Research Grants on Education: Small

Program Update: Strategic Grantmaking Refresh

The Spencer Foundation is undertaking a strategic refresh of our core research grant programs and decision-making processes. As part of this effort, **we will not open new competitions for this program between January and June 2027 and are not currently accepting new applications.**

During the refresh, we will reconsider our grantmaking priorities, program structures, and application and review processes. This may result in changes to existing programs or the creation of new funding opportunities.

We expect to announce our refreshed grantmaking approach and future application schedules in June 2027. Please see the Spencer Homepage for more information about the refresh.

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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.

Please see below for information on applying to the Small Research Grants on Education Program. For information on optional appendices, our review process, frequently asked questions, and other key details, please review the full Request for Proposals in our online portal: https://spencer.smartsimple.us/.

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.

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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.

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.

Deadlines

Applications Open
Now closed.

Online Application Portal

On our online application portal you'll find the full Request For Proposal and other applicant resources such as optional appendices, our review process, frequently asked questions, and writing guides. To review these resources and to apply, please visit https://spencer.smartsimple.us/.
