William T. Grant FOUNDATION

Research Grants on Reducing Inequality

Full Proposal Guidance

Updated February 2025

*Please note that your proposal and all supporting documents (including institutional signatures to approve the budget) are due by **3pm** on the stated deadline.

Contents

Overview **3**
Developing Your Narrative **4**
- 01. Fit with Research Interests 4
- 02. Conceptualization and Relevance 4
- 03. Research Design 5
- 04. Feasibility 7
- 05. Products and Communication Plan 7
- 06. Other 7

Preparing Your Application Materials **8**
- 01. Proposal Narrative 8
- 02. Curriculum Vitae 8
- 03. Budget and Budget Justification 9
- 04. IRS Tax Determination Letter 9

Submitting Your Proposal **10**
- 01. Log In and Open your Application 10
- 02. Enter Project Details 10
- 03. Endorse the Proposal (PI) 11
- 04. Upload your Documents 11
- 05. Review and Submit your Application 11
- 06. Endorse the Proposal (Institutional Signee) 11

Understanding the Review Process **12**

Overview

The Foundation's focus on reducing inequality grew out of our view that research can do more than help us understand the problem of inequality; it can generate effective responses. To that end, we fund studies that build, test, or increase understanding of programs, practices, or policies to reduce inequality. We expect that proposed projects' central focus will be on examining these responses.

Applicants are strongly encouraged to revisit the letter of inquiry application guidelines, especially the discussion of review criteria (p. 8-10). Our website also provides additional resources to support the development of a strong proposal, including redacted annotated full proposals that reviewers found especially compelling (here and here).

Developing Your Narrative

As you develop your narrative, keep in mind the review criteria and related guidelines detailed below.

01. Fit with Research Interests

Reviewers are asked to assess how well proposals fit with the Foundation's interest in reducing inequality.

- Proposals should fall into one of the following categories: 1) an intervention study that examines an attempt to reduce inequality, 2) a descriptive study that clarifies mechanisms for reducing inequality, or 3) a measurement study that will enhance the work of researchers, practitioners, or policymakers to reduce inequality.
- Proposals should align with the Foundation's interest in addressing the dimensions of inequality and outcomes specified in the application guidelines and on our website. Reviewers will want to see the target youth population(s) of interest and the outcomes clearly specified.
- Proposals should present a compelling rationale for how the program, policy, or practice being examined has promise for reducing inequalities for the specified youth populations of interest. Please see more on this point below.
- We encourage applicants to revisit a recent Foundation blog post on what makes a proposal a strong fit with our interest in reducing inequality.

02. Conceptualization and Relevance

We encourage applicants to ground their studies in clear theoretical and conceptual frameworks that inform the research questions, sampling design, and data collection and analysis plans.

- Strong proposals are grounded in well-developed conceptualizations of inequality that draw on existing literature to describe the inequality and why it exists.
- For studies focused on race and/or ethnicity, we encourage applicants to be very clear about how the groups of interest are being conceptualized. This conceptualization should be aligned with the proposed design, methods, and analyses. For example, if the study will focus on Latinx immigrant youth and their families, reviewers often want to know whether the study can account for variation within that category (e.g., immigrant origin, generational status, etc.) in data collection and analyses.
- Strong proposals are often grounded in a theoretical framework that provides a rationale for why or how a program, policy, or practice is expected to reduce inequality or improve outcomes for the specified youth population(s). For example, if the study will examine an intervention to reduce racial disparities between Black and White youth, what about the intervention is expected to produce this change? Reviewers often appreciate a well-developed theory of change.
- Reviewers are asked to evaluate how well the study will contribute to existing empirical and theoretical literature. The proposal should make a compelling case about how the research will enhance existing literature on reducing inequality.
- Applicants should also be explicit about how results might be used to inform a response to inequality. While we do not expect a single study to change policy or practice,

reviewers will want to see how findings might translate to youth-serving settings to improve youth outcomes.

  - For descriptive studies, especially those that seek to build a response to inequality or closely examine mechanisms through which inequality is reduced, the proposal should explain how findings are expected to identify or explain a program, policy, or practice that could feasibly be implemented in the education, child welfare, criminal justice, labor market, or other youth-serving system.
  - For studies that are designing or testing interventions, the proposal should address how the results of the study might be integrated into an existing system or scaled to other systems. Reviewers are often especially attentive to the feasibility that an intervention can be scaled up.

03. Research Design

One of the most important things reviewers will look for is strong alignment between the research questions or hypotheses and the research design. They will also seek sufficient information on the sampling plan, data collection procedures, protocols, measures, and analysis plans to evaluate their rigor and appropriateness for addressing proposed research questions or hypotheses. Reviewers appreciate tables or other tools that illustrate how the study's central questions, methods, data, and analyses are aligned.

Applicants who plan to conduct participatory or co-designed projects in which methodological choices will emerge as the project develops should be clear about how the process will happen, as well as about who the participants will be at each stage of the work. Other guidelines for methods and analyses include:

Sample

- Strong proposals provide a clear sampling framework, including a rationale for the case selection or sampling of sites or individuals. Reviewers are often skeptical of sampling plans that appear to be based solely on convenience. Please be sure to explain the rationale for sample size(s).
- Provide a clear rationale for why the sampling frame would advance relevant theory. If there is variation among cases, sites, or individuals, provide a rich description of what that variation looks like and why it is relevant.
- Reviewers look for a strong recruitment plan, including how you will recruit the sample and maximize response rates. When studies involve collecting longitudinal or sensitive data, the proposal should provide assurances as to how you will successfully collect that data, including prior experience with and methods for accessing respondents, maximizing response rates, and ensuring confidentiality.
- Please specify the demographic characteristics of study participants as closely as possible. For example, if you are using secondary data, what racial or ethnic populations are included, and how are they defined?

Methods

- Strong proposals include a compelling rationale for the rigor and appropriateness of the methods proposed to address the research questions or hypotheses. The Foundation supports quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods research; what is most important is that the methods described are appropriate to answer the questions asked.
- The methods section should clearly describe how central concepts and measures will be operationalized. Where relevant, proposals should include details on the reliability and validity of specific measures and how they are connected to the concepts of interest in

the proposed project. Qualitative studies should clarify how the proposed data collection will explore and identify concepts and mechanisms to reduce inequality.

- If mixed methods are proposed, the proposal should articulate how data will be sequenced or integrated across methods or study phases and why this integration or sequence is advantageous. Applicants should include adequate detail about how data from interviews, videos, field notes, recordings, etc., will be compared, contrasted, and integrated.
- Proposals for studies that include coding of qualitative data should provide details about the coding processes and an assessment of the reliability of coding. They should also explain how the proposed coding will address the research questions. Appending or referring to examples of coding schemes used in prior relevant work is welcome.
- Proposals for studies to develop or improve measures should provide a detailed plan explaining how you will demonstrate that the measures are reliable, valid, and feasible.
- Strong proposals often include drafts of surveys, interview protocols, observational protocols, and data collection instruments as appendices. Reviewers often find it helpful to see how data will be collected.

Analysis

- The data analysis plan needs to include a detailed description of how data will be analyzed to address each of the study's main research questions or hypotheses. If appropriate, also describe how the data will be sequenced or integrated across methods and why this approach is advantageous. Including an illustrative example is often useful.
- As noted in the application guidelines, the analysis plan for quantitative and/or qualitative data should communicate sufficient sophistication for understanding the strengths and limitations of various analytic techniques.
- Where appropriate, please provide a formal power analysis and enough details for reviewers to fully evaluate the proposed work. Please include an appendix with the formal power analysis that addresses the following:
    - The software used for power calculations.
    - The values chosen for each of the parameter settings and options that must be set in order to make the power calculation.
    - Any adaptations made to tailor the software for use. For example, power analysis software often assumes the use of one treatment group and one control group. If the study involves the use of two treatment groups and one control group, some adaptation will likely be needed to apply the power software to this situation.
    - Power calculation at the appropriate level given the level of random assignment (e.g., individual, group, or classroom-level).
    - Minimal detectable effects based on prior empirical literature.
- Where relevant, please include a discussion of the generalizability of the findings.
- *Applicants should clearly describe how analyses will provide evidence on reducing inequality*. For example, how will analyses provide insight into mechanisms to reduce inequality? How will the study show whether or how inequalities are reduced or outcomes are improved? Please also consider whether your project employs a targeted or a universal approach to reduce inequality (i.e., aims to improve outcomes for a specific demographic, or aims to improve outcomes for youth in general).

04. Feasibility

Reviewers will want to see a clear plan that the proposed work can be accomplished given the resources and time frame. They will also want to see that the proposed team's expertise aligns with the study's theoretical framework and research design.

- Successful applicants often provide a detailed timeline to illustrate when the stages of the project will be conducted.
- The staffing plan must reflect adequate expertise to successfully carry out the project, as demonstrated by prior training, work, and publications.
- Specific details on the staffing plan should be included in the budget justification form.
- We value interdisciplinary teams that can draw upon theories, methods, and content expertise from various disciplines.
- Please limit the use and number of advisory committees and/or consultants to those individuals who will play a significant role in the project.
- If it becomes necessary to change the Principal Investigator on your proposal, please email Jenny Irons (jirons@wtgrantfdn.org), the Foundation's Senior Program Officer, to arrange a time to discuss and obtain approval for the proposed change.

05. Products and Communication Plan

- We expect our grantees to advance theory and empirical evidence about reducing inequality in their respective fields. To that end, all applicants should outline how their proposed research will result in publications that undergo a rigorous peer-review process.
- In some cases, applicants may develop communications plans that extend beyond academic audiences. We welcome statements that specify how research will result in products and activities designed to promote use of the research by a specific group of policymakers or practitioners. Across our grant programs, successful applicants who choose to share their work in this way detail plans for proactive, coordinated engagement with target audiences, perhaps including plans to co-craft content and format. Should applicants find this avenue of interest, we encourage careful consideration of how some level of collaboration will be developed with policy or practice partners, as well as how products and activities might foster their use of research findings. For guidance on how to reach and develop relationships with policymakers and practitioners outside of academia, we encourage applicants to consult resources on our Research-Practice Partnership microsite. Although applicants for major grants are not expected to develop this type of long-term partnership, information on the site, such as the two topics linked below, can help applicants think about strategies for building effective, albeit shorter term, collaborations.
    - "Communicating Research and Engaging Stakeholders"
    - "Using Research"

06. Other

- We often seek reviewers from different disciplines. Please limit jargon and write for an audience that is not discipline-specific. In addition, consider that reviewers may not understand or agree with what is "known" in your field or discipline; they will likely seek explanations of key claims and acknowledgments regarding the strength of the research evidence for those claims.

Preparing Your Application Materials

You will be required to upload the following documents as part of your online application.

01. Proposal Narrative

In addition to the formatting requirements described in the note below, applicants should include a full reference list/bibliography and may elect to include such appendices as:

- *Exhibits such as charts, figures, and tables*. Be judicious in the selection of exhibits. Exhibits should be items critical to the understanding of the proposed project. Materials such as prior articles, intervention materials, or other potentially relevant documents should be noted, listed, or briefly summarized. Do not include them in the proposal.
- *Letters of support*. Though not required, letters of support are often useful and reassuring to reviewers that access to data, settings, or individuals is feasible.

The narrative, reference list, and all appendices should be uploaded as one single PDF file.

NOTE: Narrative sections should be formatted as follows: 12 pt. font, single-spaced paragraphs with a space between paragraphs, and 1-inch margins on the top, bottom, and left- and right-hand sides. Please add page numbers to your narrative. The proposal narrative should not exceed the maximum of 25 pages, excluding the bibliography, tables, figures, charts, and any other exhibits.

02. Curriculum Vitae

Provide a full CV for each Principal Investigator, Co-Principal Investigator, and other key staff. There are no page limits or specific formatting guidelines, but files may not exceed 16MB each. Each CV should include the following:

- Name
- Position/Title
- Educational history (baccalaureate, graduate/professional, and post-doctoral), including institution, degree, year conferred, and field of study
- Research and professional experience, including employer, title, and date of employment
- Honors and awards
- Grants
- Publications.

03. Budget and Budget Justification

(and applicable Subcontractor Budgets and Budget Justifications)

- All applicants submitting a full proposal are required to complete the online budget grid in the Budget section of the application. In cases where the project involves a subcontract award exceeding $50,000, the subcontractor must complete the Budget form in Excel and submit a separate completed Budget Justification Form.
- The proposed project's start date can take place as early as the first of the month following the Board meeting during which it is expected to be approved. For example, applicants submitting a full proposal for consideration at our March Board meeting should set a project start date no earlier than April 1st. The Foundation also prefers to make awards in the year that they are approved. Otherwise, applicants may set the project start date as they see appropriate for their project.
- The 1) budget and budget justification guidelines, 2) budget justification form, and 3) budget form for applicable subcontracts are available for download within the online application.

NOTE: While Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval is not required at this time, no grant funds will be issued for projects needing IRB review until approval is submitted to the Foundation.

---

04. IRS Tax Determination Letter

Grants are limited, without exception, to tax-exempt organizations. A copy of the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) tax-exempt status determination letter is required from each applying organization.

Submitting Your Proposal

01. Log In and Open your Application

- Visit https://wtgrantfoundation.org/and click the "Log In" tab to enter your ID and password.
- On your home page, locate the list of applications in progress and click on the Full Proposal Draft.
- Begin your online application. You can save and return to it as many times as you would like.
- As you navigate the application, please review and update any information that was automatically copied from your letter of inquiry.
- Please note that if you close the SmartSimple page without saving, you will lose the data entered. This applies throughout the entire application, especially the budget.

02. Enter Project Details

Project Information

- *Project title* (120 characters maximum)
- *Start and end dates*
- *Project description* (1,500 characters maximum). Please write the project description in language appropriate for an educated lay audience, not for other researchers. Begin by stating the major questions guiding the work. Then, briefly summarize the project's rationale and background, research methods, and data analysis plan.
- *Requested amount* (direct and indirect costs combined)

Budget

- Under the Budget tab, click "Open Budget Template" to complete the project budget by grant year, for all direct and indirect costs. **Indirect costs may not exceed 15 percent of total direct costs for each grant year.** This ceiling includes any indirect costs contained in expenses for subcontracts. Please note that if you close without saving you will lose the data entered.
- Under Budget Justification Upload, click "Download Template" to download a copy of the "Budget and Budget Justification Guidelines," and then use the upload button to submit your completed Budget Justification Form.
- If your project involves any subcontract(s) with a budget exceeding $50,000, answer "Yes" to the question "Are you using any subcontractor(s) totaling $50,000 or more?" This will enable you to download templates for the required Subcontractor Budget and Subcontractor Budget Justification Form. After these forms have been completed, upload them using the buttons displayed within the application.

Contacts

Enter updated information about your co-principal investigators and any institutional contacts involved with endorsing and/or administering your grant.

Institution Signee. An authorized institution official must endorse the proposed project and certify that the costs entered in the budget form are necessary to execute the

proposed project and that they are estimated in the manner described in the budget justification. Under the “Contacts” tab, click “Invite Institution Signee” to enter the contact information of the institution official who will endorse the project. This individual will receive an invitation to endorse your full proposal and must follow the steps listed in the email to create their own SmartSimple signee account. You will not be able to submit your full proposal for their review until this account is created and the signee’s name is listed on the “Contacts” tab.
- *Additional Contacts*. Use the “Add Additional Contacts” button to modify the contacts that were included in your letter of inquiry. Review and update your list of co-principal investigators as needed. Be sure to add any fiscal contacts that would be involved with grant administration.

03. Endorse the Proposal (PI)

The principal investigator must endorse the proposed project and budget before submitting the proposal for the Institution Signee’s review.

04. Upload your Documents

Upload the following files in the appropriate fields (All documents should be uploaded as PDFs):

- Full Curriculum Vitae
- Proposal Narrative
- IRS Tax Determination Letter.

05. Review and Submit your Application

- Once you have saved your uploads to your application, click on the “Validate” button at the bottom of your screen. A report will only appear if any errors are found within your application. Review the report and make additional edits as necessary.
- The “Application Summary” button that appears above the application instructions will generate a PDF of your proposal to preview. Review the file carefully and ensure that all application materials are correct. You will not be able to modify your proposal after you click “Submit” unless it is requested by the institutional official endorsing the proposal.
- Click on the “Submit” button at the lower right-hand corner of the page. Your full proposal will then become available to the Institution Signee for their review and endorsement.

06. Endorse the Proposal (Institutional Signee)

- Once the Principal Investigator submits the full proposal to the Institution Signee, the signee will receive an email notification from SmartSimple that the proposal is available for their endorsement.
- The Institution Signee should log into to their SmartSimple account, review the full proposal, and either provide their endorsement for the project or, if any modifications are necessary, reopen the proposal for editing.
- By clicking the button to endorse the proposal, the Institution Signee will complete the formal submission of the proposal to the Foundation. **This endorsement must be provided before the full proposal deadline.** Please allow sufficient time for the Institution Signee to provide the endorsement, especially in the event modifications to the proposal are required.

Understanding the Review Process

Full proposals undergo a rigorous peer review process. Each proposal is reviewed by at least two external peer reviewers. External reviewers receive the full proposal, as well as related documents on our research interests, including our application guidelines. Applications that are favorably reviewed by external reviewers are then reviewed by two members of the Foundation's Senior Program Team. If proposals advance past this stage of review, applicants are invited to submit a written response to reviewer concerns. Proposals, reviews, and applicant responses to reviews are then evaluated by the Foundation's Senior Program Team and decisions are made about which proposals to recommend for funding. The Board of Trustees makes award decisions three times per year, and funding is available immediately thereafter. See the following table for approximate timelines:

Full proposal due	*Board Meeting*	*Earliest start date*
April	October	November 1st
September	March	April 1st
November	June	July 1st