



# Call for Applications

## IRP Extramural Large Grants for Poverty and Economic Mobility Research 2025–2026

**Letter of Intent Deadline:** February 7, 2025, 11:59 p.m. CST

**Informational Webinar:** Monday, January 13, 2025, 1:00–1:30 CST

Zoom link: <https://uwmadison.zoom.us/j/94839443399> | [Add to Calendar](#) (iCal Link)

### [Frequently Asked Questions](#)

Posted on December 9, 2024

*Updated: January 10, 2025*

## ABOUT THE GRANT

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As the National Research Center on Poverty and Economic Mobility, the Institute for Research on Poverty (IRP) at the University of Wisconsin–Madison seeks to fund research on high effective marginal tax rates, also known as benefit cliffs. This is a key area of interest identified by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE), Office of Human Services Policy (HSP), which serves as the sponsor of the National Research Center on Poverty and Economic Mobility.

HSP is particularly interested in research that focuses on the policy implications for human services programs administered by HHS (e.g., child care, child welfare, child support, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families [TANF], youth homeless services, and Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program) but is also interested in the broader social safety net programs (e.g., Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program [SNAP], subsidized housing programs, Medicaid/Children’s Health Insurance Program, refundable tax credits, and Supplemental Security Income) especially when those programs interact with the human services administered by HHS.

If appropriate for the project aims or research question, applicants are encouraged to consider meaningfully engaging affected communities in the research and/or dissemination process (e.g., collaboratively developing research questions, potential methods, and plans for data collection; working with community members to interpret findings and put them into context; and sharing results in ways that are accessible to impacted individuals such as through visuals, blogs, and videos).

Proposals are invited from PhD-holding scholars at all career stages, from postdoctoral fellows to senior faculty, and from all disciplines who are interested in pursuing policy-relevant research. Researchers who are awarded grants will be asked to consider integrating feedback from IRP and HSP into their projects and ongoing research.

## ABOUT IRP

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The Institute for Research on Poverty is a center for interdisciplinary research into the causes and consequences of poverty and inequality in the United States and the impacts of related policies and programs.

As the National Research Center on Poverty and Economic Mobility sponsored by the US Department of Health and Human Services, IRP coordinates the [US Collaborative of Poverty Centers \(CPC\)](#). IRP and its partner centers support and train poverty and economic mobility scholars with a special focus on expanding opportunities for scholars from historically underrepresented groups. In addition, IRP and its partner centers provide relevant, cutting-edge research on a wide range of topics with the goal of improving the effectiveness of public policies to reduce poverty and its consequences.

## ABOUT ASPE

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The Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation is the principal advisor to the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services on policy development. ASPE is responsible for major activities in policy coordination, legislation development, strategic planning, policy research, evaluation, and economic analysis. Within ASPE, the Office of Human Services Policy (HSP) conducts policy research, analysis, evaluation, and coordination on various issues across the Department, including but not limited to, poverty and measurement, marginalized communities, early childhood education and child welfare, family strengthening, economic support for families, and youth development. HSP serves as a liaison with other agencies on broad economic matters and is the Department's lead on poverty research and analysis. HSP is focused on human services programs and their ability to promote the economic and social well-being of many of America's most marginalized people. Through a variety of programs, services, and benefits administered at the federal, state, local, and community levels, the field of human services provides a range of resources to best support the complex needs of a variety of America's lower income families and individuals.

To learn more about ASPE and the work they do, check out [this video](#).

## 2024 FOCAL THEME: HIGH EFFECTIVE MARGINAL TAX RATES/BENEFIT CLIFFS

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*Effective marginal tax rates* refer to the portion of an earnings increase that is eroded by reductions in public benefits resulting from that earnings increase. High effective marginal tax rates—previous ASPE projects have used 45 percent as a definition of “high”—can make it difficult for families to achieve economic mobility and act as a work disincentive for some who might otherwise try to increase their earnings.

*Benefit cliffs* refer to situations where an earnings increase actually puts the family in a financially worse-off situation because the value of the benefit loss exceeds the

earnings increase. However, the term “benefit cliff” is also used to simply refer to high effective marginal tax rates (from this point further we use the terms benefit cliffs and high effective marginal tax rates interchangeably).

Benefit cliffs can result from a single program that ends abruptly once the income eligibility threshold has been breached (e.g., child care subsidies) or from a program that phases out over an income range (e.g., SNAP). Individuals receiving multiple public benefits may also lose two or more benefits at the same time when their income increases (e.g., SNAP and Earned Income Tax Credit [EITC]).

Benefit cliffs are a complex problem, and the solution will require contributions from many sectors, including federal agencies, Congress, states, nonprofits and community-based organizations, employers, financial technology companies, and researchers.

Research on benefit cliffs often centers on means-tested federal programs that serve many people and have a relatively high dollar value, including (but not limited to) SNAP, Medicaid/CHIP, EITC, TANF, Child and Development Care Fund (CCDF) subsidies, public housing and rental assistance, and Supplemental Security Income (SSI).

ASPE’s work on benefit cliffs found that [low-income households with children](#) had the highest levels of effective marginal tax rates, where rates in the 40 and 50 percent range were typical. [Focus group work](#) suggests that while working parents knew about benefit cliffs, they were not clear about what income levels would trigger benefit reductions. Furthermore, some parents were reluctant to give up benefits in large part because of the perceived difficulty of getting benefits back if the benefits were needed again at a later time (i.e., due to job loss). ASPE has also developed a [benefit cliff calculator](#) to help people and caseworkers determine how much benefits would be reduced by a given an earnings increase. Most recently, ASPE estimated how people respond to different levels of effective marginal tax rates, using a survey experiment. Finally, ASPE is examining hypothetical policy changes that would reduce the number of families facing high effective marginal tax rates, using microsimulation.

Applications are welcome from Principal Investigators with research projects on the topic of high effective marginal tax rates and benefit cliffs, with a focus on low- and moderate-income families. HSP is particularly interested in policy-relevant research that directly or indirectly contributes to solving the challenge of benefit cliffs. Research is “policy-relevant” when it informs local, state, or federal law, regulation, procedure, administrative action, or program adoption and implementation in a way that is targeted, timely, and actionable. Policy-relevant research may inform knowledge and understanding of the nature, causes, correlates, and effects of benefit cliffs with the goal of improving the effectiveness of public policies. Furthermore, HSP is interested in researchers who are committed to translating and distilling complex study findings for policy analysts and policy makers at the local, state, and federal levels. Research findings should be useful for informing or developing policies that reduce or mitigate high effective marginal tax rates and problems that stem from high effective marginal tax rates.

Potential topic areas are listed below; researchers may also propose projects that address topics other than those listed.

- Benefit-cost analysis of policy alternatives that reduce effective marginal tax rates. For example, this could involve comparing short-term program costs with long-run potential cost savings, e.g., if people exit benefit participation earlier due to long-term and substantial earnings increases.
- People's views/perspectives about the trade-offs between a larger initial benefit amount coupled with a steep phase-out or cliff, versus a smaller initial benefit amount coupled with a more gradual phase-out. (In a budget-constrained policy environment, these are often the trade-offs). In other words, do people prefer benefit stability or benefit sufficiency? We anticipate that qualitative methods may be well-suited to examining this topic.
- Scalable policies to reduce high effective marginal tax rates. This could include evaluations of demonstration projects or pilots to mitigate high effective marginal tax rates, or microsimulation of potential policy levers to reduce high effective marginal rates among households with low incomes.
- Relationships between effective marginal tax rates and observable indicators of well-being, such as employment and earnings. This could involve exploiting state and local policy variations. Comparing two or more programs could also be useful, which could tell policymakers which program(s) to prioritize.
- Understanding people's perspectives and views on benefit loss and benefit reductions across different benefit types (for example, housing versus EITC). This could involve using qualitative methodology and, if so, should build on or be informed by previous [ASPE work](#). This sort of work could tell policymakers which program(s) to prioritize.
- Understanding the relationship and interaction between minimum wage and benefit cliffs. For example, change and variation in state/local minimum wage laws could be exploited.

Successful projects will be designed to generate actionable policy and/or programmatic implications at the federal, state, or local levels.

## **TERMS**

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### **Eligibility**

The principal investigator must hold a doctorate or the highest degree appropriate for their discipline at the time of application. Applicants must be associated with a university. Individuals not associated with a university (domestic or foreign) and foreign entities are ineligible for grants made under this announcement.

University of Wisconsin–Madison faculty and postdoctoral fellows are ineligible for funding.

### **Contract Period**

The grant contract period is flexible depending on scope of the project not to exceed **15** months from grant start date.

### **Funding**

Grants may not exceed \$50,000. This amount includes indirect costs at the applicant's institution, if required (see Item 4 under Application Instructions below).

### **Commitment**

Receipt of a grant from IRP will require a commitment to:

- Within the **first 6 weeks** of the grant period, participate in a video conference with IRP to discuss the project and how to maximize its policy relevance.
- Submit brief quarterly progress reports ( $\leq$  150 words) of work accomplished during the preceding three months **every quarter** in the established grant period except for the last two quarters (see timeline for more details) to [irpapply@ssc.wisc.edu](mailto:irpapply@ssc.wisc.edu).
- Submit a draft paper for review and comments to [irpapply@ssc.wisc.edu](mailto:irpapply@ssc.wisc.edu) **three months before the end of the established grant period**.
- **Within two weeks of submitting the draft**, participate in a video conference with IRP to discuss the draft paper and discuss how to maximize its policy relevance.
- Submit a revised draft by **end of established grant period** to [irpapply@ssc.wisc.edu](mailto:irpapply@ssc.wisc.edu).
- Present the paper at a seminar, workshop, or other mutually agreed-upon public event sponsored by IRP.
- Agree to have the work summarized in an IRP publication (e.g., *Focus on Poverty*; *Fast Focus Poverty Brief*), webinar, and/or podcast.
- Submit a final paper for academic publication **no later than nine months after the end of the established grant period** and alert IRP of the submission by sending an email to [irpapply@ssc.wisc.edu](mailto:irpapply@ssc.wisc.edu) with the name of the journal.

All travel related to presentations requested by IRP will be funded by IRP directly; applicants do not need to include these travel expenses in their budgets. When relevant, IRP will coordinate meetings with ASPE and principal investigators.

All publications associated with the grant should acknowledge the support of IRP and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE).

### **Selection Process**

This is a two-stage selection process. All interested parties must submit a letter of interest which will be reviewed by IRP-affiliated scholars and staff as well as ASPE research staff for the following:

- The relevance of the topic to IRP's focal theme; and
- The potential usefulness of the proposed research project to influence the policymaking process, especially related to programs administered by the US Department of Health and Human Services.

IRP will provide feedback to applicants. Top projects will be invited to submit full applications. (See timeline for details.)

Selected applicants will have additional time to submit a full proposal. (See timeline for details.) Final applications will be reviewed as follows.

1. Applications will be screened for completeness, including:
  - a. Online application completed; and
  - b. Application materials uploaded.
2. Qualifying applications will be evaluated by a panel of distinguished scholars from IRP, its CPC partners, and ASPE research staff and management. The panels will use the application materials as the basis for scoring the following:
  - a. The potential usefulness of the proposed research project to influence the policymaking process, especially related to programs administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services;
  - b. The potential usefulness of the proposed research project for the advancement of scientific knowledge;
  - c. Clarity of stated objectives and anticipated results;
  - d. The appropriateness and soundness of the research design, including choice of data, methods of analysis, and other procedures;
  - e. Demonstrated ability of research to be conducted in the timeframe established in this grant;
  - f. The reasonableness of estimated cost and time commitments in relation to anticipated results; and

- g. The qualifications and experience of personnel, including demonstrated familiarity with the literature and data to be used.

## **AWARD INFO**

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IRP anticipates funding up to three projects, with total funding (including direct and indirect costs) up to \$50,000 each. Applicants are encouraged to request that their home institution forego or charge minimal indirect costs.

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**

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This is a two-stage selection process. All interested parties must submit a letter of interest. Selected applicants will receive feedback and will be invited to submit a full proposal. Note that only applicants who submit a letter of interest will be invited to submit a full proposal. Applicants cannot submit a proposal unless invited to do so.

**Submit letter of interest by Friday, February 7, 2025 at:**

[https://irpwisc.formstack.com/forms/extramural\\_large\\_grant\\_letter\\_of\\_intent](https://irpwisc.formstack.com/forms/extramural_large_grant_letter_of_intent)

Fax submissions will not be accepted. Proposal receipt will be acknowledged.

The letter of interest must contain the following components as a single PDF file in the order listed:

1. A letter (not to exceed two pages) describing in detail:
  - a. The issue(s) to be examined and their significance/importance;
  - b. Research questions to be answered;
  - c. Methodology proposed; and
  - d. Anticipated results of the research, including their potential implications for public policy.
2. Curriculum vitae for the principal investigator.

**Submit full proposal by Friday, April 4, 2025 at:**

[https://irpwisc.formstack.com/forms/extramural\\_large\\_grant\\_app](https://irpwisc.formstack.com/forms/extramural_large_grant_app)

Fax submissions will not be accepted. Proposal receipt will be acknowledged.

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

listed:

1. A cover sheet giving the title of the proposed research, applicant's name, date of PhD, and institutional affiliation with full address and telephone number, email address, and home address.
2. A one-page (double-spaced) abstract describing research objectives, data, and methods.
3. Description of the applicant's proposed research, not to exceed eight double-spaced pages in 12- point, Times New Roman font with one-inch margins all around, exclusive of references or appendices. The proposal should carefully describe:
  - a. the issue(s) to be examined and their significance/importance;
  - b. research questions to be answered;
  - c. methodology proposed; and
  - d. anticipated results of the research, including their potential implications for public policy.
4. An itemized budget showing (as relevant) the researcher's time, research assistant's time, and people with lived experiences' time spent on project consultation, travel costs (other than those related to IRP-initiated meetings and events), computer services, supplies, and indirect costs if required. (Note that applicants are encouraged to request that their home institution forego or charge minimal indirect costs.) Grant awards will be issued in two or three increments corresponding to the IRP parent award and depending on the length of the project. As such, the itemized budget should be presented in the following periods:
  - a. from July 1, 2025 to September 29, 2025; and
  - b. from September 30, 2025 to September 29, 2026.
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. The University of Wisconsin–Madison will not execute subcontracts without documentation of IRB approval or exemption.



## CONTACT

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All inquiries, including questions on the application process, budget, and research issues, should be directed to [irpapply@ssc.wisc.edu](mailto:irpapply@ssc.wisc.edu).

## TIMELINE

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Proposal release	December 9, 2024
Optional Webinar	January 13, 2025 from: 2:00–2:30 ET   1:00–1:30 CT   12:00–12:30 MT   11:00–11:30 PT Link to webinar: <a href="https://uwmadison.zoom.us/j/94839443399">https://uwmadison.zoom.us/j/94839443399</a> <a href="#">Add to Calendar</a> (iCal file)
Deadline for letter of interest	February 7, 2025
Feedback provided by IRP on letter of interest and invitation to submit full proposal	Early March 2025
Deadline for full proposal	April 4, 2025
Notification of grant award	Mid-June 2025
Contract begins	July 1, 2025
Meeting with IRP	August 2025
Quarterly progress reports due	Due the fifth day of the following quarter; for example: Work completed from July 1, 2025–September 30, 2025 will be included in October 5, 2025 report.  Work completed from October 1, 2025–December 31, 2025 will be included in the January 5, 2026 report.
Draft research report	Three months before the end of the contract period
Meeting with IRP	Within two weeks of submitting draft paper
Final research report	End of award period
End of award period	No later than <b>September 29, 2026</b>

**Note:** Contract dates and reporting requirement deadlines will be specified in the award letter upon notification.