

2023 Call for Proposals

Proposal Deadline: June 21, 2023 (3 p.m. ET)



Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

Addressing Structural Barriers to Economic Inclusion for Children and Families

Elevating and Accelerating Promising Approaches

BACKGROUND

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) has a vision of a Culture of Health rooted in equity where everyone has a fair and just opportunity to reach their best health and wellbeing, no matter their race, ethnicity, or social class. Pursuing economic inclusion for family wellbeing is a central and generational goal of RWJF and is the heartbeat of the Healthy Children and Families (HCF) theme. At RWJF, we envision an America where parents and caregivers are no longer consumed by the mental stress of not having enough resources to care for their family—one where all parts of society function with a shared commitment to ensuring that each and every child has an array of opportunities that helps them grow up healthy. The vision is one in which all parents and caregivers are fully integrated into our economy and the barriers to wealth and prosperity are removed, allowing them to provide for their families in ways that they would need and want.

We seek efforts to bring to life a vision of a new social contract for children and families—one that recognizes our collective interdependence, the need for shared prosperity, and the inherent value and dignity of all families and children—to truly promote the health and wellbeing of children and families above all else.

[Research demonstrates](#) a clear, robust, and reality-based causal link between access to economic resources and opportunity for health and wellbeing. The United States economy is built on racialized policies and discrimination that deny families the opportunity to achieve health and wellbeing and fully participate in society. Our economy is designed to both disproportionately extract from and exclude families particularly across certain identities, including Black, Indigenous, and immigrant families. In addition, nearly all systems that families interact with in our country prioritize production and economic growth. This exclusion from the nation's shared prosperity is upheld by harmful, persistent mindsets—like [deservingness](#) and [individualism](#)—that are ascribed to families based on factors—such as participation in the traditional labor market and intersecting identities of race, gender, class, and other social stratifications.

As a consequence of these cultural paradigms, some families rarely have the resources that they need to raise healthy, thriving children—and the very social programs that claim to support

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them often fall short of providing them with the full resources and wealth needed to ensure health and wellbeing. These programs, while vital for temporary relief, rarely acknowledge the fundamental role that care and families play in ensuring a healthy society. Our goal is to deeply shift this by addressing the structural factors that refocus the frame for economic systems, policies, and decisionmaking on the importance of and inherent value of children and families and their wellbeing. We seek to challenge the idea that economic value in our nation is only generated through production and the opportunity for economic growth—as well as the idea that adults, particularly caregivers and their families, are only deserving based on the extent to which they participate in the formal workforce.

Economic inclusion, such as assuring access to adequate [income](#) and building and sustaining [wealth](#), enables families to realize their aspirations and invest in their children’s wellbeing. In order to reach that goal, HCF invests in strategies to prioritize child and family wellbeing and disrupt current economic paradigms that value production over wellbeing. **We are focused on systems change, leading us to shift our focus from programs, policies, and services that fill gaps in families’ resources to the longer-term structural and systemic changes that will ensure all families have the resources they need to raise thriving children.**

With this call for proposals (CFP), we are looking to elevate and advance understanding, visibility, uptake, and influence of innovative approaches that disrupt structural barriers to families’ economic inclusion and in service to their wellbeing. We look to inspire a vision that promotes child and family health and wellbeing as a core goal of our nation and the infusion of such into the economy.

THE PROGRAM

This CFP will create a portfolio of grants addressing structural issues that hinder children and families from thriving in our economy. We are interested in frameworks, ideas, models, or approaches that demonstrate an alternative economic vision that positions families at the center—challenging the idea that the value of families can only be understood in connection to work or production. ***We are looking for creative solutions and alternatives that address structural or systemic issues that impact families having the resources they need to thrive.***

Through this program, we aim to:

1. Support a more expansive or provocative understanding of our economy by accelerating the visibility, uptake, and learning from promising new ideas, frameworks, models, or approaches that target structural racism in the economy and that drive resources to children and families.
2. Contribute to an evidence base that expands understanding of what it looks like to have the wellbeing of children and families prioritized in our economic decisions.

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3. Elevate promising and innovative models, their connections to current approaches, and how they might demonstrate a path forward from incremental improvement toward systems transformation.

The following are **essential components** that must be evident and demonstrated in all proposals:

- **A clear benefit to families with children** grounded in families' realities and their stated resource needs to raise healthy, thriving children. RWJF is most interested in efforts that redefine success, which is often measured solely in terms of getting families more money, jobs, or access to basic services—but neglects the importance of health, wellbeing, and family dignity in achieving true economic inclusion and some of the structural roots of economic exclusion.
- **Potential to shift current economic practices, approaches, and tactics by** demonstrating the feasibility and benefit of alternative structural solutions. We know that families have lived with these challenges for generations and sometimes centuries, but there are also communities that have invested in the innovation of their leaders to build a more equitable pathway to economic inclusion. While we hope to better understand the contours of the challenges that families face, we most want to support efforts that directly address the systems and structures that perpetuate exclusion. Specifically, we are looking at areas where there is a clear throughline from historical and current oppression to the resources that families need.
- **Understanding of the opportunity to leverage and build from this idea** to advance toward transformative change for families versus incremental "fixes" to existing systems that were designed to exclude. This project will also serve to accelerate progress of existing efforts that are designed to disrupt the status quo. We know that the social programs that families access are key to their ability to live—however, many do not address the fundamental structures that leave families without economic support over generations.

This CFP is *not* intended to support programs, services, or interventions that address *individual behavior* for families to access resources within the existing economic system, nor basic safety-net issues (e.g., financial coaching, literacy programs, access to food relief). We explicitly seek efforts to transform the experience of families—their ability to sustain their families through full participation in the economy and related social systems.

We offer the following questions and topics to illustrate a few of the many ideas that might be explored through this CFP. This list is not exhaustive and applicants are strongly encouraged to submit proposals that address other related topics and questions aligned with the essential components detailed above:

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- How can the concept of social security and who it's for (i.e., our elders—and young only through survivor benefits or disability) be reimagined? What are solutions aimed at securing resources for children from the beginning of their lives (e.g., baby bonds)?
- What approaches or ideas demonstrate and activate collective accountability for children and to caregivers, or disrupt structural barriers experienced in childhood that perpetuate disparities in wealth, opportunity, and wellbeing later on (such as guaranteed basic income for parents and caregivers)?
- How can healing and repair be incorporated in the context of systems that have harmed children and families—for instance, how might reparations meant to address race-based theft, extraction, and exclusion take an explicitly child and family lens and promote their long-term wellbeing and ability to participate fully in society?
- How have children and families been prioritized in relation to work and productivity? How might that view of what is “productive” be transformed to meet children, caregivers, and families' needs while optimizing their economic outcomes and wellbeing? How might the means by which families meet their core needs and build economic capacity to sustain shocks (e.g., in the form of insurance, other benefits, income, paid leave) be untethered from work?
- How do dominant understandings and definitions of family impact the resources that ensure children can thrive (e.g., alternatives to child support that allow noncustodial parents to optimally contribute resources to their children; support for nonbiological caregivers; benefits structures that enable economic stability, health, and wellbeing for cohabiting adults and children who are not biologically or legally related)?

FUNDING DETAILS

- **Type of Award:** Awards funded under this opportunity will be structured as grants.
- **Number of Awards:** Up to 10 awards will be funded.
- **Amount of Award:** Each award will be between \$250,000 and \$750,000.
- **Award Duration:** Awards will be between 12 and 24 months.
- **Use of Funds:** Award funds should cover actual costs of the project including personnel and other direct costs. If the grantee is a public charity, grant funds will also cover 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

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construct or renovate facilities, and for lobbying or political activities. Additional budget guidelines are provided in the online application materials.

- **Payment of Awards:** Payment of the award generally will be based upon spending against approved budgets or milestones (not invoices).

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

Eligible applicants:

- Must have organizational infrastructure that demonstrates sufficient capacity and a history to conduct proposed efforts in timely, well-managed capacity that led to desired outcomes.
- 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.
- Two or more organizations may partner to develop and implement this grant program. While each collaborating organization must be described in detail in the proposal, only one organization may represent the collaboration and be the lead contact in the application process and may engage the other organization(s) through a subcontract or grant.
- The Foundation seeks to engage organizations that do not provide—and within the past year have not provided—significant services to clients whose interests conflict, or appear to conflict, with programs of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Such clients include, but are not limited to, those that promote tobacco or firearms of any kind, promote alcohol products irresponsibly, promote the work of trade associations for the tobacco, alcohol or firearms industries, or promote to children food of minimal nutritional value. According to federal regulations, "foods of minimal nutritional value" are foods that provide less than 5 percent of the Recommended Daily Allowance per serving for each of eight key nutrients. They include soft drinks, water ices, chewing gum, and certain candies made largely from sweeteners, such as hard candy and jelly beans.

This guideline also may apply in cases where such clients' work is done by an affiliate company of the entity or vendor submitting the proposal, e.g., if the entity or vendor's parent company has clients who promote tobacco. This guideline, of necessity, cannot cover every potential situation; accordingly, the Foundation will consider conflicts, or perceived conflicts, on a case-by-case basis.

- Must demonstrate the characteristics highlighted in the Selection Criteria below.

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SELECTION CRITERIA

Applicants will be evaluated on demonstration of each of the following characteristics related to the proposed area of focus in their application:

1. **A clear benefit to families with children** grounded in families' realities and stated resource needs to raise healthy, thriving children—focused on the structural roots of exclusion and not individual behaviors.
2. **Potential to shift current economic practices, approaches, and tactics** by demonstrating the feasibility and benefit of alternative structural solutions. Clear articulation, with rationale and documentation, for how and why the proposed project will influence the systems and structures that perpetuate exclusion. Specifically, we are looking at areas where there is a clear throughline from historical and current oppression to the resources that families need.
3. **Opportunity to leverage and build from this idea** to advance toward transformative change for families versus incremental “fixes” to existing systems that were designed to exclude. Orientation of the proposed project toward disrupting the status quo—we are looking for projects that will uniquely add value, push on understanding, and/or bridge learning to action.
4. **Demonstrated organizational experience and infrastructure** to fulfill the proposed project, ability to track, synthesize, and disseminate learning, and willingness to work with RWJF grantees and partners to help extract and synthesize learning.
5. **Organization commitment to equity and addressing structural racism** and driving transformative systems change to address these foci. Structural racism refers to a system in which history, public policies, institutional practices, social structures, culture, and other norms reinforce and perpetuate racial and group inequities that systematically benefit White people and disadvantage people of color. The vision and mission of the applicant(s) should be aligned with RWJF's Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Commitment outlined below.

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

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resulting publications open access (typically \$2,000–\$5,000 per manuscript). See our [Open Access policy](#) for more information.

HOW TO APPLY

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

This is a one-phase competitive proposal process. Applicants that meet the selection criteria should submit a full proposal. Proposals would ideally be five pages if applicants can succinctly respond to the questions, but applicants may go up to 10 pages if needed. Proposals should be accompanied by a detailed budget, budget narrative, high-level project timeline, and additional supporting information.

A proposal narrative (maximum 10 pages, 12-point font, 1.5 line-spaced) should be prefaced by a summary one to two sentences that succinctly describe the project and its potential to influence structural racism and economic inclusion for children and families.

The narrative should include a) the project purpose, objectives, and the anticipated influence or impact of what will be accomplished over the funding period; b) how the project will be thoughtfully executed; and c) appropriate documentation and rationale for how the project meets each of the essential components (see Purpose section above):

- **A clear benefit to and prioritization of families with children**, grounded in families' realities and their stated resource needs to raise healthy, thriving children.
- **Potential to shift current economic practices, approaches, and tactics** by demonstrating the feasibility and benefit of alternative structural solutions.
- **Opportunity to leverage and build on the existing moment** to accelerate progress of transformative efforts that are designed to disrupt the status quo versus incremental "fixes" to existing systems that were designed to exclude.

Proposed processes and approaches to operationalize the project purpose and objectives should be detailed, as well as the key activities including a general work plan with deliverables and timeline. A high-level project timeline for the project's major milestones will be required in the Supporting Documents section of the online application system. The timeline does not count toward the 10-page proposal narrative maximum.

Identification of any key partners/collaborators, specific expertise and role(s), and how the working relationship will be operationalized from both a programmatic and financial perspective. Letters of partnership are encouraged in cases where the applicant has a key partner(s) whose involvement is critical to the implementation of the proposed project. The letter/s of partnership

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should be provided in the Supporting Documents section of the application and do not count toward the 10-page proposal narrative maximum.

The most significant opportunities and challenges to successful implementation of this work.

Describe (name, title, credentials) your nomination for a proposed program office director and key staff/advisors (if known at this time), including experience in developing and leading similar efforts. (The application will require resumes for the proposed project director and other key staff. The resumes do not count toward the 10-page proposal narrative maximum.)

A budget and budget narrative that reflects proposed activities and responsibilities; outlines how resources are allocated for major benchmarks; and demonstrates commitment to responsible stewardship of funds. Additional budget guidelines are provided in the online application materials.

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.

PROGRAM DIRECTION

Responsible staff members at the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation are:

- Erissa Scalera, *senior program officer*
- Jeanette Elstein, *program officer*
- Trene Hawkins, *program officer*
- Ariel Sankar-Bergmann, *program officer*

KEY DATES AND DEADLINES

- **June 1, 2023 (2:30 p.m. ET)**
Optional applicant webinar. Registration is required [through this link](#).
- **June 21st, 2023 (3 p.m. ET)**
Deadline for receipt of full proposals.
- **October 15, 2023**
Grant start date.

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Applicant Deadline Policy

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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 opportunity page at rwjf.org. In addition, an email will be sent to all individuals that have started a proposal in the RWJF online system.

EVALUATION AND MONITORING

An independent group selected and funded by RWJF may conduct assessments across all funded efforts of this 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.

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.

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

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 wellbeing. 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.

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. For more information, visit www.rwjf.org.

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

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