



Robert Wood Johnson
Foundation

Active Living Research

Investigating Policies and
Environments to Support
Active Communities

2008—An RWJF *New Connections* Call for Proposals

Proposal Deadline

August 28, 2008

Program Overview

(Please refer to specific sections for complete detail.)

Purpose

Active Living Research is a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) that supports research to identify promising policy and environmental strategies for increasing physical activity, decreasing sedentary behaviors and preventing obesity among children and adolescents. We place special emphasis on strategies with the potential to reach racial/ethnic populations and children living in low-income communities who are at highest risk for obesity. Grants funded under this call for proposals (CFP) are expected to advance RWJF's efforts to reverse the childhood obesity epidemic by 2015.

This funding opportunity is for *New Connections* grants awarded through the Active Living Research program. The New Connections initiative brings new perspectives to RWJF grantmaking by supporting researchers and investigators from historically disadvantaged and underrepresented communities. Two types of New Connections grants will be funded under this CFP: *research grants* and *publication grants*. Both types of grants are discussed in detail beginning on page 4.

Eligibility Criteria (page 9)

Applicants must:

- represent populations historically disadvantaged and underrepresented in research, including racial/ethnic minority researchers, those from low-income communities and first-generation college graduates;
- have completed a doctorate or terminal degree (e.g., Ph.D., M.D., J.D.) within the past seven years (after September 1, 2001); and
- demonstrate evidence of research skills relevant to the proposed study or publication.

Additional eligibility criteria for each type of grant are outlined on page 9.

Selection Criteria (page 10)

Complete selection criteria are described on page 10.

Total Awards

A total of up to \$286,000 will be awarded for research and publication grants as outlined below:

- Research grants: Five 12- to 18-month awards of up to \$50,000 each.
- Publication grants: Three 12-month awards of up to \$12,000 each.

Key Dates and Deadline

- **August 28, 2008 (1 p.m. PT)**—Deadline for receipt of full proposals.
- **November 2008**—Notification of finalists.
- **January 15, 2009**—Funding initiated.

How to Apply (page 13)

All proposals must be submitted through the RWJF Grantmaking Online system.

Please direct inquiries to:

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Background

Childhood obesity poses a serious threat to our nation's health, health care system and economy. 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 more than doubled among children ages 2 to 5. Today, nearly one-third of U.S. children and adolescents are either overweight or obese, placing them at increased risk for heart disease, type 2 diabetes and other serious health problems.

Social and environmental changes over the past few decades have resulted in less physical activity in children's daily routines. Children's access to safe places to walk, bike and play has decreased. 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 time in sedentary activities using electronic media, such as television, DVDs, 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 and calories. Together, the lack of physical activity and unhealthy eating patterns create an energy imbalance that leads to unhealthy weight gain.

Two reports published by the Institute of Medicine in 2005 and 2007, *Preventing Childhood Obesity: Health in the Balance* and *Progress in Preventing Childhood Obesity: How Do We Measure Up?*, recommend research to identify effective environmental and policy approaches at multiple levels (e.g., national, state, community, institutional) and in varied settings (e.g., school, neighborhood, community) that have potential to improve children's physical activity, energy balance and body weight. These and other reports describe growing evidence that disparities in children's environments underlie the pronounced sociodemographic disparities in youth obesity levels. For example, children living in low-income communities often have limited access to public recreation facilities and to quality school-based physical education, and their parents are more likely to cite fear of crime as a reason to keep their children indoors. Research can help identify promising environmental and policy solutions to address disparities in physical activity levels and to prevent childhood obesity at the population level.

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 physical activity and healthy eating in schools and communities throughout the United States. *RWJF places special emphasis on reaching children and youth ages 3 to 18 who are at greatest risk for obesity: African-American, Latino, Native American, Asian American and Pacific Islander children who live in under-resourced and/or low-income communities.*

**A Collaborative Effort
between Active Living
Research and New
Connections**

This CFP offers a new funding opportunity from the Foundation: New Connections grants made available through the Active Living Research program.

About New Connections

The *New Connections* initiative is designed to expand the diversity of perspectives that inform RWJF programming and introduce new researchers and scholars to the Foundation, while simultaneously helping to analyze data that measures progress towards program objectives. New Connections invites junior investigators and senior consultants from historically disadvantaged and underrepresented communities to address specific questions posed by one of the Foundation's program areas. For the purpose of this CFP, only new investigators—defined as individuals who received their doctorate or terminal degree within the last seven years—are eligible for funding.

About Active Living Research

Active Living Research is an RWJF national program managing \$15.4 million in funding over five years, for research on environments and policies that support physical activity among children and families. The goals of the Active Living Research program are to:

- establish a strong research base regarding policy and environmental factors that influence physical activity and healthy weight status in children, as well as effective policy and environmental strategies for reversing the childhood obesity epidemic;
- build a vibrant, multidisciplinary field of research and a diverse network of researchers; and
- ensure that findings are effectively communicated to inform policy debates and guide the development of effective solutions.

Active Living Research seeks scientifically rigorous, solution-oriented proposals from investigators and scholars representing diverse disciplines and backgrounds. The program’s overall aim is to provide decision- and policy-makers with evidence to accelerate effective action to reverse the epidemic of childhood obesity.

The Active Living Research/New Connections Grant Program

New Connections grants awarded through Active Living Research share the same goals, and aim to attract and support the career development of investigators from historically disadvantaged and underrepresented communities. Investigators who meet the specific eligibility criteria for this CFP also are eligible and encouraged to apply for other Active Living Research grant opportunities.

Through this CFP, Active Living Research will provide funding for:

- five research grants of up to \$50,000 each for 12-18 months; and
- three publication grants of up to \$12,000 each for 12 months.

Awards are made directly to the grantee home institution. Indirect costs (up to 12 percent) are included in the total project awards.

Proposed projects may be conducted as supplements to existing studies. Project co-funding is welcome, and sources and amounts must be fully described in the proposal. The benefits of the proposed research or publication grant should be clearly described.

All proposals also must describe how the proposed project will address and advance the stated goals of Active Living Research as outlined in the Selection Criteria on page 10.

Grantees funded through this CFP will be part of a broader network of grantees representing both the New Connections and Active Living Research programs. In addition to participating in a listserv, grantees will be eligible to participate in all New Connections training and networking events. These include the annual New Connections symposium in June 2009, and the New Connections research and coaching clinic in October 2009. Grantees also will be eligible to receive mentoring, networking and statistical support provided by our program-sponsored activities. The New Connections network includes underrepresented scholars from all disciplines who share the Foundation's research interests.

Mentoring Opportunities

All grantees will have access to a range of structured technical assistance and mentoring opportunities. Effective mentoring can support and enhance research careers, foster the development of a diverse and multi-disciplinary network of researchers, and advance the field by building a strong community of researchers who are working with communities at high risk for childhood obesity.

While not a program requirement, applicants may identify a mentor in their proposals or work with Active Living Research to select a mentor soon after an award is made. Applicant-identified mentors should submit a letter of support with the applicant's proposal.

Mentors will participate with their grantees in an initial orientation conference call led by Active Living Research to review mentoring roles and responsibilities. Honoraria for project mentors cannot exceed \$2,000, based on four days of work at the RWJF standard rate of \$500 per day. These costs, and any project-related travel costs, must be included in the applicant's proposal.

Project Deliverables

Research grantees are expected to submit at least one paper from their Active Living Research project to a peer-reviewed journal during the award period. They also will be encouraged to develop proposals for follow-on research grants.

Publication grantees are required to submit and be identified as the first author on at least two empirical research reports to peer-reviewed journals during the 12-month grant period.

Funding and Types of Studies

Research Grants

a. Small-scale Studies

Small-scale studies might identify and evaluate environmental determinants of children’s physical activity levels, or evaluate changes to physical activity environments or policies in a variety of settings to investigate the impact on children’s physical activity levels.

For example, small-scale studies could include the following:

- experimental or quasi-experimental studies, including laboratory simulations (e.g., altering TV-viewing policies in day care, altering school recess policies, providing “active” video games in the homes of low-income children);
- “natural experiments” and other studies that evaluate the impact of environmental changes taking place on national, state, community or institutional policy levels;
- secondary analyses of existing datasets (such as cross-sectional or longitudinal analyses) to analyze the impact of natural variation in environments or in policies related to physical activity;
- financial or cost-benefit studies evaluating the economic impact of changes in physical activity-related environments or policies;
- analyses of interactions between built environment and social environment factors (including culture, crime and fear of crime, indicators of community disorder and traffic) as they relate to physical activity and weight outcomes; and
- measurement-development studies to:
 - develop, adapt, test and validate tools and methods that can be used to identify and evaluate physical activity policies and environments and their impact in a variety of settings; and/or
 - adapt or develop practical, validated audit tools to measure built environment attributes expected to be related to physical activity, sedentary behavior or weight outcomes that are tailored to communities at high risk for obesity and that can be used by practitioners and community members to assess environments in relevant settings, such as schools (including preschools and day care), neighborhoods, parks and transportation systems.

Small-scale studies also may include correlational studies; limited original data collection; pre-test or baseline evaluations prior to planned environmental or policy changes; and post-test evaluations when baseline data are available. An adaptation of existing measures to unique populations or communities also may be conducted.

b. Analyses of Macro-level Policies and Environmental Approaches

Macro-level “upstream” policy and environmental approaches address the highest levels of influence and have impact at the population level. Children’s access to programs and places for physical activity are the result of macro-level policies (e.g., school physical education policies, affordable housing policies, park funding, transportation policies, zoning laws) and market forces (e.g., real estate practices, advertising of active vs. sedentary entertainment, cost of private recreation) that represent potentially powerful levers for change. These macro-level factors also have the potential to impact a wider population.

Currently, there is limited understanding of the roles these environmental factors play or could play in creating activity-friendly environments and policies. The aim of projects that analyze the impact of macro-level factors is to understand the larger environmental and policy determinants of children’s physical activity and sedentary behaviors, and to identify the most promising focal points for efforts to reverse the childhood obesity epidemic.

Macro-level policy analyses could analyze past and present upstream factors and generate imaginative policy ideas for creating healthier physical activity environments. Macro-analytic methods may include, but are not limited to: historical analysis, policy analysis, legal analysis, economic analysis, market analysis, statistical and simulation modeling, use of existing databases and case studies.

Study Guidelines for Research Grants

The particular outcome variables for research grants may vary. Given the limited scope and short duration of these projects, measures of changes in weight or BMI are not required for research grants. However, applicants are encouraged to include objective measures of physical activity and/or estimated impact of interventions on energy expenditure or energy balance. Investigators are encouraged to assess variables likely to affect the impact and feasibility of the policy and environmental changes being studied (e.g., demographic variables, community characteristics and other contextual variables).

Experimental studies or laboratory simulations must show promise for generalization to real-world community environments, especially in low-income and racial/ethnic populations. Studies conducted in real-world settings are preferred.

Studies focused solely on behavior change at the individual level, health education to promote physical activity, or treatment of overweight or obese children will not be funded. However, studies could compare the impact of environmental changes with or without physical activity education or promotion, or they could isolate effective components of a multicomponent intervention.

Proposals must demonstrate the ability to produce new information about important, modifiable environmental and/or policy determinants of children's physical activity, sedentary behavior, energy balance and/or weight status, or about policy or environmental change strategies with strong potential to influence these outcomes. Special consideration will be given to strategies that will benefit children in the low-income and racial/ethnic populations at greatest risk for obesity.

Researchers are encouraged to 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 designing the study and framing the research questions, and the strategies that will be used to communicate research results.

Publication Grants

Applicants must identify two new scientific manuscripts that will be developed and submitted to peer-reviewed journals through the publication grants. The two proposed publications should be empirical papers using qualitative or quantitative data, though the grant can also be used to support completion of additional review or conceptual papers.

Study Guidelines for Publication Grants

Manuscript aims must focus on identifying promising policies and environmental changes with potential to promote active living and a healthy energy balance and to prevent obesity among children and teens.

Grantees must produce at least two new first-authored empirical papers to be submitted to peer-reviewed journals during the grant period.

Eligibility Criteria

All investigators must:

- be citizens or permanent residents of the United States or its territories;
- be affiliated with or sponsored by a university or an organization that is tax-exempt under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code and is not a private Foundation under Section 509(a) of the Code. The sponsoring institution must agree to receive and administer the grant;
- be from a group that has been historically disadvantaged or underrepresented in research disciplines, such as ethnic or racial minorities, first-generation college graduates, people from low-income communities, or others who historically have been underrepresented. These examples are intended to be illustrative, not exclusive. Applicants who do not fall within one of the categories listed but who believe they are from a historically disadvantaged or underrepresented background should specify their underrepresented status in the proposal;
- have completed a doctorate or terminal degree (e.g., Ph.D., M.D., J.D.), within the past seven years (after September 1, 2001);
- hold a faculty or other research position in a university setting, or hold an equivalent position in a non-university setting, such as an independent research organization; and
- demonstrate evidence of research skills relevant to the proposed study or proposed publication.

For publication grants, applicants must propose new publications as a part of the proposal. Publication grants may be used for publishing papers from previous grants that were funded by RWJF or other sources, provided that the proposed papers generate additional scientific value. If the study that is providing data for the proposed publication was funded by a previous grant, the applicant must have published (or have in press) at least one paper that reports major results. **Applicants for publication grants must demonstrate that these requirements are satisfied.**

Selection Criteria

Proposals for research and publication grants must demonstrate the potential to produce new information about the physical activity environment and/or policy strategies relevant to physical activity and sedentary behavior practices. Special consideration will be given to studies of strategies that will benefit children in the low-income and racial/ethnic populations at greatest risk for obesity.

To help build a multidisciplinary field of research, Active Living Research seeks proposals from investigators in a wide range of fields, such as public health, public administration, law, economics, transportation, political science, medicine, recreation, architecture, city planning, behavioral sciences, child care and education. The perspectives of researchers who are knowledgeable about racial/ethnic and socioeconomic disparities in community settings and physical activity environments are especially encouraged.

All proposals will be assessed by a committee composed of RWJF staff, Active Living Research staff at San Diego State University, national advisors and other expert reviewers from multiple disciplines. The committee will use the following criteria to assess proposals:

- significance and relevance of the proposal to the goals and requirements described in this CFP;
- relevance to the mission of Active Living Research;
- qualifications of the applicant, including: professional training, personal background and experience that will provide insight into communities that are at high risk for obesity; career goals; research potential and relevant experience as it relates to the research approach;
- quality and specificity of the plan for the proposed research, scientific merit, policy relevance and feasibility;
- scientific rigor of the proposed research and analytic methods, quality of data to be collected or used, and plan for papers to be produced from the project;
- uniqueness of the project in relation to the mix of potentially fundable projects; and
- contribution of the proposed project to advancing the research career of the applicant.

The review committee will make recommendations to RWJF, which will make all final grant decisions. RWJF does not provide individual critiques of proposals submitted.

Evaluation and Monitoring

Grantees will be expected to meet RWJF requirements for the submission of narrative and financial reports. Given the benefit of measuring common outcomes across the pool of grants, grantees may be asked to incorporate selected dependent, independent and contextual measures. As part of the proposal process, finalists 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 will be required to submit periodic information needed to assess 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. Active Living Research and RWJF staff will work with grantees to actively communicate the results of the funded projects to scientific audiences, media, policy-makers, school decision-makers, educational organizations, public health advocates and other audiences as appropriate. An independent research group selected and funded by RWJF will conduct an evaluation of the Active Living Research program. As a condition of accepting RWJF funds, grantees will be required to participate in the evaluation, and may be asked to adopt limited core dependent or independent measures to facilitate cross-study comparisons.

Use of Grant Funds

RWJF grant funds may be used for project staff salaries (e.g., principal investigator, co-investigator, research assistant), consultant fees (up to \$500 per day), data collection and analysis, dataset procurement, meetings, supplies, project-related travel and other direct project expenses, including a limited amount of equipment that is essential to the project. Applicants have the option of identifying mentors who can be paid honoraria of \$500 per day for up to four days of consultation. Any project-related travel costs for mentors must be included in the budget. 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.

Grant funds can be used only to cover the costs of evaluation, not the costs of the policy or environmental changes per se (e.g., renovating playgrounds, community policing around parks). Some extremely low-cost experimental changes (e.g., costs of altering access to TV in day care or providing “active” computer games in homes), may be supported through grant funds.

Grant funds also may be used to cover grantee costs associated with project-related travel. Awardees are required to travel to one annual Active Living Research grantee meeting and conference. Funds to attend that meeting should be included in the proposed budget. Awardees also are expected to attend one annual New Connections meeting. Travel funds for that meeting will be covered separately by Active Living Research. Principal investigators also may include travel expenses to present their research at one additional national professional meeting. A guideline for travel budgeting is available on the Active Living Research Web site at www.activelivingresearch.org/grantsearch/grantseeker_resources.

Additional Resources

At any time during the course of funding, grantees may request assistance from Active Living Research program staff to identify consultants or technical assistance resources in key areas, such as participant recruitment, measurement development, data collection, analysis methods, writing, development of publication plans or preparation for follow-up grant-writing strategies.

Studies that could inform debates about specific policies at the local, state or federal levels are of particular interest. Examples of active living-related policies may be found at www.activelivingresearch.org/files/ALR_PolicyGrid_April2008.pdf.

A glossary of terms used in Active Living Research CFPs and other background information that may assist applicants in preparing proposals is available at www.activelivingresearch.org/grantsearch/grantopportunities.

Active Living Research loans a limited number of Actigraph accelerometers for objectively measuring physical activity. E-mail Chad Spoon at cspoon@projects.sdsu.edu for further information.

How to Apply

All proposals for both research grants and publication grants must be submitted online through the RWJF Grantmaking Online system.

For detailed formatting instructions and to prepare and submit your proposal, please go to <http://grantmaking.rwjf.org/papnci>.

Applicants for both types of grants need to submit full proposals accompanied by a budget, a budget narrative and additional supporting documents. Full proposals are limited to 15 single-spaced pages.

Applicants for research grants must submit a proposal for a research project, including: clear research aims and hypotheses; a detailed research plan and study design; a dissemination plan; a timeline; and a budget. Studies may be conducted as supplements to existing studies supported by Active Living Research or other funders, or as independent new studies.

Applicants for publication grants must submit a proposal detailing a plan for analysis of existing data and the preparation of at least two manuscripts for submission to peer-reviewed journals within the 12-month grant period.

Active Living Research also will host one optional conference call for potential applicants on July 30, 2008, to answer questions about the program and the proposal selection process. Participation in this call is encouraged, but is not required. If you wish to participate in the call, you must register in advance through the Active Living Research Web site at www.activelivingresearch.org/grantsearch/grantopportunities/teleconference.

Applicant information, including frequently asked questions (FAQs) and applicant resources, may be found at www.activelivingresearch.org/grantsearch/grantseeker_resources.

For more information about this funding opportunity, please contact:
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Program Direction

Direction and technical assistance for this program are provided by San Diego State University, which serves as the national program office (NPO).

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Responsible staff members at the NPO are:

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

Responsible staff members at the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation are:

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

Timetable

- **July 30, 2008 (10 a.m. PT)**
Optional conference call for potential applicants. Details and registration information are posted at <http://activelivingresearch.org/grantsearch/grantopportunities/teleconference>. Applicants will have an opportunity to ask questions during the call.
- **August 28, 2008 (1 p.m. PT)**
Deadline for receipt of full proposals.*
- **November 2008**
Notification of finalists.
- **January 15, 2009**
Awards begin.
- **February 18-20, 2009**
Active Living Research grantee meeting and annual conference. Recently awarded grantees are encouraged to attend.

**All proposals must be submitted through the RWJF Grantmaking Online system. All applicants should log in to the system and familiarize themselves with online submission requirements well before the final submission deadline. Program 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 applications.*

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.

Sign up to receive e-mail alerts on upcoming calls for proposals at www.rwjf.org/services.



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