

Racial Equity Special Research Grants

In honor of the Spencer Foundation's 50th Anniversary, the Foundation has launched The Racial Equity Special Research Grants program to support education research projects that will contribute to understanding and ameliorating racial inequality in education. We are interested in funding studies that aim to understand and disrupt the reproduction and deepening of educational inequality in education, and which seek to remake and imagine anew forms of equitable education. Thus, we are also interested in research projects that are working toward transforming systems by reimagining educational opportunities in a multiplicity of education systems, levels, settings, and developmental ranges and that reach beyond documenting conditions and paradigms that contribute to persistent racial inequalities.

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 relation to racial equity in education.

As with other Spencer grant programs, this program is “field-initiated” in that proposal submissions are not required to be developed around a particular research topic, discipline, design, method, or geographic location. We will be accepting applications for projects ranging from one to five years with budgets up to \$75,000.

Program Statement

The Racial Equity Special Research Grants supports education research projects that will contribute to understanding and disrupting racial inequality in education and work to reimagine generative possibilities to advance educational equity, with budgets up to \$75,000 for projects ranging from one to five years. While the field of education has long focused on issues of

inequality and its growth globally we now find ourselves in a time of increased urgency given the current intersections of the COVID-19 public health crisis, rapid shifts in educational systems, economic challenges, and growing civil resistance to systemic racism and anti-blackness. There is perhaps no issue of greater importance right now than racial inequality across all of our systems and structures. We believe that educational research can play an important role in developing new forms of education that are humane, equitable, and just. As such, there is a pressing need for robust approaches to scholarship that can contribute consequentially to achieving racial equity in education. We encourage a wide range of methodological approaches to creatively and ambitiously engage in advancing racial equity.

This program is “field-initiated” in that proposal submissions are not required to focus on a particular research topic, discipline, design, or method. We hope that scholars will identify the most compelling and needed areas of research. For instance, scholars might focus on: Instructional challenges and innovations; racial and geographic disparities and promising directions for engaging and supporting children, families, and communities; informal learning environments and informal educators; assessment challenges and opportunities; social-emotional learning and well-being; educator and leader development, identity, and well-being; digital learning environments; systems change and policy making; intersections between housing, health, and education.

We are interested in proposals at all levels and in all settings of learning, including early childhood, higher education, and in schools, families, and communities. We are also interested in studies that seek to understand the situated experiences of minoritized groups, including Black, Latinx, AAPI, Indigenous and other minoritized communities. In addition, we are interested in studies that focus on those learners that are multiply marginalized, including intersections with English language learners, immigrants, students with disabilities, highly mobile and institutionalized youth (e.g., foster youth or those in youth prisons), LGBTQ youth, and those in rural communities. In addition, we encourage proposals that are reflective of other national and local contexts. We recognize that the experiences of inequality, as well as the histories and structures producing it, will vary. We especially welcome proposals that advance strength- and resiliency-based

perspectives and those that may push us to rethink and transform current paradigms.

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 relation to racial equity in education. We seek to support scholarship that develops new foundational knowledge that may have a significant impact on practice and policy. We value work that fosters creative and open-minded scholarship, engages in deep inquiry, and examines robust questions related to education and inequality. We also value work that is engaging in emerging possibilities and transformations. We invite proposals that aim to grow the current scope of research on racial equity, develop new knowledge through interdisciplinary scholarly engagement, and include collaboration in the service of increasing the impact of educational research.

To this end, this program supports proposals from multiple disciplinary and methodological perspectives, both domestically and internationally, and from scholars at various stages in their careers. We anticipate that proposals will span a wide range of topics and disciplines. 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, and historical research, to name a few. We are also interested in methodological research that can enable and support research on and with racialized communities that build capacity for equitable educational systems. This could include exploration of methods appropriate in small samples and populations, the development of new measures and indices, and studies regarding the impact of methods and algorithms on reducing or promoting inequality. We are open to projects that might incorporate data from multiple and varied sources or work closely with practitioners or community members over the life of the project. Further, we recognize that social distancing policies may pose challenges to some modes of inquiry. We encourage creative new approaches to the collection and analysis of data.

Eligibility and Restrictions

Eligibility

Proposals to the Racial Equity Research Grants program must be for academic research projects that will contribute to understanding and ameliorating racial inequality in education, broadly conceived. 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 Racial Equity Research Grant must have an earned doctorate in an academic discipline or professional field, or appropriate experience in an education research-related profession. 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 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 colleges, universities, school districts, and research facilities, as well as other non-profit organizations with a 501(c)(3) determination from the IRS.

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 \$75,000 total and may not include indirect cost charges [per Spencer's policy](#).

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

PIs and Co-PIs may not submit more than one application for a given deadline in this program. Spencer is making an exception for this research program wherein PIs or Co-PIs can have two projects under review in

different programs. PIs or CO-PIs that currently have a proposal under review in a different program may submit to this program. However, the proposed project must be different than the one under review. Alternatively, a PI or CO-PI can choose to withdraw a proposal under review and resubmit it to this program.

How to Apply

The application process begins with an Intent to Apply form. Once submitted, you will automatically have access to the Full Proposal application in our online portal. Intent to Apply forms are due by 12:00pm Noon 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 are 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 as described in Step 1 below, then provide the 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 Racial Equity Special Research Grants program.

Your draft form can be saved and returned to so that you may continue 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 proposal is requested, such as the project title, estimated duration, the central research question(s), and a 200-word project summary.

Project Data – Within the online application, we ask you to check off the appropriate options with regard to your research study 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 have 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 automatically 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- 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.

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.

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 2500 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 2500-word limit.

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.

Project Timeline- A project timeline should be uploaded as a PDF file 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). 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 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 document, 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.

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 who 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 Racial Equity Special Research Grants program uses a peer review process for all eligible submissions. Each proposal will be reviewed by both external panel reviewers and internal staff. The review process for this program takes approximately 7 months from the full proposal 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 racial equity and education in the research, the importance of the topic to transforming inequality, 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 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, 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 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, 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 whether your idea for a research project falls within this program, feel free to email us at jjanicki@spencer.org for guidance. While we are not able to provide feedback on proposal drafts, we are happy to answer questions by email.

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 8 months after the full proposal deadline. The review process for this program takes approximately 7 months, and once notified of the funding decision, it can take an additional 1-2 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.
