



# Russell Sage Foundation

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

[russellsage.org](https://russellsage.org)

**Eric Bias**  
Program Associate

**Summer Institute in Migration Research Methods**  
University of California, Berkeley

June 14, 2023



# Russell Sage Foundation

## 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.



# Russell Sage Foundation

## 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.

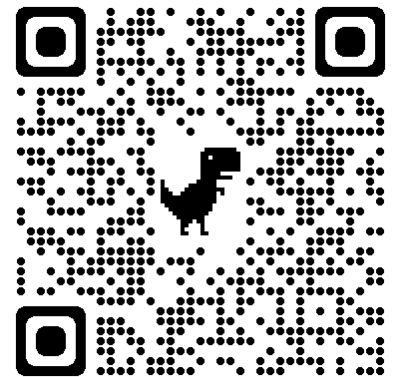


# Russell Sage Foundation Dissertation Research Grants

- 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>





# Russell Sage Foundation 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>







Russell Sage Foundation

# 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.



Russell Sage Foundation

# 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.



Russell Sage Foundation

# 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)





Russell Sage Foundation

# 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.rsfsjournal.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.*



Russell Sage Foundation

# 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



Russell Sage Foundation

# 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?



# Russell Sage Foundation

## 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!





Russell Sage Foundation

# 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





Russell Sage Foundation

## 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!



# Russell Sage Foundation Thank You!

**Website:**

[www.russellsage.org](http://www.russellsage.org)

**Email us:**

[programs@rsage.org](mailto:programs@rsage.org)

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.