Research Grants on Education: COVID-19 Related Special Grant Cycle

This special grant cycle is now closed. We continue to accept COVID-19-related proposals through our regular grant programs.

Program Statement

The COVID-19 Related Research Grants supports education research projects that will understand the rapid shifts and contribute to the improvement of education during this time of crisis with budgets up to $50,000 for projects ranging from one to three years. We are especially interested in supporting two primary categories of projects. First, we are interested in supporting rapid response grants that aim to understand and disrupt the reproduction and deepening of educational inequality caused by the COVID-19 crisis. Second, we also recognize that in times of great disruption and change, there may be opportunities to remake and imagine anew forms of equitable education. Thus, we are also interested in research projects that are working to reimagine educational opportunities in these times. While we are open to what these reimagined educational opportunities might be, please note that they must be research projects.

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 and their partners will identify the most compelling and needed areas of immediate research. For instance, scholars might focus on: K-12 Instructional challenges, responses, and innovations; racial and geographic disparities in the impacts of COVID and COVID related responses; supporting and engaging children and families; assessment challenges and opportunities; social-emotional learning and well-being; educator leadership and development; systems change and policy making.
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 non-dominant groups, including English language learners, immigrants, minoritized communities, Indigenous communities, students with disabilities, highly mobile and institutionalized youth (e.g., foster youth or those in youth prisons), and rural communities.

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 during this global health crisis. We seek to support scholarship that develops new foundational knowledge that may have a lasting impact on educational discourse and opportunity or may have a significant impact on practice and policy in these times. We value work that fosters creative and open-minded scholarship, engages in deep inquiry, and examines robust questions related to education and inequality in times of crisis as well as those that may persist beyond the current moment as a result of COVID-19 responses. We also value work that is engaging the possibilities that may be emerging in these times.

To this end, this program supports proposals from multiple disciplinary and methodological perspectives, both domestically and internationally, from scholars at various stages in their careers. We anticipate that proposals will span a wide range of topics and disciplines that innovatively investigate questions central to education in times of crisis. 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, and historical research, to name a few. 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.

Spencer will be accepting proposals on a rolling basis until June 8th. We will review proposals received during 3 review cycles and make a portion of our
allotted funding decisions according to each of those cycles. The cutoff dates for the 3 review cycles will be May 4th, May 18th, and June 8th.

**NOTE: We have received an overwhelming number of proposals for our first two cycles. As a result, we have revised our review timeline. We continue to read through these proposals and anticipate having decisions out by mid-June.

Eligibility and Restrictions

Eligibility

Proposals to this 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 COVID-19 Related Research Grant on Education 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
Restrictions

Proposed budgets for this program are limited to $50,000 total and may not include indirect cost charges per Spencer’s policy.

Projects proposed may not be longer than 3 years in duration.

PIs and Co-PIs may hold both a COVID-19 research grant and an additional research grant from the Spencer Foundation.

PIs and Co-PIs may not submit more than one application to this program.

How to Apply

The application process begins with a full proposal; there is no requirement to submit a letter of intent or intent to apply form.

Full Proposal Guidelines

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 Special COVID-19 Related Research Grant program. Your draft application can be saved and returned to so that you may continue work on it at a later time and can be found on your Draft Proposals list on your Workbench.

**COVID-19 Research 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.

**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) a statement of need for the work during the current health crisis; (b) a short summary of the relevant literature, the relationship of the proposed research to that literature, as well as the new knowledge or contribution to the improvement of education expected to result from the proposed research; and (c) a summary of the conceptual framework or theory guiding the project and
how the project utilizes or builds on this framework or 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 2000 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 2000-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 3 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.

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 a 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 when you would like it to be submitted.

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

Proposals received will be internally reviewed by a program officer and either the President or Senior Vice President of the foundation. In addition, we may also seek one external peer review for proposals. Please note that we are suspending providing feedback to all proposals for this program. We will rate the proposals internally using the following aspects:

**Significance of the Project:** Readers will evaluate the importance of the research in relation to the current crisis, 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:** Readers 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:** Readers 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:** Readers will evaluate the adequacy of the budget and timeline.

**Project Team:** Readers 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:** I would like to submit a proposal for this program, but I’m not sure I can do so before June 8th (the last cut off date). Will you be extending this call into the summer?

**A:** No, this is a limited-time call that will end after June 8th. That said, if your research design does not require rapid funding, you may consider submitting a proposal to the Small Research Grants program. (The Small Research Grants application opens May 1, 2020 and the next deadline for submissions is July 1, 2020.)

**Q:** Is it okay to submit the same proposal to this program and the Small Research Grants program?

**A:** No. This program is specifically meant to support the need for immediate funds to conduct research on the COVID-19 crisis and its effect on education. That would imply a different, more urgent research plan than is typical in our long-standing Small Research Grants Program.

**Q:** If chosen for funding, how soon would we receive the grant award letter?

**A:** We plan to have decisions made within 2 weeks of each of the cut off dates (May 4, May 18, and June 8) and will notify the PI via email as soon as the decision is made. We will then work quickly to provide your organization with official award letter (1-2 weeks).

**Q:** I have a proposal under review, can I apply to this program too?

**A:** Yes, for this program only, you may have two Spencer research grants concurrently.
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 3 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 and receive a grant through this program?

A: Yes, because this is a special COVID-19 related funding opportunity, we are allowing scholars to apply for and potentially receive this grant while having an active research grant from Spencer.

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 Jasmine Janicki 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.