

Cultivating Resiliency in the Election Administration Workforce

Request for Proposals

Election administration is approaching a cliff precipitated by high turnover, stymied recruitment, and the loss of institutional knowledge. Without intervention, we risk reaching a point at which elections are administered and staffed by a wave of new officials grappling with the complexities of their role while operating under intense public scrutiny. Even for experienced officials, new challenges require new competencies. Onboarding new workers and preparing existing workers for new challenges will be critical in ensuring that elections are trusted and trustworthy, even as threats shift and grow.

Despite high turnover, we don't have good data on just how many election officials have left, how turnover rates have changed over time, or how they compare to other public service positions. And despite a renewed focus on training and development, little research has been done on what training approaches and curricula are most effective. Creating a sustainable elections workforce in the long term will require investing now in research that helps us better understanding the current landscape to find actionable, evidence-based solutions.

The Bipartisan Policy Center's Elections Project and The Elections Group (TEG) have made \$500,000 available to support research projects that generate new findings on election administration recruitment, retention, and training. The goal is to lay the empirical foundation to solve workforce challenges in election administration in the long term.

We will consider proposals in the \$10,000 to \$100,000 range, prioritizing those that can be completed before the 2024 general election. Project proposals will be evaluated in part on their plans to engage election administrators in planning and executing research. Final research reports will be required to include actionable recommendations for policymakers and/or election administrators.

Proposals will be reviewed by BPC, TEG, and our new [Election Workforce Advisory Council](#), comprised of a diverse group of election officials, experts, academics, and industry representatives. The advisory council is a multi-tiered effort to study, develop, and implement best practices that improve recruitment, retention, and training within election administration in the long term.

The grant program is supported by the [Election Trust Initiative](#), a nonpartisan grant-making organization working to strengthen the field of election administration, guided by the principle that America's election systems must be secure, transparent, accurate, and convenient.

Priority Research Areas

BPC and TEG seek to fund research through this initiative that does one or more of the following:

- Generates new findings on retention and turnover. In particular:
 - Current and historical data on the rate of turnover. Ideally, this would be recent and historical (since 2000) and include all levels of election administration (mid- and entry-level staff, as well as chief officials) for all 50 states.
 - Assessment of knowledge transfer vs knowledge loss. For example, what proportion of officials who resign are leaving the field versus going to a new jurisdiction? What is the experience level of new officials (and how long had they been serving under predecessor)?
 - Anticipated rate of turnover (e.g., survey data to determine how many election officials plan to leave their roles before or after 2024).
 - Drivers and factors impacting turnover (e.g., jurisdiction size, retirement age, burnout, work/life balance, competencies, illness, threats, low pay, elected vs appointed, etc.). Also whether retention is impacted by hiring practices or selection methods (for instance, hiring less experienced candidates from within the state or from election professionals around the country).
- Performs program evaluation of existing election official training programs. Assesses impact of training on performance.
- Pilots or tests new training models.
- Explores what trait-based qualities should be selected for in recruitment, as well as how to cultivate value-alignment in new additions to the workforce. The expectation is that improved selection in the recruitment and hiring phase will reduce future workforce challenges (for example, through reduced turnover or better alignment between knowledge, skills, and attributes of candidates and their future job responsibilities).
- Explores pipeline, hiring, onboarding, career pathways, continuing education, ethics, accountability, or other topics related to the election workforce not explicitly stated here.
- Evaluates diversity, equity, and inclusion in election administration.
- Provides comparative insight into what lessons can be learned from workforce challenges in other areas of government or the private sector.

We are open to a range of methodological approaches and will prioritize projects that:

- Represent partnerships among researchers and election officials.
- Take an interdisciplinary perspective to incorporate psychological science, adult learning, or behavioral economics.

- Are conducted by multiple institutions or individuals working in concert.

Criteria for Selection

BPC's Elections Project and The Elections Group plan to grant \$500,000 to projects identified through this RFP. The total number of projects will depend on the number of proposals and the budgets of the selected projects. We anticipate that grants will range in size from \$10,000 to \$100,00, but projects with budgets below or above these levels may be selected. Given the limited size of the grant program, researchers are encouraged to submit proposals that enable them to supplement current, partially funded projects, as long as the goals, methods, and timelines are consistent.

All research projects will be reviewed by representatives from BPC, TEG, and the Election Workforce Advisory Council, and assessed on their relevance to the issues discussed in this RFP according to the following criteria:

- Responsiveness to the goal of generating new findings on election administration recruitment, retention, and training.
- Rigor and/or novelty in methodological approach.
- Prospect of providing practical guidance to the fields of election administration and election science.
- Consultation and collaboration with current/former election administrators.

Proposals that are judged to meet the overall goals will be further assessed according to three specific evaluation criteria:

- **Methodological approach.** Proposals will be evaluated on the general approach to the question posed and the specific data to be gathered and methods to be deployed in analyzing the data.
- **Work plan, time frame, and budget.** Proposals will be assessed according to whether the tasks delineated in the proposal are adequately described and can feasibly be carried out in the time frame proposed. Projects completed by November 2024 will be prioritized.
- **Institutional capacity and personnel.** Proposals will be assessed on the qualifications of key personnel and whether plans for supporting research team members are appropriately scaled.

Budgets will be assessed according to their appropriateness given the research proposed. Specific allowable expenditures would include the following if clearly justified by the research proposal:

- Release time and/or summer salary for principal researchers
- Graduate research assistance
- Travel to conduct interviews, gather data, etc.
- Travel to present research at scholarly conferences

At least one member of each research team will be expected to attend a virtual research workshop of grantees to present research findings to BPC and TEG's Election Workforce Advisory Council.

Application Process: Two-Step Approach

In the interest of ensuring a comprehensive and fair evaluation of proposals, we have implemented a two-step application process.

Timeline

- Submit Letter of Intent via [Google Forms](#) by **November 20, 2023**. We will respond no later than **December 17, 2023**.
- Those invited to the next step will be asked to submit full proposals by **January 31, 2023** – sooner is preferable if capacity allows.

Step 1: Letter of Intent Submission

Interested researchers are invited to submit a Letter of Intent (LOI) as the first step of the application process. The LOI should be a concise document, 1-3 pages, providing an overview of the proposed research project. Specifically, the LOI should include:

- A brief abstract summarizing the research focus and objectives.
- A description of the approach, highlighting the methodology to be employed.
- An outline of the research team's capacity to conduct the project, including relevant expertise and experience.
- A ballpark estimate of the time frame and budget for the proposed research.

The LOI will serve as an initial indication of interest, allowing us to gauge the pool of potential projects and align them with our research priorities. Researchers are encouraged to clearly indicate their alignment with the outlined research areas in the RFP.

Our review committee, comprised of representatives from BPC, TEG, and the Election Workforce Advisory Council, will evaluate the LOIs based on their alignment with the RFP's goals, methodological soundness, and potential contribution to the field of election administration. From the LOIs received, a subset of researchers will be invited to proceed to the next stage of the application process. Feedback on the research project will be offered to the researchers based on the Election Workforce Advisory Council's collective expertise.

Step 2: Invitation for Full Proposal

Researchers whose LOIs align closely with the program's objectives will be invited to submit a full proposal. Full proposals will be rigorously evaluated based on their methodological approach, feasibility, potential impact, and alignment with the program's goals.

Proposals should be **no more** than 10 pages (single-spaced, 12-point type, 1-inch margins). Each proposal should include the following:

- A brief abstract of no more than 150 words of the work being proposed;
- A statement of research questions to be addressed, including a discussion of why these questions are important and a discussion of any previous research aimed at answering these questions;
- A description of the approach;
- A work plan describing the tasks to be conducted and the timeline for completing them;
- A staffing plan indicating the key staff who will perform each task. The staffing plan should include a short bio of each principal staff member;
- A statement of how the research team intends to engage with election officials and/or other practitioners, if not explicitly addressed in the description of the research; and
- A budget with separate line items for labor costs, other direct costs, and indirect costs. Overhead payments will be limited to 10% of direct costs.
 - Allowable expenditures include: Release time and/or summer salary for principal researchers; Graduate research assistance; Travel to conduct interviews, gather data, etc.; Travel to present research at scholarly conferences.

Proposals should be explicit about the proposed grant period. A cover page for the proposal should include the name and contact information for a single point of contact about the proposal. The cover page should also include the total amount of funding being requested.

Submission Instructions

Please submit your letter of intent no later than November 20, 2023, via [Google Forms](#).

Questions

Any questions about the grant program may be directed to Rachel Orey at rorey@bipartisanpolicy.org. Research groups looking to partner with other research organizations on a topic or seeking practitioners as partners should also reach out for assistance.

The Bipartisan Policy Center Elections Project

BPC's Elections Project works directly with election officials to develop timely, innovative, and bipartisan policy solutions to the most pressing challenges in election administration. In 2019, we launched the field's only task force of currently serving election officials. Our [Task Force on Elections](#) has grown to a group of 30 election officials from more than 20 states, and since 2019 we have released seven unanimously endorsed reports and statements on the most challenging issues in election administration, from electronic ballot transmission to insider threats among election workers, to mail ballot processing. We blend in-depth subject matter expertise with rigorous research and convening power to find solutions that bring both parties to the table.

The Elections Group

The Elections Group works with federal, state and local election agencies as they seek to adapt to modern challenges, through implementing new programs or improving processes for voters and stakeholders. By working around the country on a variety of long term, and emergent challenges, The Elections Group assures a timely and accurate understanding of the ecosystem. TEG brings that knowledge to all projects and partnerships and their election experts works quickly to provide guidance, resources, and support to election related projects.