

2024 Call for Proposals

Concept Paper Deadline: April 3, 2024 (3 p.m. ET)
Full Proposal Deadline (by invitation only): July 10, 2024 (3 p.m. ET)



Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

HEALTHY EATING RESEARCH

Supportive and Equitable Policies and Programs Enabling All U.S. Children and Adolescents to Thrive: Focus on Diet Quality, Access to Affordable Nutritious Foods, and Nutrition Security—ROUND 14

BACKGROUND

It is well documented that health is powerfully influenced by our social conditions and circumstances, including the neighborhoods and communities where we live. These determinants of health include education; access to good jobs with fair pay; adequate housing; access to quality health care; and social support networks. Access to healthy and nutritious food is also a key determinant of health and health equity.

Nutritious food is the foundation of good health, starting in early childhood and continuing throughout life. But for far too many families living in the U.S.—especially those living in low-income communities and communities of color—access to affordable, nutritious food is out of reach; therefore, food and nutrition insecurity is a national concern. Short- and long-term health consequences of poor diet in children may affect cognitive and physical growth and development, academic success, and quality of life. A lack of healthy dietary patterns also places children and adults at increased risk for nutrition insecurity and diet-related chronic diseases such as obesity, pre-diabetes and diabetes, and other cardiovascular diseases. Without access to affordable and nutritious foods on a consistent basis, families will remain at high risk for poor health and wellbeing.

To ensure that all children and families have a fair and just opportunity for optimal health, we must work to dismantle the systemic and structural barriers—

HEALTHY EATING RESEARCH PROGRAM

Healthy Eating Research (HER) is a national program of the [Robert Wood Johnson Foundation \(RWJF\) committed to building a Culture of Health](#) through identifying effective strategies to improve children's nutrition and weight. HER's mission is to support and disseminate research on policy, systems, and environmental strategies that promote healthy eating among children and advance nutrition security and health equity. The program goals are to:

- 1) build a research base for policy, systems, and environmental strategies that advance health and nutrition equity in the areas of healthy food access, nutrition security, diet quality, and healthy weight;
- 2) foster a vibrant, inclusive, interdisciplinary field of research and a diverse network of researchers; and
- 3) communicate research findings to accelerate policy, systems, and environmental changes that promote healthy eating and advance nutrition and health equity.

HER issues calls for proposals (CFPs) to solicit scientifically rigorous, solution-oriented proposals from investigators representing diverse disciplines and backgrounds. To learn more about the program, we encourage applicants to visit the Healthy Eating Research website at www.healthyeatingresearch.org.

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such as racism, poverty, and discrimination—that impede good health and wellbeing. Public policies and programs that supplement income or increase access to basic needs, such as food, housing, health care, childcare, and education, can be particularly powerful in promoting the health and wellbeing of children and families with lower incomes. To ensure healthy eating, nutrition support policies are needed (e.g., federal nutrition assistance programs), as well as social and economic policies, such as those providing housing and income support, which can also impact nutrition status. In addition, collaboration across different sectors and policy areas is needed to advance health and wellbeing for families and communities.

PURPOSE

As part of its commitment to building a national [Culture of Health](#), the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) seeks ideas that advance health, equity, and wellbeing. Healthy Eating Research supports this goal through improving diet quality and nutrition for all Americans, addressing nutrition disparities, and reducing food and nutrition insecurity.

The purpose of this call for proposals (CFP) is to generate evidence on supportive family policies and programs that have strong potential to impact equitable access to nutritious food in communities, nutrition security, diet quality, and improved nutrition and health outcomes. We are especially interested in strategies to improve health outcomes for families with lower incomes and/or racially and ethnically diverse populations experiencing higher rates of diet-related chronic disease and/or health disparities. Findings will be used to guide and inform decisionmaking about policy and system changes that can advance nutrition equity and improve health.

Through this CFP, we seek to learn what works (or not), why, and under what circumstances; who benefits the most from these policies and programs; and whether disparities are reduced. We are interested in solution-oriented research that focuses on policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) change at the national, state, local, and tribal levels. The PSE research strategies can focus on how to strengthen or build on existing policies or programs; evaluation of current policies or programs; or designing and pilot-testing new innovative programs that have policy-relevance. We are also interested in PSE research that is more developmental in nature but has potential for policy and systems impact in addressing nutrition inequities. Additionally, we are looking to support work that seeks to develop, validate, and evaluate new measures for assessing PSE changes and also nutrition and health equity measures that could be used to measure progress.

TARGETED AGE GROUPS, PRIORITY POPULATIONS

The target population is children (ages birth to 18) and families in the United States, with high priority on those who are at highest risk for poor nutrition, specifically lower-income families and racially and ethnically diverse populations (e.g., Black, Latino/a, American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander).

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PRIORITY TOPIC AREAS

This CFP focuses on five priority topic areas related to supportive family policies and programs to improve nutrition and health:

- Child nutrition programs
- Food access and hunger-relief programs
- Structural inequities impacting access to healthy and affordable foods
- Social and economic programs (nonfood policies)
- Emerging topics

The following offers brief descriptions of each thematic area. Examples of potential research topics or questions can be found in the frequently asked questions (FAQ) document in the RWJF online application system.

Child nutrition programs

Child nutrition programs help ensure that children receive nutritious food, including meals and snacks that promote their health, growth, and school success. There are several federal child nutrition programs administered by USDA, including the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), and the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP), Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP) for elementary schools, Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), the Farm to School Program, and the new Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer Program for Children (Summer EBT) that will officially launch in summer 2024. Summer EBT provides grocery-buying benefits to low-income families with school-aged children when schools are closed for the summer. There are also other child nutrition programs operated by states (e.g., universal school meals, after-school snacks and supper programs) and at local levels. Through this CFP, there is an opportunity to examine strategies to expand the reach and impact of these programs. Strategies may include innovations in technologies; expanding program outreach and eligibility; simplifying program enrollment processes; identifying ways to improve equity within nutrition assistance programs; building the evidence base for these programs' impacts on diet quality, food insecurity, nutrition, weight, and health; and areas for improvements and scalability.

Food Access and hunger-relief programs

Equitable access to healthy and affordable food in the U.S. is a major public health concern. To increase access to food and nutrition and reduce hunger among families, USDA administers the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the SNAP-Ed Connection program, The WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP), The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), and the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR). There are also other national, state, local, and community programs that are using novel approaches to increase access to healthy foods in low-resource communities and settings.

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The charitable food system—a network of food banks, food pantries, and meal programs—distributes billions of pounds of food annually to families experiencing food insecurity. Traditionally, items supplied by food banks have been shelf-stable foods and beverages high in saturated fat, sodium, and added sugars; however, in recent years, many food banks have begun prioritizing sourcing and supplying more nutritious foods. Efforts to promote healthy choices in food banks and food pantries include the creation and adoption of formal nutrition policies, cultivation of relationships with food donors who can donate healthier products, and investment in capacity to store and display healthier food items.

In addition, the 2022 White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health laid out a [nationwide vision and call to action](#) for ending hunger and reducing diet-related diseases by 2030, and closing disparities among the communities that are most impacted. Achieving the conference’s goals will require research and evaluation on promising and innovative approaches to determine the most effective, impactful, and equitable solutions for reducing hunger and diet-related diseases and communicating these solutions to inform current and future policy decisions. This CFP provides opportunities to develop and test innovative approaches to increasing access to healthy foods (including via improving the food retail environment); to conduct natural experiments and/or test interventions; and evaluate programs aimed at improving nutrition security and diet quality for children and families, especially among understudied populations.

Structural inequities impacting access to healthy and affordable foods

Structural barriers, such as racism and classism, involve processes by which interconnected political, economic, social, and ideological systems generate and maintain unequal access to opportunities and resources. Such barriers are the result of historical and contemporary policies and practices deeply rooted within systems. The [food justice and Indigenous food sovereignty movements](#) are grassroots community initiatives emerging in response to food insecurity and economic shocks that prevent access to healthy, nutritious, and culturally appropriate foods. These movements view disparities in healthy food access as a systemic problem stemming from structural racism, inequalities, and loss of community control of food. By confronting the root causes of injustice in the food system, community activists and advocates seek to reclaim communities’ self-determination and sovereignty over food access and production. Communities of color and Indigenous populations are taking action to address structural racism and systemic inequities by building community power to improve health. They are creating local food systems to better support access to culturally relevant, traditional, and fresh foods, which also improves nutrition security and community economic development. When scaled, these efforts have the potential to lead to more resilient, fair, and sustainable local food systems, including small-scale agriculture and food entrepreneurship. This CFP would allow community-academic partnerships to evaluate community-powered initiatives, develop interventions to address root causes of food insecurity or obesity, and co-design and test innovative models. There is also a need to better understand the structural inequities and forces that have shaped contemporary food access and food insecurity in low-income areas and communities of color and approaches to mitigate these forces.

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Social and economic policies and programs

Social and economic inequities drive child nutrition disparities. To date, little research has been conducted on the relationships and interconnections between nutrition, weight, and food and nutrition security in families and policies related to poverty reduction, family income supports, economic resources, housing assistance, or other family supportive policies. Some examples of these policies and programs include: financial payments to families; income assistance and support programs; housing assistance or housing security programs; and increased access to social services [e.g., childcare subsidies; Medicaid; Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP); DoD programs for military families]. We are also interested in exploring other supportive family policies (e.g., paid family leave, flexible work schedules, home visiting programs, breastfeeding support) that impact parental and child health and nutrition outcomes. We encourage applicants to consider non-USDA programs—such as those operated by HUD, HHS, EPA, DoD, IRS, DoT—and their impacts on food security, diet quality, weight, and health.

Emerging topics

This category is intended to allow for exploration of new and emerging public health topics impacting nutrition security, food security, and/or health equity and innovative policies, systems, and environmental strategies to support the optimal health of children and families. Examples of potential topics could include applying a prevention (rather than clinical) lens to food in medicine initiatives; identifying novel ways to utilize Medicaid or CHIP programs to optimize families' nutrition and food security; examining the impacts of climate change on food systems and access to healthy foods; examining the implications of new obesity/weight loss drugs for public health and prevention initiatives, especially related to prevention work with adolescents and young children; addressing unique issues impacting the health and wellbeing of rural communities; examining issues related to public health datasets; development of new measures and metrics for measuring progress, and others. This list is not intended to be exhaustive, but all ideas must have some connection to food or nutrition security and relevance for policy, systems, and environmental approaches to improving children's nutrition and health.

TYPES OF STUDIES

All studies must have a clear, data-driven, and testable research question, with a rigorous study design. A variety of research designs and analyses, including mixed methods and linkages of existing data sources, can be used to answer research questions. Studies could include experimental or quasi-experimental studies; secondary analyses of existing datasets; evaluations of PSE interventions or natural experiments; retrospective analyses of PSE change successes; case studies; financial, economic, or cost-effectiveness studies; simulation modeling studies; or quantitative meta-analyses. We are also interested in looking at how these programs interact with each other and the impact of multiple policies on nutrition and health.

FUNDING DETAILS

- **Type of Awards:** Awards funded under this opportunity will be structured as grants.

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- **Amount of Award:** Each award will be up to a maximum of \$275,000 with a total of up to \$2.5 million to be funded through this CFP. We encourage proposals that request lower budget amounts.
- **Award Duration:** Awards will be a maximum of 24 months in duration. We encourage proposals that request shorter periods (e.g., 12-18 months).
- **Use of Funds:** Award funds should cover actual costs of the project including personnel and other direct costs. In keeping with RWJF policy, funds may *not* be used to support clinical trials of unapproved drugs or devices, to construct or renovate facilities, and for lobbying or political activities. For invitation-only full proposals, we will provide additional budget guidelines in the online application materials.
- **Payment of Awards:** Awards will be made directly to the principal investigator's home institution. Payment of the award generally will be based upon spending against approved budgets or milestones (not invoices).

Indirect costs (up to 15% for U.S. colleges/universities and hospital or health systems; up to 30% for nonprofit organizations; and 0% for for-profit organizations or government entities) are included in the total project awards [per RWJF budget guidelines](#).

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

- Applicant organizations must be based in the United States or its territories.
- Awards will be made to organizations, not to individuals.
- 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.

SELECTION CRITERIA

Concept papers will be reviewed by HER leadership and RWJF senior staff. Concept Papers will be evaluated based on the rationale of the project; strength of the research question and aims; strength and feasibility of the research design; alignment with the goals and topics described in this CFP; balance in topic areas; and potential to target the age groups and priority populations as described above.

Invited *full proposals* will be reviewed by a minimum of three external reviewers (with relevant expertise in research, content area, and/or policy), HER leadership, and RWJF senior staff. Final funding decisions will be made by RWJF leadership. We will evaluate full proposals based on:

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- 1) Importance and relevance of study aims, hypotheses, methods, and outcomes;
- 2) Use of a clear theoretical framework, conceptual model, or rationale;
- 3) Scientific rigor of proposed research, sampling approach and effect sizes needed, data collection and analytic methods, and data sources;
- 4) Research qualifications and experience of the investigator(s) and appropriateness of disciplines and perspectives represented;
- 5) Appropriateness of proposed budget and project timeline, including the realistic feasibility of completing the project within the specified funding period;
- 6) The approach for communicating, disseminating, and translating research findings to advocates, decisionmakers, policymakers, and community members, if applicable.

RWJF 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, the Foundation is committed to fostering diverse perspectives, recognizing 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.

While the presence of diverse perspectives alone is not sufficient, the Foundation is also committed to creating inclusive environments where all individuals are encouraged to share their perspectives and experiences. RWJF believes 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. RWJF is committed to being continuous learners and working alongside others to cultivate equity, diversity, and inclusion.

EVALUATION AND MONITORING

The purpose of evaluation at RWJF is learning rather than accountability. 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. Grantee participation includes assisting with necessary data collection to accomplish the evaluation objectives.

RWJF monitors the grantees' efforts and careful stewardship of grant funds to assure accountability. 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

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

OPEN ACCESS

In order to ensure that HER research is made accessible to a wide and diverse audience, grantees of the HER Round 14 program who publish HER data and findings in peer-reviewed publications must do so in open access journals or must include funds in their budgets to cover the cost of making the resulting publications open access (typically \$3,000–\$5,000 per manuscript).

HOW TO APPLY

Proposals for this solicitation must be submitted electronically via the RWJF online application system.

To apply for HER Round 14, visit <http://www.rwjf.org/cfp/her14> and click the “Apply Online” link. If you have not already done so, you will be required to register at my.rwjf.org before you begin the application process.

There are two phases in the application process:

Phase 1: Concept Paper

All applicants must submit: 1) a concept paper narrative of up to three pages (1.5 line spacing) describing the study; and 2) bio sketches for key personnel. Applicants must follow the instructions and use the templates provided in the online system.

Phase 2: Full Proposals (if invited)

Selected Phase 1 applicants will be invited to submit a full proposal narrative of up to 15 pages (1.5 line spacing) accompanied by a budget and budget narrative and additional supporting documents. Applicants must follow the instructions and use the templates provided in the online system.

Please see the section below for a complete list of key dates and deadlines for the two phases.

Please direct inquiries to:

Healthy Eating Research

Email: healthyeating@duke.edu

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](https://www.rwjf.org). In addition, an email will be sent to all individuals that have started a proposal in the RWJF online system.

RWJF and HER do not provide individual critiques of proposals submitted. RWJF will make all final grant decisions.

KEY DATES AND DEADLINES

- **January 31–April 3, 2024**
RWJF online system becomes available to applicants to submit concept papers.
- **April 3, 2024 (3 p.m. ET)**
Deadline for receipt of concept papers. Those submitted after the deadline will not be reviewed.*
- **May 8, 2024**
Applicants notified whether they are invited to submit a full proposal.
- **July 10, 2024 (3 p.m. ET)**
Deadline for receipt of invited full proposals. Those submitted after the deadline will not be reviewed.*
- **September 2024**
Notification of finalists.
- **November 2024**
Awards begin.

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PROGRAM DIRECTION

Direction and technical assistance for the Healthy Eating Research program is provided by Duke University, which serves as the national program office located at:

Healthy Eating Research

Duke Global Health Institute

310 Trent Drive

Duke Box 90519

Durham, NC 27708

Email: healthyeating@duke.edu

Website: www.healthyeatingresearch.org

Responsible staff members at the national program office are:

- Mary Story, PhD, RD, director
- Megan Lott, MPH, RD, deputy director
- Erin Escobar, MPH, senior research manager

Responsible staff members at the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation are:

- Katherine Hempstead, PhD, senior policy adviser
- Jamie Bussel, MPH, senior program officer
- Jennie Day-Burget, senior communications officer
- Jan Mihalow, program financial analyst

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 rwjf.org.

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

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