

December 14, 2012

2012–2014 Emerging Scholars Small Grants Competition

Request for Proposals: Research on Building Human Capital and Economic Potential

(Deadline for Proposal Receipt: **5:00 p.m. Central Standard Time on February 1, 2013**)

Purpose

The Institute for Research on Poverty (IRP) seeks to fund research that will enhance our understanding of how policies and programs can build economic self-sufficiency by increasing employment, wages, labor market skills, and earnings, which is one of three integrated research themes shaping IRP's research agenda as a National Poverty Research Center. IRP anticipates funding up to five projects, with a maximum award of \$20,000 each, to emerging scholars as defined below. Grantees will benefit from consultation with IRP senior affiliates, with each other, and—during a workshop at which grantees will present their draft paper—with other senior poverty scholars.

Background

IRP is a university-based center for interdisciplinary research into the causes and consequences of poverty and social inequality in the United States. It is one of three National Poverty Research Centers sponsored by the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (ASPE/DHHS). IRP has established this small grants program as part of an integrated set of research, training, and dissemination activities.

IRP's Director is Timothy Smeeding; the Associate Director of Research and Training is Katherine Magnuson; and the Associate Director of Programs and Management is Jennifer L. Noyes. Coordinators of the 2012–2014 small grants program on building human capital and economic potential are Timothy Smeeding, Arts & Sciences Distinguished Professor of Public Affairs at the La Follette School of Public Affairs, and Carolyn Heinrich, Sid Richardson Professor of Public Affairs, Affiliated Professor of Economics, and Director of the Center for Health and Social Policy, University of Texas at Austin, and IRP affiliate.

Focal Theme

Building human capital and economic potential is one of IRP's focal research themes. Employment is the primary pathway out of poverty for most non-elderly adults in the United States. But economic trends, both cyclical and structural, have reduced employment and wages in low- and middle-wage labor markets, which has in turn increased the proportion of poor households that are headed by working-age adults. Stagnating wages and increasing unemployment are also contributing to rising income inequality.

These changes in the labor market have coincided with a transformation of welfare benefits from income guarantees to a package of services and benefits designed to support the employment efforts of low-skill workers. Yet the volatility and instability of low-wage work, particularly during times of economic downturn, challenge such an approach.

Research | Training | Policy | Practice

Efforts to meet the twin goals of encouraging self-sufficiency and improving the well-being of vulnerable families confront a range of challenges. Despite agreement that work must be a central element of any strategy, important questions remain concerning the potential for low-income families to become self-sufficient and the role that policy can play in improving outcomes for adults and encouraging appropriate savings and asset building.

Questions of Interest

In response to these trends and challenges, we invite research proposals that consider evidence on cost-effective ways to build skills and earnings potential among low-wage/low-skill workers, addressing the following types of questions in one of the following three areas:

1. The role of human capital in reducing disconnections from the labor market

- How can disconnections from schooling and the labor force be prevented among youth/young adults? How can youth be engaged before they drop out?
- How can human capital acquisition bolster labor market entry/re-entry for these groups? What types of human capital acquisition would be most effective?
- What policies/programs are needed to better aid subgroups at high risk of disconnection and prolonged unemployment, e.g., the formerly incarcerated, disabled, immigrants, and minorities who lag in educational attainment?
- How can promising interventions be effectively replicated and/or scaled up?

2. The role of formal education and training in increasing employment and wage/earnings growth

- What school-based interventions are needed to increase high school graduation rates?
- What types of interventions will increase college and/or career readiness, particularly for subgroups at high risk of disconnection, including dropouts and those with only a GED?
- What strategies will reduce racial and socioeconomic gaps in completion rates for 2- and 4-year colleges?
- What are the most promising public and/or private training initiatives that target growing jobs and bring together training providers, employers, workers, and community-based organizations in design and implementation (e.g., sector-focused programs, integrated basic and technical skills programs) to increase employment and wage/earnings growth?

3. The implications of changing demand for labor, job creation, and job quality

- What new or tested approaches will work best to maintain or create jobs and promote upward job and wage mobility (e.g., temporary short-time work arrangements, wage subsidies, non-wage cost reductions, expansions in self-employment, profit-sharing)?
- How are the processes of job search and job matching changing, and how can new approaches be harnessed to increase success for the hard-to-employ?
- How is the quality of jobs changing, and what role should public and private sector entities/policies have in promoting/supporting job quality (stability, flexibility, benefits)?
- What reforms to unemployment insurance (UI) can be undertaken to eliminate disincentives for work and stem the tide of workers shifting from UI to disability programs?
- What macroeconomic efforts, such as state job growth policies, should be pursued to support the effectiveness of human capital investments?

- What public/private (or “across silo”) partnerships and strategies are needed to bring employers into partnerships and successfully expand the most promising interventions for the hard-to-employ?

Terms

1. Individuals (domestic and foreign) and foreign entities are not eligible for awards made under this announcement.
2. The Principal Investigator must hold a doctorate or the highest degree appropriate for their discipline. The Principal Investigator must have received their Ph.D. or its equivalent after January 1, 2005.
3. University of Wisconsin–Madison faculty and postdoctoral fellows are ineligible for funding.
4. The grant contract period will be May 1, 2013, to September 15, 2014.
5. Grants may not exceed \$20,000. This amount includes indirect costs at the applicant’s institution, if required (see item 4 below).
6. Receipt of a grant from IRP will require a commitment to:
 - submit a draft paper for review and comment by January 22, 2014;
 - present this draft paper at a meeting the week of April 8, 2014 (exact date TBA; travel expenses for this event will be paid by IRP);
 - submit a revised paper by June 24, 2014;
 - present the paper at a structured mentoring workshop to be held in Madison on July 23, 2014 (travel expenses for this event will be paid by IRP);
 - attend a research conference to be held in Madison July 24–25, 2014 (immediately following the mentoring workshop); and
 - submit a final paper suitable for academic publication no later than September 9, 2014.
7. All publications should acknowledge the support of IRP and the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (ASPE/DHHS).

Availability of Funds

Program support is subject to the availability of funds. Nothing in this description of applications should be construed as committing IRP to dividing available funds among all qualified applicants.

Application Instructions

Applicants should submit their proposal to Robin Snell via e-mail to irpapply@ssc.wisc.edu by **5:00 p.m. Central Standard Time on February 1, 2013**. Fax submissions will not be accepted. Proposal receipt will be acknowledged.

The application must contain as a single file the following components in the order as listed:

1. A cover sheet giving the title of the proposed research, applicant’s name, date of Ph.D., institutional affiliation with full address and telephone number, e-mail address, and home address.
2. A one-page abstract, describing research objectives, data, and methods.
3. Description of the applicant’s proposed research, not to exceed 8 double-spaced pages exclusive of references or appendices. The proposal should carefully describe the issue(s) to be examined, hypotheses to be evaluated, methodology proposed, data sources to be used, and anticipated results of the research, including their potential implications for public policy.
4. An itemized budget showing the researcher’s time, research assistant’s time, travel costs, computer services, supplies, and indirect costs if required. Please note that the University of Wisconsin is not collecting indirect costs on these sub-awards from the prime grant; applicants are encouraged to request that their home institution forego or charge minimal indirect costs.
5. Curriculum vitae for all investigators.

6. A letter from the office of research and sponsored programs of the applicant's institution confirming administrative approval of the proposal.
7. A timely *plan* for obtaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval or exemption for human subjects research (typically secondary data analysis is eligible for exemption approval; consult your institution's IRB office). The University of Wisconsin will not execute subcontracts without documentation of IRB exemption or approval.

Selection Criteria

IRP will evaluate proposals in collaboration with affiliated scholars and ASPE staff. **Award notifications will be made on April 1, 2013.**

Proposals will be evaluated according to the following criteria:

1. The relevance of the topic to IRP's focal theme of building human capital (as discussed above).
2. The potential usefulness of the proposed research for the advancement of scientific knowledge and the development and implementation of public policy.
3. Clarity of stated objectives, methods, and anticipated results.
4. The appropriateness and soundness of the research design, including choice of data, methods of analysis, and other procedures. The reasonableness of estimated cost and time commitments in relation to anticipated results.
5. The qualifications and experience of personnel, including demonstrated familiarity with the literature and data to be used.

Feedback

The top 20 proposals will be selected by the program chairs (Heinrich and Smeeding) and reviewed by them and two outside referees. Written feedback on each of these proposals will be delivered to the authors with the award decision.

Questions

Proposers may direct process-related questions to Deborah Johnson (djohnson@ssc.wisc.edu) and budget-related questions to William Wambach (wambach@ssc.wisc.edu). Research-related questions should be directed by e-mail to Tim Smeeding (smeeding@lafollette.wisc.edu) and Carolyn Heinrich (cheinrich@austin.utexas.edu).

Timeline of Important Dates

IRP Emerging Scholars Research on Building Human Capital and Economic Potential Timeline of Important Dates*	
Deadline for proposal receipt	5:00 p.m. CST, February 1, 2013
Notification of award	April 1, 2013
Contract begins	May 1, 2013
Complete initial draft paper due	January 22, 2014
Present draft paper	Week of April 8, 2014*
Complete revised paper due	June 24, 2014
Present revised paper (Madison)	July 24, 2014
Final paper due	September 9, 2014
*The date marked with an asterisk is subject to revision; grantees will be notified when the date has been finalized.	

12/10/12