

2023 Call for Proposals

Concept Paper Deadline: April 5, 2023 (3 p.m. ET)
Full Proposal Deadline (by invitation only): July 12, 2023 (3 p.m. ET)



Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

HEALTHY EATING RESEARCH

Addressing Supportive Family Policies and Programs so All Children and Adolescents in the U.S. Can Thrive: Focus on Access to Affordable Nutritious Foods, Nutrition Security, and Diet Quality—ROUND 13

BACKGROUND

Nutritious food is the foundation of good health, starting in early childhood and continuing throughout life. But for far too many people living in the U.S.—especially those living in low-income communities and communities of color—access to affordable, nutritious food is out of reach. It is clear that the resulting short- and long-term health outcomes can include impacting cognitive and physical growth and development, school success, and quality of life. A lack of nutritious food also has negative consequences in placing children and adults at increased risk for nutrition insecurity and diet-related chronic diseases such as obesity, pre-diabetes and diabetes, and other cardiovascular diseases. Without access to affordable and nutritious foods on a consistent basis, families will remain at high risk for poor health.

It is well known that health is powerfully influenced by our social conditions and circumstances, including the neighborhoods and communities where we live. These determinants of health include education; access to good jobs with fair pay; adequate housing; access to quality health care; and social support networks. In order to ensure that all children and families have a fair and just opportunity for optimal health, we must work to dismantle the systemic and structural barriers—such as poverty, racism, and discrimination—that impede good health and wellbeing.

HEALTHY EATING RESEARCH PROGRAM

Healthy Eating Research (HER) is a national program of the [Robert Wood Johnson Foundation \(RWJF\)](#) committed to building a [Culture of Health](#) through identifying effective strategies to improve children's nutrition and weight. HER's mission is to support and disseminate research on policy, systems, and environmental strategies that promote healthy eating among children and advance nutrition security and health equity. The program goals are to:

- 1) build a research base for policy, systems, and environmental strategies that advance health and nutrition equity in the areas of healthy food access, nutrition security, diet quality, and healthy weight;
- 2) foster a vibrant, inclusive, interdisciplinary field of research and a diverse network of researchers; and
- 3) communicate research findings to accelerate policy, systems, and environmental changes that promote healthy eating and advance nutrition and health equity.

HER issues calls for proposals (CFPs) to solicit scientifically rigorous, solution-oriented proposals from investigators representing diverse disciplines and backgrounds. To learn more about the program, we encourage applicants to visit the Healthy Eating Research website at www.healthyeatingresearch.org.

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Collaboration across different sectors and policy areas is needed to advance health and wellbeing for families and communities. Research clearly documents that poverty in childhood can have detrimental impacts on a person's health throughout their life. Thus, public policies and programs that supplement income or increase access to basic needs, such as food, housing, health care, childcare, and education, are particularly important in promoting the health and wellbeing of lower-income families and those with higher health needs. To ensure healthy eating, nutrition support policies are needed, as well as social and economic policies, such as those providing housing and income support, which can also impact nutrition status.

Access to affordable, nutritious, culturally appropriate food should be a human right. All families in the U.S. should be able to provide their children with nutritious foods that support optimal growth and development. As part of its commitment to building a national [Culture of Health](#), the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) seeks solutions that advance health, equity, and wellbeing. Healthy Eating Research supports this goal through improving diet quality and nutrition for all Americans, addressing nutrition disparities, and reducing food and nutrition insecurity.

The 2022 White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health laid out a [nationwide vision and call to action](#) for ending hunger and reducing diet-related diseases by 2030 and closing disparities among the communities that are most impacted. More than \$8 billion in new commitments were made as part of the conference's call to action. Achieving the conference's goals will require research and evaluation on promising and innovative approaches to determine the most effective, impactful, and equitable solutions for reducing hunger and diet-related diseases and communicating these solutions to inform current and future policy decisions.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this call for proposals (CFP) is to generate evidence on supportive family policies and programs that have strong potential to impact equitable access to nutritious food in communities, nutrition security, diet quality, and improved nutrition and health outcomes. We are especially interested in strategies to improve health outcomes for families with lower income and/or experiencing higher health needs. Findings will be used to guide and inform decisionmaking about policy and system changes that can advance nutrition equity and improve health.

Through this CFP, we seek to learn what works (or not), why, and under what circumstances; who benefits the most from these policies and programs; and if disparity gaps are reduced. We are interested in solution-oriented research that focuses on policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) change at the national, state, local, and tribal levels. The PSE research strategies can focus on how to strengthen or build on existing policies or programs; evaluation of current policies or programs; or designing and pilot-testing new innovative programs that are policy-relevant. We are also interested in PSE research that is more developmental in nature but has potential for policy and systems impact in addressing nutrition inequities.

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TARGETED AGE GROUPS, PRIORITY POPULATIONS

The target population is children (0 to 18) and families in the United States, with high priority on those who are at highest risk for poor nutrition, specifically lower-income families and racially and ethnically diverse populations (e.g., Black, Latino/a, American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander).

PRIORITY TOPIC AREAS

This CFP focuses on four areas related to supportive family policies and programs to improve nutrition and health:

- Federal nutrition-assistance programs;
- Hunger-relief programs;
- Community-powered food systems efforts; and
- Social and economic programs (nonfood policies).

Below are brief descriptions of each thematic area. Examples of potential research topics or questions can be found in the accompanying FAQ document.

Federal nutrition-assistance programs

The U.S. Dept of Agriculture (USDA) administers 15 nutrition assistance programs. The most widely known of these are the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), and the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program. Other family- and child- relevant programs are the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR), Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP) for elementary schools, Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), the Farm to School Program and the SNAP-Ed Connection program. Through this CFP, there is an opportunity to examine strategies to expand the reach and impact of federal nutrition programs, such as: innovations in technologies; expanding program outreach and eligibility; simplifying program enrollment processes; identifying ways to improve equity within federal nutrition-assistance programs; building the evidence base for these programs' impacts on food insecurity, nutrition, weight, and health; and areas for improvements and scalability.

Hunger-relief programs

The charitable food system is a network of food banks, food pantries, and meal programs that distributes billions of pounds of food annually to food-insecure families. For example, Feeding America is a national membership organization that includes approximately 200 food banks across the U.S. that distribute food through 60,000 hunger-relief agencies and serve an estimated 46 million individuals with low incomes each year. Food banks receive food (or money for food purchases) through multiple channels, including the federal Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) which provides USDA commodities to food banks at low cost, individual donors, food drives, and donations from growers, manufacturers, and distributors.

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Traditionally, items supplied by food banks have been shelf-stable foods and beverages high in saturated fat, sodium, and added sugars; however, in recent years, many food banks have begun prioritizing sourcing and supplying more nutritious foods. Efforts to promote healthy choices in food banks and food pantries include the creation and adoption of formal nutrition policies, cultivation of relationships with food donors who can donate healthier products, and investment in capacity to store and display healthier food items. This CFP provides opportunities to test interventions and evaluate programs aimed at improving nutrition security for children and families, especially among understudied populations.

Community-powered food systems efforts

The [food justice and food sovereignty movements](#) are grassroots initiatives emerging from communities in response to food insecurity and economic pressures that prevent access to healthy, nutritious, and culturally appropriate foods. These movements view disparities in healthy food access as a systemic problem stemming from structural racism, inequalities, and loss of community control of food. By confronting the root causes of injustice in the food system, community activists and advocates seek to reclaim communities' self-determination and sovereignty over food access and production. Communities of color and indigenous populations are taking action to address structural racism and systemic inequities by building community power to improve health. They are creating local food systems to better support access to culturally relevant, traditional, and fresh foods, which also improves nutrition security and community economic development. When scaled, these efforts have the potential to lead to more resilient, fair, and sustainable local food systems, including small-scale agriculture and food entrepreneurship. This CFP would allow community-academic opportunities to evaluate these community-powered initiatives, develop interventions to address root causes of food insecurity or obesity, and co-design and test innovative models.

Social and economic programs

To date, little research has been conducted on the relationships and interconnections between nutrition, weight, and food and nutrition security in families and policies related to poverty reduction, economic resources, housing assistance, or other family supportive policies. This CFP provides an opportunity to build the evidence base on these relationships, as well as to explore how these nonfood policies and programs may assist in creating healthier, more equitable communities. Some examples of these policies and programs include: financial payments to families; income assistance and support programs; housing assistance or housing security programs; and increased access to social services (e.g., childcare subsidies, Medicaid, Children's Health Insurance Program, DoD programs for military families). We are also interested in exploring other supportive family policies (e.g., paid family leave) that impact parental and child health and nutrition outcomes. We encourage applicants to consider non-USA programs—such as those operated by HUD, HHS, EPA, DoD, IRS, DoT—and their impacts on food security, diet quality, and health.

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Types of Studies

All studies must have a clear, data-driven, and testable research question with a rigorous study design. A variety of research designs and analyses, including mixed methods and linkages of existing data sources, can be used to answer research questions. Studies could include 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; simulation modeling studies; or quantitative meta-analyses. We are also interested in looking at how these programs interact with each other and the impact of multiple policies on nutrition and health.

TOTAL AWARDS

Up to \$2.5 million will be awarded through this CFP, with each award up to a maximum of \$275,000 and 24 months in duration. We encourage proposals that request lower budget amounts and shorter periods (e.g., 12–18 months).

Awards will be made directly to the principal investigator's home institution. Indirect costs (up to 12% for U.S. colleges/universities and hospital or health systems; up to 20% for nonprofit organizations; and 0% for for-profit organizations or government entities) are included in the total project awards [per RWJF budget guidelines](#).

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

- Applicant organizations must be based in the United States or its territories.
- Awards will be made to organizations, not to individuals.
- 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.

SELECTION CRITERIA

Concept Papers will be reviewed by HER leadership and RWJF senior staff. Concept Papers will be evaluated based on the rationale of the project; strength of the research question and aims; strength and feasibility of the research design; alignment with the goals and topics described in this CFP; balance in topic areas; and potential to target the age groups and priority populations as described above.

Invited *Full Proposals* will be reviewed by a minimum of three external reviewers (with relevant expertise in research, content area, and/or policy), HER leadership, and RWJF senior staff. Final funding decisions will be made by RWJF leadership. We will evaluate Full Proposals based on:

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- 1) Importance and relevance of study aims, hypotheses, methods, and outcomes;
- 2) Use of a clear theoretical framework, conceptual model, or rationale;
- 3) Scientific rigor of proposed research, sampling approach and effect sizes needed, data collection and analytic methods, and data sources;
- 4) Research qualifications and experience of the investigator(s) and appropriateness of disciplines and perspectives represented;
- 5) Appropriateness of proposed budget and project timeline, including the realistic feasibility of completing the project within the specified funding period;
- 6) The approach for communicating, disseminating, and translating research findings to advocates, decisionmakers, policymakers, and community members, if applicable.

RWJF 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 wellbeing. Achieving this goal requires focus on equity, diversity, and inclusion. To that end, the Foundation is committed to fostering diverse perspectives, recognizing 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.

While the presence of diverse perspectives alone is not sufficient, the Foundation is also committed to creating inclusive environments where all individuals are encouraged to share their perspectives and experiences. RWJF believes 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. RWJF is committed to being continuous learners and working alongside others to cultivate equity, diversity, and inclusion.

EVALUATION AND MONITORING

The purpose of evaluation at RWJF is learning rather than accountability. 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. Grantee participation includes assisting with necessary data collection to accomplish the evaluation objectives.

RWJF monitors the grantees' efforts and careful stewardship of grant funds to assure accountability. 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

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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 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. The information received will help us measure the effectiveness of RWJF grant making and improve the grant proposal experience.

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.

OPEN ACCESS

In order to ensure that HER research is made accessible to a wide and diverse audience, grantees of the HER Round 13 program who publish HER data and findings in peer-reviewed publications must do so in open access journals or must include funds in their budgets to cover the cost of making the resulting publications open access (typically \$3,000–\$5,000 per manuscript).

HOW TO APPLY

Applications for this solicitation must be submitted electronically via the RWJF online system. To apply for HER Round 13, visit <http://www.rwjf.org/cfp/her13> and click the “Apply Online” link.

If you have not already done so, you will be required to register at 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:

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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) bio sketches for key personnel. Applicants must follow the instructions and use the templates provided in the 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 online system.

Please see the section 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

Late Submissions

Per RWJF policy, HER 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 and HER do not provide individual critiques of proposals submitted. RWJF will make all final grant decisions.

KEY DATES AND DEADLINES

- **January 31–April 5, 2023**
RWJF online system becomes available to applicants to submit concept papers.
- **April 5, 2023 (3 p.m. ET)**
Deadline for receipt of concept papers. Those submitted after the deadline will not be reviewed.*
- **May 10, 2023**
Applicants notified whether they are invited to submit a full proposal.

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- **July 12, 2023 (3 p.m. ET)**
Deadline for receipt of invited full proposals. Those submitted after the deadline will not be reviewed.*
- **September 2023**
Notification of finalists.
- **November 2023**
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 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.

PROGRAM DIRECTION

Direction and technical assistance for the Healthy Eating Research 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

Website: www.healthyeatingresearch.org

Responsible staff members at the national program office are:

- Mary Story, PhD, RD, director
- Megan Lott, MPH, RD, deputy director
- Erin Escobar, MPH, senior research manager

Responsible staff members at the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation are:

- Katherine Hempstead, PhD, senior policy adviser
- Jamie Bussel, MPH, senior program officer
- Jennie Day-Burget, senior communications officer
- Jan Mihalow, program financial analyst

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ABOUT THE ROBERT WOOD JOHNSON FOUNDATION

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) is committed to improving health and health equity in the United States. In partnership with others, we are working to develop a Culture of Health rooted in equity that provides every individual with a fair and just opportunity to thrive, no matter who they are, where they live, or how much money they have. For more information, visit [rwjf.org](http://www.rwjf.org).

Sign up to receive email alerts on upcoming calls for proposals at <http://www.rwjf.org/manage-your-subscriptions.html>.

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