

Research Grant Budget Guidelines: General

Please use these guidelines for proposals submitted for the October 26, 2026, proposal deadline

RSF has limited funds to allocate across projects. Proposed budget lines may be reduced by RSF during the review process if requested amounts are determined to be excessive or if they exceed RSF allowable costs as outlined below (for example, for salary support, travel, etc.), if the request is unallowable, or if the PI has access to other resources for the same or closely related project.

Maximum Grant Amount

Varies by grant type; see specific grant for details.

Project Length

Varies by grant type; see specific grant for details.

Budget Template

PI(s) must use the [RSF budget template](#) when invited to submit a budget. All budget requests must include a separate detailed budget justification and breakdown of costs of all line items in the main budget, and any subcontracts. Budgets must be uploaded in Excel format. The budget justification should be uploaded in Word or PDF format.

Indirect Costs

RSF covers indirect costs of up to 15% on all research grants, except dissertation research grants. If the budget includes a subcontract to another university or research organization, only the subcontract organization can budget for indirect costs for the funds in the subcontract—the primary grantee organization cannot receive any indirect costs for the subcontract funds.

Subawards

When projects include work subcontracted to another university or research organization, the budget and budget justification must include details for each line item in the subcontract. Each university or research organization may include indirect costs only on its portion of direct costs.

Personnel

PI Salary Support

Salary caps vary by grant type; see specific grant for details.

Proposals should include no more than five PIs, three of whom may receive funding. In rare circumstances, RSF will consider requests for salary support for additional PIs if it is crucial to the completion of the proposed research. Applicants must provide a detailed explanation in the budget justification of the tasks and time efforts of all PIs. When more than three PIs are requesting funding, the budget justification must explain the expertise those additional individuals bring to the project.

Only individuals with salaries below \$300,000 are eligible to request salary support. For all salary support requests, the budget must include the base salary from which the salary request is calculated.

PIs may be funded on more than one RSF grant at the same time but may not receive more than their respective RSF salary caps (see relevant PI salary support category) over the grant period, regardless of the number of projects they have with RSF.

Course Buyouts

Varies by grant type; see specific grant for details.

Student Research Assistance

RSF supports salary/wages for research assistance time for undergraduate and graduate students. The budget must include an hourly rate and number of hours to be spent on the project (estimated if students are paid for a semester rather than hourly).

At a minimum, the compensation for research assistants must be based on the minimum wage in the state where the fiscal agent for the grant is located or at least \$17.00 per hour, whichever is higher.

Grant funds can cover RA fringe benefits and health insurance, but RSF expects the university to cost-share tuition for graduate and undergraduate students. RSF will consider exceptional circumstances, detailed in the budget justification, on a case-by-case basis. If considered, total fringe benefits, including tuition and health insurance, cannot exceed the maximum RSF rate of 40%.

Post-Doc Support

RSF funds can be used to support post-doctoral researchers. The request should be based on the percent of time spent working on the RSF project, up to a maximum of \$70,000 over the duration of the project.

Other Research Assistance

RSF will consider salary support requests for staff positions that provide research assistance. For most researchers in staff positions, the maximum salary support is limited to \$25,000 for a one-year grant, or \$50,000 for a two-year grant. Exceptions may be made for junior (pre-doctoral) researchers in staff positions on a case-by-case basis. RSF will also consider limited requests for salary support for project managers/coordinators who conduct research, but not administrative activities, on a case-by-case basis, depending on the nature of the project. When requesting support for staff positions, applicants must explain in the budget justification why the work cannot be performed by student research assistants or post-doctoral researchers.

Fringe Benefits

RSF pays fringe benefits where required up to a maximum rate of 40%. RSF expects the university to cost-share tuition for graduate and undergraduate students. RSF will consider exceptional circumstances, detailed in the budget justification, on a case-by-case basis. If considered, total fringe benefits, including tuition and health insurance, cannot exceed the maximum RSF rate of 40%.

Research Costs

Consultants

Expert Consultants

The core research team should have all necessary skills to conduct the project. However, if the PIs require the special skills of an outside consultant, the budget justification must specify the expertise the consultant brings to the proposed project which is lacking among the other PIs.

The budget justification must provide the consultant's rate and time commitment to the project. The maximum allowable payment for expert consultants whose services can be justified is \$125 per hr. RSF does not pay fringe benefits on consultant fees. Only consultants whose annual salary is \$250,000 or less are eligible to request support. Any exceptions to the salary and rate caps will be considered on a case-by-case basis. The

total fees for an individual consultant cannot exceed \$20,000 over the course of a two-year project (\$10,000 for a one-year project).

Research assistants paid as consultants

RSF understands that for administrative reasons, research assistants not affiliated with the PI's organization must sometimes be paid as consultants; in such cases, the budget guidelines for the relevant research assistance category apply (e.g., student research assistance, non-student research assistance).

Data Collection

This budget category includes: **travel for data collection, data purchase, survey fees, participant recruitment and compensation, equipment, RDC access, transcription, and translation.**

Travel for data collection

RSF will consider reasonable travel expenses directly related to carrying out the research project (e.g. data collection or access to restricted data). The budget justification must include a breakdown of estimated travel costs.

Equipment

RSF will consider limited requests for equipment, such as computers, on a case-by-case basis. The budget justification must explain the importance of the equipment to the data collection or analysis.

Survey Fees

If data collection will be performed by a survey firm, please obtain a quote from at least two firms, including information about the firm's participant compensation structure (see "Study Participant Incentives" for additional requirements). The budget justification must include a discussion of the two quotes and justify the decision to use one of the firms.

RDC Access

If the budget includes fees to access/work with restricted data at a Research Data Center (RDC) or non/governmental facility, the budget justification must include a breakdown of the fees, including the amount of time required at the RDC to carry out the project and any additional fees that may be associated with the specific dataset the PI(s) wish to access. RSF is a member of the New York RDC (NYRDC), which allows researchers to access restricted-use microdata in physically secure facilities at Cornell University, Yale University, and Baruch College. RSF-supported scholars may use one of

the three affiliated sites without paying an access fee if their projects are approved through the NYRDC'S normal application process for conducting research at the sites.

Study Participant Incentives

When grant funds are used to compensate study participants, applicants must fully describe the compensation plan as well as the reasoning behind the amount, method, and terms of compensation. If a survey firm has been hired to collect the data, applicants must obtain information from the firm about their participant compensation structure. RSF requires that payments to study participants (including for crowdsourced workers) be based on the minimum wage in the state where the grantee organization is located or at least \$17 per hour, whichever is higher. Justified alternate compensation structures will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Other Direct Costs

All direct costs not pertaining to Data Collection or the project team should be included under "Other Direct Costs." This includes costs associated with **computing/software subscriptions, data storage, conference/collaboration travel, and dissemination/publication**. The budget justification must include breakdowns of each budget line.

Caps on travel for dissemination and collaboration vary by grant type; see specific grant for details.

Funds from other organizations

Co-funding and/or cost-sharing by the grantee university or organization is encouraged and should be reported in the budget justification. This includes approved or pending funding. Requested RSF funds must be allocated to budget items that are not covered by other funders.

Unallowable Expenses

Research grant funds cannot be used for the following expenses:

- Rent or other payments for office space.
- Sabbaticals or fellowships at other institutions, even if the PI will be working on an RSF project.
- Tuition remission for graduate or undergraduate students, unless exception is explicitly granted.
- The development of the data collection instrument and sample design as part of the proposed project (allowed for Early-Career Grant Programs).

- Generic costs, such as copying, printing, mailing, phone calls, office supplies, information/computer services, etc.

Core Research Grants

Maximum Amount

Direct costs are capped at \$200,000 for Trustee Grants and \$50,000 for Presidential Grants. RSF will consider direct costs up to \$75,000 for Presidential Grants if the proposed research project involves labor-intensive data collection or includes access fees to restricted-use data, or when the proposal budget includes salary support for multiple assistant professor PIs.

Project Length

Projects are generally limited to two years. PIs can request either a one- or two-year grant.

PI Salary Support

Faculty PIs and co-PIs: Investigators in tenure-track faculty positions with academic-year salaries up to \$250,000 are eligible to request summer salary support up to \$15,000 for a 1-year grant and up to \$30,000 for a 2-year grant, not including fringe benefits.

If the PI salary is between \$250,000 and \$300,000, the total summer salary support is capped at $\$25,000 \times (\$300,000 - [\text{PI salary}]) / \$50,000$ for a 2-year project, or half that for a 1-year project.

Other PIs and co-PIs: Post-doc PIs should refer to the post-doc section of the budget guidelines for the maximum amount of salary support. For investigators who do not have a tenure-track position, who must raise all of their salary via grants or contracts, or who are not affiliated with universities, RSF will consider providing support for the percent of time spent working on the RSF project, up to a maximum of 25 percent of their normal salary, but no more than \$20,000 per PI in each year of a two-year grant (a maximum of \$40,000), not including fringe benefits.

If the PI salary is between \$250,000 and \$300,000, the total salary support is capped at $\$40,000 \times (\$300,000 - [\text{PI salary}]) / \$50,000$, for a 2-year project, and half that for a 1-year project.

Course Buyouts

For faculty with an academic-year teaching load of four or more courses, RSF allows grant funds to be used for one course release over the duration of the project instead of salary support. If the cost of the course release is less than the maximum allowed in salary support (\$30,000 for a two-year project and \$15,000 for a one-year project), the PI may request the balance in summer salary support. For faculty members with an academic-year teaching load under four courses, RSF will only consider exceptions on a case-by-case basis if the project requires the work to take place during the academic year (e.g., collecting data during an election).

Travel for Collaboration and Dissemination

Conference travel and travel for collaboration purposes is limited to \$5,000 per grant. The budget justification must include a breakdown of estimated travel costs.

Sheldon Danziger Pipeline Grants

A budget is not required at the time of submission. The budget will be finalized with the PI, their university's research office, and RSF after approval of the grant. A budget template will be shared with PIs after approval.

Maximum Amount

Direct costs are limited to \$50,000 for individual PIs or \$65,000 for teams of eligible PIs.

Project Length

Projects are limited to one year.

PI Salary Support

PI/co-PI salary support is limited to \$15,000 per eligible PI, not including fringe benefits.

Full professors, associate professors, and assistant professors who have previously received RSF funding are eligible to be co-PIs on projects but cannot receive funding.

Course Buyouts

Course buyouts are allowed in lieu of summer salary, limited to the cost of one course buyout. If a course buyout is less than \$15,000, the remainder is allowed to be taken as summer salary.

Travel for Collaboration/Dissemination

Conference travel is allowed and limited to \$3,000 per PI eligible to receive salary support. The budget justification must include a breakdown of estimated travel costs.

Causal Research on the Criminal Justice System Grants

Maximum Amount

Budgets are limited to \$100,000 in direct costs.

Project Length

Projects are limited to one year.

PI Salary Support

PI/co-PI salary support is limited to \$15,000 per eligible PI, not including fringe benefits.

Associate professors are eligible to be co-PIs on these grants but cannot receive salary support.

Course Buyouts

Course buyouts are allowed in lieu of summer salary, limited to the cost of one course buyout. If a course buyout is less than \$15,000, the remainder is allowed to be taken as summer salary.

Travel

Conference travel is limited to \$3,000 per PI eligible to receive salary support. The budget justification must include a breakdown of estimated travel costs.