

2014 Call for Proposals

Concept Paper Deadline: January 7, 2015



Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

HEALTHY EATING RESEARCH SPECIAL SOLICITATION IN TWO CHILDHOOD OBESITY PREVENTION AREAS: *HEALTHY FOOD RETAIL AND EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION*

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE:

Childhood obesity is one of the most serious threats to the health of our nation. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF), through its commitment to reversing the childhood obesity epidemic, has provided national leadership in efforts to achieve a healthy weight for all of our nation's children, especially in lower-income communities and communities of color. This landmark work continues today as part of its vision to build a national Culture of Health that will enable all Americans to live longer and healthier lives, now and for generations to come.

Healthy Eating Research: Building Evidence to Prevent Childhood Obesity is an RWJF national program. The program supports research on environmental and policy strategies with strong potential to promote healthy eating among children to prevent childhood obesity, especially among groups at highest risk for obesity: Black, Latino, American Indian, Asian/Pacific Islander children, and children who live in lower-income communities. Findings are expected to advance RWJF's efforts to reverse the childhood obesity epidemic and help all children achieve a healthy weight.

This call for proposals (CFP) focuses on childhood obesity prevention efforts in two settings:

- Healthy Food Retail
- Early Care and Education

THE PROGRAM:

Healthy Eating Research program goals are to:

- establish a research base for policy and environmental factors that influence healthy eating and body weight in children, as well as effective policy and environmental strategies for reversing the childhood obesity epidemic;
- build a vibrant, multidisciplinary field of research and a diverse network of researchers; and
- ensure that findings are communicated effectively to inform policies and guide the development of effective solutions.

Healthy Eating Research issues CFPs to solicit scientifically rigorous, solution-oriented proposals from investigators representing diverse disciplines and backgrounds. The program's overall aims are to identify strategies likely to have important population-level impacts and to provide advocates, decision-makers, and policymakers with evidence to guide and accelerate effective actions to reverse the childhood obesity epidemic. You can learn more about *Healthy Eating Research* at www.healthyeatingresearch.org.

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The primary goal of this CFP is to fund and communicate strategic and timely research addressing key evidence needed to advance RWJF's childhood obesity prevention priorities. A strong and credible evidence base and the ability to identify effective (and ineffective) policies and environmental strategies in a timely manner are essential for effective advocacy to reverse the childhood obesity epidemic and close disparity gaps. *Healthy Eating Research* relies on researchers' creativity and their responsiveness to the needs of advocates, decision-makers, and policymakers to generate innovative, timely, solution-oriented, and policy-relevant studies.

Research Topics

This CFP focuses on studies of policy and environmental strategies in two strategic areas outlined below. All proposed studies in response to this CFP must address *one* of the two areas.

- *Healthy Food Retail*

The food retail sector consists of multiple retail channels including grocery stores, supermarkets, supercenters, convenience stores, corner stores, bodegas, farmers' markets, dollar stores, drug stores, and online food shopping. Restaurants and cafeterias are considered part of the food service sector and are not included in this CFP. The food retail sector is critically important, as 70 percent of daily calories consumed by children are purchased at a store. Healthy food marketing strategies in retail settings offer the opportunity to influence purchases by families with children. Research in real-world settings is needed to:

- identify the most effective strategies to shift consumers away from purchasing higher-calorie, energy-dense foods and beverages toward purchasing healthier, lower-calorie foods and beverages;
- test the impact of interventions that seek to improve the appeal, affordability, and image of healthy products, including strategies such as product placement, pricing, labeling, promotions, and incentives; and assess how they may differ among racial and ethnic populations and across multiple retail channels. Researchers are encouraged to collaborate with retailers and other retail channel leaders to design, test, and evaluate promising strategies that drive consumer demand for healthier, lower-calorie purchases, especially in those retail channels that serve lower-income and racial and ethnic populations at highest risk for obesity; and
- better understand how families with children make food purchasing decisions across food retail channels.

- *Early Care and Education*

Today, nearly one in five children ages 2 to 5 in the United States is overweight or obese. Of these young children, roughly three-quarters spend time in some form of child-care arrangement such as child-care centers and family child-care homes, preschools, Head Start programs, and pre-kindergarten programs. These early care and education (ECE) settings offer important opportunities to promote healthy eating at a young age, given that children consume a significant portion of their daily calories and spend many of their waking hours in such settings. Taste preferences and dietary habits are also formed early in life, making these settings and this developmental period critical for

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intervention. Research is needed to strengthen the foundation for early childhood obesity prevention in order to accelerate the adoption and spread of evidence-based policies and best practices. Further research is needed to:

- develop, test, and evaluate culturally appropriate and tailored obesity prevention interventions that include environmental and/or policy initiatives that promote healthier meals and snacks in age-appropriate portions for preschool-aged children, with emphasis on reaching lower-income and racial and ethnic minority communities;
- evaluate the impact of policies, regulations, and support for child-care programs at the federal, state, and local level on the feeding practices, food preferences, eating behaviors, and weight status of young children; and
- evaluate intervention strategies on how to use child-care settings as access points to create linkages to parents, caretakers, and health care providers as partners in health promotion.

Types of Studies

Studies could include any of the following: small-scale pilot studies, secondary analyses of existing datasets, pretest or baseline evaluations prior to planned environmental or policy changes, evaluations of planned interventions or natural experiments, retrospective analyses of apparent policy or environmental change successes, economic or financial studies, statistical modeling studies, policy and legal analyses, quantitative meta-analyses, and in-depth case studies.

Overall Study Guidelines

- Given the limited scope and short duration of these projects, measures of changes in weight or BMI are not required, but are encouraged if data are available. Objective measures of food sales, purchases, intake, or estimated reductions in average daily caloric intake are encouraged. Variables likely to affect the impact and feasibility of the changes studied (e.g., demographics, community characteristics, and other contextual variables) should be assessed. Though not required, applicants are encouraged to search the NCCOR Registry of Measures to identify possible measures, available at <http://tools.nccor.org/measures/>.
- Target populations include children and adolescents ages 2 to 19 and their families, especially in lower-income and racial and ethnic populations at highest risk for obesity.
- Studies focused solely on behavior change at the individual level or nutrition education interventions will not be funded. However, studies could compare the impact of environmental, policy, or systems changes with or without nutrition education, or identify the most effective components of a multicomponent intervention.
- Studies conducted in real-world settings are preferred, especially those that impact lower-income and racial and ethnic minority populations. Researchers conducting healthy food retail studies in stores are strongly encouraged to partner with retailers. If an investigator is invited to submit a full proposal, a letter of support will be needed from the retail channel partner. Similarly, if research is being conducted in an early care and education setting, a letter of support will be needed from the participating child-care organization at the full proposal stage.

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- Researchers should seek input from relevant stakeholders—such as retail and child-care leaders, advocates, policymakers, parents, or youth—to develop feasible, cost-effective, and policy-relevant studies. Proposals also need to describe the dissemination plans to communicate the research results to key stakeholders, advocates, decision-makers, and policymakers.
- Awards will be made directly to the principal investigator's home institution. Indirect costs (up to 12%) are included in the total project awards.
- Proposed projects may be conducted as supplements to existing studies. Project co-funding is welcome; sources and amounts must be fully described in the proposal. The added value of the proposed research grant should be clearly described.

TOTAL AWARDS:

Approximately \$425,000 will be awarded under this CFP. Awards up to 12 months and up to \$75,000 each will be funded through this special solicitation. Applicants are strongly encouraged to apply for projects that require between \$25,000 and \$75,000 to complete. Approximately two-thirds of the funds available will be allocated to studies focused on healthy food retail and one-third will be allocated to studies focused on early care and education.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA:

- Preference will be given to applicants that are either public entities or nonprofit organizations that are tax-exempt under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code and are not private foundations or Type III supporting organizations.
- Applicant organizations must be based in the United States or its territories.
- The focus of this program is the United States; studies in other countries will be considered only to the extent that they may directly inform U.S. policy.

DIVERSITY STATEMENT:

Consistent with RWJF values, this program embraces diversity and inclusion across multiple dimensions, such as race, ethnicity, gender, disability, age, and socioeconomic status. We strongly encourage applications from investigators who will help us expand the perspectives and experiences we bring to our work. We believe that the more we include diverse perspectives and experiences in our work, the more successful we will be as we strive together to build a Culture of Health, enabling all in our diverse society to lead healthier lives, now, and for generations to come.

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SELECTION CRITERIA:

Invited full proposals will be reviewed by a committee composed of national program office faculty, a national advisory committee, other expert reviewers, and RWJF program staff. The committee will use the following criteria to assess proposals:

- Ability to identify policies, systems, and environmental change strategies that hold strong potential to accelerate the nation's efforts to reverse the childhood obesity epidemic.
- Relevance and timeliness of the study to inform policy action or larger-scale systems changes.
- Relevance to the needs of lower-income communities and children in lower-income and racial and ethnic minority populations at highest risk for obesity.
- Degree to which the strategies are widely applicable, feasible, and sustainable.
- Clarity of study goals, hypotheses, methods, and outcomes.
- Use of a clear theoretical framework, conceptual model, or rationale.
- Scientific rigor of proposed research and analytic methods, including quality of the measures and data to be used.
- Research qualifications and experience of the investigator(s) and appropriateness of disciplines and perspectives represented.
- Collaboration with retail channels or child-care entities.
- Appropriateness of proposed budget and project timeline. The timeline should include target dates for completing the research phase, data analyses, and availability of final results for communication and dissemination.
- Plans for communicating and disseminating research results to key audiences, such as advocates, decision-makers, policymakers, and scientists (e.g., briefs and reports, formal presentations, stakeholder convenings, Web-based dissemination efforts, peer-reviewed papers).

EVALUATION AND MONITORING:

As part of the application process, finalists will be asked to disclose any financial arrangements (e.g., fees, funding, employment, stock holdings) or relationships that might compromise the credibility or perceived credibility of the findings, mirroring the types of disclosure requested by leading journals.

Research teams are required to submit periodic information needed for overall project performance monitoring and management. Research teams are expected to meet requirements for the submission of narrative reports. Research teams also will be required to respond to periodic surveys and other communications sent from *Healthy Eating Research*.

RWJF may select and fund an independent research group to conduct an evaluation of the *Healthy Eating Research* program. As a condition of accepting RWJF funds, we require research teams to provide information requested for program evaluation activities.

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USE OF GRANT FUNDS:

Grant funds may be used for project staff salaries, consultant fees, data collection and analysis, meetings, supplies, project-related travel, and other direct project expenses, including a limited amount of equipment essential to the project. In keeping with RWJF policy, funds may *not* be used to subsidize individuals for the costs of their health care, to support clinical trials of unapproved drugs or devices, to construct or renovate facilities, for lobbying, for political activities, or as a substitute for funds currently being used to support similar activities.

HOW TO APPLY:

Proposals for this solicitation must be submitted through the RWJF online system. Visit www.rwjf.org/cfp/herss and click on the *Apply Online* link for this solicitation. If you have not already done so, you will be required to register at MyRWJF at <http://my.rwjf.org> before you begin the application process.

There are two stages in the application process:

Stage 1: Concept Paper

All applicants must submit: 1) a concept paper narrative of up to two pages (1.5 line spacing) describing the study, and 2) bio sketches for key personnel. Applicants must follow the instructions and use the templates provided in the RWJF online system.

Stage 2: Full Proposals (if invited)

Selected Stage 1 applicants will be invited to submit a full proposal of up to 10 pages (1.5 line spacing) accompanied by a budget and budget narrative and additional supporting documents, including letters of support (if applicable). Applicants must follow the instructions and use the templates provided in the RWJF online system.

All proposals must be submitted through the RWJF online system. Applicants should log in to the system and familiarize themselves with online submission requirements well before the final submission deadline. Program staff may not be able to assist all applicants in the final 24 hours before the submission deadline. In fairness to all applicants, the program will not accept late proposals.

Please direct inquiries as follows:

For Healthy Food Retail proposals, contact:

Laura Klein, MPH, *senior research coordinator*

Phone: (800) 578-8636

Email: healthyeating@umn.edu

For Early Care and Education proposals, contact:

Lesley Schmidt Sindberg, MPH, *program coordinator*

Phone: (800) 578-8636

Email: healthyeating@umn.edu

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PROGRAM DIRECTION:

Direction and technical assistance for this program are provided by Duke University and the University of Minnesota, which serve as the national program office:

Healthy Eating Research

Phone: (800) 578-8636

Email: healthyeating@umn.edu

Website: www.healthyeatingresearch.org

Responsible staff members at the national program office are:

- Mary Story, PhD, RD, *program director*
- Karen M. Kaphingst, MPH, *deputy director*

Responsible staff members at the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation are:

- Jamie Bussel, MPH, *program officer*
- Tina Kauh, MS, PhD, *program officer*
- Ginny Ehrlich, DEd, MS, MPH, *team director, Childhood Obesity*
- Naomi Meier-Kriesche, *program financial analyst*

KEY DATES AND DEADLINES:

December 3, 2014

RWJF online system for concept papers will be available to applicants.*

January 7, 2015 (3 p.m. ET)

Deadline for receipt of concept papers.*

January 21, 2015

Applicants will be contacted by email and informed as to whether or not they are invited to submit a full proposal. Invited full proposals must be submitted via the RWJF online system.*

March 4, 2015 (3 p.m. ET)

Deadline for receipt of invited full proposals.*

Late April 2015

Notification of finalists.

Summer 2015

Projects begin.

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ABOUT THE ROBERT WOOD JOHNSON FOUNDATION

For more than 40 years the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has worked to improve health and health care. We are striving to build a national Culture of Health that will enable all to live longer, healthier lives now and for generations to come. For more information, visit www.rwjf.org. Follow the Foundation on Twitter at www.rwjf.org/twitter or on Facebook at www.rwjf.org/facebook.

Sign up to receive email alerts on upcoming calls for proposals at www.rwjf.org/funding.

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