

Research Grants on Education: Large

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. We accept Intent to Apply forms twice 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

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 twice 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 quantitative, qualitative, mixed-methods, ethnographies, design-based research, participatory methods, 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

Proposals to the Research Grants on Education program must be for academic research projects that aim to study education. Proposals for activities other than research are not eligible (e.g., program evaluations, professional development, curriculum development, scholarships, capital projects). 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

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.

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 a time. (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 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 proposal under consideration in any of these programs, they are required to wait until a final decision has been made on the pending proposal before they can submit a new proposal.

***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, 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.

Deadlines

Applications Open

Early April 2025

Intent to Apply

May 14, 2025, 12:00 PM noon (Central/Chicago Time)

Full Proposal Deadline

June 17, 2025, 12:00 PM noon (Central/Chicago Time)

How to Apply

The application process begins with an Intent to Apply form. Once submitted, you will have access to the Full Proposal application in our online portal. Intent to Apply forms

are due by 12:00pm Central Time on the deadline date.

Intent to Apply Guidelines

The Intent to Apply form must be submitted through an online application form following the guidelines below before you be given access to the full proposal application.

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 and access the Intent to Apply form.

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 – Intent to Apply Form

To fill out the Intent to Apply form, go to your Workbench and click the Apply button for the Large Research Grants on Education.

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

Intent to Apply Form Elements

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

Project Personnel - As the person creating the draft application, you will

automatically be assigned to the proposal as the Principal Investigator. If there are Co-PIs on the proposal, you are asked to provide their names and organizations in this section.

Proposal 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.

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.

Submit

Once you've completed the form, click the Submit button at the bottom of the page. You'll now have access to the Full Proposal application form on your Workbench.

Note: You must complete an Intent to Apply form by noon on the deadline if you intend to submit a Full Proposal for the upcoming review cycle.

Full Proposal Guidelines

Once your Intent to Apply form has been submitted, 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 - 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 (*see note below*). We strongly encourage applicants to carefully consider this when constructing their project budgets and not only reach for the highest budget category.

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.

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 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 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.

Optional Appendices A

If you have additional documents focused on scientific instrumentation relevant to the study, for example interview protocols or survey instruments, they can be uploaded in this section of the application.

Optional Appendices B

If you have other supporting documents such as letters of agreement or collaboration, they can be uploaded in this section of the application and will be reviewed during the final stages of the review process. Please see the guidelines in the online application for more information about these types of appendices.

Optional Appendices C: Innovative approaches to equity in research

We recognize that scholars and scholarship have continued to develop innovative approaches to conducting research in ethical and just ways. Scholars have raised that proposals attending to these issues in sophisticated ways often face choices in providing detail in their proposals. Thus, if you so choose, you are invited to include a one-page appendix in your grant proposal to elaborate on the theoretical, methodological, and partnership structures, or other dimensions you deem as relevant to conducting ethical and just research.

For example, if your work engages youth, families, or community-based organizations, you may want to elaborate on how traditional power dynamics will be addressed. Or, if your work engages with Indigenous communities, you may want to elaborate on the project leadership's histories and engagement with Indigenous communities, any formal agreements (e.g. Tribal IRB or approvals), or the use of Indigenous methodologies in the project. Or, perhaps you are working on new quantitative measures or modeling approaches that would benefit from further explanation. We anticipate and welcome a wide range of other possibilities.

A note about IRB Approval - Proof of Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval is not required at the time of proposal submission. In the event that IRB approval is needed for this project and it is chosen for funding, the Administering Organization will be responsible for obtaining IRB review and approval in accordance with its institutional policies and applicable law.

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.

Recommended Reviewers – In addition to our standing panel that we utilize throughout the review process, finalists are also sent to ad hoc reviewers who have deep expertise aligned with proposals. In the application, we ask that you recommend 3-5 people who you think could serve in this role and provide their name, organization, and email address.

Project Data – Within the online application, we ask you to check off 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 proposal and for internal evaluations of our grant programs

Signature from Authorized Representative of the Administering Organization

– This section of the application details the steps necessary to obtain the authorized signature for your proposal through the Adobe E-sign process. You are required to provide the Signatory's name, title, and email address; this is normally an administrative or financial person that has the authority to sign the proposal on behalf of your organization. Note: The signature process must be completed by noon on the deadline date. You, as the applicant, are responsible for making sure your proposal is signed by the deadline. Please account for the time it takes your organization's authorized signer to review and sign proposal submissions. We recommend filling in the online application at least a week ahead of the deadline date. The Spencer Foundation is unable to accept late submissions.

Submit

Once you've completed all of the elements listed above, click the Submit button at the bottom of the application page and it will be routed to your Signatory for signature and final submission.

Review Process

All full proposal submissions are reviewed by external panel reviewers and internal staff. The review process for this program takes approximately 11 months from the Intent to Apply deadline date.

The review panel for this program is made up of scholars in the field of education research with expertise across many disciplines and methodological areas. Panelists are asked to rate and comment on the following aspects of your proposal:

Significance of the Project: Reviewers will evaluate the centrality of education in the research, the importance of the topic to its field, and the quality of the research question(s) and/or direction of inquiry.

Connection to Research and Theory: Reviewers will evaluate the adequacy of the description of how other researchers have treated the same topic and how well the proposal responds to prior work and theory.

Research Design: Reviewers will evaluate the overall quality, sophistication, and appropriateness of the research design as well as its alignment with the research question(s) and/or conceptual framing.

Budget and Timeline: Reviewers will evaluate the adequacy of the budget, timeline, and strength of proposal within their funding tier.

Project Team: Reviewers will comment on the potential of the investigator(s) to complete the study as described and share the results or other findings.

Dissemination Plans: Reviewers will evaluate the proposed plans for sharing the results or other findings of the research project, which may include traditional submissions to conferences or publications as well as other efforts aimed at influencing research, policy, practice, or public discourse.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Is the Intent to Apply form evaluated to determine if I should submit a full proposal?

A: No, it is not evaluated. The completion of an Intent to Apply form opens your access to the full proposal submission portal. It is simply to signal to Foundation staff that we may anticipate receiving your full proposal.

Q: Does this program support research in settings other than K-12 and higher education institutions?

A: Yes, the Foundation funds research projects that span the life course (i.e., from early childhood to adult learning) as well as those that focus on contexts outside of school.

Q: Do you have a preference for certain research methodologies?

A: No, we are open to whatever qualitative and quantitative methods make sense for answering the questions at hand. Historically, the Foundation has supported research across a range of methods and academic disciplines, and we expect this to continue in this program.

Q: Do you have a preference for research teams vs. individual researchers?

A: No, we do not have a preference. The important thing is to plan the staffing around the aims of the project.

Q: Can a graduate student serve as a Co-PI on a proposal submission?

A: No, the PI and any Co-PIs named on the proposal are expected to have earned doctorate degrees prior to proposal submission. While graduate students may be included in the budget as research assistants, this program is not meant to support student research projects.

Q: Do you accept proposals from outside the United States?

A: Yes, we accept proposals from outside the U.S. Application materials must be submitted in English and project budgets must be in U.S. dollars.

Q: Do you have a preference for regional, national, or international projects?

A: No, we do not have a preference.

Q: What is the expected duration of projects in this program?

A: We leave the duration of the project up to the PI/research team to determine, but limit it to no more than 5 years.

Q: Can my organization submit more than one proposal at a time?

A: Yes, as long as the proposals are for different projects and the research teams are different, it is fine for an organization to submit multiple applications at one time.

Q: If I have a current grant through Spencer, can I apply for a new grant?

A: You may not hold more than one active research grant at a time from the Spencer Foundation. You may apply for a new grant while you have an active grant at the Spencer Foundation if the active grant will end before the anticipated start date of the new project.

Q: What is your policy on indirect costs?

A: Research grant proposals with budgets over \$75,000 may include 15% indirect cost charges (IDC) on the total direct costs. Subcontract budgets may include the 15% IDC but should not be included in the main budget total when calculating the overall IDC for the project.

Q: Are budgets expected to include in-kind giving or cost sharing? If not expected, is it allowed?

A: In-kind giving or cost sharing is not expected or required as part of your proposal budget. However, if you plan to include in-kind giving or cost sharing as part of your project budget, you should indicate this in the online budget form in the narrative section. If your proposal is chosen for funding, the grant award may be contingent upon receiving documentation confirming the additional support.

Q: If I am turned down, is it possible to revise my proposal and reapply in a later cycle?

A: Spencer does not have a policy against accepting uninvited revised proposals. However, you should know that many factors go into the final decision on each proposal, including our limited budget. Even if you receive feedback on your proposal and are able to address all of the reviewer concerns in the submission, we can offer no guarantees as to the likelihood of funding due to the fact that we currently fund less than 10% of the submissions we receive. Please note, resubmissions are considered among all of the other newly submitted proposals and are not given special status or consideration in the review process.

Q: I have an idea for a project and would like feedback. Is it possible to contact someone?

A: If you have reviewed our program statement and application guidelines and still have questions about where your idea for a research project falls within the program, feel free to email us at largegrants@spencer.org.

Q: How do I determine my start date and when should I expect payment if my proposal is selected for funding?

A: We recommend proposing a start date that is at least 11 months after the deadline for the Intent to Apply form. The review process for this program takes approximately 10 months and once notified of the funding decision, it can take additional time for the official approval process, which entails reviewing the budget, processing award letters, and issuing the grant payment. NOTE: Grant payments are issued on the third week of each month. If Spencer has not received your signed award letters by your start date, your payment will not be issued.

Recent Awardees

Winter 2024/2025 Awardees (February 2024 deadline)

The Emergence and Consequences of Culture Wars and Curriculum Conflicts in Education

Huriya Jabbar, Danfeng Soto-Vigil Koon
University of Southern California

Individualized Language Plans for Multilingual Learners with Disabilities: Investigating Implementation and Stakeholder Perspectives

Sara E.N. Kangas, Jamie L. Schissel
Lehigh University

A Qualitative Examination of the Experiences of Transgender High School Athletes

Yannick Kluch, Anna Posbergh
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Picture Books as a Tool to Foster Positive Racial Attitudes in Preschool-Aged Children

Catarina Vales
Carnegie Mellon University

Thriving in Community Colleges: A Longitudinal Mixed Methods Study of Student Mental Health and Educational Success

Xueli Wang, Kelly Wickersham, Xiwei Zhu
University of Wisconsin-Madison
