

**Research  
Practice  
Partnerships**

**SPENCER  
FOUNDATION**

# Research-Practice Partnerships: Collaborative research for educational change

The Research-Practice Partnership (RPP) Grants Program is intended to support education research projects that engage in collaborative and participatory partnerships with project budgets up to \$400,000 and durations of up to three years. We accept Intent to Apply forms once a year in this program.

We view partnerships as an important approach to knowledge generation and the improvement of education, broadly construed. Over the long term, we anticipate that research conducted by RPPs will result in new insights into the processes, practices, and policies that improve education for learners, educators, schools, universities, families, and communities.

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## Program Statement

The Research-Practice Partnership (RPP) Grants Program is intended to support education research projects that engage in collaborative and participatory partnerships with project budgets up to \$400,000 and durations of up to three years. We accept Intent to Apply forms once a year in this program.

We view partnerships as an important approach to knowledge generation and the improvement of education, broadly construed. Rigorous partnership work is intentionally organized to engage diverse forms of expertise and perspectives, across practitioners as well as scholars and disciplines, in knowledge generation around pressing problems of practice. Further, RPPs can facilitate the long-term accumulation of knowledge in new ways as researchers and practitioners work together to ask practitioner-relevant

questions on key topics in specific settings over time. Many key problems of practice are historically saturated and require multiple perspectives and long-term engagement if sustainable and systemic change is to occur. Over the long term, we anticipate that research conducted by RPPs will result in new insights into the processes, practices, and policies that improve education for learners, educators, schools, universities, families, and communities.

This grant program is open to partnerships between researchers and a broad array of practitioners. We define practitioners as school districts, county offices of education, state educational organizations, universities, community-based organizations, out-of-school-time providers, informal educators, and other social sectors that significantly impact learners' lives. As such, we are open to applications from design-based research teams, networked improvement communities, placed-based research alliances, and other partnership arrangements.

We expect the partners in the RPPs we fund to have engaged in fruitful long-term collaborations. How this history is evidenced can vary. For example, teams might have a track record of success as demonstrated by in-process or completed research studies, solutions-in-progress, established trusting relationships, or data-sharing agreements, amongst other possibilities. This grant program is specifically intended to build the capacity of partnerships to make educational change. Effective governance is a key aspect of successful partnerships, and as such all proposals should specify their governance structures and how the work is jointly developed across all partners. Additionally, we expect that partnerships will foreground issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion and articulate these dimensions in the proposal.

While this grant program is open to all partnership configurations across a range of learning contexts, in addition to pre k-12 school systems, we especially encourage applications from partnerships that include scholars and institutions of higher education, rural geographic locations, and partnerships that deeply engage community-based organizations and families.

### **Activities that May be Funded**

Research is fundamental to every research-practice partnership, and we

expect research activities to be the central element of every proposal. In addition to detailing a plan for research, successful applicants may also prioritize plans for communicating and disseminating key findings that have the potential to foster positive educational changes.

The following categories are meant to be illustrative, but not exclusive, of activities beyond the research that could be funded under this program. We expect proposed activities will be highly related to partnership type and context but will also, at their core, have the potential to make a contribution to improved educational policy and practice beyond the specific context in which scholars and practitioners are working.

### *Research Activities*

Each proposal should describe new research that would be launched or existing research activities that would be expanded with the grant. Examples might include randomized trials of new curricula, participatory studies with learner and family co-researchers; design-based research focused on teacher classroom practice; needs mapping with community partners; or deep descriptive work focused on a range of learner outcomes. We encourage a wide range of research methods and approaches.

### *Research Infrastructure*

Funds may be used for building and sustaining infrastructure needs for the research activities of the partnership. These infrastructure needs may apply to the full range of methodological approaches. Examples may include the development of surveys, assessment tools, and other instruments; the development of co-design protocols; and the upkeep of data archives and matching systems. Additionally, administrative activities concerning data may be supported by this grant. These may include developing IRB and review protocols, creating standard data definitions, co-designing consent forms, and developing data security and privacy protocols.

### *Outreach, Communications, and Relationship Building*

Activities that strengthen the working relationship between partners and other stakeholders are also a possible component of the projects. Successful

research-practice partnerships devote a great deal of attention to building and maintaining trust across stakeholder groups and within their partnership. Potential activities may include convening researchers, educators, learners, parents, and other participants to co-design a research agenda; hiring a communication specialist and/or developing a strategy for communicating research findings to important constituents; supporting staff in the partner organizations to manage partnership relations; and preparing research reports and other publications to present the work of the partnership to the public.

### *Capacity Development*

Many research-practice partnerships seek to assist the practice partner in developing capacity to use research evidence and data in their daily decision-making. Funds could be used to learn how to better engage others in research, conduct better practice-driven research, or to be better equipped to communicate complex research findings to practitioners, families, communities, or policy makers that were not primary partners.

We also see the importance of developing the next generation of scholars and practitioners who are prepared to collaborate in partnerships to improve both practice and research. We encourage proposals that include funds dedicated to the development of skills and expertise in conducting research in partnership for graduate students and early-career professionals and researchers. While we expect that most proposals will include funds to support graduate students as part of the partnership, proposals could include plans for training and education beyond that. Examples might include the development of a research methods course focused on research partnerships, the production of online training modules, or the integration of research-practice partnerships in teacher or principal preparation courses.

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## Eligibility and Restrictions

### **Eligibility**

Proposals to the Research-Practice Partnership program must be for research and other activities aimed to support collaborative partnerships between academic researcher(s) and a broad array of practitioner(s) of education.

Principal Investigators (PIs) and Co-PIs applying for a Research-Practice Partnership Grant are expected to have an earned doctorate in an academic discipline or professional field, or demonstrated professional experience appropriate for this program. Note: If the PI or Co-PI from the practice side of the partnership does not have an earned doctorate, they are expected to have appropriate professional experience to serve in this role in the partnership. While graduate students may be part of the team, they may not be named the PI or Co-PI on the proposal.

The PI must be affiliated with a non-profit organization that is willing to serve as the administering organization if the grant is awarded. The Spencer Foundation does not award grants directly to individuals. Examples include non-profit colleges, universities, school districts, and research facilities, as well as other non-profit organizations with a 501(c)(3) determination from the IRS.

The PI associated with the administering organization for this grant could be either the practitioner or researcher of the partnership. At least one Co-PI should be from the other member organization(s).

Proposals are accepted from the U.S. and internationally, however all proposals must be submitted in English and budgets must be proposed in U.S. Dollars.

## **Restrictions**

Research-Practice Partnership budget totals are limited to \$400,000 including up to [15% indirect cost charges](#).

Duration proposed may not be longer than 3 years.

PIs and Co-PIs may only hold one active research grant from the Spencer Foundation at a time. (This restriction does not apply to the administering organization; organizations may submit as many proposals as they like as long as they are for different projects and have different research teams.)

PIs and Co-PIs may not submit more than one research proposal to the Spencer Foundation at a time. This restriction applies to the Small Grants Program, Large Grants Program, and Research-Practice Partnership Program. If the PI or any of the Co-PIs currently have a research proposal under consideration in any of these programs, they are required to wait until a final decision has been made on the pending proposal before they can submit a new proposal.

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## Deadlines

### **Applications Open**

September 15, 2021

### **Intent to Apply**

November 10, 2021 12:00PM (Noon) CENTRAL

### **Full Proposal Deadline**

December 8, 2021 12:00PM (Noon) CENTRAL

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## How to Apply

The application process begins with an Intent to Apply form. Once submitted, you will automatically have access to the Full Proposal application in our online portal. Intent to Apply forms are due by 12:00pm Noon central time on the deadline date.

## **Intent to Apply Guidelines**

The Intent to Apply form must be submitted through an online application form following the guidelines below before you are given access to the full proposal application.

## Step 1 - Registration

Note: This application is configured for the Principal Investigator (PI) on the project to register and submit the form. If someone other than the PI will be completing the online application (e.g., an administrative assistant), the PI should register as described in Step 1 below, then provide the username and password to the person assisting them with the application.

If you (the PI) have never accessed the Spencer Foundation online portal, you must register and create a profile by going to <https://spencer.smartsimple.us> and clicking the “Register Here” button. Follow the guidelines on the registration page to create your profile.

If you already have an account, log on to update your profile and access the Intent to Apply form.

## Step 2 - My Profile

After logging in, follow the directions to complete the information requested on the My Profile page and upload your current CV (10 page limit). The My Profile page is your online account with the Spencer Foundation whether you are applying for a grant, reviewing a proposal, or submitting a grantee report.

## Step 3 – Intent to Apply Form

To fill out the Intent to Apply form, go to your Workbench and click the Apply button for the Research-Practice Partnerships.

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

# Intent to Apply Form Elements

Within the online form, there are detailed guidelines for each section. Below is an overview of the application elements you’ll be expected to complete.

**Project Personnel** - As the person creating the draft application, you will automatically be assigned to the proposal as the Principal Investigator. If there are Co-PIs on the proposal, you are asked to provide their names and



organizations in this section.

**Proposal Summary** – Information about the proposal is requested, such as the project title, estimated duration, the central research question(s), and a 200-word project summary.

**Project Data** – Within the online application, we ask you to check off the appropriate options with regard to your research activities in the partnership in the following categories: disciplinary perspective, methodologies, topics, geographical scope, contexts, and participants. This information is helpful in determining the appropriate reviewers for your eventual full proposal and for internal evaluations of our grant programs.

## Submit

Once you've completed the form, click the Submit button at the bottom of the page. You'll now have access to the Full Proposal application form on your Workbench.

Note: You must complete an Intent to Apply form by noon on the deadline if you intend to submit a Full Proposal for the upcoming review cycle.

## Full Proposal Guidelines

Once your Intent to Apply form has been submitted, you will automatically have access to the Full Proposal application on your Workbench. Within the online application, there are detailed guidelines for each section. Below is an overview of the elements you'll be expected to complete.

**Administering and Partner Organizations:** - In this section you will confirm the Administering Organization for the proposal and enter the name(s) of the partnering organization(s).

**Project Personnel** – It is necessary for you to connect the profiles of the Co-PI(s) to the full proposal. Instruct your Co-PI(s) to create an account and update their profile following Steps 1 and 2 above. Once they have done so, follow the guidelines in this section for connecting them to the proposal.

In this section you are also asked to confirm that neither the PI nor the Co-PIs

currently have another research proposal under review at Spencer (see Restrictions).

**Proposal Summary** – Information about the project is requested, such as the project title, start and end dates, the central research question(s) and a 200-word summary.

**Budget and Budget Justification** - The budget form is divided into the following categories and each category has a pulldown menu of the line item choices listed in parentheses below:

Salaries (PI, Co-PI, Postdoctoral Research Assistant, Graduate Student, Researcher, Undergraduate Researcher, Other Research Staff, Other Staff)

Benefits (PI Benefits, Co-PI Benefits, Researcher Benefits, Other Staff Benefits, Tuition/Fees)

Other Collaborator (Independent Consultant, Advisor)

Travel (Project Travel, Conference or Dissemination Travel)

Equipment and Software (Equipment, Software)

Project Expenses (Supplies, Participant Stipends/Costs, Communication, Transcription)

Other (This should only be used for expenses not covered in the choices above)

Subcontracts (Information is pulled from the subcontract budget forms – see below)

Each expense for your project should be added and the budget narrative field should be completed, providing a description of that specific expense.

Detailed guidelines are available within the application form.

**Subcontracts:** If your project will have subcontracts, a separate subcontract budget form will need to be completed for each. The subcontract form has the same categories and line item choices listed above.

Indirect Cost Charges (IDC): Budgets in this program may include 15% IDC (aka overhead). Subcontract budgets may also include the 15% IDC, but should not be included in the main budget total when calculating the overall IDC for the project.

**Proposal Narrative** - We are looking for applications that make a persuasive argument for the value of your partnership and for why the proposed activities will strengthen the partnership and contribute to educational change. You are expected to upload a proposal narrative pdf that includes the following:

### **History, Background, and Context of Partnership**

Describe the nature of your partnership, including but not limited to: who the key organizational players in the partnership are, the history of the partnership, its theory of change, central goals and achievements to date, and how you envision the partnership progressing over the next five to ten years or longer. We also expect the proposal to make a compelling argument for why your partnership is useful and how it adds value above traditional research.

### **Proposed Activities**

Research activities – Describe the activities you will undertake with support from the foundation. A clear articulation of your research activities should be a central component of your proposal narrative. You may describe how funds will be used to strengthen ongoing research activities or enable you to launch new studies. Situate these research activities in one or more particular topic area(s) and explain how proposed activities will lead to knowledge generation that ultimately advances understanding of the issue and leads to improved policy or practice. To make this argument, you may consider briefly describing existing research and gaps in that work, but we do not expect a full literature review.

Additional activities – In addition to research activities, you should describe how funds will support activities that fall under at least one of the three other categories: (1) research infrastructure; (2) outreach, communications, and relationship-building; or (3) capacity-building. We recognize that there may

be activities that will advance your work that fall outside these categories. We will consider proposals that seek funds for other kinds of activities with a compelling rationale for their importance to your work.

When describing the research and other activities you seek support for, it is important to clearly specify what these activities are and explain why support for them is critical to advancing the work of the partnership and realizing its long-term potential.

The proposal narrative may not exceed 4000 words and at the conclusion, should include the word count in parentheses. Your reference list should follow your narrative in the same pdf file and will not count toward the 4000 word limit. The text should be double-spaced and in 12-point font. APA style is preferred.

Note: Tables and other figures can be included in the text of your proposal, where appropriate, provided they are used sparingly. The text contained in any tables and figures will not count towards the word limit. However, it is important that you describe or explain any tables or figures in the narrative portion of your proposal, which will contribute to your word count. Do not assume that tables and other figures are self-explanatory.

**Partner Letter:** A letter from the partner organization(s) to the administering organization submitting this application should be uploaded. This letter should describe the value of the partnership from the partner's perspective. If there is more than one partner organization, please consider joint letters or one representative letter.

**Project Timeline:** The project timeline should indicate the proposed start and end dates of the partnership activities as well as key events and milestones. The major activities listed in the project timeline should be reflected in the proposal narrative. The project timeline may not exceed 1 page and the text should be in 12-point font. The proposed project duration can be up to 3 years.

**Project Team:** A document should be uploaded that identifies the roles, responsibility and knowledge base of the key personnel involved in the partnership. The Principal Investigator should be associated with the administering organization for this grant, which could be either the

practitioner or researcher of the partnership. At least one Co-PI should be from the other member organization(s). This document should articulate how the team will work together toward the goals of the partnership, highlighting what each team member will contribute to the work. When applicable, please discuss the learning opportunities team members may experience through their participation in this project. This document may not exceed 800 words and the text should be double-spaced and in 12-point font.

**Optional Appendices A** – If you have additional documents focused on scientific instrumentation relevant to the research activities, for example interview protocols or survey instruments, they can be uploaded in this section of the application.

**Optional Appendices B** – If you have other supporting documents, such as letters of agreement or collaboration, Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs), data-sharing agreements, description of governance processes, and other relevant documents, they can be uploaded in this section of the application.

A note about IRB Approval: Proof of Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval is not required at the time of proposal submission. In the event that IRB approval is needed for this project and it is chosen for funding, the Administering Organization will be responsible for obtaining IRB review and approval in accordance with its institutional policies and applicable law.

**Resubmission** – If this is a resubmission of a proposal previously submitted to the Spencer Foundation, you are asked to indicate this within the application and upload a 1-page explanation of how the proposal was revised.

**Project Data** – Within the online application, we ask you to check off the appropriate options with regard to your research activities in the partnership in the following categories: disciplinary perspective, methodologies, topics, geographical scope, contexts, and participants. This information is helpful in determining the appropriate reviewers for your proposal and for internal evaluations of our grant programs

**Signature from Authorized Representative of the Administering Organization-**

This section of the application details the steps necessary to obtain the authorized signature for your proposal through the Adobe E-sign process. You are required to provide the Signatory's name, title, and email address; this is normally an administrative or financial person who has the authority to sign the proposal on behalf of your organization. Note: The signature process must be completed by noon on the deadline date. You, as the applicant, are responsible for making sure your proposal is signed by the deadline. Please account for the time it takes your organization's authorized signer to review and sign proposal submissions. We recommend filling in the online application at least a week ahead of the deadline date. The Spencer Foundation is unable to accept late submissions.

## Submit

Once you've completed all of the elements listed above, click the Submit button at the bottom of the application page and it will be routed to your Signatory for signature and final submission

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## Review Process

All full proposal submissions are reviewed by external panel reviewers and internal staff. Those chosen as semi-finalists will be considered in the final decision meeting against the other semi-finalist proposals. The review process for this program takes approximately 8 months from the Intent to Apply deadline date.

The review panel for this program is made up of both researchers and practitioners familiar with research-practice partnerships in the field of education research. Panelist are asked to rate and comment on the following aspects of your proposal:

**Suitability of the Partnership:** Reviewers will evaluate how well the partnership meets the tenets of a research-practice partnership as described in the program statement.

**Focus of Activities on Research to Improve Practice:** Reviewers will evaluate the overall quality and alignment of the partnership activities in contributing both to local practice and the broader education research community.

**Focus of Activities on Development and Sustainability:** Reviewers will evaluate the potential of the partnership to develop during the grant and sustain and advance itself beyond the proposed timeline of the grant.

**Budget and Timeline:** Reviewers will comment on the adequacy of the budget and timeline.

**Project Team:** Reviewers will comment on the potential of the key personnel to do the work of the partnership as described in the proposal.

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## Frequently Asked Questions

**Q:** Do you support the work of research-practice partnerships in sectors other than K-12 and higher education?

**A:** Yes, partnerships between researchers and practitioners in educational settings that span the life course (i.e., from early childhood to adult learning) as well as those that focus on contexts outside of school are eligible.

**Q:** Do you support small-scale research-practice partnerships, for example a partnership between a researcher and a classroom teacher, or a partnership between the administrator of a small after-school program and a researcher?

**A:** We certainly see value in these partnerships, but this grant program is aimed at larger-scale partnerships that are likely to involve multiple schools or other educational sites. Because the program is intended to support long-term capacity building, we think that the larger scale is important for long-term viability.

**Q:** Do you accept proposals for this grant program for partnerships outside of the U.S. or between U.S. and international agencies?

**A:** Yes.

**Q:** Many professors and colleges of education partner with schools to provide professional development or pre-service and in-service training and would like to add a research component to their work. Are these partnerships suitable for this grant program?

**A:** Partnerships based on providing professional development would only meet the criteria for this grant program if they already had a history of conducting research jointly.

**Q:** Can the practice side of the partnership be the administering organization or principal investigator for the grant?

**A:** Yes. Given our emphasis on supporting partnerships that are mutualistic, we can imagine a scenario where the principal investigator is the director of a practice-oriented organization.

**Q:** If the practitioner is the lead PI for the grant, do they need an earned doctorate to be eligible?

**A:** Not necessarily. If the PI will be from the practice side of the partnership but does not have an earned doctorate, reviewers will expect them to have demonstrated professional experience appropriate for this RFP. However, we do expect the partners on the research side of the partnership to have an earned doctorate in an academic discipline or professional field.

**Q:** Am I allowed to subcontract with my partnering organization?

**A:** Yes. In many cases, subcontracting with the partner organization might be appropriate. The details on how to create a budget with subcontracts are available in the application guidelines.

**Q:** Can my organization submit more than one proposal at a time?

**A:** Yes, as long as the proposals are for different partnerships and the teams are different, it is fine for an organization to submit multiple applications at



one time.

**Q:** If I have a current grant through Spencer, can I apply for a new grant?

**A:** You may not hold more than one active research grant at a time from the Spencer Foundation. You may apply for a new grant while you have an active grant at the Spencer Foundation if the active grant will end before the anticipated start date of the new project.

**Q:** What is your policy on indirect costs?

**A:** Research grant proposals with budgets over \$75,000 may include 15% indirect cost charges (IDC) on the total direct costs. Subcontract budgets may include the 15% IDC, but should not be included in the main budget total when calculating the overall IDC for the project.

**Q:** Are budgets expected to include in-kind giving or cost sharing? If not expected, is it allowed?

**A:** In-kind giving or cost sharing is not expected or required as part of your proposal budget. However, if you plan to include in-kind giving or cost sharing as part of your project budget, you should indicate this in the online budget form in the narrative section. If your proposal is chosen for funding, the grant award may be contingent upon receiving documentation confirming the additional support.

**Q:** I would like to speak with someone about my partnership before submitting a proposal. Is this possible and whom should I contact?

**A:** If you have reviewed the program statement and are still uncertain as to whether your partnership falls within the Spencer Foundation's funding mission and request for proposals, feel free to email [research-practice-partnership@spencer.org](mailto:research-practice-partnership@spencer.org).

**Q:** How do I determine my start date and when should I expect payment if my proposal is selected for funding?

**A:** We recommend proposing a start date that is at least 9 months after the deadline for the Intent to Apply form. The review process for this program

takes approximately 8 months and once notified of the funding decision, it can take an additional 2 months for the official approval process which entails reviewing the budget, processing award letters, and issuing the grant payment. NOTE: Grant payments are issued on the third week of each month. If Spencer has not received your signed award letters by your start date, your payment will not be issued.

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## Recent Awardees

### **"Orange County Educational Advancement Network: Facilitating a Network of RPPs at County Scale to Better Support Housing Insecure and Foster Youth"**

June Ahn (University of California, Irvine), Richard Arum (University of California, Irvine), Anthony Saba (Samueli Academy)

### **"Project LEARN: Language, Equity, and Action Research with Newcomer Students"**

Alison Dover (CSU Fullerton), Renae Bryant (Anaheim Union High School District), Fernando Rodriguez-Valls (California State University, Fullerton)

### **"Identifying strategies to diversify Tennessee's teacher workforce through recruitment and retention research"**

Jason Grissom (Vanderbilt University), Kevin Schaaf (Tennessee Department of Education), Pamela Chapman (Tennessee Department of Education)

### **"Innovations in Family Empowerment and Community Partnerships in Early Education: A Research Practice Policy Partnership in New York City"**

Kate Tarrant (City University of New York, Research Foundation: New York Early Childhood Professional Development Institute), Vanessa Rodriguez (New York University School of Medicine), Kimber Bogard (The New York Academy of Medicine)

### **"Strengthening education in a rural community of former guerrilla members and their families: A participatory action research approach"**

**towards peace-building in Colombia"**

Lina Trigos-Carrillo (Universidad de La Sabana), Laura Sarmiento (Universidad de La Sabana), Diego Tovar (COOMBUVIPAC)

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