SYNERGY MEETING: SPENCER FOUNDATION
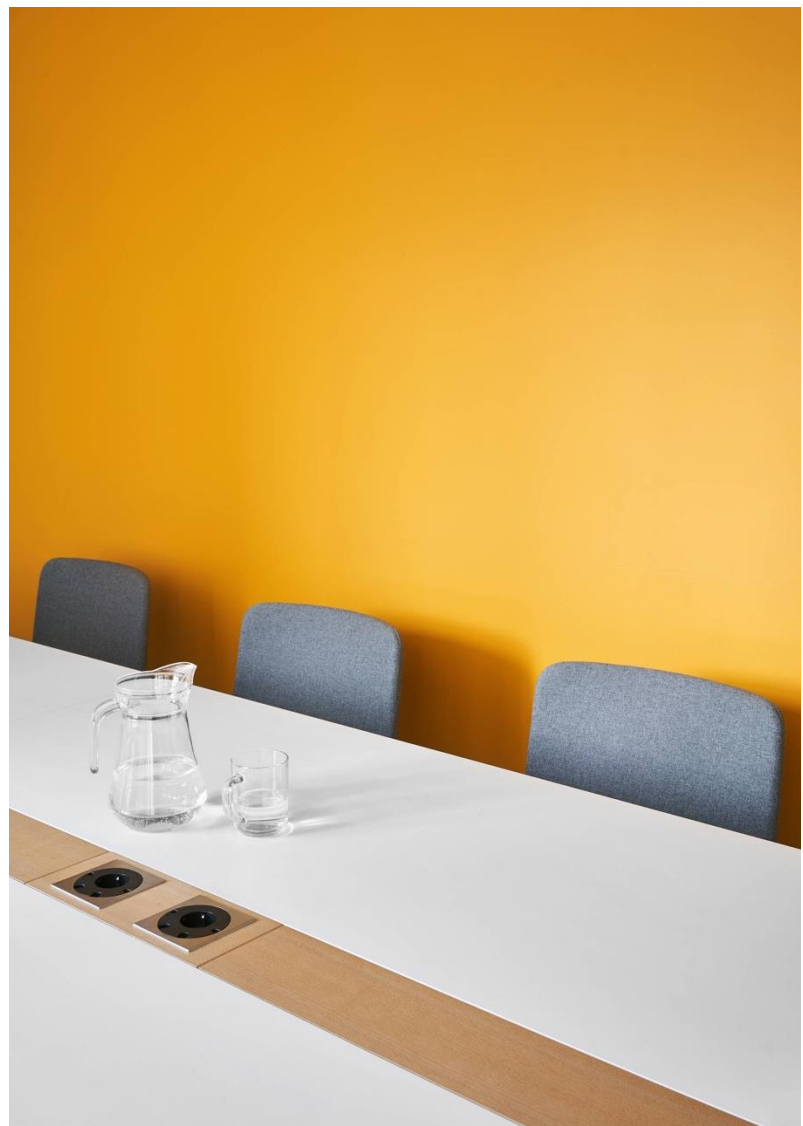
April 21, 2025

BROUGHT TO YOU BY

FOCUS: Fostering Opportunities through Collaborative University Synergies

AGENDA

- Welcome

- Spencer Foundation Funder Overview by Hanover Research

- Panel Discussion

- Q&A

SPENCER FOUNDATION FUNDER OVERVIEW

PROVIDED BY

KAREN RAYMOND, GRANTS CONSULTANT

- Introduction

- Spencer Foundation Overview

- Types of Funding Opportunities and Key Features of Each

- Special Initiatives – Racial Equity and AI in Education

- Tips for Writing a Competitive Proposal

- Questions

HR
HANOVER
RESEARCH

OFFICE OF RESEARCH - SYNERGY MEETING
THE SPENCER FOUNDATION OVERVIEW

Utah State University – April 21, 2025

PRESENTER

DR. KAREN RAYMOND

Grants Consultant, Hanover Research

Karen joined Hanover in 2024 after a 20-year career in higher education. She has managed post-award performance reporting for several federal and privately funded programs, served as the interim director and research instructor for the Ronald E. McNair Scholars Program, and worked as a senior research analyst in enrollment management and institutional research offices.

In addition, she has taught graduate research methods courses and served as a peer reviewer for the Department of Education, including as an evaluation panelist for the IES Education Innovation and Research Program.

At her former institution, she was a member of an internal grant review team that supported the development of student success grants for the Department of Education and private foundations, with awards totaling over $7 million.

She lives in Colorado and enjoys hiking with her family and their newly rescued and exuberant German Shepherd, Rocky.

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AGENDA

- Spencer Foundation Overview

- Types of Funding Opportunities

- Special Initiatives – Racial Equity and AI in Education

- Tips for Writing a Competitive Proposal

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SPENCER FOUNDATION OVERVIEW

THE SPENCER FOUNDATION - OVERVIEW

- Lyle Spencer founded Science Research Associates (SRA) in 1938, an educational publishing firm. In 1962, he established the Spencer Foundation, formally beginning its grant-making efforts.

- Awarded over $500M since inception, supporting **education-focused research projects, research fellowships, and additional field-building initiatives**.

- Spencer is the only national foundation focused exclusively on supporting education research.

- Most common topics: teaching & learning (P-20), educational policy, social-emotional learning, and understanding race, class, and culture in education.

- **Does not fund program evaluations, professional development, curriculum development, or research centers.**

Spencer Foundation Motivation, Goals, and Core Commitments: https://www.spencer.org/about-us

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THE SPENCER FOUNDATION FUN FACTS

- Total applications received (2023): **2,229.** Total awarded: **98 (4%)**

- Number of reviewers: 151, and 4,527 reviews completed.

- $13,134,922 was awarded in the field-initiated research grant program.

- Grants were awarded to **institutions in 16 countries** – a significant increase from 2019, when just one international grant was awarded.

- Spencer has increased the diversity of institutions receiving awards**: R1's are a smaller proportion of the total.**

- Early career scholars represent the largest share of grantees.

- The Spencer Foundation's most common grant amount is $40,000. (SOURCE: FOUNDATION CENTER)

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TYPES OF RESEARCH GRANTS

RESEARCH FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

Field-Initiated Education Research Grants

- Research Grants on Education – Small: Up to $50,000*

- Research Grants on Education – Large: Three funding tiers between $125,000 and $500,000; Indirect costs are allowed at 15%

- Racial Equity Grants: Up to $75,000

- Research-Practice Partnerships: Up to $400,000; 15% indirect costs.

Field-Building Grants

- Vision Grant (VG): Up to $75,000

- Transformative Research Grant for Equity (TRG): Only Vision grantees may apply; budgets up to $3.5 million. (Intend to fund only two annually).

Link: https://www.spencer.org/research-grants

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Grant	Topics/Priorities	Duration	Cycle	Word Limits
Small: 60 of 1,245 (4%)	Field-initiated	1 to 5 years	Three per year -Feb/April -Summer/Fall?	1,800 Team: 250 Timeline: 1-page
Large: 19 of 656 (2.8%)	Field-initiated Dissemination Plan	1 to 5 years	Twice a year; -May/June	5,000 Team: 800 Timeline: 1-page
Racial Equity: 13 of 69 (18%)	Field-initiated -Racial inequality -Set aside for AI	1 to 5 years	Once per year; -May/June	2,500 Team: 250 Timeline: 1-page
Practice – Partnerships: 6 of 259 (2.3%)	-Field-initiated -Collaborative -Participatory partnerships	Up to 3 years	Once per year; -Reopens summer	4,500 Team: 800 Timeline: 1-page
Vision: *expect 10 each cycle	-Planning stage -Impact on equitable systems -Set aside for AI	6-12 months	Twice per year -Feb/March -Opening soon	2,000 Timeline: 1-page

HR GRANTS

PROGRAM OFFICER OUTREACH

Program	Contact
Small	smallgrants@spencer.org
Large	Maricelle Garcia: largegrants@spencer.org
Racial	Maricelle Garcia: racial-equity@spencer.org
RPP	Maricelle Garcia: research-practice-partnerships@spencer.org
Vision	Jessica Anzaldua: visiongrants@spencer.org

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SPECIAL INITIATIVES

RACIAL EQUITY RESEARCH GRANTS

- Targets dollars to understand causes **and** solutions to racial inequality in various educational systems, levels, settings, and developmental ranges.

- **Special encouragement for proposals that focus on the following:**

1) Youth and educator mental health

2) Current political challenges around DEI

3) Youth civic education and engagement.

- **Set-aside dollars targeted at AI and racial equity.**

- The white paper series on Culturally Sustaining and Relevant Education (CSRE) also revealed two key research directions:

1) More quantitative studies and

2) More discussion of explicit outcomes

SPENCER 2024 - AI WORK GROUP

1) <u>Advancing cutting-edge research on AI and education</u>

- How can AI be more culturally relevant?

- How can we leverage recent advances in learning sciences to build more sophisticated classroom tools?

- In what ways can these tools be leveraged outside of school to enable learning?

2) <u>Cultivating connections and collaboration between relevant stakeholders</u>

- What are the best regulatory practices when new AI technologies emerge for school or public use?

3) <u>Enriching public discourse on AI and Education</u>

Link: <u>https://www.spencer.org/initiative-on-ai-and-education</u>

Link:<u>https://www.spencer.org/convenings/towards-new-horizons-of-ai-learning-and-equity-in-education</u>

WRITING COMPETITIVE PROPOSALS

REMEMBER THE RULE OF 40

Field-Initiated Research Grant Programs

"Always assume that your proposal is the 40th in a stack, that the reviewer has 40 other things they'd rather be doing, and they haven't had a good night's sleep in 40 years."

Foundation Program Officer

DEVELOPING YOUR PROPOSAL

Grant format and structure are often strictly prescribed.

- Always check formatting requirements (e.g., font, margins) before you begin drafting, to avoid problems later.

- <mark>Structure your proposal transparently around the funder's requested information, even if the funder doesn't ask you to do this.</mark>

- Use sub-headings to make all elements visible.

- Remember that reviewers are working with a checklist: everything on their checklist should be easy to find.

- Remember that reviewers are often tired. Make their lives easy!

Although it may be tempting to use a creative structure, in most cases grant proposals should be predictable and conventional.

SUGGESTED HEADING STRUCTURE

1. <u>Project Description</u>
    - Overview
    - Research Questions
    - Significance to education

2. <u>Rationale for the Project</u>
    - Literature Review
    - Conceptual Framework or Theory

3. <u>Research Methods</u>
    - Overall Research Design
    - Participants/Site Selection
    - Data Collection/Data Sources
    - Data Analysis

4. <u>Dissemination*</u>

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TONE/WRITING APPROACH

Academic Writing versus Grant Writing: Contrasting Perspectives

Academic Writing	**Grant Writing**
Scholarly pursuit:	**Sponsor goals:**
Individual passion	*Service attitude*
Past oriented:	**Future oriented:**
Work that has been done	*Work that should be done*
Theme-centered:	**Project-centered:**
Theory and thesis	*Objectives and activities*
Expository rhetoric:	**Persuasive rhetoric:**
Explaining to reader	*"Selling" the reader*
Impersonal tone:	**Personal tone:**
Objective, dispassionate	*Conveys excitement*
Individualistic:	**Team-focused:**
Primarily a solo activity	*Feedback needed*
Few length constraints:	**Strict length constraints:**
Verbosity rewarded	*Brevity rewarded*
Specialized terminology:	**Accessible language:**
"Insider jargon"	*Easily understood*

Source: http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ902223.pdf

ALIGNMENT ACROSS ALL COMPONENTS

Project Summary

Project Data (choose disciplinary perspective, methodologies, topics, geographical scope, contexts, and participants)

Project Personnel

Budget and Justification

Narrative (within word limits; use tables to add necessary detail)

Timeline (noting key project events and milestones)

Optional Appendices

-Scientific Instrumentation

-Letters of Support

-Innovative Approaches to Equitable and Just Research

GRANTS

REVIEW PROCESS

SELECTION CRITERIA AND POINTS

Significance of the Project (Maximum points = 12)

-The proposed research is focused on topics related to learning or education.

-Topics are critical to the field.

-RQs are clear and compelling.

Connection to Research and Theory (Maximum points = 8)

-Relevant research is used to justify the proposed work.

-Theory is used to explain how the research will contribute to our challenge current knowledge.

Research Design (Maximum points = 12):

-The context or sites, potential participants, and access and sampling approaches are sufficiently described.

-Data sources and collection plans are clearly identified and well justified.

-Analytic methods are clearly stated; how the data will be used to answer the RQs is evident.

Total points = 32

SPENCER FEEDBACK

SPENCER REVIEW FEEDBACK – EXAMPLE 1

Section	Points
Significance of the project	12
Connection to research and theory	8
Research design	11
Total	31

Reviewer Comments.

The research is highly **relevant and timely**, with **clear and focused research questions** that align well with the study's aims. The authors present a **strong body of research to justify their work** and situate it within a **respected conceptual model**, clearly explaining its contribution to current understandings. The research design is **thorough and well-aligned with the study's objectives**, and the detailed analytical plan enhances validity. However, the study could benefit from **further highlighting its theoretical contributions to existing literature on teaching and learning**. Additionally, the **recruitment tactics for focus group participants** and the **inclusion criteria need to be more clearly outlined**.

Section	Points
Significance of the project	9
Connection to research and theory	4
Research design	7
Total	20

Reviewer Comments.

I appreciate the proposed study's efforts to focus on the importance of the topic. However, I have **questions about its significance to education and theoretical direction**. The frameworks you plan to use are **unclear**, and I suggest incorporating additional theory and research to enhance understanding. **Clarify the target audience** of your action research study and ensure your research questions align with recent theories. In Question 1, you imply causality. I recommend **reframing all research questions to define your research aims and design better**. **Specify your data sources and collection methods clearly**; the way you worded Question 2 made me **unsure** if you would have a qualitative component. Your **expertise in the topic and your co-PIs' work with schools are commendable**, and your budget and dissemination plans are appropriate.

QUESTIONS

ADDITIONAL TIPS & TRICKS

- Spencer reviewers consist of experts in the field of study/methodology as well as generalists in educational research.

- <mark>They do attempt to return written feedback on as many of them as possible</mark>

- Take the time to review, revise, and resubmit
  - Create a proposal planning timeline that offers deliverable targets
  - <mark>Use your own internal peer review process</mark>

- Consider adding a new collaborator, an expert, a colleague with more experience

- <mark>Use writing guides!</mark>

- Common Mistakes:

- Projects are not research studies or are not clearly related to education.

- Overly broad/long literature review. Research design choices are not justified.

- Limited design details (samples, site description, recruitment criteria)

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Thank you.
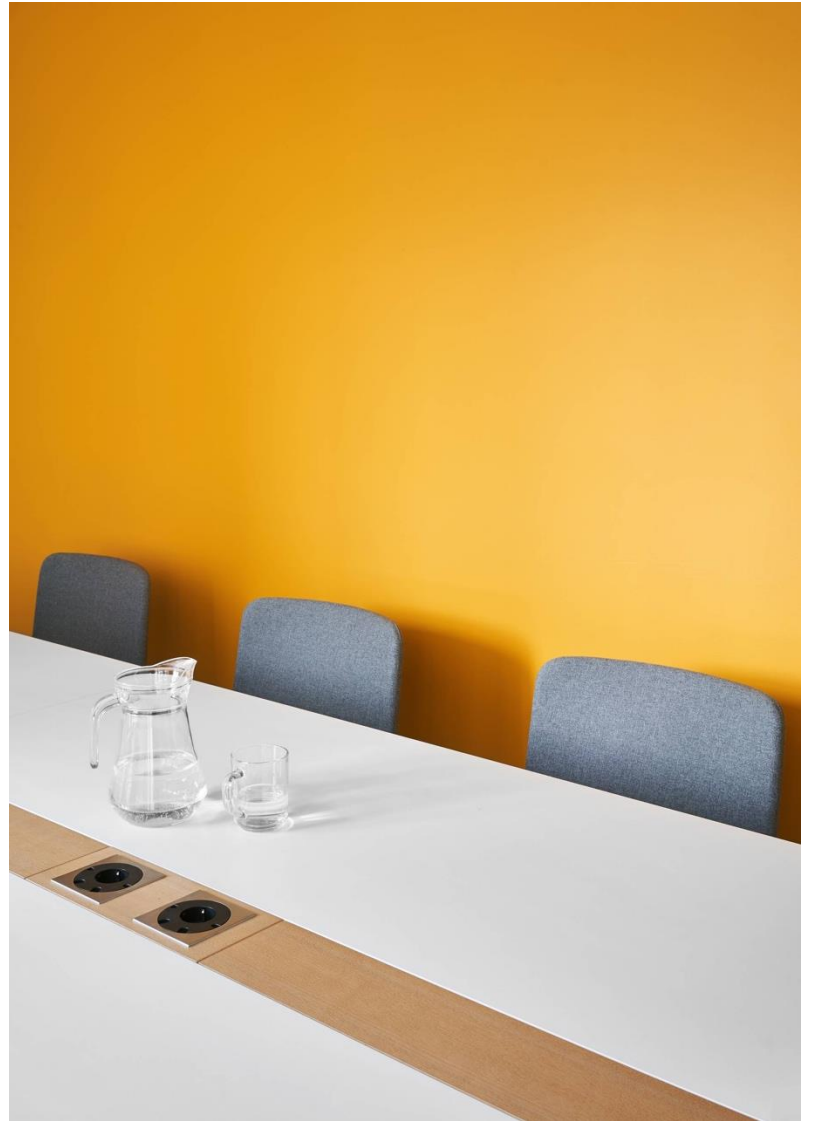
CONTACT

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PANEL DISCUSSION

PANELISTS

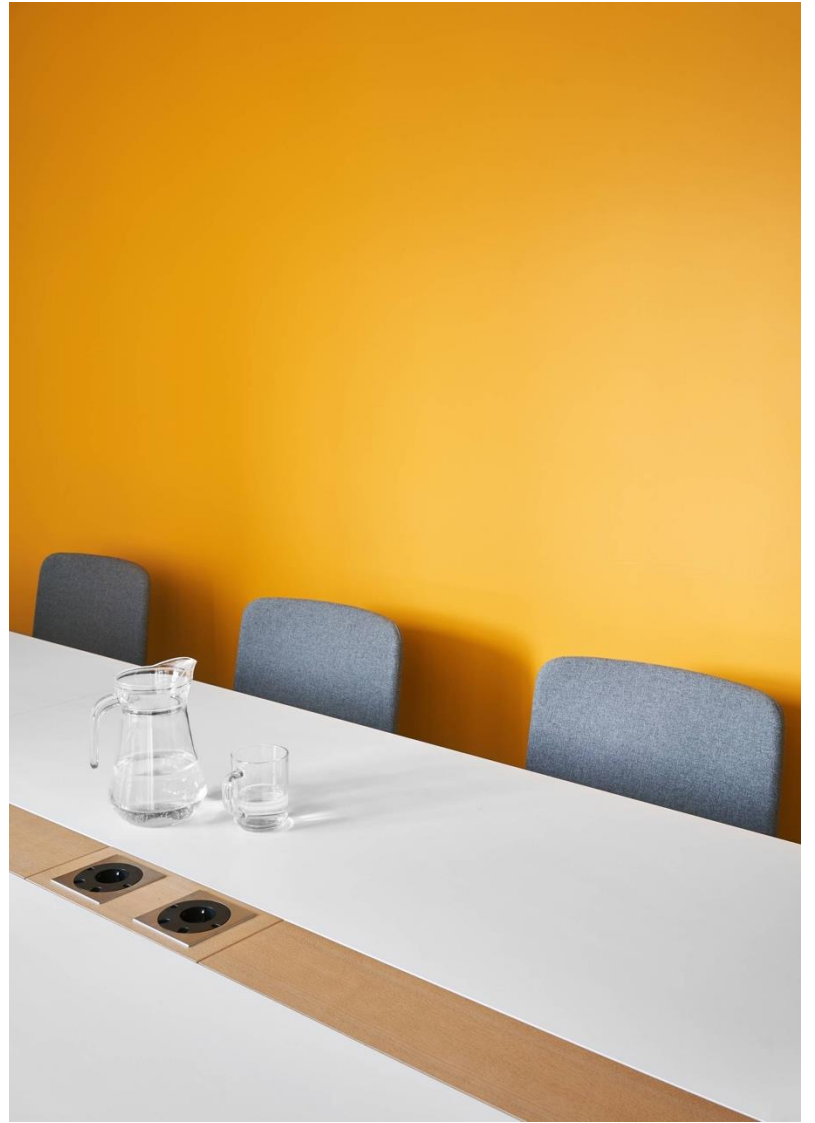Ruby Batz, Assistant Professor, Department of Special Education, University of Nevada – Reno

Ryan Knowles, Associate Professor, School of Teacher Education & Leadership, Utah State University

Daniel Tannenbaum, Associate Professor, Department of Economics, University of Nebraska – Lincoln

Melissa Tehee, Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, Utah State University

Emily Tomayko, Assistant Professor, Department of Food Systems, Nutrition & Kinesiology, Montana State University

Q&A

A REMINDER FROM THE SPENCER FOUNDATION

Virtual Office Hours available!

Dedicated sessions provide scholars with the opportunity to ask questions and discuss grantmaking opportunities with Spencer program staff.

Bookable appointments are added monthly but check back regularly as additional sessions may be included.

Each appointment is **15 minutes** long and conducted over a Zoom call. **Appointments must be booked more than 24 hours in advance.**

[Book a time online](.).

THANK YOU!

The FOCUS Team

Montana State University: Nicole Motzer
University of Idaho: Carly Cummings and Ryan McAllister
University of Nebraska – Lincoln: Heather Borck, Matthew Dwyer, Jackson Hardin, Nathan Meier, and Tisha Gilreath Mullen
University of Nevada – Reno: Carrie Bushá and Aurora Pinkey
Utah State University: Dawnie Elzinga and Jeri Hansen