



Call for desktop research projects

The Animal Welfare Foundation is the BVA's charity and is run by veterinary and animal welfare professionals. Our aim is to give animals a better life using expert veterinary knowledge.

Funding scientific research to find practical solutions to animal welfare issues has been at the heart of AWF's work since our inception and we are committed to ensuring that animal welfare remains high on the agenda.

Covid-19 has meant that carrying out field work whilst social distancing measures are in place is not feasible and so we have refined our approach to compensate during the current pandemic. Therefore, we are now offering funding for short, desk-based research projects that can be safely carried out during this time.

In 2019 AWF received the [final report of a major project to develop an expert consensus on priority animal welfare issues in the UK](#), commonly referred to as its Delphi study. The report indicated and prioritised many areas where there was scope to improve animal welfare.

We would welcome applications for projects which fall within scope of this report and focus on issues of relevance to the veterinary profession. For subjects of particular interest to the veterinary profession, please refer to [BVA's list of priority animal welfare problems](#).

Projects that are able to deliver impact and have a strong knowledge exchange plan outlined will score highly. Generating discussion and debate around key animal welfare topics is at the core of our work. AWF can give you a platform and will expect you to share your research with the veterinary profession.

Projects should also be designed in accordance with good research practice to minimise sources of bias. They must be on an animal welfare¹ topic; topics focussing solely on physical health, disease, or ethics, for example, will not be funded.

AWF invites proposals for research projects that meet the following criteria:

Scope:

- The Delphi report has highlighted a common theme across all species groups related to euthanasia and particularly the impact that delaying euthanasia has on animal welfare. Examples of projects on this issue that would be welcomed by the AWF Research Projects and Funding Committee include:
 - Delayed euthanasia in livestock - a scoping exercise to assess the issue of delayed euthanasia in farm animals [*Appendix A*]
 - The validity, reliability and impact of quality of life assessment tools for companion animals [*Appendix B*]
 - Delayed euthanasia in dogs and cats [*Appendix C*]
- Projects relating to any of the other 11 overarching welfare issues identified by the AWF Delphi project "[Prioritisation of animal welfare issues in the UK using expert consensus](#)"
- Projects on [welfare issues highlighted by the profession](#) and / or whose results could support the veterinary profession in tackling the issue.
- Welfare issues becoming evident during the COVID19 pandemic.

¹ Animal welfare broadly refers to the mental, emotional, and physical wellbeing of individual animals. Many factors can affect animal welfare, such as health, husbandry, and whether animal needs are met. Some concepts of welfare also include naturalness, or normal behaviour. Quality of life is a concept of welfare describing the balance of positive and negative experiences over a relatively long time period.



Logistics: Projects must be desk-based with the ability to access existing data or collect data remotely.

Project duration: Up to 6 months.

Grant amount: AWF is looking to support between 2 to 5 projects contributing up to £10,000 each, with the flexibility to extend up to £30,000 for an exceptional proposal.

Eligibility: Principal investigator must have a minimum of 2 years research experience and be based in the UK.

Knowledge exchange: The research should be appropriate for publishing in a peer-reviewed journal with open access. The successful applicant will also be expected to present their work at meetings organised by AWF and other interested organisations.

Application deadline: 12th July (midnight)

Useful links:

Overview of the AWF funded Delphi project to prioritise animal welfare issues (includes links to published articles): <https://www.animalwelfarefoundation.org.uk/grant/prioritisation-animal-welfare-issues/>

Final report to AWF on the Delphi results: https://www.animalwelfarefoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Delphi_AWF-Final-Grant-Report.pdf

BVA Animal Welfare Strategy: <https://www.bva.co.uk/take-action/our-policies/animal-welfare-strategy/>

BVA priority animal welfare problems: <https://www.bva.co.uk/media/3123/priority-animal-welfare-problems.pdf>

APPENDIX A

Delayed Euthanasia in Livestock

Background:

As knowledge of disease processes increases and clinical records are available for scrutiny through the use of large databases, it becomes easier to provide owners with realistic prognoses. As such, when treating patients suffering from conditions with inevitable terminal outcomes, options for euthanasia may be considered at an earlier stage. Decisions between euthanasia and long-term capacity have a significant bearing on the animal's quality of life, with the aspiration for all decisions to pass elements of the "life worth living" test in line with the concepts outlined by AWC (formally FAWC) when considering livestock.

The project:

A rapid scoping study to explore the possibility of using existing databases and networks to help livestock farmers and their veterinary surgeons to make decisions about potentially terminally ill livestock in a more timely way so as to minimise the interval between first diagnosis and eventual slaughter.

Outputs/Outcomes:

Amongst information we anticipate the project would generate, AWF would wish to be provided with details of where relevant databases reside that have information about case definitions, clinical findings and outcomes in terminally ill production animal species, slaughter dates in relation to described defined conditions, likely value of data from national data sources (e.g. BCMS, national disease surveillance records), likely numbers of animals involved, common reasons for on-farm or emergency slaughter, possible difficulties as a result of SARS-Covid19 and any other production animal industry constraints, and possible mitigating measures.

APPENDIX B

Validity, reliability and impact of quality of life assessment tools for companion animals

Background

Delayed euthanasia was highlighted in the Delphi report as a cross species issue and delayed euthanasia for elderly or suffering pets was an important source of welfare concern for cats, dogs and horses. There are currently a number of decision-making tools available which can be used to aid discussions between veterinary surgeons and their clients on euthanasia versus treatment. Whilst a brief literature search supports that there is some value in the use of these assessment tools, a more thorough review is warranted.

The project

A literature review with the aim of identifying which Quality of Life tools and assessments are already available for cats, dogs and horse owners. The review should assess how valid and reliable these tools are by investigating which are currently being used, how they are being used and whether the impact of their use has been assessed.

Outcomes

To increase awareness amongst veterinary professionals of which Quality of Life tools and assessments are of merit and can reliably reduce the likelihood of suffering due to delayed euthanasia.

APPENDIX C

Delayed Euthanasia in Dogs and Cats

Background

It is commonly asserted that the treatment provided to some companion animals, particularly dogs and cats, has become more intensive over the years whilst the quality of life of the animals being treated is not necessarily enhanced by treatment intended to prolong life.

The Delphi study funded by AWF raised the issue of a delay in euthanasia as a potential factor adversely affecting the welfare of the animals. The group of experts who participated in the modified Delphi investigation considered the delay to affect most species although there was no attempt to understand why there might be a delay or to quantify the potential welfare harm.

The Project

AWF wishes to better quantify the extent to which there may be delays in euthanasia in companion animal veterinary practices and the underlying reasons for the delay. This would be a pilot study using data which may be available from a range of clinical sources and should be focussed on the time before the coronavirus pandemic. We would expect the project to examine the interval between first presentation for a condition to euthanasia where that concludes treatment and what treatment was provided in the interim.