



Robert Wood Johnson
Foundation

Aligning Forces for Quality

A Special Solicitation for Planning
Phase Grants

2008 Call for Proposals—Special Solicitation

Proposal Deadline

November 19, 2008

Program Overview

(Please refer to specific sections for complete detail.)

Purpose

Aligning Forces for Quality (Aligning Forces) is the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's (RWJF) core initiative in its longstanding commitment to improve the quality of health care that Americans receive. Through this initiative, targeted communities across the country are working to lift the overall quality of health care in both the inpatient and outpatient settings, reduce racial and ethnic disparities in care, and provide models for national reform. Communities participating in the program focus on three core activities:

- improving measurement of care and public reporting of those measures;
- increasing consumer engagement; and
- enhancing community support for physicians, hospitals and clinics in their efforts to improve.

These activities should also explicitly strengthen the role of nurse leaders and front-line nurses in quality improvement initiatives and work to reduce disparities in care in order to improve care in ways that matter to patients.

RWJF seeks to expand the current number of Aligning Forces communities for a total of no more than 20. Through this special solicitation, RWJF is offering 16 selected communities the opportunity to compete for a total of four planning phase grants. With these planning phase grants, recipient communities would receive technical and financial assistance to help them prepare a credible Aligning Forces proposal at the end of a six-month planning process. Successful planning grant recipients would subsequently receive an invitation from RWJF to submit a proposal to participate in Aligning Forces. RWJF does not plan on expanding the Aligning Forces initiative beyond these last four slots. Receipt of a planning grant does not guarantee ultimate acceptance into the Aligning Forces initiative.

Eligibility Criteria (page 7)

- Only one planning proposal per community will be accepted.
- To ensure that only one organization per community applies, all applicant organizations must register first with the program on or before November 7, 2008. *Only planning proposals from registered applicants will be accepted.*
- Applicant organizations must represent multiple community stakeholders, including substantial representation from the following community health care stakeholders:
 - Physicians and nurses, including safety net providers
 - Hospitals
 - Health care plans
 - Employers
 - Consumer advocacy groups
 - Health care consumers

Selection Criteria (page 7)

Complete selection criteria begin on page 7.

Total Awards

Up to four communities will be selected to receive planning phase grants of up to \$200,000 each for a six-month period. Successful selected communities will be invited to submit full proposals for participation in Aligning Forces.

Key Dates and Deadlines

- **November 7, 2008**—Deadline for intent to apply.
- **November 19, 2008**—Deadline for receipt of planning phase proposals.
- **March 2009**—Finalist selections.

How to Apply (page 12)

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

For information about the program, selection criteria, Webinars, content-related proposal questions, or for questions about the proposal process itself, please visit the following Web site:

www.aligningforces.org/expansion

Background

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) is committed to ensuring that all Americans receive quality health care. Specifically, we aim to help communities across the country set and achieve ambitious goals to improve the quality of health care in ways that matter to patients and their families, including patients from specific racial and ethnic backgrounds who often experience lower-quality care.

Despite advances in medical technology and science, health care in America is still fraught with uneven and often poor quality. Although we know of many best practices that could help to improve the quality of treatment, formidable barriers prevent these practices from taking hold and transforming care across the country. In most communities, health care is delivered through fragmented systems within which hospitals, clinics, doctors, nurses and patients struggle to understand what quality care is and how to achieve it.

Beyond the burdens placed on physicians and patients by dysfunctional health care systems, health care costs are growing at a rate that places even greater burdens on our country's economy. Therefore, we need far more rational ways than we currently observe to ensure that health care delivers value that's worth the investment—value to patients, physicians, nurses, hospitals, health plans, businesses and government. Right now, health care in America represents one of the biggest expenditures by the federal government and many others, and people still aren't getting the right care at the right time. For instance, the Dartmouth Atlas, an ongoing research project that produces data on regional differences in the delivery of health care services, reported huge variations in Medicare spending for end-of-life care in hospitals. Yet these differences in Medicare spending were not related to whether the patients experienced better outcomes as a result of the higher expenditures. In other words, *more* and *more costly* care did not result in *better* care.

Not only do we have a quality and value problem in U.S. health care, but research shows that certain groups—from specific racial, ethnic, cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds—persistently suffer the lowest-quality care. These gaps in quality persist even when other factors, such as insurance status and income level, are taken into account between minority and non-minority patients.

The Aligning Forces Approach

RWJF's Aligning Forces for Quality initiative seeks to help targeted communities across the country set and achieve ambitious goals to improve the quality of their health care. The goal of Aligning Forces is to build on RWJF's past and current investments in improving health care and partner with communities that are trying to promote substantial and meaningful change.

Aligning Forces is the Foundation's core strategy in its longstanding commitment to improve the quality of health care that Americans receive. Aligning Forces brings an unprecedented commitment of resources, expertise and training to turn proven practices into real results on the ground. By teaming up those who get care, give care and pay for care, we can deliver lasting change across entire communities.

The premise of Aligning Forces is that no single person, group or profession can improve health and health care throughout a community without support of others. Aligning Forces asks key community leaders to work toward common, fundamental objectives that RWJF and others believe will lead to community-wide improvements in care. Aligning Forces helps grantee communities' business, health care, consumer and political leadership work simultaneously on three strategies for aligning multiple dynamic forces that are all driving toward sustainable quality: (1) prompting health professionals in all clinical settings to measure and publicly report performance; (2) helping health professionals get better at improving care; and (3) motivating the public to become better informed and play an active role in their own care.

RWJF launched the first phase of Aligning Forces in 2006 as an effort to help 14 markets begin the enormous challenge of working together as a community to improve care. This first phase of Aligning Forces provided community leadership teams with substantial expert assistance and grants to help them work with physicians to improve quality of care, to measure and publicly report on the quality of ambulatory care, and to engage consumers to make informed choices about their own health and health care. The program expanded in June 2008 to include inpatient care, as well as a focus on reducing racial and ethnic gaps in care and enhancing the central role that nursing plays in good health care. At the same time, RWJF established a new national program office (NPO), located at The George Washington University Medical Center School of Public Health and Health Services, to help RWJF manage the activities of Aligning Forces.

Aligning Forces is currently operating in 14 communities across the country: Cincinnati; Cleveland; Detroit; Humboldt County, Calif.; Kansas City, Mo.; Maine; Memphis, Tenn.; Minnesota; Seattle;

South Central Pennsylvania; Western Michigan; Western New York; Willamette Valley, Ore.; and Wisconsin. In addition, two communities, New Jersey and Albuquerque, N.M., are currently in an Aligning Forces planning phase. Both of these communities have received RWJF support to help them refine their community leadership teams and prepare an Aligning Forces proposal that they will submit to RWJF at the end of their respective six-month planning phases.

All Aligning Forces communities must have a single, multistakeholder organization that serves as the recipient for grant funds and supports key staff for this initiative.

Each participating Aligning Forces community builds its initiative around a single, core leadership collaborative. Those collaboratives or alliances include participation from physicians, nurses, patients, consumers and consumer groups, purchasers, hospitals, health plans, safety net providers and others. Aligning Forces emphasizes improvements in care for all patients, including patients from all racial and ethnic backgrounds. Aligning Forces works with communities to engage nurses and nursing leadership in the effort because of the critical role of nursing in overall improvement.

Aligning Forces provides grant funding to the community through the community's multistakeholder leadership organization along with technical assistance to help participating communities make substantial improvements in the following three core areas:

- Measuring the quality of care and publicly reporting outpatient and inpatient performance measures, patient experience, efficiency and price.
- Enhancing community resources for quality improvement by health care providers across clinical settings.
- Engaging consumers on health care quality issues.

The Program

RWJF is seeking to expand the number of Aligning Forces communities from the current 14 to up to a maximum of 20 communities. Through this special solicitation RWJF is inviting 16 communities to submit proposals for up to four planning phase grants. RWJF may conduct follow up telephone conferences or site visits to communities as part of the process to identify the four planning phase grant recipients. Applicants must work with other key health care stakeholders in their communities in order to participate in this planning phase. Planning grant recipients who successfully complete this phase of work will then be invited to submit proposals for the four remaining Aligning Forces slots.

RWJF will only accept one proposal from each community.

With this document, RWJF is inviting your community to submit a planning phase proposal to receive funding and technical assistance for a six-month period.

After completing this planning work successfully, a planning grant recipient will then be invited to submit a full proposal to participate in the full Aligning Forces initiative.

Through this special solicitation, RWJF is *not* explicitly inviting your community to participate in Aligning Forces, but is inviting qualified applicants to apply for a six-month planning grant.

The leadership organization of each planning grant recipient will receive grant funds, as described below, and technical assistance to help your community strengthen its leadership organization and develop concrete plans that will move your community forward in the Aligning Forces priority areas. The technical assistance will come in a variety of forms—including individual expert consultation on developing leadership organizations and crafting community plans in areas like performance measurement, public reporting, quality improvement capacity and consumer engagement; peer-to-peer community learning; access to webinar activities; and assistance from the Aligning Forces consumer engagement learning network.

At the end of the six-month planning phase, RWJF and its partners will review and assess each community's progress. Successful grantees will then be invited to submit a proposal for full participation in Aligning Forces.

To begin the planning process, your community must first identify a single appropriate leadership organization and leadership team and respond to a list of questions outlined below. RWJF will not accept more than one proposal from a particular market. Each proposal should identify other interested, key health care stakeholders within your health care market and develop a single planning phase proposal for your community. This leadership organization must be in place during the six months of this planning phase. The leadership organization that you identify for this planning proposal may or may not be the leadership organization and structure that you ultimately use for the subsequent Aligning Forces proposal, should you decide to submit an Aligning Forces proposal at the end of the planning phase.

Eligibility Criteria

Only One Planning Proposal per Community.

Aligning Forces will accept only one proposal per community. All potential applicants must register before submitting a proposal. Only registered applicants may submit proposals. The deadline for registration is November 7, 2008. For details on how to register, please see page 12.

Applicant Organization.

The applicant organization must represent multiple community stakeholders with substantial representation from:

- physicians and nurses, including safety net providers;
- hospitals;
- health plans;
- employers;
- consumer advocacy groups; and
- consumers.

Selection Criteria

Structure of the Leadership Team

Applicants must demonstrate the ability to bring key health care stakeholders into a regional improvement effort.

1. Please confirm the name, lead staff and contact information for the multistakeholder organization that you have identified to serve as the umbrella organization for the proposed planning phase.

This organization would serve as the recipient for grant funds and provide key staff for this planning work. However, this entity that you identify as the lead organization for the planning process may or may not be the lead multistakeholder organization for your community after you complete this planning process and in the event your community seeks to participate in Aligning Forces.

The applicant organization must represent multiple community stakeholders with substantial representation from the following health care market stakeholders:

- Health care providers including physicians, nurses and safety net providers, hospital leadership (including hospital chief executive officers and chief nursing officers, and key staff responsible for quality improvement, including nurses and other front-line staff) from 50 percent of the hospitals in the region, or from hospitals accounting for 50 percent of the hospital discharges within a particular market. *Hospital representatives must also demonstrate a strong relationship with a significant portion of outpatient care providers in the area.*
- Employers.

- Publicly-funded and nonprofit health care organizations or public health experts, including community health centers, urban Indian clinics, Indian Health Service facilities and other similar providers of health care.
- Consumer advocacy groups.
- Health care plans.

RWJF is committed to programs that embrace racial, ethnic, cultural and gender diversity. We encourage you to take the diversity of your community into account as you form your leadership team.

2. Please list and include contact information for the members of your leadership team (name, title, organization, address, phone/fax and e-mail). The leadership team must include individuals from applicant member organizations who have the authority to make decisions on behalf of their respective organizations, and may also include individuals with this type of decision-making authority from organizations that are not members of the applicant organization.

Market Characteristics

Applicants must describe their community's health care market. They must provide a clear definition of the health care market in which people who live and work in that community receive their health care. Applicants must then provide validation of their market by linking the definition to some external definitions, such as a Metropolitan Statistical Area or Hospital Referral Region. Applicants should also describe their market with concrete, objective, descriptive examples such as: the market's demographics, including race and ethnicity; percentage of the community's covered individuals that the project is likely to affect; percentage of the community's physicians that would be covered by this proposal; amount of aggregate health care expenditures represented by the applicant organizations; detailed estimates of the number of patients covered by this proposal; proportion of the community's private sector providers, public sector providers, safety net organizations, and the portion of community's private sector health care purchasers covered by this proposal.

Capacity to Utilize Population Data

As part of Aligning Forces, leadership teams are expected to use population-wide and regionally-based data to plan activities to improve health care quality. This data, from sources such as the Dartmouth Atlas of Health Care research project and the ongoing research conducted by the Center for Studying Health System Change, will be provided to your community along with technical assistance on how to analyze the data and how to use it for the purposes of improving the quality of health care. Planning proposals must include a commitment by the leadership team

to the development of an action plan that outlines how the community might use the data to develop interventions to improve care coordination, patient-centered care, or care for minority populations as indicated.

Public Reporting Commitment and Measurement Standards

Under Aligning Forces, communities must commit to publicly report major, nationally-recognized measurement sets for inpatient care on all hospitals within the market, as well as ambulatory care, such as those approved by the Ambulatory Care Quality Alliance (AQA), those proposed by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), or those endorsed by the National Quality Forum (NQF). Performance information must include measures of patient experience, clinical quality, efficiency and price. The applicant must commit to achieving public reporting of ambulatory care performance information by more than 50 percent of the community's primary care providers within the first three years of an actual Aligning Forces grant. The community's planning phase work plan must show how the community might achieve this goal if the community ultimately participates in Aligning Forces. Aligning Forces communities must also develop plans for publicly displaying relevant inpatient measures along with outpatient measures in a manner that is helpful and understandable to the public. Please include a statement describing your community's commitment to publicly reporting these measures if your community participated in Aligning Forces.

Commitment to Collecting Race and Ethnicity Demographic Data

Your proposal should outline how hospitals, plans and ambulatory care providers actively participating in Aligning Forces might work together if your community ultimately participates in Aligning Forces to achieve the comprehensive collection of self-reported data about patients' race, ethnicity and primary language, and how your community will integrate this information into its overall quality measurement, reporting and improvement activities.

Consumer Engagement Commitment

Consumer engagement is an essential component of Aligning Forces. Each applicant must outline a credible plan for engaging consumers and consumer advocacy groups in a regional improvement effort.

1. Please describe any consumer engagement efforts that are under way in your community. Describe any ideas you have regarding how to create strategies for consumer engagement. Consumer engagement may involve using public reports of quality to help consumers make choices, communications activities designed to educate the public on variations in quality, implementing measures of patient engagement or activation

in their care, and creating consumer decision-making or self-management tools. Please describe your current thinking and understanding about how your community might engage individuals in your community outside the health care industry in your efforts to improve quality.

2. Please specify how you would increase the active and credible representation of diverse consumers and consumer advocacy groups in the governance and core activities of the leadership team.

Patient-Centered Care, Nurse Leadership and Ambulatory Provider Quality Improvement Capacity

1. Aligning Forces communities must commit to having at least one hospital in the region participate in a learning collaborative designed to implement a patient-centered quality improvement initiative that empowers front-line nurses to perform rapid-cycle quality improvement. Please describe the hospital environment in your community and indicate which hospital is most likely to participate in such a collaborative. Tell us something about some of the challenges you anticipate in establishing this effort.
2. Please describe any current strategies and efforts that physicians in your community use to improve outpatient chronic illness care quality. Describe any plans your community might have for building upon these efforts. If you do not plan to build on these efforts, why not? What have been some of the challenges of previous efforts, if any? If your community does not have preexisting strategies, please describe how you will approach engaging physicians to improve quality and ideas you have for creating a sustainable infrastructure for this purpose.

Letters of Support

Please provide letters of support from your leadership team and any partnering organizations that you feel are appropriate, that include a commitment from their organizations to support your proposed initiatives.

Financial Information

The grant award is up to \$200,000 each for six months for developing and solidifying your multistakeholder leadership organization and working on Aligning Forces planning activities. The preparation of a budget and budget narrative is an essential component of the grant proposal. Please use the attached budget guidelines to provide a detailed list of activities and an itemization of the associated costs for each component of this planning project. In your proposed budget, please specify major budget categories such as staff, travel (if needed) and indirect costs.

Work Plan and Timeline

Please use this work plan template as a guide to prepare a timeline that outlines the project’s required components (i.e., structure of the leadership team, measurement and reporting, use of population-wide and regionally-based data, patient-centered care, nurse leadership and ambulatory provider quality improvement capacity and consumer engagement). Please include the major tasks and milestones. Outline the type of technical assistance that you believe would be beneficial to your planning.

Add or delete lines as necessary. Please limit the number of tasks to two per component. Your timeline and work plan do not count toward the 10-page limit for this proposal narrative.

Area	Major Tasks	Timeline	Technical Assistance Requested
Structure of the Leadership Team			
Use of Population-Wide and Regionally-Based Data			
Patient-centered Care and Nurse Leadership			
Measurement and Reporting			
Consumer Engagement			

Evaluation and Monitoring An independent research group selected and funded by RWJF is conducting an evaluation of Aligning Forces. Participation in this evaluation is a condition of receiving RWJF funding. In the context of a planning grant, this may include being available for a few brief interviews by phone responding to a brief survey or other such low-burden activities.

Grantees are expected to meet RWJF requirements for submission of narrative reports, as well as periodic information needed for overall project management. We will ask project directors to participate in periodic meetings and give progress reports on their grants. At the close of each grant, the lead agency is expected to provide a written report on the project and its findings suitable for wide dissemination.

Use of Grant Funds

Grant funds may be used for project staff salaries, consultant fees, data collection and analysis, meetings, supplies, project-related travel, and other direct project expenses, including a limited amount of equipment deemed essential to the project. Grantees may not use funds to *maintain* aspects of the program, such as data collection. They *may use* grant funds for one time “start up” activities necessary to begin program activities. 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.

How to Apply

The program will accept only one proposal from each community. In the likelihood that several applicants from a single community submit separate proposals, all interested applicants must notify RWJF of their intent to apply by November 7, 2008. To do this, applicants should e-mail the following information to aligningforcesforquality@rwjf.org:

- Name of your community.
- Name and key contact information for the applicant organization.
- A sentence indicating your intention to apply for this planning phase grant.

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

For information about the program, selection criteria, Webinars, content-related application questions, or for questions about the proposal process itself, please visit www.aligningforces.org/expansion.

Optional Webinars
(Registration required)

The program will hold two informational Webinars for applicants on October 17 and October 29, 2008. These Webinars will provide information on this special solicitation, the project goals, assistance with the proposal process and an opportunity for applicants to ask questions. Participation in a Webinar is not mandatory, but it is highly encouraged. Potential applicants can learn more about these Webinars and must register by visiting www.AligningForces.org/expansion.

RWJF does not provide individual critiques of proposals submitted.

Program Direction

- Responsible staff members at the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation are:
- Michael W. Painter, J.D., M.D., *senior program officer*
 - Anne Weiss, M.P.P., *senior program officer*
 - John Lumpkin, M.D., M.P.H., *senior vice president and director, Health Care Group*
 - Minna Jung, J.D., *senior communications officer*
 - Ashley Ranji, *grants administrator*

Timetable

- **November 7, 2008**
Deadline for intent to apply.
- **November 19, 2008**
Deadline for receipt of planning phase proposals.
- **March 2009**
Finalist selections.

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.



Robert Wood Johnson
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