

GRANT OPPORTUNITY:
Robert Wood Johnson Foundation’s
Building Local Alignment Initiative
Phase One

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) announces a new grant opportunity that will build on its efforts to increase collaboration among public health, healthcare, and social service organizations working to improve community health. Specifically, the initiative will support community-led organizations and networks focused on health and racial equity to participate in these collaborations as full partners in their design, implementation, and oversight.

This initiative is using a participatory grantmaking process overseen by a diverse panel of stakeholders external to RWJF. This [Grant Advisory Committee](#) (GAC) will design and oversee an application process and make grant decisions in support of a set of intermediary organizations. The selected intermediaries, in turn, will employ their own participatory grantmaking processes to disburse (or “regrant”) these funds to community-based organizations and networks to ensure the voices of those most affected are involved in these decisions.

An important part of this project is providing co-learning and knowledge-sharing opportunities among all participants—including GAC members, intermediaries, grantees, and foundation staff over the multi-year grantmaking period.

Acronyms Used in This Document

| Acronym | Meaning |
|----------------|---|
| RWJF | Robert Wood Johnson Foundation |
| BLA | Building Local Alignment: the name of this initiative |
| GAC | Grant Advisory Committee: the group of external stakeholders overseeing this grantmaking process for the initiative |

WHY THIS PROJECT AND WHY NOW?

RWJF’s new initiative builds on efforts it has undertaken during the past several years through its strategy to ensure that healthcare, public health, and social services systems collaborate in ways that improve community health.

While these systems have made progress in aligning their efforts more strategically toward better health outcomes, this new effort focuses more explicitly on uprooting deeper structural problems that perpetuate inequities and diminish opportunities for people to live their healthiest lives. Feedback data and RWJF’s experience also indicate that the systems-level shifts that many funders say they want to see require community-centric approaches where residents are valued as co-owners and co-creators. In other words, funders can best support systems-level

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change by working in partnership with communities in trusting, power-sharing relationships that value the lived experiences of those who are directly affected by a problem or issue. Through this grant opportunity, RWJF is integrating this approach into its strategy and decision making.

A unique aspect of this initiative is RWJF's decision to use a participatory grantmaking approach guided by the GAC, which includes 10 individuals representing a broad cross-section of stakeholders (including community organizers, participatory grantmakers, social service/health care system practitioners, scholars, and others).

See the GAC members [here](#).

The GAC is overseeing all parts of the grantmaking process, including reviewing all information and proposals provided by applicants and making all funding decisions. RWJF will conduct any necessary financial and legal due diligence before grant agreements are final.

There are two phases to the GAC's grantmaking process. In Phase One, the GAC is asking interested organizations and networks to respond to this Request for Information (RFI) with answers to the questions on pages 4-5; the focus in this phase of review will be to assess the organizational fit of applicants for the initiative. In Phase Two, the GAC will invite a smaller set of responding organizations to provide more detailed proposals describing how they would approach the work.

An important goal of this endeavor is to learn about and model participatory approaches for both the philanthropic and participatory grantmaking fields. The GAC, the intermediary grantees, and their sub-grantees will develop learning priorities to ensure that findings are useful for grantees, practitioners, as well as other foundations.

The project's evaluation will also be designed using this participatory approach. The GAC and RWJF will be working alongside an evaluation partner and grantees to co-develop an evaluation of the initiative, with a focus on using equitable evaluation principles and frameworks. (An example of such principles and frameworks can be found [here](#).) The GAC and the foundation will be sharing more information on evaluation approaches as the initiative moves forward.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Project Description

Rooted in the belief that those closest to a problem should be central in crafting solutions, the GAC will award **two to three grants totaling \$4.2 million** to a set of intermediary organizations around the country for regranting, as well as supporting some related costs for the intermediaries themselves. Selected intermediaries will then have roughly three years to regrant funds using a participatory grantmaking process of their design and to provide other supports to community-based organizations/networks engaged in public health, healthcare, and social service health equity collaboratives.

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This approach recognizes: 1) that a large foundation like RWJF has limited capacity to directly reach smaller, community-based organizations; and 2) that community members have the most knowledge about what their communities need to address systemic inequities and remove the obstacles that limit their influence, decision-making power, and collective accountability.

This multi-year process also includes: ongoing evaluation; communications and information-sharing among all participants—including GAC members, grantees, and foundation staff; coaching, support, and technical assistance; and convenings of all grantees, GAC members, and foundation staff.

This initiative has been designed as a one-time grant opportunity. This pilot has the potential to impact and inform future strategy development, programming, and grantmaking. However, there is no guarantee that renewal funding will be available.

Goals

- Center communities of color, low-income residents & other individuals and groups facing historic and ongoing harm from systemic inequities as co-creators & beneficiaries of local efforts to advance health equity.
- Advance strategies that require public health, healthcare & social service (multi-sector) systems—as well as funders and intermediaries—to demonstrate accountability to community residents, their priorities & racial equity.
- Provide additional support for community-led nonprofits for technical assistance, policy advocacy, leadership development, community organizing, and other priorities and needs they identify.
- Foster meaningful, transparent, and equitable partnerships between community-led nonprofits & multi-sector systems in advancing racial and health equity.
- Model participatory grantmaking approaches that shift power and influence to communities—and share lessons across RWJF and beyond in ways that seed new norms for how philanthropy is done.

Definition of Terms

“Participatory grantmaking” is defined as grantees and grantors:

- Co-designing funding strategies and priorities
- Reviewing and assessing proposals
- Establishing decision-making criteria
- Making funding decisions
- Participating in and co-designing the evaluation of an initiative

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“Intermediaries” are organizations that demonstrate:

- Strong connections to—and trusting relationships with— communities
- A proven record of designing and implementing programming with outside funding
- Capacity and commitment to serve as the facilitating entity between the funder and sub-grantees
- Infrastructure to re-grant and provide technical assistance, bridge-building and other supports to community-led nonprofits

“Community” is defined as people who share *one or more* of the following:

- An interest in, commitment to, and/or focus on a locality or region
- Common or intersecting identities and lived experiences
- Shared or similar priorities, goals, and direction
- A commitment to advancing the common good as defined by those living and working in the community

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

As noted above, there are two phases to the grantmaking process. Phase One is focused on assessing organizational fit using responses to the questions below.

The GAC is asking interested applicants to **briefly** reply to this Request for Information by responding to the questions below in whatever format—written document, video, audio recording, and/or others—they are most comfortable using. This response is not a formal proposal; rather, it will be used by the GAC to invite a smaller set of organizations/networks to submit a more detailed application, which will focus on the applicant’s proposed approach to the work. *Applications of varying styles will be accepted and will not be judged on length.*

Questions

- Tell us a little about your organization/network, e.g., mission, goals, activities, etc.
- How does your work/project align with the goals the GAC has outlined?
- Describe your community-led work, including demonstrated accountability to community members/partners, support for community/Black/POC-led organizations, current state of community and cross-sectoral partnerships (and how these are defined).
- Describe how your organization/network could serve as an intermediary for this project, including regranteeing capacity, providing non-monetary resources, and employing a participatory grantmaking process.

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- The GAC values and is open to partnering with organizations of all sizes and scale. Please indicate in your response where your organization falls in terms of its annual budget:
 - \$10M+
 - \$5M-10M
 - \$3M-5M
 - \$1M – 2M
 - Under \$1M
- Please provide examples of how your organization has demonstrated its commitment to racial justice internally and externally.

Criteria the GAC Will Use to Assess Applications

Phase One applications will be assessed by the committee using the following criteria:

- Whether the organization can be considered an “intermediary” using the definition on page 4 (for example, capacity to regrant and provide technical assistance, strong connections with communities, etc.).
- How the organization’s existing work is aligned with the project goal to increase collaboration among public health, healthcare and social service organizations, and how the applicant plans to expand on this work or initiate new efforts with additional funding.
- Evidence of applicants’ community-led work, including: accountability to community members/partners; support for Black/POC-led organizations; current state of community partnerships (and how partnership is defined).
- Commitment of the intermediary to a participatory process externally (regranting and providing non-monetary resources) and internally (extent to which its governance and decision-making systems involve community members).

From this review, a smaller set of organizations will be invited to submit more detailed proposals. Specific questions and criteria for Phase Two of the process will be provided to those organizations at that time, based in part on feedback and suggestions we receive from applicants during Phase One.

Help Us Help You

- Let us know if you have suggestions or questions. This is an iterative process focused more on learning and experimenting than on executing a pre-determined and inflexible formal design. Your participation, feedback, and recommendations will be important to ensuring that the learning we share as a result of this process will incentivize other foundations to consider employing participatory approaches. If you have questions or feedback please email us at BLA@rwjf.org.

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- Applicants are encouraged to send questions and comments to the GAC at BLA@rwjf.org. The GAC will make every effort to respond to all emails as quickly as possible.

HOW TO SUBMIT YOUR APPLICATION

In order to submit your response to this RFI you must:

1. Complete a brief applicant contact form [here](#).
2. Email your response to the application questions on pages 4-5 of this RFI in your chosen format/s (document, video, etc.) to BLA@rwjf.org.

Responses should be submitted by April 24, 2023.

ELIGIBILITY

The GAC is eager to work with a diverse range of applicants for this opportunity. That said, applying organizations must:

- Be based in the United States and focus on work taking place in the United States;
- Have a demonstrated history of managing/overseeing projects where community members have equal decision-making power; and
- Have 501(c)(3) status or be fiscally sponsored.

KEY DATES AND DEADLINES

- **April 24, 2023**
Deadline for receipt of response to Phase One application questions and completion of applicant contact [form](#)
- **Early June 2023**
Notification of whether or not Phase One applicants are invited to advance to Phase Two
- **August 2023 (final date TBD)**
Phase Two applications due
- **October 2023**
Notification of finalists

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- **January 2024**

Grant start

Thank you for your interest in this exciting opportunity. Visit the initiative website at www.rwjf.org/buildinglocalalignment for more information.

We look forward to your application!