



EC*REACH Research Seed Grants: Strengthening the Early Childhood Workforce in Chicago

Early Childhood Workforce Grant Application

Purpose of the EC*REACH Research Seed Grants

The Early Childhood Research Alliance of Chicago (EC*REACH) Research seed grants are designed to support collaborative research focused on strengthening and transforming the early childhood workforce in Chicago.

The early childhood workforce is foundational to children's learning and development, family economic stability, and community well-being. Yet the early childhood workforce faces multiple structural challenges, including compensation and benefit disparities across sectors, high turnover rates, limited advancement pathways, and insufficient supports and resources for educator well-being.

These grants provide resources for researchers to partner with communities and education workforce professionals to develop bold, workforce-centered research that strengthens Chicago's education systems and advances more sustainable conditions for the people who teach, support, and serve Chicago's children and families.

About EC*REACH

EC*REACH is housed at Northwestern University's Institute for Policy Research (IPR). Our tagline is "research driven answers to community driven questions" to strengthen policy and programming for children age birth-to-five and their families. We seek to serve as a hub for research and support collaborations outside of our organization and build new community-based research partnerships, which is what these seed grants are designed to support. Collectively, at EC*REACH, we convene and connect researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and community leaders to co-create knowledge to spark and support collaborations among partners to share insights, engage in actionable research, and build a stronger early childhood ecosystem in Chicago.

Award Information and Timeline

- **Who is eligible to apply:** This is an open call to local, state, and national U.S.-based non-profit organizations, community-based organizations, and higher education institutions engaged in early childhood education workforce-related research in Chicago.

- **Expected Number of Grants Awarded:** Two
- **Grant Amount:** \$15,000 per award
- **RFP Released:** September 8th, 2026
- **Application Due:** November 16th, 2026
- **Award Notification:** January 8th, 2027
- **Award Contract Period:** March 30th, 2027-August 30th, 2028

Selected awardees will be required to complete and submit a Letter of Intent (LOI) prior to the execution of the grant agreement. The LOI must be reviewed and signed by an authorized representative of the applicant organization with the appropriate signing authority before submitting to Northwestern University.

Focus Area: Early Childhood Workforce in Chicago

Proposals may address, **but are not limited to:**

- Compensation and wage equity
 - Credentialing, preparation, and career pathways
 - Workforce recruitment, retention, and mobility
 - Educator well-being and working conditions
 - Leadership development
 - Culturally/linguistically appropriate training
 - Policy and governance structures impacting workforce stability
-

EC*REACH Support:

Throughout the project period, EC*REACH will provide up to five (5) hours of advisory support to select awardees. This support may include, but is not limited to:

- Project planning consultation
 - Research design
 - Community engagement
 - Data collection and/or analysis
 - Other project-related needs as appropriate
-

Final Deliverables

At the conclusion of the project, awardees will be required to complete the following deliverables (by January 2029), as determined in collaboration with EC*REACH:

1. Rapid Report

- In partnership with EC*REACH, awardees will develop a rapid report summarizing the project. The report should include the project's purpose, methodology, preliminary findings, key insights, implications for the early childhood workforce, limitations, and recommendations for future research, policy, and/or practice.

2. Project Presentation

- Awardees will deliver a presentation to the EC*REACH team and relevant partners, highlighting the project's objectives, activities, preliminary findings, lessons learned, implications for the early childhood workforce, and recommendations for future research, policy, and/or practice.

Proposal Requirements

The Project Narrative should be no more than 2 pages single spaced. Supplemental Documents (CV and Budget, Timeline and Narrative) are not included in this page limit and should be attached as separate documents.

1. Title of Project

2. Description of Applicant Organization

- Briefly describe how this project fits within your organization's mission/goals and describe your organizations capacity for research

3. Research Project

- Describe the workforce problem your project will address and how this research advances the current state of knowledge in the field, including:
 - Problem statement
 - Brief review of relevant research/policy literature and how your project situates within it
 - Primary research questions and/or hypotheses to be tested
 - Methodological approach and data required

4. Partners and Collaboration Process

- Organizational partnerships are encouraged but not required. If you currently have a partnership or plan to develop one through this project, please describe the role and relationship of the intended research–practice partnership.

5. Implications of Research Project for Chicago

- Describe how the seed grant will support your teams' longer term research goals in Chicago.

6. Team Composition

- Identify key team members participating in the project/research study (Name, Title, Role) and explain how their expertise positions the project's success.

Supplemental Documents

1. CVs for all key research team members

2. Budget and Timeline
 - Line item budget
 - Personnel, their level of effort, salary charged, and fringe benefits charged (if applicable)
 - Non-personnel costs – list each category separately (supplies, travel, research subject payments, etc.)
3. Budget narrative
 - Description of each line in the budget
4. Projected Timeline

Submission Details

All application documents must be submitted by 11:59pm on November 16th, 2026. Proposal requirement documents, CVs, and Budgets should be compiled into two individual PDF files. One file contains all proposal requirements, and the other contains all CVs and Budget items (see below). Applications will be emailed to Jordan Herron (jordan.herron@northwestern.edu).

Applicant Submission Checklist

PDF #1:Proposal Requirements Document	☐ Title of Project ☐ Description of Organization ☐ Research Project Information ☐ Partners and Collaboration Process ☐ Implications of Research Project ☐ Team Composition
PDF #2: Supplemental Documents	☐ CVs of all key research team members ☐ Budget and Timeline ☐ Line item budget ☐ Budget narrative ☐ Projected timeline