

## 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 youth thrive in a tech-filled world – and we believe educators are essential partners in making that possible. [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 can be beneficial and challenging, energizing and exhausting, and a source of connectedness and loneliness. Getting to the future we want requires an “all hands on deck” approach, where we bring both adults and young people to the design table to co-create solutions for digital well-being.

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. Now in its third year, this Fellows program was created 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

The theme for the 2026–27 Digital Thriving Fellows program is **Educating for Digital Agency**. At the Center for Digital Thriving, we define **digital agency** as **having meaningful choice, intentionality, and control over how technology fits into our lives**.

**We invite applications from educators and education professionals (e.g., counselors, tech integration specialists, instructional coaches) whose work with young people embodies and/or explores agency-centered approaches to digital literacy and well-being. Projects could include the design of educational frameworks, practices, pedagogies, curricula, resources, and/or tools that support digital agency among young people and envision what digital agency looks like.**

### Why focus on Digital Agency?

Years of listening to young people has [taught us that their sense of agency](#) can be routinely undercut in a world of ubiquitous 24/7 digital technologies.

- When tech features hold young people’s attention, making it hard to pull away to do other things that they value
- When tech offers up a firehose of social information and young people spiral and stress about what it all means

- When a youth takes care of their own digital footprint but their friends post things they would never want online
- When new technologies like Generative AI create tension with young people's values or other things they find important, like creativity or the environment.

We know that when people have agency, their mental health is better and they're better positioned to manage stressors (Bandura, 2001). When young people's agency is persistently undercut, adults need to pay attention. For more info, see our FAQ on "What do you mean by Educating for Digital Agency".

### **Why focus on Educators?**

We know that educators are uniquely poised to support young people as they grow up with technologies like social media and generative AI. Educators, educational designers, and education leaders and policymakers hold essential expertise in engaging and supporting youth. Through our ongoing conversations in our educator advisory groups and our online course, we are seeing how educators are both well-positioned and excited to support teens' well-being and agenda. We also know that time and resources to do so are not always available. Our Center for Digital Thriving team is excited to support and learn with and from a cohort of practicing educators.

### **Who should apply?**

We warmly welcome applications from educators who meet the following criteria:

- Hold a role as a classroom teacher, school counselor, librarian, educational technologist, curriculum designer, school leader, afterschool educators (e.g. afterschool programs, coaches, etc.), and/or policymaker
- Work in K12 schools or other learning contexts in the U.S. that serve children and/or adolescents
- 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, 2026 – May 31, 2027. 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
- Mentorship pod structures to provide focused feedback and support across the year
- 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	→	<b>February 13 2026 – March 9, 2026</b>
Applicant Info Session		<b>February 20, 2026 at 1PM EST (10 AM PST)</b>
Letter of Interest Due	→	<b>March 9, 2026 at 11:59PM PST</b>
Invitations for Full Proposal	→	<b>Early April 2026</b>
Full Proposals Due	→	<b>Early May 2026</b>
Decisions	→	<b>June 30, 2026</b>
Fellowship Begins	→	<b>September 1, 2026</b>

## 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 project ideas and then invite the most promising candidates to submit more detailed proposals.

Initial “Letters of Interest” will be accepted **until March 9, 2026 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 Educating for Digital Agency
- 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](https://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

#### 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 9, 2026 at 11:59 PM PST**)

The Letter of Interest is your opportunity to introduce yourself and your fellowship 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 Community Agreement: "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. Describe how the concept of digital agency fits into your current educational work or thinking.
    2. How has the concept of agency influenced how you interact with young people related to tech?
    3. What do you propose to do to support or deepen young people's sense of agency in a world of evolving digital technologies? What activities will you carry out?
    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 demographic 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.

#### 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 come to our [info session](#) on **Feb 20, 2026 at 1:00 p.m. ET (10 a.m. PT)**.