William T. Grant FOUNDATION

Research Grants on Reducing Inequality: 2027 Application Guidelines

Updated November 2026

2027 Application Deadlines*
for *Major Research Grants* and *Officers' Research Grants***
January 6 | July 28 (3:00pm ET)

*Applicants may submit only one application per cycle as the principal investigator.
**Officers' research grants require institutional signature at the time of submission.

Contents

At A Glance **01**

Introduction **03**
Overview 03
Background 03
Research Interests 04

Awards **06**
Major Research Grants 06
Officers' Research Grants 06

Eligibility **07**
Eligible Organizations 07
Eligible Principal Investigators 07
Eligible Studies 07

Application Requirements **08**
Project Information 08
CV, Biographical Sketch, or Resume 08
Project Narrative 09

Application Review Criteria **10**
Fit with Research Interests 10
Conceptualization and Relevance 11
Methods 11
Feasibility 12

Application Review Process **13**

Appendix A: Application Checklist **14**

Appendix B: Useful Links **15**

Appendix C: Special Interest **16**

At A Glance

Synopsis

This program funds research studies that examine 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, ***along dimensions of race, ethnicity, economic standing, sexual or gender minority status (e.g., LGBTQ+ youth), language minority status, or immigrant origins.***

We fund:

- Descriptive studies that describe, explore, or explain how programs, practices, or policies reduce inequality.
- Intervention studies that provide causal evidence on the effectiveness of programs or policies for reducing inequality.

We do not fund:

- Studies that focus solely on dimensions other than those ***prioritized above***.
- Studies that focus primarily on the causes, extent, or consequences of inequality.
- Studies that focus primarily on physical health outcomes (e.g., physical illness, clinical trials, etc.).

Funding Amounts

- Major research grants: $100,000 to $600,000 over 2-3 years, including up to 15% indirect costs. Funding amounts vary based on the study design, see page 6 for more information.
- Officers' research grants: $25,000–$50,000 over 1-2 years, including up to 15% indirect costs.

Funding Rates

Due to recent increases in application numbers, funding rates have reached historic lows. Rates listed here are for 2026:

- Major research grants: About 6-7% of letter of inquiry submissions were invited to submit full proposals; about 14% of full proposals were approved for funding.
- Officers' research grants: About 5% of letter of inquiry submissions were approved for funding.
- This means that even high-quality submissions do not always result in a positive funding decision and that feedback is limited.

Application Timeline

Letters of inquiry for major research grants are accepted only in early January and late July.

- Letters of inquiry for major research grants do not require budget materials; they require only an estimated total.
- Successful letters of inquiry for major research grants will result in invitations to submit full proposals.
- Invitations to submit full proposals are emailed within approximately nine weeks of letter of inquiry submission deadline.
- For major research grants, the total timeline from letter of inquiry to funding decision is between 10-12 months.

Letters of inquiry for Officers' research grants are also accepted in early January and late July.

- Officers' research grant applications require a full line-item budget and budget justification.
- Officers' research grant applications require institutional sign-off prior to submission. Please leave time for this and coordinate with your institution in advance of the deadline.
- Officers' research grants are awarded on the merit of the letter of inquiry alone.
- The funding decisions are emailed within approximately 14 weeks of the letter of inquiry submission deadline.

Introduction

Overview

This program supports research to examine 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, along dimensions of race, ethnicity, economic standing, sexual or gender minority status (e.g., LGBTQ+ youth), language minority status, or immigrant origins.

KEY DEFINITIONS

Programs:
Coordinated sets of activities designed to achieve specific aims in youth development (e.g., a professional development program to address teachers' implicit racial bias).

Policies:
Broader initiatives intended to promote success through the allocation of resources or regulation of activities. Policies may be located at the federal, state, local, or organizational level (e.g., anti-poverty tax credits).

Practices:
The materials and activities through which youth development is enabled (e.g., coaching, mentoring, parenting, peer interactions, teaching). Practices involve direct interaction with youth (in-person or virtual).

Background

Our 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. We believe that it is time to build stronger bodies of knowledge on how to reduce inequality in the United States and to move beyond the mounting research evidence about the scope, causes, and consequences of inequality. Thus, we fund research that focuses on responses to inequality.

Research Interests

Our research interests center on studies that examine ways to reduce inequality in youth outcomes. 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.

Recognizing that findings about programs and practices that reduce inequality will have limited societal impact until the structures that create inequality in the first place have been transformed, the Foundation is particularly interested in research to uproot systemic racism and the structural foundations of inequality that limit the life chances of young people.

For more information on this special interest, see Appendix C.

> NOTE
>
> **While we value research on the causes and consequences of inequality, we do not fund this work. We also do not fund studies that examine or describe inequality to generate potential responses to inequality.**
>
> Instead, we support research that centrally focuses on how, why, or whether a policy, program, or practice reduces inequality among young people.
>
> We invite studies from a range of disciplines, fields, and methods, and we encourage investigations into various youth-serving systems, including justice, housing, child welfare, mental health, and education.

Applications for research grants on reducing inequality must:

1. **Identify a specific inequality in youth outcomes.**

   We fund research to reduce inequality in academic, social, behavioral, or economic outcomes.

- Show that outcomes are unequal in a brief discussion of existing literature.
- Highlight the main explanations for the unequal outcomes that are relevant for your study.
- ***Please note that we do not fund studies that primarily focus on physical health outcomes, such as physical illness.***

2. **Make a convincing case for the dimension(s) of inequality the study will address.**

   We fund research to reduce inequality along the dimensions of race, ethnicity, economic standing, sexual or gender minority status (e.g., LGBTQ+ youth), language minority status, or immigrant origin status.

- Please specify the groups on which the study will focus. We do not fund studies that use vague terms such as "at-risk youth," "disadvantaged youth," or "vulnerable youth."
- Offer a well-developed conceptualization of inequality. Avoid treating dimensions of inequality (e.g., race, economic standing) as variables without providing conceptual and/or theoretical insight into why and how the identified inequality exists.
- Research that focuses on a dimension other than race, ethnicity, economic standing, sexual or gender minority status, language minority status, or immigrant origins must be in intersection with one of these dimensions. Though important, we do not have the resources to fund studies that focus primarily on other dimensions of inequality, like disability status.

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

- Draw on extant theoretical and empirical literature to provide a rationale for why the specific programs, policies, or practices under study will equalize outcomes between groups or improve outcomes of a particular group. In other words, specify your theory of change.
- Identify how the study will investigate this rationale to determine whether it holds up to empirical scrutiny.

Awards

Major Research Grants

- $100,000 to $600,000 over 2-3 years, including up to 15% indirect costs.
    - Please note the following items are not allowable as direct costs: liability insurance (e.g., GAEL), flat rates for shared services, and rent. These types of costs are addressed through the indirect rate.
    - To be considered a direct cost, technology costs and communication services need to be presented as project specific (e.g., prorated in some way with an explanation of how they support the proposed research).
- Projects involving secondary data analysis are typically at the lower end of the budget range, whereas projects involving new data collection and sample recruitment can be at the higher end. Proposals to launch experiments in which settings (e.g., classrooms, schools, youth programs) are randomly assigned to conditions are usually on the higher end. We encourage applicants pursuing cluster randomized designs to apply for additional sources of funding to ensure support for a sufficient sample.

Officers' Research Grants

- $25,000–$50,000 over 1-2 years, including up to 15% indirect costs. Please see note above about indirect costs.
- Studies may be stand-alone projects or may build off larger projects. The budget should be appropriate for the activities proposed.



NOTE

In addition to financial support, the Foundation invests significant time and resources in capacity-building for research grantees. We provide opportunities to connect with other scholars, policymakers, and practitioners, and we organize learning communities that allow grantees to discuss challenges, seek advice from peers and experts, and collaborate across projects.

Eligibility

Eligible Organizations

- The Foundation makes grants only to tax-exempt organizations. We do not make grants to individuals.
- We encourage proposals from organizations that are under-represented among grantee institutions, including Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Hispanic-Serving Institutions, Tribal Colleges and Universities, Alaska Native-Serving Institutions, Native Hawaiian-Serving Institutions, and Asian American Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions.

Eligible Principal Investigators

- The Foundation defers to the applying organization's criteria for who is eligible to act as a principal investigator or co-principal investigator on a grant. In general, we expect that all investigators will have the experience and skills to carry out the proposed work.
- We strive to support a diverse group of researchers in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, and seniority, and we encourage research projects led by Black or African American, Indigenous, Latinx, and/or Asian or Pacific Islander American researchers.
- ***Please note that you may only submit one application per cycle as the principal investigator. For example, you may submit only one major grant or one Officers' research grant letter of inquiry.***

Eligible Studies

- Only studies that 1) align with the stated research interests of this program and 2) relate to the outcomes of young people between the ages of 5 and 25 in the United States are eligible for consideration.
- We do not support non-research activities such as program implementation and operational costs, or make contributions to building funds, fundraising drives, endowment funds, general operating budgets, or scholarships. Letters of inquiry for ineligible projects are screened out without further review.

Application Requirements

NOTE

The application process for all research grants begins with a letter of inquiry, a five-page proposal. Letters of inquiry for major research grants and Officers' research grants are accepted two times per year, in winter and summer.

We accept applications only through our online application system, which is accessible through our website.

See Appendix A for a checklist of required materials.

Letters of inquiry for all research grants must include the following:

1. Project Information

- Project title.
- Start and end dates.
- Total requested amount (including the combined direct and indirect costs for the full grant period).
  - Indirect costs may not exceed 15% of total direct costs.
- Brief description (1,500 characters maximum).
  - Start with the major research questions or aims.
  - Briefly summarize the project's rationale and background.
  - Describe the research methods, data analysis plan, and intervention (if applicable).
  - Use language appropriate for an educated lay audience.

2. Curriculum Vitae, Biographical Sketch, or Resume

One page maximum. No formatting requirements

- Include a one-page curriculum vitae, biographical sketch, or resume for each principal investigator and co-principal investigator.
- Be sure to include education and training, peer-reviewed publications, and grants.
- Do not submit full curricula vitae or resumes.

3. Project Narrative

Five pages maximum. Format your narrative 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. If you have a reference list, include it in this upload. It will not be counted toward the five-page maximum.

- State the major research questions or aims guiding the proposal.
- Provide a strong rationale that includes :
  - A brief literature review indicating how the project complements and advances existing theory and empirical research.
  - A description of the theories that provide the foundation or organizing frame for the work.
  - A description of the study's relevance for policy or practice.
- Include specific hypotheses and/or research questions to be tested or addressed.
- Describe the methods and data collection plan, including:
  - Sample/case definition and selection procedures.
  - Research design.
  - Key constructs, data sources, and procedures for data collection.
  - Intervention (if applicable).
- Summarize the data analysis plan for addressing the hypotheses and/or research questions.
  - Identify the key measures.
  - If you are proposing quantitative analyses of a causal nature, provide convincing evidence that the study will be adequately powered to detect effects, particularly for any subgroups of interest (e.g., differences between different racial and ethnic groups).
  - If you are using qualitative data, provide some detail about coding processes and the plan for establishing that the coding is reliable.
  - If you are proposing to develop or improve measures, discuss how you will show that the measures are valid and reliable.
- Applicants do not need to describe the project team in the narrative. The narrative should focus on the research questions, theoretical and empirical background, theory of change for the proposed change strategy, and research design.

NOTE

If you are applying for an Officers' research grant, you must also submit with your letter of inquiry:

- A budget and a budget justification form.
  - Templates for both are provided in the online application.
  - Indirect costs may not exceed 15% of total direct costs.
- The applicant organization's IRS tax-exempt status determination letter.

Please note, Officers' research grant applications also require an institutional signature prior to submission. Please coordinate with your institution. In some cases this requires more than a day to secure.

The items above and institutional sign off are not required for major research grants letters of inquiry.

Application Review Criteria

All letters of inquiry are initially reviewed by a set of reviewers with social science expertise. In general, however, given the breadth of studies proposed in letters of inquiry, internal reviewers may lack deep knowledge of an applicant's specific area of work, so avoid disciplinary jargon and use language appropriate for an educated lay audience. Some letters of inquiry Officers' research grant applicaions will be reviewed by a panel of youth reviewers in addition to staff.

We begin application reviews by looking at the importance of the research questions or hypotheses and alignment with our funding interests. Then we evaluate whether the proposed research designs and methods will provide strong empirical evidence on those questions.

> NOTE
>
> For major research grants applications, based on internal review of the letter of inquiry, the Foundation either invites a full proposal for further consideration, or declines the application. We do not accept unsolicited full proposals. **Officers' research grants are awarded on the merit of the letter of inquiry alone.**

The letter of inquiry functions as a mini-proposal and is reviewed against the following criteria:

1. Fit with Research Interests

- The proposed study aligns with this program's research interests.
  - The proposed study aims to examine a program, policy, or practice to reduce inequality in the academic, social, behavioral, or economic outcomes of young people ages 5–25 in the United States.
  - The study focuses on reducing inequality along the dimension(s) of race, ethnicity, economic standing, sexual or gender minority status, language minority status, or immigrant origins.
  - ***Studies that focus primarily on documenting the causes and consequences of inequality are not a fit with our interests.***

- The letter of inquiry makes clear how findings will inform policies, practices, or programs that can or will be implemented through organizations, institutions, and/or systems. It is not adequate to propose a study that will document inequality and conclude with a general statement that research will be relevant for policy and practice.
- Inequality may be reduced by implementing a program, policy, or practice that helps a group (or groups) of students more than others, or by applying a universally beneficial approach strategically so that it especially benefits the youth who need it most.

2. Conceptualization and Relevance

- The letter of inquiry reflects a mastery of relevant theory and empirical findings.
- The letter of inquiry states the theoretical and empirical contributions the study will make to the existing research base.
- The letter of inquiry discusses how the findings will or could be relevant to policy or practice.
- The letter of inquiry presents a compelling theory of change or explanation about why the program, policy, or practice being studied is likely to reduce inequality in youth outcomes.

3. Methods

- The proposed study employs rigorous methods (quantitative, qualitative, or mixed) that are commensurate to its goals.
- The study's design, methods, and analysis plan align with the proposed research questions.
- The description of the research design makes clear how the empirical work will test, refine, or elaborate specific theoretical notions.
    - Quantitative analyses might emphasize hypotheses and plans for testing them, while qualitative analyses might elaborate on how the research will illuminate processes underlying specific programs, policies, or practices.
- Plans for case selection, sampling, and measurement clearly state why they are well-suited to address the research questions or hypotheses.
    - For example, samples must be appropriate in size and composition to answer the study's questions. Qualitative case selection—whether critical, comparative, or otherwise—must 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.

- If proposing mixed methods, plans for integrating the methods and data are clear and compelling.
- If proposing quantitative methods, the letter of inquiry demonstrates that the study will have adequate statistical power to detect meaningful effects.
- Where relevant, the letter of inquiry discusses the potential generalizability of findings.
- The letter of inquiry demonstrates adequate consideration of the gender, ethnic, and cultural appropriateness of concepts, methods, and measures.

4. Feasibility

- The proposed methods, time frame, staffing plan, and other resources are realistic.
- The letter of inquiry assures that data will be successfully collected, describes the team's prior experience collecting such data, and identifies strategies for maximizing response rates and access to data sources.
- Prior training and publications highlighted in curriculum vitae demonstrate that the research team has a track record of conducting strong research and communicating it successfully. They also demonstrate that the team has the conceptual, theoretical, and methodological knowledge to execute the proposed study.

Where appropriate, we value projects that:

- Harness the learning potential of mixed methods and interdisciplinary work.
- Involve practitioners or policymakers in meaningful ways to shape the research questions, interpret preliminary and final results, and communicate their implications for policy and practice.
- Combine senior and junior staff in ways that facilitate mentoring of junior staff.
- Are led by members of racial or ethnic groups underrepresented in academic fields.
- Generate data useful to other researchers and make such data available for public use.
- Demonstrate significant creativity and potential to advance the field, for example by introducing new research paradigms or extending existing methods, measures and analytic tools to allow for comparison across studies.

Application Review Process

Officers' Research Grants

Officers' research grants are awarded on the merit of the letter of inquiry alone. The decisions are emailed to applicants approximately 14 weeks after the submission deadline.

Major Research Grants

Successful letters of inquiry for major research grants will result in invitations to submit full proposals. These review decisions are emailed to investigators within approximately 9 weeks of the letter of inquiry submission deadline.

For major research grants, the review process for a successful application—beginning with the submission of a letter of inquiry and ending with approval by our Board of Trustees—is 10 to 12 months.

1. If you are invited to submit a full proposal, you will receive a deadline approximately 6-7 weeks from the date of the invitation.
    - The full proposal follows a format similar to that of the letter of inquiry, and includes a proposal narrative of about 25 pages, a complete budget and budget justification, and full curriculum vitae or resumes for key investigators and staff. We will provide additional detailed instructions on developing the proposal.
    - Institutional Review Board approval is not required at the time of the proposal's submission but is required before issuing grant funds.
    - Full proposals are reviewed using a scientific peer review process involing two or more external reviewers with content, methodological, and disciplinary expertise in the proposed work.
2. Following external review, the Foundation's Senior Program Team reviews promising proposals and offers additional feedback.
3. Applicants who receive positive reviews with critiques that can be addressed within a short time frame are asked to provide written responses to internal and external reviewers' comments.
4. Applicants' responses to external reviews are then further reviewed by the Senior Program Team. Finally, the team makes funding recommendations to the Board of Trustees.
5. Approved awards are made available shortly after the Board's June and October meetings.

Appendix A: Application Checklist

Required Materials	Major Research Grant LOIs	Officers' Research Grant LOIs
Project Narrative (5 pages max.)	**Yes**	**Yes**
One page CV, Bio Sketch, or Resume (For each PI and Co-PI)	**Yes**	**Yes**
Project Details (Title, dates, 1,500-character max. description; within SmartSimple application)	**Yes**	**Yes**
Total Requested Amount (Within SmartSimple application)	**Yes**	**Yes**
Foundation Focus Area (Within SmartSimple application)	**Yes**	**Yes**
Additional Contacts (e.g., Co-PIs; filled out within SmartSimple application)	**Yes**	**Yes**
Applicant Demographics (Filled out within your SmartSimple profile)	**Yes**	**Yes**
Applicant's Highest Degree Attained (Filled out within your SmartSimple profile)	**Yes**	**Yes**
Full Budget (Template in SmartSimple)	No	**Yes**
Budget Justification Form (Template in SmartSimple)	No	**Yes**
Organization's Most Recent Audited Financial Statement	No	**Yes**
IRS Tax-Exempt Status Determination Letter	No	**Yes**
Institutional Sign-Off	No	**Yes**
Add wtgrantfdn.org to your **safe sender list** to ensure you receive notifications.	**Yes**	**Yes**

Appendix B: Useful Links

1. **Resources for Applicants**
   https://wtgrantfoundation.org/funding/research-grants-on-reducing-inequality/applicant-resources

   Resources include applicant guidance, annotated proposals, and recommended reading on topics such as conceptualizing reducing inequality, methods and measurement, and research agendas for reducing inequality.

2. **Frequently Asked Questions**
   https://wtgrantfoundation.org/funding/research-grants-on-reducing-inequality/faq

   FAQs cover topics including what we do and do not fund, our research interests on reducing inequality, the letter of inquiry, study designs and methods, the research grants budget and human subjects approval, and specifics about the Officers' research grants.

3. **Awarded Grants, 2004–Today**
   (Search and filter all awarded grants by program and focus area)
   https://wtgrantfoundation.org/the-library?_sft_format=grants&_sft_focus_area=reducing-inequality&_sft_program=research-grants

Appendix C: Special interest in studies that address systemic racism and structural foundations of inequality

Recognizing that findings about programs and practices that reduce inequality will have limited societal impact until the structures that create inequality in the first place have been transformed, the Foundation is particularly interested in research to uproot systemic racism and the structural foundations of inequality that limit the life chances of young people.

Such research shifts the focal point of change from individuals to macro-level social institutions and examines how these institutions might be altered to dislodge the deep roots of inequality and develop a way forward toward greater equity.

Studies might examine how structural responses improve outcomes for youth, or the mechanisms through which such change occurs. Or they might ask how power hierarchies are disrupted, or how resources are redistributed. Examples include, but are not limited to:

- Research on dramatic changes to the U.S. federal tax system, such as those examined in the Foundation-supported National Academies study, A Roadmap to Reducing Child Poverty.
- Research on shifts in power structures, such as changes in governance systems, or on the process through which the mindsets and behaviors of those who hold power are changed.
- Research on the role of social movements to reduce inequality in youth outcomes, as laid out by Jenny Irons in "Conducting Research on Social Movements to Challenge and Change Youth-Serving Systems."
- Research on the potential impact on youth outcomes of reparations to American descendants of enslaved people, as proposed by William J. Darity, Jr. in "A New Agenda for Eliminating Racial Inequality in the United States: The Research We Need," and in a new grant awarded by the Foundation.
- Research on the consequences for reducing educational inequality of significant school finance reforms, as discussed by former William T. Grant Distinguished Fellow Robert Kim in "How School Finance Research Can Sharpen the Debate, Strengthen Policy, and Improve Student Outcomes."
- Research on implementing new approaches to prosecution aimed at eliminating racial and ethnic disparities, such as explored in recent Foundation grant.
- Research on whether equitable bank lending policies can reduce housing segregation, improve neighborhood quality, and enhance youth development.
- Research on the consequences for youth outcomes of a reallocation of municipal resources away from punitive action and towards social services.

This list is intended to illustrate what we mean by systemic racism and the structural foundations of inequality. It is not an exhaustive set of possible grant topics. Please note that to be eligible for funding, the research still needs to focus on outcomes for young people ages 5-25 in the United States.

For a discussion of why research on programs and practices to reduce inequality in youth outcomes remains important even as the larger structures of racism and inequality persist, please see "**Research on reducing inequality: Why programs and practices matter, even in an unequal society**," by former William T. Grant Scholar David Yeager.

William T. Grant
FOUNDATION

60 East 42nd Street, 43rd Floor
New York, NY 10165
212.752.0071

wtgrantfoundation.org