

National Dissertation Award for Research on Poverty and Economic Mobility 2025–2026

Application Deadline: January 24, 2025, 11:59 p.m. CST

Informational Webinar Rescheduled: Wednesday, December 4, 2024, 3:00–3:30 CST

Zoom link: <https://uwmadison.zoom.us/j/93833282655>

[Frequently Asked Questions](#)

Posted on October 18, 2024

ABOUT THE FELLOWSHIP

As the National Research Center on Poverty and Economic Mobility, the [Institute for Research on Poverty \(IRP\)](#) at the University of Wisconsin–Madison invites applications from dissertators from disadvantaged backgrounds for its 2025–2026 National Dissertation Award for Research on Poverty and Economic Mobility program. This award is provided with the financial support of the US Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, Office of Human Services Policy (US DHHS/ASPE/HSP).

IRP has established this award to support an outstanding dissertation project that explores issues of poverty, inequality, or economic mobility in human services. Competitive dissertation proposals will produce actionable policy research on reducing inequalities in human services administered by HHS (e.g., child welfare, child support, child care, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, youth homeless services, and Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program). Research on the broader social safety net programs (e.g., Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, subsidized housing programs, employment and training programs, and tax credits) will also be considered, especially when those programs interact with the human services administered by HHS.

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 policy issues such as income dynamics, poverty, individual and family functioning, and child well-being with the goal of improving the effectiveness of public policies.

Preference will be given to dissertators with purposeful plans to engage affected populations in their research or dissemination (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

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such as through visuals, blogs, and videos). See [Strategies to Center Community Voices in Research](#) for more background.

Proposals are welcome from all disciplines by dissertators from disadvantaged backgrounds as defined by the [National Institutes of Health](#) (see Eligibility section below for more detail).

ABOUT IRP

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 OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR PLANNING AND EVALUATION (ASPE), OFFICE OF HUMAN SERVICES POLICY (HSP)

The Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation is the principal advisor to the Secretary of the US 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](#).

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Eligibility

Proposals are invited from doctoral students at US universities, other than UW–Madison, who are from disadvantaged backgrounds and whose dissertation is focused on issues related to

poverty, inequality and economic mobility in human services. IRP is using the [National Institutes of Health](#) (NIH)'s definition of disadvantaged backgrounds which requires individuals to meet two or more of their established criteria. Applicants will be asked to briefly identify which of the NIH disadvantaged background criteria they meet.

Applicants should expect to complete their required coursework by September 2025 and can reasonably expect to complete their PhD by the 2026–2027 academic year or earlier. Applicants need the support of their dissertation chair as documented through a letter of support provided by the dissertation chair as part of the application package.

University of Wisconsin–Madison dissertators are ineligible for funding under this award.

Contract Period

The award contract period is flexible depending on needs of the applicant, but funding must be spent by September 29, 2026. Funding can be used during summer 2025, fall semester 2025, spring semester 2026, summer 2026 or any combination of the preceding times.

Funding

The fellowship provides \$25,000 awarded to a dissertator's home institution to be spent by September 29, 2026. Funding can be used to cover items including tuition, stipend, data acquisition (e.g., data access fees, purchase of data sets, collection of qualitative data, etc.), research assistance, subject payments (including compensating community members or others with lived experience who consult on the project), travel (for data collection or access or to attend a research conference), and supplies. Other research expenses will be considered on a case-by-case basis. University indirect costs may also be billed but IRP encourages home institutions to waive this cost.

Budget

Applicants should provide a draft budget narrative outlining when and how they plan to use the \$25,000 in their application materials. Note that home institutions may have restrictions on how the funding is spent and awardees may have to pay taxes on all or part of the funding depending on how it is used. After the award is announced, IRP will work with the awardee and their home institution to develop a detailed budget including determining the amount of indirect costs applied.

Commitment

Receipt of this dissertation award from IRP will require a commitment to:

- Within the **first 6 weeks** of the award begin date, participate via video conferencing in a meeting with IRP to discuss plans for an HHS/ASPE product and how to maximize its policy relevance.
- Submit brief quarterly progress reports (≤ 150 words) of work accomplished during the preceding three months **every quarter** in the established award period except for the last two quarters (see timeline for more details), to irpapply@ssc.wisc.edu.

- Submit a draft of the final HHS/ASPE product for review and comments to irpapply@ssc.wisc.edu **three months before the end of the established award period.**
- **Within two weeks of submitting the draft**, participate via video conferencing in a meeting with IRP to discuss how to maximize its policy relevance.
- Submit a revised final draft by **end of established award period**, to irpapply@ssc.wisc.edu.

The HHS/ASPE product could be a presentation, slide deck, or memo for ASPE staff. This end product, as well as the quarterly progress reports, will be shared with the ASPE Program Officer. All publications associated with the award should acknowledge the support of IRP and the US Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE).

In addition, the funded dissertator will be invited to attend [quarterly professional development trainings](#) provided virtually. These trainings are developed primarily for in-residence fellows (post-doctoral PhDs) working at HHS through grants from IRP. Additional IRP grantees will also be invited to attend. These sessions are voluntary but will expose the awardee to a broad range of research and methods topics, poverty research careers, as well as provide the opportunity to engage with a cohort of early-career researchers focused on policy-relevant research on themes tied to poverty and economic development.

Selection Process

Applications will be reviewed in a three-stage process.

1. Applications will be screened for completeness, including:
 - a. online application completed;
 - b. application materials uploaded; and
 - c. letter of sponsorship uploaded.
2. Complete applications will be reviewed by an internal IRP panel to assess whether applicant meets the following eligibility requirements:
 - a. is from a disadvantaged background (i.e., meets two or more of the established NIH criteria);
 - b. has a dissertation topic focused on issues related to poverty, inequality, or economic mobility in human services; and
 - c. application materials, including letter of support, show that applicant is expected to complete their required coursework by September 2025 and can reasonably expect to complete their PhD by the 2026–2027 academic year or earlier.
3. Qualifying applications will be evaluated by a panel of distinguished scholars selected by IRP. The panels will use the application and letter of recommendation as the basis for scoring the following:
 - a. The potential of the dissertation to advance the field of study in which it is proposed and make an original and significant contribution to knowledge on issues related to poverty, inequality, or economic mobility in human services;

- b. The quality of the dissertation proposal with regard to its methodology, scope, theoretical framework, and grounding in the relevant scholarly literature (Please note: IRP welcomes applications that challenge scholarly convention);
- c. The potential for the dissertation to influence the policymaking process, especially related to programs administered by the US Department of Health and Human Services;
- d. The quality of proposed HHS/ASPE product;
- e. The quality and feasibility of the plan for engaging affected communities in research or the dissemination process;
- f. The feasibility of the dissertation proposal and the likelihood that the applicant will execute the work within the proposed time frame; and
- g. The applicant's record of scholarly engagement and potential for scholarly achievement, taking into account the relative advantages and constraints on resources for the proposed project and over the course of the applicant's doctoral training.

AWARD INFO

IRP anticipates supporting one dissertation research project with a \$25,000 award to be spent by September 29, 2026, provided to the dissertator's home institution. Award will be made in early April 2025.

APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS

Complete applications must include both (1) applicant-provided proposal using [the online application form](#); and (2) letter of sponsorship provided by dissertation chair using the [online sponsor submission form](#).

Applicants are responsible for providing the [online sponsor submission form link](#) to their sponsoring dissertation chair and asking their sponsor to directly submit their letter of sponsorship by the application deadline. Both the applicant and the dissertation chair will receive a confirmation email when the letter of sponsorship is submitted. Note that the letter of sponsorship can be completed before or after the application is submitted but both the application and the letter of sponsorship must be completed by the deadline for the application to be considered complete.

1. **Submit proposals via the [online application form](#).** Applicants should provide the materials outlined below as one PDF file, in the order listed, by the application deadline. Your application should include:
 - a. Cover page listing the following:
 - i. Dissertator's name, department, university, contact information;
 - ii. Sponsoring dissertation chair's name, department, university, contact information;
 - iii. Project title and abstract; and
 - iv. Anticipated timeline for dissertation completion and defense.

- b. Description of proposed work, no more than 10 double-spaced pages, to include:
 - i. Research question, original contribution to literature on issues related to poverty, inequality, or economic mobility in human services;
 - ii. Research design, methodology, and data sources;
 - iii. Anticipated results of research, including potential implications for public policy;
 - iv. How the research process or dissemination process will engage affected communities, including a plan for compensating those who consult on the project;
 - v. Brief description of proposed HHS/ASPE product;
 - vi. Draft budget narrative outlining when and how \$25,000 will be used; and
 - vii. Current status of dissertation, preliminary work completed to date, and expected dissertation completion date.
 - c. Current curriculum vitae
2. **Have your dissertation chair submit a letter of sponsorship via the [online sponsor submission form](#).** The letter of sponsorship should address:
- a. The merits of the dissertation project including its potential to advance the field of study in which it is proposed and make an original and significant contribution to knowledge on issues related to poverty, inequality, and economic mobility in human services;
 - b. Expected dissertation completion date; and
 - c. The applicant’s record of scholarly engagement and potential for scholarly achievement, taking into account the relative advantages and constraints on resources for the proposed project and over the course of the applicant’s doctoral training.

CONTACT

All inquiries, including questions on the application process, budget, and research issues, should be directed to irpapply@ssc.wisc.edu.

TIMELINE

Call Release	October 18, 2024
Optional Webinar Rescheduled	Wednesday, December 4, 2024, from: 4:00–4:30 ET 3:00–3:30 CT 2:00–2:30 MT 1:00–1:30 PT Webinar link: https://uwmadison.zoom.us/j/93833282655
Application Deadline	January 24, 2025, 11:59 p.m. CST
Notification	Early April 2025
Contract Begins	Flexible depending on proposal
Meeting with IRP	Within the first six weeks of award begin date
Quarterly Progress Reports Due	On the 5th of the month of each quarter during the contract period

Complete Initial Draft of HHS/ASPE Product	Three months before the end of the established award period
Meeting with IRP	Within two weeks of initial draft submission
Final of HHS/ASPE Product Due	By contract end date
Contract Ends	Flexible depending on proposal no later than September 29, 2026

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