



Transforming Academia for Equity

BACKGROUND

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation supports research to identify and address the root causes of health inequities in the United States that are strongly linked to structural and systemic racism and other forms of oppression. We believe a diverse academic workforce that encompasses varied perspectives and lived experiences can best advance this research agenda. However, systemic racism creates unfair obstacles in academia that limit support and advancement opportunities for many qualified scholars—especially indigenous and racially excluded groups, people with disabilities, LGBTQ+ persons, and others. Adequate support with equitable methods of assessment and evaluation criteria for tenure are needed to challenge biased conventions in research and academia, promote innovation, and train future generations of diverse scholars.

Academic institutions have evolved over time based upon historical priorities and interests. The result has been to continue promotion and reward structures that disproportionately advantage faculty from mainstream backgrounds who often propose traditional research approaches and topics. While institutional racism started a very long time ago, the structures and policies and their impacts have evolved and remain. Current institutional leaders play a critical role in identifying and dismantling racist, exclusionary practices and policies that ultimately impact the type and quality of health equity research produced by historically underrepresented researchers and its subsequent impact on communities and society. This initiative is designed to unpack, understand, and shape the contextual and intervening conditions necessary for underrepresented scholars to thrive professionally and personally—and in turn, be better able to contribute to and expand health equity-related research and evidence that can help build a Culture of Health.

THE PROGRAM

Transforming Academia for Equity (TAE) is a bold opportunity for academic institutions to identify, challenge, and move beyond the shadow of the historical roots of structural racism and exclusion. Academic institutions are at an important inflection point where they can invest in and create inclusive space for all faculty—including those from diverse races, ethnicities, abilities, sexual orientations, and gender identities; support research topics and approaches that reflect the varied experience of historically underrepresented faculty and communities; transform to be

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a place where equity, diversity, and inclusivity (EDI) are valued and effectively integrated in the institutional policies, culture, and behaviors; and where:

- all members of the institutional community are agents of institutional change;
- all faculty, including those who have been historically underrepresented, are supported to effectively compete for grants without bias because of race, ethnicity, or topics of interest;
- leadership is committed to advancing policies and using their position and platform to amplify a focus on EDI;
- leadership actively promotes and invests time and resources to ensure that academic institutions are a wider space for all, and underrepresented voices are recognized, valued, and fully engaged;
- traditions and the status quo are understood for their current impact and dismantled or adapted;
- power and its equitable distribution are addressed and challenged; and
- there is accountability and consistent analysis of institutional culture, processes, outcomes, and actions to support and enhance equity.

We will fund seven university-based public health profession schools and programs, represented by cross-department faculty and staff leadership teams, which award doctoral degrees to advance systems-level change within their institutions. During their participation in the program, the teams are expected to develop an analysis of current barriers to advancing innovative health equity research approaches with particular attention to underrepresented faculty development. Teams will develop an EDI change plan that outlines the commitment each school/program will make to foster an environment and culture where historically underrepresented researchers can thrive and begin implementation of the plan during the project period. Selected teams are also expected to participate in a peer-to-peer learning community with other schools in the cohort where they will share challenges and successes encountered throughout their equity journey.

Applicants will form interprofessional and diverse guiding teams (GTs) that are representative of the voices that influence and are impacted by the desired change. The teams will comprise institutional leaders, department leaders, new and experienced faculty, past and current researchers, students, community members, and other interested parties.

A Coordinating Center (from here on, the Center) led by Change Matrix, in partnership with other key stakeholders in the system (e.g., the Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health [ASPPH]) will support these teams in an 18-month process where they will:

- identify the origins of their current system, traditions, and policies;
- understand the current impact of the origins and how they have evolved and impacted disparities in their college or program and identify strategies to dismantle barriers and burdens to historically excluded researchers in public health;

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- address the many ways that rigor and the development of knowledge are considered and recognized by the institution and the field;
- develop and/or enhance a robust process for valuing and making visible the many innovative contributions faculty make and develop guidance on how they influence reappointment, promotion, and tenure.

Through this process, GTs will connect with their institution and work with the larger university community to generate ongoing engagement and support. They will also participate in a peer learning community with other grantees throughout the process. It is expected the funds for this project will be used to support dedicated personnel to engage all levels of the institution in transformative change. A structured process and adaptive change assistance will be offered throughout the process, and grantees will be expected to participate in an external evaluation of the initiative.

Support provided by the Center to the GTs includes but is not limited to:

1. Formation of GTs to identify institutional EDI efforts (past and present) and capacity-building opportunities for EDI;
2. Strategic planning guidance for institutional cultural change processes to advance innovative health equity research approaches; and
3. Facilitate opportunities for peer learning (including one in-person event for 2–3 members of the GT), connection, and sharing of progress in advancing systems-level change.

TOTAL AWARDS

There will be seven awards up to \$300,000 per award over 18 months.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

An RWJF Transforming Academia for Equity applicant must:

- be a member in good standing of the Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health with accreditation from the Council on Education for Public Health;
- be a school of public health or public health program that has been established for a minimum of five years and is currently admitting students;
- have a minimum of 25 public health degrees conferred per year; and

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- have a faculty-student ratio of 18 students per faculty member (or fewer) with a minimum of 20 percent of teaching faculty in tenure track positions.

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.

SELECTION CRITERIA

We recognize that the work of change toward equity is a long journey that requires reflection, action, learning, and course corrections. We expect that applicants will come from various points along that journey. We are looking for a range of readiness, experiences, and progress in equity, diversity, and inclusion change efforts, as well as diversity in size, university characteristics, and geography. Applications will be reviewed based upon the following information/criteria:

- Program/school characteristics (mission/vision; years in operation; faculty profile/demographics; student profile/demographics; makeup/structure of guiding-team);
- Description of equity, diversity, and inclusion change efforts:
 - Awareness of institutional/programmatic history with equity, diversity, and inclusion, and equity-informed transformative change;
 - Existing infrastructure (e.g., committees, workgroups, dedicated faculty, and staff) to promote and navigate equity, diversity, and inclusion efforts;
 - Current efforts to implement equity, diversity, and inclusion processes and practices:
 - Programmatic policies, practices, and metrics;

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- Anticipated barriers and challenges, and initial thoughts on how to overcome them;
 - Stakeholders engaged in your efforts.
- Priorities for equity, diversity, and inclusion change;
- Current and demonstrated engagement of university and program leadership in equity, diversity, and inclusion change efforts;
- Current and demonstrated engagement of university governance bodies in equity, diversity, and inclusion change efforts.

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

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

APPLICANT SURVEY PROCESS

The project director of the proposal may be contacted after the submission deadline by SSRS, an independent research firm. The project director 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.

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

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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.

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

To apply, provide the following:

- Narrative (6 pages max) that responds to the eligibility and selection criteria. Please use Arial point 11, single spaced.
- Overview of proposed team (e.g., names, brief description of role. Max 1 page.)
- CV/Biosketch/Resumes for current team members – Biosketch preferred (no limit to amount)
- Letter of commitment from university leadership (e.g., Dean of School of Public Health, Provost)
- Budget

Proposals for this solicitation must be submitted via the RWJF online system. Visit www.rwjf.org/cfp/TAE 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.

Please direct inquiries to:

Sheldon Oliver Watts, MPH, PhD, *program officer*

Phone: (609) 627-5846

Email: swatts@rwjf.org

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.

RWJF does not provide individual critiques of proposals submitted.

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PROGRAM DIRECTION

Direction and technical assistance for this program are provided by Change Matrix, which serves as the Coordinating Center, located at:

Transforming Academia for Equity Coordinating Center

Change Matrix

2251 N. Rampart Blvd., #365

Las Vegas, NV 89128

Website: www.changematrix.org

Responsible staff members at Coordinating Center are:

- Elizabeth Waetzig, JD, co-director
Phone: (626) 390-5400
Email: ewaetzig@changematrix.org
- Rachele Espiritu, PhD, co-director
Phone: (720) 369-3671
Email: respirtu@changematrix.org
- Nancy Vang, *project coordinator*

Responsible staff members at the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation are:

- Sheldon Oliver Watts, MPH, PhD, *program officer*
- Mateusz Szalda, CPA, MAcc, *program financial analyst*

KEY DATES AND DEADLINES

- **November 8, 2021 (3 p.m. ET)**
Optional applicant webinar to review the requirements, the process, and field questions. Registration is required [through this link](#).
- **December 6, 2021**
Full proposals due.
- **Mid-December 2021**
Review of proposals and interviews take place.
- **January 12, 2022**
Selection of grantees.

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- **March 15, 2022**

Grants begin.

Applicant Deadline Policy

All proposals for this solicitation must be submitted via the RWJF online system. Visit www.rwjf.org/cfp/TAE 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 proposal requirements well before the final submission deadline. Please note that, in the 24-hour period leading up to the proposal deadline, staff may not be able to assist all applicants with any system-related issues. Therefore, we encourage you to submit your proposal well before the deadline so that any unforeseen difficulties or technical problems may be addressed in advance.

Late submissions will not be accepted for any reason. While late submissions will not be accepted, RWJF may choose, at its sole discretion, to extend the proposal deadline for all applicants. Such extensions generally will be granted only in the event of: (1) a verified issue with the RWJF proposal system that prevented completion and submission of proposals; or (2) a disaster, emergency, or significant internet outage that affects one or more regions. For purposes of this policy, a region is generally considered to be one or more states. RWJF strives to give all applicants any support needed to successfully submit their proposal prior to the deadline. Submission is defined as all sections completed, marked finished, the proposal “submit” button used, and the proposal status shows “Submitted.” If the deadline is extended for any reason, the extension will be posted on the Funding Opportunities page at rwjf.org. In addition, an email will be sent to all individuals that have started a proposal in the RWJF online system.

ABOUT THE ROBERT WOOD JOHNSON FOUNDATION

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (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.

Health is more than an absence of disease. It is a state of physical, mental, and emotional well-being. It reflects what takes place in our communities, where we live and work, where our children learn and play, and where we gather to worship. That is why RWJF focuses on

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identifying, illuminating, and addressing the barriers to health caused by structural racism and other forms of discrimination, including sexism, ableism, and prejudice based on sexual orientation.

We lean on evidence to advance health equity. We cultivate leaders who work individually and collectively across sectors to address health equity. We promote policies, practices, and systems change to dismantle the structural barriers to well-being created by racism. And we work to amplify voices to shift national conversations and attitudes about health and health equity.

Through our efforts, and the efforts of others, we will continue to strive toward a Culture of Health that benefits all. It is our legacy, it is our calling, and it is our honor. For more information, visit [rwjf.org](https://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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