



Integrated Research & Policy Fellowship FAQ

Who is eligible for the fellowship?

- **Research Fellows:** Must be enrolled in graduate school (master's or doctoral) at the time of the application, and through at least December 2025, in the field of early care and education (ECE), education or public policy, labor/employment, or a closely related field. Students must be residing in the United States. International students with F1, J1, M1, or similar student visas are welcome to apply for the research fellow track. However, this fellowship opportunity does not provide sponsorship.
- **Policy Fellows:** Must be employed as an early educator *or* employed in an organization working on ECE, education or public policy, labor/employment, or a closely related field. At least one policy fellowship will be designated for a candidate currently working as an early educator (e.g., teacher or assistant in a child care center such as a community-based center, Head Start program, or school-based preschool, family child care provider or assistant) or in a related role (e.g., child care center director, program manager, instructional coach) but has been in an educator role within the past three years.

What are the educational requirements for the fellowship? Do I have to be a graduate student?

- For the policy track, there is no specific level of education required and applicants do not need to be in graduate school. For the research track, candidates must be enrolled in graduate school (master's or doctoral) at the time of the application, and through at least December 2025, in the field of early care and education (ECE), education or public policy, labor/employment, or a closely related field.

Can I apply for the research track if I plan to complete my graduate program before the end of the fellowship?

- Candidates applying for the research track must be enrolled in a graduate program at the time of application and through at least December 2025. Candidates who have already completed a graduate degree may be eligible for the policy track if they are currently employed as an early educator or employed in an ECE-related organization.

What level of research skills and experience is needed for the research track? How can applicants demonstrate their research skills and experience?

- Research applicants should have completed at least one graduate-level course in quantitative or qualitative research methods or statistics. Applicants can demonstrate this by providing a transcript showing their completed graduate-level research coursework. This requirement ensures applicants have a foundational understanding of research necessary for the fellowship.



Can I apply to the policy track if I do not work directly with children?

- Yes. For the policy track, preference will be given to applicants who are currently early educators (e.g., teacher or assistant in a child care center such as a community-based center, Head Start program, or school-based preschool, family child care provider or assistant) or in a related role (e.g., child care center director, program manager, instructional coach) but has been in an educator role within the past three years. However, individuals currently employed in organizations in ECE or related fields are also eligible to apply for the policy track, regardless of whether they work directly with children.

Do I need to be currently employed to participate in the policy track of the fellowship?

- Yes. Candidates for the policy track must be currently employed (full- or part-time) as early educators or employed in an organization working on ECE, education or public policy, labor/employment, or a related field. Substitute teachers or those not currently employed in ECE or an ECE-related field are not eligible.

Is it possible to apply for both the research and policy tracks of the fellowship program?

- While applicants may find themselves eligible for both tracks, we strongly discourage submitting applications for both. We recommend that you carefully consider which track aligns more closely with your expertise, experience, and skills, as well as which will best support your professional aspirations.

Do policy fellows and research fellows participate in convenings and learning sessions together? Are the learning sessions the same for both tracks?

- Yes, all four fellows (two research fellows and two policy fellows) will participate in convenings and learning sessions together. The fellowship is designed to integrate research and practice, offering shared learning opportunities across the two tracks to build capacity in the field for applied, policy-relevant research and research-based policy analysis and implementation.

What is the difference between a supervisor and a mentor?

- Within the fellowship program, a supervisor will be a member of the National ECE Workforce Center staff, housed at either the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment or Child Trends. They will actively guide the capstone project. A mentor, on the other hand, will be an experienced ECE leader from any ECE-related organization who can help facilitate individual fellows' professional development, as well as support and enrich fellows' professional journey.

Are applicants required to submit a letter of recommendation, cover letter, or writing sample?

- No, applicants do not need to submit a letter of recommendation, cover letter, or writing sample. However, applicants must submit a letter of support from their employer or research advisor. The letter of support indicates that the applicant has the support of their supervisor or advisor to fully participate in fellowship activities. Templates for these letters of support are available for download on the [fellowship webpage](#).

Who is eligible to sign the letter of support?

- For the policy track, the letter of support should be signed by a direct supervisor, such as program director or organizational leader, who can commit to supporting the fellow to fully participate in the fellowship's requirements.
 - If you are a family child care owner or other small business owner, please note that on the letter of support form and sign and date the form as the policy fellow applicant. There is no need to provide an additional signature from an employer or supervisor.
- For the research track, the letter of support should be from an academic or research advisor who oversees the applicant's academic progress. This advisor should be familiar with the applicant's academic work and able to endorse their skills and fellowship commitment. We understand that an academic advisor may not oversee the schedule of academic coursework. The letter of support is meant to ensure that the advisor/supervisor is aware of fellowship activities and supports these endeavors. The fellow is expected to independently confirm that the schedule of fellowship activities can be met.
- Templates for the letter of support are provided on the [fellowship webpage](#). Applicants are not required to use the templates. They are offered as guidance.

What is the time commitment? Is it inclusive of the capstone project?

- Fellows will dedicate approximately **15-20 hours per month** to fellowship activities; this includes convenings, learning sessions, meetings with mentors, and work on their individual capstone projects. The fellowship program is structured to support both employed individuals and students and should allow them to maintain their professional or academic commitments while participating.

Are fellows given compensation and benefits during the fellowship year?

- Fellows receive a \$12,500 stipend (which fellows must report as income on their taxes) to facilitate participation. Structured to support individuals from diverse income backgrounds, fellows should be able to participate in the program without jeopardizing employment or academic commitments. There are no additional benefits provided due to the program's structure, which is designed to allow fellows to maintain their employment or student status.

What are the timeline and key dates for the fellowship program?

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- The fellowship program runs from February 2025–January 2026. Key dates include attending the capstone presentations of the first cohort of fellows on February 12, 2025, and the virtual kick-off event on March 19, 2025, from 12-4 p.m. ET / 9 a.m.-1 p.m. PT, which serves as an essential introduction to the program and fellow cohort members. Additionally, a full-day, expenses-paid in-person convening is scheduled for April 22, 2025, offering an immersive opportunity for learning and networking. Consult the [website](#) for other key dates for the learning sessions. Learning sessions will be held from 3:00 p.m.- 4:30 p.m. ET/12 p.m. -1:30 p.m. PT.

What types of topics can my capstone project be on?

- Fellows will individually complete a capstone project designed to integrate research with policy and practice. Fellows will explore a question, topic, or policy related to the ECE workforce and related to the National ECE Workforce Center’s key topics of career pathways, compensation, and/or work environments. Capstone supervisors will co-design capstones with fellows and guide project work. Both policy and research fellows will utilize data to inform their projects and will develop recommendations for policy and future research.

What are the short-answer questions on the application?

- **All:** Please describe how you envision your participation in this fellowship would contribute to your professional goals, particularly in relation to ECE workforce policy. Your response should be 250 words or less.
- **Research track applicants:** Consider what you see as the most pressing issues facing the ECE workforce. Describe one to two research questions you would like to explore to address these issues. Provide a brief explanation of the design and potential data you could use to answer the question(s). Your response should be 250 words or less.
- **Policy track applicants:** Please identify the most pressing equity issue(s) in the ECE workforce and describe one to two policy change(s) that would address these issues. Explain your reasoning for those changes and their potential impact on the equity concerns you have highlighted. Your response should be 250 words or less.