

**Lyle Spencer
Research
Awards to
Transform
Education**

**SPENCER
FOUNDATION**

Lyle Spencer Research Awards to Transform Education

The Lyle Spencer Research Awards Program supports intellectually ambitious research projects that aspire to transform education with budgets between \$525,000 and \$1 million and project durations of up to five years. We accept applications for this signature program once per year.

A clearly articulated commitment to lasting improvement distinguishes the Lyle Spencer Awards from our other research award programs. We hope to engage the research community in thinking big: to do work that is thoughtful, critical of prevailing assumptions, self-critical about the work and its limitations, and relevant to the aim of building knowledge for the “lasting improvement in education” that our founder Lyle Spencer challenged his foundation to promote.

Program Statement

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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, or method. 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. 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 also welcome projects that incorporate data from multiple and varied sources, span a sufficient length of time as to achieve a depth of understanding, and work closely with practitioners or community members over the life of the project. In addition, we expect proposals will be submitted by multidisciplinary and multigenerational teams who are positioned to contribute to the project as well as contribute to the teaching and learning of fellow team members.

Finally, we expect 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 Lyle Spencer Research Awards 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 Lyle Spencer Research Award 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

Lyle Spencer Research Award budgets should be between \$525,000 and \$1,000,000, including up to [15% indirect cost charges](#).

Projects proposed in this program 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. Simultaneous submissions to the Foundation from PIs and Co-PIs are discouraged due to this policy. (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.)

Deadlines

Applications Open

Applications are open

Letter of Intent Deadline

February 27, 2020 at 12:00pm CT

Full Proposal Deadline

TBD

How to Apply

The initial step in the Lyle Spencer Research Awards program is to submit a Letter of Intent (LOI) following the guidelines below. Letters of Intent are due by 12:00pm Central Time on the deadline date.

Those invited to continue in the application process will be emailed an invitation along with guidelines on how to submit their full proposal.

Letter of Intent Guidelines

Letters of Intent 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 LOI. 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 LOI 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 LOI application, go to your Workbench and click the Apply button for the Lyle Spencer Research Awards Program.

Your draft LOI application can be saved and returned to so that you may continue work on your application at a later time. Your draft application will be available on your Draft Proposals list on your Workbench.

Letter of Intent Application Elements

Within the online application, there are detailed guidelines for each section on the form. 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, 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, estimated duration, estimated budget total, the central research question(s), and a 200-word project summary.

Letter of Intent PDF – You are expected to upload a Letter of Intent in pdf format. Your Letter of Intent should convey to readers (1) a clear and compelling rationale that explains the importance of the research project, and (2) a concise and viable plan of action to carry out the research project. Because this program aims to discover the most significant research, the strongest letters tend to devote the majority of their efforts to the development of this first point.

1. We are interested in the significance of your proposed research. Please remember that we are looking for intellectually ambitious research oriented to improving the practice of education. As such, you should devote a sufficient amount of your letter to making a case for the importance of your proposed work by (a) articulating your major research questions or direction of inquiry and (b) explaining how your study will make a meaningful advance in understanding education, noting especially how it will advance the aim of improving educational practice. Please be sure to situate your research questions in the existing literature and clearly explain what new knowledge you expect to gain by answering these questions.
2. After you have attended to the significance of your project, you should describe a plan of action to carry out the research in a non-technical manner. You should (a) outline the methods you plan to use to answer your research questions, and when appropriate, clearly specify the sources of data you will draw on, the sample you will study, the data collection instruments you will employ, and the types of analyses you will conduct. (If your proposed work does not align well with this structure, we welcome a clear statement of theory and methods that fits properly with the kind of project you envision.) Additionally, you should (b) explicate a conceptual framework that links your research questions and research design. Research team bios should be added as an appendix

(see below) and should pinpoint how the research skills and technical capabilities of the project team align with the overall demands of the proposed work.

Your letter will be read by individuals with knowledge about issues of education and educational research, but they might not have specialized expertise in the topics or methods discussed in your submission. While you should not avoid complex ideas or the use of disciplinary terms, we encourage you to clearly define any technical or conceptual language as well as use language throughout the letter that is appropriate for an eclectic audience of trained researchers.

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 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). Please be explicit about prior experience that prepares each team member to contribute to realizing the ambition. 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. Note that this document will be reviewed along with the CV of the PI and any Co-PIs included on the application.

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 Letter of Intent and for internal evaluations of our grant programs.

Submit

Once you have completed all the required information within the application, you can click the Submit button at the bottom of the page. You can expect an email confirmation that your Letter of Intent has been received and will be reviewed.

Note: Institutional sign-off is not required at this stage in the proposal process.

Letter of Intent Review Process

The Lyle Spencer Research Awards program uses a peer review process for all eligible Letter of Intent (LOI) submissions. Each LOI will be reviewed by both external panel reviewers and internal staff. The LOI review process for this program takes 3-4 months from the 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 LOI:

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 clarity and viability of the research design and the capacity of the research team, taking into account that the LOI has an abbreviated research plan.

Those invited to submit a full proposal will be emailed an invitation along with guidelines on how to submit their full proposal. Invited full proposal submissions will be due in July 2020 and the review process will take approximately 9 months. Final funding decisions can be expected by April 2021.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: How is the Lyle Spencer Research Awards program different from Spencer's Research Grants on Education program?

A: The Lyle Spencer Research Awards and Research Grants on Education programs are all field-initiated, funding research in education, broadly conceived. The Lyle program, however, requires applicants to articulate how their research project is intended to contribute ultimately to improvements in practice. Lyle proposals are also evaluated for their potential to be transformative for the field. No such foci are required for the Research Grants on Education program. Additionally, Lyle Awards can be funded up to \$1 million, whereas the small and large grants in the Research Grants in Education program are capped at \$50,000 and \$500,000, respectively.

Q: Are there any research topics within education that are excluded from consideration in this program?

A: No research topics are ruled out categorically. It is essential, however, that the proposal articulate clearly how the research is intended to contribute ultimately to improvements in practice. In addition, given our focus on research, there are some types of projects that we typically do not consider for funding. These include 1) requests for time to write a book in which the bulk of

the research has been completed; 2) curriculum development projects in which conducting research is not the primary aim; and 3) evaluation projects in which the primary goal is to determine whether or not a given program achieved its desired outcomes, rather than to contribute to understanding broader theoretical or empirical questions, such as the mechanisms and conditions that may have enabled (or hindered) the program's success.

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

A: Yes, we fund 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 approaches to research 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 transnational projects?

A: No, we do not have a preference.

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

A: Projects range in duration from one to five years. If you believe your project may require more time, please email lyles@spencer.org to discuss any possible exceptions.

Q: Is it possible to combine a Lyle Spencer Research Award with funding from other sources to support a larger total effort?

A: Circumstances of this type are handled on a case-by-case basis. Anyone who anticipates such a possibility should alert us to it as early as possible, either at the LOI stage or through direct communication at lyles@spencer.org.

Q: Can more than one Letter of Intent be submitted from my organization at a time?

A: Yes, as long as the letters are for different projects and the research teams are different, it is fine for multiple letters to come from one organization.

Q: If I (the PI or Co-PI) have a current grant through Spencer, can I submit a Letter of Intent 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 Letter of Intent and reapply in a later cycle?

A: Spencer does not have a policy against accepting uninvited revised LOIs. However, many factors go into the final decision on each submission. 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 your being invited to submit a full proposal. 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 lyles@spencer.org for guidance. While we are not able to provide feedback on Letter of Intent drafts, we are happy to answer questions by email.

Recent Awardees

The Lyle Spencer Research Awards program has been active since 2015 and in that time we have funded the 36 projects listed below.

2015

“Leveraging Lotteries for Value-Added: Bias Reduction vs. Efficiency”

Joshua D. Angrist, Parag A. Pathak, Christopher R. Walters, and Peter D. Hull
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

“School Choice in Indiana: An Examination of Impacts and the Conditions Under Which Choice is Effective”

Mark Berends and R. Joseph Waddington
University of Notre Dame

“The New ‘One Best System?’: Urban Governance and Educational Practice in the Portfolio Management Model”

Katrina Bulkley, Julie Ann Marsh, Douglas N. Harris, and Katharine O. Strunk
Montclair State University

“Using Multiple Lenses to Investigate the Development of Content Knowledge and Teaching Practices in Relationship to Learning Opportunities”

Elizabeth A. Davis and Annemarie Palincsar

University of Michigan

“Broadening Participation in a Computational Future: Casting a Wide Net”

Michael Horn, Kai Orton, and Uri Wilensky

Northwestern University

“The Education Governance & Accountability Project”

Stephane Lavertu, Vladimir Kogan, and Zachary Peskowitz

The Ohio State University

**“Supports for Rich and Explicit Language and Vocabulary Instruction in
Preschool Classrooms Serving Children from Disadvantaged Backgrounds”**

Beth M. Phillips and Carla Wood

Florida State University Research Foundation, Inc.

**“A Comparative Study of School Systems: Infrastructure, Practice, and
instructional improvement”**

James Spillane and Donald J. Peurach

Northwestern University

**“Parenting Matters? Examining the Value and Optimal Approaches of
Family Engagement in Educating Students of Color”**

Ming-Te Wang and James P. Huguley

University of Pittsburgh

**“The Development of Ambitious Instruction in Elementary Mathematics
and English Language Arts”**

Peter A. Youngs, Corey J. Drake, Dorothea Anagnostopoulos, and Spyros
Konstantopoulos

University of Virginia

2016

**“Distinguishing between Low English Proficiency and Learning
Disabilities”**

Jamal Abedi and Robert J. Bayley

University of California, Davis

“The Children Cannot Wait: Generating Actionable Evidence to Improve

the Practice of Education in Conflict-Affected Contexts”

J. Lawrence Aber and Jeannie Annan
New York University

“Teachers in the Movement: Pedagogy, Activism, and Freedom”

Derrick P. Alridge
University of Virginia

“Youth, Peace, and Violence in Nairobi and Karachi: Testing Educational Assumptions”

Dana Susan Burde, Elisabeth King, Daphna Harel, and Jennifer Hill
New York University

“Improvement of Mathematics Teaching At-Scale”

Richard J. Correnti and Mary Kay Stein
University of Pittsburgh

“English Learner Achievement in Elementary School: Classroom Composition and Opportunity to Learn”

Peggy Estrada
University of California, Santa Cruz

“How Does Eliminating Tenure and Collective Bargaining Affect Teacher Labor Markets and Student Achievement?”

Matthew A. Kraft
Brown University

“Supporting Parents: Clarifying the barriers to parental involvement in early childhood through experimental testing within a highly effective parent text messaging program”

Susanna Loeb
Brown University

“Indigenous-Language Immersion and Native American Student Achievement”

Teresa L. McCarty, Tiffany S. Lee, Sheilah E. Nicholas, and Michael H. Seltzer
University of California, Los Angeles

“Improving Instruction through Data Use on Teaching Quality”

Lauren Sartain, Dan A. Black, and Jennie Y. Jiang
The University of Chicago

“Making the Invisible Visible: Systematically Examining Classroom Enactments of Bias with MET Data”

Carola Suarez-Orozco
University of California, Los Angeles

2017

“Race-based Biological Stress, Ethnic-Racial Identity, and Educational Outcomes: New Approaches to Studying Academic Achievement Gaps”

Emma Kristine Adam, Mesmin Destin, and Adriana J. Umana-Taylor
Northwestern University

“Knowledge and Nudges: Increasing Educational Achievement Among Disabled Youth”

Manasi Abhay Deshpande and Rebecca Dizon-Ross
National Bureau of Economic Research

“Understanding Thinking and Learning Among Students with Significant Disabilities”

Karen A. Erickson and George Noblit
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

“Up, up and away: Malleable features of pre-k and primary classrooms and their contributions to sustained benefits for vulnerable children”

Anna D. Johnson, Diane M. Horm, and Deborah Phillips
Georgetown University

“The Promise and Practice of Prison Higher Education”

Amy E. Lerman
University of California, Berkeley

“Design Meets the Real World”

Jal Mehta
Harvard University

“Towards An Inclusive Education for Refugees: A Comparative

Longitudinal Study”

Maha Shuayb, Nina Maadad, and Ali Zafer Sagioglu
Centre for Lebanese Studies

“The Listening Project: Addressing the Crisis of Connection in Education via Semi-Structured Interview Training of Teachers and Students”

Niobe Way, Alisha Nadia Ali, David E. Kirkland, Hirokazu Yoshikawa, and Joseph Nelson
New York University

2018

“Understanding marginalized youth’s secondary education experiences: A mixed-methods study of Colombia, India, and Malawi”

Amita Chudgar, Nancy Kendall, and Thomas Luschei
Michigan State University

“Teacher Turnover and School Improvement: Examining the Mechanisms Through Which Instability Disrupts Schools, and How to Mitigate It”

Jennifer Jellison Holme and Huriya Jabbar
The University of Texas at Austin

“Project TRANSLATE”

Robert Jimenez, Amanda P. Goodwin, Mark Barba Pacheco, Mikel Walker Cole, Samuel S. David, Emily Phillips Galloway, and Kelly Puzio
Vanderbilt University

“Prototyping and Evaluating a Living Research Synthesis Infrastructure”

Pamela A. Moss and Carl Lagoze
University of Michigan

“Matching in Multilevel Contexts”

Lindsay Page and Luke J. Keele
University of Pittsburgh

“Discriminating Language: Race, Gender, Letters of Recommendation and Outcomes in Academic Hiring”

Kimberlee A. Shauman, Catherine R. Albiston, and Victoria C. Plaut
University of California, Davis

“Exploring the Development of Teaching Skills”

James H. Wyckoff, Courtney Bell, and Eric S. Taylor
University of Virginia
