case hours | 30% of case hours |

**For example:** A lawyer with a market rate of $300 per hour would be expected to provide 20% of the hours worked on the case as pro bono hours. For a case that involves 30 hours, they would provide 6 hours of pro bono, or 1/5 of the time on each bill. Note that this is a guide only, not a requirement.

For lawyers who prefer to discount their rates, this option is still available, and a lawyer who charges out at or below the EDRF rate is not expected to provide pro bono hours as well.

EDRF grants can be used towards the fees of scientific, Indigenous or other technical experts to build evidence for your case. We can also fund the expenses of lawyers or experts, such as filing fees, copying, and postage.

**How do I find a lawyer?**

The EDRF has a roster of lawyers who are interested in taking on public interest environmental law cases. Please call us if you would like assistance in finding a lawyer to take your case. We also encourage you to approach lawyers in your local community, or from your own networks. We can work with you to orient them to our application requirements. You will need to discuss and confirm the hourly rate for legal services with your lawyer.

**Grant Recipient Contributions**

It is expected that grant recipients will contribute to legal or expert fees as much as they are able. Grant recipients are encouraged to organize a community effort to resolve an environmental dispute. This may include gathering public support, promoting public dialogue, fundraising, and meaningful engagement of affected parties. We also acknowledge that in some circumstances an applicant may request to have their application remain private from the public for privacy, safety, or legal reasons.

Grant recipients are expected to stay actively involved in their case and are responsible for ensuring their lawyer’s invoices are paid, whether through EDRF funds or their own.

**What does the EDRF *not* fund?**

The EDRF does not fund your clerical or administrative expenses. While we encourage community education and organizing, we do not fund the costs of this work. In addition, the Fund will not provide grants to pay for: (a) a private litigant's liability for an adverse cost award; (b) the purchase of land; or, (c) defence against contempt proceedings arising from civil disobedience. Please call us with any questions.

**What are the first steps in applying?**

1. Reach out to the Program Manager to discuss the details of your environmental issue
2. Find a lawyer to support your application. We can provide you with referrals to lawyers.
3. Request a letter of support from your lawyer. (See checklist for the letter requirements)
4. Complete your draft application and submit it to our Program Manager. Our staff will help you finalize your application and budget.

Please submit your application by email to EDRF Project Manager Alida Morris at amorris@wcel.org. We can be reached at 1-800 330-WCEL (toll free in BC) if you have any questions about your application. Please refer to the checklist in this package to ensure your application is complete.

**What accommodations are available for the application process?**

Our team is able to:

* Accept application forms and reports in alternative formats, including audio and video;
* Accept applications written by hand and photographed instead of PDF;
* Accept applications written in point form;
* Provide an audio-recorded version of the questions;
* Provide proposal assistance by discussing and helping to develop your case over the phone; and
* Incorporate additional support for translation services.
* If you experience difficulty with technology and/or written words, please contact us by phone so we can determine how best to support your application.
* The application is available in the dyslexia-friendly font Dyslexie Font on our website and upon request.

# APPLICATION CHECKLIST

1. **Application Form**

Please answer *all* questions and check the boxes in the application form. You may use point form.

☐ Your signature on the last page of the application

☐ Stage 2 applicants should append a written legal opinion on the likelihood of success of their chosen course of action, or have this information covered in their lawyer’s letter (#3 below)

1. **Budget**

☐ Please ensure your lawyer(s) and expert(s) have signed off on your budget

1. **Lawyer’s Letter of Support**

The letter of support is a statement of your lawyer’s willingness to work on your case and the terms and conditions of the work. The letter must contain the following:

☐ A statement of the names and roles of all legal professionals working on the file;

☐ A statement of the hourly rate that the lawyers and experts will charge;

☐ An estimate of the number of hours required to complete the work and an estimate of other costs such as filing fees (or if there is uncertainty, the cost of most likely scenarios);

☐ An acknowledgement that the EDRF will cover up to a maximum of $135.46/hr for pre-approved expenses; and

☐ An overview description of the legal issues and the legal work to be performed under grant funds

☐ An estimate of their pro bono contribution (Pro bono hours or hourly rate discount)

1. **Expert Information** (if applying for funding for one or more experts)

☐ A resume for each expert

☐ Scope of work that describes the expert work to be performed under grant funds

☐ An estimated total cost of the work including a statement of the hourly rate and any disbursements

1. **Optional Materials**

☐ Letters of support from key institutions or coalition partners

☐ News clippings that highlight the environmental issues, community support and key partnerships

☐ Maps and diagrams as relevant

☐ A few photos of your group and the place or issue of interest

# Application to the ENvironmental Dispute Resolution Fund

Please indicate which type of grant you are applying for:

**☐ Stage 1 Grant** (up to **$3,800** for initial legal support)

**☐ Stage 2 Grant** (up to **$19,700** for extended negotiations, court, or tribunal work)

**Contact Information**

Name:

Position:

Organization:

Address:

Phone Number:

Email:

Group website (if applicable):

☐ I am authorized to act on behalf of the organization in relation to this application

 **Environmental Issue and Need for Support**

1. Please describe your **environmental concern** in **up to one page of text**. Please reference any expert evidence you have access to, and if possible, include a copy with your application. You are encouraged to submit video and images with your application if available. Please answer the following questions:
2. What are the threats to ecosystems and/or human health?
3. What are you trying to achieve in the short and long term?
4. What action is needed from government, industry, or other stakeholders?
5. Do you feel this is a systemic environmental management issue? If so, please explain.

☐ The EDRF prioritizes applications from individuals and organizations who would otherwise be unable to afford the services to be provided. Please check this box if your access to legal services depends on financial support.

1. Please summarize in the table below the main actions you have already taken to address this issue. **If this is a Stage 2 application, please summarize what you have done since your last application**. Include letters written, meetings with decision-makers, media and/or community-based actions. Please keep this chart to **up to one page**. You may attach additional information to the end of the application if necessary.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Month/Year** | **Brief Description of Action** | **Outcome** |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |

1. Please tell us what legal work you are applying to fund, and how it will help you address your environmental concern. Your answer should relate to the scope of legal work outlined in your lawyer’s letter of support.

**Community Support**

1. Have you enlisted other partners in your community? If so, please name them and describe the nature of your collaboration. We encourage you to obtain a letter of support from key partners and include them with your application.
2. Are there any other organizations, including Indigenous communities that are working on this issue? If so, please name them and describe what makes your work on this issue unique. We may need to make contact to discuss the details of your case.

☐ I authorize the EDRF to make contact with these organizations to discuss this application.

1. WCEL is committed to ensuring that all EDRF-funded cases uphold the inherent rights, responsibilities and interests of each Indigenous people in environmental decision-making as affirmed within the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, the Canadian Constitution, and their Indigenous legal order. What is your understanding of the interests and priorities of the First Nations whose territories are impacted by this environmental issue? Please describe your efforts to reach out to these communities and the results.

**Legal Support**

1. Have you received any legal assistance from another lawyer and/or environmental law organization, such as the Environmental Law Centre, Ecojustice, or the Pacific Centre for Environmental Law and Litigation? If yes, who? Please describe any assistance received. We may need to make contact to discuss the details of your case.

☐ I authorize the EDRF to make contact with this lawyer/organization.

**Information Sharing and Confidentiality**

The EDRF reports on all grants made to our funder, the Law Foundation of British Columbia. The report includes the name of the grantee, the grant amount, and a brief description of the grant objective.

If your case has the potential to create new legal precedents in British Columbia, the EDRF may seek the comment of peer environmental organizations such as the [UVic Environmental Law Centre](http://www.elc.uvic.ca/), [Ecojustice](https://www.ecojustice.ca/), and the [Pacific Centre for Environmental Law and Litigation](https://www.pacificcell.ca/).

☐ I authorize the EDRF to make contact with these organizations to discuss this application.

In addition, the EDRF may publish brief descriptions of grants and grantees on our website at [www.wcel.org/edrf](http://www.wcel.org/edrf). At times, these descriptions and/or cases featured on our blog may be shared via WCEL’s email newsletter and social media channels. These communications allow others to learn about the work you are doing to protect the environment and raise public awareness of the EDRF program. Please check the box below if you do not want details of your grant to be posted on the WCEL website, social media or other communications.

☐ I do not want details of my grant to be shared on WCEL communications channels.

**Grant Terms and Conditions**

Please review the following granting terms and conditions. If you agree with these terms, please check the box and provide your signature below.

* If your application is approved, funds may be spent only as outlined in your approved budget;
* Your grant must be used for the purpose outlined in this application. Any desired change in the use of the grant must first be approved by EDRF staff, and in some cases, by the EDRF Management Committee;
* If, as a direct result of the work conducted under your grant, you receive a costs award, monetary settlement, award for damages or any other monetary payment, you will be required to repay the EDRF according to the ratio of your contributions to your EDRF case. For example, if the client contribution and EDRF contribution were 50% each, then the EDRF and the Client would divide the award 50-50. If the Client contributed 30% and the EDRF contributed 70%, then 30% of the award would go to the Client and 70% to the EDRF. In total, you will be required to return funds up to the amount of the compensation/repayment or the grant, whichever is less. Returned funds are put into our general Fund and redistributed to make legal aid available to new applicants;
* If EDRF-funded work will be carried out by individuals other than those named in the application, the change must be approved by EDRF staff, and in some cases, by the EDRF Management Committee; and,
* Any grant given may be less than requested and/or may be subject to such terms and conditions as the EDRF Management Committee sees fit.

☐ I have read and accept the grant terms and conditions.

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**EDRF Applicant Signature**

**EDRF Application Budget**

Please complete the budget below, ensuring it is consistent with the following requirements:

* Stage 1 grant requests may be up to **$3,800** and Stage 2 requests may be up to **$19,700**;
* EDRF grant funds can reimburse the hourly fees of lawyers and experts up to **$135.46** per hour plus applicable taxes. Articled students must work under the supervision of a lawyer and can be reimbursed up to **$96.76** per hour plus applicable taxes;
* You may include relevant expenses that will be incurred by your lawyers or experts, such as court fees or travel expenses; and,
* You may provide a top-up to the fees of your lawyer(s) on top of the EDRF reimbursement rate of $135.46 /hour plus taxes.

For ease of use you can use the Grant Budget Calculator Excel spreadsheet found at <https://www.wcel.org/apply-edrf> which will automatically calculate your budget.

|  |
| --- |
| BUDGET |
|  | **Total Project** |  **EDRF Grant Amount**  | **Client Contribution** |
| **Legal Fees**  | Legal hours | hrs  |   |   |
| Hourly Rate | $ |   | 135.46  | 11 |
| Legal Fees | $ |  -  |   |  -  |
| GST @ 5% | $ |  -  |  -  |   |
| PST @ 7% | $ |  -  |  -  |   |
| ***Subtotal Legal Fees*** | **$** |  |  |  |
| **Legal Disbursements** | Court Fees incl. tax | $ |   |   |  -  |
| Travel and accommodation incl. tax | $ |   |   |  -  |
| Other | $ |   |   |  -  |
| ***Subtotal Legal Disbursements*** | **$** |  |  |  |
| **Expert Fees** | Expert hours | hrs  |   |  |
| Hourly Rate | $ |   | 135.46  |  -  |
| Expert Fees | $ |  -  |  -  |  -  |
| GST @ 5% | $ |  -  |  -  |  -  |
| ***Subtotal Expert Fees*** | **$** |  **-**  |  **-**  |  **-**  |
| **Expert Disbursements** | Copying, Postage and Courier incl. tax | $ |   |   |   |
| Travel & Accommodation incl. tax | $ |   |   |  -  |
| ***Subtotal Expert Disbursements*** | $ |  **-**  |  **-**  |  **-**  |
| **TOTAL** | $ |  **-**  |  **-**  |  **-**  |
| **Contribution** | % |   |  |  |

☐ This budget has been reviewed and approved by my lawyer(s) and expert(s).