

**Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)  
Interdisciplinary Research Leaders (IRL) Program**

*Updated March 2021 for the Cohort 6 CFA*

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**GENERAL**

**Q: Can you share some qualities that you are looking for in IRL team members?**

A: Our successful IRL Teams have these top two qualities: 1) The capacity and desire to become a research leader advancing population health and health equity, 2) A compelling vision for how research and community partners will work together collaboratively and be accountable to and engage with the community, and 3) Conduct credible and transparent research with a strong potential to inform policy or action at the local and/or national level, properly scaled, and not too ambitious.

**Q: What are the specific learning objectives of the IRL program?**

A: Learning objectives for all team members include:

- Increase expertise in interdisciplinary research
- Engage in team leadership for the promotion of health equity
- Understand how to use leadership and network skills to drive change in academic and community settings
- Improve the facilitation of compelling, action-oriented research that improves health and advances health equity goals in all manner of communities
- Increase understanding of how structural racism and other “isms” constrain health and opportunity, in both the historical and contemporary contexts
- Determine how to apply anti-racist practices into research and leadership
- Enhance skills to ensure that ethical research and community standards are equal priorities
- Build skills for the dissemination of research findings to improve community health
- Understand the process to effectively communicate health research evidence to inform policy and change

Additional learning objectives directed for community partner include:

- Develop skills for partnering with researchers to answer critical community-oriented questions
- Develop skills to lead, guide, and utilize research for action and improvement in community health

Additional learning objectives directed for the research partner include:

- Develop skills and understanding to create equitable partnerships with community members and leaders
- Develop skills to create research that is responsive to community concerns

**Q: The Call for Applications references RWJF's Policy on Open Access. Where can I find more information?**

A: The policy and frequently asked questions on the policy can be found at <https://www.rwjf.org/en/about-rwjf/our-policies/policy-for-open-access.html>

### COMMUNITY PARTNER

**Q: For the community partner, do you have a preference for the type of organization or sector in which they work?**

A: Community partners may work in a variety of organizational settings, as long as their experience and expertise are relevant to the proposed research project. The community partner can work in any area including community organizing, education, health care, local government, or any range of nonprofit and private sectors, whether healthcare-related or not.

For the purposes of this program, community partners are deeply engaged with the community of interest. Individuals must have the potential to take action on the issue themselves or have relationships with entities that can take action. We aim to help develop community partners as research leaders, too. So while not professional researchers, community partners should be interested in using, compelling, and helping to execute credible and transparent research for action.

**Q: Are there opportunities for additional support for the community partner's organization?**

A: Community Partners in Cohort 6 will be eligible to work with an organization to apply for mini-grants from the National Program Center to provide additional financial support for the community partner's employer, sponsoring institution, or another community organization directly involved in the research to help build the research capacity and infrastructure within the community organization. One example of how this additional support can be used is to support other staff and personnel at the community organization to help advance the IRL research project so the burden of work doesn't fall exclusively on the community partner. This opportunity will generally be limited to Section 501(c)(3) public charities and government entities.

### RESEARCHER PARTNER

**Q: Can you define mid-career researcher?**

A: We are looking for applicants who are mid-career, rather than early-career or late-career. While we don't have a set definition for "mid-career," generally speaking, a researcher would be considered "mid-career" if they are more than three years out from their PhD (or another terminal degree) or have extensive (e.g., 10+ years) rigorous research or evaluation experience. Importantly, the determination of mid-career need not be based on rank. We want team members who are skilled and experienced in doing research and past the initial phase of their career, but not at the end. Researchers and community leaders who are interested in being included as team members are invited to make their case for their mid-career status in the application materials. We focus on "mid-career" because these individuals are in a unique position where they have gained the skills and experience to lead but also have time to

implement their learning and influence their peers and organizations as they continue to work formally for significant time beyond the IRL program.

**Q: Do the researchers have to be at an academic institution?**

A: No, researchers do not need to be based at an academic institution. Researchers may hold academic appointments or positions in applied research firms or community organizations. We encourage you to browse through our [website](#) to get a sense of our IRL fellows, teams, and their research projects. All that really matters is that the research is rigorous, credible and transparent wherever it is conducted.

**Q: Do you have to have a PhD in order to be included on an application as a research partner?**

A: While we expect that many researchers listed as team members will have earned a PhD or related degree, this is not necessary provided the applicant can demonstrate that the researcher has a strong record of excellence in research or evaluation. With that said, researchers from diverse disciplinary and demographic backgrounds are strongly encouraged to apply.

**Q: How do you gauge demonstrated expertise in research?**

A: We assess the research experience of the team as a collective. This includes the team having some past experience working on the theme in the application. For some, teams can show a clear record of quality peer-reviewed publications. For others, white-paper reports, policy briefs, community reports, a model policy language, Op-Eds, public advocacy documents, books, or other documents that illustrate past experience with action-oriented research. Overall, there is no one metric. Applicants and team members must make their case. Again, we are interested in researchers interested in creating credible and transparent evidence for action.

**Q: Can the researchers be from the same organization/institution?**

A: Yes, the two researchers can be from the same organization/institution.

**Q: If I am currently a doctoral student or in a post-doc position, can I be included on an application as a research partner?**

A: No, doctoral students and post-doctoral fellows are not considered “mid-career researchers.” In addition, persons on NIH or NSF training fellowships (e.g. K awards) are ineligible for this program. You must have completed any such program before the start of the IRL program.

## TEAM

**Q: Does the team need to show a record of working together, or can it be a newly formed team?**

A: Team members do not need to be located in the same geographical area or have a long history of collaborating together, but a plan for maintaining team cohesion is a necessary component of the application and selection process. More specifically, each team must thoroughly describe their experience and plan for establishing and/or maintaining an effective, equitable collaboration.

**Q: Is each individual only allowed to be part of one IRL application, or can an individual be on more than one team, as long as the focus of each individual application is different?**

A: You can only apply to be part of one IRL Team. In other words, you can only be listed as a team member in one team application

**Q: If by November 1, 2021, I will have graduated from a different RWJF leadership program or another RWJF grant program, am I eligible to apply for IRL?**

A: Yes, you can apply to be part of an IRL Team as long as by the Cohort 6 official start date in the program (November 1, 2021), you are not a current/active grantee in one of the following RWJF programs: Culture of Health Leaders, Clinical Scholars, Health Policy Research Scholars, Harold Amos Faculty Development Program or Health Policy Fellows. Other research or program grants from RWJF are allowed.

## RESEARCH PROJECTS

**Q: Can you give us a sample research project for your current teams or alumni teams?**

A: Check out the IRL website to learn more about our [current teams](#) and [alumni teams](#) and their research projects.

**Q: What are the different research themes/topic areas for previous IRL cohorts?**

A: The themes for the previous IRL cohorts are:

- Early childhood and health (Cohort 1)
- Housing, community development, and health (Cohort 1)
- Youth development approaches to prevent violence and promote health (Cohort 2)
- Individual and community resilience and health (Cohort 2)
- Solutions for better health care delivery in rural America (Cohort 3)
- Addressing Social and Economic Determinants to Prevent Chronic Conditions and to Promote Health, Wellbeing and Equity in Rural America (Cohort 3)
- Community development and health (Cohort 4)
- Clinical practice, social services, and health (Cohort 4)
- Community environment and health (Cohort 5)
- Families and child health (Cohort 5)

**Q: What are the two themes/topic areas for the 2021 IRL CFA (Cohort 6)?**

A: IRL applicant teams must focus their research and associated action activities on one of two topic areas, or themes. For the sixth IRL cohort (beginning November 2021), the two topic areas are:

1. Structural racism in health care
2. Structural racism and community health and well-being

**Q: How detailed does our research project description need to be at the time of application (e.g. number of surveys/focus groups, sample size, etc.)?**

A: In general, the more detailed your research project description is in the application, the better. We are interested in projects that yield credible and transparent information that is useful for action. It follows that research should be novel, at least to the local issue. Building on prior research is expected but the importance of the proposed research must be demonstrated.

**Q: What if the research ideally involves more than a single community partner? Is it possible to involve additional community partners?**

A: For this IRL Call for Applications, the team is limited to one community partner team member. However, you can include contractors and consultants in the research project budget to engage the services of additional community partners if the project calls for it.

**Q: What does the ‘Revised Research Proposal’ entail?**

A: It is our expectation that all teams accepted into the program successfully submit a Revised Research Proposal in March 2022. The first four months of the program will be spent refining the research proposal and teams will have input and assistance from members of the IRL Research Team. Funds for the research project will not be released until submission and approval of a full revised research proposal, approximately six months after the grant start date of November 1, 2021.

**Q: Is program evaluation eligible for funding under this call?**

A: Yes, an evaluation of an intervention is one example of an evaluation-specific research design that can be proposed and detailed in the application.

## FUNDING/SUPPORT/AWARD

**Q: Can you share more information about the funding?**

A: The first award is a stipend of \$25,000 per fellow for each year of the three-year program. These funds are meant to support time for participation in the IRL program. These funds will be paid directly to each team member’s sponsoring organization. In most cases, an individual’s sponsoring organization is their employer.

The second award is for the team research project. We anticipate that the total 2.5 year research project budget, including indirect costs/overhead, will be \$125,000. Each team will select an organization/institution (in almost all cases, this will be one of the team member’s employers) that will receive and manage the team research project grant. The recipient organization must be based in the U.S. or its territories.

**Q: What is the time commitment for fellows in this program?**

A: The time commitment for the program is estimated to be one day per week – approximately 20% FTE – for three years. To support the fellows’ time to participate in the program, the grantee organization will receive financial support of \$25,000 per team member for each year of the three-year program. Note that this expectation is honest: the program expects Fellows to fully participate in all program activities.

**Q: Is there guidance regarding indirect cost rates for RWJF grants/awards?**

A: Yes. For the stipend portion, An optional administrative fee of \$1,000 per year, \$3,000 in total, may be provided to cover the sponsoring organization’s administrative costs of managing the grant will be available. No other indirect costs will be allowed. For the research project, RWJF’s Indirect Cost Rate Policy will apply and can be found [here](#).

**Q: Is there funding to assist the team members in attending the in-person meetings?**

A: Yes, all travel expenses for all required program meetings will be paid directly by the IRL national program center or RWJF. This will not come out of your grant budget or your fellow support funds.

**Q: Will you fund programs in the same city/county?**

A: Yes, it is possible that we would fund more than one team in the same city or county.

## SELECTION

**Q: Will applications be scored and reviewer comments provided to applicants?**

A: Applications will undergo a rigorous, multi-stage review process. Per RWJF policy, reviewers' comments will not be provided to applicants. While we can't provide applicant teams with specific reviewer information, we can share some of the qualities of applications that were selected to be part of the program.

## FUTURE IRL CFA

**Q: Will there be a 2022 IRL Call for Applications?**

A: The 2022 IRL Call for Applications is expected to be released in the first quarter of 2022. We encourage you to subscribe towards the bottom of the [IRL website](#) homepage to receive future funding alerts, and follow us on Twitter at @IRLeaders.