SPENCER FOUNDATION

[Research on Education Practice and Policy]

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Room 118, Academic Success Center
INTRODUCTION TO ORD AND CFR

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The Spencer Foundation was established in 1962 by Lyle M. Spencer, founder of Science Research Associates (SRA), the educational publishing firm that provided the basis of his wealth and ultimately the creation of the Spencer Foundation.

The Spencer Foundation has more than $501 million in assets and awards approximately $21 million in grants annually.

The Spencer Foundation is committed to supporting high-quality investigation of education through its research programs and to strengthening and renewing the educational research community through its fellowship and training programs and related activities.

The Foundation has six major grantmaking programs: Lyle Spencer Research Awards ($100K-$1M); Small Research Grants (up to $50K); Research-Practice Partnership Program (up to $400K), Midcareer Grant Program (up to $150K); Conference Grants (up to $50K); and Fellowship Awards.
Spencer Foundation: Research on Education Practice and Policy

WHAT SPENCER FUNDS (AND DOESN’T FUND)

- The Foundation supports research that investigates the ways in which education can be improved around the world.

  Spencer's approach to supporting education research reflects an awareness of the **complexity of the educational enterprise**, realizing it depends on students’ cognitive development, cultural values, and social backgrounds, teachers’ practices, knowledge, and attitudes, institutional structures, educational politics, markets for educated workers, and more.

  This leads the Foundation to be open to a **wide variety of research**, but also leads them to seek proposals that can help to **describe and explain that complexity** in meaningful ways that can lead to improvement.

  Spencer expects proposals not only to describe **strong research designs and rigorous analytic methods**, but also to give a **clear and compelling account** of how the research proposed may be significant for educational policy and practice and, by providing a conceptual framework and discussing related research, to show how it will contribute to understanding in ways that go beyond the study at hand.
WHAT SPENCER FUNDS (AND DOESN’T FUND)

The Spencer Foundation supports research. It does not support:

- Scholarships
- Curriculum development
- Program development and/or implementation
- Program/curriculum evaluation
- Professional development programs
LYLE SPENCER RESEARCH AWARDS

- Supports intellectually ambitious, large-scale education research projects with budgets between $100,000 and $1,000,000.

- This program encourages proposals initiated by scholars across a variety of disciplines and fields in an effort to create much-needed space for creative and ambitious research projects that promise to advance our understanding of educational practice and its improvement.

- The Foundation wants scholars who seek their support to have convincing, well-reasoned answers to the question: How in the end does the work you are undertaking contribute to making the practice of education better?

- Through this program, Spencer seeks to press the research community to raise their level of intellectual ambition, encourage work that is more thoughtful, more critical of prevailing assumptions, more self-critical about their own work and its limitations, and more relevant to the aim of building knowledge for improved educational practice.
Most of the proposals funded by Spencer in this program fall into one of three broad categories:

- **Instructional Practice** - Studies that focus more or less directly on teaching and learning processes themselves, at the classroom level (or in instructional settings outside classrooms).

- **Educational Infrastructure** - Studies that pay attention to the larger policy and institutional environments within which educational transactions take place. Key to our interest here is attention to the conceptual and empirical links between elements of the infrastructure and the actual character of educational practice. Studies that aim at better understanding how different ways of defining, measuring, and rewarding teacher performance affect teachers' professional goals, time use, and understanding of success would fall into this category.

- **Research Infrastructure** - Studies that help develop research tools that can support advancing the kinds of research defined above. The development of improved measurement tools, stronger theoretical frameworks and analytical methods, and the development of new databases and the archiving of existing data bases – none of these will make educational practice better today, but the Foundation regards advances on these fronts as essential to lasting improvement in education.
SMALL RESEARCH GRANTS

- This program funds research projects with budgets of $50,000 or less.

- The work Spencer has funded through these grants has spanned a range of topics and disciplines, including education, psychology, sociology, economics, history, and anthropology, and they employ a wide range of research methods.

- The following examples of recently funded small grants illustrate the diversity of what the Foundation supports:
  - an experimental study of how college students use visual representations in solving math problems
  - a study exploring the process of racial and rural identity formation among African American high-school students who attend de facto segregated schools in the rural South
  - a mixed-methods study focusing on the different types of knowledge novice and experienced teachers draw on in teaching reading comprehension

- Spencer has a very low funding rate for these proposals - they receive over 800 proposals per year and fund roughly 10%.
Applicants will be asked to propose a cohesive and concise project that will contribute to or challenge current understandings of education, and clearly articulates possible connections of findings to educational improvement.

In these proposals, Spencer seeks:
- A compelling rationale for the study that is based on the important literature;
- A clear focus of inquiry and/or specific research questions;
- Sufficient information about the research setting and participants;
- Detailed information about how you will analyze, or make meaning of your data; and
- An alignment among the above—the educational significance, the research questions, and the proposed activities (data collection and analyses).

Ask yourself:
- What will the project do that is significant? Not just a significant topic.
- What is the puzzle I’m trying to understand?
- Can someone outside my academic circle understand me?
- Will my plans for collecting data and conducting analyses answer my questions?
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SMALL RESEARCH GRANTS

- Spencer shares some general areas of interest for these proposals; this information is not part of the evaluation, but is captured in the application.

- **Field-Initiated** - Proposals in this area are those that fall under the Spencer Foundation’s general mission of funding research on education, but don’t appear to fit in one of the other areas.

- **Relation between Education and Social Opportunity** - Proposals where the primary aim is to examine the ways in which differences in social and educational experiences (such as quality and character of schooling or the number of years in school) translate into differences including employment, earnings, and civic and academic outcomes would be included in this area.

- **Teaching, Learning, and Instructional Resources** - Studies in this area would be those that will lead to better understanding and improvements in the intellectual, material, and organizational resources that contribute to successful teaching and learning.

- **The New Civics** - Proposals with this focus would deepen our understanding of influences on civic action, attend to social inequalities in civic education, and have the potential to shape future research and practice in these fields.

- **Organizational Learning in Schools, School Systems, and Higher Education Systems** - Research in this area would contribute to strengthening the capacity of schools and education systems to operate as learning organizations.

- **Purposes and Values of Education** - Proposals in this area would be interested in advancing analytical, historical, and empirical work that probes effectively and creatively into deeply challenging and permanently important issues which can contribute toward social decision-making that moves education along constructive paths.
This targeted program provides support for those who are interested in advancing their understanding of a compelling problem of education by acquiring new skills, substantive knowledge, theoretical perspectives or methodological tools.

It is not intended to encourage researchers to abandon their existing area of expertise, but rather to build on, enrich, and extend that training with the acquisition of new methodological tools and/or perspectives about a subject to which they have been deeply committed throughout their academic career.

In each award cycle, Spencer funds up to five awards at $150,000 for one year.

Applicants for the 2018 application must have received their PhD, EdD or equivalent research degree between January 1, 1998 and December 31, 2011.
MIDCAREER GRANT PROGRAM

• Through this program, the Foundation intends to heighten the potential for midcareer productivity and contribution by operationalizing this understanding about scholarship: that reaching beyond familiar ways of thinking about education puzzles and problems has the potential to bring innovative ideas to the work and, by extension, to lines of inquiry in the field.

• Grant awards will not be confined to proposals to learn a new discipline, although in a number of cases that would fit:
  • A psychologist studying techniques for promoting positive character development in children might spend a year studying philosophical work bearing on character development and the proper role of families and schools in shaping children’s character.
  • A historian of American education might spend a year studying some aspect of the history of education in Brazil or France.
  • A scholar who works on the teaching of writing in colleges might have reason to acquire a deeper understanding of early literacy.
The National Academy of Education (NAEd)/Spencer Postdoctoral Fellowship supports early-career scholars working in critical areas of education research.

This nonresidential postdoctoral fellowship funds proposals that make significant scholarly contributions to the field of education. The program also develops the careers of its recipients through professional development activities.

Applicants must have received their PhD, EdD, or equivalent research degree between January 1, 2013, and December 31, 2017.

The fellowship of $70,000 will be awarded to up to 30 scholars. Fellows may elect to take the fellowship full-time over one year or half-time over two years.
UPCOMING DEADLINES

Small Research Grants are awarded four times annually; applications are due May 1, August 1, November 1, and February 1.

Midcareer Grants are awarded once annually; applications are typically due in September.

Lyle Spencer Research Awards are awarded once annually; applications are typically due in October.

NAEd/Spencer Postdoctoral Fellowships are awarded once annually; applications are typically due in November.
A Limited Submission call for the Lyle Spencer Research Award Program will be announced by the VPR’s Office in **May 2018**. Submissions will be due in **mid-June 2018**. Applications are typically due to Spencer in **October**.

ORD and CFR will assist with putting together teams if research interests overlap.

Faculty interested in pursuing a Small Research Grant or the NAEd/Spencer Postdoctoral Fellowship should contact Amber Padgett at day6@clemson.edu for assistance developing their proposals.
QUESTIONS?

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