E4A Innovative Research to Advance Racial Equity

The Letter of Intent Stage Applicant Guide

This guide is meant to help applicants during the letter of intent (LOI) stage of the grant application process for the Evidence for Action (E4A): Innovative Research to Advance Racial Equity Call for Proposals (CFP). For more details about the funding program, review criteria, and more, please review the funding section of the E4A website.

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When to Apply

The CFP operates on a rolling basis, meaning that applicants can submit their applications at any time. Timing of submissions should be driven by the preparedness of the team and the timeliness of the project. Applications are reviewed as they are received, and there are no deadlines nor advantages to submitting at any particular time of year.

Budget

There is no cap for the research budget request. Applicants should request the amount of funding they anticipate is needed to complete the proposed research project. We will work with applicants to adjust the budget, if needed, to align with E4A funding priorities.

Typical funding levels are from approximately $300,000 to $500,000, but we have awarded both smaller and larger grants, commensurate with the scope of the projects. The size of the budget will be weighed in relation to the importance and likely contribution of the proposed work.

Indirect costs should be included in the total budget. Do NOT include a detailed budget at the LOI stage; you should submit an estimate to the nearest $10,000. When estimating your budget, include costs associated with dissemination activities (e.g., open access fees, conference fees, salary for time spent on dissemination activities, etc.).

We strongly encourage you to visit our funded projects page, which provides award amounts that correspond to a wide range of grantee projects.

Grant Duration

We have a strong preference for projects between 18 and 36 months but will consider grants of up to 48 months with sufficient rationale. Grants longer than 36 months may not produce actionable findings quickly enough to inform the real-world decisions that drove the research in the first place. Ensure you build in sufficient time to both conduct the research and disseminate the findings within the proposed project period.

The Application & Review Process

E4A has a multi-stage application process that begins with a two-page LOI submitted via the RWJF Application and Review (A&R) System along with additional applicant and project details. If you do not already have an account, you will need to create one at my.rwjf.org and then follow the instructions in the online system to submit your proposal for review and funding consideration.

The LOIs are reviewed by E4A and RWJF leadership, and applicants are generally notified of decisions within six to nine weeks of submission, unless an applicant provides rationale that warrants an expedited review. Please be aware, while E4A staff will respond to inquiries and answer questions regarding submissions, we cannot review drafts of LOIs or other written materials prior to submission in the A&R System.

At the LOI stage, applications are reviewed on the basis of:

- Relevance to advancing racial equity and building a Culture of Health;
- Actionability and the potential for practical and timely application of findings in the real world;
- Methodological rigor in both quantitative and/or qualitative approaches;
- Inclusion of health outcome measures that are important and plausible;
- Feasibility in terms of sufficient time and resources to do the re-search well; and the
- Qualifications of the research team, which includes all expertise needed to complete the project, not only academic or research qualifications.

For more information about these criteria, please review the frequently asked questions and call for proposals on the E4A funding page.

Following the LOI, applicants may be invited to submit a full proposal that includes greater detail about the intervention, research questions and hypotheses, research design and approach, and team capacity. If invited, applicants have two months to submit their full proposal.

Applicants typically receive notification about funding within six to eight weeks after submission. Successful applicants generally receive funding between five and seven months following LOI submission. Applicants may also be invited to revise & resubmit their LOIs or participate in Technical Assistance. (See Figure 1, below).

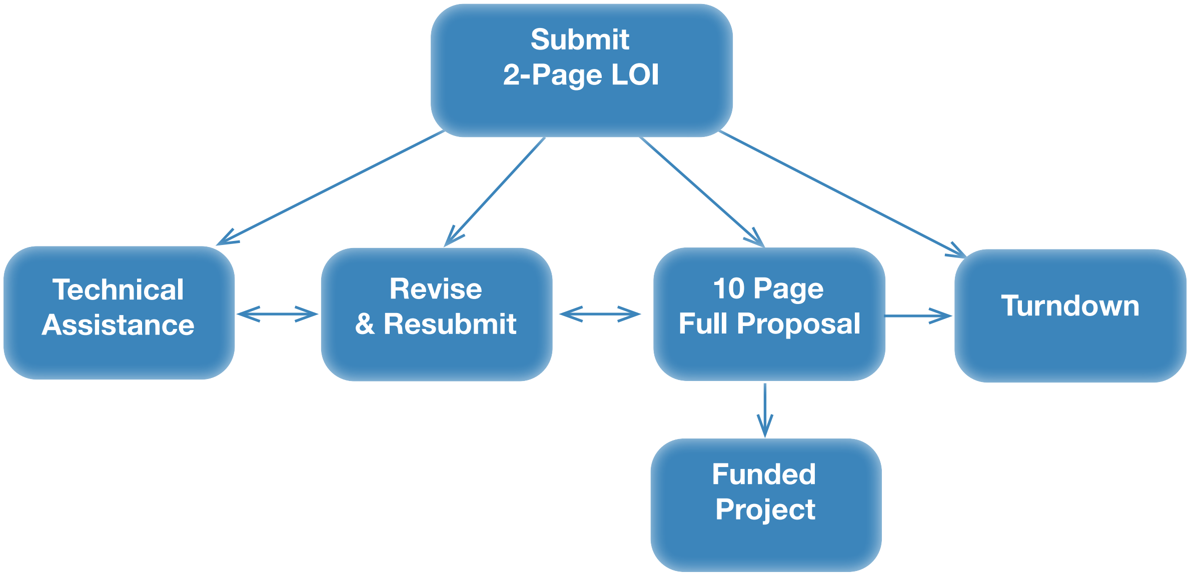
Turndown is also a possibility at this stage. Approximately seven percent of applicants are invited to submit a full proposal. However, over forty percent of full proposals that are submitted are funded.

The most common reasons for turndown at the LOI stage include:

- The intervention being evaluated was not clearly described;
- The intervention being evaluated did not focus on a change at a systems, structural, or environmental level;
- The research question or hypothesis was not clearly stated;
- The research question was not relevant to advancing health and racial equity or immediately applicable to policy or practice changes;
- There were not appropriate health outcomes;
- The research design did not meet E4A standards for rigor.

Applicants who receive a turndown at any stage are eligible to apply again and may contact E4A for feedback on how to make their projects more responsive to the call for proposals.

Figure 1. Possible Outcomes of the Application & Review Process.



The Letter of Intent Narrative Template

At the LOI stage, applicants have two pages to introduce the reviewers to their project. Applicants should answer the three questions posed in the LOI template found in the A&R System, provided below, while adhering to the guidelines regarding the length of each component. On the following pages we also provide additional prompts and context for each of these sections. The blocks of color correspond with approximately how much space should be allocated to each section.

Rationale (>1/2 page): What will be gained from this work?

- State how this research addresses a root cause of health and racial inequities. For research on a specific intervention, describe the intervention (including the theory of change, logic model, etc.) and information about the design and delivery/implementation/policy enforcement. Explain why this research is needed, and who will benefit from it. Be specific about the populations to whom findings will apply.

Implications of Findings (<1/2 page): In what ways will this research be used to inform policy or program decisions or priorities?

- Briefly outline 2-3 specific applications for the research. State who the end users are and how they will use findings, including positive, negative, and null findings.

Research Approach and Activities (1 page): What are the specific research question(s) or hypotheses that will be examined and how will this be accomplished?

- Clearly state your research question(s).
- Specify the health outcome(s) and any other primary or secondary outcomes being measured.
- Provide as much detail about the study design as possible, including a description of the methods that will be used, the study setting and population (both treatment and comparison groups), sample sizes, and plans for data collection and analysis.
- If the study sample includes different races/ethnicities, describe whether and how the data will be disaggregated to assess heterogeneous treatment effects.

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Identifying Information

Evidence for Action: Innovative Research to Advance Racial Equity

Project Title: [The Title of Your Project]; **Letter of Intent I.D.:** [Number found in the upper right corner of any A&R system screen]; **Principal Investigator Name:** [Principal Investigator Name(s)]; **Legal Name of Applicant Organization:** [Your Institution]

Rationale (>1/2 page)

The Rationale section is where you will introduce the population health and racial equity issue that the intervention is meant to address. Avoid a long summary of existing evidence about how structural racism and other social determinants affect health; instead be concise about the specific problem, population(s) affected, and any contextual factors that justify the intervention as a reasonable solution. Emphasize why the research, not the issue, is important.

If evaluating an intervention, clearly describe the intervention (policy, program, or practice) to be studied. Provide a brief outline of what the intervention entails and why it is expected to have an impact on this specific problem. If applicable, describe the theory of change, logic model, or other depiction of how the intervention is theorized to work, including drivers or other intermediaries through which it operates. A brief summary of the current state of evidence about the intervention can help make a case for why the proposed research is needed. Given space constraints, do not include citations in the LOI. If you are proposing another type of study (e.g. pilot trial, implementation study), clearly describe what is already known about the intervention or approach, and what gaps your research would fill.

Be explicit about the population(s) and contexts to which the research findings will apply — for example, members of a specific community; people of a certain race/ethnicity, age, and/or geographic location; participants in a given program.

Implications of Findings (<1/2 page)

The Implications of Findings section is where you should explain how the research findings will be used in the real world. Be sure to go beyond theoretical implications, and state the specific audiences, communities, or decision-makers that would be able to take action as a result of the research. Specify the types of policies, programs, practices, mindsets, norms, etc., that will be influenced by findings - and how these may vary depending on whether findings are positive, negative, or null.

Highlight the timing of actionability, particularly if there is an urgent or specific window of opportunity for the findings to drive action.

Research Approach & Activities
(1 page)

The Research Approach and Activities section focuses on specific aspects of the research design and plan. It is an opportunity for you to demonstrate that the research is rigorous, feasible, and able to produce valid findings. It should flow from (but not duplicate) the Rationale section, in which you have already described the components of the intervention, why/how it should work, and why the research is important. Now you will describe what the research will entail.

State the research questions or hypotheses clearly. There is no required number of questions or hypotheses.

List the primary outcomes or outcomes you expect will show effects as a direct result of the intervention being evaluated. Begin with the health outcomes, which are required, and which may include physical, mental, and socio-emotional health and well-being outcomes. Clearly state how they will be measured (i.e., what are the psychosocial measures, biometric markers, physical or anthropometric indicators, or community-level measures, depending on the units of intervention and analysis?). In some cases, health behaviors that are well-established as determinants of health (e.g., tobacco use, sleep duration and quality, physical activity, etc.) may be used as a proxy or surrogate health outcome, if sufficient rationale is provided.

Next, state any other primary non-health outcomes you plan to measure. These are not required but may be included to provide more context for the intervention. Finally, state any secondary or exploratory outcomes of interest — such as important health measures for which effects are less certain or may be too small to detect from your sample but are still valuable to assess.

State the research design. If you are proposing a randomized controlled trial (RCT), in which people are randomly assigned to treatment or control groups (“arms”), clearly describe each study arm. If not an RCT, describe who will receive (or be exposed to) the intervention as well as the comparison group(s), if any. Be clear about how exposure was assigned or determined (e.g., at random, using a set of criteria or protocol, etc.). For qualitative or mixed-methods studies, state the research approach (e.g., grounded theory, ethnography, phenomenology, etc.) and provide a brief overview of the protocol.

Describe how you will identify and recruit participants, along with the criteria you will use to determine eligibility. Be explicit about how many people will be in your study (your sample size). Be sure to account for attrition, non-response, or loss to follow up (if applicable). Although presenting a power analysis is not always necessary at the LOI stage, in quantitative studies with small samples, it can be helpful to demonstrate that your study will have enough power to detect the anticipated effect.

Indicate where you will get the data for your study. If you are using secondary data, name the sources and state whether you already have access to the data. You may also list specific surveys or databases that you have access to. While not required prior to funding, securing data access in advance can strengthen an application. If you will collect new data, describe what methods you will use to collect the information (e.g., surveys, interviews, focus groups, observations). If available, state the specific tools or instruments that you will use.

Project Information Questions

In addition to the information about the research proposal you described in the two-page LOI narrative, applicants will also need to provide responses to the three open-ended questions outlined below. Do not duplicate information from your LOI narrative.

1. In a few sentences, describe the ways in which this research will contribute to advancing racial equity. (500 character limit)

   For example, if you are evaluating the impact of an intervention, state whether and how the intervention is intended to target structural/systemic inequities, improve health for a specific population, and/or reduce disparities by race or ethnicity. If you are proposing research corresponding to earlier stages of an intervention, such as its design or trial, state what gains will be made toward racial equity through this research.

2. Describe the context under which the research question and study were developed. Who are the people or communities that will be most impacted by this research, and what input have they provided? Why was this particular population chosen for this study? (500 character limit)

   Demonstrate that the research question and study were motivated or developed in partnership with people who have direct knowledge or experience with the topic or issue, and that the research responds to the needs and priorities that have been identified or expressed by impacted communities. Justify why the study sample you propose is the most suitable population for the specific research question being asked.

3. Briefly describe how your core project team was formed. In what ways is the team qualified to understand this issue, conduct this research, and/or ensure that findings will be actionable? Describe any relevant skills or expertise not represented in the CVs/resumes, including those related to research methods, implementation, dissemination, subject matter, or other lived experiences. (1000 character limit)

   Do not repeat information from uploaded CVs/resumes. Instead, use this space to share how your team came together and what unique skills, insights, and experiences are represented. Highlight the ability of your team overall, as well those of any individual members, to ensure that the project is relevant and feasible, that the study is methodologically rigorous, and that findings are actionable.

Additional Resources

- Call for Proposals
- Recorded Webinar, Slides, Transcript, & Q&A
- E4A Office Hours: A Virtual Question and Answer Session
- Frequently Asked Questions
- E4A Methods Blog & Methods Notes
- How to Apply to E4A, A Tutorial
- Technical Assistance

Additional Links

- Meet the E4A Team & Reviewers
- Review E4A Funded Projects
- RWJF Application & Review System

Contact Us

- Email us at EvidenceforAction@ucsf.edu.
- Follow us on Twitter.
- Like us on Facebook.
- Connect with us on LinkedIn.