

Research Grants on Education: Small

The Small Research Grants on Education Program supports education research projects that will contribute to the improvement of education, broadly conceived, with budgets up to \$50,000 for projects ranging from one to five years. We accept applications two times per 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 Small Research Grants on Education Program supports education research projects that will contribute to the improvement of education, broadly conceived, with budgets up to \$50,000 for projects ranging from one to five years. Eligible investigators may also request additional supplemental funds for a course release. We accept applications two times per 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, 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, among 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, computational modeling, 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, and/or work closely with practitioners or community members over the life of the project.

Eligibility and Restrictions

Eligibility

Proposals to the Small Research Grants on Education program must be for research projects that aim to study education. Proposals for activities other than research are not eligible (e.g., program evaluations with no significant research component, creation of professional development programs, curricula, and/or assessment tools, with no significant research component, scholarships, capital projects, software development). Additionally, proposals for research studies focused on areas other than education are not eligible.

Principal Investigators (PIs) and Co-PIs applying for a Small 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. 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). The Spencer Foundation does not award grants directly to individuals.

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

Proposed budgets for this program are limited to \$50,000 total and may not include indirect cost charges [per Spencer's policy](#). Eligible investigators may also request additional supplemental funds for a course release. See the Optional Supplemental Course Release section for details.

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 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 in review. However, the projects proposed in a Vision Grant proposal and in another Spencer grant program proposal must be distinct.

How to Apply

The application process begins with a full proposal; there is no requirement to submit an intent to apply form. Full proposals for a Small Research Grant on Education are due by 12:00 pm central time on the deadline date.

Full Proposal Guidelines

Small Grant proposals 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 as described in Step 1 below, 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 application.

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.

Note: If you will have Co-PIs on your project, they must also register and complete their profile information if they wish to be included on the application.

Step 3 – Start a Proposal

To fill out the application, go to your Workbench and click the Apply button for the Small Research Grants on Education. Your draft application can be saved so that you can return to it at a later time and continue working on it. Once you save a draft application, you can find it again on your Draft Proposals list on your Workbench.

Small Grant Proposal Elements

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 -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, they can be added to the application in this section. They must first follow Steps 1 and 2 above before being added to the application.

In this section you are also asked to confirm that neither the PI nor the Co-PIs currently have another research proposal under review at Spencer (see Restrictions).

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, Supplemental PI Course Release, Supplemental Co-PI Course Release)
- Benefits (PI Benefits, Co-PI Benefits, Researcher Benefits, Other Staff Benefits, Tuition/Fees, Supplemental Course Release Benefits)
- 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.

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.

This narrative may not exceed 1800 words and at its conclusion should include the word count in parentheses. Your reference list should follow your narrative in the same PDF and will not count toward the 1800-word limit. Proposals that exceed the word limit will not be reviewed.

The text should be double-spaced and in 12-point font. APA style is preferred. 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.

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 Small Grants program to the Spencer Foundation online portal, you will be asked to acknowledge that you have read, understood, and agree to comply with these guidelines. Please see the guidelines within the application.

Project Timeline - A project timeline should be uploaded as a PDF 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. Teams should plan to begin their project timeline no sooner than 8 months from the original proposal submission deadline.

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). In the case where your project includes Co-PIs and other supporting researchers, this document 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. This document should not exceed 250 words and should be double-spaced in 12-point font. Note: this document will be reviewed along with the CV of the PI and any Co-PIs included on the application.

Optional Supplemental Course Release - The Spencer Foundation recognizes that scholars' course loads vary significantly across the field creating differential contexts and capacities for research projects. To help mitigate these uneven demands on time, the PI or Co-PI may request supplemental course release funds of up to \$10,000 over and above the \$50,000 Small Grant budget limit, for a total of up to \$60,000.

To be eligible, the scholar (PI or Co-PI) must have a course load of 6 or above per academic year. The supplemental funds cannot be used for anything besides a course release for the scholar and should be the standard rate for a course release at their institution. You may only request 1 additional course release per grant. Two things of note: 1) requesting the Supplemental Course Release funds does not guarantee they will be awarded, and 2) if you have a course load that is less than 6, you may still include a course release in your proposal budget, but your budget may not exceed the \$50,000 Small Grants limit and you are not required to supply the documents requested.

To apply for these the Optional Supplemental Course Release Funds, there are 3 additional application pieces needed:

- The amount requested and a brief budget narrative for the Supplemental Course Release should be included in the Proposal Budget section (detailed above). It should be clearly indicated in the Salary section of the budget form by choosing the appropriate Supplemental Course Release line item from the drop-down menu, as well as in the Benefits section as needed.
- A 250-word Course Release Rationale Statement describing how the additional course release will impact the proposed project should be uploaded as a PDF.
- A Supporting Letter from the scholar's Dean or Chair should be uploaded below as a PDF. The supporting letter must include the following: (a) confirmation that the scholar's course load is 6 courses or more per academic year, (b) confirmation that the scholar will be released from teaching a course, if awarded the supplemental funds, and (c) confirmation the budgeted amount for the course release is appropriate for their institution.

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 as supplemental information.

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. Please see the guidelines in the online application for more information about these

types of appendices.

Optional Appendices C – 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 upload a **one-page appendix** in your grant proposal to elaborate on the theoretical, methodological, and partnership structures, or other dimensions you deem 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 also recognize that scholars who are doing work outside of the US, might be approaching equity related questions in specific ways that are also innovative and related to their local context of study. As a result, international education scholars might benefit from sharing more details about their context of study and how questions about educational equity are being explored in this context.

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.

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 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

The Small Research Grants on Education program uses a peer review process for all eligible submissions. Each proposal will be initially reviewed, and a selected subset of proposals will receive two additional reviews as part of Spencer's decision-making processes. The entire review process for this program takes approximately 6-7 months from the deadline date.

Reviewers for this program are all scholars in the field of education research with expertise across many disciplines and methodological areas. Reviewers evaluate 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 and timeline.

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.

Frequently Asked Questions

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

A: Yes, Spencer 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 formal schooling contexts.

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

A: No, we are open to whatever methods make sense for answering the questions at hand. Historically, Spencer 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 (the PI or Co-PI) 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 Spencer if the active grant will end before the anticipated start date of the new project.

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

A: Yes, Spencer welcomes proposal resubmissions. However, 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 5% 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: Does The Spencer Foundation have an AI Policy?

A: 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. Anyone submitting a proposal to any of the Foundation's grant programs will be asked to read and comply with the policy. The policy is available on Spencer's website, as well as in the Spencer Foundation online portal.

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 whether your idea for a research project falls within this program, feel free to email us at smallgrants@spencer.org for guidance. While we are not able to provide feedback on proposal drafts, we are happy to answer questions by email. Additionally, if helpful please consult the Spencer writing guides available on your Workbench in the Spencer Foundation online portal (To see your Workbench, please log into your online portal account. For guidance on creating an account, please see 'Step 1 – Registration' in the Full Proposal Guidelines section of the Small Research Grants in Education RFP.)

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

A: Proposed project start dates should be at least 8 months after the proposal deadline. The review process for this program takes approximately 6-7 months and once notified of the funding decision, it can take an additional 2 months 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.

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.