

2026 Call for Applications

Application Deadline: November 3, 2026 (3 p.m. ET)



Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Health Policy Fellows

BACKGROUND

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) takes 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 fund leaders who draw upon both innovative and time-tested strategies to create lasting change.

The RWJF Health Policy Fellows program supports RWJF's vision by creating a strong and varied leadership in health policy committed to advancing health. This nonpartisan, Washington, D.C.-based fellowship engages midcareer subject-matter experts, with 10 or more years of experience, who are interested in increasing their expertise in health policy.

Initiated in 1973, the RWJF Health Policy Fellows program seeks outstanding midcareer health professionals, behavioral and social scientists, and others with an interest in health and the drivers of health who (1) possess the skills and commitment to use the fellowship experience to provide leadership in improving health through policy change at the national, state, or local level; (2) bring a depth of subject-matter expertise and knowledge about health and the drivers of health to the policymaking process; (3) have at least 10 years of experience and a minimum of a master's-level degree; and (4) can offer an informed perspective on important and complex challenges facing policymakers.

Fellows actively participate in the formulation of national health policies in congressional or executive branch offices of their choosing and accelerate their careers as leaders in health policy. The National Academy of Medicine (NAM) conducts and administers the fellowship, with funding support from RWJF.

THE PROGRAM

The RWJF Health Policy Fellows program provides the nation's most comprehensive midcareer learning experience at the intersection of health, science, and policy in Washington, D.C. Fellows participate in the policy process at the federal level and leverage that leadership

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experience to promote policies, practices, and systems changes that advance the health of the nation.

The fellowship requires a full-time commitment with a minimum 12-month residence in Washington, D.C., which prepares individuals to influence the future of health and its drivers in the nation.

The fellowship begins in September with an intensive three-and-a-half-month orientation arranged by the NAM, during which time the fellows meet with national leaders well versed in health, healthcare policy, drivers of health, think tanks and interest groups, executive branch officials, and members of Congress and their staff. Fellows also participate in seminars on health economics, the congressional budget process, priority issues in federal health policy, and the process for federal decisionmaking. The concentrated orientation is designed to prepare the fellows for immediate success in federal legislative and executive branch positions.

The NAM will assist all fellows in setting up placement interviews. Each fellow is, however, solely responsible for selecting and securing their own placement in a federal government office in Washington, D.C., by January 15, 2028.

Fellowship placements generally begin no later than January 31. During these assignments, fellows are full-time, contributing participants in the policy process with members of Congress, a congressional committee, or in the executive branch. Solely under the supervision of the office in which they are placed, fellows typically will:

- Help develop legislative or regulatory proposals;
- Organize hearings, briefings, and meetings for interested parties;
- Meet with constituents; and
- Brief legislators or senior administration officials on a range of health issues.

Fellowship assignments are supplemented throughout the year by nonpartisan seminars and group discussions on contemporary federal policy topics, as well as media/strategic communications training and leadership development activities. Fellows prepare a formal presentation on a health policy issue with which they have been engaged. Fellows also take part in meetings with the NAM and other health policy organizations throughout the year.

Fellows may request approval from the national program office (NPO) at the NAM to extend the Washington, D.C., stay past the 12-month residential period of September 1, 2027, to August 31, 2028, until December 31, 2028, when the legislative session ends.

After the Washington, D.C., residential experience, fellows become part of a nationwide alumni network and typically return to Washington, D.C., each year to attend an Alumni Retreat and the NAM Annual Meeting, and to be briefed on issues and trends in health and healthcare policy.

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FUNDING DETAILS

- Stipend: \$175,000 per fellow over a period of 12–24 months for up to eight fellows.
- Housing/Relocation: Eligible fellows will be directly reimbursed for relocation and approved housing expenses through separate funds within limits specified by the NAM and RWJF up to \$20,000.
- 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. Additional budget guidelines are provided in the online application materials.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

- Exceptional midcareer professionals from academic institutions, not-for-profit organizations, or government (including military; U.S. Dept. of Veterans Affairs; U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps; and state offices who are not considered government officials under Section 4946 of the Internal Revenue Code);¹
- Applicants must have earned an advanced degree (master's or doctoral degree);

¹ Federal, state, tribal, and local government employees are eligible to apply unless they are considered government officials under Section 4946 of the Internal Revenue Code. For these purposes, a government official is defined as any person who holds one of the following:

1. An elective public office in the executive or legislative branch of the Government of the United States.
2. An office in the executive or judicial branch of the Government of the United States, appointment to which was made by the President.
3. A position in the executive, legislative, or judicial branch of the Government of the United States—(A) which is listed in schedule C of rule VI of the Civil Service Rules; or (B) the compensation for which is equal to or greater than the lowest rate of basic pay for the Senior Executive Service under section 5382 of title 5, United States Code.
4. A position under the House of Representatives or the Senate of the United States held by an individual receiving gross compensation at an annual rate of \$15,000 or more.
5. An elective or appointive public office in the executive, legislative, or judicial branch of the government of a State, tribe, possession of the United States, or political subdivision or other area of any of the foregoing, or of the District of Columbia, held by an individual receiving gross compensation at an annual rate of \$20,000 or more, and a significant part of whose activities include "the independent performance of policymaking functions."
6. A position as personal or executive assistant or secretary to any of the foregoing or
7. A member of the Internal Revenue Service Oversight Board.

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- In addition, applicants must have developed deep subject matter experience in a health-related discipline and have at least 10 years of full-time work experience. Examples include but are not limited to medicine; nursing; public health; law; dentistry; economics and other social sciences (especially disciplines related to factors that influence population health, such as housing, transportation, nutrition, employment, education, and environmental and community conditions); health services and social work/behavioral health; and other health professions;
- Applicants whose official job description or responsibilities are primarily government relations or advocacy are not eligible;
- Individual candidates for receipt of award funds must be U.S. citizens, or permanent residents at the time of application. The RWJF Health Policy Fellows are placed in assignments in the federal government. Therefore, changes in federal policy or law may necessitate that RWJF consider adjustments in eligibility and grant terms, as well as placements in the program.
- Additionally, individual candidates for receipt of award funds cannot be related by blood or marriage to any Officer or Trustee of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, or be a descendant of its founder, Robert Wood Johnson.²

SELECTION CRITERIA

Members of the RWJF Health Policy Fellows advisory board will assess each applicant, based on the following criteria:

- Professional achievements;
- Potential for leadership in health policy;
- Potential for future growth and career advancement;
- Potential for significant contributions to advancing health for all Americans;
- Interpersonal and communications skills;
- Individual plans for incorporating the fellowship experience into specific career goals.

² The Officers are the Chair of the Board of Trustees; President and CEO; Chief of Staff; Chief Operating Officer; Executive Vice President; General Counsel; Secretary; Assistant Secretary; Treasurer; and Chief Investment Officer of the Foundation.

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By mid-January 2027, the advisory committee will select finalists from the applicants for in-person interviews in Washington, D.C., which will be held in mid-February 2027. Applicants who are selected for interviews will receive details about the remainder of the process upon invitation.

THE IDEAL CANDIDATE

Ideal candidates for this fellowship have a record of exceptional professional accomplishment and are recognized experts within their profession, community, institution, and/or organization. The fellowship strongly encourages individuals with diverse backgrounds, ideologies, and perspectives to apply.

Candidates who come from professional backgrounds and disciplines that have not historically been represented in the RWJF Health Policy Fellows program are encouraged to highlight how their subject matter expertise and career trajectory support the goals of the program.

Due to the unique nature of working on Capitol Hill or in the executive branch of the federal government and the uncertainty that often accompanies the political process, individuals who are flexible, team players, and fast learners tend to be more successful. A positive attitude, confidence, sense of humor, humility, critical thinking, listening skills, discretion, and patience are highly regarded. Those with strong emotional intelligence and networking skills will be able to maximize the value of this experience during the fellowship and in their subsequent roles as leaders and influencers committed to building a healthier future for everyone.

MIDCAREER

Since we know that lives and careers follow many paths, we do NOT define “midcareer” in terms of age or years of experience. Typically, our fellows have *at least* the equivalent of 10–15 years of full-time practice or work experience (beyond training or residency) and are committed to contributing to the health policy field for at least 10 years after the fellowship.

Successful applicants to this program have gained deep subject matter expertise in an area of health and/or the drivers of health and have a demonstrated track record of leadership activities and distinguished professional accomplishments. It is often helpful to refer to the biographies of current fellows to see examples of the level of professional achievement of successful applicants.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The NPO will request information from finalists about ongoing personal and professional activities or interests that might conflict with the participation of a fellow in congressional or federal assignments. This disclosure is required to identify any activity or interest that might represent a real or apparent conflict, including:

1. Significantly impair the fellow’s objectivity, or

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2. Create an unfair competitive advantage for any person or organization.

Each finalist will provide a list of past, existing, and future paid and unpaid activities, board affiliations, consultancies, or other interests and sources of financial support. To preserve the integrity of the fellowship program and to ensure that the fellow—during their tenure as an RWJF Health Policy Fellow—is not compromised by the appearance of a conflict of interest, fellows will sign a statement affirming that there are no conflicts of interest or competing interests that would preclude them from accepting a congressional or executive branch placement during the fellowship year.

The term “conflict of interest” applies not only to the personal interests of the fellow but also to the interests of others with whom the fellow has substantial common financial interests, including the fellow’s spouse or domestic partner and dependent children.

As a condition of the fellowship, fellows may be required by the federal government to submit a financial disclosure statement and sign a declaration of adherence to policies and laws governing codes of ethical conduct. For more information about specific ethics determinations, please visit https://www.ethics.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/f2eb14e3-1123-48eb-9334-8c4717102a6e/2003-senate-ethics-manual.pdf and <https://ethics.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Dec-2022-House-Ethics-Manual-website-version.pdf> (see page 284).

HOW TO APPLY

Applications for this solicitation must be submitted electronically via the myRWJF online system. Visit www.rwjf.org/cfp/hpf18 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 application process. Please note: the application can only be accessed via my.rwjf.org, not on the program website.

Please direct inquiries to:

Phone: (202) 334-1506

Email: info@healthpolicyfellows.org

RWJF does not provide individual critiques of proposals submitted.

This program has a national advisory committee that makes recommendations about grants to Foundation staff. RWJF will make all final grant decisions.

To complete and submit an online preliminary application, an applicant must do the following:

1. Enter personal and contact information, including the names, phone numbers, and email addresses of three references who have been asked to comment on the applicant’s qualifications for the program. Reference letters should address the Selection Criteria on page 5 and should be submitted electronically by 3 p.m. ET on October 30, 2026. Applicants are urged to actively track the status of the submission of required letters of reference. Please note that all reference letters should be submitted by October 30,

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2026, to enable submission of the complete application package by the November 3 deadline.

2. Select the anticipated sponsorship track indicating the source of sponsorship. (Track 1—provide name of sponsoring institution and name of sponsoring institution's chief executive officer; or Track 2—request for stipend administration by the NAM.)
3. Prepare in advance the following documents. Before you begin, be sure to read the detailed instructions within the templates in the myRWJF online application system.
 - a. An up-to-date curriculum vitae with dates (no more than five pages).
 - b. Two essays on the following topics:
 - i. Discuss how your personal background and experiences have shaped your worldview and understanding of health; the highlights of your professional achievements, what unique perspectives you bring to the program; and what has led you to apply to the fellowship at this point in your career journey. Please also give us an understanding of how you plan on utilizing the skills and network you build during the fellowship to advance the health of all Americans and ensure everyone has a fair and just opportunity to thrive (no more than two pages).
 - ii. Imagine that you are serving as a health policy adviser to a member of Congress or the head of a federal agency. Prepare a memo describing a current health policy challenge and recommend an approach that the nation should take to address this challenge (no more than two pages, including bibliography or works cited).

Applicants who become finalists will be invited to complete a full application that will include a proposed budget of \$175,000. Track 1 applicants must also submit a letter from their sponsoring institution's chief executive officer affirming the institution's willingness to serve as an adviser to the applicant; to cultivate the fellow's growth as a health policy leader during the funding period of 12–24 months; and to administer the grant and comply with RWJF's grant reporting requirements.

5. RWJF and NAM do not provide individual critiques or feedback of applications submitted.

6. All applicants should log in to the system and familiarize themselves with the 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. In fairness to all applicants, the program will not accept late submissions.

PROGRAM DIRECTION

Direction and technical assistance for this program are provided by the NAM, which serves as the NPO under the direction of the RWJF Health Policy Fellows advisory board:

RWJF Health Policy Fellows

National Academy of Medicine

National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine

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500 Fifth Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20001
Phone: (202) 334-1506
Fax: (202) 334-3862

Email: info@healthpolicyfellows.org

Website: www.healthpolicyfellows.org

Responsible staff members at the national program office are:

- Gregg Margolis, PhD, director
- Mona Rahman, MA, deputy director
- Marissa Gioffre, MEd, outreach and engagement specialist
- Andrew Cheng, senior administrative and financial specialist

Responsible staff members at the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation are:

- Avenel Joseph, vice president for policy
- Katherine Hempstead, senior policy officer
- Tejal Shah, senior program financial analyst

NATIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Mark Douglas Smith, MD, MBA, *chair*

Founding President
California HealthCare Foundation
Oakland, CA

Margarita Alegría, PhD

Chief, Disparities Research Unit
Department of Medicine
Massachusetts General Hospital
Boston, MA

Jonathan W. Burks, MA

Executive Vice President, Economic and Health Policy
Bipartisan Policy Center
Washington, D.C.

Lanhee J. Chen, PhD

David and Diane Steffy Fellow in American Public Policy Studies
Hoover Institution
Stanford University
Stanford, CA

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Michelle Dennison, PhD, RD/LD, BC-ADM, CDE

Vice-President of Policy and Prevention
Oklahoma City Indian Clinic
Oklahoma City, OK

Melanie Egorin, PhD, MA

Professor of Practice in Public Policy
Frank Batten School of Leadership and Public Policy
University of Virginia
Charlottesville, VA

Julie Freischlag, MD, FACS, FRCSEd (Hon), DFSVS, MAMSE

Chief Executive Officer
Atrium Health Wake Forest Baptist
Wake Forest Baptist Health
Winston-Salem, NC

Jose Pagán, PhD

Chair and Professor
Department of Public Health Policy and Management
School of Public Global Health
New York University
New York, NY

Janice Phillips, PhD, RN, FAAN

Associate Professor
Director, Nursing Research and Health Equity
Rush University
Chicago, IL

Rita Redberg, MD, MS, FACC

Professor, Cardiology
Department of Medicine
University of California, San Francisco
San Francisco, CA

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Avik Roy, MD

Co-Founder & Chairman

The Foundation for Research on Equal Opportunity

Austin, TX

Reginald Tucker-Seeley, MA, ScM, ScD

Principal & Owner

Health Equity Strategies and Solutions

Los Angeles, CA

Sten Vermund, MD, PhD

Dean & Distinguished University Health Professor of Public Health and Pediatrics

USF College of Public Health

Senior Associate Vice President, USF Health

University of South Florida

Tampa, FL

KEY DATES AND DEADLINES

- **(All in 2026): August 25 (3 p.m. ET), September 2 (11 a.m. ET), September 22 (12 p.m. ET), October 7 (3 p.m. ET), October 27 (2 p.m. ET)**
Optional applicant webinars. Registration is required through this [through this link](#).
- **October 30, 2026 (3 p.m. ET)**
Deadline for receipt of three reference letters.
- **November 3, 2026 (3 p.m. ET)**
Deadline for receipt of preliminary applications.
- **Mid-January 2027**
Selection and notification of finalists.
- **Mid-February 2027**
Deadline for receipt of full applications.
- **Late February 2027**
Finalist interviews with advisory committee.
- **Late February 2027**
Selection and notification.
- **September 1, 2027**
Start of fellowship.

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Applicant Deadline Policy

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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 application deadline for all applicants. Such extensions generally will be granted only in the event of (1) a verified issue with the RWJF application system that prevented completion and submission of applications; 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 application prior to the deadline. Submission is defined as all sections completed, marked “Finished,” the application “Submit” button used, and the application 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 an application in the RWJF online system.

MONITORING

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

OUR EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION COMMITMENT

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation 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. 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

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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

RWJF is a leading national philanthropy dedicated to taking bold leaps to transform health in our lifetime. To get there, we must work to dismantle structural racism and other barriers to health. Through funding, convening, advocacy, and evidence-building, we work side-by-side with communities, practitioners, and institutions to achieve 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 www.rwjf.org/manage-your-subscriptions.html

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