



ATI Student Success Research Grant Program: Request for Proposals

The American Talent Initiative (ATI) is seeking proposals for the ATI Student Success Research Grant Program, which supports a cohesive set of research that will build evidence of successful practices for enrolling and graduating lower-income students, increase the visibility and public consciousness of challenges facing lower-income students and the institutions that serve them, and engage institutional leaders with research findings. The theme of this program is *ensuring lower-income students succeed in postsecondary education*.

ATI is a Bloomberg Philanthropies-supported collaboration between the Aspen Institute's College Excellence Program, Ithaka S+R, and an alliance of colleges and universities dedicated to substantially expanding opportunity and access for low- and moderate-income students. ATI members—all graduating at least 70 percent of their students within six years—have joined together to address this challenge.

Background

It is important for students to complete credentials in order to receive the full benefits of a postsecondary education. Although attending college may build human capital, obtaining a credential provides markedly larger benefits for students and society. Completing a credential is associated with higher earnings, decreased reliance on social safety nets, increased happiness, higher levels of civic engagement and volunteerism, lower rates of incarceration, and improved health outcomes, among other individual and social benefits. Moreover, lower-income students appear to benefit more from degree attainment thus positioning colleges and universities as conduits to improve equity in outcomes.

Although lower-income students are poised to benefit greatly from earning a college degree, these students face a multitude of obstacles and graduate at lower rates than their peers. Lower-income students receive less financial support from families and often have to work full-time jobs while attending school. These students frequently have less social, cultural, and economic capital than their peers which can serve as a barrier for student success. Additionally, lower-income students are not a monolith. Lower-income students are more likely to be adult learners, student-parents, justice-impacted, first-generation, racially or ethnically minoritized, and facing basic needs insecurities. In short, lower-income students are frequently existing in spaces that were not built for them historically and are frequently inhospitable. This diversity in life and educational experiences necessitates context-specific solutions to ensure institutions change and adapt in ways that serve lower-income students' needs.

Although lower-income students face unique obstacles, research shows that these students are capable of postsecondary success and targeted interventions can promote this. Institutional and public policies and programs such as intrusive advising, wrap-around supports, clearer financial aid offers, cohort-based programming, co-requisite remediation, targeted mentorship, streamlined transfer pathways, and summer bridge programs, among other interventions, can

improve lower-income students' academic success and attainment. Although many institutions are implementing evidence-based practices, there are still important gaps in our collective knowledge on how best to serve a diverse population of lower-income students and what policies and programs stand to improve student success at high-graduation institutions the most. To this end, we seek proposals that identify and fill these gaps and build the evidence base on which programmatic and policy decisions can be made.

Proposal Process

The ATI Student Success Research Grants Program seeks to fund five to eight research projects with grants ranging from \$10,000 to \$20,000. We will accept proposals from researchers and practitioner-scholars at colleges and universities, research organizations, and policy and advocacy groups. We encourage project teams to reflect upon their positionality, leverage researchers' lived experiences that will benefit the project, and include opportunities for junior researchers and students. While specific topics will be field generated, the background section provides a brief overview of important areas of concern for lower-income students and ATI member institutions. Successful proposals will align with the goals of ATI and will be adequately grounded in the current literature, extend that literature with new analyses or perspectives, and have applicable recommendations for institutional leaders seeking to improve academic outcomes of lower-income students and inform practices at ATI institutions.

Intended Project Audience

Funded research studies should have two primary audiences: ATI practitioners and researchers. ATI seeks to fund novel research studies that can directly inform practice at member institutions. Research studies should speak directly to programs and policies aimed at improving student success for lower-income students in the ATI context (i.e., institutions with six-year graduation rates consistently above 70 percent). Informing institutional leaders, such as provosts and chief academic officers, may come through targeted evaluation studies, research on the implementation of programs or policies targeting lower-income students, or revealing or clarifying the unique needs of sub-populations. Regardless of the focus of the work, researchers should plan to translate these findings for practitioners in order to inform institutional practices.

In addition to translating findings into actionable recommendations for institutional leaders, we expect studies funded through this program to advance our collective knowledge of practices, programs, and policies aimed at improving lower-income student success. Researchers should expect to advance the body of research in this area in order to inform future research in this area.

To reach these audiences, the program will culminate in three outputs: a convening where grantees will share research findings with presidents, provosts, and other academic administrators at ATI institutions and engage in moderated discussions about how to apply new evidence to institutional practices (this may be a standalone convening or part of other relevant ATI programing), an edited volume of peer reviewed research articles in an open-access edition

of an education-related journal, and two-page issue briefs that focus on key takeaways for institutional leaders. Additionally, we expect grantees to make any new datasets publicly available, given data use restrictions, for future research.

Proposal Requirements

We expect funded projects to advance the research on lower-income student success and have implications for policy or practice that align with the ATI mission and are applicable for ATI institutions. Projects should build upon current literature and identify important gaps in our understanding where findings stand to improve the design or implementation of programs that increase lower-income students' persistence and completion. Projects should use an appropriate methodology for their analysis. We also expect research projects to be useful for building evidence-based policies and practices. Principal Investigators should hold a terminal degree, but the research team can include a range of researchers. Given the nature and timeline of this program, this grant is not suitable to fund a student's dissertation research. Although the research should be relevant to the ATI program, researchers do not need to be an ATI institution to receive grant funds. Grant funds may not be used for the following purposes a) to carry on propaganda, or otherwise to attempt to influence any legislation; b) to influence the outcome of any specific public election; and c) for travel, study, or similar purposes.

Proposal narratives should be no more than 2,500 words, excluding references, budget, and resumes/CVs. The proposal narrative should include the following elements:

- *Objective.* This should clearly state the problem(s) and/or research question(s) being addressed in the study.
- *Relevant literature and theoretical or conceptual framework.* Research projects should be grounded in current literature with the intention of filling important gaps or extending the literature. A complete set of references should be included.
- *Data source(s) and method(s).* Clearly articulate which data and analytic tools will be used and why these are appropriate for your project. We encourage authors to acknowledge limitations in their data and approach as well as address any potential obstacles in obtaining data.
- *Significance.* Authors should discuss the potential significance for both practitioners and researchers.

In addition to the proposal narrative, authors should submit a detailed budget broken down into the following categories: personnel, research materials, participant remuneration, and other costs associated with the research. Grant funds cannot be used for institutional overhead. Awards will be between \$10,000 and \$20,000. If authors are seeking additional funding for this work, please explain how this award will enable the project team to execute the project. Proposals will be evaluated on their alignment with the ATI Student Success Research Grant Program goals, significance to practice and research, methodological rigor and appropriateness, and feasibility given the timeline and budget.



Program Timeline

October 17, 2023: Proposals should be submitted by 12:00pm ET. Proposals can be emailed to James Ward at james.ward@ithaka.org.

November 10, 2023: Applicants will be notified of decisions and Ithaka S+R will begin the process of signing grant agreements and dispensing funds.

October 14, 2024: Grantees to submit research manuscript.

November 27, 2024: Grantees will receive peer review reports.

January 2025: Grantees submitted revised manuscript.

February 2025: Grantees to submit two-page issue brief.

March 2025: ATI staff to finalize issue brief formatting and production. This process may require additional edits from authors.

April 2025: Grantees to receive final page proofs for edited volume.

Spring 2025: Grantees will attend the virtual convening with institutional leaders and other stakeholders to share research findings and foster meaningful dialogue on the topics studied. The two-page issue briefs will be released alongside the virtual convening on the ATI and Ithaka S+R websites to maximize exposure and impact of this research.

Any questions regarding the proposal process can be directed to James Ward at james.ward@ithaka.org.