2026
REQUEST FOR
PROPOSALS
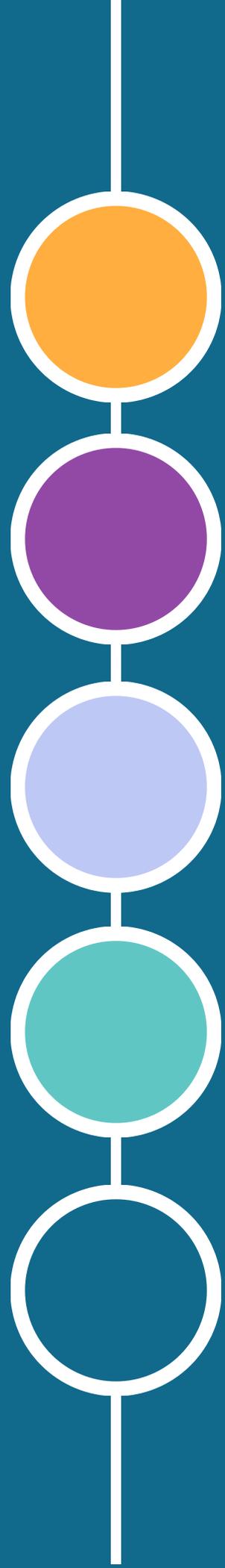
EdFund

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EdFund envisions evidence-based state funding policies that align with district and student needs. To achieve this vision, we need new research to support the decision-making of policymakers and advocates who advise how $800 billion is raised and spent for public schools annually.

To cultivate a stronger research base, EdFund will support new projects that answer the most pressing questions about how we fund our schools. The policymakers and advocates we consulted eschew the theoretical debates entertained in academic discourse and instead pose practical questions about school finance policy. These questions pertain to how and what to fund to support public education and require new research that prioritizes context and utility in addition to novelty and rigor.

In 2026, we will award grants ranging from $10,000-$75,000, with funding supplements potentially available for data acquisition*. We are pleased to support new work that we anticipate will advance what the field knows, provide new data or tools, and connect policy to outcomes—all in service of our ultimate objective: to improve the way we fund our public schools.

*Data must be made public upon completion of the project, with consideration of relevant privacy laws.

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For the 2026 funding cycle, EdFund will consider proposals across **four strategic priority areas**. These areas reflect both our broader research agenda and specific topics where new evidence could meaningfully inform pressing policy decisions. Applicants should clearly indicate which priority area their proposed project addresses and explain how the project will advance knowledge within that area.

The types of projects that are most actionable will vary depending on the current state of knowledge. For some topics, there is limited documentation of existing practice, and the field would benefit from landscape analyses or the construction of new datasets that researchers can use. For other topics, there is sufficient foundational knowledge to support studies examining the outcomes of policies and programs for students, districts, or states.

Proposed projects should be designed to be completed within a maximum of twenty-four months. We welcome projects that are smaller in scope, including short-term projects completed over a few months, student-led studies, and data collection efforts.

Priority Area 1: General Research Agenda

EdFund has established a <u>research agenda</u> to guide the support of new, policy-relevant studies. To develop this agenda, we engaged with policymakers and advocates to identify the key unanswered questions in the school finance policy space. These conversations revealed a need for research that moves beyond theoretical debates and instead addresses practical questions about how states design funding systems to support student needs.

We welcome proposals that address questions within our broader research agenda on state school finance policy. These projects may examine how states determine the resources districts need, how funding formulas distribute those resources across districts and student populations, or how funding policies influence student, school, and community outcomes. We are also interested in research on how states and communities raise revenue for public education, including policies that shape local tax effort, revenue stability, and the overall amount of funding available for schools. The sample questions included in the research agenda are intended to guide applicants but are not exhaustive. We welcome proposals that address related policy questions within these areas of school finance policy.

- **Priority Area 1 Driving Question:** What is the best way for states to design school funding systems that align resources with student needs and accommodate unique community conditions to ensure that both allocation and resourcing strategies are fair and representative?

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Priority Area 2: English Learners (EL) Funding

Multilingual students classified as English Learners (ELs) are one of the fastest-growing student populations in the United States, comprising roughly 10% of the K–12 student population. However, the share of EL students varies widely across states, ranging from less than 1% in some states to more than 20% in others, making state context especially important for policy design. Students learning English often require specialized supports such as bilingual instruction, trained language specialists, and targeted instructional materials to support both language development and academic achievement. Although nearly every state provides some form of supplemental funding for EL students, through formula weights, categorical grants, reimbursement systems, or other mechanisms, relatively little is known about how these funding approaches influence student identification, district resource allocation, or student outcomes.

EdFund seeks research that helps policymakers and advocates better understand how state funding formulas can most effectively support EL students. In particular, we are interested in projects that examine how different funding mechanisms, weighting structures, or eligibility rules shape the resources districts ultimately deploy to support English learners and how these districts respond to state and fiscal incentives. Because EL populations vary widely in size, linguistic diversity, and concentration across states and districts, the field would benefit from policy research grounded in specific state contexts that accounts for concentration factors and economies of scale while avoiding incentives that delay student reclassification or otherwise hinder student progress. Studies that generate new evidence on how funding policies affect both resource allocation and educational outcomes for EL students are especially encouraged.

- **Priority Area 2 Driving Question:** How are state funding formulas best structured to support English Learners?

Priority Area 3: Low-Income Student Identification Project

Policymakers and advocates have long faced challenges in designing policies and administrative processes that accurately identify students from low-income households for the purposes of school funding formulas. Recent changes to eligibility for public benefit programs have made this challenge more acute, particularly for approximately seven states that rely exclusively on direct certification to identify low-income students. These states and others need empirically validated, administratively feasible alternatives to ensure that funding formulas allocate resources accurately and equitably based on student need. Through this priority area, EdFund seeks projects that demonstrate which identification methods most accurately and reliably capture student poverty for the purposes of state funding formula allocations.

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Given the current context, we're interested in projects that test the feasibility of moving away from federal income proxies and toward novel mechanisms that are measured at state and/or local levels. For instance, Texas uses a neighborhood-based model with multiple "at-risk" measures that are much more inclusive than simply household income.

Rather than relying solely on theoretical analysis, successful proposals will model the impact of alternatives in actual state contexts, considering what may work best within the state's political and sociodemographic landscape. Identification approaches may include student-level proxies (such as direct certification), neighborhood-based indices, school-level concentration measures, or hybrid approaches that combine multiple indicators. Research teams may draw on methods such as GIS mapping, large-scale administrative and geospatial data analysis, statistical programming (e.g., Stata or R), and education policy analysis to evaluate the strengths and limitations of different identification strategies.

We welcome proposals that take the form of a class project or multiple students working with a supervising professor. This project will offer opportunities for students to work directly with state advocates and technical assistance providers. For Priority Area 3, proposed projects should be designed to be completed within a maximum of twelve months.

- **Priority Area 3 Driving Question:** What is the best way for states to identify and provide targeted funding to address student and community factors in school funding formulas?

Priority Area 4: Career Pathways

As states seek to expand pathways to economic mobility, policymakers are increasingly focused on how funding systems can support programs that prepare students for entry into the workforce. Studies in this area should examine how school funding policies support career pathways, such as through programs like career and technical education (CTE), dual enrollment, and work-based learning.

Although many states offer these career-focused options within their K–12 systems, funding for these options varies widely. Some provide categorical grants dedicated to CTE or dual enrollment, others incorporate high school or career-pathway weights into their funding formulas, and some rely on hybrid models that combine multiple funding mechanisms. Each of these approaches may create different incentives for schools and districts related to program participation, credential attainment, or alignment with labor market demand. Given this variation across states and the limited evidence base on how these funding approaches affect program access and student outcomes, EdFund seeks research that helps illuminate how states should fund career pathways.

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We encourage projects that evaluate the design, implementation, and outcomes of different funding models for career-focused programs, including how these policies influence student participation, credential attainment, postsecondary enrollment, and labor market outcomes. Studies that assess the incentives created by different funding structures, estimate the return on public investment in career pathways programs, or examine how funding policies shape district decisions about program offerings are particularly encouraged.

- **Priority Area 4 Driving Question:** What is the best way for states to fund career pathways to productive careers that begin in K–12 schools?

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Benefits and Expectations

Awardees will receive financial support for their school finance research project as well as access to additional resources to support their work. Benefits for grant winners include:

- $10,000-$75,000 of funding, based on project scope
- Data and policy insights from expert partners
- Assistance with promoting and platforming findings to advocates, policymakers, and journalists
- Membership in a community of practice with twice yearly meetings and other optional events to share and receive policy insights, troubleshoot data or methods issues, and network with other researchers studying school finance
- Curated opportunities to discuss your work and interact with high impact policymakers and journalists
- Assistance in finding additional/ongoing funding opportunities

For those awarded grant funding, a few conditions have been established to ensure projects are aligned with EdFund's priorities. Grant recipients are expected to commit to the following:

- Participate in quarterly meetings with EdFund to discuss progress toward project objectives
- Produce one or more policy brief(s) to be made public and shared with the policy community
- Cap indirect costs at no more than 10% of proposed budget

Timeline

Please note the following timeline, to which strict adherence is expected. Proposals will be considered on a rolling basis.

- Letters of Interest (LOIs) Due: April 24th, 2026
- Letters of Interest Results: May 18th, 2026
- Full Proposals Due (Upon Invitation): June 12th, 2026
- Awards Announced: July 31st, 2026

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Review Criteria and Process

When reviewing submissions for funding, we will be evaluating proposed research studies against three primary goals for funded projects: advancing school finance policy, advancing research, and expanding and diversifying the field. We have a preference for supporting doctoral students or post-doctoral researchers under the supervision of a professor.

The following table lists the features of studies' objective, design, and project team that we will use as the criteria to determine alignment with these three objectives. It is not necessary for each proposed study to achieve each of the items listed in the table, nor even to make progress towards all three of the larger goals. We welcome proposals for projects that make a contribution to only one or two of these objectives and will consider them favorably if we feel the contribution is sufficiently impactful.

Advance Policy	Advance Research	Expand the Field
Alignment with the 2024-2026 EdFund Research Agenda	Collection of baseline data for a topic that is currently unstudied in the field	Project team inclusion of students, early-career scholars, and/or post-doctoral candidates
Applicability to multiple states based on shared policy contexts (see FundED for reference on funding policies)	Focusing study approaches on the impact of specific school finance policies	Cross-institution and/or cross-disciplinary collaborations
Study designs tailored to meet specific policy needs	Innovative approaches/perspectives	Inclusion of diverse perspectives
Partnerships with policy organizations or advocates	Including analysis of the impact of school funding policies on student, school or community conditions	Unique partnerships

Letters of interest will first be reviewed by EdFund staff, with select LOIs then shared with the EdFund Advisory Board for further evaluation. EdFund staff will collate feedback from our Advisory Board members and identify the LOIs we want to receive greater detail about through the full proposal process. Full proposals will be reviewed by EdFund staff with input from the Advisory Board requested on an as-needed basis. Final funding decisions will be made by EdFund's executive director and the advisory board chairs.

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As the first step in the request for proposal process, we invite applicants to submit a Letter of Interest giving an overview of a proposed study or data collection effort. The LOI should be no more than three pages in length, single-spaced, 12pt font. To consider the project for funding, we request LOIs to address the following items:

- **Study objectives and alignment with review criteria**
  - How does this study align with one of EdFund's four strategic priority areas?
  - How will this study build on what we know about the topic?
  - How will this study advance policy, advance the research field, and/or expand the research field?

- **Study design**
  - Research question(s), methods, data sources, and analysis plan
    - *For Priority Area 3 only:*
      - *How will you assess identification accuracy (e.g., validation methods)? How will you evaluate administrative feasibility and cost?*
      - *Student mentorship plan: Describe the role of the students in the project and how the supervising professor will mentor students while overseeing the research process*

- **Brief study timeline**
  - Anticipated start date and end date (twenty-four months maximum or twelve months maximum for Priority Area 3)
  - Timing of project deliverables

- **Proposed deliverables and dissemination plan**
  - Must include at least one policy brief, other policy-relevant deliverables are highly encouraged
  - Must identify state decisionmakers and/or advocates whose agendas align with the proposed research

- **High-level budget**
  - Total amount of funding requested (maximum $75,000)
  - What are the primary cost drivers for the proposed project?
  - List of any subcontractors who will participate in the project work

- **Project team bios (does not count against the page limit)**
  - Briefly list each team members' role, responsibilities, and relevant skills
  - Each bio should be 200 words maximum

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Letter of Interest Due Date

In order to be considered, Letters of Interest must be submitted by 11:59 p.m. EST, April 24th, 2026. Submissions should be made via email to rfp@ed-fund.org and should specify the Priority Area number your LOI addresses, using the subject line: "EdFund LOI submission: Priority Area #".

Full Proposal Invitations

Applicants who are selected for further consideration will be invited to submit a full, six-page proposal expanding on the information outlined in their LOI. In these proposals, we will ask for greater detail about the proposed study, including a more developed description of the proposed methods, data, and limitations, as well as a more detailed budget. We expect to fund 50-75% of the projects selected to submit a full proposal.

Greater detail about this process will be shared with applicants invited to submit a full proposal.

Contact

For questions about the RFP process, please contact rfp@ed-fund.org.

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Acknowledgements