Evidence for Action: Indigenous-Led Solutions to Advance Health Equity and Wellbeing

BACKGROUND

To help applicants understand this call for proposals, we encourage referring to the frequently asked questions (FAQs) for additional clarification.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) is committed to building a national Culture of Health that enables all in our diverse society to lead healthy, thriving lives now and for generations to come. To this end, RWJF supports research that identifies solutions to the systemic root causes of U.S. health inequities, recognizing that they are strongly linked to settler colonialism, structural racism, and other forms of oppression. One of the ways the Foundation does this is through Evidence for Action (E4A), a national program of RWJF, which funds research to generate the knowledge needed to build a Culture of Health with an explicit emphasis on advancing racial equity.¹

RWJF and E4A respect and acknowledge the sovereignty of Indigenous Tribes and communities, urban and rural, regardless of U.S. and state governmental acknowledgement. We recognize Indigenous Peoples as descendants of independent sovereign nations who experience contemporary health inequity due to centuries of intentional colonial subjugation. For the purposes of this funding opportunity, Indigenous Peoples means Tribal Nations based in the U.S. (regardless of federal or state recognition), American Indians, Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders of U.S. territories.

The impact of settler colonialism and racism continues to be deeply ingrained within our societal systems, leading to persistent health inequities. Indigenous communities, although sociopolitical

¹ Racial equity refers to the conditions in which race or ethnicity no longer predict a person’s ability to live a healthy life.
groups rather than racial groups, have been racialized and experience racism because it intersects with colonialism and is embedded in and operates through U.S. systems, policies, and practices. Despite this, Indigenous Peoples have historically lived healthy, thriving lives, as communities lived in harmony with nature, practicing vibrant cultural and spiritual traditions. Indeed, in many Indigenous communities, the concepts of culture and health are so intertwined as to be synonymous. Knowledge and approaches that lead to health equity already exist within Indigenous communities, and Indigenous practices and ways of knowing are integral to Indigenous self-determination, whereby health equity solutions are developed. As such, we look toward Indigenous Peoples to identify and define health priorities and lead the associated initiatives required to promote flourishing and wellbeing.

**PURPOSE**

*The purpose of this call for proposals (CFP) is to support Indigenous-led systematic inquiry to enhance the health and wellbeing of Indigenous Peoples and generate approaches to improve health equity.* This will be achieved by funding community-prioritized investigation, elevating and integrating Indigenous cultures and knowledge-building practices. To support a diverse range of projects tailored to different phases of development and scope, awards will be made through two tracks, as described later in this solicitation.

Distinguished Māori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith's seminal text *Decolonizing Methodologies*, points out that the concept of 'research' is inseparably tied to the historical context of European colonialism and its impacts on Indigenous Peoples globally (Smith 2021). Acknowledging the harmful misuse of research against Indigenous communities, our objective is to adopt a critical and realistic approach to systematic inquiry, striving to promote ethical practices that respect and uplift Indigenous communities. Despite enduring a history of colonial subjugation and research exploitation, Indigenous Peoples have persevered and harnessed their rich cultural assets to improve health and wellbeing. Fundamental shared Indigenous values like relationship-building, embracing responsibility, practicing reciprocity, and promoting redistribution in research partnerships are core to enhancing wellbeing in Indigenous communities (Gone 2023). Furthermore, the understanding that knowledge is relational is core to an Indigenous paradigm. This means that knowledge creation is based on relationships—inter- and intra-personal, environmental, spiritual, and conceptual (Wilson 2008). Research in service of Indigenous communities should therefore embody and contribute to the advancement of relational knowledge, self-determination, and identity affirmation for Indigenous Peoples.

In embracing these values, this funding opportunity will support community-driven research advancing “upstream” solutions to promote Indigenous health equity. “Upstream” refers to systems, structures, laws, policies, norms, and practices that determine the distribution of resources and opportunities, which in turn influence individuals’ choices and behaviors. Projects should:
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- center the needs, experiences, and strengths of Indigenous communities, such as thriving in the face of historical trauma;
- be reflective of Indigenous worldviews and concepts of knowledge, health and wellbeing;
- be able to inform a specific course of action and/or establish beneficial practices.

Strategies focused on developing healthy and equitable communities; ensuring economic inclusion for family wellbeing; and fostering alignment of equitable and affordable public health and healthcare systems are of particular interest to RWJF.

Given the focus on systemic and structural causes of inequities, studies of solutions 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 (e.g., cultural sensitivity trainings)—are not a fit for this funding opportunity. Additionally, research that aims to solely describe a problem or document inequities is not a fit. For instance, in the context of the critical issue of water access and sovereignty, one avenue to address this situation could involve rematriating water rights to Indigenous communities or Tribal entities. Projects that explore and establish a path for achieving this outcome would be well-aligned with this funding opportunity. Conversely, documenting the lack of access to clean water in Tribal communities is not an ideal fit for this solicitation. We seek to fund concrete and promising solutions and actions that move beyond raising awareness.

We encourage the use of Indigenous research methods and methodologies, which are rooted in a deeper understanding of Tribal or Indigenous norms and protocols and may require additional formal agreements, Tribal or other community oversight, and training. Approaches and processes that optimize Indigenous leadership, such as Tribally driven participatory research (TDPR), are also encouraged to build on existing community strengths and capacity, help establish collaborative partnerships, work toward equitable power dynamics, and facilitate bi-directional learning (Mariella et al. 2009). Depending on the research purpose and design, it may be appropriate, and is permissible, to apply “Western” research methods. We also support the mixing of Indigenous and “Western” approaches, methodologies, and methods, as described by the Etuaptmumk—Two-Eyed Seeing concept created by Mi’kmaw Elder Albert Marshall, which refers to “learning to see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing, and from the other eye with the strengths of Western knowledges and ways of knowing, and learning to use both these eyes together, for the benefit of all” (Institute for Integrative Sciences and Health). Ultimately, the research approaches, methodologies, and methods should be selected based on their appropriateness for answering the research questions in a manner that aligns with community values and priorities.

While there are existing and well-established research partnerships in Indigenous communities that are already actively engaged in sustained research endeavors, some communities are in the early stages of building research relationships and infrastructure. To accommodate both of
these groups and stages, awards will be made through two tracks: (1) Track 1: Initiating and Developing Research Capacity and Infrastructure and (2) Track 2: Supporting Later-Stage, Sustained Research Efforts. Track selection is not a selection criteria for funding. Applicants should self-select into the track that best reflects the stage of their project.

**Track 1: Initiating and Developing Research Capacity and Infrastructure**

Examples of projects that may be a good fit for Track 1 include, but are not limited to:

- Use of TDPR, or Indigenous research methods and approaches to identify solutions and strategies for health that are prioritized by Indigenous Peoples.
- Carrying out Indigenous-grounded needs assessments to identify research priorities that matter to Indigenous communities.
- Developing and validating culturally appropriate tests and measures to assess the health of Indigenous Peoples.
- Developing new data collection, access, and management approaches within Indigenous communities.

**Track 2: Supporting Later-Stage, Sustained Research Efforts**

Examples of projects that may be a good fit for Track 2 include, but are not limited to:

- Developing restorative justice or reconciliation projects that aim to address historical injustices and promote healing.
- Measuring the impact of strategies that target structural or systemic inequities for Indigenous populations (e.g., cultural revitalization initiatives).
- Assessing whether specific policies or programs (e.g., healthcare infrastructure or systems investments, economic and commerce developments, employment opportunities, housing initiatives, climate change adaptations or mitigation) impact Indigenous Peoples’ health and wellbeing.
- Determining whether certain practices (e.g., traditional healing, Indigenous cultural practices, etc.) improve Indigenous Peoples’ health and wellbeing.

These examples are not meant to be prescriptive or exclusionary, but rather to describe approaches that align with the program’s intent. Project teams are encouraged to submit innovative, strengths-based proposals of significance to Indigenous communities, using any appropriate research designs, methods, and combination thereof.

**FUNDING DETAILS**

- **Type of Award:** Awards funded under this opportunity will be structured as grants.
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- **Number of Awards:** The number of grants to be awarded (both by track and in total) will be determined based on the number, size, and scope of the studies proposed, and we expect to award grants in a range of sizes and durations.

- **Amount of Award:** A total of up to $4 million will be awarded through this CFP.

  **Track 1: Initiating and Developing Research Capacity and Infrastructure**

  - There is not an explicit budget cap for awards funded under this track, but we expect that grants will be in the approximate range of $100,000–$400,000 total. We anticipate much of the grant duration to involve relationship-building, trust development, and community feedback processes. Proposals must demonstrate a clear plan for ongoing and sustained collaboration and continued work with newly engaged partners.

  **Track 2: Supporting Later-Stage, Sustained Research Efforts**

  - There is not an explicit budget cap for awards funded under this track, but we expect grants will be in the range of approximately $500,000–$750,000 total. We expect project teams to demonstrate established, equitable partnerships with Indigenous communities who can begin testing a solution or strategy as part of their project.

  - **Duration of Awards:** Preference is for award durations between two and three years (24–36 months), but durations of up to five years (60 months) will be considered with reasonable justification.

**Use of Funds:** Grant funds should cover all research-related aspects of a project, including staff time, travel stipends, support for participant involvement, consultant fees, data collection, analysis, interpretation, dissemination, meetings, supplies, support for intellectual contributions (e.g., review sessions, advisory board service), and research capacity-building, among a variety of other costs related to the research project itself. 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 construct or renovate facilities, or 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, rather than through invoices.

**Eligibility Criteria**

- Awards will be made to organizations, not to individuals.
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- Preference will be given to applicant organizations that are Tribal entities (including those that are state recognized, federally recognized, or have no formal recognition status) or Indigenous-Serving Organizations\(^2\), including Urban Indian Organizations. Applicant organizations must be based in the United States or its territories.

- We strive to support research teams with diverse lived experiences, including diversity of lived experiences related to race, ethnicity, gender, ability, sexual orientation, and seniority. We particularly encourage the following individuals to apply:
  - Project directors who are American Indian, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian, or otherwise Indigenous to the United States or its territories;
  - Researchers from organizations that are underrepresented among RWJF grantee institutions, including Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), Alaska Native-Serving Institutions, Native Hawaiian-Serving Institutions, Asian American/Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions, and other Indigenous-Serving Organizations; and
  - First-time applicants for an RWJF grant.

- Applicants who have been or are currently RWJF grantees are eligible to apply.

- Only one organization may serve as the lead applicant.
  - For Track 1, this must be a Tribal entity or Indigenous-Serving Organization.
  - For Track 2, this is not required to be a Tribal entity or Indigenous-Serving Organization.

SELECTION CRITERIA

Proposals will be reviewed by a committee composed of Indigenous scholars and community members, RWJF staff, E4A's National Advisory Committee members, leaders of E4A's National Program Office (NPO), and other expert reviewers as needed. The Foundation will make all final grant decisions.

Proposals will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- **Relevance to improving Indigenous Peoples’ health and wellbeing**—research aims are important to improving Indigenous Peoples’ health and wellbeing, with an emphasis on addressing root causes and improving social and structural determinants of health, as opposed to requiring individual behavior modification in the absence of larger systems changes.

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\(^2\) For the purpose of this CFP, Indigenous-Serving Organizations are defined as entities with a core mission to serve Native Americans, Alaskans, Hawaiians, or Peoples indigenous to the U.S. Territories; that can demonstrate a track record of successfully meeting this mission; are poised to reach these populations; and can obtain appropriate verification from a Tribal or Indigenous governing body that the applicant meets these requirements as a contingency of award.
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- **Actionability**—findings from the proposed research are solutions-oriented and clearly tied to informing or driving plausible systems-level actions to improve Indigenous Peoples’ health and wellbeing. Research should **not** serve to solely describe a problem or inequity; it should ensure tangible benefits by informing strategies to advance health equity for Indigenous Peoples.

- **Methodological appropriateness**—studies must include a clear research question(s) and use methods and frameworks that are appropriate for answering the question(s); these can be inclusive of Indigenous approaches, methodologies, and methods, “Western” research methods and frameworks, including quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods, or a mixing of both Indigenous and “Western” methods.

- **Focus on health equity**—projects have a clear focus on improving health equity for Indigenous populations. While there is no singular viewpoint on Indigenous concepts of health and wellbeing, applicants are encouraged to consider Indigenous concepts of these domains. Projects may be guided by Indigenous frameworks and worldviews, such as the inclusion of cultural connectedness, relationships to land and natural resources, holistic approaches, and traditional practices of wellness, among others.

- **Feasibility**—projects can be conducted within the proposed scope, including evidence of respect for Indigenous data sovereignty and governance, which recognizes the rights of Indigenous Peoples to govern and control data pertaining to their communities, lands, cultures, environments, and knowledge systems throughout the entire data lifecycle (from collection and storage to application and utilization). There is timely access to appropriate data and/or study participants, as well as reasonable budgets and timelines that account for sufficient and equitable engagement of relevant partners.

- **Qualifications of team**—project teams demonstrate evidence of authentic and durable relationships among team members, as indicated by a history of previous partnership; project teams in the early stages of building relationships demonstrate intent and describe steps needed to develop long-standing, sustainable partnerships; work and resources are equitably distributed across collaborating organizations; and teams are Indigenous-led or include members who have extensive experience working with Indigenous communities.

These criteria will be applied to both tracks; how they are defined and interpreted may vary slightly between tracks. For example, actionability for projects in Track 1 might be demonstrated by markers of established partnerships, whereas actionability for projects in Track 2 might be demonstrated by specific policy implications. Relatedly, while the research approaches will vary both within and between tracks, all projects are expected to adhere to correspondingly rigorous methodological standards. The only meaningful difference in criteria pertains to the qualifications of the team, which **must be led** by Tribal entities or Indigenous-Serving Organizations for submissions through Track 1 (see above for Eligibility Criteria).

Applicants whose proposals do not meet all selection criteria—but satisfy some criteria—may be offered Technical Assistance (TA). Guidelines and information, including a list of frequently asked questions, a description of TA services, and other supplemental resources that provide additional detail about the CFP and grantmaking process are available on the E4A website.
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Grantee Expectations

We seek grantees who are deeply committed to conducting rigorous and equitable research—inclusive of Indigenous methodologies, practices, and processes—and ensuring that their findings are actionable in the real world. In addition to research funding, we also support our grantees with networking, dissemination of findings, and other activities that can enhance their projects’ potential to “move the needle” on improving Indigenous Peoples’ health and wellbeing.

Grantees funded through this CFP are expected to:

- Develop research in alignment with tenets of the CARE Principles (Collective benefit, Authority to control, Responsibility, Ethics), which outline essential guidelines for non-Indigenous actors when handling Indigenous data (Carroll et al. 2020).

- Participate in periodic progress check-ins throughout the grant period with E4A National Program Office (NPO) staff; share research findings or learnings with RWJF and E4A’s NPO; and submit financial reports annually.

- Attend annual RWJF meetings (dates and locations vary); E4A staff are also available to visit grantee sites, if invited and appropriate.

- Participate in peer networking activities with other E4A and RWJF grantees.

- Build appropriate funds and time into the project budget and timeline for engagement, conferences, meetings, and other forms of dissemination—especially to community groups, including after analyses are complete.

- Collaborate with the E4A team to develop and implement an appropriate strategy to disseminate findings and engage relevant audiences. We respect that some information gathered and gained through these grants may be deemed sacred or proprietary. However, some aspects of the research or research process—with approval from Tribal or Indigenous communities—are expected to be shared publicly (e.g., via story work, videos, presentations, community-organizing activities, fact sheets, reports, white papers, journal articles).

Additionally, grantees are encouraged to pre-register their research on Open Science Framework (OSF) at the start of the grant period. Exceptions will be allowed in cases where pre-registration would compromise data sovereignty or other Indigenous research agreements.

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
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access journals. Grantees may include funds in their budgets to cover the cost of making the resulting publications open access (typically $2,000–$5,000 per manuscript). Please note that grantees are encouraged but are not required to publish in peer-reviewed journals. *If* grantees choose to publish findings in a peer-reviewed journal, articles must be made open access. See RWJF’s Open Access policy for more information.

How to Apply

All brief and full proposals for this solicitation must be submitted via the RWJF online Application and Review system. Visit [http://www.rwjf.org/cfp/E4AILS](http://www.rwjf.org/cfp/E4AILS) and use the “Apply Online” link. If you have not already done so, you will be required to register at [my.rwjf.org](http://www.rwjf.org/my.rwjf) before you begin the proposal process.

There are two phases in the competitive proposal process:

**Phase 1: Brief Proposals**—Applicants must first submit responses to a number of questions describing the lead organization, project team, basic project information, and an overview of the proposed research.

**Phase 2: Full Proposals**—Applicants whose brief proposals meet the outlined selection criteria will be invited to submit a full proposal narrative of up to 8 pages, along with a detailed budget, timeline, and dissemination strategy, and other supplemental information. Only applicants invited to submit a full proposal will be considered for funding.

Please direct inquiries to:

Evidence for Action National Program Office
Phone: (415) 502-3490
Email: evidenceforaction@ucsf.edu
Website: [www.evidenceforaction.org](http://www.evidenceforaction.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.

Program Direction

The Evidence for Action NPO 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.
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Evidence for Action
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Website: www.evidenceforaction.org

Responsible NPO staff members are:

• Amani M. Allen, PhD, MPH, director
• 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

KEY DATES AND DEADLINES

• December 7, 2023 (2–3:30 p.m. Eastern Time)
  Optional applicant webinar. Registration is required through this link.

• March 1, 2024 (3 p.m. Eastern Time)
  Deadline for receipt of brief proposals.

• April 1, 2024
  Applicants are notified whether they are invited to submit full proposals.

• June 28, 2024 (3 p.m. Eastern Time)
  Deadline for receipt of full proposals (by invitation only).

• July 31, 2024
  Applicants are notified of review committee decisions.

• October 1, 2024
  Grant start date.
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Applicant Deadline Policy

All proposals for this solicitation must be submitted via the RWJF online system. Visit http://www.rwjf.org/cfp/E4A1LS 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 opportunity page at www.rwjf.org. In addition, an email will be sent to all individuals that have started a proposal in the RWJF online system.

MONITORING

RWJF monitors the administering institution’s careful stewardship of grant funds to assure accountability. Grantee organizations 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.
OUR EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION COMMITMENT

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation is committed to building a Culture of Health that provides everyone in the United States 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, nationality, 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 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.

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REFERENCES


