



## Evidence for Action

### Innovative Research to Advance Racial Equity

#### BACKGROUND

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) is committed to building a national Culture of Health that enables all in our diverse society to lead healthier lives now and for generations to come. A Culture of Health is one in which good health and well-being flourish among all people, and everyone has the opportunity to lead a healthy lifestyle. Structural racism poses obstacles to achieving this ambitious goal by creating and upholding discriminatory systems, policies, and practices, many of which perpetuate health disparities by race, ethnicity, and other identities.

Evidence for Action (E4A), a national program of RWJF, funds rigorous research that expands the evidence needed to build a Culture of Health, with an explicit emphasis on advancing *racial equity*.<sup>1</sup> We recognize that achieving racial equity is not possible without a focus on the foundational and structural drivers of health, often referred to as the social determinants of health (e.g., housing, education, built environment, economic opportunity, law enforcement, and others). Therefore, we partner with researchers, practitioners, community leaders, advocates, and policymakers across the many sectors and domains that impact health and well-being to develop evidence about *what works* to dismantle or remedy unjust systems and practices and produce more equitable outcomes for people and communities of color.

E4A seeks grantees who are deeply committed to conducting rigorous and equitable research and ensuring that their findings are actionable in the real world. In addition to research funding, we also support our grantees with stakeholder engagement, dissemination of findings, and other activities that can enhance their projects' potential to "move the needle" on health and racial equity. Only through intentional and collaborative efforts to disrupt racism and translate research to action can we hope to build a more just and equitable society and a Culture of Health.

#### THE PROGRAM

Evidence for Action prioritizes research to evaluate specific interventions (e.g., policies, programs, practices) that have the potential to counteract the harms of structural and systemic racism and improve health, well-being, and equity outcomes. Our focus on racial equity means we are concerned both with the direct impacts of structural racism on the health and well-being

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<sup>1</sup> Racial equity refers to the conditions in which race or ethnicity no longer predict a person's ability to live a healthy life.

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of people and communities of color (e.g., Black, Latina/o/x, Indigenous, Asian, Pacific Islander, and other races and ethnicities), as well as the ways in which racism intersects with other forms of marginalization, such as having low income, being an immigrant, having a disability, or identifying as LGBTQ+<sup>2</sup> or a gender minority.

This funding is geared toward studies about “upstream” causes of health inequities, such as the systems, structures, laws, policies, norms, and practices that determine the distribution of resources and opportunities, which in turn influence individuals’ options and behaviors. Research should center on the needs and experiences of communities exhibiting the greatest health burdens and be motivated by real-world priorities. It should be able to inform a specific course of action and/or establish beneficial practices, not stop at characterizing or documenting the extent of a problem.

While we will consider research on various aspects of health equity, we prioritize studies of interventions that are designed to reduce race-based disparities (e.g., by confronting a root cause of disparities or targeting benefits to those experiencing the greatest burdens). RWJF is particularly interested in strategies focused on developing healthy and equitable communities; supporting the needs of children, families, and caregivers; and fostering alignment among health care, public health, and social service systems.

Examples of projects that may be a good fit for E4A include research to:

- Measure the impact of strategies that target structural or systemic inequities (e.g., reparations, eviction moratoria, anti-displacement-focused neighborhood revitalization) on physical or mental health outcomes for marginalized populations;
- Determine whether changes in given practices (e.g., grassroots organizing, school assignment, credit scoring, vaccine distribution) improve health and racial equity;
- Assess whether new policies or programs (e.g., public infrastructure investments, child tax credits, police reforms) have differential health impacts across racial/ethnic groups;
- Replicate prior studies of interventions using samples of additional racial/ethnic groups, to establish whether outcomes differ for different groups.

We are interested in estimates of both the effects of interventions on the health of specific populations and their effects on improving health equity. Our preference is for studies that can address both estimates.

Because some approaches to disrupting structural racism are in early stages of development or trial, we will also consider other types of research that can inform action to advance racial equity, which may include:

- Research to identify viable policy or programmatic responses to community needs and priorities;

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<sup>2</sup> Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer or questioning; or an umbrella term used to refer to the community as a whole.

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- Pilot studies to demonstrate proof of concept or feasibility of promising novel initiatives and/or provide early estimates of effectiveness;
- Implementation studies to improve the acceptability, sustainability, or scalability of initiatives that promote racial equity;
- Development and validation of new key measures of racial equity that can be used to guide and monitor progress toward equity goals.

These examples are intended to provide context and stimulate thinking, not to serve as rigid guidelines or restrictions. Investigators are encouraged to submit innovative proposals using any appropriate combination of research designs/methods, including quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods approaches. We encourage studies that take advantage of natural experiments, which involve changes in large-scale programs, policies, or practices that may provide unique opportunities to establish causation.

Given the program's focus on systemic and structural causes of inequities, applicants should note that studies of interventions operating solely at the individual, household, or other hyperlocal unit—for example, programs that encourage individuals to modify their personal behavior in the absence of greater environmental or structural changes—are **not** a fit for E4A.

## TOTAL AWARDS

There is not an explicit range for allowable budget requests. You should request the amount of funding you will need to complete and disseminate findings from your proposed research project—including direct and indirect costs for the entire duration of your grant. The size of the budget will be weighed in relation to the importance and likely contribution of the proposed work. Pilot studies and formative stage research are expected to correspond with lower budgets. As a research funding program, E4A does **not** fund the costs of program implementation or operations. Visit the [Funded Projects](#) section of our website for a sense of the budget range of grants funded by E4A.

Grant periods are flexible up to 36 months; rare exceptions may be made for projects needing up to 48 months if sufficient justification is provided. Our preference is for projects that produce findings in the near term.

## ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

- 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.
- Preference will be given to applicant organizations that are either institutes of higher education, public entities, or nonprofits that are tax exempt under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code and are not private foundations or Type III supporting organizations. Other types of nonprofit and for-profit organizations are also eligible to apply. RWJF may require additional documentation.

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## SELECTION CRITERIA

As an investigator-initiated program, E4A does not pose a specific set of research questions, topics, or categories for funding. In general, research funded by E4A should apply a racial equity “lens” in both its topic and approach. This means that research topics center the health priorities of people or communities that have been impacted by structural racism; that problems and solutions being studied are motivated and/or validated by people who are directly impacted; and that the research process engages stakeholders at appropriate stages of the project. Moreover, E4A-funded studies should be designed so that positive, negative, or null findings can all be informative for policy or programmatic decision-making.

Studies will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- **Relevance**—research aims are important to advancing racial equity and building a Culture of Health; research can inform demonstrable policy or implementation priorities.
- **Actionability**—goes beyond theoretical implications and demonstrates potential for practical and timely application in the real world; conditions (e.g., timing, relationships, windows of opportunity) are favorable for translating findings to action; dissemination plans and tactics are appropriate.
- **Methodological rigor**—studies designed to support causal inference are powered to detect meaningful and plausible effect sizes, account for relevant context and covariates, and include appropriate comparison groups; qualitative studies adhere to best practices in design, sampling, analysis, and interpretation.
- **Inclusion of health outcome measure(s)**—outcomes may include diverse dimensions of physical, mental, and socio-emotional health and well-being, or behaviors that are well established as determinants of health and well-being, assessed using validated instruments.
- **Feasibility**—evidence of timely access to appropriate data and/or study populations; reasonable budgets, and timelines that account for sufficient and equitable engagement of relevant stakeholders.
- **Qualifications of team**—expertise of academic researchers, practitioners, and individuals or groups with issue-specific knowledge and experiences are integrated at appropriate stages of the project; community members, advocates, policymakers, and/or other stakeholders are engaged equitably and meaningfully.

*Letters of intent* (LOIs) will be evaluated based on the applicant’s ability to clearly articulate these components. *Full proposals* will be evaluated based on more detailed explanations of these elements, such as the context, justification, or needs that prompted the research question; theoretical framework, conceptual model, or rationale that guides the design of the study; specificity of the design or approach for sampling, data collection, and analyses; access to needed data, settings and study populations; qualifications, experience, and track record of the proposed team; plans for disseminating to and engaging community members, policymakers, and other relevant stakeholders; and potential to make a meaningful commitment to advancing racial equity. More detailed information can be found in our [Frequently Asked Questions](#).

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## **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.

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.

## **EXPECTATIONS FOR GRANTEES**

E4A highly values peer learning, as well as dissemination of research to inform policy and other decision-making. The following are expectations of all E4A-funded grantees:

- Pre-register the study—including research questions, hypotheses, main variables, and analysis plan—on Open Science Framework (OSF) at the start of the grant period.
- Publish or disseminate findings, regardless of whether they are positive, negative, or null. When publishing in peer-reviewed journals, ensure open access.
- Participate in periodic progress check-ins throughout the grant period with E4A national program office (NPO) staff; present research findings to E4A leadership; and submit reports annually.
- Attend up to two RWJF meetings annually (dates and locations vary).
- Participate in peer networking activities with other E4A and RWJF grantees. These activities typically take place via virtual or online meetings.
- Build appropriate funds and time into the project budget and time line for stakeholder engagement, conferences, meetings, and other forms of dissemination, including after analyses are complete.
- Collaborate with the E4A team to develop and implement a strategy to disseminate findings to and engage stakeholders both within and outside the research community. Dissemination activities should go beyond publication in academic journals and include outreach to relevant end users (e.g., white papers, policy briefs, op-eds, infographics, etc.).

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## 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).

## USE OF GRANT FUNDS

Grant funds may be used for project staff salaries, consultant fees, data collection and analysis, meetings, supplies, project-related travel, other direct project expenses, including a limited amount of equipment essential to the project, and indirect costs to support the applicant organization's general operations. In keeping with RWJF policy, 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. Additional budget guidelines are provided in the online application materials.

## HOW TO APPLY

There are two phases in the competitive proposal process:

- *Phase 1: Letter of Intent (LOI)*—Applicants first must submit an LOI describing the proposed research through RWJF's online Application and Review system.
- *Phase 2: Full Proposals*—Applicants whose LOIs meet the outlined selection criteria are invited to submit a full proposal narrative of up to 10 pages, along with a detailed budget, dissemination plan, and other supplemental information.

All LOIs and full proposals for this solicitation must be submitted via the RWJF online system. Visit <http://www.rwjf.org/cfp/E4A3> and use the “Apply Online” link. If you have not already done so, you will be required to register at [my.rwjf.org](http://my.rwjf.org) before you begin the application process. All applicants should log in to the system and familiarize themselves with online application requirements.

At either the LOI or full proposal stage, the NPO may provide feedback or request further clarification or revisions that would improve the proposal's fit with E4A program goals. Applicants whose LOIs do not meet certain selection criteria—but satisfy other criteria—may be offered [Technical Assistance \(TA\)](#). Guidelines and information, including a list of frequently asked questions, a description of TA services, and archived videos that provide an overview of the CFP and grantmaking process are available on the [E4A website](#).

## APPLICATION TIME LINE

**Applications are accepted on a rolling basis.** Applicants will generally receive notice within six to nine weeks of applying as to whether they are invited to submit a full proposal. Full proposals will be due two months from the date of notification. Funding recommendations will generally be made within eight weeks of receipt of the full proposal. In circumstances when a

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research opportunity is time sensitive, reviews may be expedited. An explanation of the time-sensitive nature of the research should be included in the LOI application.

## 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 awardee is expected to provide a written report on the project and its findings suitable for wide dissemination.

## APPLICANT SURVEY PROCESS

The principal investigator of the proposal may be contacted after the submission deadline by SSRS, an independent research firm. The principal investigator will be 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 SSRS will not impact the funding decision for your proposal in any way.

SSRS will protect the confidentiality of your responses. RWJF will not receive any data that links your name with your survey responses.

## PROGRAM DIRECTION

The Evidence for Action national program office is housed at the Center for Health and Community at the University of California, San Francisco, and provides direction and overall assistance for the program.

Email: [evidenceforaction@ucsf.edu](mailto:evidenceforaction@ucsf.edu)

Website: [www.evidenceforaction.org](http://www.evidenceforaction.org)

Please direct questions about the program, selection criteria, or application content to the NPO staff. Email is the preferred method of contact. Please see the “How to Apply” section for information about the online application process.

Responsible staff members at the national program office are:

- Nancy Adler, PhD, *director*
- David Vlahov, RN, PhD, *co-director*
- Maria Glymour, ScD, MS, *associate director*
- Laura Gottlieb, MD, MPH, *associate director*

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- Erin Hagan, PhD, MBA, *deputy director*

Responsible staff members at the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation are:

- Claire Gibbons, PhD, MPH, *senior program officer*
- Alonzo Plough, PhD, MPH, *vice president*, Research-Evaluation-Learning Unit and *chief science officer*
- Tejal Shah, *program financial analyst*

This program has a national advisory committee that makes recommendations about grants to RWJF staff. All final grant decisions are made by RWJF.

## **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](http://www.rwjf.org). Follow the Foundation on Twitter at [www.rwjf.org/twitter](http://www.rwjf.org/twitter) or on Facebook at [www.rwjf.org/facebook](http://www.rwjf.org/facebook).

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