

Research Project Program

Learn. Collaborate. Advance.



ACCO members and staff conduct research projects, synthesize findings and produce publications that provide opportunities for members to learn from and shape best practices on a broad range of climate-related strategies and issues. These research reports, benchmark studies and white papers provide prospective authors and underwriters the opportunity to be recognized as thought leaders related to service offerings or targeted subject matter.

To supplement ACCO's capabilities in this arena, ACCO is partnering with a select group of universities whose environmental management, sustainability and/or climate change focused graduate programs require students to conduct client-facing projects in order to complete masters requirements. This resources enables us to provide substantially greater capacity in our research services.

ACCO Client-Centered Group Masters Projects

Masters Projects (MPs) are considered original research (not to be as large as a masters thesis) that culminates in a publishable product. All MPs will either follow traditional scientific research formats or best practices in research, surveying or modeling in an appropriate field. The projects are typically either one semester or year in length, with student groups being assigned an advisor from the university's faculty and a project manager from ACCO staff. These projects may include:

- Laboratory or field research;
- Management plans, handbooks, educational curricula, or other such products;
- Surveys, trends research or case studies;
- Business modeling;
- Policy analyses; and
- Quantitative and/or qualitative analysis of research findings.

Some MPs address a specific problem for a specific client, while other MPs address a problem that is of broader interest, where the connection to a real world problem might be more distant. All MPs must be consistent with ACCO's mission (i.e. proposed projects outside the scope of ACCO's operations or mission will not be considered).

University Graduate Student Research Programs

ACCO will submit project proposals to the following Master's programs in environmental studies —considered by many to be the top environmental graduate schools in the country, attracting top level talent and producing future environmental leaders in all sectors.

- Duke University Nicholas School of the Environment (and Fuqua School of Business)
- Bren School of Environmental Science & Management at the University of California, Santa Barbara
- Arizona State University's Sustainability School

Additional universities will be added to this list in 2013.

Research Topics

Whether a project is assigned a graduate student team is ultimately up to the university and the graduate students themselves. ACCO will work to ensure that project proposals fit university guidelines and are attractive to graduate students. In general, a project will have a good chance of being accepted by the university partner if the MP:

- Can be completed in a single academic year;
- Can realistically and beneficially be addressed by a team of graduate students;
- Is a real world situation, rather than an overly theoretical or academic issue;
- Provides real benefits to the client;
- Has a clear objective and deliverable;
- Allows students to gain valuable experience for future environmental careers;
- Is based primarily on existing data sources (e.g. company energy data) and does not require time intensive data collection efforts;
- Is multidisciplinary; and
- Effectively utilizes student skills at a level commensurate with their graduate school education.

Examples of Projects Likely to be Accepted

- Investigating the feasibility of using alternative fuels in a company's distribution network
- Facilities energy management audit with accompanying recommendations
- Creating a climate adaptation plan for a region, city, or facility
- Developing a carbon neutrality plan for a facility
- Estimating a carbon footprint for a specific business activity such as food served

Examples of Projects NOT Likely to be Accepted

- An audit of a company's energy data without a set or recommendations or required analysis
- Reviewing literature on corporate governance for climate change, without connection to the company and realistic situations being faced
- A project investigating a broad theme such as "energy" without a clear goal or deliverable
- A project requiring 6 months collecting water samples before being able to analyze data
- A project projecting change in energy consumption over the next 5 years

Project Management

ACCO's Role — ACCO will manage the project throughout, handling both administrative duties and guiding research and analysis efforts. ACCO's role is to make these research efforts as simple as possible for members so that they can focus on articulating the problem or question and benefiting from the recommendations and results.

Client's Role — Clients will provide necessary resources to project team to support them with their research. Individuals proposing projects should participate in regularly scheduled conference calls and be available to respond to project group members who have questions in order to ensure that the project is meeting the client's needs. These projects are meant to benefit ACCO members who propose them, and if there is a benefit to closely managing the project or being involved in all aspects of it, members are welcome to do that. If however, members would benefit most from simply receiving a report or set of recommendations at the end of the process, they can have minimal direct involvement.

Financial Requirements

MP projects differ greatly based on the scope of work and complexity of the project. Most projects will be billed on a flat fee basis (estimated range \$2,500-\$7,500). Once ACCO and the client have finalized the proposal to be submitted to the university partners, ACCO will provide a final project fee to the client. Half of the project fee is due before the project commences; the balance is due upon completion of the project.

ACCO gold and silver organizational members may offset part of the cost of the project by leveraging the dedicated research support hours included with membership.

Member Discount Information	
ACCO Gold Organizational Members	First 30 hours free (estimated \$1,500). 20% discount on remaining balance.
ACCO Silver Organizational Members	First 15 hours free (estimated \$750). 10% discount on remaining balance.
ACCO Bronze Organizational	10% discount on project fee.
ACCO Basic Organizational Members	5% discount on project fee.

Proposal Process

1. Propose research topics by emailing a brief description of the project to members@accoonline.org.
2. ACCO will work with the originator of to coordinate details and refine aspects of the project to maximize the chances of being approved.
3. ACCO will submit formal proposals to university partners for consideration for the year's slate of graduate student projects.

Publications and Sponsorship Recognition

ACCO will publish reports for each project completed. Reports will not include any client confidential business information or proprietary information. Clients will be recognized as the sponsor for publications resulting from their projects.

Timelines

January 2013	Final proposals due
January 2013	Initial meetings with MP teams for semester projects
Spring 2013	Initial meetings with MP teams for 1-year projects
April 2013	Semester length projects completed
May/June 2013	ACCO to publish project semester project reports
Summer/Fall 2013	1-year projects launched
February 2014	Draft findings for client review
March/April 2014	1-year project reports due
May 2014	ACCO to publish 1-year project reports