



Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

Healthy Eating Research

Building Evidence to Prevent
Childhood Obesity



2009 Call for Proposals—Round 4

Proposal Deadline

February 24, 2009

Program Overview

(Please refer to specific sections for complete detail.)

Purpose

Healthy Eating Research is a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF). The program supports research on environmental and policy strategies with strong potential to promote healthy eating among children to prevent childhood obesity, especially among low-income and racial/ethnic populations at highest risk for obesity. Findings will advance RWJF's efforts to reverse the childhood obesity epidemic by 2015.

Round 4 funding focuses on studies of policy and environmental strategies in four areas: food pricing and economic approaches; food and beverage marketing; improving access to healthy foods in low-income communities; and evaluations of promising food-related policy and environmental strategies in settings where children and their families make food choices.

Eligibility Criteria (page 11)

Preference will be given to those applicants that are 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 its territories at the time of application. 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.

Selection Criteria (page 11)

Complete selection criteria can be found on page 11.

Total Awards—Round 4

Approximately \$2.4 million will be awarded for two types of research grants:

- *Small- and large-scale studies:*
 - 12- to 18-month awards of up to \$150,000 each.
 - 18- to 36-month awards of up to \$400,000 each.
- *Macro-level analyses:*
 - 12- to 18-month awards of up to \$100,000 each.

Key Dates and Deadlines

- **February 24, 2009 (3 p.m. ET)**—Deadline for receipt of brief proposals.
- **May 1, 2009**—Applicants notified if invited to submit full proposals.
- **June 12, 2009 (3 p.m. ET)**—Deadline for receipt of full proposals.

How to Apply (page 14)

All proposals must be submitted through the RWJF Grantmaking Online system.

Direct inquiries to:

Kathy Kosiak, *research coordinator*

Phone: (800) 578-8636

E-mail: healthyeating@umn.edu

Other Grant Opportunities (page 16)

- An RWJF New Connections call for proposals also is available through the Healthy Eating Research program.

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 more than doubled among children ages 2 to 5. Today, almost one-third of U.S. children and adolescents—nearly 23 million children—are either overweight or obese.

Changes in children’s food environments over the past few decades have increased the availability, appeal, affordability and consumption of foods and beverages that are low in nutrients, but high in fat, sugar and calories. Few children eat the amount of fruits and vegetables recommended in the federal government’s *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, and many youths consume excess fat and calories. Parallel to the changes in the food environment are the social and environmental changes that have resulted in fewer opportunities for children to be physically active. Few children and youths get the recommended 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity per day recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for healthy growth and development. This makes it even more important to improve children’s consumption of healthy foods in order to achieve the energy balance required for a healthy body weight.

Changes to the food and physical activity environments together with policy approaches may be the most effective strategies for creating population-wide improvements in diet and physical activity and reducing the prevalence of obesity. We are in the early stages of understanding the most effective environmental and policy approaches to improve children’s healthy eating.

Healthy Eating Research, a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF), supports studies to identify and evaluate policies and environmental approaches that have the greatest potential to improve children’s diets and energy

balance to reverse the nation's levels of childhood obesity. This program parallels and complements RWJF's *Active Living Research* program that is building evidence to inform effective policy and environmental strategies to increase physical activity among children and adolescents (www.activelivingresearch.org).

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 2015 by promoting healthy eating and physical activity in schools and communities throughout the United States. **The Foundation places special emphasis on reaching the children at greatest risk for obesity: African-American, Latino, Native American and Asian/Pacific Islander children, and children who live in low-income communities.**

The Program

Healthy Eating Research is a five-year, \$16-million RWJF national program. Its 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 effectively communicated to inform policies and guide the development of effective solutions.

Healthy Eating Research issues calls for proposals (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**

decision- and policy-makers with evidence to guide and accelerate effective action to reverse the rise in childhood obesity.

Round 4 Research Topics

Round 4 focuses on studies of policy and environmental strategies in four strategic areas: food pricing and economic approaches; food and beverage marketing; improving access to healthy foods in low-income communities; and evaluations of promising food-related policy and environmental strategies in settings where children and their families make food choices.

Target populations include children and adolescents ages 3 to 18 and their families, especially those in low-income and racial/ethnic populations at highest risk for obesity.

Total Awards

Approximately \$2.4 million is available in this round of funding. There are two major categories of funding:

1. *Small- and large-scale studies* to identify environmental determinants or evaluate changes to the food environment or policies. We anticipate awarding small-scale grants of up to \$150,000 each over 12 to 18 months, and larger-scale grants of up to \$400,000 each over 18 to 36 months.
2. *Macro-level analyses* of food and beverage policies and environmental approaches. We anticipate awarding macro-level grants of up to \$100,000 each over 12 to 18 months.

Small- and Large-Scale Studies

Factors that distinguish small and large grants relate more to the scope of work and the level and duration of funding than to the topics studied. Small- and large-scale studies could include the following:

- Experimental or quasi-experimental studies (such as altering the food environment through changes in pricing, portion size, packaging, or point-of-purchase nutrition information).
- Evaluation of natural experiments or other studies that assess the impact of environmental changes or national, state or local policy changes.
- Secondary analyses of existing datasets (such as cross-sectional or longitudinal designs) to analyze the impact of food policies and environments.
- Financial, economic or cost-benefit studies evaluating the impacts of changes in the food environment or policy.
- Health impact assessments or statistical modeling studies to identify, predict or evaluate the likely changes resulting from policy or environmental changes on diet, energy intake or weight outcomes.
- Measurement studies to develop and validate methods to identify and evaluate food policies and environments and their impact in a variety of settings and among different population groups.

Macro-Level Analyses

The aim of these projects is to analyze the impact of “upstream” factors that represent powerful levers for change. Upstream factors include food production and distribution systems, food marketing, agricultural policies, federal food assistance programs and economic price structures. These studies can help identify salient focal points for intervention and policy efforts to reverse the childhood obesity epidemic. Analytic methods may include, but are not limited to: policy analysis, legal analysis, economic analysis, market analysis, statistical modeling, use of existing databases, health impact assessments, case studies and simulation models of scenarios.

Priority Research Areas

All proposed studies in response to this CFP must address one or more of the areas outlined below. A

general description of each area, including research needs, is provided below. Researchers also are encouraged to look at studies funded under Round 3 at www.healthyeatingresearch.org. We rely on researchers' creativity to generate innovative, solution-oriented environmental and policy research studies.

1. Food pricing and economic approaches.

The cost of food to consumers and to intermediary purchasers (e.g., schools, food retailers, restaurants, government food assistance programs), is an important determinant of food choice and diet. Food supply trends and obesity rates are strongly influenced by the economics of food choices. Highly processed, low-nutrition foods that are high in calories, sugar and fat are widely accessible in the marketplace at a relatively low cost. On the other hand, fruits and vegetables are often more expensive than many processed high-fat or high-sugar foods. Research suggests that changing the price of foods influences their purchase. But many questions remain about the best ways to utilize pricing to influence public health. Studies are needed to document how food prices and changes in food prices affect children's diets and caloric intake at the population level and in a variety of populations and settings (e.g., government-supported food assistance programs, grocery and convenience stores, restaurant and fast-food outlets, school cafeterias). There is also a need to evaluate price-related interventions in real-world and controlled-simulation settings for their effects on children's diet quality and weight status. Studies also are needed to identify the important modifiable macro-level determinants of the costs associated with healthy/unhealthy foods to help clarify the economics of price and market factors and identify possible levers for change.

2. Food and beverage marketing.

Food and beverage marketing aimed at children and adolescents influences their diet and health. Youth today are exposed to an unprecedented amount of advertising and marketing through a wide range of

approaches and techniques. Marketing refers to all forms of advertising and promotional techniques. The four traditional components of marketing include not only price, as discussed above, but also product (e.g., features such as taste, portion size, packaging), placement (e.g., outlets, shelf location, distribution points used to reach target markets), and promotion (e.g., nutrition information and advertising via multiple channels). Research is needed on how different marketing techniques influence the food and beverage choices and weight status of children and adolescents. There is also a need to understand how marketing techniques can be used to promote healthier eating among youths to reduce obesity. In addition, research is needed on legal or regulatory policy approaches to advertising and marketing aimed at youths, including an evaluation of the impact of food industry's voluntary efforts to limit food and beverage marketing.

3. Improving access to healthy foods in low-income communities.

Many low-income urban communities, poor rural communities and Indian reservations have been described as “food deserts” due to the limited availability of affordable healthy foods. A lack of grocery stores and supermarkets in a community contributes to poor access to nutritious foods. At the same time, the availability of fast-food restaurants and inexpensive, energy-dense foods has been found to be greater in low-income and minority neighborhoods than in high-income, predominantly white neighborhoods. Initiatives throughout the country are now striving to improve access to nutritious foods in low-income communities by introducing supermarkets and farmers’ markets, farm-to-school programs, and community investment approaches (e.g., tax abatements, low-cost loans to retail grocery stores). Efforts also include encouraging convenience stores to offer healthier food options and expanding healthy, affordable menu items in restaurants and fast-food outlets. Local and state governments are showing

interest in legislation to improve access to fresh produce and other healthy foods in low-income communities, such as incentives to attract grocery stores to low-income neighborhoods or zoning restrictions on new fast-food restaurants. But there is limited evidence about the impact of these strategies. Research is needed to develop an evidence base on what strategies and policies are the most effective for improving food access and preventing obesity. Research is also needed to develop valid and reliable measures of food environments and policies.

4. Evaluations of promising food-related policy and environmental strategies in settings where children and their families make food choices.

This topic area includes studies of policy and environmental determinants of children's access to and consumption of healthy foods in different settings (e.g., child care, school, after-school, home, grocery stores and communities), and evaluations of interventions to modify those determinants. The Institute of Medicine report *Progress in Preventing Childhood Obesity: How Do We Measure Up?* emphasized the importance of identifying and evaluating policy and environmental changes and concluded that the lack of systematic evaluation has hindered the development of an evidence base to document effective approaches to preventing childhood obesity. Children's diets and energy intake are directly influenced by the types and amounts of foods provided in settings where they spend their time, such as their homes, schools, preschool and child-care facilities, after-school programs and food outlets close to these settings. Even small changes in excess caloric intake in these settings could have a meaningful effect on children's risk of obesity. Research is needed to identify and evaluate solution-oriented policy and environmental strategies with strong potential to reduce diet-related obesity. Research is also needed for the development and refinement of measures and tools for assessing food environments and policy changes in a variety of settings.

Overall Study Guidelines

- The main 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. Objective measures of food purchases, dietary consumption or estimated impact on average daily caloric intake are encouraged. Variables likely to affect the impact and feasibility of the policy and environmental changes studied (e.g., demographics, community characteristics and other contextual variables) should be assessed.
- 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 changes with or without nutrition education or promotion, or identify the most effective components of a multicomponent intervention.
- Studies conducted in real-world settings are preferred. Experimental studies or laboratory simulations must show promise for generalization to real-world settings, especially in low-income and racial/ethnic minority populations.
- Researchers should seek input from relevant stakeholders—such as policy-makers, school or community leaders, parents and children—to develop feasible and policy-relevant project goals and outcomes. Proposals should describe the input received from these stakeholders in designing the study and research questions, and the strategies that will be used to communicate research results. Applicants should include at least one representative of the community or stakeholder group targeted (e.g., community leader, policy-maker) as a regular adviser.
- Indirect costs up to 12 percent are included in the total project awards.
- Studies may be conducted as supplements to existing studies. Co-funding is welcome; sources and amounts must be fully described in the proposal.

To get a sense of the type of studies funded by this program, applicants are encouraged to visit the Healthy Eating Research Web site (www.healthyeatingresearch.org) and view the abstracts for studies previously funded in Rounds 1, 2 and 3. The Web site also has other pertinent applicant resources.

Eligibility Criteria

Preference will be given to those applicants that are 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 its territories at the time of application. 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.

Selection Criteria

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:

- Ability to identify policies and environmental changes or strategies that hold strong potential to produce changes that accelerate the nation's efforts to reverse the childhood obesity epidemic.
- Potential to eliminate disparities in children's access to and consumption of healthy foods and beverages.
- Relevance and timeliness of project to inform policy action.
- The degree to which the strategies are widely applicable, feasible and sustainable.
- 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 the measures and data to be used.
- Relevance of the project to the four areas targeted in this round of funding and 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 not only to scientists, but also to policy-makers and 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. As part of the proposal 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. Grantees also will be required to respond to periodic surveys and other communications sent from Healthy Eating Research.

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. 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 templates on the RWJF Grantmaking Online system contain guidelines for travel budgeting.

How to Apply

All proposals 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/her4>.

There are two stages in the competitive proposal process:

Stage 1: Brief Proposal

Applicants must submit a brief proposal of no more than three pages, which is similar to a letter of intent, describing the project and including the total amount of the budget.

Stage 2: Full Proposal

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

A Web conference call for brief proposal applicants will be held on January 30, 2009, to answer questions about the call for proposals, as well as the proposal and selection processes. Participation in this call is encouraged, but is not required. It is necessary to register in advance through the Healthy Eating Research Web site at 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

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*
- Robert Jeffery, Ph.D., *senior adviser*
- Leslie Lytle, Ph.D., R.D., *senior adviser*
- Melissa C. Nelson, Ph.D., R.D., *faculty research associate*
- Kathy Kosiak, *research coordinator*
- Laura Klein, M.P.H., *research coordinator*

Responsible representatives of 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*
- Stephanie Weiss, Sc.M., *research associate*
- Kathryn Thomas, M.J., *senior communications officer*
- Punam Ohri-Vachaspati, Ph.D., R.D., *visiting research fellow*
- Jan Mihalow, M.S.M., *grants administrator*
- Prabhu Ponkshe, M.A., L.L.B., *communications consultant*

The Healthy Eating Research senior program advisory panel is chaired by Shiriki Kumanyika, Ph.D., M.P.H.

Other Grant Opportunities

New Connections Grants Through the Healthy Eating Research Program

Through collaboration with RWJF's *New Connections* program, the Healthy Eating Research program is accepting proposals from early career investigators from historically disadvantaged and underrepresented communities who bring special experience and expertise regarding the racial/ethnic and low-income populations and communities targeted by the Healthy Eating Research program. Up to three grants will be awarded for research studies to identify and evaluate environmental and policy strategies to promote healthy eating in populations where childhood obesity rates are highest and rising fastest.

Grants will fund small-scale studies to identify and evaluate promising policy and environmental changes (12- to 24-month awards of up to \$50,000 per year, with a maximum award of \$100,000) or macro-level policy analyses (12- to 24-month awards of up to \$50,000 in either year, with a maximum award of \$75,000). These grants also offer career-development opportunities. The topics for these grants are the same as the Healthy Eating Research Round 4 CFP. The deadline for brief proposals is February 24, 2009. For more information about New Connections grants through the Healthy Eating Research program, please go to www.healthyeatingresearch.org.

Timetable

- **January 30, 2009**
Optional Web conference call for potential applicants. For complete details and to register, visit www.healthyeatingresearch.org. Applicants will have an opportunity to ask questions during the conference call.
- **February 24, 2009 (3 p.m. ET)**
Deadline for receipt of brief proposals.*
- **May 1, 2009**
Applicants notified if invited to submit full proposals.
- **June 12, 2009 (3 p.m. ET)**
Deadline for receipt of full proposals.*
- **Mid-August, 2009**
Notification of finalists.
- **November 1, 2009**
Awards begin.
- **December 2009**
Healthy Eating Research Grantee Meeting.

** All proposals must be submitted only through the RWJF Grantmaking Online system. All 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.*

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, we work with a diverse group of organizations and individuals to identify solutions and achieve comprehensive, meaningful and timely change.

For more than 35 years we've brought experience, commitment and a rigorous, balanced approach to the problems that affect the health and health care of those we serve. When it comes to helping Americans lead healthier lives and get the care they need, we expect to make a difference in your lifetime.

For more information visit www.rwjf.org.

Sign up to receive e-mail alerts on upcoming calls for proposals at
www.rwjf.org/services.



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