

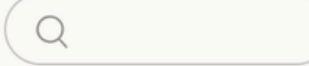


# Wenner-Gren Foundation Grant Proposal Writing Training



**Brendane A. Tynes, Ph.D.**

FOUNDATION ANTHROPOLOGIST FOR  
RESEARCH EQUITY & EXCELLENCE



# Wenner-Gren Foundation

Supporting Anthropology Worldwide

Est. 1941

The Wenner-Gren Foundation is committed to playing a leadership role in anthropology. We help anthropologists advance anthropological knowledge, build sustainable careers, and amplify the impact of anthropology within the wider world.

# Before you apply for our Dissertation Fieldwork Grant, do your research.

What are the eligibility requirements? Do you meet them?

What are the mission, values, and purpose of Wenner-Gren Foundation?

What does a successful application look like?

Have you watched or attended one of our Proposal Writing workshops?





**Gather and study** examples of successful proposals from grantees and/or our website repository.

**Organize** a writing group to share drafts and to provide feedback.

**Give** yourself at least 6 weeks to draft your proposal.

**Meet with your advisor** to discuss your draft.

# What topics will we cover?

- Components of a Compelling Research Project
  - Object of Study & Object of Observation
  - Constructing Research Questions
  - Components of a Successful Research Grant Proposal
- Dissertation Fieldwork Grant Overview
- Dissertation Fieldwork Grant Deep Dive



**Dissertation vs.  
Dissertation Fieldwork  
Research**

**object of  
study**



**THE BIG PICTURE**

**object of  
observation**



**RESEARCH  
SUBJECT/OBJECT**



**METHODS  
SITE  
THEORY  
SIGNIFICANCE  
ETHICS**

**RESPONSIBILITY TO MITIGATE HARM**

**Components of a Compelling Research Project**

# Research Questions

- a. Questions that are **focused** and that can be answered through **empirical research**.
- b. Questions that are **feasible**. Can the applicant answer these research questions with \$25,000 and with 12-18 months of research?
- c. Questions that are **legible**. Do these questions make sense for the discipline of anthropology?

# Dissertation Fieldwork Grant

Dissertation Fieldwork Grants offer US\$25,000 to individuals enrolled in a doctoral program to support dissertation research. Applicants must be engaged in research that contributes to anthropological knowledge.

Applicants of any nationality or country of residence may apply.

In 2025, we received about **2500** proposals for our Dissertation Fieldwork Grant and Post-PhD Research Grant at our May 1st and November 1st deadlines. We were only able to fund about 9% of those (~140).

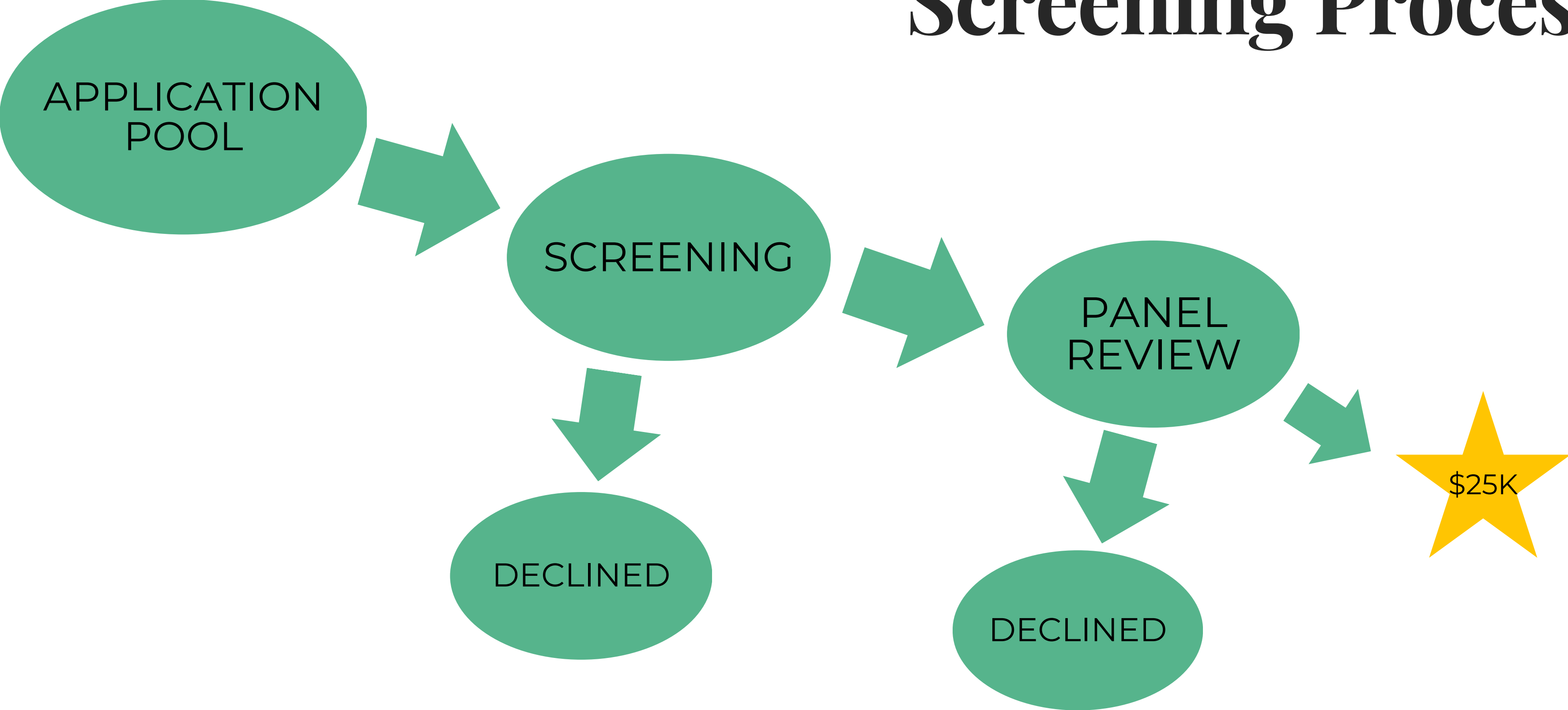
Here's how we decide who to fund.

## **The application asks for the following**

- General information about you and your project
- A summary of your proposed project (abstract)
- Answers to six questions about your project
- A resubmission statement if we have rejected a dissertation fieldwork grant application you have previously submitted
- A detailed budget for Plan A (best-case scenario)
- A detailed budget for Plan B (worst-case scenario)
- A bibliography relevant to the proposed project.

The application also asks you to list the authorizations and permissions required for the proposed project, with the estimated dates by which you expect to obtain them. However, do not send these documents with your application. If your application is approved, we will request copies of all relevant materials when we notify you of the award.

# Screening Process



# What are reviewers assessing?

They are looking for projects that move forward the conversation in **anthropology**.

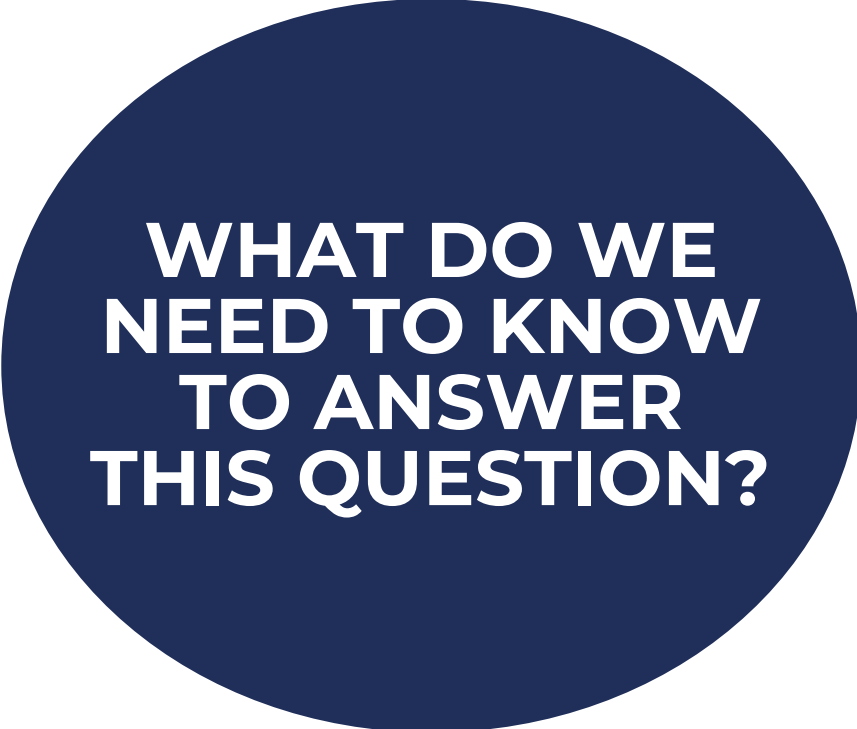
- a. Proposals that are **focused** and that can be answered through **empirical research**.
- b. Proposals that are **feasible**. Can the applicant answer these research questions with the time and money available?
  - c. Proposals that are **legible**. Does this project make sense for the discipline of anthropology?

They are also looking for projects with the potential to **make a difference** in the discipline in these uncertain and demanding times.

**Let's do a deep dive on  
the questions.**

# Question 1

Describe the aim of your research. What will be the focus of your investigation? What is your main research question? What other questions will you need to answer to address it? You should formulate your research objectives clearly and carefully. In these uncertain times, conditions can change unexpectedly. Find a focus that allows you to approach your questions through a number of different avenues. [Limit: 1000 words]



**WHAT DO WE  
NEED TO KNOW  
TO ANSWER  
THIS QUESTION?**

- Main research questions
- Secondary research questions
- Research objectives
- Research focus
- Compelling rationale for the research
- Research background

# Question 1 Strategies

- Use all available space to describe your object of study and your object of observation and research context.
- Introduce your research project and your research questions early. Have 1 overarching question and 2-3 subquestions that you will investigate.
- Provide all necessary context for your research area.
- Clearly describe the significance of your research topic.

# Question 1 Strategies

- Don't assume what your reviewer knows.
- Don't say that "nobody" or very few people have done this work before. You may have a reviewer who has done this work.
- Do not use unnecessary jargon.
- Don't have more than 1-2 overarching research questions and 2-3 sub-research questions.
- Don't write as if you already know the answers to your questions.
- Don't try to argue with a specific theory or school of thought.

**After reading question 1, your reviewers should be able to  
summarize your research topic in 1-2 sentences**

**understand and explain the significance of your dissertation research  
project**

**have an overview of your methods**

**understand clearly your object(s) of observation**

**know how your work will shift the discipline of anthropology**

## Question 2

How does your research draw inspiration from existing scholarship in anthropology and other disciplines? Whose findings will you be building on? Give specific examples of the various lines of work with which you are in dialogue and which you are seeking to advance.  
[Limit: 1000 words]

**WHAT DO WE  
NEED TO KNOW  
TO ANSWER  
THIS QUESTION?**

- existing scholarship in Anthropology+ and your contribution
- specific examples of work that this project draws upon & moves forward

## Question 2 Strategies

- Use all available space to describe the areas of literature you're drawing upon.
- Choose no more than 3 bodies of literature.
- Describe each field and cite relevant scholars.
- Emphasize *your* contribution to these fields.

**After reading question 2, your reviewer should be able to clearly name you 2-3 fields of study.**

**They should also be able to articulate how your work contributes to those bodies of study.**

# Question 3A

What evidence will you need to collect to answer your research question? How will you go about collecting and analyzing this evidence? Here, we are interested in the best-case scenario: a description of the research activities you will use if you are able to travel and meet with research participants and collaborators safely and ethically in person. [Limits: 1000 words]

# Question 3A Strategies

- Use all available space to describe what you'll be doing during the fellowship and how you'll analyze the data.
- Connect your methods to your research questions and your interlocutors.
- Provide all necessary context for your research methods. Why are you speaking with x group to answer y question? How do you know your interlocutors? Do you have existing connections in the field?
- Why are you doing archival research? Where will you conduct the research? What will you be looking at?

- Evidence needed to answer research questions
- Appropriate data collection methods;
- Research sites and activities;
- Informants/interlocutors;
- What each interlocutor will help you understand and answer
- feasibility



**WHAT DO WE  
NEED TO KNOW  
TO ANSWER THIS  
QUESTION?**

# **METHODS**

Archival work

Comparative work

Epistolary work

Existing field notes and data sets

Grey literature

Media analysis

Museum collections

Online interviews and observation

and more!

**After reading question 3A, your reviewers should be able to  
name your research methods**

**identify with whom you'll be conducting research and how  
have a detailed understanding of your methods and research  
timeline**

## Question 3B

In addition to the plans laid out above, we need to know you have developed a strategy that will allow you to address your research questions should the situation change dramatically. If you are unable to travel or meet in person with research participants and collaborators, how will you address your research questions? What methods will you use to ensure that your research is safe and ethical? [Limit: 1000 words]



**WHAT DO WE  
NEED TO KNOW  
TO ANSWER THIS  
QUESTION?**

- Alternative methods to address research questions
- Ways to ensure the research is safe and ethical;
- Knowledge of digital and other technologies that will allow the research to happen

# Question 3B Strategies

- Use all available space to describe your project's new methods.
- Spend time talking about how you know your methods are feasible.
- How will you access the field and your interlocutors? What pivots would you need to make?
- Do more than just move your project to Zoom. Be creative. What other ways can you answer your research questions?
- Think about the ethics of your new methods. What are the risks to your interlocutors? How will you mitigate them?
- Don't create a new research project unless absolutely necessary.

# **METHODS**

Photojournal


Diaries/journals

Research Assistance

**After reading question 3B, your reviewer should be able to know and articulate clearly how your work will shift in an unprecedented crisis.**

# Question 4

Why are you the right person to carry out this project? We are interested in how you became committed to doing this work. Describe your background and your relationship to the community or communities affected by your project. We are also interested in how you have prepared yourself for this research. Describe your language competence, technical skills, previous research, and any other relevant experience. Describe any work you have already done on this project and how this research relates to other research you have done. You may be working with academic collaborators. If so, please describe their role in this project and how it will relate to yours.



**WHAT DO WE  
NEED TO KNOW TO  
ANSWER THIS  
QUESTION?**

- The purpose of the project and why you are the right person to carry out this project;
- the unique skills and background that you bring to this research;
- language competency;
- how to articulate your relationship to the community/communities in the research;
- how to establish a trajectory of relevant research;
- how to write about work already completed on this project while making it clear that more work needs to be done;
- relationship to academic collaborators

# Question 4 Strategies

- Use all available space to describe what you'll be doing during the fellowship and how you'll analyze the data.
- Discuss information that is relevant to your research. This is not a life history essay, so only share what is relevant for helping the reviewer understand why you are qualified and authorized to conduct this study.
- Don't share your advisor's name unless they are collaborating with you.
- If you are applying for funding for a specific phase of your research, justify this here. What will this phase add to your dissertation research project?

**After reading question 4, your reviewers should be able to understand why you are conducting this research**

**know more about who you are and why you chose this research project**

**identify with whom you'll be conducting research and how you relate to them**

# Question 5

Please discuss the most salient ethical issues raised by your research and explain how you are approaching them. Institutional review boards tend to focus on immediate risks to participants and the importance of anonymizing data. Our understanding of research ethics extends much further. We encourage you to think broadly about your ethical obligations to research participants, descendant communities, local stakeholders, and others affected by your work. Note to applicants who propose to work with human remains: we're interested in understanding how you are constructing the identity of the people whose remains or tissues you are studying and what efforts you and the institutions you are working with have made to engage with descendant communities. [Limit: 500 words]

We aren't interested in replicating the work of your institution's ethics board in asking these questions; instead, we want to encourage you to think carefully about the social, political, and legal implications of your work. We recognize there are no single right answers when it comes to ethical concerns you will be facing. But we would like to see that you have educated yourself on the ethical issues raised by your research and are seeking effective ways of addressing them.

**WHAT DO WE  
NEED TO KNOW  
TO ANSWER  
THIS QUESTION?**

- Ethical issues in anthropological research
- What ethical issues would be important to your informants/interlocutors
- Ethical issues of doing research in certain populations/areas of the world
- Ethical issues discussed in relevant literature
- How would you approach these issues

# Question 5 Strategies

- Use all available space to describe your project's ethical considerations.
- Demonstrate that you've thought about the ethical implications of your research carefully--not only for you, but also for your interlocutors.
- Don't just copy and paste from your IRB.

**After reading question 5, your reviewer should be able to understand how you will approach ethical issues in your research project.**

**Your reviewer should leave question 5 with a clear understanding of how and why your project is ethical.**

# Question 6

What contribution will your project make to one or more traditions of anthropology? Please note that the Foundation's mission is to support innovative research and researchers. We are interested in funding scholars who will do more than simply add to an existing body of knowledge. Describe how your project will bring new insights to the field as a whole and help the discipline reach its full potential. [Limit: 500 words]

The Wenner-Gren Foundation defines anthropology in its broadest terms as a discipline that promotes knowledge about what it means to be human. A successful application is one that emphasizes the contribution of the proposed project to the broader field of anthropology. Be explicit about what your research will add to the wider anthropological conversation and how, by funding your project, we will be developing the capacity of the discipline as a whole.

**WHAT DO WE  
NEED TO  
KNOW TO  
ANSWER THIS  
QUESTION?**

- What unique contributions this project will make to anthropology
- Anthropological debates/areas of study to which this project directly contributes
- What new insights your project brings
- What your project illuminates about the human (and non-human) condition
- Pauses, gaps, openings in current anthropological research

# Question 6 Strategies

- Use all available space to describe your project's unique intervention to the discipline of anthropology.
- Highlight 2-3 specific bodies of literature/"objects of study" your project will inform, complicate, enrich, etc.
- Reference scholars and articulate how your work departs from theirs or general thinking in the fields you identified.
- Your interventions can be methodological (how you conduct the research), theoretical (what theories your work complicates/innovates), and/or analytical (your new way to apply x theory to y research site).
- Don't assume you know what your reviewer knows.
- Don't add new topics.
- Don't say that "nobody" or very few people have done this work before. You may have a reviewer who has done this work.
- Don't use unnecessary jargon.
- Don't have more than 3 areas of intervention for your project.

**After reading question 6, your reviewer should be able to articulate clearly how your work will shift the discipline of anthropology and understand the significance of your work.**

# Budget

We will ask you to submit detailed budgets for Plan A and Plan B. You should develop these budgets based on your answers to Questions 3a and 3b of the Project Description. The maximum award for the Dissertation Fieldwork Grant is US\$25,000. Note: The total amount of your request for Plan A and Plan B budgets must be the same.

Include only the items and amounts you are requesting from Wenner-Gren. If your project depends on funding from more than one source, you must include a brief description of the items not covered by Wenner-Gren's budgets, along with the cost of these items. Remember to indicate in your answer to Project Description Questions 3a and 3b whether your project will be viable if this additional support is not provided.

It is important to include a detailed analysis showing how you have estimated expenditure in each category. You should use the categories listed below where relevant and be detailed in your justification/explanation. Items that are not fully justified will not be considered.

# What's covered?

Research expenses directly related and essential to the project, including travel, living expenses during fieldwork, childcare, research assistance, transcription costs, specialized software, gifts for informants, visa fees and other relevant research expenses.

If you are requesting several field trips, please provide a justification. The Foundation does not fund pilot research or trips back from the field to consult supervisors or colleagues or to carry out preliminary data analysis. Nor do we fund field trips for supervisors to advise or support their PhD students.

If you are requesting funds for research assistance, explain why you need this help. Explain in detail the aspects of the research you will be carrying out and which aspects the research assistant(s) will be responsible for. Provide a justification for the level of payment of the research assistant(s) in the context of the appropriate salary rate for your research site. Clearly specify the number of assistants you are requesting and the amount of time they will work.

# What's *not* covered?

- Your salary and/or additional benefits
- Personal income tax
- Travel, subsistence, insurance and other expenses of family members and other non-project staff accompanying you in the field
- Travel to meetings and/or participation in meetings, if they are not part of your research
- Return trips to consult your supervisor or colleagues
- Institutional overheads or institutional support
- Expenses incurred before the effective date of the grant
- Writing or publication costs, including costs related to page charges for publication in journals or the (re)production of illustrations, photographs and maps.
- Expenses incurred elsewhere than at the research site - rent, mortgage payments, childcare, storage of personal belongings, etc.
- Living expenses while writing the thesis
- Contingency funds or miscellaneous expenses.

Thank  
you!