William T. Grant FOUNDATION

# Mentoring Grants

*Supporting grantees' mentoring relationships with junior researchers of color*

**2026-27 Application Guidelines**

*Updated September 2026*

*Application Deadline:*
February 10, 2027, 3 PM ET

*Award Notifications:*
June 2027

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# Introduction

## Program Overview

The Foundation's goals for the mentoring program are two-fold. First, we want to support our grantees in developing a stronger understanding of the career development issues facing their junior colleagues of color and to strengthen their mentoring relationships with them. Second, we seek to strengthen the mentoring received by junior researchers of color and to position them for professional success.

The mentoring grants program is designed to support Black or African American, Indigenous, Latinx, and/or Asian or Pacific Islander American junior researchers, both doctoral students and postdoctoral fellows, in their career trajectories and to help faculty strengthen their mentoring support. The program was started in 2005 when the Foundation initiated a pilot project to support William T. Grant Scholars' mentoring relationships with junior researchers of color. The grants were made an ongoing part of the Scholars Program in 2007, reflecting the Foundation's commitment to increasing the number of people of color in research careers while also fostering the Scholars' professional development as mentors. Building on this effort, in 2018 we expanded eligibility for mentoring grants to include principal investigators of major research grants.

The program provides grant support, advice, consultation, and a community focused on mentoring and career development. In the longer term, we hope to increase the number of strong, well-networked researchers of color doing research on the Foundation's interests and to foster more diverse, equitable, and inclusive academic environments.

## Background

The Foundation takes mentoring seriously, recognizing it as a critical strategy for supporting the professional success of researchers of color. The program seeks to strengthen the mentoring relationship itself, as well as the fluency, skills, and experiences of faculty that mentor junior researchers of color. Skills in mentoring, like research, are developed over a career and honed with experience. Early-career faculty who are newer to mentoring often seek to build a solid foundation of mentoring skills. More senior faculty may already have ample mentoring experience but seek to further develop their strategies for confronting racism and supporting their junior colleagues of color. Many applicants fall somewhere in between, seeking both to bolster their mentoring skills and to address blind spots in their mentoring as it relates to race and racism in the academy.

The mentoring program is also a vital part of the Foundation's commitment to increasing racial and ethnic diversity in the research community. The grants provide direct financial support to junior researchers of color so that they have protected time and training to focus on developing their research skills, expertise, and publication records. Because we know that academic advancement does not occur in a strict meritocracy, the program also supports the development of mentees' networks and skills navigating academia's formal and informal academic norms. We also seek to counter the isolation that too many people of color face in the academy.

The focus on both mentees' and mentors' development means that the application requires evidence of the mentee's potential for a successful research career as well as the mentor's commitment to reflecting on their own practices, knowledge, and skills when it comes to mentoring people of color. We recommend that applicants begin by identifying mentees' and mentors' learning goals. Mentor and mentee should conduct a candid assessment of the current strengths and limitations in the mentee's research skills (e.g., writing, methods, analyses, developing a research agenda, presenting, etc.) and assets (e.g., prior experiences, professional networks, publication record, etc.) and use that information to identify specific goals for the grant. What are the areas in which mentees need further development to successfully advance to the next stage of their careers?

Mentors should also assess their current strengths and limitations in mentoring researchers of color and identify goals for how they want to improve their mentoring. Mentors should use this information to identify specific activities they will pursue during the grant to improve their mentoring. What are the areas in which mentors need further development to successfully advance to the next stage of their careers? We hope this program helps mentors deeply explore issues of race, privilege, equity, and belonging in the academy and tackle the challenges with courage and sensitivity. Because of the current dearth of faculty of color, many of the mentoring relationships—though not all—are cross-racial. We encourage White mentors to candidly discuss their positionality and prior experiences mentoring across difference, and to explain the ways in which they hope to further advance their mentoring work. We also encourage mentors of color and from other marginalized groups to reflect on the aspects of their own experiences mentoring and being mentored, and to share how they intend to use these reflections to inform their future mentoring work.

## SELECTED RESOURCES FOR APPLICANTS

The following papers provide insight into the mentoring literature. Both highlight the career implications of mentoring for graduate students and faculty of color.

- In "**Graduate Students' Perceptions of Their Advisors**," Shiri Noy and Rashawn Ray use an intersectionality framework to assess whether and how the advisor–student relationship varies by race and gender.
- In "**How Do You Advance Here? How Do You Survive?**" Michelle Espino and Ruth Zambrana investigate the perceived career consequences of formal and informal mentoring among faculty of color.

The following papers discuss lessons learned from past grantees and others in the field. The most competitive applicants use them to develop their applications.

- Louie, V. & Wilson-Ahlstrom, A. (2018). ***Moving It Forward: The Power of Mentoring and How Universities Can Confront Institutional Barriers Facing Junior Researchers of Color***. William T. Grant Foundation.
- Wilson-Ahlstrom, A., Ravindranath, R., Yohalem, N., & Tseng, V. (2017). ***Pay it Forward: Guidance for Mentoring Junior Scholars (updated edition)***. The Forum for Youth Investment.

Finally, the following resource will also be useful as you prepare your application:

- In "**The Unseen Labor of Mentoring**," Manya Whitaker discusses the invisible emotional labor faculty of color and other marginalized faculty perform. This post may be helpful to both mentors and mentees as they develop their respective statements.

# The Award

**Awards cover $60,000 for mentoring doctoral students and $110,000 for mentoring postdoctoral fellows (including up to 7.5% indirect costs).**

- The Foundation anticipates awarding up to 6 mentoring grants annually.
- Grants will begin July 1 of the award year and end June 30 two years later.
- All mentors and mentees convene during annual meetings designed to support the mentoring relationships, mentors' learning, and junior researchers' development as researchers. Do not budget for travel to these meetings in the application; the Foundation will cover associated expenses.
- Mentors and junior researchers will each submit separate, confidential interim program reports six and twelve months after the initiation of the grant, and final reports at the end of the award period.
- Mentors will submit a financial report at the end of the award period.

# Eligibility

- William T. Grant Scholars and major research grantees whose grants 1) are active at the time of the application, 2) will not end (or request a no-cost extension) in the same calendar year when the applications is submitted (e.g. 2027) and 3) will not be in the no-cost extension phase when the mentoring award begins are eligible to apply. Annual reporting must be up to date..
- Junior researchers of color may be Asian or Pacific Islander American, Black or African American, Indigenous, and/or Latinx. Scholars and principal investigators may reach out to the Foundation to confirm the eligibility of a potential mentee if the mentee belongs to a racial or ethnic group that is not listed here but is underrepresented or marginalized in research careers.
- Junior researchers may be full-time doctoral students or postdoctoral fellows. At minimum, students must be in their second year of doctoral studies at the onset of the award.
- The Scholar/principal investigator and junior researcher must be housed in the same institution. Exceptions will be considered on a case-by-case basis, for example for mentor-mentee pairs with an existing relationship history that will facilitate the grant's success.
- Eligible Scholars/principal investigators may receive the award only once during a grant.

# Application Requirements

*All uploaded documents should be 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. Submission instructions will be available in late-January.*

**From the Scholar / Principal Investigator**

1. **Nominating letter (one page maximum)** that describes the junior researcher and how they fit the eligibility and review criteria.
2. **Mentor's statement (two page maximum)** that describes: a) prior mentoring experience, b) a candid assessment of current strengths and limitations as a mentor for junior researchers of color, including the role of the mentor's positionality in shaping mentoring relationships, and c) learning goals for improving mentoring of junior scholars of color. Please use the template provided by the Foundation.
    - We anticipate that applicants at different stages of their career will propose differing goals. For example, in addition to goals for supporting the mentee, senior mentors might set department or institutional goals in relation to racial equity. On the other hand, early career mentors might focus on how to extend their learning to their research team.
3. **Abridged Curriculum vitae**
    - Please use the template provided by the Foundation.

> **WHAT IS POSITIONALITY AND WHY DOES IT MATTER TO MENTORING ACROSS DIFFERENCE**
>
> The concept of positionality conveys the idea that the various dimensions that comprise our identities—our race, ethnicity, class, gender identity, sexual orientation, ability status, and so on—are indicators of our positions in the social world vis-a-vis others. These positions may afford us certain privileges or disadvantages, and they affect our relationships with others.
>
> In mentoring, positionality is complicated by the already unequal relationship that exists because mentors have seniority, professional access, and resources that mentees do not yet have. Thus, it is especially important for mentors to develop awareness and understanding of how their positionality in society may afford them more privilege than their mentees. For example, a White male scholar may be

afforded more authority on his subject matter expertise and, when his authority is questioned, attribute the doubt with the need to provide more compelling evidence or to craft his argument more convincingly. By contrast, a Latinx scholar finding their authority questioned will not only wonder about their evidence or their argument, but also about the role their identities—gender, race, ethnicity, or how they intersect—have played in the interaction. Historically, the academy has conferred assumptions of competence to people who are cisgender, male, heterosexual, White, and middle class, mirroring power hierarchies outside the ivory tower. By contrast, notions about the intellectual inferiority of women, transgender and queer people, people with disabilities, and Black, Indigenous, and Latinx people have borne a pervasive—if often unconscious—assumption of "presumed incompetence" (Gutiérrez y Muys, Niemann, González, & Harris, 2012). Mentors of color also benefit from consideration of how their positionality informs their mentoring relationships. The insights can be sources of bonding, but they can also reveal potential blind spots stemming from internalized feelings of inferiority.

Milner (2007) offered a framework to help researchers think through the seen, unseen, and unforeseen dangers that can impact their studies. This framework can also be helpful for mentors to think through their positionality. Though presented as multiple steps, Milner takes care to point out that this does not imply a linear process. Here, we share the framework's steps and adaptations of Milner's questions as a starting point while encouraging applicants to explore the framework further:

**Researching the Self** asks mentors to explore and reflect on their own intersectional identities, and how they impact their mentoring relationships. Possible questions include: What is my racial and cultural heritage? What are other dimensions of my identity that have informed my experience in the world? How do I negotiate my racial and other intersecting selves in academia and in relation to my mentees? What do I believe about race, gender, class, ability status, and sexual orientation in my academic department and institution? How do I express my own race and other intersecting identities in my mentoring?

**Researching the Self in Relation to Others** calls for mentors to reflect on mentees' identities, and how they interact with their own identities. Mentors might reflect on the following: In what ways do my mentees' racial and other intersecting identities influence how they experience academia? How do I negotiate my own interests and agendas with those of my mentees, which may diverge from mine? What are some social, political, historical, and contextual realities that have shaped my mentees' academic experiences, both past and present? How consistent and inconsistent are these realities with mine?

**Engaged Reflection and Representation** involves mentors and mentees engaging together in race- and intersectionality-conscious reflection on what is happening in their relationship, and in the mentee's professional development. Questions for the mentor-mentee pair to consider include: Why might we have different interpretations of a given professional interaction? What can we learn about each other in the tensions that arise between us? When we have a disagreement, how can we ensure both our perspectives are represented and considered as we work toward resolution? How can we turn our differences into strengths?

**Shifting from Self to System** encourages mentors to "contextualize and ground their personal or individualistic, new and expanded consciousness to take into consideration of historic, political, social, economic, racial, and cultural realities on a broader scale" (Milner, 2007, p. 397). This echoes the idea that mentorship is a collective responsibility (Louie & Wilson-Ahlstrom, 2018) because institutions have greater resources and capacity than any single mentor. Relevant questions here might be: What do race, racism, and discrimination mean in the context of our department, our university, or in academia more broadly? What do people from communities of color and other marginalized communities write about their experiences in the academy? What departmental, institutional, and professional barriers shape junior scholars of colors' experiences?

### From the Junior Researcher

1. **Junior researcher's statement (two page maximum)** that describes: a) research interests and their fit with at least one of the Foundation's focus areas, b) goals for the grant, derived from their interests and a candid assessment of current strengths and limitations as a researcher, and c) long-term career goals. Please use the template provided by the Foundation.
    - We anticipate that doctoral students and postdoctoral fellows will have different goals reflective of their career stage. Second year doctoral students, for example, may be more focused on learning research methods or honing academic writing skills, while more senior students or postdocs preparing to enter the job market may need to make a push to publish, present at conferences, and build a strong professional network.
2. **A research-oriented writing sample (20 pages maximum)**—e.g., course paper, thesis proposal, or publication—that reflects the junior researcher's stage of development. In the case of publications, preferably the junior researcher would be the primary or lead author.
3. **Curriculum vitae**

### SELECTED RESOURCES FOR APPLICANTS

We encourage mentors to provide feedback on the junior researchers' statements. Mentors offer important perspectives on worthy learning goals based on their knowledge of the field, experience training other students, and insights into their mentees' current skills.

We do not require that mentees discuss how their work fits with more than one of the Foundation's focus areas. Strong applications typically articulate fit with a single focus area—usually the one in which the mentor's existing grant has been awarded. With this in mind, we recommend that you demonstrate a good understanding of and clear fit with one focus area rather than try to make a case that the mentee's research aligns with both.

Be specific about the research skills (e.g., qualitative interviewing, writing articles, formulating a program of research, etc.) and professional assets (e.g., expanded networks, fluency in professional norms, etc.) to be developed. Consider what the junior researcher's skillset, CV, and networks would need to look like at the end of this grant for them to successfully transition to the next stage of their career (e.g., dissertation, postdoctoral fellowship, tenure-track position).

Lastly, be supportive but candid. Too often, students of color do not receive the detailed feedback they need to become the successful researchers they are capable of being. In addition, too many applicants propose a generic set of research skills that would benefit any mentee. The strongest applications are individualized, delving into specific skills and assets, for the mentee.

**From the Scholar/Principal Investigator and Junior Researcher**

- **Professional development and research plan (six pages maximum).** The mentor and junior researcher should collaborate to develop a professional development and research plan that includes the information outlined below. ***This plan should include activities that both the mentor and mentee will pursue individually and collectively to achieve the goals identified in their respective statements. Please use the template provided by the Foundation.***
    - Restate the goals for the mentor and mentee from the mentor and junior researcher statements.
    - Describe the professional development and training activities for achieving the mentor and mentee goals. Think broadly and creatively about the activities that would best accomplish the mentee and mentor goals. Describe the activities with sufficient rationale and details for reviewers to evaluate them against the review criteria (see page 13).

- Describe the research activities for achieving these goals. The section on research activities should provide enough information for reviewers to evaluate them in terms of the review criteria. Clearly state the research questions or hypotheses, describe their contribution to the literature, and provide sufficient details about the methods and analyses to demonstrate their rigor. For collaborative studies, the discussion should indicate who will take the lead, the unique part of the work that would be led by the junior researcher, and authorship plans.
- Discuss the relational aspects of your mentoring relationship. Consider how you will foster strong communication and clear expectations, as well as the mechanisms that will be put into place to manage conflicts or misunderstandings that arise.
- The plan should demonstrate sensitivity to the challenges faced by researchers of color and include compelling ways to surface and address those challenges.
- Include a detailed workplan and timeline, including meeting schedule, training or coursework, publication submissions, etc.

- **Budget and budget justification (using Foundation forms available within the online application)**.
  - The mentor and junior researcher should collaborate to prepare a budget of $60,000 for mentoring doctoral students, or $110,000 for mentoring postdoctoral fellows. The budget should be for the period of July 1, 2027, to June 30, 2029.
  - The budget may include the junior researcher's stipend, tuition, conference travel, writing support, research training, and an indirect cost allowance of up to 7.5% of total direct costs. The budget should specify the proportion of time that the mentee will allocate for the proposed research projects.
  - The award is intended to support the junior researcher and the mentoring relationship. Salary costs for the mentor are not allowed. Allowable costs for the mentor could include travel or training opportunities that would convincingly advance the mentoring goals.
  - The budget justification should provide a basis for all costs proposed.

SELECTED RESOURCES FOR APPLICANTS

The mentoring and research plan should make clear how the award will add value by supporting activities that would not otherwise occur without the award.

Mentoring across difference requires a willingness to explore the personal and professional issues that racism and other forms of discrimination raise, to have uncomfortable conversations, and to work through them. Mentors should bear the principal responsibility for their own learning and identify people, other than the

mentee, and opportunities that can support it. This is also the case when mentors share some aspect of the mentee's identity, such as race or ethnicity. While you may not be mentoring across difference, power dynamics between mentors and mentees are always at play, and it is important that mentors not project their own experiences onto those of mentees.

### From the Mentor's Department Chair

As Louie and Wilson-Ahlstrom (2018) note, effective mentorship is hard work and "responsibility for supporting the professional development of junior scholars of color resides both inside and outside of the mentoring relationship" (p. 7). Furthermore, "Departments can play a critical role in supporting effective mentoring by orienting mentees and mentors to their responsibilities and setting clear departmental norms about what is appropriate" (p. 8).

With this in mind, **we ask the mentor's department chair to provide a letter of support for the application.**

The letter (two pages maximum) should include the following:

- Affirmation of support for the mentor and mentee's learning goals and relationship.
- A description of the institutional culture around mentoring, including what resources and information are available to support mentoring relationships at the department and/or university levels.
- A description of the supports the Department will provide the mentor and mentee.

*For information on how institutions can support mentoring relationships, please see* Moving it Forward: The Power of Mentoring and How Universities Can Confront Institutional Barriers Facing Junior Researchers of Color.

IMPORTANT TIP

We recognize that departments vary in the extent to which they prioritize and support mentoring for researchers of color. We encourage department chairs to candidly reflect on their departments' current strengths and weaknesses in supporting high-quality mentoring for researchers of color. In our grant reviews, the department's current prioritization and support is less important than its plans for bolstering its structures, rewards, and incentives for mentoring. As you think about your departmental supports, you might consider these examples:

Supports for mentors might include 1) Course releases for faculty with large mentoring loads; 2) Check-in meetings to ensure mentors have what they need; 3) Access to senior scholars with expertise in mentoring junior scholars of color; 4) Clear articulation of mentoring duties, metrics for successful mentoring, and accountability for mentoring quality; 5) Counting mentoring activities toward annual and tenure and promotion reviews; and 6) Mentoring excellence awards that signal the importance the department assigns to this work.

Supports for mentees might include 1) Supplementary funds to cover travel and/or professional development opportunities; 2) Funds to support graduate student of color gatherings to discuss mentoring and professional development; 3) An open door policy, or a transparent mediation process, so mentees can feel safe expressing concerns about mentors; 4) Periodic meetings with mentees, individually or in a group, to take stock of what is working and not working for students; 5) Opportunities for mentees to build professional networks or showcase their work within the institution.

# Review Criteria

*Applications will be reviewed against the following criteria:*

## Mentor

- Prior experience appropriate to career stage demonstrates a commitment to mentoring junior researchers. This could be individual support of junior scholars or support provided through mentoring networks and academic societies.
- Identifies specific learning goals and actionable ways they would like to improve their mentoring skills and how these goals will benefit junior researchers of color.
- Makes clear how they will learn about the issues facing junior researchers of color without burdening the proposed mentee and/or scholars of color within their network.
- The above should be evidenced in the mentor's statement and/or the mentor's abridged curriculum vitae.

## Junior Researcher

- Research interests are consistent with the Foundation's mission and focus areas.
- Skills and achievements of the junior researcher are promising, given their level of education and opportunities for development.
- Junior researcher and mentor have identified compelling goals for the mentee's development to become a successful researcher. The goals stem from a strong, candid assessment of the mentees' current strengths and limitations, and fit their career stage and prior experience.
- The above should be evidenced in the nominating letter, the junior researcher's statement of research and career goals, writing sample, and curriculum vitae.

## Professional Development Plan

- Mentor's two-year plan identifies specific activities that they will pursue to improve their mentoring of junior researchers of color.
- The activities the mentor plans to pursue will benefit the proposed mentee's development and the mentoring relationship.
- Mentee's two-year plan identifies specific areas of growth appropriate to their stage of development, and which are likely to assist them in transition to next career stage.
- Mentor's role in supporting the junior researcher's two-year plan is clear.

- Award plays significant role in facilitating the mentoring relationship, with priority given to PIs who do not already have a primary mentoring relationship with the junior researcher.
- The above should be evidenced in the mentor's statement, junior researcher's statement, professional development and research plan, and department chair's letter of support.

## Research Plan

- Research to be conducted fits the Foundation's mission and focus areas.
- Research reflects intellectual rigor, creativity, feasibility, grounding in theory, and use of sound scientific methods.
- The above should be evidenced in the professional development and research plan.

## Budget

- The budget allocation provides the mentee with adequate protected time for research and to fulfill the other developmental goals of the grant.
- The budget should primarily support the mentee's two year-plan and where appropriate the mentor's two-year plan.

## References

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