



Foundation for Child Development Young Scholars Program 2024 YSP Guidelines

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. Since 2015, our Young Scholars Program (YSP) has supported policy- and practice-relevant implementation research that examines the preparation, competency, compensation, well-being, and ongoing professional learning of the early care and education (ECE) workforce. The Foundation believes that a deeper understanding of the role that ECE professionals play in enhancing young children's early learning experiences can 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.

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, xenophobia, prejudice, and discrimination. Such groups include, but are not limited to: researchers of color, first-generation college graduates, and those from low-income communities and/or immigrant families. We also encourage applications that represent a variety of disciplines and methodological approaches.

II. PRIORITY POPULATIONS

The Foundation is specifically interested in research that can strengthen the ECE professionals who serve the YSP priority populations of young children who experience the harmful effects of poverty,

racism, xenophobia, prejudice, and discrimination across the birth to age eight continuum. The priority populations include:

- Children from low-income families and/or those experiencing extreme poverty
- Children of color, including those with Asian American, Latinx, Black/African American, and/or Indigenous backgrounds
- Children in immigrant¹ or refugee² families, including child migrants, undocumented minors, children whose family members have been detained or deported, and 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 ECE Workforce

All proposed research must have primary questions that are relevant to at least one of the Foundation's three ECE workforce goals. The ECE workforce refers to the professionals who educate and care for young children, defined as birth through age eight, across a variety of settings (center- and home-based) and systems (regulated and informal), as well as the individuals who provide those professionals with leadership, support, and professional development (e.g., coaches, home visitors, administrators, higher education faculty, etc.). The ECE workforce plays a critical role in the lives of young children, as the quality of their interactions and the stimulation that they provide affect children's learning and development. Yet, the work of these professionals—who have historically been women of color and immigrants—is often not recognized and underappreciated in the U.S. Please visit the Foundation's [website](#) for more information on its aims for supporting the ECE workforce.

1. Examples of Research Questions of Interest

The following examples illustrate the types of research questions that can generate empirical evidence that fit the Foundation's workforce interests. *The list below is by no means exhaustive, and we welcome other promising ideas.*

Professionalize the Field:

- Does state ECE teacher licensing and certification regulations impact 1) the overall distribution of ECE professionals, 2) their distribution by race, ethnicity, and language skills, and 3) the quality of their practice across different kinds of programs (e.g., state prekindergarten, childcare subsidy programs, etc.).
- Does a policy of compensation parity across ECE settings increase program quality and child outcomes? If so, through what mechanisms are impacts achieved? Does, for example, well-

¹ One or both parents born outside of the U.S.

² One or both parents or the child is fleeing due to persecution or having a well-founded fear of persecution

being of workers improve and teacher turnover decline? Are impacts and mechanisms different for ECE professionals of color as compared to their White counterparts?

Enhance the Quality of Professional Practice:

- What types of interactions between ECE professionals and children are most beneficial for YSP's priority populations?
- What are effective strategies for improving ECE professionals' engagement with the families of YSP's priority populations? Does improved engagement lead to better child outcomes?
- What are the reliability and validity of quality measures for YSP's priority populations? How can quality measures be improved to better assess equity in ECE settings?
- What school principal (or center director) practices create supportive working environments that reduce teacher turnover and improve instructional quality?
- How do the frequency, duration, intensity, and content of home visiting practices affect YSP's priority populations?

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

- Which teacher preparation strategies improve instructional practice for children affected by racism, poverty, or xenophobia?
- What types of professional development have the greatest impact on ECE professionals' practices? How do effects vary across different groups of young children and ECE settings?
- Does aligning associate and baccalaureate programs improve access to and quality of teacher preparation? What are the enabling conditions for impact?

B. Supporting Implementation Research on the ECE Workforce

While substantial research has focused on examining what constitutes high-quality early learning experiences and the impact of policies and programs to identify "what works," implementation research is needed to better understand how to bring about high-quality experiences for different groups of children, across different settings and contexts. 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 its intended purpose (Maier & Hsueh, 2020³). Implementation research is an approach to scientific inquiry that examines how, and how well programs, policies, and practices

³ Maier, M. & Hsueh, J. (2020). Designing Implementation Research to Guide the Scale-Up of Effective Early Care and Education Across Settings. In *Getting it Right: Using Implementation Research to Improve Outcomes in Early Care and Education* (pp. 195-222). New York, NY: Foundation for Child Development. https://www.fcd-us.org/assets/2020/06/GettingitRight_UsingImplementationResearchtoImproveOutcomesinECE_Chapter9_2020.pdf

are executed in real-world settings (Halle, Metz, & Martinez-Beck, 2013⁴; Damschroder, Aron, Keith, Kirsh, Alexander, & Lowery, 2009⁵). 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).

We encourage applicants to propose studies that examine the implementation questions of interest to policymakers, decision makers, and program implementers. This can include, for example, questions regarding financing, or how to align new programs or practices with existing work. Given the Foundation's priority populations, we also welcome research that yields a more robust understanding of how to improve program implementation for children who have been historically marginalized (Foundation for Child Development, 2020⁶). For more resources on how the Foundation thinks about implementation research, its approaches and methods, and recommendations for future research, we highly recommend that applicants review [Getting it Right: Using Implementation Research to Improve Outcomes in Early Care and Education](#) and its companion piece, [Getting it Right: The Conversation Guide for Preparing the Next Generation of Implementation Researchers](#).

Research questions for the proposed YSP studies must support scientific inquiry into the implementation of specific ECE programs, policies, or practices that affect the workforce. Examples of lines of inquiry within implementation research include:

- Assessing how context influences the quality of implementation of a program, policy, or practice
- Identifying the critical components of a program, policy, or practice that impact important child outcomes
- Understanding the external conditions, mechanisms, processes, and/or supports necessary to sustain high-quality implementation of a program, policy, or practice over time
- Determining how a program, policy, or practice can be scaled
- Identifying the conditions that support continuous program, policy, or practice improvement

2. Research Methodology

We welcome a range of methodological approaches that may involve new data collection, secondary data analysis, formative program evaluation, field experiments, or building on a larger-scale project (that has received or is seeking additional funding from other public or private funders).

⁴ Halle, T., Metz, A., & Martinez-Beck, I. (Eds.). (2013). *Applying Implementation Science in Early Childhood Programs and Systems*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.

⁵ Damschroder, L., Aron, D., Keith, R., Kirsch, S., Alexander, J., & Lowery, C. (2009) Fostering implementation health of health services research findings into practice: A consolidated framework for advancing implementation science. *Implementation Science*, 4, 50.

⁶ Foundation for Child Development. (2020). *Getting it Right: Using Implementation Research to Improve Outcomes in Early Care and Education*. New York, NY. doi: https://www.fcd-us.org/assets/2020/06/GettingitRight_UsingImplementationResearchtoImproveOutcomesinECE_2020.pdf

Regardless of the approach, type of study, or source of data, all research must be conducted in a racially, culturally, and linguistically sensitive manner and produce findings that are relevant to the ECE workforce and the young children in YSP's priority populations. 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. The Foundation also recommends reviewing its companion piece, [Getting it Right: The Conversation Guide for Preparing the Next Generation of Implementation Researchers](#).

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

C. Public Policy, Program, and Practice Relevance

All supported research must have clear connections to policies, programs, or practices that have the potential to result in positive impacts on the ECE workforce and the young children in YSP's priority populations. We are interested in research relevant to ECE policies, programs, or practices at the federal, state, local, and organizational levels.

IV. ELIGIBILITY

1. Principal Investigators must have received their doctoral degrees (e.g., Ph.D., Ed.D., Psy.D., J.D.) between January 1, 2014 and June 30, 2022. Physician applicants must have received their M.D. degrees between January 1, 2011 and June 30, 2022. A minimum of one year must have elapsed since receiving their degrees before Principal Investigators may apply.
2. For the duration of the fellowship, Principal Investigators must be full-time, paid employees of the affiliated 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization (located within the United States and its territories).⁷ The organization will receive and process the Foundation's grant, as well as contribute material and in-kind support for the funded research project.
3. The affiliated 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization (such as research firms, colleges, or universities) must have a minimum annual operating budget of \$2.5 million, a minimum three-year track record in leading and conducting at least three multi-year research projects, describe research as a core activity 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.
4. The applicant is the sole Principal Investigator and will lead the proposed research (no Co-Investigators).
5. More than one applicant may apply from a single institution.
6. **Returning applicants are welcome and strongly encouraged to re-apply.**

⁷ Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands, American Samoa, Guam, and Northern Mariana Islands

V. GRANT FUNDING

1. Up to three grants will be awarded each year.
2. Research projects involving primary data collection or a combination of primary data collection and secondary data analysis are eligible for a grant award, including indirect costs, up to \$225,000 to be used over a two- to three-year period. The maximum grant award for research projects solely focused on secondary data analysis is \$180,000, inclusive of indirect costs, to be used over a two- to three-year period.
3. 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. Up to 10 percent of direct personnel costs may be used to support senior faculty or advisors as consultants.
5. Each award will be paid directly to, and administered by, the affiliated 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization at which the recipient holds his/her/their 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 for each cycle typically occurs in April.
2. Submit a request to the institution's internal review board (IRB) if applicable. To offset any potential delays, the process for IRB review must be underway at the time of full application submission (typically, an email is provided confirming that the application has been submitted for review to the IRB).
3. Complete research that results in a manuscript (e.g., report, book, or article) suitable for publication for which 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 covered separately and should not be included in the proposal budget.

VII. CRITERIA FOR SELECTION

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

1. Support of the YSP Purpose and Research Focus: The degree to which the proposed research fits the YSP priority populations and is relevant to ECE policy and practice.

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. Studies that combine quantitative and qualitative approaches should demonstrate how the integration of those approaches enhances the proposed study.

3. Racial, Cultural, and Linguistic Sensitivity: The extent to which the proposed research and Principal Investigator demonstrate an understanding of and sensitivity to the ways race, culture, and language are relevant to the ECE workforce and YSP's priority populations.

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 YSP research project, including its attendant public policy outreach. In general, any institution with more than a 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](#) for specific deadlines, updates, and access to the additional resources listed below:

- YSP Frequently Asked Questions
- Meet the Young Scholars
- YSP Spotlight
- Advancing Equity: Conducting Strengths-Based Research in Early Care & Education
- 2022 Young Scholars Program LOI Webinar: A Review of the Process
- Developing Strong Young Scholars Program Full Applications
- Getting it Right Roundtable Discussion: Preparing Future Early Care and Education Implementation Researchers

YSP Timeline

April

Call for Proposals opens

June

LOI Deadline

August

Notification of LOI status and invitations to submit a Full Application

October

Full Application Deadline

April

Notification of grant awards.

Questions?

Contact us via email at ysp@fcd-us.org.

* * *