

# ORDE “KNOW YOUR AGENCY” SERIES: ROBERT WOOD JOHNSON FOUNDATION

Agency Site: <http://www.rwjf.org>

## OVERVIEW

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) history involves a prestigious family, the company Johnson & Johnson, and a Founder with health problems. In 1936, Robert Wood Johnson II began a small community foundation known as the Johnson New Brunswick Foundation. He bankrolled it and made all funding decisions. He renamed it the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation in 1952, but it still ran in the same informal fashion, targeting New Jersey. Upon his death in 1968, he left specific instructions and the bulk of his estate (\$1.2 billion in Johnson & Johnson stock, the company his father created) to fund a grander version of his Foundation – a process that formally began in 1972. Today RWJF is one of the world’s largest philanthropies and the largest US philanthropy devoted to health with total assets of over \$10.5 billion in 2017 (Source: RWJF Financial Statement, Dec 31, 2017, p. 3). Health and healthcare were important issues to Mr. Johnson, both because he served as CEO of Johnson & Johnson for years and because of his health history – fighting various medical issues throughout his life caused by a bout with rheumatic fever as a child (Source: “Billion Dollar Heist”, May 2012, p. 3).

### *Approach/Specific Interests*

The Foundation mission was set by the Founder and continues today – to improve the health and health care of all Americans. The mission is pursued these days through adoption of the Foundation’s vision – *building a national culture of health*. The Foundation’s new President has called this their “North Star” (Source: 2018 Annual Message). The concept *culture of health* is defined by RWJF as “. . . individuals, neighborhoods, communities, businesses, organizations, and decision-makers embracing health as an esteemed American value and expecting it to be a routine part of life” (Source: 2013 RWJF Presidential Letter, p. 6). This vision has informed major changes to RWJF’s organization, purpose, and funding portfolio. A comprehensive review of RWJF’s past work, structure, and priorities has led to new or renewed long-term priorities.

RWJF’s four Focus Areas based on the *national culture of health* vision are:

- Healthy Communities
- Healthy Children, Healthy Weight
- Health Systems
- Health Leadership

## AGENCY ORGANIZATION

RWJF leadership includes a President/CEO and a 14-member Board of Trustees. The Research, Evaluation, and Learning Division, headed by the Foundation’s Chief Science Officer, houses program officers and other research-related staff in all Foundation focus areas. A Division of Proposal Management handles all aspects of the online submission system and the award process.

## AGENCY GRANTS PROCESS

RWJF has funded research projects, intervention projects, large-scale community-based programs, and other project types to meet their mission over the years. The Research, Evaluation, and Learning Division makes awards through Calls for Proposals (CFPs) which provide specific topic areas, eligibility criteria, the amount of money set aside for the competition, the number of projects they expect to fund, potential approaches, and specific deadlines. Recent CFPs include one on connecting the nation’s fragmented medical, social, and public health systems; one targeting healthy eating; one related to discovering what factors promote adoption of policies that result in a culture of health; and one on community-research partnerships addressing resilience. Eligible applicants include public agencies, universities, and public charities. All proposals are submitted through the RWJF online portal. Most competitions use a two-step proposal process: Step 1 pre-proposals and Step 2 invited full proposals. Funding ranges vary by CFP. Turnaround time for full proposals runs from three to seven months.

### *Awards*

In 2016, the Foundation made 850 grant awards for a total of \$386 million (Source: RWJF Grants Explorer Database).

### Additional Funding Mechanisms

The Foundation, through its Pioneering Ideas Program, accepts brief unsolicited proposals on a rolling basis for projects closely related to RWJF priorities. Pioneer staff read all unsolicited pre-proposals and may then request full proposals. The next round opens in January, 2019.

### Contact with RWJF Program Staff:

Program Officers (PO) are area experts and have many responsibilities – priority setting, developing CFPs, participating in proposal review, and managing ongoing projects. CFPs normally name a PO and provide an email address for questions. RWJF has also offered live webinars to provide answers to all applicants at the same time. However, interactions with POs appear to be limited prior to proposal submission. RWJF policy dictates that reviewer comments are not supplied to proposers, and that POs do not comment on why proposals are not selected for funding.

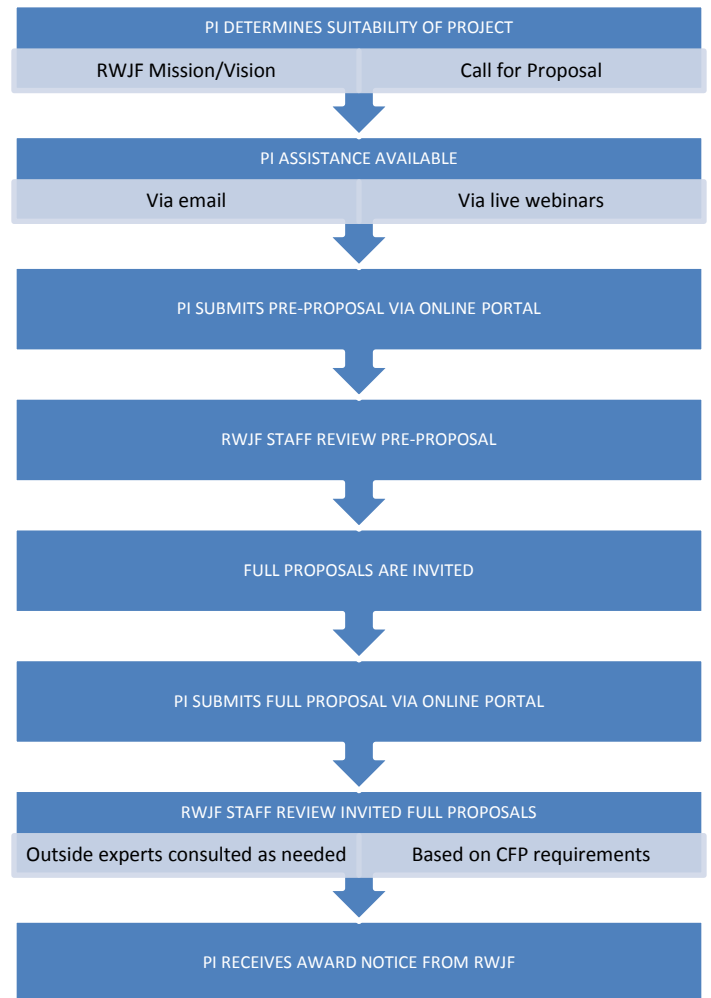
### Typical RWJF CFP Proposal Process:

- 1) PI determines suitability of proposed project to Foundation mission and specific topic area outlined in call for proposals
- 2) PI emails program with questions about application and/or attends live webinar
- 3) PI submits pre-proposal via online portal
- 4) RWJF staff evaluates pre-proposals with assistance from outside experts as needed
- 5) RWJF invites full proposals
- 6) Full proposals are reviewed by Foundation staff, again with help from outside experts as needed
- 7) Final funding decisions are made
- 8) Successful PI receives award notice

### Proposal Review Process:

Review criteria vary by CFP, but always include transformational project results, possibility of adoption in other situations, and sustainability beyond the end of RWJF funding.

## ROBERT WOOD JOHNSON FOUNDATION PROPOSAL & REVIEW PROCESS



### What Happens Next?

Once funding decisions have been made, successful proposers receive written notice of the intent to fund. When all award documentation is complete, work on the project may begin. Expect that Foundation staff will play a large role in monitoring ongoing projects. Those whose projects are not chosen for funding will want to consider if the project concept is a better fit for another agency or if it's worth waiting for the next RWJF CFP. Resubmissions are complicated by the fact that no reasons for declination or reviewer comments are supplied.