

## Proposals to the Early Career Research Awards Program (ECRA)

### GUIDELINES AND INSTRUCTIONS TO APPLICANTS

**Proposal Deadline: April 1, 2024, 5PM EDT**

The Society for the Study of School Psychology (SSSP) invites proposals for the funding of projects by **Early Career Research Award (ECRA) applicants** that are consistent with the SSSP's purposes of advancing scholarship in and about school psychology and promoting the application of research to the practice of school psychology.

The purposes stated in the bylaws of SSSP are to:

1. Advance basic and applied scientific research in all aspects of school psychology;
2. Disseminate important research results concerning school psychology to the general public, scientists, academicians, and practitioners; and
3. Foster communication about the profession of school psychology.

#### **Award Program Eligibility**

ECRA program eligibility is defined as pre-tenure individuals who are beginning research careers in universities, state or local agencies, or research centers. Generally, "early" is defined as being in a **post-doctoral research role** for up to **five years**, including persons who have more than five years of post-doctoral experience and who have recently assumed positions with research expectations and opportunities. The five-year limit may also be extended for events and activities that typically extend one's tenure including, but not limited to, leave taken for childbirth, illness, or a relative's illness.

Only investigators affiliated with non-profit organizations, public institutions (including schools), or public (and private) institutions of higher education are eligible for funding. The early-career applicant may serve as the sole Principal Investigator (PI) or as a Co-Principal Investigator (Co-PI) in partnership with one or more other applicants who also meet the ECRA eligibility criteria. An applicant can only be listed as PI or Co-PI on a single application. **Previous winners (i.e., PI or Co-PI) are not eligible for a second ECRA.** Inquiries about eligibility are welcome.

**Each ECRA proposal must designate an experienced researcher as a Mentor who has agreed to be available to provide research guidance to the PI or Co-PIs as they conduct the project.**

Non-inclusive examples of Mentor activities may include brainstorming about (a) methodological questions and design considerations; (b) implementation, data collection/analysis, and pragmatic issues; and (c) program evaluation methods.

**Please note** that current members of the SSSP Executive Board (see <https://www.sssp-research.org/current-board>) and ECRA Proposal Review Committee Members (see <https://www.sssp-research.org/early-career-research/>) cannot serve as Mentors.

### **Nature and Scope of Projects**

A wide array of projects consistent with SSSP purposes can be funded under this grant program. We anticipate that approximately \$40,000 will be available to fund multiple projects for the 2024 award cycle. Funding is limited to \$20,000 per proposal. Funded projects generally will be of one year's duration; however, projects with longer timelines will be considered but will be dependent upon the annual availability of funds and satisfactory progress in the project toward accomplishing goals. Jointly funded projects involving cooperation with other organizations also will be considered (e.g., matched funding from the applicant's university).

The key features on which proposed projects are evaluated include their consistency with SSSP purposes, scientific merit, cost effectiveness, and potential impact on school psychology scholarship and/or practice. Projects consistent with the purposes of SSSP generally will fall into one or more of the following categories:

1. Produces empirical results that address important scientific issues, methods, theories, or practices relevant to school psychology;
2. Examines the efficacy or effectiveness of assessment, intervention, or prevention practices aimed at improving academic or behavioral health outcomes for all students, or for targeted at-risk groups;
3. Examines implementation strategies that promote the adoption of evidence-based assessment, intervention, or prevention practices for PK-12 school populations, or evaluates the effectiveness of evidence-based practices when implemented at scale by practitioners in non-research settings.
4. Produces empirical evidence to inform the development of education and training models for school psychologists that promote diversity in the profession and advance evidence-based practice.

### **Award Priorities**

Our **first and foremost goal** is to support projects that are innovative; have the potential for advancing the science of school psychology by producing new knowledge (theoretical, applied, or practical) based on empirical findings; and incorporate methods that are rigorous, replicable, and clearly delineated (see <https://www.sssp-research.org/early-career-research/> for examples of topics that have been funded in previous award competitions).

Other priorities include

- Applicants who have authored or co-authored one or more published or in-press articles in a refereed journal.
- Applicants who have attended a School Psychology Research Collaboration Conference

- (SPRCC) sponsored by SSSP either at the NASP or APA annual conventions.
- Projects for which there are no other, or only limited, alternative sources of funds, including small pilot projects where the results could provide the basis for a future program of funded research.

### **Application Process**

As applicants develop their proposals, they should keep in mind the following budgetary guidelines:

- Indirect administrative (overhead) costs will **not** be reimbursed by the SSSP for any of its awards (see the SSSP website).
- It is permissible to include up to \$5,000 in investigator salary and benefits to support project activities in the proposed budget. Support may be paid as reimbursement for work performed in lieu of other duties (i.e., buyout), or for work done in excess of normal duties (i.e., overload or summer salary), if allowed by the investigator's employer. All compensation must be paid by the employer to the investigator; SSSP does not provide direct compensation nor reimbursement to individuals.
- The SSSP does **not** support honoraria or other types of support for mentors.
- The SSSP does **not** support major equipment purchases (including computers and video equipment), or graduate assistantships; graduate students can be hired for prescribed tasks at an institutionally approved hourly rate.
- Any travel allowance is limited to that required for actual data collection, not for travel to conferences or for meetings between Co-PIs or PI and mentor.

**Proposals must be submitted by April 1, 2024, 5PM EDT.** Applicants can expect a final decision on their proposals by May 31, 2024.

The proposal must be submitted electronically in a **single file** in **pdf format** to the Chair of the Proposal Review Committee (Ann Schulte, [schulte@ncsu.edu](mailto:schulte@ncsu.edu)) via e-mail attachment. Applications (sections 2 through 6) must be no more than 10 pages, 1" margins, double spaced, in a font size of 12 point or larger. Title page, appendices, references, and mentor and administrative endorsement letters do not count toward the page limitation, **but all must be included in the single file.**

Applications should be organized into the following sections:

1. Title Page: This should include the title of the study, the Principal Investigator(s) and their affiliation, the Mentor and affiliation, and the requested total budget amount.
2. Overview of the Project: Provide a succinct one-half-page statement of what will be supported with SSSP funds, the major activities, and intended outcomes. Include the primary research questions or aims.
3. Scientific Rationale for Proposal (1-3 pages): The rationale should include the theoretical, empirical, and/or logical foundation for the project. Previous literature and

pilot studies (if available) should be critically reviewed in relation to the proposed research. Clear statements about how this research addresses previous limitations and/or extends previous findings should be included. This section should end with a brief description of the current study and restated research questions that are supported by the rationale in the previous pages.

4. Fit with SSSP Purposes: Discuss how the project rationale is compatible with SSSP purposes. Describe the specific short and long-term impact that this study will have on scholarship and/or practice in school psychology.
5. Rationale for SSSP Funding: Discuss the rationale of SSSP funding in terms of other available sources of funds or describe how other resources will be combined with SSSP funds to accomplish important goals. If the SSSP funding is used to support preliminary work that could provide the basis for seeking funding from other sources, be specific about the future plans and how the preliminary work would enhance any future grant application(s).
6. Operational Plan (2-4 pages): Include specific information about participants and how they will be recruited, measures used, descriptions of interventions or other independent variables, a description of the sequence of procedures, and a plan for analyzing the data that connects directly back to the research questions (i.e., how you will answer the questions). The operational plan should include the following details of the research strategies and method:
  - a. *Participants*. Describe the number of participants and relevant demographics (e.g., ages, gender, grades, and location). Also describe methods of recruitment, plans to obtain informed consent, parent consent, or child assent (where applicable); and participant risks and protections. Please note that although IRB approval is not required at the time of proposal submission, no SSSP funds will be disbursed until IRB approval (or exemption) documentation has been submitted to the SSSP Treasurer and Director of Research and Scientific Practice. Researchers must ensure that their proposals are consistent with professional codes of ethics (i.e., APA, NASP, American Academy of Pediatrics [AAP]).
  - b. *Measures, Methods, and Research Procedures*. Explicitly state the research design and link to the rationale and research questions. Briefly describe each of the measures and their technical adequacy for the purposes of the research. Also describe scoring procedures when appropriate, including procedures to minimize instrumentation threats. If some of the measures are author-created (e.g., rating scales), discuss how the reliability of scores will be tested. Indicate if and how procedural reliability will be monitored and assured for experimental procedures.
  - c. *Planned Data Analyses*. Describe the plan for analyzing the data to answer each of the research questions. Give enough detail of statistical analyses (e.g., correlations, regression, analyses of variance, growth models, and multi-level

approaches) so that readers will understand the scores to be analyzed and the expected results to support the hypotheses.

7. Personnel: Briefly describe the qualifications of the Principal Investigator(s) in a brief vitae (up to 3 pages) as an appendix. Indicate prior experience with the School Psychology Research Collaboration Conference (SPRCC) sponsored by SSSP either at NASP or APA in this section. (Vitae pages do not count against the page limits). If a PI or Co-PI has more than five years of post-doctoral experience but still meets the eligibility requirements outlined above (e.g., moved from a practice to a research position, disruption due to the COVID-19 pandemic), the vitae should include a brief statement of the basis on which the applicant still meets the eligibility timeline. This section should also include information on Mentor qualifications and role in the project.
8. Budget: Provide detailed estimates organized according to the budget categories of: (a) Stipends/Honoraria for research participants, (b) Supplies, (c) Data processing, (d) Equipment, and (e) Other (specify). As noted above (see Application Process), travel funding is limited to that involved in the actual data collection process and SSSP will **not** reimburse for indirect costs.
9. Letter from Mentor: A proposal will not get funded without a letter from the designated mentor. The letter should **clearly indicate the role of the Mentor** and not simply read as a letter of support. Letters of support are optional, but do not necessarily communicate “mentorship.”
10. Letter of Endorsement: A letter endorsing the grant application from the appropriate administrative authority (e.g., Department Head, Research Dean, or Office of Sponsored Programs administrator) of the applicant’s institution must be included.

### **Evaluation Criteria**

Proposals will be evaluated according to the following criteria:

1. 35 points: Importance of the scientific rationale and research/project in relation to needs in school psychology
2. 10 points: Rationale for SSSP funding in relation to other sources of funds and SSSP purposes
3. 35 points: Operational plan including a detailed timeline, reasonable description of the research plan, key stages and criteria for completion, persons responsible, benchmarks for success
4. 10 points: Personnel and agency or institutional capabilities; qualifications of PI and mentor

5. 10 points: Efficiency of resource utilization, including the availability of matching funds, effective use of monies, and realistic appraisal of probable costs.

### **Review and Award Procedures**

Awards are made once each calendar year. The ECRA Proposal Review Committee, appointed by the President of SSSP with the approval of the SSSP Executive Board, reviews all proposals. In the event of a potential conflict of interest in the evaluation process, the Committee member who has such a conflict will not participate in the scoring process for that application. The initial process will include the review of all proposals by at least three members of the Review Committee; based on these reviews, the top-ranked proposals will be reviewed, discussed, and voted on by the full Review Committee, which will make recommendations regarding funding to the SSSP Board. Final approval will be made by the SSSP Board. Applicants can expect feedback concerning proposals by May 31, 2024. The grant will be for a period of one year, extending from July 1, 2024-June 30, 2025.

Successful applicants will be expected to acknowledge funding by SSSP in any subsequent publication of the results of the research supported by the grant. Successful applicants are encouraged to consider publication in the *Journal of School Psychology*. A grant report summarizing the activities and results will be required at the completion of the grant year.

If you have any questions, please contact Ann Schulte, Chair of the Early Career Research Awards Program at [schulte@ncsu.edu](mailto:schulte@ncsu.edu). Proposals to the Early Career Research Awards Program must be submitted by April 1, 2024, 5PM EDT by e-mail to: [schulte@ncsu.edu](mailto:schulte@ncsu.edu)