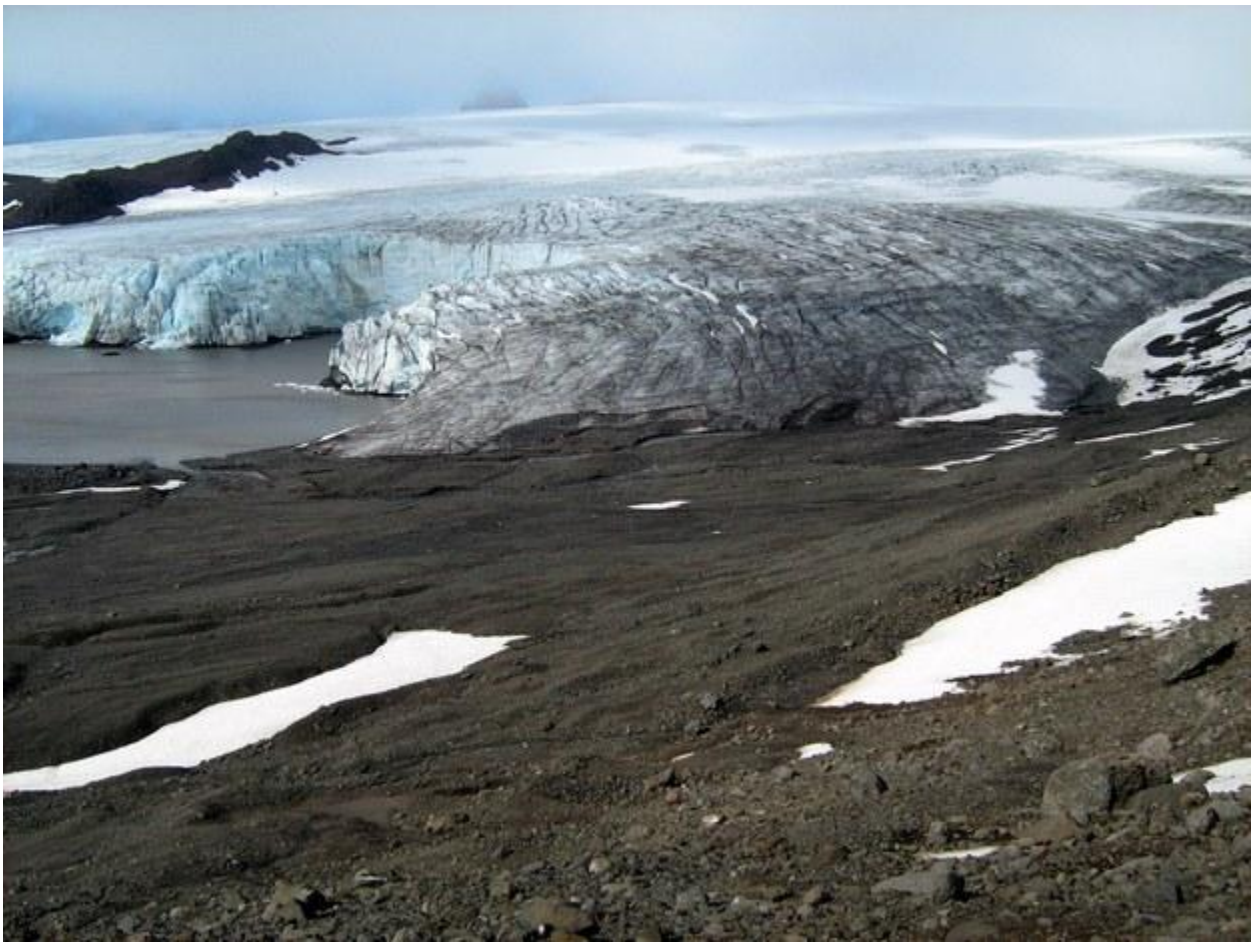
FULBRIGHT Chile

U.S.-CHILE FULBRIGHT ANTARCTIC SCIENCE EXCHANGE

Building the Future of U.S.-Chile Antarctic Scientific Cooperation



King George Island. Ecology Glacier, South Shetland Islands. / Photo: Wikimedia Commons

I. Program Overview

The U.S.-Chile Fulbright Antarctic Science Exchange Program, developed jointly with the Instituto Antártico Chileno (INACH), Chile's primary scientific institution dedicated to Antarctic research and the operator of Chile's year-round Antarctic bases on King George Island and the Antarctic Peninsula, offers early-career scientists and postdoctoral researchers an extraordinary opportunity to conduct collaborative field research in one of the world's most scientifically significant environments: the Antarctic continent.

This initiative of Fulbright Chile represents a historic milestone, the first structured program of bilateral Antarctic scientific cooperation between the United States and Chile. Building on more than seven decades of operational partnership within the Antarctic Treaty System, it establishes a consolidated institutional framework for scientific exchange between two founding signatories of the 1959 Antarctic Treaty. By fostering research partnerships between U.S. and Chilean early-career scientists (approximately five from each country), the initiative strengthens Antarctic scientific collaboration and shapes bilateral Antarctic cooperation for the years ahead.

The centerpiece of the program is an immersive field research experience at INACH's Professor Julio Escudero Base on King George Island, where U.S. participants will engage in intensive collaborative research with their Chilean counterparts, focusing on Antarctic extremophiles and molecular adaptation, a domain with direct relevance to biotechnology, biosecurity, and frontier science. Research activities will integrate field sampling and laboratory analysis to study Antarctic biological systems, from microbial diversity and physiological adaptations to terrestrial ecology and biotechnological applications. This field camp follows a multiweek structured program where U.S. scholars will forge connections with Chilean research institutions and build the foundation for sustained cooperative relationships.

INACH will provide scientific leadership throughout the program, connecting participants in their research lines of inquiry and facilitating collaboration across the cohort. Through direct engagement with Chilean counterparts and the country's Antarctic research network, participants join a unique binational scientific community designed to outlast the program itself, with concrete pathways toward joint projects, laboratory partnerships, and long-term research collaboration.

A. Research Framework

The program's inaugural theme is "Frontiers of Life: From Genes to Ecosystems" -- a framework integrating five interlocking research lines organized across two tracks:



Deschampsia antarctica -- one of only two native vascular plants on the continent, a model of adaptation to extreme conditions.



Adelie penguins, South Shetland Islands -- coastal ecosystems shaped by strong environmental gradients.

TRACK	LINE	DESCRIPTION
CORE	**Adaptation Physiology**	How Antarctic organisms respond to cold, UV, and seasonal extremes at molecular and cellular levels.
CORE	**Physiological Responses**	Comparative physiology of organisms facing extreme Antarctic stressors.
CORE	**Biodiversity & Ecology**	Community structure, trophic relationships, and ecosystem dynamics in Antarctic terrestrial and near-shore marine environments.

EXPLORATORY	**Terrestrial Ecology**	Soil microbiomes, plant communities (mosses, lichens), and nutrient cycling under climate pressure.
EXPLORATORY	**Biotechnology & Astrobiology**	Biotechnological potential of Antarctic extremophiles and relevance to astrobiology and extremophile research.

II. Program Structure & Timeline

The program runs from mid-2026 through May 2028 across five phases, combining virtual cohort-building, institutional engagement in Santiago, Antarctic fieldwork, synthesis activities in Punta Arenas, and research stays at U.S. host institutions.

PHASE	TIMING	LOCATION	DESCRIPTION
Phase 0	May - Oct 2027	Virtual	Cohort-building, Research Framework co-design, logistical preparation. ~3-4 hrs/week.
Phase 1a	3 days, Nov 2027	Santiago	Institutional engagement: U.S. Embassy, MINCIENCIA, Cancilleria. Public diplomacy launch.
Phase 1b	~10 days, Nov 2027	Punta Arenas	Pre-deployment: safety training, scientific briefings, field gear, partner network visits.
Phase 2	2 weeks, Nov-Dec 2027	Escudero Base, KGI	Antarctic field & lab work. Daily sampling + on-base molecular work. Evening seminars.
Phase 3	~2 weeks, Dec 2027	Punta Arenas	Synthesis, capacity-building workshop, public closing event in Magallanes.
Phase 4	Jan - May 2028	U.S. Host Labs	Research stays (4-12 weeks) at U.S. counterpart labs. Named deliverable per participant.
Closing	May 2028	Santiago / Washington	Bilateral closing, Joint Cohort Report release, alumni network launch, follow-on hooks.

III. Funding & Grant Benefits

The U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, along with the Fulbright Commission in Chile and the Instituto Antartico Chileno (INACH), provide the funding for the program.

GRANT BENEFITS INCLUDE

- Round-trip, economy class airfare between the Chile and United States.
- One-time Honorarium of USD $2,500.
- Enrollment in a limited health benefits program.
- Accommodations, meals, and transportation for program components within Chile.
- Antarctic field clothing and protective gear, laboratory, and field equipment.

Do you offer dependent benefits?	No.

IMPORTANT

Final grant amounts will be determined prior to the start of the academic year and are subject to the availability of funds. The United States Department of State and the Fulbright Commission in the host country reserve the right to alter, without notice, participating countries, number of awards and allowances.

IV. Participant Selection

A. Cohort Composition

The cohort for the inaugural edition is symmetric by design -- forming the first Chile-U.S. cohort of early career Antarctic scientists. It consists of 5 U.S. early career researchers, selected through the Fulbright U.S. Scholar Program under a dedicated Antarctic category added to the 2026-2027 cycle, and 5 Chilean early career researchers, selected through a dedicated Fulbright Chile competition launched in 2026. Early career includes postdoctoral fellows and equivalent early-stage independent scientists.

The cohort is supported scientifically by INACH as lead institution, working in coordination with UMAG and a curated national network of Chilean researchers active in the program's thematic areas. Named Chilean partner Principal Investigators are assigned to each sub-group prior to the kick-off in May 2027.

B. INACH as Lead Institution

INACH anchors the scientific direction of the cohort, coordinates the Chilean Antarctic research network, hosts the cohort at its facilities in Punta Arenas and at Escudero Base on King George Island, and stewards the cohort's open dataset through SCAR-ADD. UMAG provides anchor presence in Magallanes during Phases 1b and 3. The Research Framework is co-built between INACH and the cohort between May and October 2027.

The program is not logistical support for ten parallel projects -- it is a single team-based research effort, with built-in flexibility for each participant. Named Chilean partner PIs are drawn from: UMAG, Universidad de Chile, Pontificia Universidad Catolica, Universidad Austral, Universidad de Antofagasta, IDEAL Center, Cape Horn International Center, and other confirmed partner institutions.

C. U.S. Eligibility and Selection

- Early career status (typically within 7 years of the doctoral degree), with an active research trajectory aligned with the Research Framework. Postdoctoral fellows are eligible.
- Affiliation with a U.S. academic, research, or federal institution able to host a Chilean early career counterpart for a research stay between January and May 2028.
- Preference for laboratories with demonstrated polar or extremophile research experience.
- Willingness and physical capacity to participate in all phases, including six weeks in Chile and Antarctic fieldwork.
- Demonstrated commitment to collaborative, cross-border research.

D. Chilean Eligibility Criteria

- Early career researcher status: typically, within 10 years of the doctoral degree[1], with an active research trajectory in a Chilean academic, research, or public institution. Postdoctoral fellows are eligible.
- Affiliation with a Chilean university, research institute, or public scientific institution.
- Research background and skills clearly aligned with the Research Framework.
- Commitment to participate in all program phases, including the six-week deployment and the U.S. research stay between January and May 2028.
- Physical fitness and willingness to work in extreme Antarctic field conditions.

[1] The 10-year range is a guideline, not an exclusion criterion. Researchers whose doctoral degree was obtained more than 10 years ago are encouraged to apply; all applications will be reviewed by the Program Scientific Committee

- English proficiency sufficient for fieldwork and research at a U.S. institution.
- Demonstrated capacity for interdisciplinary, collaborative research.
- No prior Fulbright award required; first-time applicants are especially encouraged.

E. Application Materials -- Chilean Track

Candidates for the Chilean track submit the following materials in English through the Fulbright Chile application platform:

No.	DOCUMENT	REQUIREMENTS
01	**Application Form**	Online form submitted via the Fulbright Chile application platform.
02	**Research Alignment Statement**	Up to 5 pages describing how the applicant's background, technical skills, and research interests align with the Research Framework, and identifying U.S. laboratories or counterparts of greatest interest for Phase 4.
03	**Curriculum Vitae**	Up to 6 pages.
04	**Letters of Recommendation**	Two letters from supervisors or collaborators evaluating qualifications, technical skills, and collaborative disposition.
05	**Language Proficiency Assessment**	Applicants must demonstrate English proficiency sufficient for fieldwork and research at a U.S. institution. No specific test or minimum score is required. Proficiency may be demonstrated through any of the following: an English language test result (e.g., TOEFL, IELTS, Duolingo English Test, Cambridge), a degree, postdoctoral position or research stay completed in an English-speaking environment, publications or conference presentations in English, or a letter from a supervisor or collaborator attesting to the applicant's English skills. The Program Scientific Committee may assess proficiency through an interview.
06	**Medical Certificate**	Signed by a licensed physician, confirming physical and mental capacity to safely participate in fieldwork activities in Antarctica.
07	**Institutional Support Letter**	Signed by the head of department, center director, or relevant institutional authority, confirming the applicant will have no impediment to participating in all phases, including activities in Chile and the research stay in the United States.

F. Selection Process

STEP	WHO	PROCESS
U.S. Applications	IIE / Fulbright U.S. Scholar Program	Antarctic category added to the 2026-2027 competition. Applications open early June - September 15, 2026. Applied through the standard IIE platform with additional review by the joint Program Scientific Committee.
Chilean Applications	Fulbright Chile Commission	Fulbright Chile opens the Chilean call from late June through October 2026. Applications are screened for completeness and eligibility, then reviewed by the Program Scientific Committee.
Evaluation	Program Scientific Committee (INACH + Fulbright Chile + Chilean and U.S. external reviewers)	Coordinated evaluation of both tracks, October 2026 - January 2027. Assessment: Research Framework fit, complementarity of skills, career stage, gender, and institutional diversity.

Final Selection	Program Scientific Committee + FFSB	Final cohort decision February-March 2027. Fulbright Chile prepares the nomination package in coordination with IIE for FFSB approval.
Announcement & Onboarding	Fulbright Chile + INACH + IIE	Public announcement March 2027. Administrative procedures (grant signing, onboarding) March-April 2027. Project kick-off May 2027.

G. Review Criteria

- Research Framework Fit: does the applicant's background, skills, and proposed contribution align with the Research Framework, and can the applicant contribute specific methodological or thematic expertise needed by the cohort?
- Academic Merit and Experience: does the applicant's record -- publications, presentations, research experience, independent contributions -- demonstrate the qualifications needed to contribute to a rigorous bilateral field research project?
- Collaborative and Intercultural Potential: does the applicant demonstrate openness to interdisciplinary work, cross-cultural collaboration, and the intensity of a six-week cohort-based deployment that includes Antarctic fieldwork?

H. Program Calendar (2026-2028)

TIMING	ACTIVITY
Mid 2026	INACH and Fulbright Chile formalize the program through an MOU. Chilean Antarctic research network convened; named Chilean partner PIs identified.
Early June - Sep 15, 2026	Antarctic category open within the Fulbright U.S. Scholar competition (IIE).
Late June - Oct 2026	Chilean early career researcher call open through the Fulbright Chile platform.
Oct 2026 - Jan 2027	Application review and evaluation by the Program Scientific Committee.
Feb - Mar 2027	Final cohort selection; FFSB nomination package prepared and submitted.
March 2027	Public announcement of the bilateral cohort.
Mar - Apr 2027	Administrative procedures: grant signing, onboarding, coordination.
May 2027	Project kick-off (Phase 0).
May - Oct 2027	Cohort-building phase: monthly virtual sessions; co-design of Research Framework; Cohort Design Document finalized; logistics. Effort target: ~3-4 hours per week per participant.
Nov - Dec 2027 (6 weeks)	Field work: 3 days in Santiago + ~10 days in Punta Arenas + 14 days at Escudero Base, King George Island + 14 days in Punta Arenas (synthesis + capacity workshop + public closing).
Jan - May 2028	U.S. research stays (4-12 weeks each) at participating U.S. host institutions.
May 2028	Official closing in Santiago / Washington. Joint Cohort Report finalized; open dataset released through SCAR-ADD; alumni network launched.
6-12 months after closing	Alumni convening at an ATCM, SCAR meeting, or equivalent international forum.

V. Detailed Phase Descriptions

Phase 0
May - Oct 2027

Cohort Building & Framework Co-Design (Virtual)

The pre-deployment phase is intentionally light. The cohort consists of working scientists with their own jobs, students, and grants. The objective in Phase 0 is to build a real team, agree on what will be done in Antarctica, and arrive in Chile ready to work.

Activities

- Project kick-off in May 2027 with all 10 cohort members, INACH and UMAG leadership, named Chilean partner PIs, and Fulbright Chile.
- One consolidated cohort session per month (~90 minutes): team building, mutual scientific presentations, co-design of the Research Framework, sub-group formation.
- Cohort Design Document (internal, ~10-15 pages): drafted collectively across Phase 0, finalized by October 2027. States research questions, sub-groups, sampling and lab protocols.
- Sample & Data Management Plan: led by INACH (CITES, SCAR-MAGIC permits, SCAR-ADD deposition, open-access policy).
- Logistical preparation: medical clearance, travel arrangements, U.S. visa processing for Chilean participants, host laboratory matching.

Effort target: approximately 3 to 4 hours per week per participant.

Phase 1a
3 days, Nov 2027

Santiago -- Institutional Engagement

The deployment opens with three days in Santiago, anchoring the cohort in the bilateral institutional fabric of the program and providing the public diplomacy moment that turns a science program into a visible Chile-U.S. cooperation milestone.

Activities

- Welcome event hosted by Fulbright Chile, INACH, and the U.S. Embassy in Santiago.
- Working sessions with the U.S. Embassy in Santiago, the Ministerio de Ciencia, Tecnologia, Conocimiento e Innovacion, and the Cancilleria / Direccion de Antartica (DIRANTARTICA).
- Press launch and public diplomacy moment opening the deployment.
- Briefing on the Chilean Antarctic policy framework and the Antarctic Treaty System.

Phase 1b
~10 days, Nov 2027

Punta Arenas -- Pre-Deployment

After Santiago the cohort relocates to Punta Arenas, anchoring at INACH and UMAG, for the operational closing of the deployment.

Activities

- Antarctic safety, survival, and environmental protocol training (mandatory for all participants).
- Personal field gear fitting and distribution: INACH provides all Antarctic clothing and protective equipment at no cost to participants.
- Scientific briefings at INACH and UMAG, plus structured visits to Chilean universities, research institutes, and reference centers.
- Final fine-tuning of fieldwork and laboratory plans with INACH and named Chilean partner PIs.
- Bilateral cohort integration and administrative orientation: grant disbursement, health insurance, communication protocols.

Phase 2
2 weeks, Nov-Dec 2027

Antarctic Field & Lab Work -- Escudero Base, King George Island



Fildes Peninsula, South Shetlands -- one of the most active areas for Antarctic science and logistics.



Paradise Cove, King George Island -- terrestrial and near-shore marine environments side by side.

The core Antarctic phase. Participants fly from Punta Arenas to King George Island and reside at INACH's Professor Julio Escudero Base, which offers fully equipped laboratories -- DNA extraction, basic molecular work, microscopy -- along with zodiac boats and access to unique Antarctic terrestrial and near-shore marine environments.

Importantly, Escudero is not only a sampling site: laboratory analysis at the base is integral to the cohort's work, reducing sample-handling risk and giving participants on-base bench time alongside fieldwork.

Research Activities

- Daily structured field and laboratory sessions organized around sub-group objectives.
- On-base molecular work and microscopy at Escudero, in addition to sample collection in the field.
- INACH coordinates daily work, facilitates cross-sub-group integration, and orchestrates joint mentoring.
- Evening seminars: cohort members and INACH base scientists present thematic and methodological lectures.
- Mid-camp progress review: all sub-groups share preliminary observations and receive structured peer feedback.
- Closing session in Antarctica: the cohort sketches the structure of the Joint Cohort Report.

INACH Logistical Support (In-Kind)

- Full accommodation and meals at Escudero Base for all participants for the duration of the field camp.
- Antarctic personal protective equipment and field clothing loaned to all participants.
- Access to base laboratories, shared lab consumables, zodiac boats, and field vehicles.
- Field safety officers and INACH support personnel accompanying all field excursions.
- Transport Punta Arenas to King George Island via DAP Aviation at the INACH institutional rate (funded by Fulbright).

Phase 3 — Punta Arenas -- Synthesis & Capacity

~2 weeks, Dec 2027



Field botany at Escudero -- Deschampsia antarctica and Colobanthus quitensis, Antarctica's only two native vascular plants.



Lions Rump, King George Island -- protected area and long-term ecological reference site.

After the Antarctic deployment, the cohort returns to continental Chile for two weeks anchored at INACH and UMAG. This phase is intentionally light on outputs: the cohort is tired after Antarctica, and substantive paper drafting is reserved for the U.S. stays and beyond.

Activities

- Sample triage and continued laboratory work at INACH and UMAG, complementing analyses begun at Escudero.
- Joint analytical workshops with INACH and UMAG researchers and the broader Chilean Antarctic network.
- Capacity-building module: 1-2 day workshop in Punta Arenas with Chilean masters and doctoral students and junior INACH/UMAG technicians.
- Public-facing closing event in Magallanes: seminar / community talk presenting first observations to local audiences and media.
- Confirmation of U.S. host laboratory placements, deliverables, and exact dates for Phase 4.

Phase 4 — U.S. Research Stays

Jan - May 2028

Following the field deployment, each Chilean researcher undertakes a research stay at the home laboratory or institution of one of the participating U.S. counterparts, or at another research institution. Stays last between 4 and 12 weeks, sized to a specific scientific deliverable, with a host laboratory letter of commitment naming the deliverable, the receiving PI, and the bench resources made available.

Activities

- Continuation of sample analysis, data processing, and bioinformatic work.
- Methodological training in techniques available at the host U.S. laboratory, tied to the named deliverable.
- Drafting of any joint or sub-group papers on each participant's own scientific timeline.
- Integration of the visiting researcher into the host institution's seminar and lab meeting schedule.
- Public-facing presentations at the host institution, highlighting the program.

Fulbright Support

- Round-trip international airfare between Chile and the U.S., covered at a flat allocation of USD 2,000 per participant.
- Monthly living stipend: USD 3,100 to USD 4,100 per month depending on cost of living of the host U.S. city.
- Health and travel insurance through Fulbright's standard ASPE coverage for the full duration of the research stay.
- Administrative and U.S. visa support coordinated by the Fulbright Chile Commission and IIE.

Closing
May 2028

Program Closing -- A Beginning, Not an End

The pilot edition formally closes in May 2028 with a bilateral closing event -- co-hosted in Santiago and/or Washington -- that releases the Joint Cohort Report and dataset, launches the Fulbright - INACH Antarctic Fellows alumni network, and signals the next steps.

Follow-on Hooks

- Scheduled alumni convening 6-12 months after closing, ideally at an Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting (ATCM), a SCAR meeting, or an equivalent international forum.
- Signposting of joint Chile-U.S. proposal opportunities (Fondecyt, INACH Regular, NSF Office of Polar Programs, future Fulbright cycles).
- Public commitment to a continuation decision and, where possible, scaling the model to additional partner countries.
- Permanent alumni network with light-touch coordination by Fulbright Chile and INACH.

VI. Compliance & Interpretation

A. The Fulbright Commission will only accept applications that fully comply with these program guidelines. Failure to meet any requirement will render the application ineligible.

B. The Fulbright Commission reserves the right to interpret and determine the meaning and scope of these guidelines in the event of any doubts or disputes arising from their content or application.

C. Submission of an application constitutes full acceptance of these program guidelines.

D. Clarifications, footnotes, and official documents generated in connection with this competition form an integral part of these guidelines and will be published at www.fulbrightchile.cl.

VII. Application Deadline

APPLICATION DEADLINE

Friday, December 4, 2026, at 4:00 PM (Continental Chile time).

Applications must be submitted through the online portal:
https://app.mindaclient.com/clientportal/index.php?g=a42ad3d1-4f9a-11f1-aae6-0cc47a838570

VIII. Questions

A. All applicants are required to read these program guidelines in full prior to applying. The guidelines are available at fulbrightchile.cl.

B. For questions, please contact becas@fulbright.cl