William T. Grant FOUNDATION

Institutional Challenge Grant
Application Guidelines

Updated April 2021

Application Opens:
May 18, 2021

Application Deadline:
September 14, 2021, 3PM ET

Finalist Interviews:
February 8, 2022

Contents

Program Overview

The Institutional Challenge Grant encourages university-based research institutes, schools, and centers to build sustained research-practice partnerships with public agencies or nonprofit organizations in order to reduce inequality in youth outcomes.

To do so, research institutions will need to shift their policies and practices to value collaborative research. They will also need to build the capacity of researchers to produce relevant work and the capacity of agency and nonprofit partners to use research.

Applications are welcome from partnerships in youth-serving areas such as education, justice, child welfare, mental health, immigration, and workforce development. We especially encourage proposals from teams with African American, Latinx, Native American, and Asian American members in leadership roles. The partnership leadership team includes the principal investigator from the research institution and the lead from the public agency or nonprofit organization.

PARTNERSHIP

Build a sustained institutional partnership with a public agency or nonprofit organization

RESEARCH

Pursue a joint research agenda to reduce inequality in youth outcomes

INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

Create institutional change to value research-practice partnerships and their work

CAPACITY

Develop both partners' capacity to collaborate, and to produce and use high-quality relevant research

Background

Policymakers and practitioners need rigorous research evidence that is relevant to their work. But too often the evidence produced by research institutions is shaped by the traditional values of the academy—the work is rigorous, but it speaks most clearly to the research community. Compounded by limited resources and capacity, this misalignment limits the usefulness, use, and impact of research in policy and practice.

Research-practice partnerships—long-term, mutually beneficial collaborations that promote the production and use of rigorous and relevant research evidence—are a promising strategy for better aligning these communities in their efforts to reduce inequality. Researchers who partner with practitioners or policymakers are better equipped to understand local contexts, address pressing questions, and produce informative and actionable findings. They also gain access to programmatic and/or policy insights and data that can facilitate rigorous and groundbreaking research to make headway on issues relevant to youth. Policymakers and practitioners, meanwhile, can more easily access, interpret, and use research evidence when they collaborate with researchers. They can also help define and shape research agendas. Partnerships, then, equip public agencies and nonprofit organizations with new knowledge and tools to better serve youth.

Building sustained research-practice partnerships requires significant investments. It takes time to develop the trusted relationships that form the foundation of the partnership. Establishing the infrastructure to grow and sustain a partnership requires considerable resources. And although we suspect that research-practice partnerships are most robust when they are built at the institutional level, research produced by partnerships is not always valued by institutions. Research institutions' policies and practices can inadvertently create disincentives to participating in research-practice partnerships. In turn, this can make it difficult to recruit experienced researchers to participate in research-practice partnerships or to sustain their involvement beyond a single project.

The Institutional Challenge Grant is a direct response to these obstacles. The program challenges research institutions to remove barriers to partnership success. This includes the careful scrutiny and redesign of internal policies, practices, or incentives that limit the longevity of partnerships or discourage exceptional researchers from taking part. In turn, when partnerships are more productive, respected, and commonplace, research, policy, and practice communities will be better aligned to reduce inequality in youth outcomes.

Useful Links: Research-Practice Partnerships

→ Research-Practice Partnerships Website

→ Assessing Research-Practice Partnerships: Five Dimensions of Effectiveness

→ Five Ways RPPs Can Fail and How to Avoid Them: Applying Conceptual Frameworks to Improve RPPs

Goals

The Institutional Challenge Grant asks grantees to pursue four goals:

1

Build a sustained institutional partnership with a public agency or nonprofit organization.

The research-practice partnership will have defined objectives, roles, and agreements, and will be built for the long term. In this way, the partnership will be mutually beneficial, enabling the partners to develop and pursue a joint research agenda that is relevant to the public agency or nonprofit organization's work over an extended period of time.

2

Pursue a joint research agenda to reduce inequality in youth outcomes.

The partnership's research will aim to build, test, or increase understanding of programs, policies, or practices to reduce inequality in the academic, social, behavioral, or economic outcomes of young people ages 5-25 in the United States. Specifically, the research agenda will seek to inform responses to inequality on the basis of race, ethnicity, economic standing, language minority status, or immigrant origins.

3

Create institutional change to value research-practice partnerships within research institutions.

The research institution will design a feasible strategy for institutional change that addresses the structural, motivational, and financial barriers that inhibit research-practice partnerships. By establishing structural supports and incentives that encourage skilled, mid-career researchers to conduct joint work with policymakers and practitioners, the institution will develop an environment for partnerships to thrive.

4

Develop the capacity of both partners to collaborate on producing and using research evidence.

Grantees on the research side will have new experiences that foster deeper understandings of a given policy or practice context and the skills required to serve as effective partners. At the same time, the public agency or nonprofit partner will also bolster their capacity to understand, conduct, and use research through activities such as technical assistance, infrastructure improvements, or staff training.

2018

Protecting Vulnerable Families and Children in the Crosshairs of the Opioid Epidemic: A Research-Practice Partnership

Rachel Dunifon, Cornell University, and Anna Steinkraus, Cornell Cooperative Extension, Tompkins County

2019:

Mind the Gap: Partnering to Narrow Denver's Achievement Gaps by Retaining Top Teachers

Mimi Engel, School of Education, University of Colorado, Boulder; Sarah Almy, Denver Public Schools

Raising Academic Achievement in Under-Performing Schools through Improved Management: A Research-Practice Partnership

Gustavo Bobonis, Dept. of Economics, University of Toronto; Maria Christian, Puerto Rico Dept. of Education

2020:

The Impact of Upstream Prevention of Homelessness on Youth Educational and Developmental Outcomes

Gautam Yadama, School of Social Work, Boston College; Michael Durkin, United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley

The Northwestern-Evanston Education Research Alliance: Designing for Equity and Excellence in Education

David Figlio, Simone Ispa-Landa, Mesmin Destin, and Megan Bang, School of Education and Social Policy, Northwestern University; Eric Witherspoon, Superintendent, Evanston Township High School District 202; Andalib Kheighati, Assistant Superintendent of Schools, Evanston/Skokie District 65

Understanding and Intervening in Inequities in Chronic Absenteeism and its Consequences Among High School Students

Emily Ozer, School of Public Health, University of California, Berkeley; Susan Stone, Dept. of Social Welfare, University of California, Berkeley; Norma Ming, San Francisco Unified School District

2021:

Enhancing Nursing Capacity to Understand and Address the Needs of Native American Youth on the Fort Belknap Reservation

Teresa Brockie, Johns Hopkins University School of Nursing; Karen Yazzie, Fort Belknap Indian Community, Fort Belknap Tribal Health Dept.

Youth and Undergraduate Transformation to Harness Community Change (YOUTH-C2)

Rebecca London, University of California, Santa Cruz, Dept. of Sociology; Keisha Browder, United Way of Santa Cruz County

Building a More Holistic and Inclusive Workforce Development System for Boston's Youth

Alicia Modestino, Northeastern University, School of Public Policy and Urban Affairs; Rashad Cope, Department of Youth Engagement and Employment, City of Boston

Descriptions of each partnership's proposed work can be found on the Foundation's website

The Award

The award will provide $650,000 over three years. This includes:

- Up to $50,000 for up to 9 months of joint planning activities (e.g., refining protocols for partnering, selecting fellows, finalizing partnership and data sharing agreements, etc.).
- Fellowship support for the equivalent of one full-time or two half-time mid-career fellows per year for two years. In addition, universities are required to commit to a 1-for-2 match on the mid-career fellows. The grant pays for two full-time equivalent fellows, and universities are required to fund one additional full-time equivalent fellow.
- Up to three years of support for the partnership to conduct and use research to reduce inequality in youth outcomes.
- Resources to advance the proposed institutional shifts and capacities of both partners.
- Indirect cost allowance of up to 15 percent of total direct costs.

Current grantees have the opportunity to apply for a funded two-year continuation grant in order to solidify the partnership and institutional changes. At the end of the five years, we expect the following results:

- The research institution has established a set of strategies that facilitate sustained research collaborations with public agencies or private nonprofit organizations.
- The public agency or private nonprofit organization has increased its capacity to use research evidence.
- Participating researchers have improved partnership skills.
- The research generated has been used in decision making and is likely to lead to improved outcomes for youth.

Our intention when we launched the Institutional Challenge Grant program was to make one award per year. Since 2018, the generosity of the Spencer Foundation, the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, and the American Institutes for Research have allowed us to make multiple awards per year. We intend to award at *least one* grant per year.

Eligibility

Eligible research institutions

The award will be made to an organization, not to an individual. Organizations can include university-based research institutes, schools, or centers. Grants are limited without exception to tax-exempt organizations. *Institutions that sit outside of the academy, such as research organizations and think tanks, are not eligible.*

Eligible principal investigators

Eligible principal investigators are leaders at eligible research institutions. They have visibility, influence on institutional policies and practices, and access to the resources needed to optimize and implement the award. They also possess the skills needed to cultivate trusting relationships with leaders from the partner public agency or nonprofit organization and to ensure the conduct of high-quality research.

Eligible public agencies or nonprofit organizations

Eligible public agencies include state or local agencies and their departments and divisions. Nonprofit, tax-exempt organizations are eligible if they are open to the general public and provide or coordinate services for youth ages 5 to 25 in the United States. Eligible agencies and organizations engage in work relevant to youth in the areas of education, justice, child welfare, mental health, immigration, or workforce development and have the resources needed to implement and optimize the award.

Eligible leaders from the public agency or nonprofit organization

Eligible leaders from the public agency or nonprofit organization have the authority and influence required to successfully institutionalize the partnership and the use of research evidence in the agency or organization's work.

Eligible partnerships

We are most interested in supporting existing research-practice partnerships that will use the grant to continue learning and growing. While the competition is open to partnerships at different stages of maturity, the grant is intended to add significant value to what already exists.

Eligible fellows

All fellows must be mid-career. For researchers, we define mid-career as having received the terminal degree within 8 to 20 years of the date that the application is submitted. (This should be calculated by adding 8 and 20 years to the date the doctoral degree was conferred. For medicine, an institution should use the date from the completion of the first residency.) The research fellow does not need to be an employee of the research institution and can be recruited from another institution. Applicants may appoint one mid-career fellow from the public agency or nonprofit organization. (All other fellows must be researchers). This should be a mid-career professional at the agency or organization who will be called on to facilitate the use of research. A mid-career professional has 8 to 20 years of cumulative experience in his/her current role.

Application Materials

The Foundation accepts applications only through our online application system, which is accessible through our website at wtgrantfoundation.org. Applications are due by 3:00 pm ET on September 14, 2021.

We recommend starting the application as early as possible to allow sufficient time to develop a strong proposal, secure the necessary agreements and letters of support, and resolve any technical issues that may arise.

Applications must include the following:

Budget and Budget Justification

Provide budget information for three years using the budget grid in the online application. Also complete the Foundation's budget justification form, which can be downloaded from the online application. The budget justification should map tightly to the activities and staffing described in the narrative. The total budget should be $650,000. This total includes the planning period costs and an indirect cost allowance of up to 15 percent of all direct costs.

Funds for the planning period may not exceed $50,000. At least half of the planning budget should be allocated to the public agency or nonprofit organization(s).

The remainder of funds may be used to support the fellows, capacity building activities, and research-related work. (The Foundation pays expenses for the research and practice or policy leaders of the partnership to participate in Foundation-sponsored meetings, such as grantee convenings on improving the use of research evidence and reducing inequality. Do not include funds for those expenses in the budget.)

If funds to the public agency or nonprofit organization exceed $50,000, complete a separate subcontract budget and budget justification. (The forms can be downloaded from the online application.) Subcontract funds of $50,000 or less do not require separate forms, but must be explained in detail in the primary budget justification.

Short CV/Resume of PI (5 page maximum)

Include education; position history; recent and relevant publications; grants, roles, and products related to work with policymakers and practitioners; and leadership roles within the institution.

Short CV/Resume for lead from the public agency or nonprofit organization (5 page maximum)

Include education, position history, key roles and responsibilities at the current agency or organization, and positions or products related to work with researchers.

Short CV of any identified Fellows (optional; 5 page maximum each)

Include education; position history; recent and relevant publications; and grants, roles, and products related to work with policymakers or practitioners (for research fellows) or with researchers (for policy or practice fellows).

IRS Tax-Exempt Status Determination Letter (for the applying research institution)

A copy of your institution's IRS tax-exempt status determination letter is required as part of your application.

Structured Abstract (maximum of 4 pages and formatted as follows: 12-point font, single-spaced text with a line space between each paragraph, and 1-inch margins on all sides)

Abstracts are a critical part of the application. Foundation staff use them to screen applications for further review. In addition, Selection Committee members review the abstracts of all finalists, but do not necessarily read the full applications.

Include sections providing sufficient detail about each of the following areas of the application: 1) the partnership, 2) joint research agenda and research plans, 3) shifts in organizational practices to elevate the status of partnership work, and 4) criteria for selecting mid-career fellows and activities to build fellows' and public agency or nonprofit organization's capacity.

Narrative (maximum of 25 pages and formatted as follows: 12-point Times New Roman font, single-spaced text with a line space between each paragraph, numbered pages, and 1-inch margins on all sides)

Describe the planning period, institutional partnership, joint research agenda and research plan, capacity building activities, and changes in institutional policies and practices. Tables, references, and appendices are not included in the 25-page limit. Below are guidelines for each section of the narrative:

- *Planning Period:*

  The Institutional Challenge Grant includes up to $50,000 to support a planning period of up to nine months during the first year. The planning period activities are intended to advance the partnership and its work.

  Describe the length, objectives, and activities proposed for the planning period. This includes details about the process for refining protocols for partnering, readying the organizations for the joint work, and advancing the research agenda and selection of fellows. Also describe the value of these planning activities for the rest of the grant.

- *Institutional Partnership:*

  One of the goals of this grant is to establish the supports and capacities necessary to facilitate a long-term partnership. Toward this end, include a rationale for the selection and inclusion of the public agency or nonprofit organization, as well as the nature of their current relationship with the research institution. We encourage partners that are situated in close geographic proximity, with a demonstrated commitment to the local/regional setting.

  Joint work is challenging, time intensive, and requires intention and formal structure (Coburn, Penuel, & Geil, 2013; Dugery & Knowles, 2003; Trotter, Laurila, Alberts, & Huenneke, 2014). The proposal needs to describe the collaboration and relationship-building process and articulate the plan for working together, including the type and frequency of activities that will cultivate trust and deepen relationships, strategies for communicating, and processes for using the research. A strong application makes it evident that the public agency or nonprofit organization is significantly invested in and has co-defined the proposed work, and that they will interact regularly with the university fellows, provide input on the interpretation of the findings, and have compelling plans for using the research.

The plan for joint work needs to demonstrate mastery of the literature on the challenges and strategies of collaborative work to promote the use of research evidence (Oliver, Innvar, Lorenc, Woodman, & Thomas, 2014; DuMont, 2015; Hunter, 2017; Tseng, 2017). Therefore, in your narrative, provide a strong justification for how the proposed plan will offset differences in institutional cultures and reward systems, ensure equal voice in the agenda setting, and overcome operational barriers for both the university and the nonprofit or public agency. Successful applications discuss potential challenges to research practice partnerships and how the current partnership is prepared to address those challenges proactively. Prior work on the use of research evidence offers helpful suggestions for initiating and advancing meaningful partnerships and establishing long-term collaborations (Coburn, Penuel, & Geil, 2013; Henrick, Cobb, Penuel, Jackson, & Clark, 2017; Palinkas, Short, & Wong, 2015). Further, there should be a theory of action and clear articulation of how the evidence produced by the partnership will be used (Tseng, 2017).

To the extent possible, include memoranda of understanding and/or other documents that articulate the partnership goals, roles, governance, principles for working together, and timelines. It may also be appropriate to reference data sharing agreements. These documents may be refined during the planning period, but we anticipate that successful applicants will have worked out the initial agreements before submitting the proposal.

Well-established partnerships with strong institutional support will need to make a convincing case that the award will add value to the existing work. Newer partnerships, meanwhile, will need to show promising initial evidence that the partners have worked together successfully in the past and have the potential to sustain a long-term collaboration.

Useful Links: Improving the Use of Research Evidence

→ The Next Big Leap for Research-Practice Partnerships: Building and Testing Theories to Improve Research Use

→ How School and District Leaders Access, Perceive, and Use Research

→ Research-Practice-Policy Partnerships for Implementation of Evidence-based Practices in Child Welfare and Mental Health

→ What is the Conceptual Use of Research, and Why is it Important?

- *Joint Research Agenda to Reduce Youth Inequality*

  The partnership must conduct research to build, test, or increase understanding of programs, policies, or practices to reduce inequality in the outcomes of young people ages 5-25 in the United States. The research questions must be relevant to the local organization, while also informing theory and extending prior and concurrent research. The proposed research agenda must:

  — Identify a specific inequality in youth outcomes and show that the outcomes are currently unequal. We are especially interested in supporting research to reduce inequality in academic, social, behavioral, health, or economic outcomes.

  — Clearly identify the basis on which these outcomes are unequal and articulate its importance. We are especially interested in research to reduce inequality on the basis of race, ethnicity, economic standing, language minority status, or immigrant origin status. Proposals for research on reducing inequality on a basis not listed here, or on ways in which one basis of inequality intersects with another, must make a compelling case that this research will improve youth outcomes.

  — Articulate how findings from your research will help build, test, or increase understanding of a specific program, policy, or practice to reduce the inequality that you have identified.

  — Make a compelling case that the inequality exists, why the inequality exists, and how the study's findings will be crucial to informing a policy, program, or practice to reduce it.

  The proposal needs to articulate the specific hypotheses and/or research questions to be addressed and describe the methods. In the description of research methods, attend to the sample/case definition and selection procedures; the research design; key constructs, measures and data sources; and procedures for data collection. Include the data analysis plan for addressing the hypotheses and/or research questions. Please review the selection criteria (p. 18) for the research agenda to help anticipate the level of detail expected.

Our Interest in Reducing Inequality

The Foundation supports research from a range of disciplines and using a variety of methods. We welcome descriptive studies that clarify mechanisms for reducing inequality or elucidate how or why a specific program, policy, or practice operates to reduce inequality. We also welcome intervention studies that examine attempts to reduce inequality. In addition, we seek studies that improve the measurement of inequality in ways that can enhance the work of researchers, practitioners, or policymakers. The common thread across all of this work is an explicit focus on reducing inequality—one that goes beyond describing the causes or consequences of unequal outcomes and, instead, aims to build, test, or understand policy, program, or practice responses.

- *Changing Institutional Policies and Practices*

  A unique and important requirement of this grant competition is institutional change in research institutions. Research institutions' policies and practices too often limit participation in research-practice partnerships and obstruct career advancement for those who engage in them. This is not necessarily intentional, nor is it incidental. Still, internal competition for resources and long-standing reward structures often create disincentives to participating in research-practice partnerships. Reward structures for hiring, tenure, and promotion, for example, often value publishing in academic outlets, publishing often, and publishing on a narrow range of topics. These requirements may be out of alignment with those of partnerships, where researchers must dedicate considerable time to develop trusting relationships, produce research that meets the local public agency or nonprofit organization's needs, and share the research in ways that meet their needs.

  Applicants must carefully consider the alignment of their research institution's policies and practices with the nature and demands of the partnership and research agenda. For example, a university center might recognize that the contributions of researchers involved in partnerships need to be evaluated differently than those who conduct investigations to primarily influence the research community. This might result in greater flexibility or new criteria for judging the performance of researchers. Enacting these changes might involve including policymakers or practitioners in promotion and award committees, extending the promotion review timeline, developing alternative metrics to evaluate faculty contributions, and increasing recognition of investigators involved in partnerships during promotion decisions (Institute of Medicine, 2005; American Sociological Association, 2016).

The narrative must provide a compelling plan to offer incentives, introduce practices, or alter policies to encourage strong researchers to conduct joint work with public agencies or nonprofit organizations. Initial strategies might include course releases, reductions in service obligations, seed money to support partnership work, forums that showcase the work, distinguished appointments, and training to help researchers become more effective partners. More lasting strategies also are needed. Tseng and Gamoran (2017) discuss ways universities might restructure how they evaluate the contributions of faculty who engage in policy or practice relevant research. The grants funded thus far also offer promising strategies. Several grantees are building a supportive infrastructure that facilitates partnering and reduces barriers to conducting research in partnership. Others are trying to shift the image of a successful scholar, to engage a broader array of accomplished scholars, and to elevate the status of scholarship conducted in partnership. Still others are striving to establish compelling incentives to reward research-practice partnership work, including revisiting how contributions from partnership research are judged in career advancement decisions.

We encourage applicants to continue to engage deeply with the challenge of how institutions can value the work of research-practice partnerships and those engaged in partnering. Applicants should propose plans that are both bold and feasible. The plan must also convince reviewers of the institution's commitment to continue these significant efforts beyond the award period.

- *Developing the Capacity of the Partners to Collaborate and Use Research*

The mid-career fellows will be instrumental carrying out the research agenda. Researchers at this career stage have established skills and expertise, influence, and job security. They also have ample time left in their careers to sustain long-term relationships. A mid-career professional from the public agency or nonprofit organization may also serve as a fellow to develop the capacity to be a critical consumer and user of research. The learning objectives, primary responsibilities, and rationale for all fellows should be clearly delineated.

In this section, provide the specific methods the partners will use to recruit fellows and the criteria by which fellows will be selected. If the applicant has already identified potential fellows, the application will describe how their skills and expertise match the activities in the project. For selecting new mid-career fellows, the criteria for selecting fellows must be clear, rigorous, and well-suited for the research-practice partnership and its research projects. We want to know how applicants will ensure that fellows' expertise and scholarship are relevant to the proposed research, and how applicants will ensure that fellows have the requisite skills to engage in a successful partnership.

Applications need to include a plan for how the research institution will support the research fellows in gaining a deep understanding of the policymakers' and practitioners' needs and systems. All fellows must commit to a minimum of half-time status for at least a six-month period. The arrangement should provide ample opportunity to establish meaningful relationships between the fellow and the public agency or nonprofit organization, and to conduct the research and support the use of the findings. Also include plans for orienting and training the fellows. Well-designed plans will reflect consideration of the burdens and benefits for both partners. Be sure to describe the amount of time allotted and specify whether research fellows will be embedded in the practitioner organization (Frisch, 2016; Petersilia, 2008) or maintain separate working spaces (Coburn, Penuel, Geil, 2013).

Criteria For Selecting Mid-Career Fellows

For established models of selection criteria for mid-career fellows, you may find candidate eligibility information for high-profile mid-career development awards such as the NSF Mid-Career Advancement Award and the NIH K01 Award useful.

In addition, the research institution must invest in and develop the capacity of the public agency or nonprofit organization to use research evidence, and if applicable, the capacity of the policy or practice fellow to use research. Specify how the grant dollars will be used to advance the non-profit's or public agency's access to, interpretation of, and use of research. Describe specific strategies, mechanisms, and conditions that may increase routine and beneficial uses of research in deliberations and decisions relevant to youth. Strong applications include strategies aligned with existing literature on the organizational conditions that facilitate the use of research evidence. For example, funds may be used to support a research staff person, data infrastructure, routine access to research expertise on agency priorities, or staff development to improve use of research (Frisch, 2016).

Partnership Agreement

This document articulates the partnership goals, key roles, governance, principles guiding joint work, and timelines, and must be signed by both the principal investigator at the research institution and the partnership leader at the public agency or nonprofit organization. Resources on building partnerships and samples of memorandums of understanding and working agreements can be found on the Foundation's research-practice partnerships website: rpp.wtgrantfoundation.org.

Endorsement of the Application from the Research Institution

This letter must come from the appropriate institutional office (e.g., university dean, provost, vice chancellor for research) and demonstrate support for the PI, partnership, research project(s), and changes in institutional policies and practices. The letter must also confirm the institution's commitment to provide a match of one full-time equivalent fellow for one year and the presence of sufficient resources to carry out the proposed work.

Endorsement of the Application from the Public Agency or Nonprofit Organization

This letter must come from the appropriate institutional office (e.g., agency leader, director, or executive) and demonstrate support for the leader of the partnership within the agency or organization. The letter must also confirm that there are sufficient resources within the organization to carry out the proposed work. This attachment should be uploaded by the PI.

Selection Criteria

Applications should meet the selection criteria detailed below:

Planning Period

- Activities for the planning period will strengthen the partnership.
- Activities advance the research agenda, selection of fellows, and capacity building plans.
- The public agency or nonprofit organization will receive at least half of the dollars available for planning.

Institutional Partnership

- The rationale for partnering provides compelling evidence that the research institution and the public agency or nonprofit organization can build a sustained partnership that will work together effectively.
- The plan for partnering demonstrates mastery of the literature on the challenges and strategies for collaborative work to promote the use of research evidence.
- Activities for building the partnerships will cultivate trust and deepen relationships.
- There is evidence that the public agency or nonprofit organization is invested in the partnership, will interact regularly with the fellows, and has strong plans for using the research.
- The partnership is likely to be sustained after the award ends.

Joint Research Agenda to Reduce Inequality in Youth Outcomes

- The long-term research agenda (including one or more research projects) aligns with the Foundation's focus on build, test, and increase understanding of a program, policy, or practice to reduce inequality in the academic, social, behavioral, or economic outcomes of young people on the basis of race, ethnicity, language minority status, immigrant origins, or another compelling dimension.

- The research questions and findings are likely to significantly advance the public agency or nonprofit organization's efforts to reduce inequality in youth outcomes.
- The proposal reflects a mastery of relevant theory and empirical findings, and clearly states the theoretical and empirical contributions the study will make to the existing research base.
- The research plan reflects rigorous methods that are appropriate for the proposal's goals.
- Plans for case selection, sampling, and measurement clearly state why they are well-suited to address the research questions or hypotheses. For example, samples are appropriate in size and composition to answer the study's questions. Qualitative case selection—whether critical, comparative, or otherwise—is also be appropriate to answer the proposed questions.
- The quantitative and/or qualitative analysis plan demonstrates awareness of the strengths and limits of the specific analytic techniques and how they will be applied in the current case.
- The methods, time frame, staffing plan, and other resources are realistic.
- Plans to interpret and use the research findings in policy or practice decisions are convincing, feasible, and aligned with the literature on improving the use of research evidence.
- Plans for broader dissemination are likely to amplify study findings and their use.

Changing Institutional Policies and Practices

- The application provides a thoughtful discussion of potential obstacles that limit researchers' participation in research-practice partnerships and offers a plan for overcoming those obstacles.
- Assurances are compelling that the research institution will provide the necessary funding, alter policies, and/or enact new practices to attract, support, and reward strong investigators to conduct partnership research.
- The plan for institutional change is feasible given the resources and time frame.
- The application demonstrates a commitment to sustain the institutional changes beyond the conclusion of the award.

Developing the Capacity of the Mid-Career Fellows and Partners

- The application includes written assurances that the research institution will provide support for the equivalent of one full-time mid-career fellow for one year.
- All fellows commit a minimum of half-time status for at least a six-month period.
- The criteria for selecting fellows ensure that the fellows possess the relevant expertise to carry out the proposed work and can effectively communicate what is learned to the broader research community and to change makers in other state or local settings.
- The capacity-building plan for the research fellows significantly extends the fellows' skills as effective partners to policymakers and practitioners.
- Capacity-building activities for the public agency or nonprofit organization leverage the empirical literature on strategies for mobilizing research for use in practice or policy.
- The capacity-building plan for the public agency or nonprofit organization significantly extends the organization's ability to access, conduct, and integrate high-quality research evidence into their work.

Application Review Process

Review occurs in the following stages: Staff screen the 4-page abstracts, brief CVs, and, if warranted, full applications to determine whether they fit with the primary objectives of the award and potentially meet other Selection Criteria. If a proposal is declined at this stage in the process, feedback about the application is limited.

Next, the Institutional Challenge Grant Selection Committee reviews the remaining applications. Each application receives detailed reviews by at least two Committee members, and these reviews are shared with applicants. The Committee then chooses finalists, and the PI and leader from the public agency or private nonprofit organization are invited to submit a written response and to attend an interview in New York City with the selection committee. The interview for the 2021-2022 competition will be held on February 8, 2022; the Foundation will cover airfare, meals, and hotel associated with the trip. During the interview, finalists have the opportunity to present their team and respond to Committee members' reviews. Following the interviews, the Selection Committee chooses at least one Institutional Challenge Grant recipient. The application is presented for approval by the Board of Trustees at its March meeting.

Post-Award Review

A program report will be required from the principal investigator 30 days prior to the end of the planning period. This report should describe the progress of the planning period, announce identified fellows, update the partnership agreement(s) (if necessary), and confirm that the planning period funds were disbursed equally between the research institution and partner public agency or nonprofit organization.

Thereafter, annual program and financial reports are required from the principal investigator and their institutions. Final reports are due at the conclusion of the award. The lead from the public agency or nonprofit organization must also complete annual and final program reports.

Annual program reports describe work during the past year and facilitate the Foundation's grants management activities. Grants are assigned for post-award review to a member of the Foundation's Senior Program Team. Team members review program reports in order to: 1) find opportunities to link grantees to other scholars, policymakers, and practitioners working in relevant areas; 2) provide technical assistance, advice, or other resources to support the work; and 3) assist grantees with communication and dissemination efforts.

Institutional Challenge Grant Selection Committee

Sumie Okazaki, chair
Professor of Counseling Psychology
New York University

Elaine Allensworth
Lewis-Sebring Director of the Consortium on School Research
University of Chicago

Marc Atkins
Professor of Psychiatry and Psychology and Director of the Institute for Juvenile Research
University of Illinois at Chicago

Megan Bang
Professor of Learning Sciences and Psychology, Northwestern University
Senior Vice President, Spencer Foundation

Rumeli Banik
Senior Program Officer for Child Well-being
Doris Duke Charitable Foundation

Allison Blake
Chief Executive Officer
Child and Family Agency of Southeast Connecticut

Adam Gamoran
President
William T. Grant Foundation

Ritu Khanna
Chief of Research, Planning, and Assessment
San Francisco Unified School District

Pedro Reyes
Ashbel Smith Professor of Education Policy
University of Texas at Austin

Carolyn Heinrich
Professor of Public Policy and Education and Professor of Economics
Vanderbilt University

Mark Soler
Executive Director
Center for Children's Law and Policy

1st row, L-R: Sumie Okazaki, Adam Gamoran, Mark Soler;
2nd row, L-R: Rumeli Banik, Marc Atkins, Megan Bang;
3rd row, L-R: Ritu Khanna, Allison Blake, Robert Sellers (term ended Feb. 2021);
4th row, L-R: Pedro Reyes, Elaine Allensworth, Carolyn Heinrich

References

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Other Funding Opportunities for Researchers

Research Grants on Reducing Inequality

Research grants on reducing inequality support studies that aim to build, test, or increase understanding of programs, policies, or practices to reduce inequality in the academic, social, behavioral, or economic outcomes of young people, especially on the basis of race, ethnicity, economic standing, language minority status, or immigrant origins.

Research Grants on Improving the Use of Research Evidence

This program supports studies to identify, build, and test strategies to ensure that research evidence is used in ways that benefit youth. We are particularly interested in research on improving the use of research evidence by state and local decision makers, mid-level managers, and intermediaries.

William T. Grant Scholars Program

The William T. Grant Scholars Program supports career development for promising early-career researchers. The program funds five-year research and mentoring plans that significantly expand researchers' expertise in new disciplines, methods, and content areas.

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