

Health Equity Scholars for Action

2025 Call for Proposals
Applicant Webinar
October 10, 2025



Agenda

1. Introduction to RWJF
2. HES4A background & program elements
3. Scholar reflections
4. Eligibility criteria
5. Application and review processes
6. Scholar expectations
7. Q&A
8. Additional resources

Speakers



Sheldon Oliver Watts, PhD, MPH
Senior Program Officer, RWJF



Mieka Smart, DrPH, MHS
HES4A Program Director, Tulane
University



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ACME, Johns Hopkins University



Zoe Smith, PhD, LCP
University of Denver



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University of Alabama
at Birmingham

Introduction to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

We are building the evidence base on what can help us achieve health equity — deepen our understanding of what shapes health and what types of policy and system changes have the greatest potential for impact.

We take bold leaps to transform health in our lifetime and pave the way, together, to a future where health is no longer a privilege, but a right.





Our Approaches

- Build and bridge power
- Cultivate leadership across systems
- Influence policy change
- Change narratives
- Produce and disseminate actionable evidence and data
- Catalyze investment in communities



Prioritized Systems

- Healthcare
- Public Health
- Economic Supports for Families (Tax and Care)
- Community Development
- Government
- Media
- Health Science Knowledge



Generational Goals

Healthy and Equitable
Community Conditions

Equitable and
Accountable Public Health
and Healthcare Systems

Economic Inclusion for
Family Wellbeing



Outcome

**Elimination of
systemic and
structural barriers
to health and
wellbeing, including
those related to
structural racism.**

HES4A Background and Program Elements

Health Equity Scholars for Action

- The primary goal of HES4A is to support the career development and academic advancement of health equity researchers from historically marginalized backgrounds, to address the challenges that they typically experience, and help them overcome obstacles to earning tenure

Purpose of the 2025 Call for Proposals

- Select the next cohort of HES4A fellows who will receive grants that will offer:
 - Access to independent research funding
 - Advance their careers through tailored mentorship and coaching
 - Connection with a community of support

Research

Transformative, action-oriented,
evidence that address structural
barriers to health and wellbeing



Research

- Research projects **should** center community needs, assets, experiences, and expertise and build evidence for systemic solutions to health inequities
- For example:
 - Natural experiments
 - Implementation research
 - Developmental studies
 - Impact studies
 - Analyses of existing data sources
 - Network or systems analyses
 - Diverse methodological approaches and ways of knowing

Research

- Research that is **NOT** a good fit includes:
 - Descriptive studies that seek to document the extent of a problem or condition without evaluating a solution
 - Literature reviews and needs assessments
 - Development or validation of screening tools
 - Individual behavior change
 - Basic biomedical inquiry, drug therapy or device research, and animal or plant science

Mentorship and Coaching

Tailored guidance to help develop and strengthen technical skills, explore career opportunities, and foster networks of support and accountability



Mentorship and Coaching

Each scholar will be matched with:

- Technical Mentor – primary mentor and research advisor
 - Provides research-related technical assistance
- Career Coach – leader in the scholar's field
 - Serves as a role model, guide and sponsor to promote career advancement
- Home Institution Advisor
 - Promotes the scholar's success within the home institution

Community of Support

Supporting network and relationship with others in and outside the field



Community of Support

- Partners for Advancing Health Equity: A Research Learning Collaborative facilitates the sharing of ideas to harmonize the goals of people and organizations, to advance solutions to achieve health equity
 - Opportunities for peer support and kinship, networking, and professional development
 - Training and capacity building
 - Access to resources
- Events and activities organized by RWJF or grantee partners

HES4A Research Awards

- Grants will be up to \$260,000
- 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 salary is \$90,000, 70% can be covered by grant (\$63,000 each year)
 - If salary is \$110,000, up to \$75,000 will be covered by grant, although it is less than 70% of the salary
- Up to 15 grants will be awarded
- Grants will be for 24 months

Scholar Reflections

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Eligibility Criteria

Who's eligible to apply?

- Applicants must demonstrate challenges and/or barriers to full inclusion they have faced in their research disciplines because of their personal characteristics and/or experiences
- For example:
 - First-generation college graduates
 - People for whom English is not a native language
 - People from low-income communities
 - Individuals with disabilities
 - Older or second career professionals
 - People from geographically isolated locations
- These examples are meant to be illustrative, not exhaustive

Who's eligible to apply?

- Have completed a doctoral degree within the past 5 years (graduation date between May 1, 2020, and May 31, 2025)
- Be a junior faculty member, with a full-time appointment at an accredited U.S. school, that could lead to tenure, or be poised to be in such a position by the start of the grant
- Have a home institution that agrees to administer the grant
- Have never served as a PI on a post-doctoral grant greater than \$10,000

Who's eligible to apply?

- Have not received major support from other post-graduate research or training programs
- Be a U.S. citizen, permanent resident, or Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipient
- Not be related by blood or marriage to any Officer or Trustee of RWJF, or be a descendant of its founder

Application & Review Process

Application Process

This is a two-phase application process:

- Phase 1: Letter of intent (LOI)
 - Eligibility questions
 - Brief statement of impact
 - Two-page research narrative
 - Applicant CV
- Phase 2: Full proposal (invited applicants only)
 - Detailed research narrative, budget, and timeline
 - Other supporting materials
 - Web-based interviews with semi-finalists

- Apply at my.RWJF.org
- LOI: November 6, 2025, 3:00 PM ET
- Late proposals will not be accepted

Review Process

Who Will Review My Proposal?

- RWJF program officers and staff
- Alumni from RWJF *New Connections* program
- E4A, P4A, and S4A program representatives
- Other expert reviewers as needed

Details of Review Process

- All LOIs that meet eligibility criteria will be read by at least 2 reviewers
- Reviewers will score LOIs based on selection criteria
- You will be notified by January 26, 2026, if you are invited to submit a full proposal
- If invited, you will receive further instructions and resources for preparing your full proposal application

Elements of a Competitive Proposal

At the LOI stage, reviewers will be looking for...

- Potential for HES4A to impact your career trajectory
 - ...as described in your statement of impact
- Relevance of the research to Foundation's vision for achieving health equity through systems change, thus dismantling structural barriers to health
 - ...as described in the Rationale section of your letter of intent narrative
- Feasibility of the research
 - ...the extent to which you have a reasonable plan to access data, study settings, other necessary conditions

Scholar Expectations

- Collaboration with RWJF program officers and other HES4A scholars to identify and leverage potential synergies across scholar projects and to disseminate results broadly
- Regular meetings with technical mentor and career coach
- Active participation in research collaboration and translation activities offered through [Partners for Advancing Health Equity: A Research Learning Collaborative](#)

Scholar Expectations

- Participation in other activities organized by RWJF and other program offices including, but not limited to, webinars, blogs, podcasts, research meetings and presentations, and policy briefings
- Participation in periodic progress check-ins throughout the grant period with RWJF staff managing the program
- Attendance at monthly program meetings and annual scholar convenings. If held in person, travel and hotel costs to attend will be covered by RWJF

Questions?



Additional Applicant Resources

- [Full funding opportunity](#)
- [Program Specific Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQs\)](#) – regularly updated
- Archived recording of this webinar
- Virtual office hours
 - Wednesday, October 15, 2025, 1:00-2:00 PM ET
 - Tuesday, October 21, 2025, 2:00-3:00 PM ET
 - Register for the office hours by going to “Programmatic and Technical Office Hours,” within the “Resources” section of the Application and Review system

Contact Us

Website: www.rwjf.org/

Email: HES4A@rwjf.org

Phone: 609-627-5846

Apply: my.RWJF.org

Thank you!



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