

STUDENT EXPERIENCE RESEARCH NETWORK - CLOSED CALL FOR PROPOSALS

Student Experience Research Network (SERN) invites proposals as part of our strategic sunset process. Our overarching goal for the sunset is to help seed future field-building, scholarship, and translation in the student experience domain—and to support the people and organizations who will lead that work in the years to come. As part of that effort, SERN will provide up to \$2.75M in grants to help seed a next generation of research-focused knowledge-building, relationship-building, and action initiated by research, practice, and policy actors in education who are committed to supporting students' experience of respect as valued people and thinkers in schools. The grant program is open to SERN's partners across research, practice, and policy (see Eligibility and Award Information section below). All awards made under this RFP will be 12-month grants to be concluded by August 31, 2024. We will not be able to grant no-cost extensions due to the sunset context.

Please send an email to ops@studentexperiencenetwork.org by Friday, January 20, 2023 if you are interested in submitting a proposal and indicate which strand you are considering applying under. This notification is non-binding but will greatly help us in planning for the proposal review process.

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I. BACKGROUND OVERVIEW

As part of SERN's sunset, we will issue up to \$2.75M in a final round of grantmaking to support work focused on building new knowledge, relationships, and action. This work will be led by researchers, practitioners, and policymakers in the education ecosystem committed to supporting [students' experience of respect as valued people and thinkers in schools](#). This is a closed RFP for researchers and education organizations that SERN has partnered with previously.

All awards made under this RFP will be 12-month grants and must be made to 501(c)(3) public charities (including universities and fiscally-sponsored organizations) and for-profit companies. Proposals will need to be submitted by a Project Lead who can accept funds through their institution or organization. Indirect or overhead costs are capped at 15%. No-cost extensions will not be possible on these grants, so budgets must realistically be able to be spent down completely by the end of the 12-month grant period. The grant period will run from September 1, 2023 through August 31, 2024, with final financial reports and a narrative report due September 30, 2024. Each proposal will be reviewed by both external and internal reviewers.

RFP design and strands

This RFP will include three strands, which were crafted based on SERN's sunset priorities and input gathered from research, practice, and policy members of our community. Prospective applicants with projects that fit in one of the three strands described below are encouraged to apply under this RFP. We encourage the submission of collaborative projects (i.e., an eligible party may apply as Project Lead and identify partners and/or collaborators, including those who have not previously partnered with SERN, to support the work of the grant).

Through the input gathered from research, practice, and policy members of our community, we heard about a number of opportunities to support future research, build relationships and establish new partnerships, and propel collaborative action focused on the structures that shape student experience and how those structures can be changed to improve student experience. We also reflected on important features of SERN's work over the past seven years, including bridging between research, practice, and policy; encouraging practically relevant research that is interdisciplinary and equity-centered; promoting collaboration and elevating insights across disciplinary, methodological, and theoretical lines in research; developing the next generation of scholars; and sharing learnings with the field. These principles have been woven throughout the design of the RFP to celebrate the work we have accomplished together and plant seeds for future efforts focused on student experience. The three strands for the RFP, detailed below, also speak to our collective work building knowledge through research, developing resources, and advancing new agendas, action, and shared learning, all of which we heard a resounding interest in through stakeholder input. In scoping these strands, we also considered what types of projects would be achievable within the 12-month grant period, which is reflected in the final design.

A note on the illustrative activities and outputs described below: These illustrative activities and outputs were informed by engagement with SERN stakeholders in designing the RFP and are meant to serve as a jumping off point for prospective applicants. **These examples are not exhaustive, and we encourage applicants to submit proposals for a variety of activities and outputs that are aligned with the strand they are applying under and reflect the following overarching objectives:**

- Responding to the needs of researchers, practitioners, and/or policy audiences

- Bridging across at least one of the following silos in education:
 - within research (e.g., disciplinary, theoretical, methodological)
 - within education practice and policy (e.g., across subdomains within education)
 - between research and practice or policy
 - including students, families, and practitioners as partners in the generation and use of research knowledge to inform decision-making
- Building new knowledge, relationships, and action related to how structures (i.e., practices policies, and norms) in education shape student experience and how they can be changed to improve student experience and support equitable opportunities and outcomes
- Sharing knowledge and learnings publicly and/or among partners in a variety of formats (e.g., written, spoken, visual) in order to both inform the broader field and continue to build demand and support for interdisciplinary research and bridging across research, practice, and policy
- Achievable during the 12-month grant period

Strand 1: Policy-focused research knowledge building

This strand will focus on generating new policy-relevant research and/or synthesizing existing policy-relevant research on how structures in education shape student experience and how those structures can be changed to improve student experience and support equitable opportunities and outcomes. Policy actors should be engaged during the project lifecycle, not just at the end when sharing outputs, to ensure the knowledge building is relevant to their questions and context.

Based on current policy interests in K-12 and postsecondary education, some examples of relevant areas of scholarship focused on student experience could include (but are not limited to): measurement and assessment (related to both measuring aspects of student experience and also how assessments in schools affect student experience); culturally responsive and sustaining education; educator recruitment, development, professional learning, and workplaces that foster inclusive instructional practice and classroom environments in K-12 and postsecondary contexts; school culture and climate in K-12 and postsecondary institutions; holistic supports for students; family and community engagement; equitable funding; Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Hispanic-Serving Institutions, and Tribal Colleges and Universities; and postsecondary transitions, pathways, and on-campus experiences.

Illustrative (i.e., not exhaustive or complete) examples of activities informed by stakeholder input include:

- Synthesizing policy-relevant scholarship across disciplines, methods, and theories to develop new, interdisciplinary models and frameworks to advance the field's understanding of how structures shape student experience and how those structures can be changed to improve student experience
- Piloting or planning new, interdisciplinary, policy-relevant research meant to advance our understanding of how structures shape student experience and how those structures can be changed to improve student experience; such activities may involve identifying and laying groundwork for new research-policy partnerships
- Building a partnership between a scholar / a group of scholars and a policy organization (e.g., to perform descriptive analysis for the organization to inform their work; to serve as a scholar-in-residence; to consult on or co-develop new research and reports)
- Conducting research to understand the relationship between innovative structures in educational systems / institutions and student experience that can address the current questions, needs, and priorities of policy actors

Illustrative (i.e., not exhaustive or complete) examples of outputs informed by stakeholder input include:

- Plan for a larger study conducted in collaboration with policy partner(s)
- Recordings of research talks, slides, and other supporting materials
- Drafts of new models and frameworks
- Drafts of manuscripts, book chapters, working papers, and similar products
- Co-authored reports or presentations with research and policy partners
- Briefs, blog posts, or other materials (including in non-written formats) that summarize new findings for policy partners and audiences

We invite proposals for project funding under this strand with budgets ranging from \$50,000 to \$150,000 for the 12-month grant term.

Strand 2: Resource development for policy and practice audiences

This strand will support the development of new resources, tools, and/or case studies designed for intermediary organizations, system and institution leaders, and/or policymakers. These practice and policy actors should lead or be engaged as partners in co-developing the resources to ensure the resources reflect their needs and expertise. Outputs from this strand will integrate research on how structures in education shape student experience into changes in practice and/or policy.

Illustrative (i.e., not exhaustive or complete) examples of activities informed by stakeholder input include:

- Developing materials designed to support K-16 school and system leaders to integrate research on how structures shape student experience into practice
- Developing new or revised resources (e.g., curricular or instructional materials, training and professional learning materials and supports, assessments) that integrate research on how structures shape student experience and how those structures can be changed to improve student experience
- Developing policy briefs, podcasts, and/or “explainers” or infographics for policy audiences to better understand and apply research on how structures shape student experience and how those structures can be changed to improve student experience
- Developing case studies on systems that have applied research on how structures shape student experience and how those structures can be changed to improve student experience
- Supporting engagement by the target audience with the new resource developed as part of the funded project
- Connecting researchers to policy and/or practice organizations to share learnings (e.g., a series of webinars, a series of Hill briefings) from research about how structures shape student experience and how those structures can be changed to improve student experience

Illustrative (i.e., not exhaustive or complete) examples of outputs informed by stakeholder input include:

- Curricular or professional learning materials and supports
- Podcasts
- Policy briefs

- Infographics
- Case studies
- Decision-making frameworks
- Briefings (e.g., fact sheets, agendas, takeaways)

We invite proposals for project funding under this strand with budgets ranging from \$100,000 to \$200,000 for the 12-month grant term.

Strand 3: Agenda-setting, alignment, and documentation

This strand will bring together individuals and organizations across silos to collectively advance research, practice, and/or policy related to how structures shape student experience by generating new agendas, coordinating learning and action, or documenting new models and approaches that advance field-level knowledge and practice. Participating individuals and organizations should span silos, including within research (e.g., disciplinary, theoretical, methodological), education practice and policy, and/or the inclusion of students, families, and practitioners as partners in the generation and use of research knowledge to inform decision-making.

Illustrative (i.e., not exhaustive or complete) examples of activities informed by stakeholder input include:

- Hosting a series of working sessions to align partners engaged in similar or related work toward a common goal or shared activities aimed at advancing the overall field
- Engaging students, young people, and other proximate stakeholders as partners in the process of generating and using research on student experience and documenting lessons from these models for the field
- Hosting convenings / conferences that advance field-level knowledge in research, practice, and/or policy related to how structures shape student experience and how they can be changed; for example: documenting lessons learned and future needs and opportunities related to engagement between researchers and practitioners or policymakers; addressing emerging methodological issues connected to the study of this topic
- Hosting a professional learning community of organizations focused on a shared objective or body of work to assess and advance their collective practice and that of the field
- Supporting a public series of webinars or other professional learning opportunities for researchers that take up foundational issues connected to conducting research on how structures shape student experience and how those structures can be changed that is responsive to the needs of practice and policy partners, interdisciplinary, equity-centered, and rigorous
- Piloting new concepts and pressure testing plans for longer-term initiatives that are designed to increase knowledge building, cultivate new connections, and build capacity within a field

Illustrative (i.e., not exhaustive or complete) examples of outputs informed by stakeholder input include:

- New interdisciplinary, practically relevant research agendas
- Public calls to action for the field
- Public resources that advance the current state of practice by the field (e.g., documenting new innovations and lessons learned, models, and strong practices)
- Longer-term partnership and alignment strategies among a group of entities

- New grant proposals or proposals for collaborative projects

We invite proposals for project funding under this strand with budgets ranging from \$100,000 to \$200,000 for the 12-month grant term.

II. ELIGIBILITY AND AWARD INFORMATION

We invite proposals for project funding for the 12-month grant term. We expect that proposed budgets will vary and plan to fund a portfolio of projects of different sizes; the proposed budget should match the scope of the project (and the match between budget and scope will be a factor in selection).

The RFP is designed for SERN's partners across research, practice, and policy. These partners can apply for the RFP as Project Leads:

- SERN scholars
- Alumni, faculty contributors, mentors, advisors, faculty consultants, and faculty directors who participated in SERN's fellowships
- Principal investigators and co-principal investigators in SERN's funded research portfolios
- Awardees under the DAIRL Analysis Program and Data Curation Project
- Participants in SERN's outreach initiatives
- Participants in SERN's Intermediary Bright Spots series
- Reviewers of SERN's public field resources for research and education audiences

Given that researchers and practice / policy organizations apply for funding differently in their respective contexts, there are different eligibility criteria applied to SERN partners from these two groups.

- If the eligible SERN partner is a researcher, they must be allowed to serve as a Project Lead (i.e., principal investigator) on a grant according to their institution; researchers' eligibility for the RFP can transfer to a new institutional home if they have left the institution at which they were based when they partnered with SERN.
- If the eligible SERN partner is on staff at a practice / policy organization, someone else from their organization may serve as the Project Lead on the proposal but eligibility for this RFP cannot transfer beyond the organization at which the person was based when they partnered with SERN.

Project leads are strongly encouraged to partner with other individuals and organizations as part of their proposed work, including those who have not partnered with SERN, but grants can only be made to a single receiving entity.

Grants under this RFP can only be made to 501(c)(3) public charities (including universities and fiscally-sponsored organizations) and for-profit companies.

All awards made under this RFP will be 12-month grants. No-cost extensions will not be possible on these grants so budgets must realistically be able to be spent down completely by the end of the 12-month grant period, which will run from September 1, 2023 through August 31, 2024, with final financial reports and a narrative report due September 30, 2024. SERN's fiscal sponsor allows for a variance of up to 5% or \$5,000 (whichever is smaller) on the overall budget on which the grantee can retain unspent funds as long as they attest they will be used toward the aims of the project; however, any unspent

funds beyond that limit will need to be returned to SERN's fiscal sponsor at the conclusion of the 12-month grant period.

Applications will be considered if:

1. The applicants meet eligibility requirements stated above.
2. The project falls under one of the three strands described above.
3. The application follows the formatting guidelines and includes all relevant application materials as described below.

III. APPLICATION REVIEW CRITERIA

Priority will be given to proposals that are strongest in meeting the following criteria, which will be evaluated in the review process:

1. **Fit for RFP strand:** The project's proposed aims, approach, and outputs are well-developed and appropriate for advancing the aims of the selected RFP strand.
2. **Relevance:** The project has the potential to advance the field's understanding about how structures in education shape student experience and how those structures can be changed to improve student experience and to generate new relationships, knowledge, and action connected to this topic.
3. **Bridging:** The project will (a) bridge within research (e.g., disciplinary, theoretical, methodological), within education practice and policy (e.g., across subdomains within education), and/or include students, families, and practitioners as partners in the generation and use of research knowledge to inform decision-making and/or will (b) bridge between research and policy or practice.
4. **Approach:** The project's approach is well-developed and appropriate to the aims of the project.
5. **Equity:** The proposal's aims and approach reflect a sophisticated understanding of equity and apply that knowledge in the project's design.
6. **Sharing knowledge and learnings:** The project identifies how outputs will be shared and disseminated in order to advance the field's understanding about how structures shape student experience and how those structures can be changed to improve student experience and support equitable opportunities and outcomes. Such public outputs may also offer more broadly relevant lessons learned from the process of conducting the project. If any outputs cannot be shared publicly by the end of the grant period (e.g., a pilot research plan, an in-progress draft), applicants will have described their plans to share early versions with others in relevant domains for feedback and otherwise model open and transparent science best practices in research projects.
7. **Feasibility:** The project aims and approach are appropriate for the scope of the project and can realistically be achieved on the project's 12-month timeline; the budget is aligned with the proposed project.

8. **Strength of project team and partners:** The team has a demonstrated ability to carry out the work described in the proposal, including the overall approach and the ways in which the project will focus on bridging, centering equity, and sharing of public outputs. Reviewers will also consider if and how the project plans to explore or establish new partnerships and/or extend existing partnerships in new directions that can deepen the work and encourage greater impact.
9. **Engagement of emerging scholars and/or junior staff:** The project provides an opportunity for early career team members (e.g., graduate students, postdoctoral researchers / assistant professors who earned a PhD in 2020 or later, and/or junior staff at organizations outside of the academy) to stretch and grow professionally in a supportive and collaborative team culture.

IV. APPLICATION PREPARATION AND SUBMISSION

Proposals should be submitted through the [New Venture Fund Grantseeker Portal](#) via access code MSNW 002704. **New Venture Fund is SERN's fiscal sponsor.**

Proposal narrative

Proposals should include the following information, submitted as a single PDF document. For ease of reviewing, please format application materials to fit on 8.5 x 11" paper with 1-inch margins, single line spacing, 12-point font, and consistent with the professional style guidelines of the applicant's field before converting to a single PDF to be uploaded to the [New Venture Fund Grantseeker Portal](#).

1. **Cover page (1 page):** Please include the following:
 - **Project title and strand:** Identify the project title and whether it falls under Strand 1, 2 or 3 (note: proposals should only be submitted under a single strand).
 - **Abstract:** A 1-paragraph description of the project.
 - *Please note that, if funded, the project title and abstract will be used in public communications about the portfolio.*
 - **Project Lead:** Include name, institution / organization, and email address.
 - **Funding sources:** Indicate whether this project is being funded by other sources and, if so, please share the other sources and amounts of funding that will be leveraged and what elements of the project they will fund.
 - *Please note that, while proposed projects may leverage existing funding sources, we expect that proposals submitted under this RFP will not require project teams to seek supplemental funding beyond what is provided through this RFP (i.e., project teams should not scope proposals in such a way that they will need to seek additional funding before or during the grant period to complete the proposed scope and outputs).*
2. **Project description (up to 8 pages):** We recommend that the description contains the following sections:
 - **Specific aims:** Describe what you hope to accomplish with this funding, including how the proposal will advance the field's understanding about how structures in education shape student experience and how those structures can be changed to improve student

experience, and how this will address an unmet need in research, policy, and/or practice.

Please also describe how this project (a) bridges within research (e.g., disciplinary, theoretical, methodological), within education practice and policy (e.g., across subdomains within education), and/or includes students, families, and practitioners as partners in the generation and use of research knowledge to inform decision-making and/or (b) bridges between research and policy/practice.

- **Approach:** Describe your approach to this project, including how you will achieve your stated aims and how this work will build new relationships, knowledge, and action related to how structures in education shape student experience and how they can be changed to improve student experience. For example, this section may include information on strategies for relationship and partnership development; plans for new research projects; identifying practices in adult learning and meeting facilitation you plan to leverage; strategies for field-building, deliverable development, dissemination and communication strategies; and/or any other relevant strategies you plan to leverage.

For project teams applying under Strand 1, please also describe the proposed research plan if relevant, including analytic methods and justification for the proposed approach. We will consider projects that use qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-method approaches or that plan to conduct syntheses of existing research; projects under Strand 1 should focus on generating new policy-relevant research and/or synthesizing existing policy-relevant research on how structures in education shape student experience and how those structures can be changed to improve student experience and support equitable opportunities and outcomes. Policy actors should be engaged during the project lifecycle, not just at the end when sharing outputs, to ensure the knowledge building is relevant to their questions and context.

For project teams applying under any of the strands, as part of describing your approach, illustrate how the project will center equity, such as engaging with equity-centered (e.g., liberatory or participatory, asset-based, anti-racist) research and frameworks; centering traditionally marginalized groups within K-12 and postsecondary education and the academy; using critical and humanizing methodologies and inclusive approaches that are tailored to your specific project objectives and the partners, communities, students, and/or families with whom you plan to engage; and taking an asset-based lens to the development of new resources. We also anticipate this will show up as part of creating an inclusive project team, including aspects such as project governance structures, the selection of project team members and organizational partners, the development of team norms and ways of working, and addressing potential power differentials, for example across career stage or between young people and adults on a project.

- **Outputs:** Describe the outputs you anticipate producing as a result of this project. If applicable, indicate which outputs will be shared publicly in order to advance the field's understanding about how structures shape student experience and how those structures can be changed to improve student experience, and how these outputs will be shared and disseminated. Such public outputs may also offer more broadly relevant

lessons learned from the process of conducting the project. If any outputs cannot be shared publicly by the end of the grant period (e.g., a pilot research plan, an in-progress draft), describe your plan for sharing these outputs in other ways (e.g., preregistering a pilot research project, hosting an off-the-record conversation to discuss early learnings from this project).

As part of the final financial report, all awarded projects will be asked to address the following questions using the format of their choice (e.g., a narrative, a slide deck, a video, etc.). To enable cross-project and field-level learning and continued awareness building about the importance of the type of work funded through this portfolio, we will identify opportunities to share highlights across the portfolio back with participants and with SERN funders:

- What were the key accomplishments of this investment? What new relationships, knowledge, and action did it generate?
 - What were some key lessons or takeaways on (a) bridging within research (e.g., disciplinary, theoretical, methodological), within education practice and policy (e.g., across subdomains within education), and/or including students, families, and practitioners as partners in the generation and use of research knowledge to inform decision-making and/or (b) bridging between research and policy or practice?
 - Please share links to any public outputs from these investments and your target audience(s) for those outputs. If you do not yet have a public-facing output, please share your plans and timeline for generating this output and which audience(s) you will target.
 - What is one lesson or takeaway you would share with the broader education funding community to inform future grantmaking?
- **Project team members and expertise:** Please share your confirmed or anticipated project team members (individuals and/or organizations), how they will be engaged, what expertise they bring to the project, and how the project will engage early career scholars and/or junior staff. This section should also be used to explain the role of any consultants you plan to engage and/or subgrants you plan to make on the project, if relevant. Please note what partnerships you plan to explore, establish, and/or extend in new directions as part of this project, if relevant.
 - **Project timeline:** Include a brief project timeline (table format preferred) that identifies major activities, the names of individuals who will perform the various activities, and their projected completion dates. Activities might include planning meetings, trainings, conferences, convenings, and deliverable development. All funded activities must be concluded and the entire award must be spent down by the end of the 12-month grant period; given the context of SERN's sunset, we will not be able to grant no-cost extensions on these projects. The grant period will run from September 1, 2023 through August 31, 2024, with final financial reports and a narrative report due September 30, 2024.

3. **References:** Provide a list of references cited in the project description.

4. ***Resumes or CVs for the Project Lead, co-lead(s), and other key personnel:*** Given that these are 12-month grants with no option for no-cost extensions, it will be critical that the full project team is able to hit the ground running as soon as the project has been funded. We expect that team members may hold very different roles based on their interests, expertise, and availability. Please list the names of all project members and the proportion of their time that will be dedicated to the project, including the names of any undergraduate students, graduate students, and/or junior staff who will be involved. Please also attach resumes or CVs for key leaders with primary responsibility for the project's success.

Budget and budget narrative

Complete and attach the budget template (found [here](#)). This can be uploaded as an Excel document.

Allowable uses of funds include:

- Salaries for project team members (including stipends, tuition, and other costs associated with students and/or postdocs)
- Payroll taxes and employee benefits for project team members
- Subgrants to other organizations; please use the Budget Narrative tab of the budget template to describe in detail the breakdown of costs for any subgrants
- Travel, conferences (including registration fees), and meeting costs
- Professional / consultant services (including contracts and honoraria)
- Other direct costs (including but not limited to technology, transcription services, and supplies)
- Indirect costs (New Venture Fund allows indirect costs or overhead of up to 15% of the approved grant amount)

Nonallowable uses of funds include:

- Lobbying
- Subgranting to ineligible types of organizations, including:
 - Candidates for public office or a candidate's campaign committee
 - Other 527 organizations, including political action committees or political parties

Additional documents

Submit the following items for the Project Lead's institution or organization. Each item can be uploaded to the [New Venture Fund Grantseeker Portal](#) individually.

- Your organization's IRS Letter of Determination
- Your organization's 2023 budget
- Key organization and project staff
 - Please include the names of all people you anticipate will be involved with the proposed project, including the names of any undergraduate students, graduate students, and/or junior staff who will be involved
- Your organization's most recent fiscal year financial statements
- Your organization's most recent audited financials
- Your organization's most recent Form 990
- Your organization's Current Board of Directors
- Your organization's [IRS W-9](#)

- A completed and signed copy of [NVF's EFT form](#)
- Engaging with Minors Form (if applicable)
 - Project teams who plan to engage with any students under the age of 18 will need to complete and attach New Venture Fund's (NVF) [Minor Safeguarding Information Sheet](#), which will be reviewed by NVF as part of the due diligence process. For more information about NVF's policies regarding engaging with minors, please consult [NVF's Minor Safeguarding FAQs and Resource](#) document.
- List of subgrantees and subcontractors (if applicable)
 - Project teams who intend to regrant any of this funding need to include a list of subgrantees and subcontractors for NVF's review

Application deadline and timeline for review

Proposals should be submitted through the [New Venture Fund Grantseeker Portal](#); we cannot accept emailed submissions. If the Project Lead encounters any technical issues submitting the proposal, please contact Alyssa.Moreno@arabellaadvisors.com before the application deadline of February 10, 2023 at 5:00pm ET. Awarded projects will be notified in April 2023.

Please contact ops@studentexperiencenetwork.org with any questions about the content or design of the RFP, though we are not able to provide feedback on draft proposals. You can also consult our [RFP FAQs document](#).