CENTER FOR TECH AND CIVIC LIFE

Advancing Research on Mid-Level Election Office Staff

Request for Proposals

Election administration depends on more than chief election officials. Every election is supported by a skilled workforce of professionals responsible for voter registration, election technology, poll worker recruitment and training, ballot processing, logistics, and countless other functions that ensure elections are administered accurately and efficiently.

Among this workforce are mid-level election office staff who serve as the operational backbone of election administration. **Mid-level staff refers to the employees who work between the chief election official and line-level or temporary workers**. These professionals manage critical programs, oversee complex processes, maintain institutional knowledge, train and support colleagues, and provide continuity when offices experience leadership transitions or increased demands. Their expertise is essential to the ability of election offices to deliver reliable services to voters and adapt to evolving challenges.

Over the past decade, researchers have significantly expanded understanding of chief election officials, including their professional backgrounds, leadership experiences, and workforce challenges. This work has strengthened the field of election administration by generating important evidence about election leadership and the challenges facing election officials. However, far less is known about the broader professional workforce that supports election administration every day.

Despite the importance of these roles, fundamental questions remain unanswered. We know relatively little about who serves in mid-level election office positions, how these roles are structured across jurisdictions, what skills and expertise they require, or how individuals enter and advance within election administration careers. We also know less about the organizational practices that help election offices recruit, develop, and retain experienced staff, preserve institutional knowledge, and maintain capacity over time.

Building a stronger election workforce requires a stronger evidence base. Election offices need insights that can help identify effective approaches to recruitment, professional development, workforce planning, and organizational resilience. Researchers and policymakers need better data to understand workforce trends, identify challenges, and evaluate potential solutions.

The Center for Tech and Civic Life (CTCL), through our Research on Electoral and Civic Health program (REACH), seeks to advance this work by supporting research on the people and systems within government that shape public life. In order to cultivate a growing field of scholarship focused on the workforce that sustains election administration, CTCL is making funding available to support individual research projects focused specifically on mid-level election office staff.

CTCL plans to grant $100,000 to projects identified through this request for proposals (RFP). The total number of projects will depend on the number of proposals and the budgets of selected projects. We anticipate that grants will range in size from $10,000 to $40,000, but projects with budgets above or below these levels may be considered. Applicants should submit budgets that are appropriate for the proposed research design, timeline, and anticipated outputs.

We welcome proposals that generate new data, answer foundational questions about the mid-level election workforce, evaluate workforce practices, identify promising approaches, or explore emerging challenges facing election professionals. Research should seek to produce insights that are useful to election administrators, policymakers, researchers, and organizations that support election officials. Projects may represent new research efforts or expand existing research activities where additional support would meaningfully advance understanding of the mid-level election workforce.

Ultimately, CTCL seeks to support research that strengthens understanding of mid-level election staff and provides the evidence needed to build more resilient election offices and a stronger public-sector workforce.

Research Opportunities

CTCL seeks to fund research that advances understanding of the mid-level election workforce and generates actionable insights for the field and those seeking to improve and support it.

The examples below are illustrative rather than exhaustive. CTCL welcomes creative proposals that explore additional questions related to the recruitment, development, support, organization, and long-term sustainability of the mid-level election workforce.

CTCL seeks to fund research that does one or more of the following:

Generates foundational knowledge about the mid-level election workforce.

While mid-level election staff play a central role in election administration, limited data exists about the composition of this workforce, the roles these professionals perform, and how election offices are staffed across jurisdictions.

Research may include, but is not limited to:

- Developing a clearer understanding of who works in mid-level election office positions, including professional backgrounds, demographics, and career experiences.
- Examining how mid-level roles and responsibilities vary across jurisdictions with different sizes, governance structures, and election responsibilities.
- Establishing baseline measures of election office staffing levels, compensation, workforce composition, and organizational capacity.
- Creating new datasets, workforce inventories, or research tools that allow researchers and practitioners to better understand workforce trends over time.

Examines recruitment, retention, and career pathways.

Election offices depend on attracting and retaining skilled professionals, yet relatively little is known about how individuals enter election administration careers or what factors influence long-term retention.

Research may include, but is not limited to:

- Career pathways into and within election administration.

- Recruitment strategies and hiring practices.
- Factors influencing turnover, retention, and burnout.
- Compensation, workload, and workplace conditions.
- Opportunities for advancement and professional growth.

Evaluates approaches to developing and supporting election professionals.

Mid-level election staff often develop specialized expertise through experience, training, and professional networks. More evidence is needed about which approaches best prepare and support these professionals.

Research may include, but is not limited to:

- Evaluations of training, certification, or professional development programs.
- Onboarding and mentorship practices.
- Competencies needed for success in mid-level roles.
- Peer learning and professional networks.
- Lessons from workforce development approaches in other public-sector settings.

Examines how election offices build capacity and resilience.

The ability of election offices to deliver reliable services depends on organizational practices that support continuity, adaptability, and institutional knowledge.

Research may include, but is not limited to:

- Staffing models and workload distribution.
- Succession planning and leadership transitions.
- Knowledge transfer and preservation of institutional memory.
- Cross-training and operational flexibility.
- Organizational practices that strengthen resilience.

Studies the workplace experiences of mid-level election staff.

Understanding the experiences of mid-level professionals can help election offices better support employees and strengthen retention.

Research may include, but is not limited to:

- Workplace culture and employee engagement.

- Threats, harassment, and political pressure.
- Professional identity and job satisfaction.
- Factors influencing long-term commitment to election administration.

Creates resources that strengthen future research and practice.

CTCL encourages projects that build shared, publicly available resources for researchers and practitioners.

Research may include, but is not limited to:

- Publicly available datasets.
- Workforce benchmarks.
- Measures of organizational capacity.
- Evidence-based tools for workforce planning.

CTCL also welcomes innovative proposals that explore emerging issues affecting the mid-level election workforce, including changing workforce expectations, new technologies, evolving professional roles, and lessons from other fields facing similar workforce challenges.

Research Approaches and Project Expectations

CTCL welcomes a range of methodological approaches and encourages researchers to pursue methods that best address their proposed research questions. Research may be national in scope or focus on one or more states, regions, or local jurisdictions. Because the mid-level election workforce operates within complex organizational environments, CTCL encourages research that considers both the experiences of individual staff members and the structures, practices, and systems that shape election offices.

We welcome proposals from academic researchers and research organizations across disciplines, including political science, public administration, public policy, sociology, organizational behavior, psychology, and related fields. CTCL will prioritize projects that:

- Generate new empirical evidence about mid-level election staff and the organizations in which they work.
- Address important gaps in scholarship on election administration and public-sector workforce challenges.
- Incorporate interdisciplinary perspectives, including public administration, organizational behavior, psychology, sociology, economics, and related fields.

- Develop new datasets, measures, or research tools that enable future study.
- Engage election administrators and other practitioners in the research process where appropriate.
- Incorporate the Standards for Excellence from the U.S. Alliance for Election Excellence into their research.
- Produce findings that can inform and educate the field and those seeking to improve and support the field .

Reporting Schedule and Content of Reports

Grantees will participate in one mid-grant check-in and provide one final written report.

Mid-grant check-in:

The grantees will participate in a virtual check-in with CTCL's REACH team approximately midway through the grant period. The check-in will include:

- An update on progress toward research goals and milestones and an update on anticipated research findings and deliverables.

Final report:

Due at the conclusion of the grant period, final reports should include:

- A narrative report describing the research conducted, key findings, and progress toward project goals.
- A summary of plans for sharing findings with election administrators, professional associations, and other relevant practitioners.
- A financial report showing the budget to actual spending.
- A statement certifying that grantees complied with all grant requirements.

Practitioner Engagement and Dissemination of Findings

CTCL believes research is strongest when informed by the experiences and expertise of the people and institutions being studied. Applicants are encouraged to engage election administrators, professional associations, and other relevant practitioners throughout the research process. Engagement may include identifying research questions, informing research design, facilitating access to data or participants, interpreting findings, or supporting the translation of findings into useful resources.

Applicants should describe how they plan to engage practitioners, if applicable, and how that engagement will strengthen the quality, relevance, or impact of the proposed research.

Funded projects will be expected to produce research products that are useful to both academic and practitioner audiences. Final research products should include discussion of implications for election administration and identify actionable insights or recommendations where appropriate.

Eligibility

CTCL is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organized under Internal Revenue Code 501(c)(3). Organizations seeking grants must be 501c(3) organizations or academic institutions. All research supported through this initiative must be nonpartisan and educational in nature, advancing CTCL's charitable and educational purpose. Funds will be distributed as research grants for the selected proposals.

Proposal Evaluation Criteria

Proposals will be reviewed by CTCL staff on the REACH team and will be evaluated based on their alignment with the goals of this initiative and their potential to strengthen understanding of the mid-level election workforce.

Review criteria will include:

- **Responsiveness to the goals of the RFP.** Proposals should address important questions about mid-level election staff and contribute to the generation of actionable, trusted, empirical evidence.
- **Importance and contribution of the research.** Proposals will be evaluated based on the significance of the research questions, the gap in existing knowledge addressed, and the potential contribution to scholarship and practice.
- **Methodological rigor.** Proposals will be evaluated based on the appropriateness and feasibility of the proposed research design, including data sources, methods, and analytical approach.
- **Potential for practical impact.** Proposals will be evaluated based on their ability to produce insights relevant to the field and those seeking to improve and support the field
- **Work plan, timeline, and budget.** Proposals will be evaluated based on whether project activities are clearly described, feasible, and appropriately supported by the requested budget.

- **Relevance to under researched communities.** Proposals will be evaluated based on their potential to generate insights relevant to communities that are under researched, including, but not limited to: voters who speak languages other than English, newly eligible voters, historically disenfranchised voters, voters impacted by the digital divide, voters living with disabilities, etc.
- **Contribution to field-building.** Proposals will be evaluated based on their potential to strengthen future research through new data, research tools, methodologies, or findings that advance understanding of the election workforce.
- **Engagement and dissemination.** Proposals will be evaluated based on the applicant's willingness to share findings publicly. This may include opportunities such as a conference session, virtual briefing or other convening hosted or supported by CTCL.

Proposal Requirements and Application Process

Interested researchers and research teams should submit a full proposal describing the proposed research project, methodology, timeline, research team, and budget. Proposals should be no more than 10 pages (single-spaced, 12-point font, 1-inch margins), excluding references and appendices. Completed proposals should be submitted to research@techandciviclife.org.

Each proposal should include:

- **Project abstract:** A brief abstract of no more than 150 words summarizing the proposed research project, including the research questions, approach, and anticipated contribution.
- **Applicant background:** A description of the researcher(s) and/or research organization, including relevant expertise and experience.
- **Research questions and significance:** A description of the research questions the project will address and why those questions are important.
- **Research approach:** A description of the proposed research design and methodology, including anticipated challenges or limitations.
- **Practitioner engagement and dissemination:** A description of how the research team will engage election practitioners or other relevant stakeholders, if applicable. Applicants should also describe plans for sharing findings.
- **Impact:** A description of the anticipated impact and insights of this work.
- **Work plan and timeline:** A description of the activities required to complete the project, including major milestones, deliverables, and anticipated completion dates.
- **Budget:** A detailed budget describing requested funding and how funds will support the proposed research activities.

Timeline

Proposals must be submitted by November 29, 2026.

Selected projects will be notified by January 15, 2027.

Projects are expected to begin by February 15, 2027 and conclude according to the timeline proposed in the application.

Questions about the application process may be directed to CTCL at research@techandciviclife.org.

About the Center for Tech and Civic Life

The Center for Tech and Civic Life (CTCL) is a nonpartisan nonprofit organization working to catalyze excellent election administration across every jurisdiction in the U.S.

CTCL's Research on Electoral and Civic Health program (REACH) is dedicated to strengthening public service and expanding civic participation. REACH equips policymakers and the public with actionable strategies for building a healthy democracy. Our research elevates the voices of today's voters and provides state and local governments with best practices to better serve their communities. Through nonpartisan partnerships, data-sharing with researchers and journalists, and subgranting, we catalyze further insights from our data that promote civic participation and the delivery of excellent government services.