HEALTHY EATING RESEARCH: SPECIAL SOLICITATION ON BEVERAGE CONSUMPTION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

Background

Optimal nutrition and a healthy weight are critical for child health and well-being across a wide range of dimensions, including physical, socioemotional, and cognitive development. Proper nutrition is particularly important during a child’s early years, as key nutrients are critical for neurodevelopment and long-term physical and mental health. Inadequate nutrition, poor diet quality, and obesity are most pronounced in lower-income communities that lack access to healthy foods or experience an overabundance of unhealthy foods, as well as in households with limited funds to buy or time to prepare healthful foods.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) has provided national leadership in efforts to improve the health of all of our nation’s children, especially those 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 enables everyone in our diverse society to lead healthier lives now and for generations to come.

Healthy Eating Research(HER) is a RWJF national program, which supports research on policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) strategies with strong potential to promote the health and well-being of children at a population-level. Specifically, HER aims to help all children achieve optimal nutrition and a healthy weight. HER issues calls for proposals (CFP) to solicit scientifically rigorous, solution-oriented proposals from investigators representing diverse disciplines and backgrounds.

The Program

Healthy Eating Research program goals are to:

* Establish a research base for PSE strategies that promote the health and well-being of children at the population level, primarily through achieving healthy dietary patterns without excess weight gain.
* Build a vibrant, multidisciplinary field of research and a diverse network of researchers.
* Ensure that findings are communicated effectively to inform the development of nutrition and obesity-related solutions in the form of PSE changes, with a particular focus on promoting health equity.

You can learn more about Healthy Eating Research at [www.healthyeatingresearch.org](http://www.healthyeatingresearch.org).

*Funding Opportunity*

**This CFP focuses exclusively on research that informs the development of policy and environmental strategies that:**

**1. decrease consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs) and/or**

**2. increase access to and consumption of safe water**

**among 0- to 5-year-olds in the United States, with a priority on lower-income and racial and ethnic minority populations that are at-risk for poor nutrition and obesity.**

Findings are expected to advance RWJF’s efforts to ensure that all children and their families have the opportunity and resources to experience the best physical, social, and emotional health possible, promote health equity, and build a Culture of Health. Approximately $2.1 million will be awarded under this CFP, resulting in the funding of about seven grants. Each grant will award up to $300,000 for up to 24 months.

*Priority Topic Areas*

RWJF funds efforts to change public and institutional policies, systems, and environments in ways that promote improved nutrition, dietary patterns, and healthy weight among children. Currently, RWJF is focused on PSE strategies that support parents’ and caregivers’ ability to provide environments that nurture and foster children’s physical, socioemotional, and cognitive health and well-being. RWJF is particularly interested in supporting efforts that will impact those at highest risk of poor health and well-being outcomes (e.g., black, Latino, American Indian/Alaska Natives, Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders; children living in lower-income communities), with the aim of promoting health equity.

Research has shown that young children’s consumption of SSBs is mostly in the form of fruit-flavored drinks (beverages that are fruit flavored or containing less than 100 percent juice). In addition, studies have also found disparities in SSB intake, including fruit drinks, and drinking water access and intake across ethnic/racial groups and income levels. Given these trends and the importance of the early childhood time frame for developing lifelong dietary and healthy behaviors, through this CFP, RWJF is interested in improving the field’s understanding of effective or promising PSE strategies to: (1) reduce SSB consumption (**particularly, fruit drinks**); and/or (2) increase safe drinking water access and intake, among 0- to 5-year-olds.

All proposed studies must have a clear impact on 0- to 5-year-olds and address one or more of the following topic areas (topics are not in any particular order). Also, all proposed studies must have the potential to impact the groups at the highest risk for obesity and poor nutrition, such as black, Latino,

American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander populations, and children living in lower-income communities. RWJF is interested in research exploring the following topics:

1. Ways to leverage federal, state, or local nutrition and food assistance policies
2. Marketing practices and policies, including pricing, promotion, placement, and on-package labeling, etc.
3. Messaging campaigns for discouraging SSB consumption and encouraging potable water consumption
4. How changes to SSB and/or water consumption impact changes in overall beverage consumption patterns
5. Settings with the greatest potential for decreasing SSB and increasing water consumption at the population-level
6. Access to safe drinking water and/or perception of tap water safety

These priority topic areas emerged from a six-month long project led by HER to develop a national research agenda to reduce the consumption of SSBs and increase access to and consumption of safe water among 0- to 5-year-olds. **For more information regarding the development of the national research agenda, the full list of key issue areas, and the specific research questions within each of these areas that may be of interest to RWJF and HER, please see the full research agenda here:**

**<https://healthyeatingresearch.org/research/national-research-agenda-zero-to-five-beverage-consumption/>**

We acknowledge that access to safe water is not universal; however, it is beyond the scope of HER and this CFP to address issues such as infrastructure, plumbing, and water remediation. We also acknowledge that nutrition needs—and thus beverage recommendations—vary during the period of early childhood and are often tied to important developmental milestones. For example, it is widely accepted that children should not consume plain drinking water prior to the introduction of complementary foods. However, for ease of writing, we will refer to this group as 0–5-year-olds throughout the CFP.

Our goal is to accelerate evidence-based, strategic and actionable solutions for improving children’s weight and nutrition, diet quality, and food access. As noted earlier, we are particularly interested in identifying PSE strategies with the greatest potential to impact young children at greatest risk for poor diet/nutrition. Thus, research studies funded through this CFP must make a clear connection between the study’s PSE strategies and specific indicators of beverage access, purchases, intake, or child health and well-being for the previously listed priority populations.

*Types of Studies*

Studies could include any of the following: experimental or quasi-experimental studies; secondary analyses of existing datasets; evaluations of PSE interventions or natural experiments; retrospective analyses of PSE change successes; case studies; financial, economic, or cost-effectiveness studies; health impact assessments; statistical modeling or simulation studies; policy and legal analyses to identify or evaluate promising PSE interventions; and quantitative meta-analyses.

*Overall Study Guidelines*

* This CFP focuses exclusively on studies of PSE strategies to decrease consumption of SSBs and increase access to and consumption of safe water among 0- to 5-year-olds in the United States. All proposed studies in response to this CFP must have a clear impact on 0- to 5-year-olds. However, studies do not have to include the entire age range of 0 to 5, and could focus only on one age group such as preschool-age children.
* Research studies funded through this CFP must make a clear connection between the study’s PSE strategies and specific indicators of beverage access, purchases, intake or child health and well-being.
* Target populations are infants and young children, 0- to 5-year-olds, from lower-income communities and racial and ethnic populations at highest risk for obesity and nutrition-related health disparities.
* Within the target population, RWJF is particularly interested in supporting efforts that will impact those at highest risk for poor health and well-being outcomes (e.g., black, Latino, American Indian/Alaska Natives, Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders; children living in lower-income rural communities), with the aim of promoting health equity. This work ranges from changes at the state or national level to those taking place at the organizational or community levels. Proposals focusing on these areas and having the potential to reach those in greatest need will be given priority, especially if strategies have the potential to be replicated and scaled up if effective.
* Studies focused solely on behavior change at the individual level or nutrition education interventions ***will not*** be funded unless they have strong likelihood for PSE impact. For these proposals to be considered, applicants will need to demonstrate proof of concept in the concept paper stage.
* Studies conducted in real-world settings are preferred. Experimental studies or laboratory simulations must show promise for generalization to real-world settings, especially in lower-income and racial and ethnic minority populations.
* Researchers should seek input from key stakeholders—such as advocates, policymakers, school or community leaders, parents, or children—in order to develop feasible, relevant and sustainable studies.
* Proposals should describe the strategies that will be used to communicate research results. Applicants must include at least one representative of the community or stakeholder group targeted (e.g., advocate, community leader, policymaker) as an ongoing adviser. Specific plans should be outlined for communicating and disseminating research results to advocates, decision-makers, policymakers, relevant stakeholders, and scientists.
* **When developing the proposal, it is important to take into account that grant extensions and no cost extensions are not allowed and an exception would be granted only under rare circumstances.** Reasons such as IRB or recruitment taking longer than expected will not be approved. Therefore, researchers need to be realistic (and not idealistic) in what can be achieved within the time frame of the grant.
* 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 $2.1 million will be awarded under this CFP, resulting in the funding of about seven grants. Each grant will award up to $300,000 for up to 24 months.

# **Foundation funded**

# The grant opportunity outlined in the call for proposals is contingent upon final funding confirmation from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation for such grants.

# **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. The Foundation may require additional documentation.
* 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.

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# **Our Equity, Diversity, and inclusion commitment**

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation is committed to building a Culture of Health that provides everyone in America a fair and just opportunity for health and well-being. Achieving this goal requires focus on equity, diversity, and inclusion. To that end, we are committed to fostering diverse perspectives. We recognize that individuals’ perspectives are shaped by a host of factors, such as their race, ethnicity, gender, physical and mental ability, age, socioeconomic status, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, familial status, education, religion, legal status, military service, political affiliation, geography, and other personal and professional experiences.

We know that the presence of diverse perspectives alone is not sufficient. Therefore, we also are committed to creating inclusive environments where all individuals are encouraged to share their perspectives and experiences. We believe that only through valuing our differences and similarities, and remaining vigilant in advancing equity, will we be able to maintain an equitable workplace and actively pursue equity in all aspects of our work. We commit to being continuous learners and working alongside others to cultivate equity, diversity, and inclusion.

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# **Selection Criteria**

Once invited, full proposals will be reviewed by a committee composed of HER national program office staff, national advisory committee members, other expert reviewers by invitation, and RWJF senior staff. The committee will use the following criteria to assess proposals:

* Ability to identify and assess PSE strategies that promote the health and well-being of children at the population-level, specifically focused on strategies to decrease consumption of SSBs and increase access to and consumption of safe water among 0- to 5-year-olds in the United States;
* Relevance and timeliness of the study to accelerate evidence-based and equitable PSE solutions for improving children’s nutrition, diet quality, and weight;
* Relevance to the needs of children in lower-income communities and racial and ethnic minority populations at highest risk for disparities in beverage consumption and health and well-being outcomes (specifically, we will assess whether the proposal’s significance, specific aims, research design and methods, and communications plan take into account intention, ability, and approaches to address health disparities/health equity and whether the research team, including consultants, has sufficient experience in research that addresses disparities or equity issues or with the populations and settings of interest);
* 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;
* Appropriateness of proposed budget and project timeline, including the realistic feasibility of completing the project within the specified funding period;
* Approaches for communicating and disseminating research results to advocates, decision-makers, policymakers, and scientists that go beyond an exclusive focus on peer-reviewed publications and/or academic conference presentations; and
* The presence of any real or perceived conflict of interest (either financial or other personal considerations).

A national advisory committee reviewsHealthy Eating Researchproposals and makes funding recommendations to Foundation staff. All funding decisions are made by RWJF. RWJF does not provide individual critiques of proposals submitted.

# **Evaluation and Monitoring**

An independent research group selected and funded by RWJF will conduct an evaluation of the program. As a condition of accepting RWJF funds, we require grantees to participate in the evaluation.

Grantees are expected to meet RWJF requirements for the submission of narrative and financial reports, as well as periodic information needed for overall project performance monitoring and management. We may ask project directors to participate in periodic meetings and give progress reports on their grants. At the close of each grant, the lead agency is expected to provide a written report on the project and its findings suitable for wide dissemination.

# **Applicant Survey Process**

For selected programs, the project director of the proposal will be contacted after the submission deadline by SSRS, an independent research firm. The project director will be asked to complete a brief, online survey about the proposal process and applicant characteristics. This voluntary questionnaire will take no more than 15 minutes to complete. Responses provided to SSRS will not impact the funding decision for your proposal in any way.

SSRS will protect the confidentiality of your responses. RWJF will not receive any data that links your name with your survey responses.

# **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, grant 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**

Applications for this solicitation must be submitted electronically via the RWJF online system.

To apply for this special solicitation, visit [www.rwjf.org/cfp/ecss-herss](https://www.rwjf.org/cfp/ecss-herss) and click the “Apply Online” link.

If you have not already done so, you will be required to register at [my.rwjf.org](http://my.rwjf.org/)before you begin the application process. 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. There are two phases in the application process:

*Phase 1: Concept Paper*

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

*Phase 2: Full Proposals (if invited)*

Selected Phase 1 applicants will be invited to submit a full proposal narrative of up to 15 pages (1.5 line spacing) accompanied by a budget and budget narrative and additional supporting documents. Applicants must follow the instructions and use the templates provided in the RWJF online system.

Please see the table below for a complete list of key dates and deadlines for the two phases.

Please direct inquiries to:

**Healthy Eating Research**

Phone: (800) 578-8636

Email: [healthyeating@duke.edu](mailto:healthyeating@duke.edu)

### Late Submissions

RWJF will accept only those proposals that are completed/submitted at the time of the deadline. Because one of our Guiding Principles is to treat everyone with fairness and respect, RWJF’s deadline policy applies to all applicants. Applicants are expected to notify the program administrator immediately if experiencing difficulty with the online proposal system that may interfere with a timely submission. To do so, click on the “Contact Us” link found in the “Resources” area on the left side of most screens within the online proposal site. We encourage you to submit your proposal in advance of the deadline so that any unforeseen difficulties, e.g., technical problems, may be addressed well before the deadline.

RWJF does not provide individual critiques of proposals submitted.

This program has a national advisory committee that makes recommendations about grants to Foundation staff. RWJF will make all final grant decisions.

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# **Program Direction**

Direction and technical assistance for this program is provided by Duke University, which serves as the national program office located at:

**Healthy Eating Research**

Duke Global Health Institute

310 Trent Drive

Duke Box 90519

Durham, NC 27708

Phone: (800) 578-8636

Email: [healthyeating@duke.edu](mailto:healthyeating@duke.edu)

Website: [www.healthyeatingresearch.org](http://www.healthyeatingresearch.org)

Responsible staff members at the national program officer are:

* Mary Story, PhD, RD, *director*
* Megan Lott, MPH, RD, *deputy director*

Responsible staff members at the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation are:

* Tina Kauh, PhD, MS, *senior program officer*
* Jennifer M. Ng’andu, *interim managing director, Healthy Children, Healthy Weight*
* Jennie Day-Burget, *communications officer*
* Jan Mihalow, *senior program financial analyst*

# **Key Dates and Deadlines**

* **September 5–October 3, 2018 (3 p.m. ET)**  
  RWJF online system available to applicants for concept papers.
* **October 3, 2018 (3 p.m. ET)**  
  Deadline for receipt of concept papers. Those submitted after the deadline will not be reviewed.
* **October 17, 2018**  
  Applicants notified whether they are invited to submit a full proposal.
* **November 28, 2018 (3 p.m. ET)**  
  Deadline for receipt of invited full proposals. Those submitted after the deadline will not be reviewed.\*
* **January 9, 2019**  
  Notification of finalists.
* **March 1, 2019**  
  Awards begin.

\*All proposals for this solicitation must be submitted via the RWJF online system. If you have not already done so, you will be required to register at [my.rwjf.org](http://my.rwjf.org/) before you begin the application process. All applicants should log in to the system and familiarize themselves with online proposal requirements well before the final submission deadline. Staff may not be able to assist all applicants in the final 24 hours before the submission deadline.

# **About the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation**

For more than 45 years the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has worked to improve health and health care. We are working alongside others to build a national Culture of Health that provides everyone in America a fair and just opportunity for health and well-being. For more information, visit [rwjf.org](https://www.rwjf.org). Follow the Foundation on Twitter at [www.rwjf.org/twitter](http://www.rwjf.org/twitter)or on Facebook at [www.rwjf.org/facebook](http://www.rwjf.org/facebook).

Sign up to receive email alerts on upcoming calls for proposals at [http://www.rwjf.org/manage-your-subscriptions.html](http://www.rwjf.org/en/manage-your-subscriptions.html)*.*

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