

Equity-Focused Policy Research: Building Cross-Cutting Evidence on Supports for Families with Young Children

Answers to Questions about this Funding Opportunity

This document provides responses to questions frequently asked about this funding opportunity. Answers to additional questions are discussed in the recording of the January 12 webinar for potential applicants, which is available on the Foundation's [website](#).

We encourage potential applicants to carefully review the [call for proposals](#) and to familiarize themselves with [briefs that summarize the research agenda](#). Tables summarizing projects previously awarded funding under the Equity-Focused Policy Research program appear at the end of this document. However, potential applicants should note the specific focus of this funding opportunity: research that addresses questions and issues that cut across policy domains.

Questions related to relevance to the research agenda and policy

Does the focus of proposed projects need to be only on children, or are policies and outcomes for parents also relevant?

The research agenda that motivates this funding opportunity focuses on families with young children and low incomes. Projects that address access to key supports among children and their caregivers are relevant.

Can applications focus on specific sub-populations, for example, children with special health-care needs, Veteran caregivers, Latinx people, American Indians, absentee fathers, expectant mothers, etc.?

Applications that focus on specific sub-populations may be relevant, to the extent that the focal populations face inequities in access to supports and the proposed research project centers on key resources for supporting their children's healthy development, especially early care and education (ECE), income supports, and nutrition supports.

How does the foundation define “young children”? Within this group, are there any priorities in terms of target population?

For this funding opportunity, the Foundation defines “young children” as children age 0 to 8. There are no priority target populations within this group, other than populations that face inequities in access to key supports.

Do we need to address all three policy domains (access to ECE, income supports, and nutrition supports) in one proposal? Can a proposal focus on just one policy domain?

It is not necessary to address all three policy domains in one proposal. However, for this call for proposals, the Foundation is particularly interested in research exploring issues that cut across policy domains. (Previous calls for proposals have addressed individual policy domains.)

Therefore, proposed projects should address multiple domains and/or have clear implications for promoting families' equitable access to multiple types of supports.

Must proposed projects address questions directly related to the COVID-19 pandemic?

No, research funded under this opportunity does not need to address questions directly related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Are there any preferences as to the geographic scope of the projects?

Proposed projects should address domestic policy at the local, regional, state, or national level.

Are proposed projects limited to research on interventions?

No, proposed projects do not necessarily need to focus on specific interventions.

Can proposed projects address ECE, income, or nutrition supports other than those named in the research agenda (for example, supports for early childhood mental health, unemployment insurance, child tax credits, school-based nutrition programs, etc.)?

Yes, applicants may propose projects that address specific programs and supports other than those named in the research agenda. Although applicants may focus on questions and programs not specified in the research agenda, proposed studies should align clearly with the objectives of the research agenda and the policy areas and topics the agenda addresses.

Questions related to policy and action-oriented research

Could you please define “policy research”?

For this call for proposals, “policy research” is defined as research that informs future policymaking and/or the design, implementation, and delivery of key supports for families with young children. The research may focus on existing policies and/or other factors that affect families' equitable access to key supports.

“Policy research” might illuminate root causes or structural barriers to equitable access to key supports but should also directly inform policy and program responses that have the potential to help address those barriers.

Can you please define “action-oriented” research?

For this call for proposals, “action-oriented” research is defined as research that can inform policymakers' stakeholders' priorities and decisions in the near term. Findings from “action-oriented” research might inform policy and/or program implementation. Proposed studies should not be oriented toward solely describing disparities or identifying topics for future research.

Questions related to research methods

Does the Foundation have any preferences regarding research methods?

A variety of qualitative and quantitative research methods may be appropriate for answering research questions relevant to this call for proposals. The Foundation does not have preferences regarding research methods. Proposals will be evaluated for the quality of the proposed research design, whether proposed research methods are well aligned with the research questions proposed, and attentiveness to the principles of equitable evaluation.

Questions related to eligibility criteria

Must applicants be based in the United States?

Yes, applicant organizations and researchers must be based in the United States or its territories.

Are co-principal investigators allowed for this funding opportunity?

Yes.

Would non-university researchers in a nonprofit organization be eligible to apply?

Yes. Please review the call for proposals for additional guidance on qualifications of proposed principal investigators and other key personnel.

Questions related to application requirements and use of funding

Are there limitations the use of funding? Can the funding be used to support program activities or only research?

Information is available on the [RWJF website](#) to provide guidance on the permissible uses of funding. Awards under this funding opportunities can be used to support delivery of program activities that are the focus of a research project.

Is there a template for resumes to include in the proposal?

No, there is no template for resumes or CVs. Resumes or CVs for key project personnel may be uploaded as attachments to the proposal.

Do proposals require approval letters from an institutional review board (IRB)?

No, approval letters are not required. However, if IRB approval is needed, it should be taken into account in developing your project timeline.

Is a budget required for brief proposals?

The brief proposal does not require a budget, but applicants do need to indicate the amount of funding requested. A detailed budget is required at the full proposal stage.

What is the Foundation’s policy on indirect cost rates?

Information is available on the Foundation’s website regarding [allowable indirect cost rates](#) and other policies affecting grantees.

Questions regarding the application process

Will all applicants be invited to submit a full proposal?

Not all applicants will be invited to submit a full proposal. Invitations to submit a full proposal are based on reviews of brief proposals.

How many applicants will you ask to submit a full proposal?

The number of applicants invited to submit a full proposal depends on the results of the review of brief proposals.

What is the timeline for the funding opportunity?

Applicants will be notified regarding the results of the brief proposal phase in March. Applicants invited to submit full proposals will have approximately five weeks to do so. For applicants awarded funding, the grant start date for applicants is expected to be September 2021.

Table 1. Equity-Focused Policy Research grantees: Income supports (2019)

Grantee	Project title	Summary	Research methods
Child Trends	The Impact of EITC Policy and Practices on Participation Rates of Hispanic Families	Explore policy-relevant factors that may boost awareness and use of EITC among eligible Hispanic families.	Mixed methods design including difference in differences analysis.
Heartland Alliance for Human Needs	Examining Barriers to TANF for Families with Young Children in Illinois	investigate the effects of structural TANF changes on racial equity outcomes.	Policy analysis; analysis of survey, interview, and administrative data.
Northwestern University	Drivers of Inequities in Access to Income Supports: Context, Decision-making, and Outcomes among Justice-involved Parents of Young Children	Examine how parents make decisions about participating in the EITC/TANF. Test associations between TANF/EITC participation and family functional outcomes.	Mixed-method study with an exploratory sequential design consisting of two phases.
Regents of the University of California	Leveling the Playing Field: Simulating Effects of Income Support Programs to Improve the Financial Outlook of Low-income Individuals and Families	Evaluate predicted effects of alternative forms of income support policies on different subgroups of the U.S. population.	Microsimulation.
Regents of the University of California	Exploring Perceptions and Use of EITC in California Using a Mixed-Methods Approach		
Rutgers University	Barriers to Accessing and Receiving TANF in New Jersey: A Mixed-Methods Equity Analysis	Investigate the reasons for disparities and resources available or missing to address these barriers.	Mixed methods approach, combining administrative data, focus groups, expert interviews, and document reviews,
University of Kansas	How do State Policies Affect Access to TANF?	Use the timing of policy changes across states to estimate models to identify the causal effects of changes in state policies on access to TANF.	Difference-in-difference models with secondary data, along with brief pilot study.
University of North Carolina	Creating Community-designed Approaches for EITC Uptake in Rural North Carolina	Develop an understanding of family uptake of EITC in North Carolina and describe how rural communities can leverage existing systems to increase access to income supports, including EITC.	Community-driven mixed methods.
University of Pittsburgh	Understanding the Effects of the Benefit Cliff on Low-wage Workers and their Young Children	Document and explore decreasing eligibility for means-tested public supports that occurs as wages increase.	On-going, large-scale, mixed-method longitudinal study using quantitative survey data and interviews

Grantee	Project title	Summary	Research methods
Urban Institute	Reducing Child Poverty in the States: Analysis of Proposed Income Support Policies	Model up to three policies or policy to understand the anti-poverty effects at the state level and variations across states in how much child poverty might be reduced.	Microsimulation
Urban Institute	Toward Equitable Benefit Access for Families with Young Children: How Benefit Cliffs Affect TANF Families' Decisions	Provide evidence of how the structure of public assistance programs and tax credits may contribute to inequities in benefit access	Mixed methods, including modeling public assistance and tax credit receipt for TANF families and participatory, qualitative field work and data analysis.

Note: EITC = Earned Income Tax Credit; TANF = Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

Table 2. Equity-Focused Policy Research grantees: Access to early childhood education (2019)

Grantee	Title	Summary	Research methods
Administrators of the Tulane Educational Fund	Increasing Early Education Access through Parent Application Support	Test a low-cost and easily scalable intervention to increase ECE application rates: text message support for public ECE applicants.	Interviews with parents to identify barriers to application process and random assignment impact evaluation.
American University	Barriers to Early Care and Education Participation: Examining Geographic, Demographic, and Policy Characteristics Across the Country	Examine associations between ECE participation and community demographic factors, economic conditions, social service participation and availability, and state policies.	Analysis of longitudinal, county-level dataset compiled from various sources.
Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center	Equity through Co-Design and Quality Improvement: Identifying and Testing Systems Solutions to ECE Enrollment Barriers in Cincinnati	Identify policy-relevant and system-level barriers, document relative prevalence and importance of identified barriers, design potential system interventions and test prototypes.	Community-engaged design, participatory evaluation, qualitative and quantitative analysis, and continuous quality improvement.
MDRC	Building Equitable Access to High-Quality Early Childhood Education: Evidence from the Boston Public Schools Prekindergarten Program	Examine how income-, race-, and language-based disparities in access to and enrollment in high-quality PreK have changed over time. Determine school-level structural characteristics that facilitate and inhibit equitable access to high-quality PreK. Map geographic differences in access.	Secondary data analysis and geo-spatial mapping.
Syracuse University	Employment Instability as a Barrier to Child Care	Examine temporal patterns of stability in employment, subsidy receipt, and child care use to identify patterns of work and child care experienced by families with low incomes and opportunities to minimize barriers to accessing and maintaining child care.	Secondary data analysis.
The Regents of the University of California, Los Angeles	Spatial-Transportation Mismatch and Early-Care-and-Education Enrollment Disparities	Examine the impact of spatial and transportation mismatch (STM) on enrollment in preschool programs.	STM analysis and multivariate modeling.
Trustees of Boston University	State-Level Child Care Subsidy Policy Generosity and Subsidy Take-Up	Examine how state-level child care subsidy policy generosity is associated with subsidy take-up among subsidy-eligible families.	Secondary data analysis.

Grantee	Title	Summary	Research methods
United Way of Massachusetts Bay, Inc.	The Effectiveness of a Supported Model of Shared Services in Increasing the Supply of Child Care in Boston's Low-Income Neighborhoods	Test business supports for small childcare providers with the goal of stabilizing and growing the types of providers often accessed by families with low incomes.	Impact evaluation using random assignment.
University of Alabama	Identifying and Addressing Barriers to Early Care and Education Access in Rural Alabama Using Rapid-Cycle Evaluation	Address inequities and barriers to ECE access, build evidence for use of rapid-cycle evaluation as an approach to supporting equitable ECE access in rural communities.	Mixed methods study using stakeholder interviews and rapid-cycle evaluations.
University of Chicago	Policy Reform to Advance Equity in Illinois' Child Care Subsidy Program	Extend prior work to understand families' experiences of the expulsion and transition process and subsequent care access. Explore how experiences vary by program type, geographic region, and family characteristics.	Mixed-method study leveraging publicly accessible and program-level longitudinal data.
University of Hawaii	Resource Mapping to Enhance Equity	Measure and map child care accessibility at the community level. Provide a model and procedures to allow other communities to create indices and maps that meet their needs.	Geographic information system techniques, 3-D mapping, and stakeholder focus groups.
University of Illinois at Chicago	Assessing High Quality Early Childhood Education During Illinois' Public Act 100-0105	Assess implications of recent changes in Illinois' child care subsidy program (CCAP) on program access and stability.	Case studies, parent interviews, and longitudinal analyses.
University of New Mexico	Child Care Needs, Preferences and Barriers in Immigrant and Tribal Contexts	Study access and barriers to child care assistance in the context of efforts in New Mexico to make enrollment processes more transparent, as well as implementation of 12-month recertification policies.	Analysis of survey and interview data.
Urban Institute	Understanding What Parents Working Nontraditional Schedules Want and Need: An Essential Step in Addressing Inequities in Access to Quality Child Care	Help policymakers in three sites understand the needs and preferences of parents who require child care during nontraditional hours.	Mixed methods including analysis of qualitative data collected through focus groups.
Urban Institute	Increasing Access to Child Care Subsidies for Young Children: A Microsimulation Analysis	Examine impacts of different policy options that expand access to CCDF subsidies, with a focus on young children. Look at variations on policies that guarantee assistance to low-income families at different income levels, consider variations that provide subsidies at no cost to families.	Microsimulation.

Note: ECE = early care and education, CCDF = Child Care and Development Fund