Harvard Catalyst Childhood Obesity Initiative

Request for Pilot Grant Applications: Addressing Childhood Obesity through Translational Research

Applications Due: August 9, 2012

The Harvard Catalyst Childhood Obesity Pilot Grant Opportunity will support novel research partnerships with the potential to have measurable impact on one of the most serious and preventable threats to the nation’s health. Grants are expected to begin in December 2012 and should be completed within 12 months. It is expected that pilot projects will lead to additional funding from other sources that will broaden their goals, scope, scale, and results.

Harvard Catalyst Community Health Innovation and Research Program (HC-CHIRP) leads the new Childhood Obesity Initiative in collaboration with the Harvard Catalyst Health Disparities Research Program and the Child Health Initiative. This Pilot Grant Opportunity will engage policy, public health, clinical, and other investigators from across the Harvard community in innovative interdisciplinary translational research to improve the prevention of childhood obesity in the context of national and state health systems reforms.

This RFA seeks innovative proposals that address one or more of the five substantive categories described in Section I below. These areas were articulated in a university-wide meeting convened by Harvard Catalyst in April 2012; a summary of that meeting is available and you are encouraged to review it at:

I. Substantive Categories
The categories listed below represent gaps in knowledge translation and opportunities for demonstrating the impact of translating what we already know into what we do. Proposals may overlap across two or more categories; applicants need not designate a primary category. Proposals will not compete by category and there is no assumption that funding will be awarded in each category. While feasibility will be a key factor in review of submissions, novel approaches are encouraged.

1. Strengthening capacity of state systems to implement and evaluate evidence-based policy and its integration within community-based public health
Projects that involve partnerships with existing state resources and foster policy approaches to address childhood obesity would be responsive. Because of our belief that policy can be the most cost-effective public health tool, particularly in reducing disparities, Harvard Catalyst maintains a strong relationship with the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH). Evidence-based interventions such as the Childhood Obesity Research Demonstration (CORD) and Mass in Motion (http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/consumer/wellness/healthy-living/about-mass-in-motion.html), a multi-year investment in local communities, will help change policy, environments, and systems affecting almost half of the population of the Commonwealth. These programs present outstanding opportunities for community-based participatory evaluation and innovation. For example, there is a
need for tools, databases, and community mapping technologies that help establish baselines and track changes over time. Changes in policy also create opportunities for a variety of natural experiments, and evaluations conducted as part of such experiments can stimulate further policy changes. Other related areas that may be fruitful for collaborative investigation include regulatory, procurement, and other contracting mechanisms, and concerns over legal liabilities that may follow from these and other local policy innovations.

2. Research and evaluation on reducing the consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages
The Harvard childhood obesity research community has played a key role in a national focus on sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs) as an important and entirely non-nutritious contributor to the childhood obesity epidemic. We encourage proposals that design and test novel and multi-faceted complementary strategies to reduce SSB consumption by children. These may include or combine advertising, marketing and other aspects of access; pricing; behavioral economics; institutional campaigns; multi-city agreements and collaborations; and strategies intended to increase substitution of water for SSBs.

3. Research and evaluation of policies and other interventions in early childhood, with emphasis on creative ways to work with families
Behavior and physiology are programmed early; it is easier to develop patterns than change them, and early childhood is the key period for setting healthy trajectories. To achieve healthier eating patterns in children requires access to families; and it may be most feasible to reach many adults through their roles as parents and grandparents. We encourage research and evaluation proposals that engage in a concerted way the various people and settings that are prominent in children’s lives and trusted by parents. These may include community health centers and pediatric clinicians; pre-school, family day care and child care centers and schools; and programs that reach out to and ally with parents and families, including home visiting programs. Programs are encouraged to go beyond information transfer; make creative use of natural opportunities for peer-to-peer connections and mutual support; and respect families’ multiple and competing priorities, world views, and traditions.

4. Research and evaluation of innovative collaborations with industry
Partnering with industry to promote healthy eating and physical activity is an effective approach since industry is neither monolithic nor immune to community concerns and interests. Retailers may be particularly cooperative; their management may make their spaces and databases available, and encourage the participation of their personnel and HR programs, particularly if incentives can be aligned to produce mutual benefit. Marketing, packaging, product placement and other strategies drawing on behavioral economics might be investigated. Strategies that reduce food waste may contribute to childhood obesity reduction if they increase consumption of healthy foods in families and settings serving children. Companies whose products encourage physical activity may be especially attracted to testing creative translation innovations. Some market-driven strategies may serve to increase disparities; a more precise understanding of who benefits from such strategies would be useful.

5. Research and evaluation on socio-cultural aspects of the food and physical activity environment
While interdisciplinary collaboration is an emphasis for all Harvard Catalyst pilot grants, it is particularly relevant to reducing disparities in childhood obesity. Researchers from a broad range of disciplines can help us recognize cultural shifts as they develop, and work with intended audiences to tailor prevention strategies so they are grounded in understanding and respect for competing belief systems. 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 program.
II. Unique Elements of the Childhood Obesity Pilot Grant Opportunity
Childhood Obesity Pilot Grants will support up to $50,000 in direct costs per application for one year, depending upon the scope of the work. Each project should be collaborative, with one Principal Investigator and at least one Co-Investigator. Each project should stand alone on its own merit; however, up to three projects may be linked together (see next page).

Option for Linked Projects
Some innovative research projects may be significantly enhanced by linking with other projects and investigators. Principal Investigators may propose projects that link with up to two other proposals. Investigators must indicate in the text of their proposal why and how their proposal is linked to another Principal Investigator's submission.

Examples of Linked Projects:
- An investigator has an idea for an intervention that she would like to pilot in one community. In order to strengthen the validity of her pilot findings, she finds another investigator willing to conduct the same pilot intervention in a different community. These two investigators link their projects together, and plan to utilize some program staff in common between the two projects.
- Three investigators have created an idea for a project with three separate components: an investigator from Harvard Business School has an idea having to do with marketing food to children, an investigator from Harvard Graduate School of Design has an idea for new packaging that would appeal to children, and an investigator from Harvard Law School has a policy approach to marketing food to children. These three investigators link their complementary projects together for consideration as a package. Each project can stand on its own, but is better, and potentially more effective, as a collaboration.

Leveraging Resources
Investigators may use pilot funding to build on and add new dimensions to existing research projects in the substantive categories noted above. For example, the Principal Investigator of an already-funded research project can propose enhancements such as additional components, sites, settings, or evaluation activities, a new collaboration with a food retailer, or a new technological innovation that augments the existing project.

June 26 Networking Session with the Massachusetts Department of Public Health
We encourage researchers to make connections with the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH). Several large-scale projects related to childhood obesity are taking place in the Commonwealth, and there are many possibilities for collaboration, evaluation support, or enhancements. To facilitate these connections, we are holding a Networking Session on **Tuesday, June 26 from 4:00pm – 6:00pm** in the Minot Room, Countway Library, 5th Floor, 10 Shattuck St., Boston. Attendees will learn about MDPH initiatives and needs, and will have the opportunity to share their research ideas with MDPH staff. For more information, or to sign up for this Networking Session, please email childhood.obesity@catalyst.harvard.edu or call 617-432-7810. Attendance is not required to apply for this funding opportunity.

III. Eligibility and Key Elements of the Childhood Obesity Pilot Grant Opportunity
Proposed projects must be collaborative and interdisciplinary. At least one Co-Investigator is required; single investigator projects are not responsive to the RFA and will NOT be considered. Inter-institutional collaborations are highly encouraged. There is no limit to the number of Co-Investigators who may be listed. While researchers may submit only one application as Principal Investigator, they may be listed as a Co-Investigator on multiple applications. This RFA encourages applications from junior or mid-level investigators. For junior investigators, appropriate supervision and mentoring must be provided.
Principal Investigator Eligibility
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 must 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.

Co-Investigator Eligibility
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 if they make a substantial contribution to the project. A substantial contributor helps conceive of the experimental idea, contributes to the intellectual development of the project, and/or designs the study or part thereof (scientific or technical details), and will be involved with the study throughout the funding year.

Linked Projects
If you are linking your project with that of one or two other Principal Investigators, please enter the names of the other Principal Investigators in the designated field on the application form. The other Principal Investigators should do the same when completing their own application form.

IV. Timeline for the Grant Submission and Review
Applications Due: Thursday, August 9, 2012, 5:00pm EST
Funding Decisions Announced: Mid-October, 2012
Anticipating Funding Start Date: December 1, 2012 (pending appropriate IRB approvals)

V. Grant Application
Please submit applications using the webform at:

http://cbmi.catalyst.harvard.edu/formsJsf/pfChildObesity.jsf

The form will close at 5:00pm on Thursday, August 9, 2012 and there will be no exceptions permitted.

Please note that your internal institutional application process may require additional time for review and additional documents, so please work with your Research Administrator during the application process. Harvard Catalyst staff will be available until 5:00pm to help you should you encounter problems submitting your application. Please allow time before the deadline to deal with any unexpected problems submitting the application.

Application materials consist of:

1. Online application form.

2. Administrative documents. The following administrative documents should be uploaded as a single PDF via the webform (found at the URL listed above):
a. For each institution that will receive funds, the following forms must be completed:
   i. PHS 398 Face Page, to be signed by institutional official. One Face Page per funded site.
ii. PHS 398 Form Page 4: Detailed budget for one year. Refer to section VIII for allowable costs. If more than one site will share the budget, the combined total should not exceed $50,000 and each site is required to submit a separate budget page.
iii. Narrative Budget Justification.
iv. A brief statement describing the work to be performed at each institution (2-3 sentences per institution).

b. If IRB approval is required and has not been obtained, please indicate the status of, and the plans for obtaining approval. Funds will not be released without the necessary approvals. The strength of the plan for obtaining the necessary approvals will be assessed as part of the review process.

c. PHS 398 Biographical Sketches for the Principal Investigator, Co-Investigators and significant collaborators. An eRA Commons ID is requested for all Co-Investigators.

d. Letter from the Principal Investigator’s department verifying appointment title if investigator’s appointment is other than Assistant Professor, Associate Professor, or Professor (see section III – Principal Investigator Eligibility).

3. The scientific proposal (uploaded as a separate PDF via the webform) is limited to five pages, not including references. You must use Arial font, size 11, single-spaced, with 0.7 inch margins. Include the following sections (suggested lengths in parentheses).

   a. Introduction (1 page). Describe the scientific background for your grant application. Critically evaluate existing knowledge; explain how your pilot proposal relates to gaps in current knowledge and the themes of this RFA; and specifically discuss how your project has the potential to impact childhood obesity. If your proposal is linked to other submitted proposals, specify them and justify the linkages.

   b. Project Details (2½-3½ pages). Describe the specific aim(s) that will be completed in the funding period. For each aim, provide the study details, and delineate an approximate timeline for the activities related to that aim, including realistic milestones with which to judge progress of the project. Preliminary data are not required, but can be included if they speak to feasibility. Please describe contributions from each member of the team in the design and execution of the proposed study. If your proposal is linked with other submitted proposals, specify how implementation of the project will overlap. If IRB approvals are necessary for your project, indicate your plans to obtain IRB approval.

   c. Future Plans (½ page). Describe how you propose to extend and fund your project past the year of support. Provide an overview of the future research plan and types of funding for which you intend to apply.

   d. References (limit to 1 additional page).

   e. Appendix material is not allowed. All figures should be included in the body of the application.

VI. Main Review Criteria
The critical qualities of successful applications will be responsiveness to one or more of the five substantive categories, as well as their innovation and feasibility. Applicants should address the following questions in their proposals:
• 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?

VII. Funding
Funding decisions will be announced in mid-October, 2012. The maximum period of award is 12 months, starting on the effective funding date. Six month no-cost extensions will be granted in some instances pending approval. The maximum amount to be awarded per application is $50,000 in direct costs. **Indirect costs are not allowed.** Projects of larger scope and scale may be submitted as a package of up to three linked proposals. Funding cannot be released until all applicable human subject protocols have been approved and copies, with approval letters, sent to Harvard Catalyst. Each award is non-renewable. Awards are not ordinarily transferable to another Principal Investigator but investigators with special circumstances can discuss the situation with Harvard Catalyst. Please be advised that upon funding, additional administrative documents may be required. It is anticipated that up to ten pilot grants will be funded in this cycle.

VIII. Allowable Costs
Faculty Salary Support: Harvard Catalyst Pilot Grants will provide salary support for up to 5% effort and in compliance with the NIH salary cap. However, please note that there is no minimum or maximum effort commitment requirement (effort above 5% will have to be cost shared by the faculty’s institution).

Other Personnel Support: Salary and fringe benefits are allowed for technical support, such as: Research Fellows, Research Assistants, Clinical Coordinators, Research Nurses, etc. However, salary support for ancillary personnel, such as Mentors, Secretaries, and Administrative Assistants, is not allowed.

Non-personnel Research Expenses: Some allowable expenses are: supplies, equipment (under limited circumstances), travel to research meetings, study subject stipends, study subject transportation costs, study subject refreshments for meetings or focus groups, and statistical and computational services including personnel and computer time. All expenses must be directly related to the proposed research. Unallowable costs are: general office supplies and equipment, computers and laptops (unless specifically requested and justified), membership dues and fees, subscription costs, mailing costs, rent, and other costs generally identified as facilities and administrative.

Facilities and Administrative Costs: Facilities and administrative costs, also known as indirect costs, are not permitted.

Subcontracts: Pass-through subcontracts to other sites are not permitted. A separate budget page should be submitted from all sites that are to share the grant funds. Subsequently, Harvard Catalyst will directly subcontract to all sites.

IX. Additional Information
Inquiries about the application process or scientific/research areas should be directed to childhood.obesity@catalyst.harvard.edu or call 617-432-7810.