



RESEARCH GRANTS ON EDUCATION: LARGE



Application Deadlines:

Applications Open

December 10, 2025

Pre-Proposal Deadline

February 24, 2026, 12:00 PM Noon (Central Time/North America)

Full Proposal (By Invitation) Deadline

June 23, 2026, 12:00 PM Noon (Central Time/North America)

Program contact:

Maricelle Garcia

largegrants@spencer.org

Happy Holidays! Our offices are closed from December 24th through January 2nd.

Our staff will respond as soon as possible in the new year to emails sent to the programmatic email address below.

Current application processes are described in the How to Apply section below. Please see the October 2025 Spencer news update from Dr. Nasir and Dr. Bricker for information about how we have changed our processes to respond to the large volume of applications we are currently receiving. Starting in 2026, we are moving to a single cycle of Large Grants per year, but as we have communicated to the field, we will fund more proposals than in past years.

The Large Research Grants on Education Program supports education research projects that will contribute to the improvement of education, broadly conceived, with budgets ranging from \$125,000 to \$500,000 for projects ranging from one to five years. We anticipate awarding grants with budgets across each of the following funding tiers: \$125,000 to 250,000; \$250,001 to \$375,000; and \$375,001 to \$500,000. Within each of our funding tiers, we evaluate projects within tier and **strongly** encourage applicants to submit for funding that best fits their project rather than applying for the highest amount of funding. We accept preproposals once a year.

This program is “field-initiated” in that proposal submissions are not in response to a specific request for a particular research topic, discipline, design, method, or location. Our goal for this program is to support rigorous, intellectually ambitious and technically sound research that is relevant to the most pressing questions and compelling opportunities in education.

Program Statement

Program Statement

The Large Research Grants on Education Program supports education research projects that will contribute to the improvement of education, broadly conceived, with budgets ranging from \$125,000 up through \$500,000 for projects ranging from one to five years. We accept applications once a year.

This program is “field-initiated,” meaning that proposal submissions are not in response to a specific request for a particular research topic, discipline, design, or method. Our goal for this program is to support rigorous, intellectually ambitious and technically sound research that is relevant to the most pressing questions and compelling opportunities in education. We seek to support scholarship that develops new foundational knowledge that may have a lasting impact on educational discourse.

We recognize that learning occurs across the life course as well as across settings— from the classroom to the workplace, to family and community contexts and even onto the playing field—any of which may, in the right circumstance, provide the basis for rewarding study that makes significant contributions to the field. We value work that fosters creative and open-minded scholarship, engages in deep inquiry, and examines robust questions related to education. To this end, this program supports proposals from multiple disciplinary and methodological perspectives, both domestically and internationally, from scholars at various stages in their career. We anticipate that proposals will span a wide range of topics and disciplines that innovatively investigate questions central to education, including for example education, anthropology, philosophy, psychology, sociology, law, economics, history, or neuroscience, amongst others.

Moreover, we expect and welcome methodological diversity in answering pressing questions; thus, we are open to projects that utilize a wide array of research methods including the diverse range of quantitative and qualitative methods, mixed-methods, ethnographies, design-based research, participatory methods, and historical research, to name a few. We are open to projects that might incorporate data from multiple and varied sources, span a sufficient length of time as to achieve a depth of understanding, or work closely with practitioners or community members over the life of the project. In addition, we welcome proposals submitted by multidisciplinary and multigenerational teams who are positioned to both contribute to the project as well as contribute to the teaching and learning of fellow team members.

Finally, we encourage teams to thoughtfully consider and describe plans regarding the trajectories of their project's findings, implications, and potential effects, especially how the knowledge may be shared and utilized across the field in practice, policy making, or with broader publics.

Eligibility and Restrictions

Eligibility

Large Research Grant budget totals should be between \$125,000 and \$500,000, including up to 15% indirect cost charges. We anticipate funding proposals in the following funding tiers: \$125,000 to 250,000; \$250,001 to \$375,000; and \$375,001 to \$500,000. We will distribute our grant awards across these three tiers. We strongly encourage applicants to carefully consider this when constructing their project budgets and not only reach for the highest budget category.

Proposals to the Large Research Grants on Education program must be for academic research projects that aim to study education. Proposals for activities other than research that do not contain a significant research component are not eligible (e.g., program evaluations, professional development, curriculum development, scholarships, capital projects, tech platform development, AI tool development). Additionally, proposals for research studies focused on areas other than education are not eligible.

Principal Investigators (PIs) and Co-PIs applying for a Large Research Grant on Education must have an earned doctorate in an academic discipline or professional field. While graduate students may be part of the research team, they may not be named the PI or Co-PI on the proposal.

The PI must be affiliated with a non-profit organization or public/governmental institution that is willing to serve as the administering organization if the grant is awarded. The Spencer Foundation does not award grants directly to individuals. Examples include non-profit or public colleges, universities, school districts, and research facilities, as well as other non-profit organizations with a 501(c)(3) determination from the IRS (or equivalent non-profit status if the organization is outside of the United States).

Proposals are accepted from the U.S. and internationally, however all proposals must be submitted in English and budgets must be proposed in U.S. Dollars.

Restrictions

This site uses cookies. [More Information.](#)

Projects proposed may not be longer than 5 years in duration.

PIs and Co-PIs may only hold one active research grant from the Spencer Foundation at one time. PIs and Co-PIs may apply for a new grant while they have an active grant at the Spencer Foundation *if* the active grant will end before the anticipated start date of the new project. Note that this restriction does not apply to the administering organization; organizations may submit as many proposals as they like as long as they are for different projects and have different research teams.

PIs and Co-PIs may not submit more than one research proposal or preproposal to the Spencer Foundation at a time. This restriction applies to the Small Grants Program, Large Grants Program, Racial Equity Research Grants Program, and Research-Practice Partnership Program. If the PI or any of the Co-PIs currently have a research preproposal or proposal under consideration in any of these programs, they are required to wait until a final decision has been made before they can submit a new preproposal or proposal. Note that an exception to both of these restrictions is the Spencer Vision Grants program. PIs and Co-PIs may apply for a Vision Grant if they have another active research grant from the Spencer Foundation or if they have another Spencer grant proposal or preproposal in review. However, the projects proposed in a Vision Grant proposal and in another Spencer grant program proposal or preproposal must be distinct.

How to Apply

How to Apply

The application process begins with a preproposal. This will be reviewed to determine if the PI will be invited to submit a Full Proposal. Preproposals are due by 12:00pm Central Time Chicago/North America on the deadline date.

Preproposal Guidelines

The preproposal must be submitted through an online application form following the guidelines below.

Step 1 – Registration

Note: This application is configured for the Principal Investigator (PI) on the project to register and submit the form. If someone other than the PI will be completing the online application (e.g., an administrative assistant), the PI should register and then provide their username and password to the person assisting them with the application.

If you (the PI) have never accessed the Spencer Foundation online portal, you must register and create a profile by going to <https://spencer.smartsimple.us> and clicking the “Register Here” button.

Follow the guidelines on the registration page to create your profile.

If you already have an account, log on to update your profile.

Step 2 - My Profile

After logging in, follow the directions to complete the information requested on the My Profile page and upload your current CV (10-page limit). The My Profile page is your online account with the Spencer Foundation whether you are applying for a grant, reviewing a proposal, or submitting a grantee report.

Step 3 – Preproposal

To create the preproposal, go to your Workbench and click the Apply button for the Large Research Grants on Education, and then follow the instructions.

Your draft form can be saved so that you may return to work on it at a later time if necessary and if before the submission deadline. Your draft form will be available on your Draft Proposals list on your Workbench.

Preproposal Elements

Within the online form, there are detailed guidelines for each section. Below is an overview of the preproposal application elements you will be expected to complete.

Project Personnel – As the person creating the draft application, you will automatically be assigned to the preproposal as the Principal Investigator. If there are Co-PIs on the preproposal, you are asked to provide their names and organizations in this section.

Preproposal PDF – The preproposal components should all be contained in one single PDF. Text should be double-spaced and no smaller than 12-point font.

- **Preproposal narrative:** We are asking you to address the following elements in no more than **1250 words**. Recommended word counts for each section are below:
 - Project Title, PI Last Name, Request ID Number (text will not count towards your word count)
 - A description of the problem or issue and its significance [250 words]
 - Your research question(s) [100 words if needed]
 - How you plan to situate the research theoretically and/or conceptually, and within existing scholarship [400 words]
 - A summary description of your proposed research design (sampling, recruitment, data collection methods, data analysis) [400 words]
 - Respond to the following question: How will the field be different as a result of this research? In other words, what do you see as the scholarly contribution of this work? [100 words]

- At the end of the preproposal narrative, please provide a word count in parentheses.

- **References:** You may also submit up to **two pages** of references that will not count toward your preproposal narrative word count. We also highly recommend using citations throughout your preproposal narrative.
- **Team Description:** You may submit a **one-page** team description that will not count toward your preproposal narrative word count.
- **Timeline:** You may submit a **one-page** draft timeline that indicates the proposed start and end dates of the project as well as key project events and milestones. The proposed project duration can be up to 5 years.
- **Budget:** A draft budget of up to **two pages** that includes budget justifications (chart or table format preferred) and a grant total. Allowable expenses: Salaries, Benefits, Other Collaborator, Travel, Equipment and Software, Project Expenses, Other, Subcontracts. Please note that The Spencer Foundation does not require an official university sign-off for your budget at the pre-proposal stage.

Please create **one PDF file** with all of these components, ensuring that you include the PI's last name and the project title at the top of the first page. **File Naming: Please name the file with the PI's last name and the request ID number, and upload it to SmartSimple.** NOTE: if this is a resubmission, prefix the file name with "Resubmission," the PI's last name, and request ID number. The Spencer Foundation does not require a signatory to sign the preproposal.

AI Agreement and Disclosure - The Spencer Foundation has developed a [policy](#) outlining the responsible and ethical use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) technologies across the Foundation's operations, programs, and activities.

We have developed the policy guidelines to appropriately balance the potential benefits of artificial intelligence with the potential risks. While submitting your application to the Large Grants program in SmartSimple, you will be asked to acknowledge that you have read, understood, and agree to comply with these guidelines.

Project Summary – Information about the project is requested, such as a project title, estimated duration, estimated budget tier, the central research question(s), and a 200-word project summary.

Resubmission – If this is a resubmission of a proposal previously submitted to the Spencer Foundation, you are asked to indicate this within the application.

Project Data – Within the online application, we ask you to choose the appropriate options with regard to your research project in the following categories: disciplinary perspective, methodologies, topics, geographical scope, contexts, and participants. This information is helpful in determining the appropriate reviewers for your eventual full proposal and for internal evaluations of our grant programs.

Once you have uploaded your PDF file and responded to all required prompts that are part of the application, click the Submit button at the bottom of the page.

Reminder: The preproposal will be reviewed and everyone who submits will receive light feedback. We will notify you if you are invited to submit a full proposal.

Full Proposal Guidelines (by invitation only)

If you are invited to submit a full proposal, you will have access to the full proposal application on your Workbench. Within the online application, there are detailed guidelines for each section. Below is an overview of the elements you'll be expected to complete.

Project Personnel – If your project will have Co-PIs, it is necessary for you to connect their profiles to the full proposal. Instruct your Co-PIs to create an account and update their profile following Steps 1 and 2 above. Once they have done so, follow the guidelines in this section for connecting them to the proposal.

Proposal Summary – Information about the project is requested, such as the project title, start and end dates, the central research question(s), and a 200-word project summary.

Budget and Budget Justification: The budget form is divided into the following categories, and each category has a pulldown menu of the line-item choices listed in parentheses below:

Salaries (PI, Co-PI, Postdoctoral Research Assistant, Graduate Student,

Researcher, Undergraduate Researcher, Other Research Staff, Other Staff)

Benefits (PI Benefits, Co-PI Benefits, Researcher Benefits, Other Staff Benefits, Tuition/Fees)

Other Collaborator (Independent Consultant, Advisor)

Travel (Project Travel, Conference or Dissemination Travel)

Equipment and Software (Equipment, Software)

Project Expenses (Supplies, Participant Stipends/Costs, Communication, Transcription)

Other (This should only be used for expenses not covered in the choices above)

Subcontracts (Information is pulled from the subcontract budget forms – see below)

Each expense for your project should be added, and the budget narrative field should be completed, providing a description of that specific expense.

Detailed guidelines are available within the application form.

Subcontracts: If your project will have subcontracts, a separate subcontract budget form will need to be completed for each. The subcontract form has the same categories and line item choices listed above.

Indirect Cost Charges (IDC): Budgets in this program may include 15 percent IDC (aka overhead). Subcontract budgets may also include the 15 percent IDC but should not be included in the main budget total when calculating the overall IDC for the project.

Another Note on Funding Tiers: We recognize that applicants are often encouraged to apply to the highest tiers and amounts of funding. However, in the case of Spencer's large grant program, we prefer that budgets are well-suited to the project design. In previous cycles, tier one has been the most competitive group of submissions, and proposals submitted to lower tiers have had better odds of being funded. We encourage researchers to consider what level of funding makes the most sense for their project and design.

Proposal Narrative - You are expected to upload a proposal narrative pdf that includes the following:

- A description of the project, the central research question(s), and the project's significance.
- A rationale for the project. This includes (a) summary of the relevant literature, the relationship of the proposed research to that literature, and the new knowledge or contribution to the improvement of education expected to result from the proposed research; and (b) a summary of the conceptual framework or theory guiding the project and how the project utilizes or builds on this framework of theory.
- A description of the proposed research methods, description of participants, data collection instruments, and modes of analysis the project will employ. If applicable to the proposed methods, please include (a) information about the proposed sample/case definition and selection procedures; (b) research design, including when appropriate a description of the context of the study; (c) description of key constructs, measures and data sources; (d) procedures for data collection; and (e) procedures for data analysis.
- A short description of plans for dissemination of the research findings. While this may include traditional submissions to academic conferences and publications, we also encourage other forms of dissemination that aim to impact policy, practice, or public discourse. We expect scholars to follow the highest ethical and professional standards of their fields. Please consult our [statement of ethics and professional expectations](#).

This narrative may not exceed 5000 words and at the conclusion should include the word count in parentheses. Your reference list should follow your narrative in the same pdf file and will not count toward the 5000-word limit. The text should be double-spaced and in a 12-point font. APA style is preferred. The document should include page numbers.

Note: Tables and other figures can be included in the text of your proposal, where appropriate, provided they are used sparingly. The text contained in any tables and figures will not count towards the word limit. However, it is important that you describe or explain any tables or figures in the narrative portion of your proposal, which will contribute to your word count. Do not assume that tables and other figures are self-explanatory.

Project Timeline - A project timeline should be uploaded in pdf format and should indicate the proposed start and end dates of the project as well as key project events and milestones. The major activities listed in the project timeline should be reflected in the proposal narrative. The project timeline may not exceed 1 page, and the text should be in a 12-point font. The proposed project duration can be up to 5 years.

Project Team - A document describing the project team should be uploaded in pdf format and should identify the roles, responsibility, and knowledge base of the PI, Co-PI(s), and any supporting researcher(s). Additionally, it should articulate how the team will work together to complete the research project, highlighting what each team member will contribute to the project. Further, a short description of the relationship between the project team and the research site may be included, if appropriate. When applicable, please discuss the learning opportunities team members may experience through their participation in this project. This document should not exceed 800 words and should be double-spaced in 12-point font.

Resubmission - If this is a resubmission of a proposal previously submitted to the Spencer Foundation, you are asked to indicate this within the application and upload a 1-page explanation of how the proposal was revised.

For information on optional appendices, our review process, frequently asked questions, and other important information, please see the full Request for Proposals in our online portal: <https://spencer.smartsimple.us/>.

Deadlines

Applications Open

December 10, 2025

Pre-Proposal Deadline

February 24, 2026, 12:00 PM Noon (Central Time/North America)

This Full Proposal (By Invitation) Deadline

June 23, 2026, 12:00 PM Noon (Central Time/North America)