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Grant Writing for RSF: Best Practices for Crafting a Successful Application

russellsage.org

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Who We Are

“For the improvement of social and living conditions in the United States”
From the Letter of the Gift by Margaret Olivia Sage establishing the Russell Sage Foundation, April 19, 1907

Then (1907-1944)
A source of institutional support, and information for private social agencies on topics like poverty reduction, social work, city planning, labor reform, housing, public health, education, consumer credit, and industrial relations.

Now (1945-Present)
RSF funds basic social science research; strengthening the methods, data, and theoretical core of the social sciences as a means of better documenting and understanding the nation’s most pressing social, political and economic problems.
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RSF Funding Priorities

Core Program Areas

- Behavioral Science and Decision Making in Context
- Future of Work
- Race, Ethnicity, and Immigration
  - Special Initiative: Immigration and Immigrant Integration (co-funded with Carnegie Corp. of NY)
- Social, Political, and Economic Inequality

Visit https://www.russellsage.org/programs for the program specific RFPs and recent grants.
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Dissertation Research Grants

• Eligibility: PhD students who are enrolled at a U.S.-based university
• Up to $10,000 for students at the ABD stage of their research
• Funds allowed for participant fees, data collection, transcription and lab fees, and a stipend of up to $5000
• 1-step application process: 5-page, single-spaced proposal with CV
• Application deadline (one per year) in February 2024

More information:
https://www.russellsage.org/research/funding/dissertation-research-grants
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Pipeline Grants Competition

• Eligibility: Tenure-track assistant professors, adjuncts and teaching faculty who have not received a grant from RSF in the past
• 1-year grants of up to $30,000
• 1-step application process: 7-page proposal, single-spaced with CV
• Mentorship component
• Capstone conference the following year (travel and lodging sponsored by RSF)
• Funds can be used for summer salary, data collection, research assistance, course buyouts, conference travel, etc.
• **Application deadline (one per year) in November 2023**

More information:
https://www.russellsage.org/how-to-apply/pipeline-grants-competition
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Research Grants: July 26, 2023 Deadline

• **Trustee Awards**: Max $200,000 including 15% indirect costs

• **Presidential Awards**: Max $50,000 with no allowed indirect or
  • $75,000 max allowed for data collection or for salary support for multiple assistant professors

The submission process is the same for both tiers of funding.
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Research Grant Application and Review

Letter of Inquiry (LOI)
- Deadlines 3x/year; typically in May/August/November
- Internal staff review
- External peer review

Invitation to Submit Full Proposal
- External peer review
- Response to reviewer comments requested
- Review by RSF Advisory Committee

Board or Presidential Approval

July 26, 2023 submissions: Funding decisions will be made at the March 2024 Board of Trustees meeting, with an earliest grant start date of mid-April 2024.
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Pipeline Grants vs. Research Grants

**Pipeline Grants (Due in Nov)**

- 1-step application process
- Asst Profs, Lecturers (PhD post Jan 1, 2013, never received RSF Research Grant/Fellowship
- Diversify the social sciences & our portfolio
- 1 year grants, $30K limit, no budget at time of application
- Funds can be used for summer salary, data, research assistance, course buyouts, conference travel, etc.
- Grants have mentorship component
- Capstone conference

**Research Grants (LOIs Due July 26)**

- 2-step application: LOIs, Proposals
- Ph.D. required for eligibility
- 1 or 2 year grants up to $75K (no indirect) Presidential Grants, up to $200K (15% indirect) Trustee Grants
- Funds for summer salary, data, research assistance, etc.
- 3 deadlines a year (generally May, August, November)
Other Funding Mechanisms and Eligibility

Visiting Fellowships
- Visiting Scholars (VS), for scholars 3+ years post-PhD
  - Next VS Deadline: June 27, 2023 (for residence in 2024-25)
- Visiting Researchers and Journalists
  - Next VR/VJ Deadline: May 2024 (for residence between Sep 2024 - Jun 2025)

Summer Institutes for Early Career Scholars
- Eligibility: PhD students, post-docs, early-career faculty
- Behavioral Economics, Proposal Development, Migration Research Methods
- Past institutes in Computational Social Science, and Biological Approaches in Social Science
- Deadlines: February - March 2024

RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences
- Open access, interdisciplinary, topic-based, peer-reviewed: https://www.rsfjournal.org

Up-to-date deadlines for all opportunities are available on our website: https://www.russellsage.org/how-to-apply/application-deadlines

There are no restrictions based on citizenship, country of study, or country of employment, as long as research is US-focused.
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Reviewers and Their Role

RSF Program Staff
- Internally screen the initial LOI/Proposals
- Assess fit with RSF programs, priorities, and submission guidelines

External Reviewers
- Interdisciplinary - generally a mix of econ, psych, polisci, soc, etc.
- Chosen specifically for their knowledge of the topic or methodology

RSF Advisory Committees
- Standing committee of interdisciplinary experts recruited by program area
- Decide which proposals are moved forward for funding consideration

RSF Board of Trustees
- RSF Board serves as the final decisionmaker on all proposals over $75,000
What We Ask Our Reviewers

Reviewers are asked to answer 5 questions at the proposal stage:

- **Are the main questions important and compelling?** Are the questions/hypotheses clearly stated and appropriately supported in terms of prior theory and empirical work?
- Are the proposed **research design, data, and methods** appropriate to address the questions raised? Is there sufficient power to make a causal claim?
- In your opinion, **is any additional expertise necessary** to carry out the project (e.g. gather data, conduct analyses, etc.)?
- **What is the likely contribution** of the project to the social sciences? Will it significantly advance the literature, result in a novel dataset, etc.?
- Do you have anything else to add that you think would help strengthen or improve the project?
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Tips & Suggestions

- **Make sure the project is a fit** with the Foundation’s funding priorities.
- **The RQs must drive the proposal, not the data:** map the research design, data and methods tightly to the research questions.
- **Balance the proposal narrative** (paragraphs on investigator quals or fit with RSF’s goals are unnecessary for an LOI).
- **Provide sufficient information** for reviewers to evaluate the appropriateness of methods.
- **Don’t overpromise or exaggerate** what the project will do – for example, don’t use causal language if you don’t have a causal design.
- **Show understanding of the strengths and limitations** of the design, methods, analyses.
- **If asked, respond to reviews seriously, graciously, and in-depth.**
- **Check Website, FAQs, example LOIs and proposals,** review RSF guidelines, deadlines.
- **Submit on time!** Register for RSF’s Fluxx portal **at least 48hrs in advance.**

We receive many more very good proposals than we can fund—learn from reviews and try again if you have a project that you think fits!
Declined at the Initial Screen?

“Not an RSF Funding Priority”
- Project not focused on the US or outcomes are not a priority
- Routine analysis of existing publicly available data (GSS, PSID, ACS, CPS, etc.)
- RSF doesn’t fund operational support, program evals, animal studies, etc.
- RSF does not fund projects on health outcomes or issues around educational curricula

“Project is too Preliminary”
- Expensive data collection vs. data analysis
- Demonstrate project feasibility w/ pilot data (see Pipeline Grants)

Other Possible Reasons
- Lack of clarity, design flaws (e.g., data/methods not suited for research?)
- LOI is not well-written, e.g. under- or over-utilizes available space, copy-pasted from other grant requests
- RSF prioritizes research projects with strong descriptive or causal designs
Some Miscellaneous Pointers...

• Use your networks, e.g. peers in your department or even #AcademicTwitter.
• Get your office of sponsored projects involved early.
• Think about your budget – know what your research is worth!
• Program staff are a resource, before and after an application. Don’t be afraid to use us!
Thank You!

Sign up for our mailing list to keep abreast of funding announcements, publications or new work in progress. Select “Join Our Mailing List” at the top of our homepage.

Website: www.russellsage.org

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