

[Our Work](#)[Current Opportunities](#)[Our Network](#)[News & Events](#)

THE LEGO FOUNDATION FELLOWSHIP

The LEGO Foundation Fellowship: Application Details

About

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PAGE NAVIGATION >

The LEGO Foundation invites applications for the LEGO Foundation Fellowship, a global research fellowship for early- and mid-career researchers whose work can strengthen understanding of how children thrive across diverse contexts.

The fellowship provides flexible support over a three-year period for researchers pursuing ambitious, rigorous, and practically relevant work. We are looking for fellows with strong research potential, clear ideas for the next phase of their work, and a commitment to building evidence that can inform action for children.

We welcome applications from researchers across disciplines, methods, and geographies. Relevant fields may include, but are not limited to, education, psychology, child development, public health, economics, sociology, neuroscience, data science, humanitarian studies, disability studies, human-computer interaction, and implementation science.

About the LEGO Foundation

We focus on the realities children face, addressing barriers, supporting learners of all abilities, and responding where children are touched by crises and humanitarian needs. By investing in the holistic ecosystems that shape childhood — from families and schools to communities and entire societies — we work to strengthen access to education, creativity, and play. This includes both grantmaking and impact investments supporting solutions that can grow and reach more children over time.

Since 1986, the LEGO Foundation has worked to create the conditions for all children to thrive. A good childhood is not a given — it is built — and too many children face challenges that limit their possibilities. Over the past 40 years, the LEGO Foundation has invested in organizations, initiatives, and individuals that help children learn, grow, and develop through play.

The LEGO Foundation Fellowship coincides with the LEGO Foundation's 40th anniversary. This is not only a celebration of impact — it is an invitation to come together for children. Around the world, more children are growing up in conflict and crisis, while many others struggle to thrive in fast-paced societies and systems not designed with children's needs, nature, or wishes in mind. The demand for bold and creative support has not been greater in the LEGO Foundation's 40 years.

About the fellowship

The LEGO Foundation Fellowship supports researchers with a clear line of inquiry related to children's thriving. Applicants should describe the work they are ready to advance during the fellowship period, how it builds on their existing research, and why this is the right moment for fellowship support.

The fellowship provides flexible support over three years. Funds are awarded to and administered by the fellow's institution and may be used, consistent with program guidelines, to support the fellow's effort and the broader costs of carrying out the research. Allowable costs include research personnel, professional travel, and equipment.

Fellows will also join a cohort of researchers working across the fellowship themes. The program will create opportunities for exchange, feedback, and sharing evidence

with relevant research, policy, and practice audiences.

Research themes

The LEGO Foundation Fellowship is welcoming research proposals that advance understanding of children's thriving through one of the following three themes: the youngest children in crisis and conflict settings; inclusion and wellbeing of neurodivergent children; and children's learning and development in an AI-enabled world. Applicants may explore the role of play where it is relevant to the research question. The consideration of play is optional and not a condition of eligibility.

The youngest children in crisis and conflict settings

In times of crisis, the youngest children are among the most vulnerable. The LEGO Foundation acts to protect children's access to education in crisis, ensuring that children can keep growing and learning, even in the hardest circumstances.

We welcome applications focusing on children (and their caregivers) from birth to eight years in crisis and conflict settings, including humanitarian emergencies and prolonged displacement. Thematic areas include:

- **Mechanisms of resilience and pathways to thriving:** Identifying the key mechanisms and pathways through which children can develop and learn despite adversity in crisis and conflict contexts.
- **Strengthening caregiving and family environments:** Exploring how caregiving, parenting, and family environments can be supported and strengthened to promote children's development and learning in crisis and conflict contexts.
- **Scaling and sustaining effective interventions:** Relevant topics related to generating evidence on how interventions for children's mental health and development can be effectively scaled and sustained within crisis-affected systems; examining how the integration of mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) with health, education, nutrition, and protection systems

influences child outcomes; and identifying effective models of intersectoral coordination.

- **Translating evidence into practice:** Understanding the factors and mechanisms that enable or constrain the adoption, implementation, and sustained use of evidence-based MHPSS interventions in humanitarian field programs.

Inclusion and wellbeing of neurodivergent children

All children deserve the opportunity to learn and grow by taking part in a quality education. With a particular focus on Autism and ADHD, we seek to strengthen support for neurodivergent children and their families, delivering proven interventions to help more children thrive.

We welcome applications focusing on neurodivergent children up to 18 years of age across different settings. Thematic areas include:

- **Support before diagnosis:** Generating evidence on how neurodivergent children's needs can be recognized and supported before formal diagnosis or specialist assessment.
- **Strengthening family environments:** Exploring how family routines, caregiving approaches and wellbeing, and home environments shape neurodivergent children's everyday experiences and ability to take part in family life.
- **Inclusive learning environments:** Identifying how education systems, school structures, teacher capabilities, and classroom practices can be designed around the needs, strengths, and experiences of neurodivergent learners.
- **Transitions and continuity of support:** Build evidence around how neurodivergent children and young people experience key transitions, and what helps maintain effective support as their strengths, needs, and environments change.
- **Enabling tools:** Generating evidence on when, how, and for whom digital technologies can reduce barriers to learning, communication, participation,

and belonging for neurodivergent children and young people.

Children's learning and development in an AI-enabled world

Education systems are under pressure. We see more children being absent from school and reporting lower levels of engagement across multiple contexts. At the same time, AI represents a profound technological shift that will impact on children's relationship with themselves as well as with the adults and institutions they interact with.

We welcome applications focusing on how AI is reshaping children's lives up to 18 years of age and how it can support thriving, learning, wellbeing, and inclusion.

Thematic areas include:

- **AI and adult-child connection:** Understanding how AI shapes interactions between children and the adults who support them, including how roles, communication, and shared activities change, and where AI can support positive connection.
- **AI and children's social and emotional development:** Assessing how children and young people's use of AI for advice, reassurance, and reflection shapes social and emotional development, including how they manage feelings, understand others, and seek help.
- **AI and productive struggle in learning:** Generating evidence on how AI affects the motivation, engagement, and persistence of children and young people in learning, and how those qualities shape children's use of AI.
- **Differential effects of AI:** Generating evidence on when AI deepens or reduces existing differences in children's learning, participation, and support.

Offers and expectations

The fellowship offers:

- Flexible research funding of USD 300,000 over three years, inclusive of 15% indirect costs.
- Funding administered by the fellow's host institution.
- Support for eligible research costs, including research personnel, professional travel, equipment, dissemination, trainee support, and related project costs.
- Access to a cohort of fellows working on children's thriving across disciplines and contexts.
- Opportunities for exchange with other fellows, researchers, practitioners, and partners including at convenings hosted by the LEGO Foundation.
- Media channels to disseminate your work to a broader audience.
- Recognition as part of the LEGO Foundation's network.

Fellows are expected to:

- Dedicate sustained time to the research agenda proposed in their application.
 - Participate in fellowship convenings, including annual meetings and virtual cohort sessions.
 - Share work in progress and contribute constructively to exchange with other fellows.
 - Submit annual progress updates and a final report.
 - Acknowledge fellowship support in publications, presentations, and other outputs.
 - Take part in LEGO Foundation coverage of the Fellowship and their work, and dissemination of their research.
 - Follow relevant ethical, safeguarding, data protection, and institutional requirements.
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Who can apply

The fellowship is open to early- and mid-career researchers from around the world who are employed by a university or research institute and have received their PhD or equivalent research doctorate within the past 10 years.

Applicants should demonstrate:

- A strong record of research accomplishment relative to career stage.
 - A clear and original research agenda related to one or more fellowship themes.
 - Strong methodological grounding and a feasible plan for the fellowship period.
- Interest in engaging with an interdisciplinary fellowship cohort.

Applicants must:

- Hold a PhD or equivalent research doctorate by July 31, 2026.
- Have received their PhD within the past 10 years, subject to any approved career-break policy.
- Be employed by a university or research institute at the start of the fellowship.
- Be able to have fellowship funds administered by their host institution.
- Submit an individual application.
- Propose work that aligns with one or more fellowship themes.

Applicants from any country are welcome to apply, with the exception of countries subject to EU or US sanctions. If your country is not on either sanctions list, you are eligible to apply regardless of your location.

Selection criteria

Applications will be reviewed against the following criteria:

- **Alignment with the fellowship themes:** The proposed work clearly aligns with one of the three fellowship themes and shows how it would advance understanding of children's thriving.
- **Clarity and strength of the proposed work:** The application presents a clear question, problem, or area of inquiry. It explains why the work matters, what gap it addresses, and what can be meaningfully advanced during the fellowship period.
- **Applicant readiness:** The applicant demonstrates the experience, judgment, and capacity to carry the work forward. Reviewers will consider the applicant's achievements and potential relative to career stage, context, and opportunity.
- **Approach and feasibility:** The proposed approach is appropriate to the question, context, and population. The application shows a realistic understanding of the work involved, including anticipated challenges and how they may be addressed.
- **Research quality:** The proposed work is rigorous, methodologically sound, and can be meaningfully advanced during the fellowship period. The applicant presents a realistic plan for the fellowship period, including methods, partnerships, timeline, ethics, and risks.
- **Field context and contribution:** The application situates the proposed work in relation to relevant research, debates, communities, or areas of practice. It explains what the work could contribute to others working on related questions.
- **Fellowship fit and cohort contribution:** The applicant explains why this fellowship is timely for their work, how participation could strengthen the proposed research, and how they would contribute to exchange with other fellows.

Application process

Application materials

- A standard online application form
- A resume or CV (two page limit)
- A research abstract (250 word limit)
- A personal statement (500 word limit) that explains a) your inspiration for pursuing research into childhood development; b) how the proposed research will contribute to scholarly knowledge on the topic; and c) how the proposed research will support your capacity for leadership in moving discovery into practice.
- A research proposal (5 page limit) that includes:
 - Relevance. Clearly articulate the research question you will answer.
 - Original contribution. Describe the practical implications of the proposed research. How will your research findings be useful to other scholars, practitioners, and/or policy makers?
 - Methods. Describe the methods you will use for your research, the type of data you will collect, how you will analyze these data, and steps you will take to ensure that the data and analysis are reliable. Explain why you have chosen the proposed approach for the given question. If your research includes human subjects, you must include your plans for obtaining IRB approval.
 - Feasibility. What practical, conceptual, or logistical challenges do you anticipate? How do you plan to address them during the fellowship term
 - Work to date. A brief description of related research work done to date, noting any preliminary analysis informing the proposed research.
 - A budget (1 page limit) and budget justification (2 page limit).
- A selected bibliography (2 page limit) relevant to the proposed research.

Application and selection process

The LEGO Foundation Fellowship program will include two evaluation stages. In the first round, an international and multidisciplinary committee of childhood development specialists will review applications and nominate a panel of finalists. In the second round, the LEGO Foundation's review committee will select grantees. Applicants will be informed of their status in November 2026.

To Apply

The LEGO Foundation Fellowship will open for applications on June 1, 2026. Applications must be submitted through the application portal by July 31, 2026, at 11:59 EST. Late or incomplete applications will not be considered.

For questions about the fellowship or application process, contact legofellowship@ssrc.org.

FELLOWSHIP SNAPSHOT

Application opens: June 1, 2026

Application deadline: July 31, 2026

Fellowship period: February 1, 2027 to December 31, 2029

Funding available: USD 300,000 over three years

Number of fellowships: Up to 10

Questions: legofellowship@ssrc.org



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