I. PROGRAM PURPOSE

The Foundation for Child Development believes that high-quality early learning experiences are crucial for the healthy lifelong development and learning of young children across the birth to age eight continuum. Our Young Scholars Program (YSP) supports implementation research that is policy- and practice-relevant and that examines the preparation, competency, compensation, wellbeing, and ongoing professional learning of the early care and education (ECE) workforce. The Foundation believes that a deeper understanding of the role of ECE professionals in enhancing young children’s early learning experiences can ultimately improve the chances for all children to reach their full potential.

Three specific goals frame the Foundation’s current programmatic priority to strengthen the ECE workforce:

1. Professionalize the early childhood field and build greater awareness of the status of the early childhood workforce.

2. Enhance the quality of professional practice.

3. Improve teacher preparation and ongoing professional learning, with special attention to the influence and role of institutions of higher education.

For more information on the Foundation’s mission, history, and programmatic direction please visit our website at fcdus.org.

Diversity is an asset for building a strong and productive society, and the Foundation is committed to diversity and equity in our work and through our grantees. To increase the diversity of research perspectives, the Foundation encourages applications from scholars who are from underrepresented groups that have historically experienced poverty, racism, prejudice, and discrimination. Such groups include, but are not limited to: researchers of color, first-generation college graduates, culturally and linguistically diverse scholars, and those from low-income communities. We also encourage applications that represent a variety of disciplines and methodological approaches. The Foundation is specifically interested in research that can support and strengthen ECE professionals who serve YSP’s priority populations of children (please see Section II).
II. PRIORITY POPULATIONS

The Foundation supports research that is related to the ECE workforce that serves the YSP priority populations of young children who experience the harmful effects of poverty and discrimination across the birth to age eight continuum. The priority populations include below:

- Children from low-income families and/or those experiencing extreme poverty
- Children with diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds
- Immigrant\(^1\) or refugee\(^2\) families, undocumented minors, or children whose family members have been detained or deported
- Dual language and multilingual learners
- Children with special education classifications
- Children experiencing homelessness
- Victims of trauma and/or child maltreatment

III. RESEARCH FOCUS

A. Supporting the Early Care and Education Workforce

All proposed research must have primary questions that are relevant to at least one of the Foundation’s three ECE workforce goals. Research should focus on the ways in which the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of the ECE workforce can support young children’s growth and development across the birth through age eight continuum. Specifically, the ECE workforce refers to the professionals who educate and care for young children and families across a variety of settings (center- and home-based) and systems (regulated and informal), as well as the individuals who provide ECE professionals with leadership, support, and professional development (e.g., lead teachers, coaches, home visitors, administrators, higher education faculty, etc.). The ECE workforce plays a critical role in the lives of young children since the quality of their interactions and the environmental stimulation that they provide have a direct impact on children’s learning and development. Please visit the Foundation’s website for more information on its aims for the ECE workforce at fcd-us.org.

1. Examples of Research Questions of Interest

The following examples illustrate the types of research questions related to the ECE workforce that can generate empirical evidence that is of interest to the Foundation. The list below is by no means exhaustive:

**Overall:**
- What elements in ECE program or policy implementation, related to the preparation, practice, and/or ongoing professional learning of the ECE workforce, appear critical to achieving success for YSP’s priority populations?

\(^1\) One or both parents born outside of the U.S.
\(^2\) One or both parents fleeing due to persecution or having a well-founded fear of persecution
Professionalize the Field:

- What is the impact of state ECE teacher licensing and certification regulations on 1) the distribution of ECE professionals in the state’s ECE programs, 2) the racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity of ECE professionals in the state’s ECE programs, and 3) the quality of practice? These licensing and certification regulations may apply across a variety of systems including state prekindergarten and child care subsidy programs.

- Does a policy of compensation parity across early care and education settings increase program quality? Does it improve the well-being of the ECE workforce and reduce teacher turnover, particularly for ECE professionals of color? How does such a policy result in better child outcomes?

Enhance the Quality of Professional Practice:

- What ECE professional/child interactions and/or ECE professional/family (caregiver) interactions are most beneficial for specific subgroups of young children, especially in YSP’s priority populations?

- Focusing on specific ECE workforce relevant issues, what do families and young children actually experience in the implementation of ECE programs and/or policies? Do all families and young children receive the intended services? If not, why not? What is the control/comparison group experiencing relative to those participating in the intervention?

- What classroom supports are needed to foster a nurturing learning environment? How do ECE professionals promote high-quality teacher-child interactions? How can ECE professionals engage in more positive disciplinary practices to better support the diversity of children across ECE settings?

- What practices or constellation of practices, of school principals and center directors, lead to creating supportive working environments for ECE professionals who provide children with high-quality instruction?

- How do home-visiting practices, including dimensions of frequency, duration, intensity, and content, vary to be responsive to the needs of specific subgroups of young children, especially in YSP’s priority populations?

Improve teacher preparation and ongoing professional learning, with special attention to the influence and role of institutions of higher education:

- What innovative strategies exist to improve student preparation and instruction and improve practice in the field, particularly to better meet the needs of the diversity of children and families (caregivers) across ECE settings? What are alternative models of preparing ECE professionals to better meet the demands of high-quality ECE practice?
• How does ongoing professional development, such as the use of coaches/mentors/communities of practice, in ECE programs change the practice of ECE professionals? What features of the professional development are likely to have the greatest impact? What effects are seen for specific groups of young children or within specific ECE settings?

• How can teacher education programs redesign their programs to help their students better understand how racism, poverty, and other challenging contexts affect children’s learning and development? How can ECE preparation change so professionals are more competent in tailoring instructional approaches to be responsive to the needs of specific subgroups of children and families?

• What are the effects on access and quality of teacher preparation when associate and baccalaureate programs are aligned and well-articulated? What are the conditions that facilitate those processes?

B. Supporting Implementation Research on the ECE Workforce
While much has been learned about advancing high-quality experiences for young children, the Foundation believes that it is time to take a deeper look into the essential components of these interventions. Implementation research provides the opportunity to engage in meaningful exploration of what works (or not), for whom, and under what conditions. As the field engages in bringing more programs to scale, our ability to achieve greater impacts for young children rests on a more nuanced understanding of how programs are being implemented and the differential impacts on subgroups of children (Foundation for Child Development, 2020). The Foundation highly recommends reviewing Getting it Right: Using Implementation Research to Improve Outcomes in Early Care and Education, as it explains the Foundation’s perspective on the value of implementation research and provides guidance on various implementation research approaches and methods.

The Foundation places a priority on supporting implementation research that advances understanding of the critical components of effective ECE programs. Implementation research is an approach to scientific inquiry that examines how, and how well programs, policies, and practices are executed in real-world settings (Halle, Metz, & Martinez-Beck, 2013; Damschroder, Aron, Keith, Kirsh, Alexander, & Lowery, 2009). Additionally, the examination of policy and program implementation also includes understanding the contextual factors and conditions that influence the execution of the program, policy and practice in complex, iterative, and non-sequential ways (Halle, Metz, & Martinez-Beck, 2013). Implementation research is not summative evaluation. Rather, it attempts to explain what is happening and whether execution of a program or policy is aligned to

---


the intended purpose, as well as answer how, why, and for whom a policy, program, or practice does or does not work (Maier & Hsueh, 2020⁶).

With a particular focus on the role of the ECE workforce, research questions for the proposed YSP studies must support scientific inquiry into the implementation of specific early care and education programs, policies, or practices.

Examples of lines of inquiry within implementation research include:

- Assessing the fidelity and quality of the implementation of an existing program, policy, or practice
- Identifying the effectiveness of specific components in an existing program, policy, or practice and the impact on a range of outcomes for children and specific subgroups of children
- Understanding the conditions, mechanisms, processes, or supports necessary to maintain and promote the sustainability of an existing program, policy, or practice
- Determining how an existing program, policy, or practice can be effectively brought to scale and maintained at scale
- Informing continuous program, policy, or practice improvement

2. Research Methodology

Proposals may include implementation research that uses a range of methodological approaches and may involve new data collection, secondary data analysis, formative program evaluation, empirical field experiments, or continuing work for a larger-scale research project (that has received or is seeking additional funding from other public or private funders). Regardless of the approach, type of study, or source of data, all research must be conducted in a culturally sensitive manner and produce findings that are relevant to the ECE workforce and young children in YSP’s priority populations. This includes studies with an adult research sample population and/or child sample population. The Foundation recommends reviewing Getting it Right: Using Implementation Research to Improve Outcomes in Early Care and Education to find additional guidance on various implementation research approaches and methods.

Please note that analysis of international data and data from international sources that provide comparisons relevant to U.S. policies and/or programs is also within the scope of interest. However, international data collection is not supported.

C. Public Policy and Program Practice Relevance
All supported research must have a clear connection to policies and practices that have the potential to result in a positive impact on the ECE workforce and on the young children in YSP’s priority populations.

These include a focus on:
- ECE practice and/or policy at the federal, state, or local level
- ECE practice and/or policy at a program, institutional, or organizational level

Examples of policies/practices that could be studied include, but are not limited to:
- Instructional supports for dual language and multilingual learners
- Coaching models as part of a professional development system
- Clinically based/ preservice training requirements as part of teacher preparation
- Compensation levels across professional roles, settings, and ages of children served

IV. ELIGIBILITY

1. Principal Investigators must have received their doctoral degrees (e.g., Ph.D., Ed.D., Psy.D., J.D.) between January 1, 2012 and June 30, 2020. Physician applicants must have received their M.D. degrees between January 1, 2009 and June 30, 2020. A minimum of one year must have elapsed since receiving their degrees before Principal Investigators may apply to the program.

2. Applicants must be United States citizens, legal permanent residents, or those who have employment authorization from the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services at the time of the award and for the duration of the fellowship.

3. For the duration of the fellowship, individual Principal Investigators must be full-time, paid employees of the affiliated 501(c)(3) nonprofit institution/organization (including research firms) or of a public American college or university located in the United States and its territories7 that will receive and process the Foundation’s grant as well as support (e.g., contribute material and in-kind support) the funded research project, if awarded.

4. The affiliated 501(c)(3) nonprofit institution/organization (including research firms) or public American college or university must have a minimum annual operating budget of $2.5 million, have a minimum three-year track record in leading and conducting multi-year research projects (at least three over the last three years), include research as a core activity as described in recent annual reports, and have produced and publicly disseminated a minimum of five publications (over the last five years) reporting the results of their research.

5. The applicant is the sole Principal Investigator and will lead the proposed research (no Co-Investigators).

---

7 Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands, American Samoa, Guam, and Northern Mariana Islands
6. More than one applicant may apply from a single institution.

7. **Returning applicants are welcome and strongly encouraged to re-apply.**

## V. GRANT FUNDING

1. Up to three grants are available for support of individual scholarship.

2. For proposed research projects involving either **primary data collection or a combination of primary data collection and secondary data analysis**, the maximum grant award, including indirect costs, is $225,000 to be used over a two- to three-year period. Grant funds are intended to support the Principal Investigator’s salary and direct research expenses. Indirect and overhead costs are limited to 15 percent of the total direct personnel costs.

3. For proposed research projects solely focused on **secondary data analysis**, the maximum grant award, including indirect costs, is $180,000 to be used over a two- to three-year period. Grant funds are intended to support the Principal Investigator’s salary and direct research expenses. Indirect and overhead costs are limited to 15 percent of the total direct personnel costs.

4. In general, up to 10 percent of direct personnel costs may be used towards senior faculty or advisors as consultants.

5. Each award will be paid directly to, and will be administered by, the affiliated 501(c)(3) nonprofit institution/organization at which the recipient holds his/her full-time position.

6. Principal Investigators may only submit one proposal during an award cycle.

7. Award recipients are designated as Foundation for Child Development Young Scholars.

## VI. FOUNDATION FOR CHILD DEVELOPMENT YOUNG SCHOLAR REQUIREMENTS

1. Initiate the research project within three months of award notification. Award notification typically occurs in the April following the initial launch of a cycle.

2. Submit a request to the institution’s internal review board if applicable. To offset any potential delays, the process for receiving approval for human subjects review from the institution’s internal review board must be underway at the time of full application submission.

3. Complete research that results in a manuscript (e.g., report, book, or article suitable for publication) where the Principal Investigator is the first author.

4. Serve as the sole Principal Investigator of the research project (no Co-Investigators).
5. Submit annual narrative and financial reports on the progress of the research.

6. Participate in meetings with other Foundation for Child Development Young Scholars. Expenses for these meetings will be underwritten separately and should not be included in the proposal budget.

**VII. CRITERIA FOR SELECTION**

Foundation staff, the Young Scholars Program Advisory Committee, and external reviewers will evaluate proposals based on the following criteria:

1. **Support of the YSP Purpose and Research Focus:** The degree to which the proposed implementation research explores relationships among the ECE workforce, quality of professional practice, and/or the learning and development of YSP’s priority populations. The degree to which the research is relevant to ECE policy and practice is particularly important.

2. **Research Concept and Methodology:** The degree to which the proposed work is theoretically based as well as conceptually and methodologically sound. Procedures for data collection and analysis should be detailed and clear for all studies, regardless of the methods used. Where both quantitative and qualitative approaches are being used, the proposed work should demonstrate how the combination of these approaches potentially enhances the proposed study.

3. **Cultural and Linguistic Sensitivity:** The extent to which the proposed research and Principal Investigator demonstrate an understanding of and sensitivity to culturally and linguistically specific issues that may be relevant to the ECE workforce and YSP’s priority populations (e.g., language as reflected in identity and culture, alternative family structures, potential societal stigmas).

4. **Applicant’s Qualifications:** The quality of the applicant’s previous research and capacity (e.g., publications, presentations, etc.) to undertake the proposed research and bring the work to successful completion.

5. **Institutional Support and Capacity:** The capacity and intention of the affiliated 501(c)(3) nonprofit institution to receive and process the grant as well as to support (e.g., expertise, material, in-kind) the Principal Investigator and the Foundation-funded research project, including its attendant public policy outreach. In general, any institution with more than 10 percent operating deficit within the prior fiscal year may be considered lacking capacity.

**VIII. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND KEY DATES**

Please refer to the Foundation’s website at [fcd.us.org](http://fcd.us.org) for specific deadlines and updates, and for additional resources such as the YSP Frequently Asked Questions.

***