

Frequently Asked Questions

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About the RWJF Culture of Health Prize

Who are the Prize administrators?

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) Culture of Health Prize is an RWJF program managed in conjunction with Health Resources in Action (HRiA), with communications support from Spitfire Strategies.

RWJF is committed to improving health and health equity in the United States. In partnership with others, we are working to develop a Culture of Health rooted in equity that provides every individual with a fair and just opportunity to thrive, no matter who they are, where they live, or how much money they have. For more information, visit www.rwjf.org.

HRiA is a nonprofit public health consulting organization serving government, nonprofits, philanthropy, and communities across the U.S. Its mission is to help people live healthier lives and create healthy communities through prevention, health promotion, policy, and research. HRiA's role will be to work with RWJF to manage the application and selection process and support winning communities in a wide range of activities in partnership with Spitfire Strategies and other partners.

Spitfire Strategies is a woman-owned, strategic communication firm that partners with nonprofits and foundations working to make the world a better place. Spitfire's values are rooted in one core principle: Everyone belongs and has the power to spark change.

How is the RWJF Culture of Health Prize different from a grant?

The Prize recognizes and celebrates communities' successes—what they already have achieved—whereas grants typically provide funding tied to specific, time-limited goals and objectives aimed at the future. The Prize is an award, and community partners can decide together how to use the funds to benefit the community. Budget reports on expenditures are not required.

How is the application process different from past years?

This year, the timeline for the application process is more streamlined than in past years. The application process has moved from eight months to three months and the review phases have been reduced to two instead of three. Video submissions will also be accepted in order to improve accessibility.

How has the focus of the Prize shifted with its relaunch?

The work of past Prize winners shows that addressing structural racism and other systemic barriers is critical to creating the community conditions to establish health equity, and progress is most powerful when the people leading change share their own stories and solutions to the issues they see. The relaunched Prize program, therefore, is focus on communities that are addressing structural racism to improve health equity.

Which communities have already won the Prize?

A list of Prize-winning communities is linked in the 2023 Call for Applications and can be found at www.rwjf.org/prize.

How many applications were received for the last round?

For the 2020–2021 competition, 228 applications were received.

Will there be a Call for Applications for the RWJF Culture of Health Prize released for 2024?

RWJF has an enduring commitment to the RWJF Culture of Health Prize and presently anticipates offering a 2024 Prize program; the timing and selection process are yet to be publicized. For more information, check the RWJF website.

Whom may I contact for more information?

For more information on the RWJF Culture of Health Prize, please contact cultureofhealthprize@hria.org.

Can My Community Apply?

Is my community eligible to apply?

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's (RWJF's) Culture of Health Prize honors community partnerships within the United States, as defined below.

Eligible applicant communities must represent one of the following:

- City, town, village, borough, or other municipality with a publicly elected governing body;
- County or parish;
- Federally recognized tribe or a state-designated American Indian reservation;
- Native Hawaiian organization serving and representing the interests of Native Hawaiians or other Pacific Islanders in Hawaii;
- Region, defined as geographically contiguous municipalities, counties, and/or reservations.
- Community within the territories administered by the United States (American Samoa, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands).

Partnership within communities is at the heart of the Prize. To be eligible, applicant communities should represent multiple unique organizations within one of the geographically defined categories above whose partnership predates the Prize application.

Types of organizations include, but are not limited to:

- Businesses
- Community coalitions

- Community development organizations
- Government agencies or departments
- Grassroots and advocacy organizations
- Hospital or healthcare organizations
- Local and regional foundations
- Nonprofit community-based organizations
- Resident groups
- Schools

To be eligible for the Prize, applications must designate a local U.S. government entity or tax-exempt 501(c)(3) public charity operating within the community to accept the \$250,000 Prize on the community's behalf should the community win. Community partners can decide together how to use the unrestricted funds to benefit the community; budget reports on Prize expenditures are not required.

As a steward of private resources that must be used in the public's interest, RWJF reserves the right to disqualify a community or its designated Prize recipient should RWJF learn of circumstances involving that community or designated Prize recipient that conflict, in fact or in spirit, with RWJF's goals or values.

Are neighborhoods eligible to apply?

Neighborhoods are not eligible to apply. While neighborhoods may not apply on their own, the work of neighborhoods absolutely can be featured as part of the broader efforts being undertaken in towns and cities.

What is a Native Hawaiian organization?

U.S. Census term that includes people who identify with one or more nationalities or ethnic groups originating in Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands. Examples of these groups include, but are not limited to, Native Hawaiian, Samoan, Chamorro, Tongan, Fijian, and Marshallese. The category also includes groups such as Palauan, Tahitian, Chuukese, Pohnpeian, Saipanese, Yapese.

Native Hawaiian organization means a private nonprofit organization that (a) serves the interests of Native Hawaiians; (b) has Native Hawaiians in substantive and policymaking positions within the organization; and (c) is recognized by the Governor of Hawaii for the purpose of planning, conducting, or administering programs (or portions of programs) for the benefit of Native Hawaiians. See, for example, U.S. Code, Title 20, Section 7517.

Our community participated in a previous year's competition but did not win and was not a finalist. May we reapply?

Yes, past applicants that did not previously win a Prize are eligible and encouraged to reapply. Prize-winning communities can only receive the Prize once; once they win, they become part of the ongoing Prize Alumni Network.

Is there a minimum or maximum population size for communities that apply?

No, the program invites applications from all communities that meet the eligibility requirements, regardless of population size.

What if a community submits more than one application?

Collaboration within communities is strongly encouraged, and reviewers will look favorably on applicant community partnerships that have done the work to bring diverse organizations and partnerships together for an application. In the event there are multiple applications from one community and/or overlapping jurisdictions, each application will be reviewed independently. If two or more applications from the same community are advanced to the interview phase, applicant partnerships will be encouraged to work together within the second phase and on behalf of their whole community.

Are you aiming for geographic diversity, or is it possible for multiple communities from one state to win?

Our primary goal is to recognize communities that are working on the forefront of advancing health, opportunity, and equity for all, as exemplified by the six Prize criteria. Thus, multiple communities from the same state can apply and win. Each applicant community will be reviewed individually against the six Prize criteria, not in relation to other applicant or winning communities located in similar geographic areas.

Can the Prize be awarded to two communities with overlapping geographical boundaries?

The Prize is a communitywide award based on a geographical jurisdiction, and it is possible that the Prize can be awarded to two communities with overlapping geographical boundaries if both communities exemplify the Prize criteria, have unique stories and lessons to share, and are engaged in work that fully reflects the scope of their respective jurisdictions. For example, a county application that includes a Prize-winning city within its boundaries could be considered for countywide accomplishments. A community that is fully geographically encompassed by a larger Prize-winning jurisdiction (e.g., a city within a winning county, or a county within a winning region) is eligible for consideration if the larger Prize-winning jurisdiction has not featured the accomplishments of the smaller jurisdiction prominently in its Prize-winning application. These overlapping communities would be eligible to be considered for the Prize in the same year or different years.

We are interested in improving an application submitted in a prior year that was not selected as a winner. Is there a way to find out why our community did not win last year?

Due to the large volume of applications received, the Prize program is unable to provide feedback to all communities about their past applications. Applicants that advance to the final phase of this year's application process but ultimately are not selected may request individualized written feedback or a conference call discussion about their application.

Is a statewide coalition with geographically continuous representation from communities coming together to take collective action eligible?

States are not eligible for the Prize, and, as a general matter, we expect that most statewide coalitions would not meet the eligibility criteria, given that whole states, in general, are not representative of geographically continuous or connected municipalities which are coming together to take collective action. However, if a set of geographically continuous or connected municipalities have come together to take collective action, and that bottom-up formation has led to a set of geographically contiguous municipalities, counties, and/or reservations that adds up to a regional or statewide footprint, it is possible that coalition could meet the eligibility requirements. The focus of the Prize is on locally generated and locally driven action.



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Does an application need to include a publicly elected governing body?

No. Applicants are not required to include a publicly elected governing body in the application to be eligible for the Prize. However, we encourage you to review and consider selection criteria #2 and #3 in relation to this question.

What Does the Application Process Look Like (Logistics) ?

Overview

How many Prizes will be given?

Up to 10 \$250,000 Prizes will be awarded in 2023. Each winning community will designate a local U.S. governmental entity or tax-exempt public charity operating within the applicant community partnership to accept the Prize funds.

How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected the application process?

The health and safety of communities and the program's partners are a priority and will be considered should the application and selection process be affected by the uncertainties that come with a pandemic. We are committed to being flexible, understanding that we may need to change in order to address the challenges applicants may face. Specifically, applicant communities that are invited to the second round, which includes an interview, may determine in partnership with RWJF and HRiA whether they wish to engage in this stage through an in-person or virtual format.

Are past Prize winners available to provide advice or guidance to applicants?

As ambassadors for the Prize, RWJF Culture of Health Prize winners share a desire to spread community improvement efforts throughout the nation, a role which includes but is not limited to discussing their work at local, regional, state, and national forums. Communities are encouraged to learn about the winners through the videos and content in the [Prize Gallery](#); however, please do not contact winning communities directly.

Why did the Prize award increase from \$25,000 to \$250,000?

A lot has changed since the Prize was first launched 10 years ago. The program has evolved in meaningful ways built upon the experiences and insights of previous winners and applicants and the program's staff and advisory group. As we stepped back in preparation to relaunch the program, we reflected on those learnings and insights from evaluations of the program and assessments of other prize programs, and made the determination to increase the Prize amount. This recognizes not only the amount of time and work that goes into the application process, but the scale of ambition that winning communities reflect through their accomplishments and aspirations.

How to Apply

Who should submit the application?

The Prize recognizes whole communities. Successful applicant partnerships think and act beyond their own individual organizations and initiatives. The application should reflect the work of the whole community, not only one organization or initiative. Community members should select two people, preferably from two different organizations or entities, to serve as contacts on the application. One should be designated as the primary contact, and the other as the alternate contact.

What are the responsibilities of the contact people on the application?

The contact people listed in the community's Prize application are responsible for ensuring the submission is complete. Both contacts will receive all communications about a community's Prize application. These communications include, but are not limited to, notifications about whether a community has been selected to advance in the application process, and ultimately whether the community wins a Prize. The primary contact often also serves as the local contact person for interviews.

Should the application include a statement of how we intend to use the Prize money should we win?

No, the RWJF Culture of Health Prize offers a monetary prize of \$250,000 to each winning community. There is no need or expectation for applicant communities to state their intentions about how the funds will be used, nor to provide reporting about expenditures.

What guidance do you have for applicants that wish to produce their application in video format?

Videos are optional and applicants are not expected to develop highly produced videos. The intention of offering videos as a format for applications is to enable creative options for answering application questions beyond a written narrative. The choice of formats is up to community applicants. Reviewers' assessments of videos will be based on content rather than production quality.

Could you recommend a quick, easy, and inexpensive way to create a video?

We highly encourage you to utilize the technology available to you and tap into your community's existing resources (for example: local media, high school video clubs, local businesses, or youth organizations). We also encourage you to rely on economical, user-friendly means such as smartphones and/or online video-production platforms, such as [Animoto.com](https://www.animoto.com/), [Windows Photos](https://www.windowsphotos.com/), [iMovie](https://www.imovie.com/). There are also other user-friendly platforms that offer video editing tools for free or at a nominal cost, such as [Canva](https://www.canva.com/).

The videos featuring the winning communities on the RWJF website are very well done. Are these videos submitted by communities as part of their applications or are they produced for the announcement of winners?

The featured videos on the website were produced by RWJF and partners following winner selection; these videos were not submitted by applicant communities. Communities that wish to submit their applications via video are encouraged to make use of user-friendly and low-cost options such as those described in the previous question.

We are having a hard time deciding on just three to six accomplishments to feature. What do you suggest?

We encourage communities to collectively think through which accomplishments to feature in their application, while keeping the six Prize criteria at the top of mind for these deliberations. An accomplishment may be an individual policy, program, or strategy, or an integrated or closely related collection of policies, programs, or strategies. Taken together, your accomplishments should reflect work that goes beyond any single intervention and showcases collective progress toward better health, opportunity, and equity. Applicants should describe how each accomplishment relates to identified community challenges and how it may improve conditions for populations or geographic areas that historically have been excluded from opportunity—showing how it is a positive solution for change. Communities that move to the interview phase will have the opportunity to showcase additional information about their accomplishments and how they are meeting all six Prize Criteria.

Our community uses a multi-sector, collective-impact approach. How should we represent this in our Prize application?

One or more of your collective impact accomplishments could be featured in the three to six accomplishments required in the application for the Prize. The five key elements of collective impact are also woven into the six Prize criteria, so use your successes in collective impact to tell us how you have done your work. For example, shared measurement systems in collective impact can be an integral part of Prize Criterion #6—Measuring and sharing progress and results.

May we submit letters of support on behalf of our application?

No supplementary materials, including letters of support, will be accepted. However, we strongly encourage you to highlight partners and supporters in your application materials.

What type of data should a community be ready to submit with their application?

In your application essay or video, we encourage communities to include qualitative and quantitative process measures, outcome data, and stories of success that you are most proud of and that best demonstrate how your community's efforts align with the Prize criteria. We are not seeking reports or studies in the application. If your community is invited to advance to the interview phase, there will be more opportunities to share outcome data with reviewers.

Should the application include references, citations, charts, photos, or hyperlinks to additional information?

Information that you want to convey to reviewers should be directly included in the content of the essay and/or video submission, while considering page or minute limitations. References, citations, charts, photos, or hyperlinks to additional information are neither required nor encouraged for the application submission.

Will submissions be accepted after the deadline?

No, submissions will not be accepted after the deadline out of fairness to all communities that submit applications on time. Applicants should log into my.rwjf.org and familiarize themselves with the application process and the online submission requirements well in advance of the submission deadline and as it affects collaborating with partners. Please be aware of slower experiences when submitting an application when many users are trying to submit their applications. Staff may not be able to assist all applicants in the final 24 hours before the submission deadline. Reasons such as lack of Internet connectivity, applicant server problems, confusion about time of deadline, or difficulty working with partners, are not grounds for exceptions.

Finalist Site Visits

How are applicant communities notified if they are advancing to the site visit phase?

The two contact people listed in each application will be notified by email. Communities selected as finalists will advance to the site visit phase and will receive an invitation with detailed instructions about requirements and deadlines for that stage of the process.

When will the site visits take place?

Site visits for the 2023 Prize competition are planned to take place in the summer of 2023.

How will site visits be scheduled?

If your community is selected as a finalist, HRiA, will reach out to your designated contacts and ask them to complete a questionnaire (generally within three to five business days of notification) to determine which of the possible site visit dates will work for your community.

How many site visitors will participate?

Each Prize site visit team will typically have three to five members and include members from RWJF, HRiA, and members of the Prize National Advisory Committee.

What happens during a site visit?

The site visit is an opportunity for finalist communities to showcase their accomplishments and bring life and voice to the applications. For this reason, Prize finalist site visits are more than a conventional interview consisting of a discussion in a room. More specific guidance and resources will be available for those invited to participate in the interview phase of the competition.

Who organizes the site visit?

The community will be asked to select two contact people to communicate with HRiA during the site visit phase. These individuals will provide leadership for organizing the site visit and will coordinate all logistics with the Prize partners.

May finalist communities offer gifts to site visitors?

To be fair across all finalist communities, please do not provide gifts or promotional materials to site visitors. Site visitors find it helpful, though, to receive any preexisting, brief written materials that have been developed for purposes other than the interview to highlight and build upon what they see and hear during the visit.

How will we be notified if we have won the Prize?

The primary contacts designated by your community will be notified by phone and/or email as to whether your community has won the Prize. Additional information on the timing of this notification will be provided during the site visit, if your community is a finalist.

What Will Reviewers Consider in the Application Process?

How can we assess if our community is ready to apply for a Prize?

The six Prize criteria are core to the program and serve as the lens to evaluate applications throughout the application process. Communities are encouraged to use the criteria as a general resource for community improvement action, as well as a tool for gauging readiness for applying for the Prize.

How will applications be evaluated?

The Prize criteria (see 2023 Call for Applications) will inform the final decisions from the application process. Reviewers are particularly interested in the extent to which accomplishments reflect the first three criteria, which are considered foundational to building a Culture of Health and will be weighted more heavily than the last three. Communities will advance based on how well their accomplishments illustrate the six Prize criteria with a particular emphasis on the first three, which are considered foundational to building a Culture of Health and will be weighted more heavily than the others: (1) Addressing structural racism and other structural injustices to create conditions that advance health equity; (2) Committing to sustainable policy, systems, environmental and cultural changes; and (3) Working alongside partners across sectors, and elevating the expertise and solutions held by people with firsthand experiences of health inequities. In addition to considering the criteria collectively, reviewers also seek to identify communities that create momentum toward positive, inclusive, equitable and lasting change while infusing creativity in addressing a wide range of community improvement priorities.

During the site visit phase, communities may also feature accomplishments and information beyond what was included in the written and/or recorded application to further demonstrate how they are improving health, opportunity, and equity in their community in line with the Prize criteria.

What is the process for selecting the winners?

Applications will be evaluated by a panel of reviewers that include staff from RWJF, HRiA, Spitfire Strategies, and the Prize National Advisory Committee. This process will determine the communities selected for a site visit. The final slate of winning communities will be approved by RWJF.

Are past applicant communities evaluated differently?

No, all applicants are evaluated according to the six Prize criteria and based on their current application materials. Applicants from past years are not assessed differently from other applicants.

What are policy and systems changes, as referenced in the Prize criteria?

In general, these types of changes represent a shift from thinking about improving individual health to how to improve health, opportunity, and equity at a population level by making healthy choices easy, and by creating conditions that provide opportunities for all community residents to live their healthiest possible lives. Policy change includes the passing of laws, ordinances, resolutions, mandates, regulations, or rules; system(s) change involves change made to the rules or processes within an organization or the rules or processes that guide how different organizations and groups work together. Policy change can also enable successful programs to be replicated and/or funded. These changes may target many different kinds and sizes of populations. For example, policy changes in education could affect students and their families in one school, a whole school district, a county, or a state. Successful applicants tend to feature a strategic mix of policy, programmatic, and systems changes that are designed to last.

What if our community hasn't yet undertaken work in the area of policy and systems change?

This work is difficult, but crucial for improving population health. Communities that have not yet done this type of work may not yet be competitive for the Prize.

Communities benefit from many different types of partnerships and collaborations, including those with organizations located outside their geopolitical boundaries. May we consider such partnerships for our application?

Yes, community applicants are encouraged to illustrate the depth and breadth of collaborations and partnerships within and beyond their communities. Please keep in mind, however, that reviewers seek to honor communities that are driving the process from within. Communities should be able to demonstrate an internal force and passion for community health improvement that is independent of external contributions.

What is the ideal number of partners to involve in a successful application?

There is no ideal number or minimum number of partners to include. Rather, the application should address how partners across sectors are collaborating and working together toward a shared goal of improving health, opportunity, and equity across the community, and how this work represents the six Prize criteria. References to partnership and collaboration in the Prize criteria are broadly defined and may include both formal and informal relationships among community members, organizations, and sectors.

Do reviewers give preference to applications that emphasize longstanding policies, programs, or strategies?

Applicant communities are encouraged to demonstrate a balanced approach to community improvement that may feature well-established as well as new or more recent accomplishments that collectively exemplify the six Prize criteria. Please note, however, that planning and convening processes such as coalition development, community health assessments, or improvement plans do not qualify as “accomplishments” for this submission. This type of foundational work can be featured in the introduction of your essay and/or video submission.

Are Prize criteria ranked in order of importance?

The six Prize criteria collectively drive the RWJF Culture of Health Prize competition from beginning to end; all play a vital role in selection of winners. That said, special consideration is given to the first three criteria throughout all stages of the review process: (1) Addressing structural racism and other structural injustices to create conditions that advance health equity; (2) Committing to sustainable policy, systems, environmental and cultural changes; and (3) Working alongside partners across sectors, and elevating the expertise and solutions held by people with firsthand experiences of health inequities.

What Happens if My Community Wins?

If my community wins, who gets the money?

Each applicant community will be required to designate a local U.S. governmental entity or tax-exempt public charity operating in its community to accept the \$250,000 Prize on the community’s behalf, should they win. To be eligible, the recommended recipient of Prize monies must be a local U.S. governmental entity, including, but not limited to, state universities, or a tax-exempt entity under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code (the “Code”) and classified as other than a private foundation or Type III supporting organization under section 509 of the Code. RWJF will review the proposed recipients to make sure the organization meets these criteria and, in certain instances, it may be necessary to designate a different recipient.

May the primary or alternate contact organizations serve as the Prize recipient and receive the \$250,000 award, should the community win?

Yes, the primary or alternate contact organizations may also serve as the recipient of Prize funds as long as the organization satisfies the necessary requirements (i.e., a local U.S. governmental entity including, but not limited to, state universities, or a tax-exempt entity under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code and classified as other than a private foundation or Type III supporting organization under section 509 of the Code).

What happens next if we win?

Lots! Based on their demonstrated capacity for and dedication to creating sustained change, representatives from Prize-winning communities will have opportunities to serve as ambassadors for building a Culture of Health across the United States—sharing their successes, learning from others, and networking locally, regionally, and nationally. This may be accomplished via invitations to interview with media; present at conferences or webinars; serve on national advisory groups; or participate in other avenues yet to be determined. Prize-winning communities are also invited to engage in ongoing learning and networking opportunities through the Prize Alumni Network. Winners will work closely with RWJF, HRiA, and Spitfire Strategies to prepare for these opportunities.

RWJF and HRiA will also work collaboratively with you to help prepare for a national event and media outreach around the announcement of this year's Prize winners. Here are a few of the initial activities you can anticipate:

- Your community will be assigned a communications liaison. This person's responsibility is to coordinate all communications and media activities for your community.
- You will work with the communications liaison to (a) prepare media releases and outreach to media, policymakers and other audiences and (b) identify what kind of communications materials would be useful to you in sharing your community's story. For example, a video crew, a writer, or a photographer may work with you and your community to help tell your story.
- You will identify which members of your community will attend the national RWJF Culture of Health Prize Celebration, and RWJF will fund travel for a limited number of members of your community to attend the event, should the event to be held in person (to be confirmed).
- During the celebration, Prize-winning community members in attendance will play a variety of roles, including accepting the Prize on the community's behalf; sharing successes' and, in some cases, speaking with media representatives. This event will provide excellent opportunities for learning and networking through engagement with current and past Prize-winning communities, RWJF and HRiA leadership and staff, and other invited guests.

When may we share the good news with our community?

You may share the news with your community after the national unveiling of winners. This means that your good news will be embargoed (that is, not allowed to be shared) until that time. Under the terms of the embargo, you may share the news with key people involved in your community improvement efforts, but not to the general public or to any media. Between learning of your good news and the national unveiling of winners, communications materials will be developed for Prize-winning communities, and preparations will be made for the official announcement.

Is there support to help winners celebrate with the local community?

We encourage winners to capitalize on the momentum of the national announcement by planning a local opportunity to “bring the Prize home” and engage partners and community members in celebrating accomplishments. Local celebration opportunities can happen any time after the national announcement of Prize winners and within one year of the announcement. At Prize-winning communities’ request, and depending on availability, a representative from RWJF, HRiA, and/or the Prize National Advisory Group may be able to participate in your local opportunity to celebrate the Prize win.

What happens after the celebrations?

To raise awareness and inspire locally driven change across the country, winning communities’ success stories will also be shared broadly in a variety of ways, which may include a combination of:

- Video storytelling;
- Social media, broadcast, and print products;
- Local and national media coverage;
- Web and online platform postings;
- Meeting and conference presentations; and
- Visits with policymakers.

Winning community leaders will become part of the Prize Alumni Network made up of over 600 members, and may receive invitations to future Prize events, as well as learning and sharing opportunities to support their ongoing community improvement efforts, and to other occasions to serve as ambassadors for building a national Culture of Health.

Whom may I contact for more information?

For more information on the RWJF Culture of Health Prize, please contact cultureofhealthprize@hria.org.