



CENTER FOR
DIGITAL
THRIVING



Digital Thriving Fellowship Program

[Call for Applications](#)

The Center for Digital Thriving is a research and innovation center at the Harvard Graduate School of Education based at Project Zero. [Our mission](#) is to create knowledge and research-based resources that help people – especially youth – thrive in a tech-filled world. [Our team](#) is multi-generational and interdisciplinary, and we all share a spirit of **critical optimism** about teens and tech. We pay critical attention to the “both/and” nature of young people’s experiences with tech, acknowledging that it is beneficial and challenging, energizing and exhausting, and is a source of connectedness and loneliness. Getting to the future we want requires an ‘all hands on deck’ approach.

The Center for Digital Thriving – and this Fellows program – is catalyzed by generous founding grants from the Susan Crown Exchange and Pivotal Ventures, a Melinda French Gates Company. We’ve launched this Fellows program in order to:

- Build a community of practice and mutual support with promising and/or emerging leaders
- Incubate new ideas, practices, and tools
- Support relevant research and projects on emerging topics of relevance to thriving in a tech-rich world

Inspired by the ways our own thinking has changed through our work with young people, this year's fellowship theme is: **Mindshifts for Youth Thriving in a Digital World.**

The 2025 Thriving Fellows Program invites changemakers whose work can progress forward-thinking approaches to digital well-being. **We invite applications for fellowship projects that specifically explore, embody, and seek to catalyze mindshifts essential for supporting youth in our digital age. These mindshifts can be aimed at:**

- **Adults who directly serve young people (parents, educators, clinicians, practitioners, youth organizations, etc.)**
- **Adults whose work impacts youth (policymakers, researchers, etc.)**
- **Youth themselves, shifting the ways they think and talk about tech and wellbeing**

Projects could include developing frameworks, classroom resources, clinical practices, apps, podcast series, youth-affirming platforms, or other transformative approaches that build youth agency and contribute to enriching the public conversation about teens, tech, and wellbeing.

Why Mindshifts?

Working with young people has taught us to rethink how we (as adults) think and talk about teens and technology. We've seen time and again that adults' assumptions – often shaped by daunting news headlines about teens and tech – can undermine efforts to help youth, despite good intentions. In our own work, we have discovered the power of embodying mindsets like:

- From Assuming to Asking: Setting aside assumptions about youth tech use with curiosity and a pedagogy of listening.
- From "Referee" to "Coach": Shifting adults' roles from simply enforcing rules to guiding and supporting youth as they navigate digital life.
- From Us-versus-Them to Us-AND-Them: Reframing conversations to acknowledge that tech is not just a challenge for teens, but for all of us as we figure out how to navigate new and constantly changing technologies.
- From Handing Down to All Hands on Deck: partnering with teens in designing tech-related policies and practices to create more meaningful solutions.
- And so much more (see [here](#)).

Mindshifts like these support empowering, empathetic, and collaborative ways of engaging with teens and tech. These are all mindshifts that we've experienced personally through our research that have transformed our thinking and our work with teens.

Who should apply?

We warmly welcome applications from U.S.-based researchers, K-12 educators, designers, policymakers, artists, community leaders, creators, journalists,, and other relevant experts who have a demonstrated history, interest, and passion for advancing youth thriving in a technology-filled world.

When and where?

Fellowships will run from Sept 1, 2025 - May 31, 2026. Fellows can carry out their projects remotely, but will be required to attend 1 - 2 in-person convenings in Cambridge, MA during their fellowship term (travel to Harvard and related expenses will be funded by the Center). Additionally, Fellows will be encouraged to participate in future convenings beyond their fellowship term.

What kind of support?

Fellows will each receive \$25k to support expenses directly related to their fellowship project (e.g., time on your project, supplies, travel and registration fees for conferences/events, etc.) . These fellowships are not a full-time role; most Fellows maintain other employment while doing the fellowship.

What will it look like?

Fellows will carry out their projects as part of the Center for Digital Thriving community of research and innovation. Fellows will share and receive support from other Fellows (fellow Fellows, if you will 😊) and from Center team members. Specific support structures and benefits include:

- Monthly Fellows seminar virtual meeting to incubate ideas and discuss projects in progress with fellows cohort, the Center research team, and guests with relevant expertise
- Opportunities to contribute relevant expertise to the Center's ongoing research and resource development work
- Communications support: As desired, the work of the Fellows will be featured in Center communications (social media, e-newsletters, website)
- Project Zero engagement: All Fellows are invited to engage in PZ Community meetings and other PZ staff events (participation is optional)
- Access to shared office space at Project Zero when in Cambridge
- Access to Harvard Libraries of resources, tools, and publications

What values and principles will guide my experience?

- **"Together we are more"** is a foundational principle for the Center's team. This principle captures our belief that our work is strengthened when we share it with others, collaborate, welcome feedback, and bring diverse perspectives to bear. Virtual convenings with the Fellows cohort and Center team members will be a regular venue for such shared experiences. Fellows will also be expected to participate in in-person events via two trips to Harvard during their fellowship year.
- **"Making our thinking visible"** is a part of how we work – and aspire to work. To that end, Fellows are expected to make their work-in-progress visible to others via at least one public presentation to a key audience at a relevant venue (e.g., K-12 school, university, professional conference, tech company) during their fellowship term.
- Creating content and resources that are **"actually helpful"** is one of our strategic pillars. Fellows are expected to develop at least one translational, public-facing resource or "product" (e.g., publishable report/paper, curriculum/course, publication, podcast, campaign, design framework, app, convening, curriculum/course module, youth-centered program) based on their project.
- **"Expect magic - and chase it!"** Expecting magic can mean envisioning positive change in how we approach digital well-being. Chasing it means leveraging your unique experiences and expertise to turn those visions into reality. We encourage fellows to dream big, stay open/flexible to magical opportunities that come up along the way, and create works that inspire and amazes – just like magic.
- **"Be accountable. Give grace"** is another Center guiding principle. Fellows will share a brief progress report roughly at the midpoint and conclusion of their fellowship, as well as one year later. We know that projects evolve and ideas change as the world and



technologies continue to evolve. Our vision is to give grace with whatever you initially propose: our fellowship is an investment in you as a changemaker for digital thriving.

Timeline

Applications Open	→	February 14, 2025 - March 15, 2025
Applicant Info Session		February 19, 2025 at 1PM PST
Letter of Interest Due	→	March 15, 2025 at 11:59PM PST
Invitations for Full Proposal	→	Mid April 2025
Full Proposals Due	→	May 15, 2025
Decisions	→	June 30, 2025
Fellowship Begins	→	September 1, 2025

Application

Our application process consists of two stages: the Letter of Interest (Stage 1) and the Full Proposal (Stage 2, by invitation only). This two-stage process allows us to review a wider range of initial ideas and then invite the most promising candidates to submit more detailed proposals.

Initial "Letters of Interest" will be accepted until March 15, 2025 at 11:59 p.m. Pacific Time. All materials should be submitted via our application portal in [Qualtrics](#).

Criteria for Fellows selection include:

- Alignment with the year's theme of "**Mindshifts for Youth Thriving in a Digital World**", displaying potential for impact in shifting conversations among adults who serve young people, adults whose work has an impact on young people, and/or among young people themselves
- Applicant's work aligns with the Center's guiding values and approaches: youth-centered, equity-focused, and/or embodies critical optimism about tech (see <https://digitalthriving.gse.harvard.edu/about/>)
- Areas of expertise and interests complement and extend beyond those of the Center's current research and resources (see digitalthriving.gse.harvard.edu).
- Fellows' individual identities enrich diversity of perspectives at the Center and/or represent identities beyond those of the Center's core team



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Notes about **Eligibility**:

- At this time, the program is limited to U.S. residents and projects based in the U.S. International projects or applicants who reside outside the U.S. are not eligible.
- Individuals who are current, full-time students at the undergraduate or graduate levels are not eligible to apply at this time. Part-time students may be eligible, depending on the circumstances; please reach out for more information.
- The Fellowship program is designed for individuals and not teams. If you plan to carry out a project with support from one or more colleagues, one application should be submitted and, if accepted, one person on your team would need to represent the project as the Fellow.

Stage 1: Letter of Interest (Due March 15, 2025 at 11:59 PM PST)

The Letter of Interest is your opportunity to introduce yourself and your project idea. At this stage, we're looking for concise, compelling summaries of your background and proposed work.

Requirements for letter of interest

- I. Upload a current resume or C.V.
- II. Letter of Interest should include the following information
 - A. A brief bio, inspired by our opening Commi'gree: "All our parts are welcomed and respected. We show up as ourselves, not as representatives." Describe your professional background and expertise. Tell us about your personal background and identities that inform *how you show up as yourself* in your work. (250 words max)
 - B. A brief project summary. Describe the project you are proposing for the fellowship. (500 words max)
 1. What kind of mindshift does your project support?
 2. What specific questions will the project help to answer?
 3. What activities will you carry out to answer those questions?
 4. An impact statement: Describe your hoped-for impact with this project and why it is needed.
- III. We will also ask you to provide your contact information and demographics information. All required materials will be submitted in the online application portal via Qualtrics. Letter of Interest (bio and project summaries) will be submitted in plain text in the Qualtrics survey.

Once submitted, our team will review letters of interest. In April, applicants who are selected to proceed to the next phase will be invited to submit a full proposal. We anticipate up to 10-12 applicants will be invited to submit a Full Proposal.



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Expectation for Full proposal

For those applicants invited to submit a full proposal, further details will be provided with the invitations in April. Please note that those invited to submit a full proposal will be asked to submit 1) a personal statement with a project proposal and response to assigned prompts, 2) work samples that are relevant to the proposed project, and 3) estimated budget.

Should you have any questions about the fellows application process, eligibility, or other questions, please reach out to us at digitalthriving@gse.harvard.edu.