

2025 Call for Proposals

Brief Proposal Deadline: October 15, 2025 (3 p.m. ET)



Exploring Equitable Futures

BACKGROUND

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) is taking bold leaps to transform health in our lifetime and pave the way, together, to a future where health is no longer a privilege, but a right.

We have set three ambitious goals for our work:

- Economic Inclusion for Family Wellbeing
- Equitable and Accountable Public Health and Healthcare Systems
- Healthy and Equitable Community Conditions

Making progress toward those Generational Goals requires changing the systems that underpin our society. Currently, those systems create and uphold inequity by placing more value on some lives than others, based on race, class, and other factors. To create a more equitable future, we must identify and dismantle structural racism in our systems. We must create space for health practitioners, community leaders, and researchers to rethink the way our systems work, dream up new possibilities, and put one foot in the future to anticipate opportunities or roadblocks that future may bring.

Through our Ideas for an Equitable Future team, we support visionary thinkers—scientists, anthropologists, engineers, technologists, creatives, and others—who are imagining what the world might look like in the next 10 to 100 years. With our funding, they explore how those futures may unfold in ways that could slow down or speed up our collective efforts to dismantle structural racism and improve health equity.

By applying this future-facing lens, our grantees are uncovering how emerging social, cultural, scientific, technological, environmental, and economic trends and forces could shape the future of health for everyone. They are also discovering and experimenting with cutting-edge ideas that have the potential to tear down barriers to health and wellbeing and reinvent our systems so that they work better for us all.

[Learn more about RWJF's Generational Goals and our focus on systems change.](#)

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PURPOSE

The purpose of this Exploring Equitable Futures call for proposals (CFP) is to support projects that seed new and unconventional ideas that could radically advance health equity for generations to come.

We aim to fund projects that:

- Explore the future by researching and experimenting with ideas that are ahead of the curve or at the edge of our collective imagination;
- Shine a light on the emerging trends and forces that are shaping our future for better or worse—and suggest ways to navigate them to mitigate harm and advance health equity;
- Dream big and challenge conventional wisdom to surface possibilities and uncover new paths to dismantle structural racism and build a more equitable future.

These projects should address [one or more of RWJF's Prioritized Systems](#).

We are particularly interested in projects that seed new and unconventional ideas within the [Health Science Knowledge System](#)—or that reimagine this system completely. At RWJF, we believe that the knowledge and evidence that's needed to guide better decisionmaking, as well as policies that influence health, must include wisdom generated and shared by communities, including those that have been traditionally ignored or undervalued. With our grantees and partners, we are working to transform the way we produce, share, and use health evidence so that it is rooted in equity and justice. As such, we are interested in projects that explore questions such as, but not limited to:

- How might trends, such as artificial intelligence and decreasing trust in institutions impact efforts to transform the Health Science Knowledge System?
- How might a reimaged Health Science Knowledge System produce knowledge that advances health equity? In a desired future, who gets to frame research questions? How does research reflect the priorities and concerns of community members? What qualifies as evidence?
- How might new structures, processes, and incentives ensure the future Health Science Knowledge System produces, validates, disseminates, and applies evidence to improve health?

Learn more about the kinds of ideas funded in the past by the Ideas for an Equitable Future team at www.rwjf.org/ideasforthefuture.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

Preference will be given to applicants that are tax-exempt under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code and are not private foundations or Type III supporting organizations.

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Applicant organizations must be based in the United States or its territories. Submissions from teams that include both U.S. and international members are eligible.

SELECTION CRITERIA

This CFP calls for a Brief Proposal Application as a first step. We evaluate these Brief Proposals based on the extent to which the proposed project seeds an idea that (1) is new and unconventional and (2) meaningfully advances health equity.

Here are the kinds of questions we ask as we review a Brief Proposal. This broad list is intended to help you assess whether your proposed project is a good fit for this CFP. We recognize that no single project will likely answer all of these questions.

Idea:

- Does this project deepen or shift our understanding of possible futures?
- Does it represent a new way of thinking or doing—something that has not been tried before?
- Does it imagine just, healthy futures and take action to make those futures real?
- Does it have the potential to disrupt or reinvent existing systems?
- Is it an idea or solution that is on the fringe or ahead of its time?
- Is there potential for this idea to be a catalyst for meaningful change?

Health equity focus:

- Does this project address one or more of the Foundation's [three goals to advance health equity](#) (make public health and healthcare more equitable; strengthen communities; and ensure that families can thrive)?
- Does this project align with RWJF's Strategic Framework to achieve health equity?
- Is there potential for this project to be a catalyst for health equity?
- Does this project have a focus on the [Health Science Knowledge System or one or more of RWJF's other Prioritized Systems](#)?
- Does the project team have a deep understanding of the system(s) that the project seeks to address?
- Does this project seek to dismantle structural racism and other structural barriers to health equity?
- Does the proposal demonstrate an understanding of structural racism?
- Does the proposal demonstrate an understanding of community power and how to engage meaningfully with community members?
- Does the project team have the practical experience and expertise to understand the root causes of the problems they are tackling and the context in which they are working?

We encourage you to consider carefully whether your idea is a good fit for this funding opportunity. In addition to reading this call for proposals, please visit Exploring Equitable Futures CFP Resources at www.rwjf.org/cfp/Ideas. You'll be able to preview a sample Brief

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Proposal Application and read program-specific FAQs about the Exploring Equitable Futures CFP and general FAQs about applying for a grant.

Note that we receive far more proposals than we can support, and a large majority of those are centered on ideas that are already widely practiced—rather than new and unconventional ideas—and thus, are not a good fit for this funding opportunity.

Other activities this CFP *does not fund* include, but are not limited to:

- Direct healthcare delivery or services, such as hospital or clinic charity care
- Direct services that work to meet basic needs, such as food or goods distribution
- Clinical interventions, including app-based interventions and diagnostic apps
- Clinical trials
- Theoretical research, or purely lab-based activities that are not linked to systems impact or practical applications
- Sustaining or expanding existing programs, such as extracurricular activities, recreational activities, community educational programs, medical pathways programs, and others
- Transportation services for healthcare clinics, hospitals, or other programs
- Capital projects, such as the renovation or purchasing of a facility or building

APPLICATION PROCESS

There are two phases in this competitive proposal process:

- Phase 1: Brief Proposal: Applicants must submit a Brief Proposal with a project description and summary and include a preliminary budget.
- Phase 2: Full Proposal: Select Phase 1 applicants will be invited to submit a Full Proposal accompanied by a detailed budget, budget narrative, and additional information.

To respond to this call for proposals, you will need to submit a Brief Proposal Application. After review, we will invite select applicants to move to Phase 2 and submit a Full Proposal.

We evaluate those Full Proposals using the Brief Proposal selection criteria outlined above, along with the following additional criteria:

- Qualifications and experience of the project team and appropriateness of disciplines and perspectives represented;
- Plan for engaging members of the communities that will be impacted by the work in the planning and execution of the project;
- Appropriateness of proposed budget and project timeline, including the realistic feasibility of completing the project within the specified funding period;
- Approach for communicating, disseminating, and translating findings to advocates, decisionmakers, policymakers, and community members, if applicable;
- Review of financial statements and tax status to ensure compliance with IRS regulations.

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HOW TO APPLY

Brief Proposal Applications for this solicitation must be submitted via the RWJF online system. Visit www.rwjf.org/cfp/ideas and click on the “Apply Online” link. If you have not already done so, you will need to register at my.rwjf.org before you begin the application process. You will receive an email invitation with a link to the RWJF online system and additional instructions. To begin your Brief Proposal Application, select the link in the email and follow the instructions.

During the application process, applicants may send questions to ideasforthefuture@rwjf.org. Prior to asking a question, please review the program-specific FAQs about the Exploring Equitable Futures CFP and the general FAQs about applying for a grant at www.rwjf.org/cfp/ideas. **Due to the volume of proposals we receive, RWJF does not provide individual critiques of proposals submitted.**

TOTAL AWARDS

There is no set number of awards or set award amount under this opportunity. You should request the amount of funding you will need to complete your proposed project—including direct and indirect costs—for the entire duration of your grant. While there is no standard award size for a grant awarded through this CFP, in 2023, grants awarded by RWJF’s Ideas for an Equitable Future team, including those awarded through this CFP, were generally between \$250,000–\$500,000. Grant periods typically range from one to three years.

USE OF GRANT 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 construct or renovate facilities, and for lobbying or political activities.

OUR EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION COMMITMENT

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation is working to take bold leaps to transform health in our lifetime and pave the way, together, to a future where health is no longer a privilege, but a right. Achieving this goal requires focusing 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.

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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.

MONITORING

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

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). See our [Open Access policy](#) for more information.

PROGRAM DIRECTION

Direction and technical assistance for this program are provided by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Responsible staff members at the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation are: Lori Melichar, senior director; Sabrina Ton, program associate; Shakila Woltz, grants management specialist; Sharleen Rajput, program financial analyst; Jody Struve, senior communications officer. Please direct inquiries to ideasforthefuture@rwjf.org.

KEY DATES AND DEADLINES

Brief Proposal Applications will be accepted between February 3, 2025 and October 15, 2025, on a rolling basis. All Brief Proposal Applications will be reviewed. We strive to get back to applicants as quickly as possible. Depending on the volume of proposals received at any given time, applicants can expect to receive a response as to whether they are invited to submit a Full Proposal or have been turned down as early as one month, and no later than six months after receipt of Brief Proposals. Any Brief Proposal Applications started in the system, but **not submitted** by October 15, 2025 at 3 p.m. ET, will be discarded.

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

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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.

ABOUT THE ROBERT WOOD JOHNSON FOUNDATION

RWJF is a leading national philanthropy dedicated to taking bold leaps to transform health in our lifetime. Through funding, convening, advocacy, and evidence-building, we work side-by-side with communities, practitioners, and institutions to get to health equity faster and pave the way, together, to a future where health is no longer a privilege, but a right.

For more information, visit www.rwjf.org.

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

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