

Bat Conservation International's Policy on Fair and Inclusive Training Opportunities for Student Scholars

Volunteering on research projects is a valuable way to gain experience and training in academic research. Research labs and graduate work often have opportunities for undergraduates, recent graduates, or other individuals to volunteer to participate in laboratory work or to join in field projects on a volunteer (unpaid) basis as learning or training opportunities. However, field projects in ecology, conservation, and wildlife biology that rely on unpaid field technicians to transfer costs of a project onto participants creates and exacerbates inequities in training opportunities for young biologists. Bat Conservation International (BCI) encourages and supports student researchers that incorporate training and mentoring opportunities as part of student research projects. However, **BCI does not support projects that use unpaid technicians.**

We define unpaid technician positions by these criteria to distinguish from volunteer training opportunities.

Unpaid technician positions involve:

- Participant incurs substantial costs to participate (e.g., must pay for their own travel, daily expenses, etc.)
- Participant is asked to be away from home for months (or years) without wages
- Work hours are equivalent or exceeding a full-time job without compensation
- Position lacks flexibility to hold other job or attend family or personal responsibilities outside of participation in project

Use of unpaid technicians does not lower the cost of a research project, but unfairly transfers the responsibility of paying for the project to students or young biologists working to gain experience to advance careers. Because unpaid technician positions are not available to individuals who lack ability to go without pay for extended periods or incur substantial personal costs to participate, such positions contribute to inequity by limiting opportunities to those with inherent privileges while excluding individuals with more diverse backgrounds.

BCI is committed to supporting and growing local capacity for bat conservation research. Projects that are staffed by unpaid technicians often involve participants from North America and Europe traveling abroad and thus deprives local students and researchers of valuable opportunities to participate in bat conservation research projects. BCI encourages all student research projects to create opportunities to support a diverse, equitable, and inclusive conservation research community and grow our global capacity to study and protect bat populations around the world.
