



Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

# Healthy Eating Research:

## Building Evidence to Prevent Childhood Obesity



**2006 Call for Proposals—Round 2**

**Proposal Deadline**

February 13, 2007

## Program Overview

(Please refer to specific sections for complete detail.)

### Purpose

*Healthy Eating Research* is a national program that supports research on environmental and policy strategies to promote healthy eating among children to prevent childhood obesity, especially among low-income and racial/ethnic populations at highest risk for obesity. Findings are expected to advance the Foundation's efforts to reverse the childhood obesity epidemic by 2015. This second round of funding focuses on children's food environments and policies in selected community settings: preschool, child-care, school and after-school environments, as well as nearby food outlets.

### Total Awards—Round 2 (page 7)

Approximately \$3 million will be awarded for two types of research grants:

- Studies to identify and evaluate promising food environment and policy changes with potential to prevent obesity among children.
  - 12- to 18-month awards up to \$100,000 each.
  - 18- to 36-month awards up to \$400,000 each.
- Analyses of macro-level policy or system determinants of food environments and policies that relate to the targeted community settings.
  - 12- to 18-month awards up to \$75,000 each.

### Eligibility Criteria (page 13)

Complete eligibility criteria can be found on page 13.

### Selection Criteria (page 14)

Complete selection criteria can be found on page 14.

### Key Dates and Deadlines

- **February 13, 2007 (3 p.m. ET)**—Deadline for receipt of brief proposals.
- **April 10, 2007**—Select applicants will be invited to submit full proposals.
- **May 23, 2007 (3 p.m. ET)**—Deadline for receipt of full proposals.

### How to Apply (page 18)

All proposals must be submitted only through the RWJF Grantmaking Online system at: <http://grantmaking.rwjf.org/her2>.

Please direct inquiries to:

Kathy Kosiak, *research coordinator*

Phone: (800) 578-8636

E-mail: [healthyeating@umn.edu](mailto:healthyeating@umn.edu)

### Other Grant Opportunities (page 20)

- *New Connections* grants for junior investigators.
- Field-building grants.

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

## Background

Childhood obesity poses a serious threat to the health of our nation. Over the past four decades, obesity rates in the United States have more than quadrupled among children ages 6 to 11, more than tripled among adolescents ages 12 to 19 and nearly tripled among children ages 2 to 5. Almost 9 million U.S. children over age 6 are considered obese. Cumulative changes in children's food environments over the past few decades have increased the availability, appeal, affordability and consumption of low-nutrient, energy-dense foods and beverages. Further, few children eat the recommended amount of fruits and vegetables, and many consume excess fat and calories. At the same time, physical activity has been engineered out of children's daily routines, making it even more important to improve children's access and exposure to healthy foods to achieve the energy balance required for a healthy body weight.

The Institute of Medicine report, *Preventing Childhood Obesity: Health in the Balance*, concluded that corrective environmental and policy changes are potentially the most powerful—but currently the least well understood—strategies for addressing childhood obesity. At present, little is known about the most important environmental influences that affect children's eating patterns and weight, or about the most feasible and effective policies for improving children's food environments. *Healthy Eating Research* aims to reduce this knowledge gap by supporting research to identify and evaluate the policies and environmental approaches that have the greatest potential to improve children's diets and to reverse the nation's rising levels of childhood obesity. This program complements *Active Living Research*, a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) that is building evidence to inform effective policy and environmental strategies to increase physical activity among children and adolescents.

RWJF is committed to tackling childhood obesity and the threat it poses to the health of our nation's children and families. The Foundation's goal is to reverse the epidemic of childhood obesity by promoting healthy eating and physical activity in schools and communities throughout the United States. **We place special emphasis on reaching the children at greatest risk for obesity: African-American, Hispanic, Native American and Asian/Pacific Islander children, and children living in low-income communities.**

## The Program

Healthy Eating Research is a five-year, \$16-million national program of the RWJF. The goals are to:

- establish a strong research base regarding 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 effectively communicated to inform policy debates and guide the development of effective solutions.

The program issues calls for proposals (CFPs) to solicit scientifically rigorous, solution-oriented proposals from investigators and scholars representing diverse disciplines and backgrounds. **The program's overall aim is to provide key decision-makers and policy-makers in many sectors with evidence to guide and accelerate effective action to reverse the rise in child obesity. While Round 1 funding exclusively targeted school food policies and environments, Round 2 addresses the potential influence of food environments and policies in a wider array of community settings.**

## Terminology

For the purposes of this call for proposals:

- **Healthy eating** to promote health and maintain an optimum body weight involves eating the types and amounts of foods, nutrients and calories recommended in the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, while limiting low-nutrient, high-fat and high-sugar foods and beverages.
- Children's **food environments** refer to their physical environments, such as preschool, child-care, school and after-school settings, as well as nearby food outlets (e.g., corner stores and restaurants) where children make food purchases before, during and after school. These settings influence children's food choices and intake through food access, availability, characteristics (e.g., energy density and portion size) and promotion (e.g., price, placement and packaging). These settings also are affected by broader macro-level influences and policies, such as food assistance programs, government regulations, agricultural policies and economic factors.
- **Food policies** operate in many settings and at many levels. Examples include restrictions on the sale of low-nutrition foods and beverages in schools, nutrition standards for foods available in schools and child-care facilities, and commodity food regulations.
- **Child-care settings** include child-care centers and child care provided in homes. Early childhood education settings, such as preschool and Head Start programs, also are included.

## Round 2: Food Environments and Policies in Selected Community Settings

Outside the home, children's diets are influenced by foods provided in community settings, such as preschool and child-care facilities, schools, after-school programs and food outlets located near schools where children and youth make purchases on their own. Of the nation's 21 million preschool children, 13 million are in child-care facilities. More than 54 million U.S. children attend school, and 6.5 million youth are in after-school programs located in schools, parks and recreational centers, YMCAs, and Boys and Girls Clubs. African-American and Hispanic children are more likely than other children to participate in after-school programs. Fifty-five percent of high-poverty urban schools provide summer school programs. Because these organized settings reach millions of low-income children, and because a substantial portion of daily food and caloric intake may occur within these environments, they are important venues for addressing childhood obesity. These settings also reach millions of children through federal food assistance programs that provide meals and snacks to youth, such as the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs, Summer Food Service Program, Child and Adult Care Food Program, and the Afterschool Snack Program. Many of these settings also offer high-calorie, low-nutrition foods and beverages. In addition, children may make frequent purchases of foods and beverages at neighborhood stores and restaurants before and after school. Even small changes in excess caloric intake in these settings where children gather could have meaningful effects on children's risk of obesity.

The recent Institute of Medicine report, *Progress in Preventing Childhood Obesity: How Do We Measure Up?*, noted that, while schools are the current focus of many childhood obesity prevention efforts, it's also important to focus on improving the nutritional quality of foods and beverages in preschool, child-care and after-school programs. The report also

emphasized the importance of evaluating policies and intervention programs. The report concluded that the lack of systematic monitoring and evaluation has hindered the development of an evidence base to document effective childhood obesity prevention approaches.

Round 2 of Healthy Eating Research focuses on children's food environments in selected community settings—preschool, child-care, school and after-school environments, as well as nearby food outlets where children make food purchases before, after or during school—and on the policies that affect those food environments.

Research studies should focus on identifying food-related environmental and policy approaches with strong potential to improve children's eating and body weight, especially in the low-income and racial/ethnic populations at highest risk for obesity. **Target populations include children and adolescents ages 3 to 18.**

### *Total Awards*

Approximately \$3 million is available in this round of funding for policy-relevant research grants in two major categories:

1. Small- and large-scale studies to identify and evaluate environmental determinants or evaluate promising food environment or policy changes in selected community settings.
2. Analyses of macro-level policy or system determinants of food environments and policies that impact children's dietary behavior in these settings.

### *Types of Small and Large-scale Studies*

#### **1. Studies to identify and evaluate changes to the food environment or policies in selected community settings—preschool, child-care, school and after-school environments and nearby food outlets—with potential to improve healthy eating and contribute to reversing the epidemic of childhood obesity. We anticipate awarding up to eight small-scale grants of up to \$100,000 each over 12–18 months, and up to five large-scale grants of up to \$400,000 each over 18–36 months.**

Research may include:

- studies to identify the modifiable environmental correlates of obesity-related dietary behaviors and obesity in children and youth;
- studies evaluating environmental interventions or policy changes in the targeted settings;
- experimental studies manipulating environmental cues or conditions;
- opportunistic studies designed to learn from natural variation in existing food policies and environments;
- correlational studies using existing databases; and
- measurement development studies to develop, test and validate tools and methods that can be used to identify and evaluate food policies and environments.

Factors that distinguish small from large grants relate more to the scope of work and the level and duration of funding than to the topics studied. *Small-scale* studies are likely to be more limited in scope, include correlational studies, rely on secondary data analyses or limited original data collection, and be experimental studies, laboratory simulations or measurement development studies. They also may include baseline evaluations prior to planned changes in the settings targeted by this CFP, post-test evaluations when baseline data are available, and supplements to externally funded evaluations to add

or improve measures related to healthy eating, food environments, policies and/or economic outcomes.

*Large-scale studies* are likely to focus on a broader set of policy and environmental influences, involve more costly or complex secondary data analysis, or include significant original data collection. A number of small, lower-cost experimental or laboratory “simulations” could be proposed as part of a larger-scale research proposal.

Measurement development could be a small-scale study or could be included as part of a larger study. Both small- and large-scale projects may be conducted as supplements to existing studies. Co-funding is welcome, with sources and amounts fully described in the application.

#### *Examples of Types of Studies*

Small- and large-scale awards could include the following types of studies:

- **Experimental or quasi-experimental studies**, including laboratory simulations, such as manipulating or altering the food environment through changes in pricing, portion size, packaging, container size, placement, promotion or point-of-purchase information for foods sold or offered in the targeted community settings.
- **Natural experiments and other studies** that evaluate the impact of environmental changes or national, state or local policy changes.
- **Secondary analyses of existing datasets**, such as cross-sectional or longitudinal analyses or statistical modeling using national survey data from public or private sources.
- **Financial or cost-benefit studies** evaluating the economic impacts of changes in food environment or policy.

- **Measurement development studies** to develop practical, valid and reliable measures of food environments, policies or dietary behaviors in these settings.

#### *Examples of Possible Topics*

The Healthy Eating Research program relies on the expertise and creativity of researchers to generate ideas for research topics that fit the overall scope of this CFP. The list below provides some examples of possible topics. Additional examples can be found at [www.healthyeatingresearch.org](http://www.healthyeatingresearch.org). Studies need not be limited to these examples.

- Socioeconomic and racial/ethnic disparities in access to healthy and less healthy foods in preschool and child-care facilities, schools, after-school programs and in food outlets located close to these facilities (e.g., corner stores, convenience stores and fast food outlets).
- School-based research to assess actual implementation and impact of the newly adopted wellness policies or voluntary beverage guidelines.
- Economic analyses of the actual costs related to serving healthy meals and snacks in daycare facilities, preschools, schools or after-school programs, especially those with federal food programs.
- Examination of the federal food programs that provide meals and snacks to low-income children (e.g., Child and Adult Care Food Program, Summer Food Service Program, Afterschool Snack Program). Evaluations of innovative strategies to improve healthy eating (e.g., increase fruits and vegetables) in these programs.
- Studies validating or testing existing measures of food environments to assess their utility in diverse populations.

#### *Study Guidelines*

- The particular outcome variables for grants may vary. Given the limited scope and short duration of these projects, measures of changes in weight or BMI are not required. However, applicants are encouraged to include objective measures of food purchases or dietary consumption and to assess variables likely to affect the impact and feasibility of the policy and environmental changes being studied (e.g., demographic variables, community characteristics, other contextual variables).
- With the exception of low-cost experimental manipulations (e.g., small-scale studies altering food prices, portion sizes or point-of-purchase information), it is expected that grant funds will be used only to cover the costs of evaluation, not the costs of the policy or environmental changes per se.
- Experimental studies or laboratory simulations should hold promise for generalization to real-world community environments, especially in low-income and racial/ethnic populations at highest risk for obesity.
- Studies involving data collection in schools or community settings require an agreement with the leadership of the participating organization, specific plans for consent and Institutional Review Board approval.
- Studies focused solely on behavior change at the individual level or educational and curricular interventions will not be funded. However, studies could compare the impact of environmental changes with or without nutrition education or promotion, or could isolate effective components of a multi-component intervention.

**2. Analyses of macro-level policy and system determinants of food policies and environments relevant to children in selected community settings—preschool, child-care, school and after-school settings, as well as nearby food outlets. Approximately eight to 10 grants of up to \$75,000 each over a 12- to 18-month period are expected to be awarded.**

The quality and types of foods provided to children in preschool, child-care, school, after-school and summer programs, as well as food outlets near these settings, are the result of macro-level policies (e.g., agricultural, legal, federal food assistance programs) and market forces (e.g., economic, industry, food marketing) that represent potentially powerful levers for change. These important “upstream” influences may be more difficult to modify than those operating at a more proximal individual level, but they have the potential for wider population impacts. Currently, there is little understanding of and limited research on these environmental factors and the role they could play in creating healthier food environments and policies. Research and analysis could generate imaginative policy ideas for creating healthier food environments and positively influence what and when children eat.

The aim of these analytic projects is to understand the larger environmental and policy context that influences the foods, beverages and calories consumed by children and to identify the most salient focal points for nationwide efforts to reverse the childhood obesity epidemic. Analytic methods may include, but are not limited to, historical analysis, policy analysis, legal analysis, economic analysis, market analysis, statistical modeling, use of existing databases and case study methods.

*Examples of Analytic Studies*

Some examples of analytic studies that may be funded through this initiative are included below. More examples can be found at [www.healthyeatingresearch.org](http://www.healthyeatingresearch.org). Studies need not be limited to these examples.

- Modeling the effects of possible changes in federal child nutrition programs (e.g., Child and Adult Care Food Program, National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs, and Afterschool Snack Program) on children’s diet and body weight.
- Analysis of federal reimbursement available for child-care and preschool programs and disparities in access to healthy foods in these settings based on socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity and geography.
- Analysis of zoning codes and regulation policies, especially in low-income communities, to study potential impact on children’s food consumption.
- Examination of economic incentives and disincentives in the form of taxes, pricing policies and subsidies to promote healthier foods to children.
- Evaluation of interventions to improve the diets of low-income children through the federal food assistance programs (e.g., commodity foods, Child and Adult Care Food Program, school meal programs, and the fresh fruit and vegetable school program).

**Eligibility Criteria**

Preference will be given to those applicants that may be either public entities or nonprofit organizations that are tax-exempt under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Applicant organizations must be based in the United States or U.S. Territories. The focus of this program is the United States; studies of policies in other countries will be considered only to the extent that they may directly inform U.S. policy.

## Selection Criteria

Proposals must demonstrate the ability to produce new information on food environment and/or policy change strategies relevant to children's obesity-related dietary practices and with strong potential to reverse the rise in childhood obesity. Special consideration will be given to strategies that will benefit children in the low-income and racial or ethnic populations at greatest risk for obesity.

Studies may be conducted as supplements to existing studies. Co-funding is welcome, with sources and amounts fully described in the application.

Researchers are encouraged to seek input from relevant stakeholders, such as policy-makers, school or community leaders, parents and children, to help assure feasible and policy-relevant project goals and outcomes. Proposals should describe the kind of input received from these stakeholders in designing the study and framing the research questions. Applicants should include at least one representative of the community or stakeholder group targeted (e.g., school/child-care official, community leader, policy-maker) as a regular adviser to help assure that research and policy analyses reflect critical institutional, community and policy needs and issues.

To help build a multidisciplinary field of research, Healthy Eating Research seeks proposals from a variety of investigators in a range of fields, such as agriculture, behavioral science, business, economics, education, law, marketing, medicine, nutrition, political science, psychology, public health, public policy and urban planning. The perspectives of researchers who are knowledgeable about racial/ethnic and socioeconomic disparities in community settings and food environments are especially needed.

All proposals will be assessed by a committee composed of RWJF staff, national program office (NPO) staff at the University of Minnesota, a senior program advisory panel and other expert reviewers.

The committee will use the following criteria to assess proposals:

- Potential impact on obesity prevention.
- Potential impact on the elimination of disparities in children's access to and consumption of healthy foods and beverages.
- Potential to address key knowledge gaps.
- Relevance and timeliness of project to inform policy action.
- Emphasis on widely applicable, feasible and sustainable strategies.
- Relevance to the needs of low-resource communities and children in low-income and racial/ethnic minority populations at highest risk for obesity.
- Clarity of project 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 data to be used.
- Uniqueness of the project in relation to the mix of potentially fundable projects.
- Research qualifications and experience of the investigator(s) and appropriateness of disciplines and perspectives represented.
- Appropriateness of proposed budget and project timeline.
- Plan for communicating and disseminating research results to scientists, policy-makers and other relevant stakeholders.

This program has a senior program advisory panel that makes recommendations about grants to Foundation staff. All funding decisions are made by RWJF. RWJF does not provide individual critiques of proposals submitted.

## Evaluation and Monitoring

Grantees will be expected to meet RWJF requirements for the submission of narrative and financial reports. Given the benefit of measuring common outcomes across the pool of funded grants, funded projects may be asked to incorporate selected dependent, independent and contextual measures. 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 the field's leading journals.

Grantees will be required to submit periodic information needed for overall project performance monitoring and management. Healthy Eating Research staff and consultants will be available to provide technical assistance when needed to ensure the success of the project. At the close of each grant, the grantee is expected to provide a written report on the project and its findings. Healthy Eating Research and RWJF staff will work with investigators to actively communicate the results of the funded projects to scientific audiences, media, policy-makers, school decision-makers and educational organizations, public health advocates, the general public and other audiences, as appropriate. An independent research group selected and funded by RWJF will conduct an evaluation of the Healthy Eating Research program. As a condition of accepting RWJF funds, grantees will be required to participate in the evaluation, and may be asked to adopt limited core dependent or independent measures to facilitate cross-study comparisons.

## Use of Grant Funds

RWJF grant funds may be used for project staff salaries, consultant fees, data collection and analysis, dataset procurement, meetings, supplies, project-related travel, and other direct expenses, including a limited amount of equipment that is essential to the project. With the exception of funds for low-cost experimental studies, it is expected that grant funds awarded in this round of funding will be used to cover the costs of evaluation, and not the costs of the policy or environmental changes per se (e.g., foods, training and implementation efforts). Additional in-kind or external funding is welcome and should be described in the proposal.

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, or as a substitute for funds currently being used to support similar activities.

Principal investigators are expected to participate in an annual grantee meeting. Funds for up to two individuals to attend one grantee meeting in each year of funding should be included in the proposed budget. Budgets also should include travel to attend an additional grantee meeting at the end of the grant period so that principal investigators can present their results. The full proposal application templates on the Healthy Eating Research Web site contain guidelines for travel budgeting.

## How to Apply

*All proposals for this program must be submitted only through the RWJF Grantmaking Online system.* For detailed formatting instructions and to prepare and submit your proposal, please go to <http://grantmaking.rwjf.org/her2>.

There are two stages in the competitive application process:

### *Stage 1: Brief Proposal*

Applicants must submit a brief proposal of no more than five pages that describes the project, including a preliminary budget.

### *Stage 2: Full Proposal*

Selected Stage 1 applicants will be invited by letter or e-mail to submit a full proposal of no more than 20 pages accompanied by a budget and budget narrative and additional supporting documents.

Applicant Web conference calls for the brief proposals will be held on January 5 and 17, 2007, to answer questions about the CFP, as well as the application and selection processes. Participation in these calls is encouraged, but is not required. It is necessary to register in advance through the Healthy Eating Research Web site at [www.healthyeatingresearch.org](http://www.healthyeatingresearch.org).

Applicant information, including frequently asked questions (FAQs) and applicant resources, can be found on the program Web site.

For more information on the program, please contact:  
Kathy Kosiak, *research coordinator*  
Phone: (800) 578-8636  
E-mail: [healthyeating@umn.edu](mailto:healthyeating@umn.edu)

## Program Direction

Direction and technical assistance for this program are provided by the University of Minnesota, which serves as the NPO.

Responsible staff members at the NPO are:

- Mary Story, Ph.D., R.D., *program director*
- Karen M. Kaphingst, M.P.H., *deputy director*
- Leslie Lytle, Ph.D., R.D., *senior adviser*
- Robert Jeffery, Ph.D., *senior adviser*
- Kathy Kosiak, *research coordinator*

Responsible staff members at the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation are:

- C. Tracy Orleans, Ph.D., *distinguished fellow and senior scientist*
- James Marks, M.D., M.P.H., *senior vice president and director, Health Group*
- Laura Leviton, Ph.D., *senior program and evaluation officer*
- Jan Mihalow, M.S.M., *grants administrator*
- Kathryn Thomas, M.J., *senior communications officer*
- Prabhu Ponkshe, M.A., L.L.B., *communications consultant*

This program's senior program advisory panel is chaired by Shiriki Kumanyika, Ph.D., M.P.H.





## About the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation focuses on the pressing health and health care issues facing our country. As the nation's largest philanthropy devoted exclusively to improving the health and health care of all Americans, the Foundation works with a diverse group of organizations and individuals to identify solutions and achieve comprehensive, meaningful and timely change. The Foundation seeks to:

- assure that all Americans have access to quality health care at reasonable cost.
- improve the quality of care and support for people with chronic health conditions.
- promote healthy communities and lifestyles.
- reduce the personal, social and economic harm caused by substance abuse—tobacco, alcohol and illicit drugs.

For more than 30 years the Foundation has brought experience, commitment and a rigorous, balanced approach to the problems that affect the health and health care of those it serves. When it comes to helping Americans lead healthier lives and get the care they need, the Foundation expects to make a difference in your lifetime.

For more information, visit [www.rwjf.org](http://www.rwjf.org).

**Sign up to receive e-mail alerts on upcoming calls for proposals at:**

[www.rwjf.org/services](http://www.rwjf.org/services).



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