Harvard Catalyst Childhood Obesity Pilot Grant Opportunity

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Are projects that deal with the social sciences applicable?
A: Yes, projects that have a social science focus are not only applicable but are encouraged. Behavioral economists, psychologists, sociologists and anthropologists, linguists, city planners, technology experts, marketing, advertising and communications specialists, and artists are among those whose expertise and methodologies we hope to engage in this pilot grant opportunity.

Q: What do you mean by linked projects?
A: We are encouraging groups of investigators with complementary project proposals to link their projects together intentionally during the application process, and these linked projects would be considered as a unit during the review process. Linked projects are a group of no more than three projects, each with a separate Principal Investigator. Each project must stand on its own (and potentially could be funded on its own), but together, the linked projects make an even stronger case for funding.

Q: How do I indicate that my project is linked when I apply?
A: There are two places where you indicate that your project is linked: 1) In your scientific proposal, indicate in the text that your project is linked with project X and Y, for example, and should be considered with projects X and Y during review; 2) You must enter the names of the Principal Investigators for projects X and Y in the designated field on the application form. The other Principal Investigator should do the same when they complete their application forms.

Q: Can you give me an example of a linked project?
A: One example of a linked project is a pilot intervention that three investigators propose to conduct in three different communities. Conducting the intervention in one community would be strong; in three communities, it would be even stronger. Another example is a project with three elements, for example, a policy component, a marketing component, and a school-based component. Each investigator would submit an application for their element of the project, but the project would be reviewed as a package.

Q: Will linking my project with another Principal Investigator's project increase my chances of being funded?
A: No. We expect to fund some stand-alone projects, and some linked projects. If you link with another project, the linkage should make sense, and enhance the project’s viability as a whole.

Q: Can this project build on work that I’m already doing?
A: Yes, we welcome proposals from investigators who are already doing work in the area of childhood obesity, but want to build on existing work using this funding opportunity. For example, they might add a collaboration with a food retailer or a new technological innovation to an ongoing intervention or study.
Q: Will my proposal be reviewed more favorably if it addresses more than one of the five substantive categories?
A: While addressing multiple categories can be a plus, it is not as important as writing a proposal that excels in meeting other criteria, e.g. innovation, feasibility, impact.

Q: Will my proposal compete only with other proposals that have the same substantive focus?
A: No.

Q: What is the purpose of the Networking Event with the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH)? Do I have to attend?
A: MDPH is conducting several large-scale research projects in Massachusetts, and there are many opportunities for taking advantage of natural experiments, or adding new elements to existing projects. The Networking Session will be interactive, so if you have an idea that you want to propose to MDPH staff, you can do that as well. While the immediate focus of the session is policy research that may become the focus of a proposal responsive to this RFA, the broader goal is building partnerships between Harvard researchers and MDPH. Attendance at this event is not required to apply for this funding opportunity.

Q: Are investigators who do not have a Harvard University appointment, or are based at institutions not affiliated with Harvard, eligible to apply for a Harvard Catalyst Childhood Obesity Pilot Grant?
A: Not as Principal Investigator. The Principal Investigator must hold a Harvard University appointment (see next FAQ for details). However, Co-Investigators can be from any institution. Conversely, if you are a Harvard Principal Investigator working with a Co-Investigator from an outside institution, it is helpful to provide justification of how the external expertise adds to the project.

Q: Who is eligible to be a Principal Investigator?
A: Investigators with a Harvard University appointment are eligible to be a Principal Investigator if they meet one of the following criteria:

- They hold an appointment at the Assistant Professor, Associate Professor, or Professor level.
- Investigators with appointments other than those listed above are eligible with the approval of their department chair. They should provide a letter from their department along with their grant application. The letter should confirm the following: 1) the Principal Investigator’s appointment title, 2) the Principal Investigator’s institution allows the investigator to be Principal Investigator on a federal grant.

Trainees (e.g. students, clinical trainees, post-doctoral fellows, clinical fellows) cannot serve as the Principal Investigator of an application, but may serve as Co-Investigators, provided they make a substantial contribution to the project. A substantial contributor helped conceive of the experimental idea, contributed to the intellectual development of the project; and/or designed the study or part thereof (scientific or technical details), and will be involved with the study throughout the funding year. If you have questions about whether you are eligible to apply, please contact us via email at childhood.obesity@catalyst.harvard.edu or at 617-432-7810.

Q: Can researchers apply for more than one Childhood Obesity Pilot Grant?
A: Researchers cannot apply as Principal Investigator for more than one Pilot Grant. However, researchers can be listed as Co-Investigator on multiple applications.
**Q: How can the award be spent?**

A: The award funds, which should be considered NIH funds, can be spent on direct costs such as supplies or salary. There is a 5% effort cap on faculty salaries, but there is no minimum effort commitment requirement. By agreement with the institutions, the Pilot Grants are not subject to indirect costs. More details about allowable costs are listed in the RFA. Some small-scale projects may be perfectly appropriate for the lower end of allowable costs. In general, the budget should fit the project.

**Q: Who are the reviewers and what purpose do they serve?**

A: Reviewers are experts in the field of childhood obesity, policy, and community engaged research. The reviewers will be asked to comment on the following considerations:

- Does the proposal provide a novel approach to an identified problem/obstacle in childhood obesity research, or does it identify a new topic of research?
- Does the project relate to at least one of the substantive categories specified in the RFA?
- Does the project address disparities in childhood obesity?
- If successful, how will the results impact childhood obesity?
- Is the project feasible in the project period and with available budget?
- Does the project have a high potential to lead to future funding?
- Do the investigators have the requisite skills and experience to carry out the project successfully?
- Is the project collaborative across disciplines or institutions?
- If the Principal Investigator is a junior or mid-level investigator, is appropriate supervision and mentoring provided?

**Q: Are preliminary data required in order to apply for a Childhood Obesity Pilot Grant?**

A: Preliminary data are not required. They can and should be included if it speaks to the project's feasibility.

**Q: Are junior investigators encouraged to submit applications, and if so, does a senior person need to be included on the research team?**

A: As long as the team has relevant experience and expertise, junior investigators are encouraged to submit applications. The proposal should specify arrangements for mentoring.

**Q: What kind of detail is needed for the budget submission?**

A: NIH detailed budget and budget justification forms are used. If there is more than one institution, budget documents are required from each institution receiving funds. For further information, please contact your departmental grants administrator, or inquiries can be directed to Lucy Kolessin, Harvard Catalyst's Director of Finance and Research Administration, 617-432-7804, lucy_kolessin@hms.harvard.edu.

**Q: Will there be a Letter of Intent or an interview by the review committee?**

A: No, there will not be a Letter of Intent or an interview.