



Robert Wood Johnson  
Foundation

# Active Living Research and Healthy Eating Research

Building Evidence to  
Prevent Childhood Obesity

## **2008 Call for Proposals – Rapid-Response Grants**

### **Letter of Intent Deadline: Open**

Grants are awarded on a rolling basis;  
letters of intent may be submitted at any time.

## Program Overview

(Please refer to specific sections for complete detail.)

### Purpose

*Active Living Research* and *Healthy Eating Research* are national programs of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) that support research to identify promising policy and environmental strategies for increasing physical activity, promoting healthy eating and preventing obesity.

This call for proposals (CFP) supports time-sensitive, opportunistic studies to evaluate changes in policies or environments with the potential to reach children who are at highest risk for obesity, including African-American, Latino, Native American, Asian American and Pacific Islander children (ages 3 to 18) who live in low-income communities or communities with limited access to affordable healthy foods and/or safe opportunities for physical activity. Research studies may focus on one or both sides of the energy balance equation—on physical activity (including sedentary behavior), healthy eating or both. Studies funded under this CFP are expected to advance RWJF's efforts to reverse the childhood obesity epidemic by 2015.

### Eligibility Criteria (page 6)

Eligibility requirements include the following:

- Preference will be given to applicants who may be either public entities or nonprofit organizations that are tax-exempt under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.
- Applicant organizations must be based in the United States or its territories at the time of application.
- The timing of the program, event or policy change to be studied must justify the rapid-review process in order to answer the proposed research questions.

### Selection Criteria (page 7)

Complete selection criteria can be found on page 7.

### Total Awards

- Up to \$800,000 total will be awarded for rapid-response research grants in 2008.
- The maximum amount for a single grant is \$150,000 with a maximum funding period of up to 12 months.

### Deadlines

- Grants are awarded on a rolling basis; letters of intent may be submitted at any time.
- Deadlines for receipt of invited full proposals are August 15 or October 15, 2008. Grant periods are expected to begin 12-14 weeks after receipt of the full proposal.

### How to Apply (page 9)

All letters of intent must be submitted via e-mail directly to either the Active Living Research or Healthy Eating Research national program office. Detailed instructions and application materials for the letter of intent are available online at [www.activelivingresearch.org](http://www.activelivingresearch.org) and [www.healthyeatingresearch.org](http://www.healthyeatingresearch.org). Full proposals must be submitted through the RWJF Grantmaking Online system.

## Background

Childhood obesity is a major public health epidemic. Over the past four decades, obesity rates in the United States have more than quadrupled among children ages 6 to 11, more than tripled among adolescents ages 12 to 19 and nearly tripled among children ages 2 to 5. Today, more than one in three U.S. children and adolescents—nearly 25 million—are either overweight or obese. These increasing rates pose a serious health and economic threat to the nation. Being overweight or obese increases the risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes and many other serious health conditions. Preventing obesity during childhood is critical, as research shows that obese adolescents have up to an 80 percent chance of becoming obese adults.

Social and environmental changes over the past few decades have resulted in less physical activity in children's daily routines. For instance, there has been a decrease in children's access to safe places to walk, bike and play. Fewer than 4 percent of elementary schools offer daily physical education, and there has been a significant decrease in the number of children who walk or bike to school. In addition, children are spending more sedentary time using electronic media, such as television, computer games and the Internet. As a result, few children and adolescents get the 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity per day recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for healthy growth and development.

At the same time, changes in children's food environments have increased the availability, appeal, affordability and consumption of foods and beverages that are low in nutrients but high in fat, sugar and calories. For instance, the most common items sold in school stores, vending machines or a la carte in the cafeteria are sugar-sweetened drinks, chips, candy, cookies and snack cakes. In addition, many families living in underserved communities do not have access to food stores that stock affordable fresh fruits and vegetables. Thus, many families and children do not have the opportunity to make healthy choices. Together, the lack of physical activity and unhealthy eating patterns create an energy imbalance that leads to unhealthy weight gain.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) is committed to tackling childhood obesity and the threat it poses to the health of our nation's children and families. The Foundation's goal is to reverse the epidemic of childhood obesity by 2015 by promoting healthy eating and physical activity in schools and communities throughout the United States.

**RWJF places special emphasis on reaching children at greatest risk for obesity: African-American, Latino, Native American, Asian American and Pacific Islander children who live in low-income communities or communities with limited access to affordable healthy foods or safe opportunities for physical activity.**

### **The Rapid-Response Grant Program**

*Active Living Research* and *Healthy Eating Research* support research to identify and evaluate policies and environmental approaches that have the potential to reverse the nation's rising levels of childhood obesity, especially among children at highest risk for obesity. The overall aim of both of these programs is to provide key decision- and policy-makers with evidence to guide effective action to reverse the rise in childhood obesity.

States and communities across the country are adopting or modifying policies and creating environmental changes in different settings to address the epidemic. For example, an increasing number of states and communities are taking action to enhance school nutrition and physical education standards; improve crosswalks, bikeways and access to safe places to play; introduce menu-labeling requirements for restaurants; and improve access to supermarkets and nutritious foods in urban and rural areas. Changes in national policies and regulations also affect children's food and physical activity environments (e.g., WIC food supplements and federal funding for pedestrian and cycling infrastructure), and the impact of these changes could be studied at the national, state, community and/or institutional level.

Because childhood obesity is a major threat to the lifelong health of children across the nation, it is important to learn as much as possible about the impact of these initiatives, and to act as quickly as possible to identify the most promising and effective strategies. Results of evaluations can inform policy debates for local, state and national action.

The annual solicitations and funding cycles of Active Living Research and Healthy Eating Research involve a seven- to nine-month period between proposal submission and the start of funding. While those solicitations serve an important purpose, they do not address the need for timely studies on emerging or anticipated changes in policies or environments. This call for proposals (CFP) for rapid-response grants is an attempt to address the specific need to support critical research that must be conducted during a short window of opportunity.

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The objective of this CFP is to support time-sensitive, opportunistic studies to evaluate natural experiments that occur when important policy and environmental changes take place in real-world environments. The studies funded under this CFP are expected to accelerate our progress toward policy and environmental strategies for reversing the rise in childhood obesity.

Letters of intent for the rapid-response grants may be submitted at any time, and invited proposals, if awarded, may begin within 12-14 weeks after submission of the full proposal (see How to Apply). Research studies may focus on one or both sides of the energy balance equation—on physical activity (including sedentary behavior), healthy eating or both.

**Studies that are not urgent and time-sensitive are not eligible to receive grants under this CFP. It is the responsibility of the applicant to clearly demonstrate why the proposed study needs to be funded, conducted and completed on an urgent or time-sensitive basis. Letters of intent and proposals must: 1) define the window of opportunity to conduct the research; 2) explain why the window is limited by time and why the usual award cycles for Active Living Research and Healthy Eating Research would not be suitable; and 3) outline the relevance of the research to a specific policy or environmental change.**

Studies supported in response to this CFP must contribute to the objectives of the Active Living Research and/or Healthy Eating Research national programs in ways that could not be achieved through the standard CFP process (see [www.activelivingresearch.org](http://www.activelivingresearch.org) and [www.healthyeatingresearch.org](http://www.healthyeatingresearch.org)). Rapid-response studies must be formulated and undertaken with the same degree of rigor and objectivity as other Active Living Research and Healthy Eating Research projects.

Up to \$800,000 in total awards are available for rapid-response grants in 2008. The maximum amount for a single grant is \$150,000, with a maximum funding period of up to 12 months.

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### *Research Topics*

Rapid-response grants are not limited to the specific funding priorities for current Active Living Research and Healthy Eating Research CFPs, but must be consistent with the programs' overall goals. The shared goals are to identify and evaluate policy and environmental approaches that have the greatest potential to prevent childhood obesity by increasing children's physical activity, decreasing sedentary behaviors, and improving diet and energy balance. Research projects may focus solely on physical activity (including sedentary behavior), *or* solely on healthy eating *or* on a combination.

Types of studies eligible for rapid-response funding are described below. These examples are for illustration purposes only. We rely on the creativity of researchers to generate the best ideas for solution-oriented environmental and policy research.

### **Opportunistic evaluations of imminent changes in policies or environments (i.e., “natural experiments”).**

Examples include:

- evaluating the effects of policies that are about to be enacted, such as menu labeling in restaurants; physical activity or nutrition requirements in child-care settings; district or state adoption of school nutrition standards for competitive foods; or new funding to enforce physical education requirements; and
- evaluating the impact of environmental changes, such as a new supermarket opening in a low-income neighborhood where none had existed; changes to public transit options for accessing supermarkets; the introduction of farmers' markets in low-income neighborhoods; renovations of parks or playgrounds; street safety improvements as part of Safe Routes to Schools; or the initiation of community policing to improve the safety of parks and playgrounds.

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**Studies that can inform an ongoing or upcoming policy debate (e.g., small experimental studies, secondary data analyses, cost-effectiveness analyses, health impact assessments, simulations of policy effects or macro-level policy analyses).**

Examples include:

- studies of menu labeling in restaurants or small-scale evaluations of the feasibility of training Head Start staff to lead physical activity;
- studies of how impending school nutrition policies affect youth food- and beverage-purchasing behaviors and the resulting impact on caloric intake;
- small-scale evaluations of strategies to improve implementation of, or adherence to, potentially high-impact policies related to school nutrition or physical education, television restrictions in preschool or day care, or restaurant menu labeling; and
- cost-effectiveness and health impact assessments to inform the policy debate on promising national, state, community or institutional policy or environmental changes designed to promote healthy eating and/or increase physical activity levels among youth and their families (e.g., an increase in federal or state funding for Safe Routes to Schools).

#### *Study Guidelines*

- Specific outcomes for grants will vary depending on the topic, but outcomes of interest include documentation of policy or environmental changes and their impact on dietary behaviors, physical activity, sedentary behaviors or weight status. Applicants are encouraged to include objective measures of physical activity or food purchases, dietary consumption or estimated impact on caloric intake. Variables likely to affect the impact and feasibility of the policy and environmental changes studied (e.g., demographic variables, community characteristics or other contextual variables) also should be assessed.
- Because of the time-sensitive nature of these studies and the limited funds available, and because some of the planned policy and environmental changes being enacted may take place over an extended period, it is permissible to request funding only to collect and analyze baseline data. A plan that describes how additional funds for follow-up data collection will be sought must be included in the proposal. The value of the baseline data to science or policy also should be described within the proposal.

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- In most cases, grant funds will be used to evaluate policy or environmental changes already planned or taking place. However, when conducting small experimental studies of potential policy changes, grant funds can be used to support the proposed intervention.
  - Quasi-experimental designs should be proposed for evaluation studies, with pre-post evaluations of physical activity, diet or weight measures and use of comparison or control sites if feasible.
  - Researchers should seek input from relevant stakeholders—such as policy-makers, school or community leaders, parents and children—to help assure feasible and policy-relevant project goals and outcomes. Proposals should describe the input received from these stakeholders in conducting the study. Applicants should include at least one representative of the community or stakeholder group targeted (e.g., community leader, policy-maker) as a regular adviser to help assure that research and policy analyses reflect institutional, community and policy needs.
  - Studies focused *solely* on individual behavior change, or on health education as a means to promote healthy eating or physical activity, *will not be funded*.
  - Studies may be conducted as supplements to existing studies. Co-funding is welcome; sources and amounts must be fully described in the proposal.
  - Applicants must recognize that summary results obtained from these projects will be communicated to key stakeholders on a timely basis, often in advance of publication in scholarly journals. As with all studies, publication of comprehensive results in scholarly journals is encouraged and expected.
  - *Accelerometer Loan Program:* To facilitate wider use of high-quality objective physical activity measures, Active Living Research is offering extended loans of Actigraph accelerometers. For more information, please contact Chad Spoon at [cspoon@projects.sdsu.edu](mailto:cspoon@projects.sdsu.edu).

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## Eligibility Criteria

Eligibility requirements include the following:

- Preference will be given to applicants that may be either public entities or nonprofit organizations that are tax-exempt under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.
- Applicant organizations must be based in the United States or its territories at the time of application.
- The timing of the program, event or policy change to be studied must justify the rapid review process in order to answer the proposed research questions.

## Selection Criteria

Proposals must: 1) demonstrate that the timing of the policy or environmental change to be studied is time-sensitive and dependent on a review process more rapid than that available through the standard Active Living Research and Healthy Eating Research CFP process, in order to conduct the study and/or provide input into a specific policy-change process; and 2) demonstrate the potential to produce high-quality, scientifically sound research that could be used to inform policy-makers about policy and environmental changes that could increase levels of physical activity, promote healthy eating or help prevent childhood obesity in the United States.

In addition to the above, the review committee will use the following criteria to assess proposals:

- Relevance and timeliness of project to inform policy action.
- The degree to which the strategies are applicable in multiple jurisdictions, feasible and sustainable.
- Relevance to the needs of low-resource communities and children at highest risk for obesity.
- Clarity of project goals, hypotheses, methods and outcomes.
- Use of a clear theoretical framework, conceptual model or rationale.
- Scientific rigor of proposed research aims, study design and analytic methods, including a clear and specific plan for systematic data collection and analysis, and quality of the measures and data to be used.
- Evidence of access to needed data, settings and study populations.
- Use of transdisciplinary research approaches and teams to provide the breadth of conceptual, measurement, study design and analytic methods needed for the best possible research.
- Documentation of experience, qualifications and time commitment of the investigator(s) and key project staff.
- Appropriateness of proposed budget and feasibility of project timeline.
- Description of a plan for prompt dissemination of research findings to scientists, policy-makers and other relevant stakeholders. Whenever possible, the nature and timing of the specific policy change process this research is most likely to inform should be described.

Proposals are reviewed in a rigorous peer-review process with independent national reviewers. Proposals that the review panels recommend for funding are then presented to RWJF for approval. All funding decisions are made by RWJF. RWJF does not provide individual critiques for letters of intent or proposals submitted.

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## Evaluation and Monitoring

Grantees will be expected to meet RWJF requirements for the submission of narrative and financial reports. As part of the final process, applicants will be asked to disclose any financial arrangements (e.g., fees, funding, employment, stock holdings) or relationships that might compromise the credibility or perceived credibility of the findings, mirroring the types of disclosure requested by the field's leading journals. Grantees also will be required to submit periodic information needed for overall project performance monitoring and management. At the close of each grant, the grantee is expected to provide a written report on the project and its findings. The national program offices and RWJF staff will work with grantees to actively communicate the results of the funded projects for wide dissemination, as appropriate. As a condition of accepting grant funds, grantees will be expected to participate in the programs' ongoing evaluation by responding to periodic surveys, e-mail inquiries and/or possible evaluation-related interviews during and after the actual grant period.

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## Use of Grant Funds

Funding will be commensurate with the size and scope of the proposed activity. Grant funds may be used for project staff salaries, consultant fees, data collection and analysis, dataset procurement, meeting costs, supplies, project-related travel and other direct expenses, including a limited amount of equipment that is essential to the project. In keeping with RWJF policy, grant funds may *not* be used to subsidize individuals for the costs of their health care, to support clinical trials of unapproved drugs or devices, to construct or renovate facilities, for lobbying or as a substitute for funds currently being used to support similar activities.

Applicants are expected to include in their proposed budget travel costs to attend either the Active Living Research or Healthy Eating Research annual grantee meeting for two consecutive years. Funds for up to two individuals to attend should be included in the proposed budget. The full proposal application templates contain guidelines for travel budgeting.

## How to Apply

There are two stages in the application process:

### *Stage 1: Letter of Intent*

All applicants must submit a letter of intent consisting of three documents, which may be downloaded from either the Active Living Research or Healthy Eating Research Web site ([www.activelivingresearch.org](http://www.activelivingresearch.org) and [www.healthyeatingresearch.org](http://www.healthyeatingresearch.org)) and must include:

- a) a **project information form** indicating the title of the proposal; applicant organization; principal investigator and co-investigators; total amount requested; proposed project start and end dates; whether the project involves healthy eating, physical activity (including sedentary behavior) or both; and other background questions.
- b) a three-page **letter of intent** (at 1.5 line spacing) describing:
  - justification of the need for rapid review;
  - a description of the specific program, event or policy change to be studied and its potential impact on reducing childhood obesity;
  - an overview of the proposed research questions and methods;
  - a timeline of the project; and
  - a list of any organizations involved with the project and any co-funding available.
- c) **biosketches for key personnel**

*All letters of intent must be submitted via e-mail directly to the Active Living Research or Healthy Eating Research national program office.*

Letters of intent may be submitted at any time. Studies focused solely on physical activity (including sedentary behavior) should be submitted to the Active Living Research national program office. Studies focused solely on healthy eating should be submitted to the Healthy Eating Research national program office. Studies that relate to physical activity and healthy eating equally may be submitted to either national program office. Detailed instructions and application materials for the letter of intent are available on both programs' Web sites at [www.activelivingresearch.org](http://www.activelivingresearch.org) and [www.healthyeatingresearch.org](http://www.healthyeatingresearch.org).

Upon review of letters of intent, select applicants will be notified if selected to submit a full proposal.

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### ***Stage 2: Full Proposal***

Within two weeks of receipt of the letter of intent, Stage 1 applicants will be notified of review results, and selected applicants will be invited by e-mail or letter to submit a full proposal. Full proposals consist of an executive summary, a project narrative of 20 pages (1.5 line spacing), budget, budget narrative and additional supporting documents. The project narrative includes: the project's significance and need for rapid review; research aims and hypotheses; detailed methods and analysis plans; communication and dissemination plans; and timeline.

***All invited full proposals must be submitted only through the RWJF Grantmaking Online system at <http://grantmaking.rwjf.org/paper>.***

Applicants invited to submit full proposals will be given additional information about formatting requirements and instructions on preparing and submitting the full proposal.

Deadlines for receipt of full proposals are August 15 and October 15, 2008. Proposals submitted by these deadlines will be reviewed using an accelerated external review process to assure that funding can begin within 12 to 14 weeks of the submission date. Full proposals received after August 15 will not be processed or reviewed until the October 15 deadline.

Please submit your full proposal to <http://grantmaking.rwjf.org/paper>.

For more information on this grant opportunity, please direct inquiries as follows:

*For research that relates primarily to physical activity or sedentary behavior, contact:*

Chad Spoon, M.R.P., *research coordinator*

Phone: (619) 260-5539

E-mail: [cspoon@projects.sdsu.edu](mailto:cspoon@projects.sdsu.edu)

*For research that relates primarily to healthy eating, contact:*

Laura L. Klein, M.P.H., *research coordinator*

Phone: (800) 578-8636

E-mail: [healthyeating@umn.edu](mailto:healthyeating@umn.edu)

*For research that relates to healthy eating and physical activity equally, please contact either individual.*

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## Other Funding Opportunities

Researchers are encouraged to periodically check the Web sites of Active Living Research ([www.activelivingresearch.org](http://www.activelivingresearch.org)) and Healthy Eating Research ([www.healthyeatingresearch.org](http://www.healthyeatingresearch.org)) for the latest information on other funding opportunities.

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## Program Direction

Direction and technical assistance for this program is provided by San Diego State University, which serves as the national program office for Active Living Research, and the University of Minnesota, which serves as the national program office for Healthy Eating Research.

Responsible staff members at Active Living Research are:

- James Sallis, Ph.D., *program director*
- Carmen Cutter, M.P.H., *deputy director*
- Deborah Lou, Ph.D., *program analyst*
- Chad Spoon, M.R.P., *research coordinator*
- Amanda Wilson, M.S.R.S., *research coordinator*
- Irvin Harrison, M.A., *administrative coordinator*
- LeeAnn Adan, *administrative assistant*

Responsible staff members at Healthy Eating Research are:

- Mary Story, Ph.D., R.D., *program director*
- Karen M. Kaphingst, M.P.H., *deputy director*
- Robert Jeffery, Ph.D., *senior adviser*
- Melissa Nelson, Ph.D., R.D., *faculty research associate*
- Laura L. Klein, M.P.H., *research coordinator*
- Kathy Kosiak, *research coordinator*
- Sharanya Johnson, *administrative assistant*

Responsible staff members at the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation are:

- C. Tracy Orleans, Ph.D., *distinguished fellow and senior scientist*
- Celeste Torio, Ph.D., M.P.H., *program officer*
- James Marks, M.D., M.P.H., *senior vice president and director, Health Group*
- Stephanie Weiss, Sc.M., *research associate*
- Kathryn Thomas, M.J., *senior communications officer*
- Laura Leviton, Ph.D., *special advisor for evaluation*
- Jan Mihalow, M.S.M., *grants administrator*
- Prabhu Ponkshe, M.A., L.L.B., *communications consultant*

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## Timetable

The *Active Living Research and Healthy Eating Research* national program offices will make every effort to achieve a rapid turnaround time for each proposal.

- Within two weeks of receipt of the letter of intent, applicants will be contacted by e-mail or letter, and informed whether or not they are invited to submit a full proposal.
- *Invited* full proposals must be submitted via the RWJF Grantmaking Online system by one of the following deadlines: August 15 or October 15, 2008.
- It is anticipated that funding for approved studies would begin within approximately 12-14 weeks of the deadline for receipt of the full proposal.

## About the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation focuses on the pressing health and health care issues facing our country. As the nation's largest philanthropy devoted exclusively to improving the health and health care of all Americans, we work with a diverse group of organizations and individuals to identify solutions and achieve comprehensive, meaningful and timely change.

For more than 35 years we've brought experience, commitment and a rigorous, balanced approach to the problems that affect the health and health care of those we serve. When it comes to helping Americans lead healthier lives and get the care they need, we expect to make a difference in your lifetime.

For more information visit [www.rwjf.org](http://www.rwjf.org).

Sign up to receive e-mail alerts on upcoming calls for proposals at [www.rwjf.org/services](http://www.rwjf.org/services).



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