



Foundation for Child Development Young Scholars Program 2025 YSP Guidelines

I. PROGRAM PURPOSE

The Foundation for Child Development aims to harness the power of research to ensure that all young children benefit from early learning experiences that affirm their individual, family, and community assets, fortify them against harmful consequences arising from poverty, racism, prejudice, and discrimination, and strengthen their developmental potential.

The Young Scholars Program (YSP) aims to support the research of emerging scholars who are poised to advance research at the nexus of policy and practice to ensure that all young children, and especially those marginalized by racism, xenophobia, or economic inequality, are able to thrive.

Our focus with YSP centers on research projects that aim to build, test, or increase understanding of policies, programs, or practices that support the early care and education (ECE) workforce to promote young children's early learning experiences. The program funds descriptive, experimental, measurement, and implementation studies that aim to clarify how, why, and for whom policies, programs, and practices support the ECE workforce in ways that positively benefit young children, defined as birth through age eight.

Diversity is an asset for building a strong and productive society, and the Foundation is committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion in our work and through our grantees. To increase the diversity of research perspectives, the Foundation encourages YSP 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. RESEARCH FOCUS

YSP funds studies that align with the Foundation's research focus areas. In 2015, the Foundation launched a 10-year initiative focused on strengthening the capacity and status of the ECE workforce across diverse settings. For the 2025 application cycle, YSP seeks to support early-career scholars with interests in conducting policy- and practice-relevant research under this initiative.

Within this frame, the Foundation’s programmatic priorities are dedicated to supporting the workforce and identifying research with the potential to:

1. Advance the status and well-being of the ECE workforce;
2. Enhance the quality of practice of the ECE workforce; or,
3. Strengthen ECE leadership to create more supportive environments for the workforce.

With 2025 marking the final year of the Foundation’s 10-year initiative focused on strengthening the capacity and status of the ECE workforce, the 2025 YSP application cycle will be the last cohort of Young Scholars awarded under these programmatic priorities. For this reason, Promising Scholars will not be awarded in 2025.

A. Supporting the ECE Workforce

For the 2025 YSP application cycle, all proposed research should have primary questions that are relevant to at least one of the Foundation’s three ECE workforce goals. The ECE workforce refers to the adults who educate and care for young children, defined as birth through age eight, such as lead and assistant teachers, educators, and providers, as well as the individuals who provide leadership, support, and professional development (e.g., coaches, home visitors, administrators, higher education faculty, etc.) to others in the ECE workforce. We are interested in the workforce across a variety of settings (e.g., center- and home-based) and systems (e.g., regulated and informal).

The ECE workforce plays a critical role in the lives of young children. The quality of their interactions and the stimulation that they provide affect children’s learning and other areas of development. Yet, the work of these individuals—who have historically been women of color and immigrants—is often unrecognized and underappreciated in the U.S. Please visit the Foundation’s [website](#) for more information on our aims for strengthening the capacity and status of the ECE workforce.

B. Supporting Implementation of Policies, Programs, and Practices

YSP research interests include descriptive, experimental, measurement, and implementation studies that aim to clarify how, why, and for whom policies, programs, and practices support the ECE workforce or shape children’s early learning experiences and opportunities in early childhood.

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,” research is needed to help us better understand how to design and deliver high-quality experiences for different groups of children across different settings and contexts. Research focused on the implementation of policies, programs, and practices move beyond summative evaluation findings. In doing so, implementation research can explain *what* is happening and whether execution of a program or policy is aligned to

its intended purpose.¹ Implementation research also examines how, and how well programs, policies, and practices are executed in real-world settings.^{2,3} 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.⁴

Given the Foundation's priority populations, we welcome research that yields a more robust understanding of how to improve ECE practice, program, and policy implementation to support the ECE workforce and thereby children who have been historically marginalized.⁴

For more resources on how the Foundation thinks about implementation research, its approaches and methods, and recommendations for future research, we 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](#).

C. Research Methodologies

We welcome a range of quantitative or qualitative methodological approaches that may involve new data collection or secondary data analysis. Regardless of the approach, type of study, or source of data, all research must be conducted in a racially, culturally, and linguistically responsive manner and produce policy- and practice-relevant findings to support the ECE workforce and the young children in YSP's priority populations.

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 and relevance to the implementation of policies, programs, or practices that aim to advance the capacity and status of the ECE workforce and positively benefit 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. Research that also builds from the interests and priorities of the communities, educators, or families who are engaged in the research is highly valued.

¹ 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

² 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.

³ 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.

⁴ 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

III. PRIORITY POPULATIONS

The Foundation is specifically interested in research that can strengthen the ECE workforce 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 who experience poverty
- Children of color, including those with Asian American, Latinx, Black/African American, and/or Indigenous backgrounds
- Children in immigrant⁵ or refugee⁶ families, including child migrants, undocumented minors, children whose family members have been detained or deported
- Children who are multilingual learners
- Children with special education classifications
- Children experiencing homelessness
- Children who experience trauma or child maltreatment

IV. ELIGIBILITY

1. Principal Investigators must have received their terminal doctoral degree (e.g., Ph.D., Ed.D., Psy.D., J.D., M.D.) within 10 years of submitting their applications to the program. In medicine, the date of the completion of the first residency is used for this calculation.
2. For the duration of the award, 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. Please see the [Institutional Checklist](#) for additional requirements.
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 (i.e., at least three over the last three years), 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. Please see the [Institutional Checklist](#) for additional requirements.
4. The applicant is the sole Principal Investigator and will lead the proposed research (no Co-Investigators). An applicant may only submit one Letter of Intent (LOI) or full proposal application per YSP application cycle.

⁵ One or both parents born outside of the U.S.

⁶ One or both parents or the child is fleeing due to persecution or having a well-founded fear of persecution.

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

5. More than one applicant may apply from a single institution per YSP application cycle.
6. Returning applicants are welcome and *strongly encouraged* to re-apply.

V. GRANT FUNDING AND BUDGET GUIDANCE

Below, we provide information about the how YSP funds can be used:

1. 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, of 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.
2. Grant funds are intended to support the Principal Investigator's salary and direct research expenses. Indirect and overhead costs are limited to 15% of the total direct personnel costs.
3. Up to 10% of direct personnel costs may be used to support senior faculty or advisors as consultants.
4. 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.

VI. AWARDS

Award recipients are designated as Foundation for Child Development Young Scholars. Two to four YSP grants are typically awarded each year though the number varies depending on the number of compelling applications and available funding.

If you are an awarded Foundation for Child Development Young Scholar, you must meet the following requirements of the program:

1. Initiate the research project within three months of award notification. Award notification for each cycle typically occurs in March or April.
2. Submit a request to the institution's internal review board (IRB), if applicable. For studies with human subjects, applicants will be required to submit either proof of a submitted application for IRB approval or confirmation of IRB approval. 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. Submit annual narrative and financial reports on the progress of the research and grant expenditures, respectively.
5. Participate in meetings with other Foundation for Child Development Young Scholars. Expenses for these meetings will be covered separately by the Foundation and should not be included in the proposal budget.

VII. LETTERS OF INTENT

The LOI has three key components:

1. The primary component is a project description.
2. The second component is the applicant's CV.
3. The third component is the LOI electronic form in the grants management system, which includes several additional prompts for information before the LOI can be submitted.

When developing the LOI, please refer to Exhibit 1. below for the LOI project description and the FAQs for more information on eligibility criteria, research focus, priority populations, and evaluation criteria for selection. The evaluation criteria for selection will be used to screen the LOIs and to identify applicants who will be invited to submit a full proposal application. Though the LOI is expected to be less detailed than a full application, be sure to provide sufficient details in the project description, so that it can be appropriately evaluated by the advisory committee. You are encouraged to work with a mentor to develop a competitive LOI (please see the [Mentor/Mentee Checklist](#) for additional information). Please see the [Institutional Checklist](#) for additional information about what is required from your host institution as part of your LOI.

To prepare your LOI, please complete the following steps:

Step 1. Create an account in FCD's grants management system. You will need to create an account in the Foundation's grants management system in order to access the 2025 YSP LOI form. The Principal Investigator (PI), as the applicant, should use their name and email address to set up an account. Use code "2025YSP" to access the 2025 YSP LOI form. This will initiate your YSP application. This same account will be used to access the Full Proposal Application Form, if you are invited to submit a full proposal.

Once the account is created and the application has been initiated, the "Collaborate" feature will allow multiple users to edit a single application. For example, the Office of Sponsored Research representatives, or a similar office, can access the application to download the Foundation's budget template, click the blue Collaborate feature (at the top right of each request). The PI can enter the appropriate email addresses to invite representatives to view, edit, or submit the application. Click [here](#) for specific instructions on how to use the Collaborate feature.

Step 2. Prepare a project description. We ask that you prepare the description of your proposed research project in a separate PDF, which will be uploaded to the online platform for submission. Save the PDF with a file name that includes the following: Applicant First and Last Name, and Request Identifier. Please also add your name and request identifier to each page to prepare the attachment for uploading.

The project description should be no more than 10 double-spaced pages. Please also include a bibliography of cited literature as part of the project description. The bibliography does not count towards the page limit guidelines.

Helpful Tips for Formatting Your LOI Project Description for Readability

Make your project description as easy to read and review as possible. We offer the following suggestions for formatting your description of the proposed research project:

- The project description should be no more than 10 double-spaced pages, inclusive of text, tables, charts or other graphics;
- Use simple, concise, and plain language for a reader who is engaged and interested, but does not have knowledge of discipline- or field-specific jargon;
- Avoid using acronyms, if possible;
- Use 12-point font and simple typeface (e.g., Calibri, Ariel Narrow, Times New Roman);
- Use 1" margins;
- Tables, charts, figures, or other exhibits can have smaller font, but no smaller than 10-point font and single-spacing; and,
- Use APA formatting for cited references.

Creating sections in your project description will help to enhance the readability and evaluation of the LOI by the advisory committee. In [Exhibit 1](#), we encourage you to use the suggested headers and subheaders for each section. In this exhibit, we also provide rough page allocations for each section and the type of information that should be provided in each section. This guidance is provided to you to help inform your preparation and level of detail for different sections of the project description. But, we understand that every project is different. You are encouraged to use your best judgment about how to allocate pages for different aspects of the project description based on the nature of your proposed research project.

Step 3. Upload your project description and CV to the grants management portal. You will upload the project description and your CV as separate PDF documents to the grants management online platform. Please be sure to add your name and request identifier to each page of the documents before uploading the required attachments.

Step 4. Submit your LOI in the grants management system. Once all of the above steps are completed, you will submit your LOI. If successfully completed, you will receive an automated notification that your LOI has been successfully submitted and received.

Exhibit 1. Suggested Sections of Your LOI Project Description

Make your project description easy to review and follow. We suggest the following headers/subheaders to help guide reviewers through your project description. We also provide a bulleted list of the type of information that should be included in each section. Using these suggestions will help reviewers locate relevant information in your project description to facilitate evaluation of your LOI.

Section 1: Background and Rationale (~ 2 pages)

This section should include the following information, as relevant:

- Theoretical or empirical foundation(s), which underlies the proposed research
- Connection of the proposed research to policies, programs, or practices that aim to advance the status or capacity of the ECE workforce
- Relevance of the proposed research for or policy, program, and practices

Section 2: Research Questions (up to 1 page)

This section should include the following information, as relevant:

- Specific research question(s) that underlie the proposed research or hypotheses

Section 3: Methods (~ 4-5 pages)

This section should include the following information with the following subheaders, as relevant:

- *Sample Identification and Recruitment*
 - Provide a description of the approach and proposed procedures for sample identification, selection, recruitment, and consent
- *Sample Size and Characteristics*
 - Provide a description of the intended sample size and characteristics of the sample
- *Data Sources*
 - Provide a description of the primary and/or secondary data sources and proposed data collection procedures
- *Measures*
 - Provide a description of the measure(s) that will be utilized

Section 4. Analysis Plan (~ 2 pages)

This section should include a description of the quantitative and/or qualitative methodologies that will be used and how these relate to the specific research questions, sample(s), and measure(s).

Section 5. Bibliography (should not count towards page count)

- Provide an APA formatted reference list cited in the LOI in alphabetical order

VIII. FULL PROPOSAL APPLICATION

A subset of applicants submitting LOIs will be invited to submit a Full Proposal Application.

The Full Proposal Application has seven key components:

1. The primary component is the Full Proposal Application form in the grants management system, which includes several prompts for information about the project description.
2. The second component is the project timeline and workplan for the proposed project.
3. The third component is the budget template for the proposed project.
4. The fourth component is the applicant's CV.
5. The fifth component is copy(ies) of primary authored publications by the applicant. The Full Proposal Application allows for up to two publications to be uploaded.
6. The sixth component is the letters of recommendation from two letter writers.
7. The seventh component is the letter of support from the host institution.

When developing a full proposal application, please refer to the Full Application Form in the grants management system for more detailed instructions and information about the requested information for each component of the Full Application Form. This guidance aims to inform your preparation of a full application.

Helpful Tips for Formatting Your Full Proposal Application

The Full Proposal Application consists of several text boxes where you will provide details about your proposed project. We offer the following suggestions for preparing responses to the different sections of the Full Proposal Application:

- Log onto the grants management system early and review the different components of the Full Proposal Application, so that you are aware of the information being requested;
- Use simple, concise, and plain language for a reader who is engaged and interested, but does not have knowledge of discipline- or field-specific jargon;
- Avoid using acronyms, if possible;
- Reduce repetition of information across sections of the Full Application Form;
- Ensure that all aspects of the proposed study are culturally, racially, and linguistically sensitive, and that responses to each section of the application are written using an asset-based frame;
- Use exhibits, like tables, charts, or other graphics, to share information about your proposed project, and reference and describe the exhibits in the responses for relevant sections of the Full Proposal Application Form. The exhibits can be combined and uploaded as a separate attachment to the Full Proposal Application;
- Use APA formatting for cited references;
- A bibliography of cited references can be uploaded as an attachment to the Full Proposal Application;
- Be sure to add your name and request identifier to each page of documents before uploading the required attachments; and,
- If preparing your responses in a word document, 9,600 characters roughly translates to about six pages, double spaced in 12-point font.

Each section of the Full Proposal Application intends to capture unique information about the proposed research project. The sections of the Full Proposal Application align with the sections for the project description of your LOI. The Full Proposal Application is your opportunity to provide more details about your proposed research project and to respond to the reviewer comments and feedback on your LOI. Please be sure to provide robust details about your proposed research project to support the evaluation of your proposal. The evaluation criteria for selection (see below in Section IV of the 2025 YSP Guidelines) will be used to evaluate your full proposal application and to identify applicants who are recommended as Young Scholars. In general, the Foundation strongly encourages applicants to work with mentors or senior scholars to develop a strong proposal (please see the [Mentor/Mentee Checklist](#) for additional information). Please see the [Institutional Checklist](#) for requirements from your host institution at the full proposal application stage.

Exhibit 2. Overview of Project Description Prompts for the Full Application Form

Executive Summary

Please provide a brief description of the proposed research purpose and goals, research question(s), sample(s), type(s) of data source(s), and analytic approach(s).

Character Limit: 1,000

Research Project Basis

Describe the theoretical or empirical foundation(s), current state of knowledge and significance of the proposed project, how the proposed project aims to contribute to the field, and the relevance of the proposed research for policy and practice.

Character Limit: 9,600

Policy, Laws, or Rulings (if applicable)

If analyzing policies, laws, or rulings, describe that content, the context in which they are implemented, and who the policies, laws or rulings are expected to impact.

Character Limit: 9,600

Research Questions or Working Hypotheses

Describe the specific research question(s) or the working hypothesis(es) which underlie the proposed work that will be addressed through the proposed project.

Character Limit: 9,600

Research Sample

Describe the target population and sample proposed for primary and/or secondary data analysis. Please describe the expected sample size and characteristics and the methods for identifying, selecting, recruiting, consenting, and engaging the sample, as applicable.

Character Limit: 9,600

Data Sources

Describe the proposed primary and/or secondary data to be utilized and the procedures for data collection, mitigating non-response or missing data, instruments and protocols that will be used (e.g., survey instruments, interview protocols), and anticipated response rates.

Character Limit: 9,600

Measures

Describe the qualitative and/or quantitative measures. Include a discussion of how the proposed measures relate to the study questions and how they are developmentally, linguistically, and culturally sensitive and appropriate.

Character Limit: 9,600

Data Analysis Approach

Describe in detail the specific analytic approaches for the proposed qualitative and/or quantitative measures to investigate the research questions or working hypothesis(es).

Character Limit: 9,600

IX. EVALUATION CRITERIA FOR SELECTION

Foundation staff and the Young Scholars Program Advisory Committee will evaluate LOIs and full proposal applications based on the following criteria:

- 1. Fit with the YSP Purpose and Research Focus:** Proposed research should fit the Foundation's research priorities to support the ECE workforce. Proposed research questions should have relevance for advancing the status and well-being of the ECE workforce, enhancing quality of practice, or strengthening ECE leadership to create more supportive environments for the workforce. Proposed research should aim to build, test, or increase understanding of a program, policy, or practice to support the ECE workforce. Proposed research studies may include descriptive, experimental, measurement or implementation research. Proposed research should have relevance for policy or practice, but we do not expect the findings from any one project should or will impact policy or practice. Proposed research that builds from the interests and priorities of the communities, educators, or families who are engaged in the research is highly valued.
- 2. Research Concept and Methodology:** The degree to which the proposed work is theoretically, conceptually, and methodologically sound and will provide convincing evidence to address the proposal's goals. Successful applications provide enough specificity for reviewers to be assured of the rigor and the feasibility of the research plans. Research plans should demonstrate careful consideration to the racial, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural appropriateness of concepts, methods, and measures proposed. Proposed research designs, methods, and analysis plans should clearly fit the research questions under study. Discussions of the sampling, data collection, and measurement plans should include a compelling rationale and be well-suited to addressing the proposed research questions. Qualitative or quantitative analysis plans demonstrate a mastery of the methodical approaches and demonstrate awareness of the strengths and limitations of the specific analytic techniques and how they will be applied in the proposed research. Where both quantitative and qualitative approaches are being used, the proposal should demonstrate how the combination or integration of these approaches will enhance addressing the research questions. Where relevant, clear attention to the generalizability of findings and to statistical power to detect meaningful effects or associations of interest for the full sample or subsets of the sample is important.
- 3. Racial, Cultural, and Linguistic Sensitivity:** The extent to which the proposed research and methods are racially, culturally, and linguistically sensitivity and equitable in approach; attune to power dynamics and unintended biases in assumptions guiding the proposed research concepts, questions, and methods; and, demonstrate a deep understanding of the cultural and linguistic assets and strengths of the proposed samples, settings, and communities that are the focus of the proposed research.
- 4. Budget, Time Commitment and Effort, and Workplan:** The extent to which the proposed resources, level of effort of the PI and supporting staff, and workplan are reasonable and appropriately account for anticipated expenses, costs, and complexity of the tasks and activities associated with the proposed research project. It is understood that the YSP grant may not fully cover project expenses, and in those cases, we encourage applicants to describe their plans for seeking additional funds to successfully carry out their projects.
- 5. Applicant's Qualifications:** Applicant demonstrates capacity to undertake the proposed research and bring the work to successful completion. Applicant also demonstrates potential to become an

influential researcher with promise for contributing to and influencing a field of research, policy, and practice beyond the specific project being proposed for the Young Scholars Program. This potential may be supported by discussion of the how the applicant's lived expertise or prior experiences; prior research, mentorship, and training; prior sponsored research projects or awards; or track record of publications and presentations position them to conduct the proposed research and line of inquiry. Note, the quality of publications is more important than the quantity. At the full application proposal phase, the letters of recommendation will also be used to evaluate the applicant's qualifications.

- 6. 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% operating deficit within the prior fiscal year may be considered lacking capacity.

X. 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
- YSP Webinar Resources
 - Advancing Equity: Conducting Strengths-Based Research in Early Care & Education
 - Getting it Right Roundtable Discussion: Preparing Future Early Care and Education Implementation Researchers

YSP Timeline

April

Call for Proposals for 2025 YSP opens

June

LOI Deadline, June 3, 2024, 11:59 PM ET

August

Notification of LOI status and invitations to submit a Full Application

October

Full Application Deadline, October 15, 2024, 11:59 PM ET

March/April

Notification of grant awards

Questions?

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

* * *