

Call for Proposals

Proposal Deadline: May be submitted on a rolling basis



Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

Pioneering Ideas: Exploring the Future to Build a Culture of Health

BACKGROUND

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) is working alongside others to help build a better, more equitable future where everyone living in the United States has a fair and just opportunity to live the healthiest life possible. We call that future a [Culture of Health](#).

We live in a dynamic world, where unforeseen global events, new technologies, scientific discoveries, changes in our climate, economy, demographics, and more, continually shape where and how we live, learn, work, and play. These changes will profoundly impact [health equity](#) in our society, from our individual health and the health of our families to the health of our communities.

RWJF's Pioneer team is charged with helping the Foundation anticipate, adapt to, and influence this evolving landscape to ensure a better future.

Pioneer investments explore emerging cultural, scientific, technological, environmental, economical and health-related trends, and support cutting-edge ideas in and beyond the fields of health and health care that have the potential to help and/or hinder our progress toward advancing health equity. We do this with the explicit goal of understanding and influencing the trajectory of these trends, by accelerating positive outcomes and averting or mitigating negative consequences.

Fifteen years ago, it was hard to fathom how certain innovations would impact our lives today. Smartphones, virtual assistants, behavioral economics, CRISPR, self-driving cars, solar storage, facial recognition, GMOs, eSports scholarships, YouTube influencers, the sharing economy, and more, were either nonexistent or in their nascent form.

Now, imagine what the world might look like in the next 15 years. What dramatic changes might we see in where and how we live, learn, work, and play? What can we do today to create a better, more equitable tomorrow?

The Pioneer team seeks to answer these questions, anticipate the future, and support unconventional approaches and breakthrough ideas that can help lead the way to a future where everyone in the United States can live their healthiest life possible. The Pioneering Ideas: Exploring the Future to Build a Culture of Health call for proposals (CFP) seeks applications from visionary thinkers across the nation who are doing cutting-edge work to advance health equity.

THE PROGRAM

Pioneering Ideas: Exploring the Future to Build a Culture of Health welcomes proposals that are primed to influence health equity in the future. We seek ideas that address any of RWJF's Pioneer team's four current areas of focus described below: **1) Future of Evidence; 2) Future of Social Interaction; 3) Future of Food; and 4) Future of Work**. Additionally, under **Open Exploration**, also described below, this call for proposals seeks ideas that might fall outside of these four focus areas but which offer unique approaches to advancing health equity and our progress toward a Culture of Health.

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The changes we seek require diverse perspectives and cannot be accomplished by any one person, organization or sector. We want to hear from scientists, anthropologists, artists, urban planners, community leaders—anyone, anywhere—who has a new or unconventional idea that could alter the trajectory of health, and improve health equity and well-being for generations to come.

The following descriptions are not meant to be prescriptive or exhaustive.

Future of Evidence

Today, the validity and credibility of evidence, and even what counts as evidence, is being questioned. Trust in institutions is declining and misinformation is threatening hard won advances in public health. A better understanding of trends that are affecting how the definition, creation, value, dissemination, use and acceptance of evidence is changing is critical. We must ensure that evidence will represent currently underrepresented populations, include a broader definition of expertise, and lay the groundwork for future practices that promote health equity.

New types of researchers, participants, data, data collection and analytic methods hold great promise to help uncover insights about our health and well-being. Since our inception, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has been driven by a continuous cycle of research, evaluation and learning. We invest in research to help to identify the root causes of health disparities in America, and potential solutions to improve health, equity and well-being. Evidence is a cornerstone to our approach to building a Culture of Health.

Past Pioneer projects have explored how technology is changing the capacity and speed at which academic research can occur; who has access to the tools (e.g., AI), data, and infrastructure for collaboration; and the implications for new fields of study such as cognitive neuroscience and sociogenomics. As we continue our exploration into the future of evidence, we want to better understand what guardrails may need to be in place to protect and advance equity, and what policies and practices may help safeguard the integrity of evidence, while promoting more accessible research that invites a diversity of thought.

Future of Social Interaction

New technologies including social media, artificial intelligence, and augmented reality are changing the nature of our individual and group social interactions: the quality of those interactions, where and how they take place, who is and isn't included, and more. How these tools and platforms are designed now and in the future—and by whom—present both opportunities and challenges for reducing social isolation or promoting exclusivity; for fostering civil society or promoting divisiveness; for creating a more collaborative, inclusive workforce or promoting a more fractured and less empowered workforce.

Strong social connections and a sense of belonging help communities, families and individuals thrive. How we connect with and treat each other, both in real life and in digital spaces, influences our perception of ourselves and others, our civility, self-agency, and how power is wielded. And this, in turn, impacts our mental and physical health, and family, community, and civic well-being.

Past Pioneer projects have explored innovative ways to foster meaningful connections in real life and how technology can enhance or hinder these connections. As we continue our exploration into the future of social interaction, a deeper understanding of emerging trends may reveal opportunities to support unique models of strong social networks and influence how technology can be designed and deployed in ways that support positive social interactions.

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Future of Food

What we eat and how we produce and consume our food has evolved over time. Understanding this evolution teaches us about civilization, power, equity, technology, sustainability, illness and, ultimately, health. The food a society produces, consumes, and wastes reflects what that society values, how it approaches scarcity and survival, and what it thinks about abundance, health, and wealth. Today, food and food production is changing under the influence of external forces, from climate change to technological advances to shifts in consumer values.

Food and access to healthy food are determinants of health. To some, including Indigenous thinkers, food is also medicine. Many in the United States don't have reliable access to healthy food. And some go hungry. As a nation, we are both malnourished and obese.

Past Pioneer projects have explored ways to prevent and address the effects of climate change, eliminate food waste, and transform food systems. As we continue our exploration into the future of food, we want to understand how changes to where and how food is produced, sold, shared, consumed and disposed of impacts health equity, changes our diets, and could offer potential solutions to climate change.

Future of Work

The nature and structure of work is changing. Technological advancements, globalization, shifts in population, and many other factors are redefining what work is, how it is organized, and what it means to be an employee. From who gets hired, to what education and skills are needed, to what benefits and wages are offered, to where and when one works, as well as how the work is managed—these significant changes in work conditions and arrangements will have large-scale implications for individuals, families, and communities, and for equity and power.

The nature and structure of work has significant influence on individual, family, and community health far beyond the economic benefits it conveys. It is a determinant of health and well-being in its own right and influences nearly all other determinants, such as where one lives and whether one has access to health benefits and, importantly, our individual and collective sense of purpose and belonging.

Past Pioneer projects have explored the implications of workplace monitoring, gig work, unstable scheduling, and diminishing access to health benefits. As we continue our exploration into the future of work, we hope to reveal how changes to the nature and structure of work may impact health and well-being and how work policies can be shaped to advance health equity.

Open Exploration

As RWJF pursues the ambitious vision of a Culture of Health, it is more important than ever to double down on innovation, explore new frontiers, and embrace risk.

In addition to the four focus areas mentioned above, this CFP seeks applications from disruptive thinkers who have cutting edge ideas that have the potential to improve health equity and that may fall outside of these areas. We want to experiment and test out ideas and explore emerging trends that are ahead of the curve or that are at the edge of our collective imagination.

We want to collaborate with pioneering thinkers who have the potential to transform our thinking, challenge long-held assumptions, and ask questions that help uncover new paths toward health equity and a Culture of Health.

Past Pioneer projects have seeded novel approaches to research, care delivery, and helping people live healthier lives. From artificial intelligence, blockchain, citizen science, impact of noise on community health, to how networks influence behavior and more, RWJF's Pioneer team explores the future.

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ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

Preference will be given to applicants that are tax exempt under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code and are not private foundations or Type III supporting organizations. Applicant organizations must be based in the United States or its territories. Submissions from teams that include both U.S. and international members are eligible, but the lead applicant must be based in the United States.

SELECTION CRITERIA

Applications will be evaluated based on, but not limited to the following criteria:

Strength of health equity focus: How will this project increase opportunities for everyone to live the healthiest life possible, no matter who they are, where they live, or how much money they make?

Strength of insight: How will this project help anticipate, adapt to, and influence the future in 5 to 15 years?

Strength of idea: Is this project pioneering in one or more of these ways?

- Offers a new take or perspective on a long-running, perplexing problem;
- Challenges assumptions or cultural practices;
- Takes an existing idea and give it a new spin—or a novel application;
- Applies ideas from other fields; and/or
- Explores how an emerging trend will shape the future
- Describe in which other way you see your project as pioneering

We are interested only in future-oriented ideas. If your proposal does not center around anticipating the next 5–15 years, it is not a fit for this funding opportunity.

For your best chance at success, we encourage you to consider whether your idea is appropriate for this Pioneering Ideas: Exploring the Future to Build a Culture of Health funding opportunity. You may find one of RWJF's other [current funding opportunities](#) to be a better fit for your work. To make an informed and honest assessment about whether your idea is right for this CFP, please read the above Selection Criteria, as well as the [General frequently asked questions \(FAQs\)](#) and [Pioneering Ideas-specific FAQs](#) and sample application.

Visit the [Grants Explorer](#) on [rwjf.org](#) to view all grants in the Pioneer portfolio.

TOTAL AWARDS

The average Pioneer grant in 2019 was \$315,031. However, there is not an explicit range for budget requests. You should request the amount of funding you will need to complete your proposed project—including direct and indirect costs—for the entire duration of your grant. Grant periods are flexible, though generally range from 1 to 3 years.

OUR EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION COMMITMENT

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation is committed to building a Culture of Health that provides everyone in America a fair and just opportunity for health and well-being. Achieving this goal requires focus on equity, diversity, and inclusion. To that end, we are committed to fostering diverse perspectives. We recognize that individuals' perspectives are shaped by a host of factors, such as their race, ethnicity, gender, physical and mental ability, age, socioeconomic status, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, familial status, education, religion, legal status, military service, political affiliation, geography, and other personal and professional experiences.

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We know that the presence of diverse perspectives alone is not sufficient. Therefore, we also are committed to creating inclusive environments where all individuals are encouraged to share their perspectives and experiences. We believe that only through valuing our differences and similarities, and remaining vigilant in advancing equity, will we be able to maintain an equitable workplace and actively pursue equity in all aspects of our work. We commit to being continuous learners and working alongside others to cultivate equity, diversity, and inclusion.

MONITORING

RWJF monitors our grantees' efforts and careful stewardship of grant funds to assure accountability. Grantees will be required to submit periodic narrative and financial reports.

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, and indirect costs to support the operations of the applicant organization. In keeping with RWJF policy, grant funds may *not* be used to support clinical trials of unapproved drugs or devices, to construct or renovate facilities, for lobbying, for political activities, or as a substitute for funds currently being used to support similar activities.

OPEN ACCESS

In order to ensure RWJF-supported research is made accessible to a wide and diverse audience, grantees who publish findings in peer-reviewed publications must do so in open access journals and/or must include funds in their budgets to cover the cost of making the resulting publications open access (typically \$2,000–\$5,000 per manuscript).

HOW TO APPLY

Proposals for this solicitation must be submitted via the RWJF online system. Visit www.rwjf.org/cfp/pioneeringideas2020 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 application process. You will receive an email invitation with a link to the RWJF online system and additional instructions. To begin your proposal, select the link in the email and follow the instructions.

There are two phases in the proposal review process:

Phase 1: Brief Proposals

Applicants must submit a brief proposal with a project description and summary and include a preliminary budget.

Phase 2: Full Proposals

Selected Phase 1 applicants may be invited to submit a full proposal accompanied by a detailed budget, budget narrative, and additional information. The Proposal Narrative section may not exceed 10 pages.

Due to the volume of proposals we receive, RWJF does not provide individual critiques of proposals submitted.

During the application process applicants may send questions to:

Email: pioneeringideas@rwjf.org

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Prior to submitting an inquiry, please review the [General frequently asked questions \(FAQs\)](#) and [Pioneering Ideas-specific FAQs](#).

PROGRAM DIRECTION

Direction and technical assistance for this program are provided by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Responsible staff members at the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation are:

- Lori Melichar, *senior director*
- Anjali Shah, *program associate*
- Deb Malloy, *grants management coordinator*
- Sharleen Rajput, *program financial analyst*
- Jody Struve, *communications officer*

KEY DATES

Proposals will be accepted throughout the year on a rolling admission. All applications will be reviewed. We strive to get back to all applicants as quickly as possible. Depending on the volume of proposals received, applicants can expect to receive a response as early as one month and no later than six months as to whether their application has been accepted for further consideration or turned down.

Please note that from time to time, we may temporarily suspend receipt of new proposals to this solicitation in order to refresh our focus areas.

ABOUT THE ROBERT WOOD JOHNSON FOUNDATION

For more than 45 years, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has worked to improve health and health care. We are working alongside others to build a national Culture of Health that provides everyone in America a fair and just opportunity for health and well-being. 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.

50 College Road East
Princeton, NJ 08540-6614
www.rwjf.org