



**AZALEA RESEARCH COMMITTEE
ANNUAL REPORT – CALENDER YEAR 2024
AZALEA SOCIETY OF AMERICA
April 25th, 2025**

Committee:

Hale Booth Committee Chair
Rick Bauer*
Aaron Cook
J Jackson
John Migas
Dr. Andy Whipple

Ex Officio: Charlie Andrews, ASA President

*Rick Bauer very recently resigned from the Research Committee

Introduction

The Azalea Research Fund is a wholly owned component of the Azalea Society of America. It is operated by the Azalea Research Fund Committee which accepts grant proposals year-round, evaluates the proposals and approves various proposals for funding. Maximum grants are \$5,000. As pointed out in the Treasurers report the “Azalea Research Fund (ARF) is self-sufficient, and its goal has been to incur no expenses other than grants awarded. The total value of the Azalea Research Fund (ARF) was \$114,074 at the end of 2023 and \$111,655 at the end of 2024. The drop is due to awards exceeding donations. The fund received donations of \$4,425 in 2024 and awarded \$9,995 in grants. The dedicated assets of the ARF at the end of 2024, in addition to moneys donated and a 50/50 split in earned interest (\$2,839 in 2024) is 60 shares of Ameriprise Financial (AMP). The total market value of the 60 shares of AMP on 12/31/2024 was \$31,946.”

The ARF Chair coordinates awards closely with the ASA Treasurer.

2024 Grant Awards

During 2024 two grant applicants were funded by ASA. The first award was for \$5,000 to University of Florida researcher Carolyn Bento Willis. Her research project is *Diversity and distribution of Exobasidium fungi on rhododendron species of North America*.

The second grant was for \$5,000 and awarded to Samantha Pryor also with the University of Florida. Some of you may have met Samantha at our last Annual Meeting in Auburn Alabama. Samantha’s research topic is : *Exploring the predictive power of pollination syndromes and the floral traits used to attract effective pollinators in rhododendron species*.

Each of these grantees agree as a condition of the award to write an article about their research project and its conclusions for the *Azalean*. Our grants are small with a maximum award of \$5,000, however they are very attractive to graduate level researchers as our funds can cover the hard costs of research projects while the graduate is contributing extensive amounts of professional time to the project at no additional cost to ASA Research funds.

One of the problems we run into is the overhead rate many universities charge against grants. This rate is calculated to cover a portion of the university fixed costs that may typically be used by any grantee. These established overhead rates can range as high as 25 to 50 percent. While that rate can be absorbed by large grants it can be a “deal killer” to small grants like what ASA provides.

As a result, before disbursing a grant award to a university-based researcher, we request they consult with their faculty advisor to determine the overhead rate that would be applied by the university in these modest awards. If the overhead rate is going to significantly impact the funding of our research award, we offer the option to the researcher of making the award directly to them. This eliminates the overhead issue but creates a potential income tax issue for the grantee. We have had a few past grantees choose this route as students typically do not reach a personal income threshold necessary to pay taxes. However, it may be creating a need for ASA to issue an IRS Form 1099 at the end of the year to any grantee who takes this route. I will explore this with my personal CPA and seek his advice.

Problems

Another problem has recently come to my attention. Our web site is set up for online grant applications which have an ASA address, when applications are submitted to this ASA address, they are then forward to the Committee Chair. This has worked well in the past, but something has changed as it is not presently working. We have two grant applications that were filed months ago and we only learned of them in the past several weeks when the applicants followed up to see whatever had happened with their proposal. I do not know why these proposals did not forward to me as the committee chair, but as a committee we are trying to respond to these dropped proposals. One was just approved by the committee and the other dropped application is starting the review process.

With the recent resignation of Rick Bauer as a member of the ASA Azalea Research Committee, we need a new committee member. Please forward any suggestions you may have to hale.booth@gmail.com You may also email me with any questions, suggestions, or other information and comments regarding this report at the above personal email address.

Respectfully submitted,

Hale Booth
Chair,
ASA Azalea Research Fund Committee