

Frequently Asked Questions: The Letter of Intent Stage

This document contains answers to frequently asked questions (FAQs) about the Health Equity Scholars for Action (HES4A) 2021 call for proposals (CFP). If you have additional questions, please email them to Sheldon Oliver Watts at HES4A@rwjf.org. We will regularly update this document as additional questions come in.

This guidance focuses mainly on applications at the letter of intent (LOI) stage. At a later time, we will provide applicants invited to submit full proposals with additional guidance around the interview process, development of the budget and full proposal narrative, and more.

FAQ Topics

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Eligibility

Am I eligible for HES4A?

You may be eligible if:

1. You are a member of a group that has been historically underrepresented in research disciplines (for example, based on race, ethnicity, gender expression or sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, disability, family background, etc.);
2. You have completed a doctoral degree within the last five years; and
3. You are or will be a full-time junior faculty member in a position that could lead to tenure by the start of the program. Please refer to the CFP for the full list of eligibility criteria.

To be eligible, individual applicants need only belong to one of the groups described under the “historically underrepresented” criterion; however, they must satisfy all remaining conditions in the list of eligibility criteria.

Am I still eligible if I do not identify with any of the examples used in the CFP to describe people from historically underrepresented backgrounds?

Terms such as “historically underrepresented,” “systematically marginalized,” and “racially minoritized,” are used in the CFP to describe groups for which systemic racism and other forms of discrimination have created barriers to advancement and promotion in academic settings. While the CFP lists characteristics such as race and ethnicity, socio-economic background, native language, disability, and identity as a member of the LGBTQ+ community, we recognize there could be other identities or circumstances that would create similar dynamics for individuals, and we welcome those individuals to apply. Applicants will have an opportunity to describe their unique circumstances as part of the online application process.

We also recognize that appropriate language and terminology for describing specific underrepresented or marginalized groups may vary over time and by group, and that no one term adequately describes all people for whom this opportunity is intended. For example, the term BIPOC (referring to Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) may not adequately represent all groups who are racially minoritized. The use of this term in the CFP is meant to be illustrative and not to exclude individuals who find other identities (e.g. LatinX, Pacific Islander) more representative. In their proposals, applicants are encouraged to use the terms they consider most appropriate, even if they differ from examples used in the CFP.

May I apply for this funding opportunity even if I am already funded by Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) or another funder?

You may apply for this funding opportunity if you have not served as a project director or principal investigator on any grant since receiving your doctoral degree. Individuals who have served in other capacities on an RWJF-supported project, such as a project staff member, or who have been awarded grants to support predoctoral research or training (e.g., predoctoral fellowship grant), **are eligible** to apply. Individuals who have received small post-doctoral awards (e.g., < \$10,000, seed funds, faculty research grants) are also still eligible. If you would like to discuss your specific situation, please contact

HES4A@rwjf.org. **Response updated 4/28/2021.**

Am I eligible if I have been a principal investigator on an NIH R01 (or similar) research project?

No, former or current principal investigators on an NIH R01 research project or the equivalent, or other individuals who have successfully emerged as independent investigators, and/or have developed a substantive research portfolio, are not eligible to apply.

What is meant by an “accredited academic institution”?

Your home institution should have an accreditation that is recognized by the Secretary of the US Department of Education (<https://www.ed.gov/accreditation>).

Can multiple applicants from the same home institution apply?

Yes, any number of applicants from any one home institution may apply. Note that to ensure that scholars have a rich training experience within their cohort, consideration will be given to the number of scholars selected from any one home institution within a given cohort.

I am not a U.S. citizen, permanent resident, or DACA recipient, but I have a valid visa. Am I eligible?

No. Only U.S. citizens, permanent resident, or DACA recipients are eligible.

If I am not chosen for this funding opportunity, will I still be eligible for other RWJF grant opportunities?

Yes, interested applicants may apply to other RWJF solicitations.

Application

What is the submission timeline?

This is a two-phase submission process.

Phase 1:

- **Letters of intent are due on June 16, 2021 at 3pm ET.** It is recommended you submit your application prior to the deadline to avoid delays that may be caused by technical issues or other difficulties that may arise. Late proposals will not be accepted.
- Applicants will be notified on July 21, 2021 of whether they are invited to submit a Full Proposal. Detailed instructions will be provided for those invited on how to complete and submit their full proposals.

Phase 2:

- **Full proposals are due September 1, 2021 at 3pm ET.**
- Semifinalists interviews will take place in mid-September 2021.
- Finalists will be notified of selection in mid-October of 2021.
- The program and funding will begin December 1, 2021.

Are there language requirements for the application and administration of the grant?

Yes, all application materials must be submitted in English. All communications with RWJF program officers and staff, including but not limited to progress updates, financial and narrative reports, and dissemination products, must also be submitted in English.

Who will review my proposal?

Proposals will be reviewed by a committee composed of RWJF staff, alumni from the former RWJF New Connections program; staff and advisory committee members at Evidence for Action (E4A), Policies for Action (P4A), and Systems for Action (S4A) program offices; and other expert reviewers as needed.

Will every applicant who submits an LOI be invited to submit a full proposal?

No, only a subset of eligible applicants who have submitted LOIs will be invited to submit a full proposal. The review will be based on the criteria described in the call for proposals.

Will I receive feedback on my LOI or full proposal?

RWJF policy prevents us from providing individual critiques of proposals submitted.

What if I have questions regarding this call for proposals or the application process?

The following are opportunities to ask questions:

An informational webinar will be held on Tuesday, May 4 at 12 p.m. ET and will include a question and answer period. **Registration is required** through this [link](#). A recording of the webinar will be available afterward.

We are also hosting a number of virtual “office hours” to speak with RWJF program officers and staff. These are open to all applicants on a drop-in basis; registration is not required and these will NOT be recorded. Join the office hours by going to “Programmatic and Technical Office Hours,” within the “Resources” section of the [Application and Review system](#), accessed through the “Apply Online” button from [the CFP overview page](#).

- For questions regarding the HES4A program (e.g., eligibility, mentorship, types of research, etc.):
 - Tues, May 11 @ 3-4 p.m. ET
 - Mon, May 17 @ 12-1 p.m. ET
 - Thurs, May 27 @ 2-3 p.m. ET
- For questions specifically about the application portal (e.g., troubleshooting, technical issues, uploading materials, etc.):
 - Wed, May 12 @ 3-4 p.m. ET
 - Wed, May 19 @ 3-4 p.m. ET

Additional questions may be emailed to Sheldon Oliver Watts at HES4A@rwjf.org.

This FAQ document will be updated regularly to include questions sent by email.

Research

What types of projects are a good fit for funding through this CFP?

This funding is for research projects that will build evidence on how specific interventions (i.e., policies, systems, programs, or practices) can inform action to impact population health, well-being, and equity. Researchers might focus on:

- Independent evaluations of program or policy implementation,
- Randomized trials, quasi- or natural experiments,
- Secondary analyses of existing data,
- Qualitative or mixed methods,
- Network or systems analyses, and/or
- Exploratory science (i.e., research into an issue that has not yet been extensively studied with the intention of identifying priorities, developing operational definitions, and improving future research around the issue).

New sources of data can also be proposed and analyzed. Studies may be conducted as standalone projects or as part of larger existing studies or trials underway. Projects involving community-based participatory research (CBPR) approaches and projects that test the efficacy of certain research methods to advance equity are welcomed.

What types of projects are NOT a good fit for funding through this CFP?

Some examples of research that are not a good fit with the program objectives include:

- Descriptive studies that seek to document the extent of a problem or condition without evaluating a solution;
- Literature reviews;
- Needs assessments;
- Development and validation of screening tools; and
- Basic biomedical inquiry, drug therapy or device research, and animal or plant science.

Funds from this award may not be used to carry out interventions or for general organizational operations. RWJF policy also does not allow grant funds to be used 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.

To what extent does my research need to reflect the spirit of RWJF's signature research programs, E4A, P4A, and S4A?

Research funded through this CFP should aim to build the evidence to establish a [Culture of Health](#) in the United States by informing action to improve population health, equity, and well-being. Given the focus of HES4A on research, mentorship, and career development, it is not expected that scholars conduct research projects of similar size or scope to what has been funded through E4A, P4A, or S4A. Applicants should propose research that can move the field incrementally forward with respect to any of the topics previously funded through these programs, or they may propose additional relevant topics, as long as they present a strong rationale for how these topics relate to systems, policies, programs, or practices that have the potential to improve population health and equity.

What are the criteria by which my proposal will be evaluated?

At the LOI stage, proposals will be evaluated based on:

- The applicant's statement of impact, which describes the potential for this program to influence the trajectory of the applicant's academic career;
- Relevance of the proposed research topic to one or more RWJF signature research programs (E4A, P4A, and S4A) aims. See previous question for more details;
- Relevance of the research question to building a Culture of Health; and
- Feasibility of the proposed research. This refers to how reasonable the applicant's plan is for gaining access to the data, populations, setting, or other conditions necessary for the research to be successful within the proposed timeline.

Applicants invited to submit a full proposal will be provided additional instructions and details on selection criteria. An overview for criteria at the Full Proposal stage is provided in the CFP.

What does it mean to apply principles of the Equitable Evaluation Framework (EEF)?

RWJF views evaluation as a tool to advance equity by applying the following principles of the Equitable Evaluation Framework:

1. All evaluation and evaluative work should hold at its core a responsibility to advance progress towards equity. RWJF prioritizes the perspectives of historically marginalized populations, and holds that evaluation information should be validated by the community members participating in the evaluation activities, and translated, as needed, to be relevant and acted upon by foundation staff, policy makers and other involved parties.

2. Evaluative work should pay attention to the historical context, highlight systems and structures that contribute to inequities, and answer critical questions about the effect of a strategy on these underlying systemic drivers of inequity, as well as capture the lived experiences of different populations.
3. Evaluative work should be multi-culturally valid and oriented towards participant ownership. RWJF encourages any rigorous methods to amplify diverse voices and produce actionable evidence while recognizing the value of lived experience and the variety of ways that knowledge is held and produced.

In its proposal review process of evaluations, RWJF examines how prospective applicants operationalize these principles in: (1) the core values and make-up of the research team; (2) the project design and approaches that are culturally appropriate and center on drivers of inequity; (3) the evaluation questions that are created and validated by affected stakeholders; (4) the project activities, analysis, and outcomes that meaningfully engage with affected stakeholders; and (5) the reporting and dissemination practices that serve multiple stakeholder groups, especially community members most affected by the evaluation.

If my research does not involve evaluation, do I need to apply EEF principles?

Equitable Evaluation Framework questions measures of objectivity, validity, and rigor that characterize the knowledge paradigm in the Western world. As such, EEF principles lend themselves to be adopted across different types of knowledge generation and learning. Because applicants are expected to propose equity-focused studies, it is important that they explain in what ways their proposed work has the potential to advance equity; highlights systems and structures that contribute to inequities; and produces actionable evidence that can inform meaningful and relevant changes for affected stakeholders.

Mentorship

What is the difference between a technical mentor and career coach?

Mentors will be identified on an individualized, case-by-case basis to align with the scholar's expressed needs and preferences, such as a match on research focus, professional pathway, physical location, home institution, and/or life experiences.

The **technical mentor** will usually serve as the primary mentor, and will spend more time with the scholar, playing the key role of research advisor. This may include assistance with technical knowledge and research skills and providing advice and feedback on research questions, design and conduct, and/or instruction in the “nuts and bolts” of working in academia.

The role of **career coach** is intended to complement that of the technical mentor. Coaches may be more advanced in their careers than technical mentors, and some may work as leaders outside of academia. They will meet with scholars on a consistent basis, and serve as a role model, guide, and sponsor (i.e., someone whose efforts are directed at actively advancing the scholar's career). They will provide opportunities for professional exposure (e.g., through nominations for speaking engagements, introductions to networks, etc.) to promote career advancement.

In what cases would these roles be filled by the same person?

The idea for scholars to be matched with two different mentors (technical mentor and career coach) is reflective of the team mentoring model that permits the relatively fewer mentors from underrepresented groups who have achieved senior status to assist the larger number of junior level faculty. In some cases, both roles may be filled by the same individual - for example, if someone has the interest, expert research skills, and stature in the applicant's specific field to entirely fulfill both roles. However, we generally anticipate that coaches will have less available time to spend with individual scholars and anticipate that dual mentor/coach arrangements will be rare.

How will mentors and coaches be chosen?

At the beginning of the program, scholars will complete an individualized goals sheet, and will participate in activities to introduce them to the program. A team at Johns Hopkins University, Accelerating Collaborations for Mentoring and Equity (ACME), will conduct a phone interview with the scholar to understand their research and career goals as well as what qualities they seek in a mentor. The scholar's research proposal will also be reviewed by ACME to help inform the matching with a mentor and a coach.

What if I have a mentor in mind that I'd like to work with?

Scholars can indicate at the beginning of the program if they have a specific mentor in mind, and ACME will take these suggestions into consideration when making matches.

Who should serve as my home institution advisor?

The home institution advisor should be a role model of a successful faculty member, who supports the scholar by providing academic advice, sharing resources and opportunities, and promoting the scholar's success. This person may have already been assigned to the applicant by the scholar's academic department within the home institution. Ideally, this person would have a successful track record of mentoring individuals at the applicant's career stage and be able to support the scholar through the program. We expect that having a home institution advisor will minimize conflicting expectations scholars may encounter at their home institution and their participation in HES4A. The advisor will be asked to write a letter of support **at the full proposal stage** describing their commitment to supporting the applicant's professional advancement within their academic institutions.

Applicants will not be penalized for not having a home institution advisor, and they will not be given an advantage in the selection process if they have one. Moreover, the qualifications of or the strength of the relationship with the advisor will have no bearing on decisions regarding the applicant's merit for HES4A.

Through this program, each scholar will be provided with a mentor and a coach regardless of whether a home institution advisor exists already.

Funding & Budget

How much funding is available per grant?

Grants will be \$250,000 and cover a project period of 24 months. The \$250,000 budget is inclusive of both direct and indirect costs.

How much of the award can be used to cover my salary?

Funds can cover up to 70% of the scholar's salary for two years (capped at \$75,000 per year), with the remainder of the award to be used for research and other related expenses.

For example:

- If a scholar's salary is \$110,000 per year, only \$75,000 may be used toward salary each year (even though it corresponds with less than 70%). This is to maintain sufficient funds for the research project.
- If a scholar's salary is \$90,000 per year, \$63,000 may be used for salary, which corresponds to 70% of the salary. The remainder will be applied toward research and other related expenses. No more than 70% of salary may be covered by this grant in order to maintain a sufficient time base for other activities related to the scholar's academic appointment.

What are appropriate uses of grant funds?

Funds may be used for personnel, consultant fees, training, data collection and analysis, meetings, supplies, project-related travel, other direct expenses, and up to 12% in overhead or indirect costs for colleges/universities. Funds from this award may **not** be used to carry out interventions or for general organizational operations.

In general, it is not appropriate to buy office equipment or office software with program funds. However, if office equipment or software essential for conducting research (i.e., collecting or analyzing data) is needed and justified in the budget narrative, and the cost does not exceed five percent of the total direct costs in the budget, it is acceptable to include such items.

What personnel may be covered by this grant?

In addition to the Principal Investigator (applicant)'s salary, project staff such as a research assistant or project coordinator are allowable expenses for this grant, and if invited to the Full Proposal, applicants will be asked to list and provide CVs for any project staff as part of the Full Proposal.

Co-investigators are **not** allowed. Compensation for the mentors and coaches provided as part of the mentorship component of the program will be covered separately by RWJF and do **not** need to be included in the applicant's budget.

What if my proposed research requires more money or time than this award covers?

Feasibility of the proposed research is one of the selection criteria, so applicants should propose studies that can be successfully executed and completed given the award amount and timeline. We encourage applicants to consider creative ways for achieving high-impact research within the duration and budget parameters of this program; for example, by focusing on a specific phase of a larger research project, using this funding to supplement an existing project, leveraging funding from multiple sources, etc.

Please contact HES4A@rwjf.org to discuss ideas for research that may fall outside of the funding parameters of this program.

How do I estimate my budget?

A detailed budget is not required at the LOI stage, and more detailed guidance will be provided in the Budget Preparation Guidelines to applicants who are invited to submit a full proposal. Budget requests should be inclusive of both direct and indirect costs.

For specific questions about what is allowable in the budget, email HES4A@rwjf.org.

Are matching funds, or research funds from other sources, required for this funding opportunity?

No, matching funds are not required, but supplemental funding is welcomed and encouraged. Applicants can indicate other sources of funding in the full proposal.

What are expectations for HES4A scholars?

HES4A scholars will be expected to:

- Collaborate with RWJF program officers and other HES4A scholars to identify and leverage potential synergies across scholar projects and to disseminate results broadly.
- Attend regular meetings with their technical mentors and career coaches.
- Actively participate in research collaboration and translation activities offered through the forthcoming Health Equity Research Learning Collaborative (HER-LC).
- Participate in other activities organized by RWJF and other program offices (P4A, E4A, and S4A) including, but not limited to, webinars, blogs, podcasts, research meetings and presentations, and policy briefings.
- Participate in periodic progress check-ins throughout the grant period with RWJF staff managing the program.
- Attend annual scholar convenings. If held in person, travel and hotel costs to participate will be covered by RWJF.

Where can I learn more about other funding opportunities from RWJF?

Active and upcoming funding opportunities can be found on the RWJF [Funding Opportunities web page](#). You can also sign up to receive RWJF news and funding email alerts, [here](#).