



UC SANTA CRUZ

Center for Economic Justice and Action

The Center for Economic Justice and Action (CEJA) is pleased to release our sixth call for research proposals for the [UC Essential Needs Research Grant Program](#). This initiative is part of the [UC Essential Needs Research, Training, and Promising Programs Consortium](#) housed at the [Center for Economic Justice and Action](#) at the University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC).

Projects may be funded up to \$100,000 (maximum budget), with all projects completed within one year (12 months) of the award date. Proposals are due November 6, 2026 by 5:00 p.m. (PST).

CEJA's UC Essential Needs Grant Program funds research that (1) advances our understanding of UC students' essential or basic needs; (2) identifies barriers to accessing basic needs programs and/or promising practices for addressing these challenges; (3) assesses the impact of basic needs programs on student well-being and success; and (4) investigates strategies or interventions for better meeting students' basic needs and/or promoting equitable access to existing basic needs programs. We use "basic needs" and "essential needs" interchangeably but encourage using the term "essential needs" to highlight their crucial role in thriving and student success.

All UC faculty and professional research staff (with principal investigator status) are invited to apply. We welcome proposals from any discipline, including fields in the humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, and public health. Individual and multi-campus proposals may be submitted. We are especially excited about research proposals that involve partnerships among principal investigators and campus basic needs units.

To learn about previous awards, please visit our [Research and Evaluation webpage](#).

More information about this funding opportunity and application guidelines are provided in the attached request for research proposals and on CEJA's [website](#). An informational session about this grant program will be held via zoom on Thursday, October 9, 12:00 p.m. (PT). Please register at: <https://forms.gle/FdHZWumwTbvYe3Zw8> and a google calendar invite with zoom link will be sent to you. If you cannot attend the information session, please contact ceja@ucsc.edu with any questions about this request for proposals or program eligibility.

Please share this opportunity widely with your network.



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UC Essential Needs Grant Program
Call for Research Proposals and Guidelines
DEADLINE: November 6, 2026, 5:00 p.m. (PST)

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Friday, October 9th at 12:00 p.m. (PT).
Register here: <https://forms.gle/FdHZWumwTbvYe3Zw8>*

Overview

The University of California (UC) system is a national leader in addressing students' basic needs. Within the UC system, "[basic needs](#)" encompasses "an ecosystem that supports financial stability by ensuring equitable access to nutritious and sufficient food; safe, secure and adequate housing (to sleep, study, cook, and shower); healthcare to promote sustained mental and physical well-being; affordable transportation; resources for personal hygiene care; and emergency needs for students with dependents". The Center for Economic Justice and Action (CEJA) uses the terms "basic" and "essential" needs interchangeably but encourages using "essential needs" to highlight their crucial role in thriving and student success.

Beginning with the establishment of the UC Global Food Initiative (GFI) in 2014 and continuing today, significant investments are being made to strengthen campus basic needs resources, develop effective programs, and build skills in serving students who are experiencing basic needs challenges. However, students of color, low-income students, first-generation students, student parents, students who are former foster youth, and LGBTQ+ identified students remain at high risk of experiencing these challenges. Ensuring equitable access for and the retention and success of these students in the UC system is crucial to the university's mission.

Essential needs research and evaluation are vital to understanding UC students' experiences, validating effective programs and promising practices, and identifying needed strategic investments. Equally important is providing evidence to policymakers,

academic communities, campus practitioners, and UC families that our interventions reduce food and housing insecurity, foster health and well-being, and increase retention and student success. A strong systemwide research agenda is needed to fully understand the impact of basic needs programs and initiatives.

CEJA's UC Essential Needs Research Grant Program funds innovative research that advances our understanding of students' essential needs and informs programs and services to meet these needs. This program is made possible by basic needs funding from the California Legislature, which is administered by the University of California Office of the President (UCOP). CEJA's UC Essential Needs Research Program is co-chaired by Professor Heather E. Bullock, University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC), and Associate Professor Suzanna M. Martinez, University of California, San Francisco (UCSF), with guidance from a review committee of UC faculty from across the system.

Program Description, Priorities, and Eligibility

Program Description. This research initiative seeks to identify and advance promising practices to meet all students' basic needs. CEJA's UC Essential Needs Grant Program funds research that advances our understanding of UC students' basic or essential needs and identifies effective strategies and programs for addressing them. To build a strong essential needs research community, awardees will present their findings to the UC essential needs community and be invited to attend other related events.

Program Priorities. Priority will be given to research studies that:

- Advance our understanding of UC students' essential or basic needs (please note: this program funds research focused on essential or basic needs of UC students who are predominantly U.S. residents)
- Identify barriers to accessing basic needs programs and/or promising practices for addressing these challenges
- Investigate strategies to improve students' housing security
- Assess the impact of basic needs programs on student well-being and success
- Investigate strategies or interventions for better meeting students' basic needs and/or promoting equitable access to existing basic needs programs
- Include partnerships with campus basic needs units and/or community basic needs programs/providers (here is a [link to UC Basic Needs Campus Centers](#) and contact information)
- Engage graduate and/or undergraduate students as research team members

To find information about previously awarded grants, please visit our [Research and Evaluation webpage](#).

We will award high impact proposals up to \$100,000 each (maximum budget), with all research activities completed within 12 months of the award date.

Eligibility. All UC faculty and professional research staff (with principal investigator status) with a research track record are eligible to apply. We welcome proposals from any discipline, including fields in the humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, and public health. Both single and multi-campus proposals are encouraged. Please note that this funding opportunity is not intended to support student projects (e.g., capstones, theses).

Allowable expenses. Include research personnel (e.g., graduate and undergraduate research assistants), travel for data collection, materials (e.g., photocopying, analytic software), and other research expenses (e.g., participant compensation). Funding is not available for basic computer equipment, faculty and staff salary (including summer salary), or conference travel. Research focusing exclusively on international students is not prioritized. All awardees must submit a final report of their findings and expenditures. Any unused funds remaining at the end of the award period must be returned to the Center for Economic Justice and Action. Timelines should also consider the time required for obtaining IRB approval (see Documentation of Compliance with Campus IRB below).

Application Review and Award Criteria. Members of CEJA's UC system-wide review committee will review each proposal. The following criteria will be considered during the review process: scholarly merit of the proposed research (e.g., originality, potential contribution to the field, conceptual/theoretical grounding, soundness of methodology); proposal alignment with the goals and principles of CEJA's UC Essential Needs Research Grant Program; potential impact of the proposed research; principal investigator and collaborator track record, qualifications, and preparation to conduct the proposed research; partnership or engagement with campus basic needs units; budget justification; ability to complete the project within the designated time frame; and dissemination plan.

While every effort will be made to ensure that a range of disciplines, focal areas, and campuses are represented among awardees, final awards will be granted based on the overall strength of the proposal in meeting the criteria above.

Research Timeline. This is the third funding round of an annual grantmaking program. All grant activities should be completed within one year (12 months) of the award date. Grant applicants and recipients can contact the Center for Economic Justice and Action at ceja@ucsc.edu with any questions about grant timelines or potential extensions.

Proposal Format. The following information will be requested as part of your application: Principal Investigator/s (e.g., name, applicant title department, campus, email address); Project Title; Amount of Funding Request; Project Abstract or Summary; Research Narrative; Itemized Budget and Budget Narrative; Project Timeline; and CV or Biosketch (2-page limit).

Proposal Submission, Review, and Award Notification

Submission and Award Notification. Proposals are due online on Friday, November 6th 2026 by 5:00 p.m. (PST). Please submit your application on this form at: <https://forms.gle/oz4D9HePTRfLSDkVA>. Award decisions will be announced in December 2026.

Abstract or Summary. Please provide a 500-word summarizing your study. Abstracts of funded projects will be [posted](#) on CEJA's website.

Research Narrative. Please include a 2,000-word narrative describing the proposed study and its goals, relationship of the proposed study to existing research, description of essential needs focus, theoretical framework, methodology, role of principal investigator(s) and collaborator(s), tentative project timeline, and plan for disseminating findings. If the study is being conducted in partnership with a campus basic needs unit, please describe this collaboration. A reference list (not included in the 2,000-word limit) should follow the project description. Proposals should be written in language accessible to non-specialists. The research narrative is the most heavily weighted component in the review process.

Itemized Budget and Budget Narrative. A detailed budget and budget justification must be submitted with the proposal. The maximum budget for proposals is \$100,000. Please note that this funding is exempt from Indirect Costs. Allowable use of funds includes the following:

- **Personnel Salary/Stipend.** Allowable for graduate and undergraduate research assistants. The role of graduate and undergraduate research assistants should be clearly defined. Funds may not be used for faculty or staff salaries, stipends, or other types of payments, post-doctoral researcher salaries.
- **Participant Compensation.** May include cash or gift card compensation. Please check your campus regulations.
- **Travel.** Allowable for data collection/research purposes only, including destination, purpose, estimated number of trips, economy-class airfare, daily food and lodging expenses, and number of days covered. Applicants must adhere to UC travel policies and obtain the most economical rates. Expenses related to conference travel are not permissible.
- **Research Materials.** May include the acquisition of data (specify data) and project-specific expendable supplies. Funding for general-purpose equipment such as computers and video cameras is not permitted.

Curriculum Vitae. All principal investigators should provide abbreviated 2-page CVs or bio-sketch focusing only on relevant activities and publications during the past five years.

Appendices. Applicants may include collaborators' CVs and supplementary study materials (e.g., questionnaires, detailed methodological procedures, and letters of support from campus partners).

Documentation of Compliance with Campus Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Applicants must ensure that their research meets all federal and state regulations, including those concerning human participants. IRB approval is not required before submitting your grant application, but funds will not be released until institutional approval is secured. The award expires 12 months from the date of notice of award, not from the date of IRB approval. To avoid a delayed start time, please submit your proposals for IRB review as quickly as possible. Applicants should consult with their Office of Sponsored Research or its equivalent on their home campus to ensure familiarity with requirements, and we encourage applicants to submit proposals for review by their IRB prior to submission of their proposal if possible.

Reporting

To facilitate widespread dissemination of findings, award recipients will provide the Center for Economic Justice and Action (CEJA) with a final report and presentation slides summary of their findings and participate in virtual convenings of systemwide essential needs researchers and practitioners. We encourage using publicly accessible language in all materials and presentations.

Quarterly Meetings. Awardees will participate in 2-3 meetings to provide updates on progress of their research and as an opportunity to connect grantees with the UC community of essential needs researchers. At a final webinar meeting, grantees will give 10-minute slide presentations of their final results.

Final Report. Awardees will submit a final report (2,000 words) summarizing core findings and recommendations within three months of the grant's end date. A list of presentations and publications from the funded study should be appended to the report.

Presentation Slides. Awardees will prepare presentation slides summarizing their study and share their findings via a virtual convening of UC essential needs researchers, practitioners, and other stakeholders.

Acknowledgement. Submitted manuscripts and conference presentations funded by this initiative should acknowledge this grant program and the UC Essential Needs Research, Training, and Promising Programs Consortium. Specific language will be provided to awardees.

CEJA maintains a web archive of projects. Final reports, presentation slides, and published work from funded projects may be shared on the Center for Economic Justice and Action website with awardee permission. We ask that any published manuscripts and presentations after the reporting deadline be reported to the Center for Economic Justice and Action (ceja@ucsc.edu) as they become available.