



Seed Grants for Research to Improve the Capacity of Child-serving Organizations to Promote Children’s Healing, Adaptive Functioning, and Positive Development

Applications due: July 15, 2022; Awards Announced: August 15, 2022

The Residential Child Care Project (RCCP), located in the Bronfenbrenner Center for Translational Research, will award 3-4 one-year grants of \$15-\$20,000. These grants will support pilot projects that have the potential to stimulate future research collaborations with the RCCP to better understand how to enhance developmental experiences and promote positive outcomes for children in residential care, foster family care, and educational settings.

Many of the behavioral and functional difficulties exhibited by children in these settings result from a history of developmental trauma and extreme adversity. RCCP focuses on creating environments that provide opportunities for children, with help from understanding adults, to improve their social emotional functioning and developmental outcomes. Research in a broad range of fields – positive psychology, environmental design, social policy, organizational development, community nutrition, communication, and neuroscience – is highly relevant to these efforts and can open new avenues of inquiry. This seed grant program aims to facilitate the basic and/or applied research on topics that have high relevance for improving the capacity of child-serving organizations to create more optimal conditions for children’s healing, adaptive functioning, and positive development.

Our intention is to stimulate new collaborations and joint funding proposals between Cornell faculty and the RCCP. An expectation is that grantees will participate in 3-4 meetings over the course of the year to exchange ideas and facilitate potential collaborations. The potential topic areas described below provide examples of the types of research that we would consider highly relevant, but ***we welcome and strongly encourage creative thinking about how your research interests and expertise may have relevance to RCCP.***

Who Is the RCCP?

The RCCP is an interdisciplinary team that has developed and implemented organizational interventions in child service settings since 1979 (a detailed description is attached). Our primary focal settings for programming and research include residential care, foster homes, and schools. These settings serve mental health, developmental disability, and juvenile justice as well as child welfare populations. About 2,000 organizations currently implement one of our major programs, *Therapeutic Crisis Intervention (TCI)* and *Children and Residential Experiences (CARE)*.

CARE is a 4-year organizational intervention designed to increase and strengthen opportunities for children to learn and grow in the everyday moments within residential and foster care settings by promoting sensitive and responsive caregiving. It complements formal clinical treatment services by helping adults better utilize the therapeutic and developmental opportunities that arise naturally throughout the day. Through education and consultation centered on a set of research-informed principles, the CARE program model helps agencies enhance the living environment in residential and foster care settings by promoting a common framework for policies, procedures, and practice norms at all levels of the organization. Nearly 100 agencies implement *CARE*, which has a scientific rating of “Promising Research Evidence” in the California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare (<https://www.cebc4cw.org>).

Our most widely disseminated program is *TCI*, a crisis prevention and management system designed to improve an organization’s capacity to prevent and de-escalate behavioral crises and reduce the use of high-risk interventions and disciplinary approaches. The TCI system, developed for use in residential care, has been adapted for foster care and school settings. Disseminated via a train-the-trainer model, nearly 4,000 trainers are currently certified worldwide.

Potential Topic Areas

The following topic areas provide examples of the types of research that we would consider highly relevant. However, as noted above, ***we welcome and strongly encourage creative thinking about how your research interests and expertise may intersect with the goals of the RCCP and this RFP.***

Note: To the extent possible, the RCCP will facilitate access to community partners. Potential applicants are encouraged to discuss these needs, or any questions about the RFP or the potential relevance of their work, with Debbie Sellers prior to submitting the proposal. Please contact her by e-mail (des256@cornell.edu).

Positive Relational Processes between Children and Adults

Facilitating positive relational experiences with adults is essential to promoting the recovery and development of children who have experienced developmental trauma or extreme adversity. Research that examines how children's functioning, healing, and development are influenced by various forms of connection between children and adults (e.g., brief positive interactions; longer-term trusting relationships; perceptions of acceptance, belonging, and safety) will inform our theories of change as well as future research and programming. Examples of relevant proposal topics include (but are not limited to) studies that aim to

- demonstrate links between specific relational processes (e.g., interpersonal synchrony, co-regulation, shared positive emotion) and positive child outcomes;
- clarify the social, psychological, and/or physiological mechanisms (e.g., emotional experience, perceived safety and connection, biological stress response) that explain how these relational processes influence children's functioning;
- identify and examine conditions under which these relational processes are more or less likely to yield positive effects on children's functioning and development.

Building Staff and Organizational Capacity

Adults in our focal settings who work directly with children require training, reflective supervision, and leadership support to effectively facilitate healthy development and promote children's resilience. Similarly, all levels of leadership require education, consultation, and support to develop policies and procedures that help staff create therapeutic, developmentally enriching environments for children. Examples of relevant proposal topics might include

- contextual and person-level factors (e.g., self-awareness, cognitive flexibility, trauma history) that influence staff's capacity to relate effectively with children in key situations that occur throughout the day;
- the roles that training delivery modes, adult learning strategies, supervisory expectations and support, and leadership approaches play in improving staff competencies and practice norms across organizations;
- organization-level factors such as leadership, staffing practices, climate and culture (e.g., readiness to change) that may affect the quality of services delivered or the implementation and sustainability of RCCP programs.

Equity in the Delivery of High-Quality Services

The success of children's services depends in part on how well adults in these settings remain sensitive to the diverse cultural backgrounds and identities of the children they serve. Black, indigenous, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and children from lower socio-economic circumstances are overrepresented in out-of-home care. Backgrounds and identities such as these may influence the quality of care and educational services children receive, and whether they experience these settings as inclusive and safe. These factors may also affect opportunities for meaningful family involvement or greater exposure to high-risk coercive interventions. We welcome proposals that examine

- ways that children's identities and backgrounds shape their lived experiences and developmental needs;
- ways to help staff create interactions and settings that are responsive to the unique needs of children from different backgrounds, identities, and cultures;
- how providing agencies with a common research-based framework to guide programming and practices may increase equity and safety for children and staff.

How to Apply

Who is eligible to apply?

Cornell University Faculty or RTE Faculty who are eligible to serve as principal investigators on grants or contracts may apply. Faculty may apply as individuals or as a team.

What should the proposal include?

Applicants should provide a proposal of no more than four single-spaced pages using one-inch margins and text in a readable font. The proposal should contain the following:

1. A description of the rationale, specific aims, and methods of the proposed project
2. Summary of the proposed project's relevance to the applicant's future research agenda
3. Potential for the proposal to advance the RCCP's research, programming, or dissemination efforts
4. A one-year timeline for the project
5. Anticipated funding sources for the research after completion of the project
6. As appendices (and not included in the four-page limit):
 - a. A budget and budget justification
 - b. CV for key personnel.

If desired, additional appendices may be included but must be limited to no more than 20 pages (beyond the pages required for the budget materials and CVs). Appropriate supporting materials may include study protocols or data collection instruments.

Allowable expenses include research-related costs, including research assistant salaries and fringe benefits (if applicable), communications and supplies, respondent incentives, travel related to the research, and equipment purchases less than \$1,500. Conference travel may be considered as well if directly related to the seed project work. Salary support is allowable for RTE faculty currently supported 100% on sponsored or restricted funds. Salary support for TTT faculty is limited to summer salary.

To submit a proposal, please send all required documents as a single PDF file to Debbie Sellers (des256@cornell.edu) no later than July 15, 2022.

How will projects be selected for funding?

Proposals will be evaluated by the RCCP research team and leadership based on

- relevance and application to issues central to the RCCP mission and programs,
- scientific merit and feasibility,
- probability of attracting external funding in collaboration with RCCP,
- extent of innovation and the suitability of the methods in the focal settings, and
- qualifications and commitment of the investigator(s) to the project.

Innovative use of qualitative approaches and mixed methods, data collection modalities (e.g., observational coding [live or video; naturalistic or scripted], psycho-physiological measures/biomarkers, experience sampling, characterizing the physical environment) and research designs (e.g., small samples, single-subject) will be given some priority.

If a project involves human participants, Institutional Review Board approval must be received before funds can be released. (Note that Program Development Approval is acceptable.)

For questions about this RFP, contact Debbie Sellers at des256@cornell.edu.

Additional Information Regarding the RCCP

The Residential Child Care Project (RCCP) was first established with funding from the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect in 1982. RCCP has been self-sufficient since 1984 through fee-for-service and contract dissemination of the TCI system and the CARE program model as well as grants for the development and/or evaluation of other programs for residential and child serving organizations.

Since development of the initial edition of the ***Therapeutic Crisis Intervention*** (TCI) system in 1982, there have been six major revisions. The revision process generally includes (a) examining the evaluation results and research conducted by the RCCP, (b) reviewing related literature and research, (c) conducting surveys of organizations using the TCI system, and (d) convening experts for consultation and review. The 7th edition of TCI was released in January 2020. TCI is disseminated through a train-the-trainer model. That is, RCCP staff serve as TCI Instructors who facilitate a 5-day train-the-trainer course. Participants who attend all five days, pass a written test as well as assessments of specific skills (restraint techniques, conducting the Life Space Interview, ability to facilitate training) are certified as TCI Trainers who may train other staff in their agency. Certification as a TCI Trainer must be renewed every two years by attending and successfully completing certification updates. Beginning in 2002, the RCCP has been assessing residential agencies', TCI trainers' and residential staff's additional training needs in their efforts to prevent, de-escalate and manage crisis situations. Through these assessment efforts, several topics have been identified and curricula developed to address these needs. These training updates provide TCI trainers with a range of topics to refresh training skills, maintain fidelity to the TCI model, and strengthen the trainer's ability to transfer skills to the direct care workers. The training updates also provide additional information and skills to help organizations maintain fidelity to the TCI system and increase their capacity to prevent crises and reduce the use of high-risk interventions.

RCCP staff developed and disseminate four additional programs:

- ***Therapeutic Crisis Intervention for Family Care Providers (TCIF)***
- ***Therapeutic Crisis Intervention System for Schools (TCIS)***,
- ***Children and Residential Experiences (CARE): Creating Conditions for Change*** program model,
- ***Children and Residential Experiences (CARE): Creating Conditions for Change for Foster Carers***.

Development of the ***Therapeutic Crisis Intervention for Family Care Providers (TCIF)*** began in 1994. The New York State Department of Social Services contracted with the RCCP to 1) collect information about what training and/or resources were needed to help foster and adoptive parents effectively deal with crisis situations and difficult behaviors and 2) develop a trauma-informed training program to address these needs. A comprehensive literature review, 26 focus groups with six different types of stakeholders, and a Difficult Behaviors Survey were conducted. After analyzing the information gathered from all these sources, TCIF was designed and piloted with foster parents, foster care workers and biological parents throughout New York State in 1995. TCIF is currently in its 4th edition and is used throughout the US, Canada, Australia, the UK, and Ireland.

The ***Therapeutic Crisis Intervention System for Schools (TCIS)*** is an extension of RCCP's TCI system to the school environment. As initial research demonstrated that TCI was associated with lower rates of aggressive incidents in residential programs, schools serving these students began implementing the TCI system-wide approach to managing violence and aggression. Given the demand, school experts with TCI system experience convened at Cornell University in 2007 and began the same research-informed and adult learning driven process to develop TCI-S (currently being revised with a second edition planned for release in early 2023).

In 2005, the development of the ***Children and Residential Experiences (CARE): Creating Conditions for Change*** model was funded with a 9-month grant from the South Carolina Association of Children's Homes and Family Services and the South Carolina Department of Social Services. Using the same research informed approach to intervention development as described above, the CARE program model was designed to support safe environments, strong programmatic elements and a wide-variety of treatment programs and interventions that are trauma-sensitive and developmentally appropriate. In 2010, a grant from the Duke Endowment Foundation funded a rigorous evaluation of the CARE program model through a quasi-experimental waitlist trial with 13 agencies in a southeastern state. As described on the RCCP website (<https://rccp.cornell.edu/>), the results of this evaluation demonstrate that implementation of the CARE program

model increases staff CARE-consistent knowledge, beliefs, and practices, reduces serious incidents, and improves children's perception of their relationship with staff. These results helped obtain a California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse listing with a Level 3 Scientific Rating of Promising Practice and a Child Welfare Relevance Rating of High for CARE in 2017. Currently, over 50 residential care organizations throughout New York State, the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, the Republic of Ireland, and Australia implement the CARE program model.

In 2012, many of the organizations contracting with the RCCP to implement CARE also had foster and adoptive parent programs. These agencies felt that the model would improve their foster and adoptive parents' ability to respond in a trauma-informed and developmentally appropriate way to children and asked Cornell to revise the CARE training so that it could be delivered to foster and adoptive parents. In 2012, the key competencies for foster parents training were identified and the **CARE for Foster Carers (CAREF)** training was developed by the RCCP, piloted in two CARE agencies, revised according to the feedback and finalized in 2013.

The impact of these RCCP programs has been acknowledged in several ways. In 2006, the *American Public Human Services Association* recognized RCCP's leadership and staff for significant achievement with the *Therapeutic Crisis Intervention* crisis prevention system. In 2007, the project received the *Outstanding Accomplishments in Extension/Outreach* award from the Director of Cornell University's Cooperative Extension Service. In 2016, the American Public Human Services Association (APHSA) awarded Martha J. Holden, the Director of RCCP, the *Career Achievement Award* for their affinity group, the National Staff Development and Training Association (NSDTA). This prestigious award is presented to an individual who has made a career commitment to the profession of human service training and development; making significant contributions in terms of leadership, new ideas and education as measured by improved organizational outcomes, impact on the field of human services training, and improvement in state and national best practices.

In 2018, RCCP received two federal grants. The first is a grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (SAMHSA Award # U79SM080012-01) to establish the Center for Creating Trauma-Informed Residential Settings. The grant is part of the National Child Traumatic Stress Network, a federal effort to develop and improve a national network of services for children and adolescents who have experienced trauma. The goal of the grant is to share research, strategies and learning to assist residential settings to use trauma-informed and evidence-based models and share the RCCP's Therapeutic Crisis Intervention (TCI) System and Children and Residential Experiences (CARE): Creating Conditions for Change with residential care centers across the USA. The second grant was awarded by the National Institute of Justice (NIJ Award # 2017-CK-BN-0012) as part of a school safety initiative. The four-year project funded a group-randomized trial of the effectiveness of the TCIS system in the elementary schools in the school district in a mid-size city in the Northeast.