The Rebecca H. Rhodes African Inclusive Literacy Research Prize

Application Criteria and Guidelines | Round Four

November 2026

Background and Purpose

In memory of inclusive education champion Rebecca H. Rhodes, the Comparative and International Education Society (CIES) and the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) established the *Rebecca H. Rhodes African Inclusive Literacy Research Prize* in 2023 to support research by African scholars and practitioners investigating how to help children and youth with disabilities learn to read and write, and read and write to learn.

UNESCOs estimates that fewer than 10% of children with known disabilities in Africa attend school, and of those, few are learning to read and write (UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report, 2020). Many other children in school have unrecognized disabilities and struggle to meet minimum learning standards. Several factors lead to these challenges in different countries and contexts, and current policies and initiatives struggle to make critical progress. At the same time, many governments, non-governmental/civil society organizations, and communities are earnestly seeking and experimenting with solutions to serve these children and the youth they become, and need more evidence on what is needed and what might work.

While many international agencies and organizations work on inclusive literacy, the most effective and sustainable approaches and national policies must come from a greater understanding of the local challenges, assets, and solutions in each context. African scholars and practitioners are best placed to conduct this research, but African research is severely underfunded. The *Rebecca H. Rhodes African Inclusive Literacy Research Prize* aims to make a modest contribution to address this problem, with a particular focus on the most resource-constrained regions on the continent that also have the greatest potential to make important strides to secure foundational literacy for children and youth with disabilities, namely in West, Central, East, and Southern Africa.

Rebecca Rhodes, who died in 2021, was an outspoken champion for inclusive education. One of the international education development community's brightest lights, Rebecca's intellect, mentorship, humor, and dedication to our field were legendary. She served as team lead for Reading and Literacy at the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and for more than twenty years designed and ran education projects across Africa. From the researchers, educators, children, and families she met and befriended across the continent, Rebecca knew that each child *can* learn, and that every child has the right to learn in order to reach their highest potential, regardless of identity, context, or – critically – disability. Supporting African research on inclusive literacy honors her legacy.

Round Four

The third round of the *Rebecca H. Rhodes African Inclusive Literacy Research Prize* will comprise **one $5,000 USD prize to be made to a single primary applicant – an individual (not an organization) –** to help cover expenses for proposed research related to literacy education (i.e., foundational reading skills, and, optionally, writing/written communication skills) for children or youth with disabilities and/or special education needs. The prize funds may also be used to cover the expenses of other study team members per the eligibility criteria detailed below.

Applications must be received **on or before midnight Pacific Time on Sunday, February 14, 2027** – and encouraged earlier if completed before this date – and must adhere to the eligibility criteria and application guidelines detailed below. Applications received by the deadline *that meet all eligibility criteria* (Section A below) will be evaluated in accordance with the evaluation criteria (Section C). A jury comprised of prize founders and representatives from ADEA, and the CIES Special Interest Groups on Africa, Inclusive Education, and Global Literacy will evaluate all eligible applicants. If one or more applicants meet both the eligibility and evaluation criteria, the winner and any shortlisted finalists will be informed by mid-March 2027 and announced publicly at the 2027 Annual CIES Conference in April; the prize will be awarded in April 2027 pending study approval from an authorized internal review board/body (see more below).

A. Eligibility Criteria and Stipulations

1. **Applicant nationality and residence**: The primary applicant **MUST**:
    a. Hold current citizenship of an African country, with a preference for those from West, East, Central, and/or Southern Africa.
    b. Either currently reside in an African country OR must have resided in an African country for two weeks or more during the past 24 months counting from February 2027 AND demonstrate an intention to work in an African country in the next one-two years, at least.

    The primary applicant can name additional research team members, and there are no restrictions on the nationality or residency status of these others. However, there is a strong preference for research teams composed of African citizen-residents in the majority.

2. **Geography**: The proposed research must be conducted in West, East, Central, or Southern Africa. This can include one or more countries.

3. **Research type**: Research proposed for this prize must be related to the intersection of literacy and education for children or youth (ages 0-21) with disabilities, defined as having any disability or disabilities and/or special education need(s) as defined by the U.S. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) or by the relevant country's own disability/special needs definitions. The proposed research can include exploratory or explanatory research; ongoing and new studies are eligible for support.

4. **Research period**: Research proposed for this prize should be completed and results made available via a report to CIES/ADEA (see section 10) within 18 months of any prize awarded in April 2027.

5. **Researcher profile**: The primary applicant must hold a master's degree or equivalent (in any field) and have at least *started a doctoral program* (in any field). The primary applicant can currently hold any position or employment status (i.e., unaffiliated, researcher for any institution, post-doctoral fellow, professor, NGO practitioner, private sector advisor, or civil servant, etc.) but must be the lead or co-lead/principal investigator for the proposed study. Any additional research team members can be of any academic and professional profile. Early career researchers/practitioners and persons with disabilities and/or special needs are particularly encouraged to apply as the primary applicant. Any reasonable accommodations that might be needed to facilitate applications from persons with disabilities should be requested at the time of the application (see more under Section B below).

6. **Other financial support for this research**: Research proposed for support by this prize can also be supported by other financial sources, but other support must not have already covered all research costs. The proposed research must still face justifiable funding needs at a minimum estimated at the amount of the research prize, and applicants need to show the value-add of this prize. Preference will be given to applicants with little to no other funding for the proposed project.

7. **Internal/Institutional Review Board (IRB) review/approval**: The primary applicant must have, at a minimum, submitted the research proposal/protocol to an IRB or equivalent body with the authority to review and approve research with human subjects and/or in the given education system to be studied (e.g., from a ministry/government agency, university, or other qualified institute) by the time of application and have proof of this pending review. Final award will be contingent on approval from said IRB/body.

8. **Prize use:** Awarded funds can be used to cover time, materials, and transportation for the primary applicant related to research design, data collection, data analysis, written reporting, and, to a more limited degree, presenting findings. Funds can also be used to cover expenses as above for other team members, but any proposed funding for team members not holding African citizenship and residency must not exceed 15% of the total prize amount. Additionally, the prize funding can cover up to a total of $210 USD in conference registration fees and up to a total of $500 USD in travel costs to present findings from the research in a public venue. Prize funding must be used within 18 months of receipt.

9. **Language:** Applications will be accepted in French and English; proposed research can be conducted in any language.

10. **Reporting, accountability, and acknowledgments:** The successful awardee will be required to submit a report in French or English no later than 18 months following receipt of the prize covering a) the study's implemented methodology, its findings, and any use of the findings in practice and/or policy or their potential use; b) financial accounting of how the funds were spent; and c) a listing of any publications and/or presentations (journal articles, blog posts, conference papers, conference or webinar presentations, etc.) produced in relation to the supported study. Additionally, any published research products must acknowledge that the research was supported, in part or whole, by "the CIES/ADEA Rebecca H. Rhodes African Inclusive Literacy Research Prize."

B. Application Instructions

I. Required Application Components

Applicants must submit a short research proposal covering each of the following components. Applications missing any of these components will not be considered.

a. Cover Letter (1 page)

Briefly introduce yourself as the primary applicant and introduce your research team (if applicable). Explain your motivation for applying for this research prize and why you think you will be successful in carrying out the proposed study.

b. Research Proposal (maximum 5 pages)

- **Title** of the research project
- **Problem/aspiration statement**: Clearly define the context, issue and need for this research, showing its relevance for disability inclusion in the area of literacy education and in the given country or region and noting unique contributions of the study in areas and/or contexts that have been insufficiently studied to date.
- **Purpose and research questions**
- **Methodology**: Overview of the proposed research methodology, showing a direct link between the methods and how they will answer the research questions. This must include, at a minimum, the overall research approach and design, sampling, data collection approach, and expected data analysis process.
- **Ethics**: Describe the IRB or equivalent review and safeguards that will be taken during the course of the study, particularly with regard to any direct work with minors and/or people with disabilities as participants of the study. Include IRB/review body approval or proof of pending review in annex per Section (f) below, including any proposals submitted to the review body.
- **Significance and intended application**: Discussion of the study's significance in terms of its intended application and potential impact on disability inclusion in literacy/reading education in African contexts. Should demonstrate a compelling strategy to influence policy and/or practice, which could involve plans for ongoing advocacy, work to inform reform implementation, or scaling up of successful interventions, etc. Include any planned or intended collaboration with relevant stakeholders or organizations.
- **Dissemination**: Brief discussion of the dissemination plan for the study findings, noting specific key target audiences and strategy for reaching them. This should normally include policymakers, educators, practitioners, and the disability community and should be linked to the study's intended application strategy.
- **Timeline:** Overview of the main tasks and calendar to complete the study and at least initial reporting of findings by 18 months (or sooner) from the time of the award in April 2027.

c. Budget Proposal (maximum 1 page)

Provide a detailed breakdown of how these research prize funds will be used. Include expenses such as researcher time (specifying the level of effort and rates for each researcher to receive funding), research materials, data collection, travel (if necessary), and dissemination efforts. Additionally, note any other existing or anticipated sources of funding to this same study, the amount(s) secured and/or anticipated, and the expenses already covered or expected to be covered by other sources. The budget can be presented in a spreadsheet or word-processing file, but all of the numbers and calculations must be correct.

d. CV(s): Of the primary applicant and any other research team members (maximum 7 pages per CV)

Provide the CV for the primary applicant and any other members of the research team, highlighting experience and qualifications relevant to designing and conducting research, the field of education, and disability inclusion. Please also include for the primary applicant and any other proposed team members the nationality/citizenship, current place of residence and duration in this place, and relevant other places and duration of residence over the past 12 months.

e. References

Provide a minimum of two written and signed references from scholars or practitioners who are not part of the proposed study team and who have demonstrated research experience. Each reference must include:

- The referee's name, title, institutional affiliation, email address, and phone number;
- A brief summary of the referee's research experience; and
- A statement of 1–3 paragraphs attesting to the primary applicant's ability and experience to successfully carry out the proposed study, including an explanation of how the referee is familiar with the applicant's research abilities and experience.

f. IRB/Review Body Application/Proof of Pending Review/Approval

Include in the annex proof of the study's review and approval from an IRB or other authorized review body or proof of pending review from such a body and any study proposal submitted for this approval.

g. Acknowledgement of AI use

AI may be used for refining, editing and supporting submissions, but should be acknowledged in the application.

II. Submission Guidelines

All application materials must be submitted in French or English, in a **single file** in Word, Google Docs, or PDF format. All components should be single-spaced, with 1-inch/2.5cm margins using 12pt Times New Roman or font or roughly equivalent size.

There are two options to submit your application:

1) Submit the application via this **Form** (preferred) but requires a google account.
2) Submit the document via email to africaninclusiveliteracyaward@gmail.com with the subject line: "African Inclusive Literacy Research Prize Application: [Primary Applicant Name]."

Any reasonable accommodations that might be needed to facilitate applications from persons with disabilities should be requested at the time of the application in the body of the submission email, or ahead of time as needed via this question intake **Google Form.**

III. Timeline

- **Application Submission Deadline**: Sunday, February 14, 2027; applications completed before this date are encouraged to be submitted as soon as possible.
- **Review and Evaluation Period**: Rolling from receipt of submissions.
- **Prize Notification**: March 2027.

IV. Contact Information for Questions

For any questions regarding the application process or criteria, please submit them **via this Google Form.**

C. Evaluation Criteria

Applications meeting all eligibility criteria and received by the deadline will be evaluated based on the following criteria and their relative importance (weighting) as outlined below.

Most important:

1. **Relevance and importance:** Relevance and alignment of the proposal with the research prize's focus, showing a direct link to disability inclusion for children and/or youth in relation to reading and/or more comprehensive literacy education in Africa. In addition, importance includes the extent to which the proposed research appears to meet a need not yet covered by previous research on the same topic and/or with the same targeting of geography or specific population(s). Preference will be given to research that seeks to better understand and/or promote potential approaches to inclusive literacy education that emanate from and/or are responsive to and appropriate for the local context (social, political, economic, and environmental) and culture.

2. **Clarity, appropriateness, and feasibility of the research design and methodology**: This includes how well the research proposal demonstrates a strong link between the methods proposed and research questions, indicating a high likelihood of ability to answer the questions with the proposed methods. It also relates to the feasibility of the proposed research timeline and the likelihood the research can be completed and reported no later than 18 months from the time of award.

3. **Nature of the research approach**: Preference will be given to research methodologies that use or integrate local approaches and ways of knowing and sense-making.

4. **Ethics**: The extent to which the proposal includes a convincing plan for safeguards and other protections of human subjects as well as other potential participants in the research and dissemination process, particularly in relation to minors and people with disabilities.

5. **Intended application and potential impact:** Clarity and immediacy of the link between the study's focus and policy and/or practice promoting disability-inclusive literacy education for children and/or youth, and the clarity of the plan to influence policy and/or practice.

Moderately important:

6. **Qualifications and expertise of the applicant and research team, if applicable:** Demonstrated past experience, even if minimal, that suggests an ability to carry out the proposed study. CVs and provided references will be used for this purpose; the selection committee may also contact additional persons with knowledge of the applicant's past experience and/or qualifications.

7. **Budget clarity, justification, and feasibility:** Extent to which the budget is clear, sufficiently detailed to understand anticipated expenses, and well-justified. This includes the clarity with which it demonstrates how this prize will support the research project in ways that allow it to be feasibly carried out within the proposed timeline and budget. It also includes how well the budget clarifies and justifies how this funding will complement
- and not duplicate - any other funding sources secured or anticipated.

NB. AI may be used by the award team for organizing, review and scoring of submissions.