

BUFFETT EARLY CHILDHOOD INSTITUTE GRADUATE SCHOLARS REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS 2026-27

For the eleventh consecutive year, the Buffett Early Childhood Institute is offering fellowships for advanced doctoral students conducting research concerning early development, with applications to the learning and development of young children, prenatal to 8 years old. The program provides financial support and mentoring for doctoral students admitted to candidacy within the University of Nebraska System. The overriding goal of the program is to increase the skills of scholars conducting innovative research with implications for early childhood, with particular attention to children placed at risk because of economic, social, and environmental circumstances.

The mission of the Institute is to transform the lives of young children by improving their learning and development. The Buffett Institute Graduate Scholars program grew out of the Institute's focus on applied research, training/professional development, outreach, and policy. Just as the Institute is cross-disciplinary and cross-campus, the fellowship program is intended to reach across traditional higher education boundaries to include all those who may impact the lives of young children. The Institute encourages a wide variety of research perspectives and interests. Additionally, the Institute seeks to support high-quality research and practice from fields such as health, education, social work, public health, music, art, and other disciplines. Multidisciplinary research and new methodologies are encouraged.

Eligibility Criteria

- Applicants must be full-time, doctoral-level graduate students who have been admitted to candidacy within a department on one of the NU campuses. Candidacy is defined, for the purposes of this fellowship, as having completed all scholarly activities required for the doctorate, except for the dissertation (ABD).
- An exception to this criterion will be considered should the student's dissertation advisor assure that the dissertation project will be approved by the student's committee by July 1, 2026.
- Faculty mentors are expected to be actively involved with the student's research and related Buffett Institute activities. They must be employed full-time at one of the NU campuses.
- Applicants may not be employed simultaneously as a graduate research assistant for the Buffett Institute and receive the award.

Project Requirements

- Applicants must submit an original research project that aligns with the mission and goals of the Buffett Institute.
- Scholars and faculty mentors are required to attend two events (in person) during their

funded year:

- A reception during the fall semester (August-October) that includes a short presentation of the proposed project
- A culminating seminar toward the end of the spring semester (March-April) that includes a presentation of project progress and/or results
- Scholars are required to participate in a short midyear check-in, via email, with Buffett Institute staff (December-January). Students may be invited to additional Institute events throughout the fellowship year.

REQUIREMENTS OF THE BUFFETT INSTITUTE GRADUATE SCHOLARS RFP

This RFP contains application information for the Buffett Institute Graduate Scholars program. Questions should be sent to Alexandra Daro at adaro@nebraska.edu.

Information about the Buffett Early Childhood Institute and its work can be found at <https://buffettinstitute.nebraska.edu/>

Timeline

- Full applications must be submitted by April 24, 2026 to this [link](#).
- Proposals must be titled with: lastname.firstname.FinalProposal.pdf
- Award recipients will be notified by the end of June 2026. Funding can begin as early as July 1, 2026, and is dependent upon IRB approval.

Funding Levels

Up to \$25,000 is available per student; up to four awards will be made each year. Details about allowable expenses are included in the budget section below.

Audience

Applicants should assume reviewers possess general knowledge of early childhood but are not necessarily familiar with the specific project topic. Therefore, applicants are encouraged to use language free of jargon.

Mentor Role

Applicants are encouraged to work closely with their faculty mentors in preparing their proposals. The proposal should represent the work of the student; however, faculty mentors are encouraged to review the proposal and provide constructive feedback.

REQUIRED APPLICATION COMPONENTS

1. Cover Page

The cover page should be formatted using the attached template. It may be single-spaced. All information on the attached template must be included.

2. Table of Contents

The table of contents should list the contents of the application including corresponding page numbers. Appendices should be included as part of the table of contents. The table of contents must be single-spaced.

3. Applicant Bio Sketch

Applicants should describe how this project relates to their doctoral studies and provide a brief

rationale for the support being requested. Applicants should describe their career goals and the skills and experiences they bring to this project and how the proposed project will advance the mission of the Institute. The bio sketch is limited to two pages, double-spaced.

4. Project Summary/Abstract

Provide a one-page summary of the project. The summary must include a brief description of the proposed project, including the research aim(s), population group(s), and design. The potential implications of the project should be addressed. At the top of the abstract, applicants should include the project title and applicant name.

5. Approach

The approach should outline a plan of action that describes how the proposed project will be accomplished. Applicants must describe any design or technological innovations, collaborative arrangements, or extraordinary social and/or community involvement in the project. Provide a list of organizations, cooperating entities, consultants, or other key individuals that will work on the project, along with a short description of the nature of their effort or contribution. This section should cite potential obstacles and challenges to accomplishing project goals and explain strategies that will be used to address these challenges. The approach is limited to two pages double-spaced.

6. Project Description and Narrative Approach

a. Background, Significance, and Aims

The applicant must demonstrate knowledge of the relevant literature on critical issues and existing knowledge, describe objectives, and demonstrate understanding of the overall significance of the proposal. Applications must address how the proposal will **address key issues relevant to the Buffett Institute's mission and/or its signature programs, related to young children (prenatal–8 years old)**. Applications must incorporate the following information:

- *A brief literature review justifying the proposed study and the outcomes of interest.* The application must briefly discuss previous studies that have been conducted related to the proposed study, as well as identify gaps in the literature.
- *The study's theoretical framework*
- *Significance and implications of the research*
- *Research aims*
- *References* (may be single-spaced)

The background, significance, and aims section is limited to five pages, double-spaced.

b. Research Design and Methodology

Method and research design. The application must clearly define the study sample, recruitment, expected sample size, and how the data will be collected. The project should be clearly designed by the graduate student. If the proposed project is part of a larger study designed by others, this section must clearly delineate the component that will be carried out by the student and how it is distinguished from the larger research project. The design must also include sufficient protection of human subjects and adequate consent procedures. IRB approval is required before any data collection.

Measures. Describe specific measures that will be used in the study, as well as a brief account of the technical properties of each measure, if applicable.

Data analysis plan. The plan for data analysis must be described, and a brief justification provided for how the data analytic plan is appropriate for the research aims/hypotheses. It is recommended that the anticipated number of participants available and power analyses be completed for each research question that will be tested, as appropriate. Citations supporting hypothesized effect sizes should be appropriate.

The research design and methodology section is limited to five pages, double-spaced.

c. Dissemination and Management Plan

The application must outline and describe plans related to how the findings will be disseminated to a larger audience and how the student and faculty mentor will work together to execute the proposed project.

Dissemination plan. The application must articulate how the project's findings will be disseminated using both research and policy-oriented products and dissemination channels. In addition to traditional research output and dissemination channels (e.g., conference presentations, journal publications), plans should include development of presentations and research briefs tailored for policymakers and/or practitioners. The Buffett Institute will provide support in translating research for appropriate audiences.

Management plan. The application must outline a strong management plan that describes a sound, workable plan of action for how the proposed project will be carried out. This section must describe how the faculty mentor will participate and maintain quality control over the implementation and ongoing operations of the study. This plan must also outline how the faculty mentor will oversee and mentor the student, including frequency of mentoring meetings and details of productivity goals.

The dissemination and management plan is limited to two pages, double-spaced.

d. Project Timeline and Milestones

An annotated timeline must be included, outlining milestones for completion of the various project tasks including:

- Expected start and completion of the research project, including when the findings will be disseminated
- Expected completion of the doctoral program (i.e., review by committee)
- Expected date of IRB approval for the project
- Required Buffett Institute activities
 - Proposal presentation at the beginning of the fall semester (August-September)
 - Midyear check-in with Institute staff (December-January)
 - Final presentation at the end of the spring semester (May-June)

The project timeline and milestones section is limited to two pages, double-spaced.

7. Project Budget and Budget Justification

Applications must include a project budget and budget justification. Project budget calculations must include estimation methods, quantities, unit costs, and other similar quantitative detail. Provide a budget justification, which includes a budget narrative and a line-item detail of the proposed project. If costs will vary over the project period, this should be noted within the budget.

The budget is limited to one page, single-spaced (a spreadsheet may be used). The budget justification is limited to two additional pages, single-spaced. Funds will not be released until

IRB approval has been received. There is not a required budget template, but you can find a useful example here: <http://research.unl.edu/sponsoredprograms/forms-templates/>

The following must be included in the budget and budget justification:

- Expenses directly related to the student's dissertation research, which may include personnel costs/salary, tuition, travel, and other directly related expenses.
 - Salary should be consistent with assistantship rates from the student's home department.
 - If the student intends to receive concurrent funding from another source (i.e., an additional grant or assistantship), the multiple roles must be justified in the bio sketch and incorporated into the budget.

The following items are **NOT** allowed within the budget:

- Indirect costs, capital costs, computer purchases (unless specifically needed for the project and justified sufficiently)
- Any expenses covered by another revenue source

8. Appendices

The following items must be included with the application:

- **Letter of support from faculty mentor.** The graduate student's faculty mentor must submit a letter of support stating that he/she approves the application and describing how he/she will regularly monitor the student's work. In addition, the letter must verify: (a) the student's status in the doctoral program, including year in program and full-time status, (b) that the funds will be used for the student's dissertation research, (c) that the student is likely to be within two years or less of completing his/her dissertation, and (d) the role of the dissertation committee in development and approval of the project. This letter should detail the commitment of the faculty member to the student's project and how he/she will actively participate in mentoring the student.
- **Curriculum Vitae for student**
- An abbreviated **Curriculum Vitae for faculty mentor** (less than five pages representing the work most relevant to the proposed project)
- **Unofficial transcript** for student reflecting completion of graduate courses and status in the doctoral program
- **Copy of admission to candidacy form** with appropriate signatures. For departments that do not use this format, this may include committee approval of the project, documentation of completed preliminary/comprehensive exams, etc.
- **Statements of support**, if applicable, from community partners, public, and other leaders that support the proposed project. If data collection will occur in specific settings (e.g., Head Start, local school district, community agencies) a letter of support must be included from that setting(s). No more than three letters of support should be included.

APPLICATION REVIEW INFORMATION

Reviewers will not access or review any materials that are not part of the application documents. This includes information accessible on websites via hyperlinks that are referenced, or embedded, in the application. All sections of the Required Application Components (1–8) will be used in the review process.

Review and Selection Process

Applications will be reviewed and evaluated by a panel consisting of Buffett Institute staff and faculty

members from the NU System. Outside consultants may be used. Feedback will be provided to applicants after final awards are announced.

TECHNICAL INFORMATION

Accepted Font Style, Application Format, and Writing Style

Applications must be in Times New Roman (TNR), 12-point font, except for footnotes, which may be TNR 10-point font. All application materials must be formatted so that they are 8½ x 11 white paper with 1- inch margins all around. Applicants should include page numbers for each page within the application.

The final application should be one file in pdf format.

The proposal format should follow guidelines from the latest edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. The research should comply with the ethical standards detailed in the *Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct of the American Psychological Association*.

Page Limitations

- Applicants must not exceed the page limitations listed within each section of the application.
- All applications must be double-spaced, except where noted otherwise.
- Applicants must limit their entire application (not including the appendices) to 24 pages.

Application Elements Exempted From Double-Spacing Requirements

The following elements of the application submission are exempt from the double-spacing requirements and may be single-spaced: cover page, table of contents, one-page project summary/abstract, vitae, logic models, third-party agreements, letters of support, footnotes, tables, references, budget, and budget justification.

ORGANIZATION OF APPLICATION

Applicants should organize their proposal using the RFP as a guideline and use headings and subheadings that correspond to the required information.

1. Cover Page (see attached template, single-spaced)
2. Table of Contents (single-spaced, includes all pieces of the application being submitted, including each Appendix)
3. Applicant Bio Sketch (two pages, double-spaced)
4. Project Summary/Abstract (must be single-spaced, one-page maximum)
5. Approach (two pages, double-spaced)
6. Project Description/Narrative Statement: The Project Description/Narrative Statement should correspond to the goals and mission of the Buffett Institute and attend to the criteria used to evaluate the applications. It is strongly encouraged that the Project Description/Narrative Statement be organized according to the sections (and subsections) presented below. Additional headings and subheadings may also be used to organize the content of each section.
 - a. Background, Significance, and Aims (five pages, double-spaced)
 - b. Research Design and Methodology (five pages, double-spaced)
 - c. Dissemination and Management Plan (two pages, double-spaced)
 - d. Project Timeline and Milestones (two pages, double-spaced)
7. Budget and Budget Justification (one page, single-spaced)
8. Appendices, including:
 - Letter of Support from Faculty Mentor (no more than three, single-spaced)
 - Curriculum Vitae for Student (single-spaced)

- Curriculum Vitae for Faculty Mentor (single-spaced)
- Unofficial Transcript for Student Reflecting Completed Graduate Courses and Status in the Doctoral Program
- Documentation of Admission to Candidacy
- Letter(s) of Support (if applicable) (single-spaced)

Cover Page (Template)
Application for Buffett Early Childhood Institute Graduate Scholars

Date:

Project title:

Student name:

Student email address:

Student mailing address:

Department name:

Campus: UNL UNO UNMC

Mentor name:

Mentor email address:

Mentor mailing address:

Requested amount of funding: _____