FORWARD PROMISE: EMPOWERMENT PROJECTS

BACKGROUND

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) has embraced a vision to build a Culture of Health in the United States to enable all in our diverse society to lead healthier lives, now and for generations to come. RWJF believes that health should be a fundamental and guiding social value, and that the United States should become a nation in which promoting health is as important as treating illness. Central to realizing this vision is ensuring that all children have the opportunity to achieve optimal physical, social, emotional, and cognitive health and well-being.

Since 2011, RWJF has worked through a broad set of investments collectively called Forward Promise to expand the potential for boys and young men of color (BYMOC) to grow up healthy, obtain a high-quality education, and find meaningful employment. Through work with previous Forward Promise grantees, as well as others in the BYMOC field, it has become clear that systemic and historical trauma play a significant role in the health challenges of BYMOC, and that addressing these traumas will require a focused investment.

As members of diverse racial and ethnic communities that experience discrimination and oppression, many BYMOC confront an array of health, educational, and socioeconomic disparities. Additionally, they must often deal with the effects of years of trauma that have not been adequately addressed, or even understood.

Over the last three decades, research on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) has led to a far greater understanding of trauma and its immediate impact on children, as well as the effects into adulthood. The seminal ACE Study identified specific childhood experiences that were damaging to brain development in infants and young children. Furthermore, they predicted the development of chronic conditions in adulthood, such as heart and lung disease, diabetes, cancer, depression, and substance abuse.

These experiences are not unique to young people of color; however, the experiences of BYMOC are compounded by racialized trauma such as their interactions with institutions and systems that, in theory, should be designed to help or serve. Negative perceptions of people of color, and BYMOC in particular, contribute to the creation of harmful policies and practices in social services, education, housing, employment, juvenile justice, and health provision. Over time, these policies and practices produce and perpetuate race-based inequities. As BYMOC navigate these systems and continue to experience a lack of understanding and empathy, they are vulnerable to further traumatization.

Although it is possible for some people who experience trauma to display remarkable resilience and lead successful lives, many others will have significant difficulties and experience traumatic stress. With strong support systems in place, limited exposure to traumatic experiences, and many resilient qualities, the effects of this stress can be mitigated.

Forward Promise was established to broadly expand and promote the health and success of all BYMOC. To advance progress toward this goal, our focus now shifts to ensuring that BYMOC heal, grow, and thrive in the face of the chronic stress and trauma. Healing is a necessary first step, but BYMOC also
need to grow in their ability to protect themselves from future trauma. BYMOC will thrive when they have learned healing modalities for self-protection, and are equipped to advance healing and growth to protect their own families and communities.

To fully embrace healing, young people must be active participants in directing their own lives and shaping their communities. Too often, the diverse lenses and life experiences of BYMOC are missing from the discussions about trauma-informed care, policymaking and youth development programming. Forward Promise is committed to supporting organizations whose work with BYMOC recognizes their brilliance, invites their authentic voices, and commits to building approaches together.

The Forward Promise: Empowerment Projects initiative seeks to elevate solutions and strategies that provide culturally relevant and evidence-supported responses to trauma for BYMOC ages 12–24, while promoting opportunities for them to heal, grow, and thrive. We are interested in both approaches that promote individual healing and those that take a structural approach to change policies and practices that are causes of trauma for entire groups of BYMOC. By elevating these strategies, Forward Promise hopes to advance a broader understanding of trauma and healing that recognizes and leverages the unique histories, cultures, and lived experiences of BYMOC.

THE PROGRAM

Forward Promise aims to promote opportunities for BYMOC to heal, grow, and thrive in the face of chronic stress and trauma. Empowerment Projects seeks to strengthen organizations that provide culturally relevant healing responses to trauma, and can partner with the youth-serving systems that touch BYMOC to advance new practices to prevent further traumatization. In doing so, it is important that the organizations use the stories of BYMOC’s resilience and healing to promote and inform their work, and that BYMOC themselves are the ones telling those stories. Forward Promise seeks to elevate the promising practices of Empowerment Projects grantees to advance a greater understanding of what it means for BYMOC to heal, grow, and thrive. Equipped with this understanding, we hope that other youth-serving organizations and systems can then identify and modify their policies and practices that, intentionally or not, serve as barriers to the health and success of BYMOC.

Through this solicitation, Empowerment Projects will support up to nine organizations to strengthen their capacity to provide programming for and with BYMOC; enhance their ability to use data and research to improve programming and sustainability; and increase their ability to influence community policy and practice in support of culturally responsive, trauma-informed, and healing-promoting strategies to positively impact the health outcomes of BYMOC.

Up to six organizations will receive a grant of up to $450,000 in total over two years, while three organizations will receive a grant of up to $150,000 in total over two years. Eligibility for award size will be determined by the applicant organization’s operating budget at the time of proposal submission.

Empowerment Projects grantees will be able to use up to 50 percent of grant funds to support ongoing direct service to BYMOC. The remaining grant funds must be used to strengthen the organization’s capacity by engaging consultants or allocating the appropriate staff time to participate in technical assistance provided by the Forward Promise national program office and its partners. This work will aim to enhance at least one of the following areas:

*Trauma and Culturally Responsive Healing Practices.* A greater understanding of these practices may enhance grantees’ ability to position youth to move from only reacting to traumatic events to thriving in the face of any new ones. Grantees can choose to engage in learning about trauma and its effects,
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Culturally responsive approaches to healing from trauma, and approaches that strengthen protective factors against future traumatic experiences. With this knowledge, grantees may assess and modify existing programs to ensure they are moving youth along a continuum that allows them to heal, grow, and thrive. As new approaches are explored, youth must have a voice in identifying the practices that resonate with them and allow them to heal to their authentic selves.

Program Evaluation. By enhancing their research and evaluation skills, grantees may be better positioned to make improvements to their services, secure additional resources to carry out their work, and advocate for changes in policy and practice. Grantees may work to identify and validate the research that supports their programs as effective solutions to addressing trauma for BYMOC. They will identify evaluation methods and measures sensitive to the unique life experiences of the BYMOC they serve, to more accurately assess their programs. In doing so, they may develop or refine their data collection systems and track additional outcomes relevant to the specific population they serve. This may lead to programmatic changes, and also fill gaps in existing research knowledge of BYMOC trauma and healing. Grantees will also work to translate their findings in a variety of ways that can be shared with funders, policymakers, and the general public. Grantees will be expected to engage youth in the program evaluation process, to give them voice, to help create more responsive programming, and to build leadership.

Storytelling. By improving their ability to connect the art of storytelling to the act of social change, grantees may improve their abilities to shape a narrative that recognizes the humanity of all BYMOC. Through learning about storytelling, grantees will be able to assist youth to craft their own compelling stories of healing, growing, and thriving. This work with grantees will elevate storytelling as a form of healing for both the speaker and the listener. Grantees can choose to engage in learning about storytelling project development, including audience identification and analysis, the utilization of various storytelling formats, and project dissemination. BYMOC will be directly involved in capturing and telling their own stories, and by doing so, illuminating for others new ways of healing from trauma.

Communications/Advocacy. Grantees are well positioned to provide alternative perspectives to both public and private actors whose decisions often impact the lives of BYMOC. Grantees may choose to enhance their advocacy approaches to expand their influence both within and beyond the BYMOC field. In doing so, they will help shift the focus from individual BYMOC behaviors to a perspective that includes how policies, institutional behavior, and structural and historical issues fundamentally impact outcomes for BYMOC. Grantees will also share how integrating aspects of trauma and culturally relevant practices has influenced their programming and services, including strategies for training staff and engaging systems such as health, housing, education, employment, justice, and other social services to address trauma and healing for BYMOC. Particular attention will be paid to engaging systems or providers that may not traditionally consider themselves a part of the BYMOC field, but which impact youth. BYMOC will be expected to play key leadership roles in designing and implementing advocacy efforts.

Technical Assistance. In addition to using grant funds to enhance organizational capacity in the above areas, grantees will also participate as a cohort in a broader technical assistance program that may include individual or group learning activities. To ensure these efforts are relevant to all organizations in the cohort, grantees will first participate in an organizational assessment, and then help develop plans with the national program office and its partners. Once those plans are finalized, group learning activities may expose grantees to a variety of new ways to carry out their work, and grantees may use grant funds to support implementation activities based on their individual technical assistance plans at their respective sites.
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TOTAL AWARDS

- Up to nine awards will be made through this initiative. To ensure the initiative is accessible to a variety of organizations, awards will be made in two sizes.

- Up to six grants of up to $450,000 per grantee will be awarded, and up to three grants of up to $150,000 per grantee will be awarded. Award size consideration will be determined by the applicant’s administrative and financial capacity as described in the following section.

- Grant duration will be two years.

- Grants will begin on November 1, 2017.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

RWJF seeks applications from organizations and/or institutions with existing programs that provide culturally relevant and evidence-supported responses to trauma, while promoting improved policies and practices that encourage healing, growth, and thriving for BYMOC. Applicants should have evidence that their programs are improving outcomes for BYMOC.

- Awards will be made to organizations, not to individuals.

- Applicant organizations must be based in the United States or its territories.

- Preference will be given to applicants that are either public entities or nonprofit organizations that are tax-exempt under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code and are not private foundations or Type III supporting organizations. The Foundation may require additional documentation.

- Programs that serve both young men and women will be considered, but must indicate an explicit emphasis on improving outcomes for BYMOC. Additionally, preference will be given for organizations whose programs are made up of at least 50 percent male participants.

- The applicant must have the administrative and financial capacity to manage an award of the size being requested. This includes proper governance, sufficient staffing and strong policies, procedures and internal controls. For consideration for grants in the amount of $450,000, this would generally indicate an annual operating budget of $1.2 million or more at the time of proposal submission. Applicants seeking grants in the amount of $150,000 would generally be expected to have an organizational budget of at least $500,000 annually at the time of proposal submission. Organizations with a budget of over $1.0 million will be considered only in the $450,000 category.

DIVERSITY STATEMENT

Consistent with RWJF values, this program embraces diversity and inclusion across multiple dimensions, such as race, ethnicity, gender, disability, age, and socioeconomic status. We strongly encourage proposals in support of organizations that will help us expand the perspectives and experiences we bring to our work. We believe that the more we include diverse perspectives and experiences in our work, the more successful we will be as we strive together to build a Culture of Health, enabling all in our diverse society to lead healthier lives, now, and for generations to come.
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SELECTION CRITERIA

Proposals will be reviewed by a committee composed of RWJF staff, leaders of the Forward Promise national program office, the program’s national advisory committee, and other expert reviewers as needed. Final funding decisions are made by RWJF staff and leadership.

In addition to the criteria listed below, projects will be selected with the intention of funding a diverse group of grantees based on several criteria such as location (e.g., region of the country, urban/rural), characteristics of the community being served, and types of stakeholders involved in the project.

All proposals will be screened for eligibility and then reviewed using the following criteria:

• Commitment to, and record of, success in improving outcomes for BYMOC, including the rationale on how programs affect outcomes for BYMOC.

• Articulation of how, and to what degree, the program(s) provides culturally responsive and evidence-supported responses to trauma, while promoting improved policies and practices that encourage behavioral and emotional healing, leadership development, and thriving for BYMOC.

• The potential of the project to influence policy or practice within the applicant organization’s other programs and other community providers or systems (e.g., education, employment, health, housing, justice, and/or other social services providers).

• The capacity of the organization to use intersectional approaches to promote the health and success for BYMOC that examines characteristics such as (but not limited to), race, gender identity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and place.

• Capacity and experience in authentically engaging young people in program design and delivery.

• A clear articulation of how RWJF funds will advance the work of the organization.

EVALUATION AND MONITORING

An independent research group selected and funded by RWJF will conduct an evaluation of the program. As a condition of accepting RWJF funds, we require grantees to participate in the evaluation.

Grantees are expected to meet RWJF requirements for the submission of narrative and financial reports, as well as periodic information needed for overall project performance monitoring and management. We may ask project directors to participate in periodic meetings and give progress reports on their grants. At the close of each grant, the grantee is expected to provide a written report on the project and its findings suitable for wide dissemination.

APPLICANT SURVEY PROCESS

To help us measure the effectiveness of RWJF grantmaking and improve the grant application experience, we will survey the Project Director listed in proposals submitted under this call for proposals. Shortly after the proposal deadline, the Project Director will be contacted by Princeton Survey Research Associates International (PSRAI), an independent research firm, and asked to complete a brief, online survey about the proposal process and applicant characteristics. This voluntary questionnaire will take no more than 15 minutes to complete. Responses provided to PSRAI will not impact the funding decision for the proposals in any way.
PSRAI will protect the confidentiality of the responses. RWJF will not receive any data that links a name with the survey responses.

If you have any questions about the survey or the use of the data, feel free to email applicantfeedback@rwjf.org.

USE OF GRANT FUNDS

Grant funds may be used for project staff salaries, consultant fees, data collection and analysis, meetings, supplies, project-related travel, and other direct project expenses, including a limited amount of equipment essential to the project. In keeping with RWJF policy, grant funds may not be used to subsidize individuals for the costs of their health care, to support clinical trials of unapproved drugs or devices, to construct or renovate facilities, for lobbying, or for political activities.

Up to 50 percent of grant funds may be used to support ongoing direct service provision to BYMOC. The remaining grant funds would be used to strengthen the organization’s capacity by engaging consultants and covering staff time to participate in technical assistance provided by the Forward Promise national program office and its partners to enhance at least one of the following areas: trauma and culturally responsive healing, program evaluation, storytelling, and/or communications/advocacy.

Preference will be given to applicants who appropriately justify their proposed allocation of grant funds to each of the aforementioned areas based on their need.

Grantees should also include travel costs in their budgets for two people to participate in up to two annual grantee meetings, using the Foundation’s travel estimate of $1,300 per person for a two-night/two-day trip where air travel is required.

HOW TO APPLY

All proposals for this solicitation must be submitted via the RWJF online system. Visit www.rwjf.org/cfp/fwp3 and use the Apply Online link. If you have not already done so, you will be required to register at my.rwjf.org before you begin the proposal process.

All applicants should log in to the system and familiarize themselves with online submission requirements well before the final submission deadline. Staff may not be able to assist all applicants in the final 24 hours before the submission deadline. In fairness to all applicants, the program will not accept late submissions.

There are two phases in the competitive proposal process:

Phase 1: Brief Proposals:

Applicants must submit a brief proposal narrative that describes the organization and its program(s) and includes a preliminary budget. The complete submission should be no more than four pages in length. Full instructions are available via the RWJF online system. Brief proposals must include the following concise descriptions of:

- The organization and its program(s) that promotes the health and success of BYMOC, including a discussion of how the programs use culturally relevant and evidence-supported responses to trauma.
- The evidence and/or indicators of success that demonstrate improvement in outcomes for BYMOC.
- The community served, including the number of young men served, geographic background, and the racial and ethnic makeup of the program participants.
• Additional partners or collaborators in program design and/or delivery, with specific mention of any systems partners that applicant organization programs are aligned with (including, but not limited to health care, mental health, public health, housing, law enforcement, education, employment, and/or social services).

• The applicant organization’s capacity and need as it relates to understanding trauma and providing culturally responsive healing programs, program evaluation, storytelling, and/or communications/advocacy.

• Estimated total budget request and proposed use of RWJF funds over a 24-month period.

Phase 2: Full Proposals:
Selected Phase 1 applicants will be invited by May 26, 2017, to submit a full proposal of no more than 10 pages accompanied by a detailed budget, budget narrative, and additional information. Applicants who submit full proposals may be selected to participate in site visits with the proposal review committee. Further description of the proposal requirements will be provided to successful Phase 1 applicants.

Please direct inquiries to:
Forward Promise
Phone: (215) 573-8558
Email: info@forwardpromise.org
Website: forwardpromise.org

We encourage interested candidates to participate in an optional applicant web conference call scheduled for April 20, 2017, at 3 p.m. ET. You must register in advance at http://bit.ly/2mno0B3. The conference will be recorded and available at forwardpromise.org for those who are unable to participate.

RWJF does not provide individual critiques of proposals submitted.
This program has a national advisory committee that makes recommendations about grants to Foundation staff. RWJF will make all final grant decisions.

PROGRAM DIRECTION
Direction and technical assistance for this program are provided by the University of Pennsylvania, which serves as the national program office co-located at:

University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education
Racial Empowerment Collaborative
3720 Walnut St., Room B-20
Philadelphia, PA 19104
Phone: (215) 573-8558
Email: info@forwardpromise.org
Website: forwardpromise.org

The Moriah Group
1750 Nick Davis Rd.
Harvest, AL 35749
Phone: (256) 241-6750

Responsible staff members at the national program office are:
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- Howard C. Stevenson, PhD, director
- Rhonda Tsoi-A-Fatt Bryant, MA, deputy director
- Erik Estrada, MPA, senior program associate

Responsible staff members at the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation are:
- Maisha Simmons, MPA, senior program officer
- Dwayne Proctor, PhD, director and senior adviser
- Christine Phares, program financial analyst

KEY DATES AND DEADLINES

April 5, 2017
Applications open for brief proposals.

April 20, 2017 (3 p.m. ET)

May 2, 2017 (3 p.m. ET)
Deadline for receipt of brief proposals.

May 26, 2017
Applicants notified of invitation to submit a full proposal.

June 1, 2017 (3 p.m. ET)
Optional full proposal applicant web conference. Registration is required. Details will be provided to successful Phase 1 applicants.

June 22, 2017 (3 p.m. ET)
Deadline for receipt of full proposals.

July 14, 2017
Applicants notified of plans for a site visit.

July and August 2017
Site visits to semifinalists.

September 2017
Finalists notified.

November 1, 2017
Start of grants.

REFERENCES
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Bryant, R. Uneven Ground: Examining Systemic Inequities that Block College Preparation for African American Boys. CLASP, 2013.


ABOUT THE ROBERT WOOD JOHNSON FOUNDATION

For more than 40 years the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has worked to improve health and health care. We are working with others to build a national Culture of Health, enabling everyone in America to live longer, healthier lives. For more information, visit www.rwjf.org. Follow the Foundation on Twitter at www.rwjf.org/twitter or on Facebook at www.rwjf.org/facebook.

Sign up to receive email alerts on upcoming calls for proposals at www.rwjf.org/manage-your-subscriptions.html.

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