



RESEARCH GRANTS FOR AFRICA-BASED EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT RESEARCHERS

APPLICATION CRITERIA AND GUIDELINES

Grant overview

Deadline: Friday, 28 February 2025 at 23:59 GMT

Webinar with more information: 23 January 2025, 10:00 am – 11:30 am (GMT)

Countries of research: Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, Tanzania (priority), and other eligible sub-Saharan African countries

Grant amount: Up to \$15,000

Time period for carrying out research: Ten months

Application form: <https://forms.gle/5Ut98kfuiZG8VSXBA>

With funding from the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, the Research for Equitable Access and Learning ([REAL](#)) Centre at the University of Cambridge, and Education Sub Saharan Africa ([ESSA](#)) invite Africa-based Early Childhood Development (ECD) researchers to apply for grants for Early Childhood Development research. This call for research grants forms part of the ECD Phase 2 project being undertaken by ESSA and the REAL Centre until 30 June 2026. The project aims to enhance the capacity of researchers in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) to undertake needed research in ECD. It represents a strategic continuation of our efforts to support and advance ECD research in SSA, building upon our [ECD Phase 1](#) project, to drive meaningful change and impact in the region.

As part of Phase 1, we engaged ECD researchers to identify their professional development needs (see this [report](#) for details). Access to funding was their top priority need, including requests for funding to conduct research on topics such as learning through play, case studies of innovative ECD programmes, children with special needs, and children in conflict environments. To help address this need, we will provide these research grants to ECD researchers (**contracting with individuals directly**) for exploration of new or emerging context- and policy-relevant ECD research topics that could lead to the development of a plan for further research.

Why we are supporting context- and policy-relevant research

The benefits of ECD for school readiness and broader individual and societal prospects are acknowledged by regional and global policy documents. For example, the Sustainable Development Goal 4.2 calls on governments and individuals to promote 'access to quality early childhood development, care, and pre-primary education so that they are ready for education.' Similarly, the African Union Agenda 2063 under the Continental Education Strategy ([African Union, 2016](#)) stressed the need for holistic development for children.

However, the realisation of these benefits in many countries in SSA is far from reality. For example, the [World Health Organization \(2020\)](#) posits that 250 million children (43%) younger than five years in low-income and middle-income countries are at risk of not achieving their developmental potential. Similarly, UNESCO's [Global Education Monitoring Report \(2023\)](#) showed that children living in Africa are five times less likely to reach the minimum level of proficiency in reading by the end of primary school, than children elsewhere. This calls for context relevant research to fill the policy and evidence gaps on ECD.

What we will fund

The grant will cover direct research expenses such as: researcher time for literature review or evidence syntheses (specifying the level of effort and rates for each researcher to receive funding), research materials, small-scale data collection in an African country, a Research Assistant's time to analyse previously collected qualitative/quantitative data, written reporting, research training, travel, evidence dissemination and stakeholder engagement efforts, among others. Twenty to 25 grants, each totalling up to **\$15,000**, will be provided for **collaborative research** between two or more researchers in the same institution or in different institutions/countries. Research proposed for funding via this grant can also be supported by other financial sources, but other support must not have already covered any of the research costs requested under this grant. We will reserve a portion of the grants applicants from the project's focus countries comprising **Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, and Tanzania**. We also encourage applications from the other countries that fit our eligibility criteria, as provided below.

Eligibility criteria

Applicants for this grant must meet the following criteria:

- A citizen of a country in Central, East, Southern or West Africa and currently based in one of those regions.
- The lead applicant should have a PhD and be working in a relevant research-oriented institution or unit such as a university, research think tank, or research unit in government department/ministry.
- Grant applications must focus on policy-relevant research on the intersection between **education** and any one or more of the following: **health, nutrition, environment & protection, caregiving, and play** of children (0-8 years old) in one or more eligible countries.
- The application and the submission of research reports should be in English.

Note:

For collaborative research projects, we will prefer applications involving partnering of more and less experienced researchers (to provide opportunities for research mentorship), as well as considerations for diversity in gender and language (e.g., Francophone, Lusophone, Anglophone, etc.) where feasible.

Expectations of grantees

- Attend monthly project meetings to be organised by ESSA and the REAL Centre to share relevant updates and to enable grantees to learn from each other for better project delivery.
- Submit mid-term progress report with template provided by ESSA and the REAL Centre.
- Complete the research and submit report (template to be provided) to ESSA and the REAL Centre within **ten months** of the award.
- Keep records of expenses and submit when requested by ESSA and the REAL Centre.
- Prepare a blog or study brief within three months after submitting the final project report to ESSA and the REAL Centre.
- Submit one manuscript based on the evidence generated from the funded project, and/or a related project, for peer-reviewed journal publication within twelve months after submitting the project's final report to ESSA and the REAL Centre.

Application instructions

Required application components

Application for this grant must cover the following components:

1. Cover letter (maximum 500 words)

Provide a brief introduction of yourself as the lead applicant and introduce your research team (if applicable). Explain your motivation for applying for this research grant and why you think you will be successful in carrying out the proposed study, as well as the potential impact that such a grant for your research could lead to.

2. Research proposal (maximum 2000 words)

- **Title of the research project**
- **The problem**

Provide a clear articulation of the need for the research in SSA. Specifically, demonstrate its relevance for policy and/or practice related to education and its intersection with one or more of the ECD components (see eligibility criteria above).

- **Purpose and research questions/objectives**

Outline the purpose of the research and indicate the questions/objectives that will help you achieve it.

- **Methodology**

Provide an overview of the proposed research methodology and explain how the methods will help answer the research questions. This could include analysis of secondary data, or a small-scale study involving collection of primary data.

- **Ethics**

Explain the Internal Review Board (IRB) or equivalent review that will take place during the research, especially with regards to any direct work with vulnerable groups such as children and/or people with disabilities as participants of the study, where relevant.

- **Significance of the research**
Discuss the research's significance with respect to policy-relevant research related to ECD in SSA.
- **Timeline**
Outline the main tasks and calendar to complete the research within ten months (including reporting) of the grant. It should also include any dissemination tasks, indicating audiences.

3. Budget proposal

Provide a detailed budget for the research activity/ies. This can include expenses such as researcher time, research materials, small-scale data collection in an eligible African country, a Research Assistant's time to analyse previously collected qualitative/quantitative data, written reporting, research training, as well as travel, dissemination, and stakeholder engagement efforts. The budget should not include overhead cost and can be presented in a spreadsheet or word-processing file.

4. Curriculum Vitae (CV - maximum of three pages)

Provide the CV for the lead applicant and other members of the research team (if applicable), highlighting experience and qualifications relevant to designing and conducting research in education and its intersection with health, nutrition, play, caregiving, and environment & protection.

5. References

The lead applicant must provide two references from scholars or practitioners who are not part of the proposed study team and who possess demonstrated research experience, confirming their confidence in the ability of the lead applicant to carry out the proposed research. **In addition to the two references, we encourage applicants to provide a letter from their institution in support of their application.**

How to apply

Please complete the application [FORM](#) and upload ALL the required documents.

Application Submission Deadline: Friday 28 February 2025 at 23:59 GMT.

Applicants can only be part of **ONE** research grant application.

We will organise a webinar on **23 January 2025 from 10:00am to 11:30am (GMT)** to provide more information about the grant and answer any questions. We encourage potential applicants to express interest to join the webinar and submit their questions ahead of the event to researchenquiries@essa-africa.org. Sign up for our [newsletter](#) to get alerts.

Review and Evaluation Period: Rolling from receipt of submissions.

Award Notification: End of April 2025.

Grant period: May to December 2025

Evaluation criteria

Applications meeting all eligibility criteria and received by the deadline will be evaluated based on the following criteria.

- Relevance and alignment with the grant's focus and addressing country level policy strategy/objective.
- Clarity and feasibility of the research approach.
- Ethical considerations.
- Qualifications and expertise of the lead applicant and researchers, if applicable.
- Budget clarity, justification and feasibility.
- Clarity and feasibility of the research timeline.

Contact

For further information, please contact ESSA at researchenquiries@essa-africa.org.