

Overview: SRCD Pre-doctoral State Policy Fellowship Program

Program Overview:
SRCD Pre-Doctoral State Policy Fellowship sponsored by
the Society for Research in Child Development
in collaboration with
the University-Based Child and Family Policy Consortium

Background: SRCD Federal Post-Doctoral Fellowship Program

In 1978, the Society for Research in Child Development (SRCD) initiated a Federal Policy Fellowship Program. The fellowship provides an immersion experience in policy through placements either in the U.S. Congress or Federal Executive Branch agencies for developmental scientists with doctoral degrees in order learn about policy development, implementation, and evaluation, and to bring their research expertise and knowledge about children, youth, and families to federal policymaking and policy implementation.

The fellowship experience provides a unique opportunity for developmental scientists to learn in greater depth about what research questions are important or salient to policymakers, how to use research to strengthen programs and policies for children and families, and how to achieve effective communication between researchers and policymakers. Interviews with fellowship alumni indicate that SRCD Federal Policy Fellowships are “seminal” and “transformative” experiences.

Alumni go on to pursue careers that bridge research and policy, taking on increasingly senior positions within academe, government, research organizations, foundations, and in applied work. Alumni describe designing research projects to inform public policy, teaching and mentoring students in ways that link research and policy and applying communication skills that they developed as fellows to communicate research findings more effectively in order to inform policy development and program implementation. The alumni report continuing to communicate with policymakers regarding child and family policy and having their research expertise called upon with requests to serve in an advisory capacity for those implementing policies and programs.

SRCD Pre-doctoral State Policy Fellowship Program

In 2017-2018, with funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, SRCD piloted a new Pre-doctoral State Policy Fellowship Program. SRCD’s Science and Social Policy Committee worked closely in the planning and implementation of this new opportunity with the leadership of the University-Based Child and Family Policy Consortium as part of a newly formalized collaborative relationship between SRCD and the Consortium, a group of about 25 university-based programs focusing on child and family policy research.

In the 2019-2020 academic year (from September 1, 2019 through August 31, 2020), with further funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, SRCD will be continuing the SRCD Pre-doctoral State Policy Fellowship Program. SRCD will be awarding up to four part-time SRCD Pre-doctoral State Policy Fellowships with placements in state executive branch

offices that work on state pre-kindergarten programs. SRCD will be seeking candidates with interest in early education, particularly with a focus on the early education of children who are dual language learners. The fellowship must align with fellows' plans for progress towards the doctorate.

The goals of this pre-doctoral fellowship are to provide participants with firsthand experience in state policymaking, program implementation, and evaluation, while also providing state executive branch agencies with greater access to child development research expertise. SRCD Pre-doctoral State Policy Fellows can be involved in bridging research and policy through a variety of responsibilities. Depending on the specific placement, responsibilities might involve, for example, helping to inform the design of a new state pre-kindergarten program; working to strengthen the implementation of an existing program; assisting in the planning or implementation of policy initiatives to improve quality; or assisting in the design, conduct, or analysis of a program evaluation.

Candidates must have completed two years of coursework in a doctoral program with a focus on children's development and must be in good academic standing. Coursework should include a focus on the research on early learning and education. Candidates must confirm with their academic advisor that participation in the program would be in keeping with the requirements of their doctoral program and would not impede progress towards the degree. Participation in the program requires a commitment to participate in a placement in a state executive branch agency for an average of 20 hours per week. Hours per week can vary across the academic year and summer as long as this variation is approved by the placement supervisor and the average is 20 hours per week over the course of the year. Fellowships are immersive experiences and fellows will be expected to be on site at the state agency for most if not all of their work. Candidates must be U.S. citizens and SRCD members.

The intent is for each SRCD Pre-doctoral State Policy Fellow to be supported and guided by both a placement supervisor within the state executive branch agency, as well as an academic mentor at the home institution. The academic mentor for a SRCD Pre-Doctoral State Policy Fellow does not need to be his or her advisor from the graduate student's program. However, if an academic mentor is not the graduate student's advisor, a letter from the program chair will be requested confirming that participation in the fellowship is in keeping with program requirements and steps for progressing towards the doctorate. SRCD expects the SRCD Pre-doctoral State Policy Fellowship Program to provide both the fellow and academic mentor opportunities to gain further experience and insights into the ways in which research and child development expertise can be used to inform policymaking in state executive branch agencies.

State agency placement supervisors should be prepared to utilize the developmental science background of the fellow in the work of the agency related to the state's pre-kindergarten program. In addition, they should be prepared to support the fellow in developing a greater understanding of state policy development, implementation and evaluation through encouraging participation in appropriate meetings and providing opportunities for discussion of questions and reflections. While there should be an idea of projects appropriate for the fellow to assist with initially, it is expected that projects will evolve, and new projects and

opportunities will emerge during the course of the year. The academic mentor should be prepared to meet on a regular basis with the fellow to assist the fellow with issues such as access to relevant research literature and providing a context to discuss how to best formulate a research question or analysis plan. At the start of the fellowship year, the fellow, placement supervisor and academic mentor (fellowship “triad”) will be asked to hold a phone meeting with SRCD staff to go over guidelines on disclosure and confidentiality regarding the work of the state agency, to confirm mutual understanding of roles and expectations, and to touch base about the extent to which the fellowship “triad” would like to schedule periodic communication to complement and extend the regular dyadic communication of the fellow with placement supervisor, and fellow with academic mentor.

SRCD will be a resource for SRCD Pre-doctoral State Policy Fellows throughout the year. SRCD will provide an initial state-specific training as well as training on federal policy development and implementation, monthly seminars held remotely via videoconference, and opportunities to reflect on progress and goals. Fellows will be asked to work with both the academic mentor and state placement supervisor to develop a professional development plan identifying goals for the fellowship year. They will also be asked to complete a brief daily or weekly log of their activities at the placement.

At the end of the year, fellows will be required to complete a portfolio that includes 3-5 selected documents illustrating their different contributions at the placement, with an introductory overview providing context for these contributions and reflecting on how the experience of the fellowship has provided an opportunity to learn about the linkages between research and policy. State placement supervisors will be asked to work with the fellow on selection of the portfolio entries and to indicate the level of confidentiality for each document (whether and how broadly it can be shared). Both the academic mentor and state placement supervisor will be asked to support the fellow in development of the portfolio.

Fellows will be asked to participate in a Capstone Meeting with all of the SRCD State Policy Fellows to present briefly on their portfolios (as appropriate given confidentiality requests by state placement supervisors) and their reflections on the fellowship experience. SRCD Federal Policy Fellows will be invited to participate in the Capstone Meeting as well.

SRCD will be seeking ongoing communication with the fellow, the state placement supervisor, and the academic mentor, with an initial kickoff call with this “triad” of participants, monthly calls with the fellows, and mid-year and end-of-year calls with the state placement supervisor and academic mentor. The final call that will be conducted at the end of the fellowship year will involve separate end-of-year interviews with each member of the triad requesting input on the SRCD State Policy Fellowship.

SRCD Pre-doctoral State Policy Fellows will receive a \$30,000 stipend, provided directly to the fellow. An allocation of up to \$15,000 to defray the cost of tuition and health insurance will be provided either to the academic institution or directly to the fellow, as requested by the fellow. Academic mentors will receive an honorarium of \$5,000 in appreciation for their mentoring of the fellow and input provided to SRCD. Funding will be available for the academic mentor, fellow, and state placement supervisor to attend a national meeting focusing on early

childhood development.

Application Process: Letter of Intent Followed by Invitation to Submit Application

The first step in applying for the SRCD Pre-doctoral State Policy Fellowship will be a brief letter of intent. The letter of intent may be submitted either by the potential academic mentor, or jointly by the pre-doctoral student and the academic mentor. Letters of intent are due by December 21, 2018. Letters of intent should be submitted by email to policyfellowships@srcd.org. A selection committee will then invite full applications from a subset of those who have submitted letters of intent, which will then be due by February 15, 2019. Further details about this program, including application guidelines, are available [here](#).

Staff in state executive branch offices focusing on pre-kindergarten programs are encouraged to reach out to research colleagues about this opportunity for collaborative placement and mentoring of a pre-doctoral fellow. Please contact policyfellowships@srcd.org for assistance in identifying university departments in the state.