

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS (CLOSED FEBRUARY 1, 2010)

Sexuality, Health and Rights Among Youth in the United States: Transforming Public Policy and Public Understanding Through Social Research

Please Note: On January 11, 2010, revisions made to the guidelines for Qualifying Institutions and Letters of Intent on pages 7 and 8.

Purpose

This request for proposals—“Sexuality, Health and Rights Among Youth in the United States: Transforming Public Policy and Public Understanding Through Social Research”—aims to support and prepare researchers to take on the challenges of social science sexuality research in the 21st century. Falling under our initiative “Supporting Sexuality Research,” the overall goal is to strengthen the capacity of social science researchers to inform public policy and public understanding of sexuality-related issues from a human rights perspective.

In recent decades, researchers have highlighted the significance of social and historical contexts and the intersecting role of social institutions, social policies and structural violence in shaping sexuality and health. In addition, the emergence of a human rights perspective in the social sciences and its emphasis on fundamental principles of social inclusion, freedom and human dignity has opened up new ways of understanding sexuality and health in relation to local communities and social movements. This means viewing sexuality, health and rights as produced “from below” as well as “from above.”

Having developed an impressive array of research methods and analytic frameworks, one of the pre-eminent challenges for innovative social science research on sexuality is to find compelling and strategic ways to communicate research findings and conceptual frames to diverse stakeholders outside of academia. Sexuality researchers need new tools to engage potential audiences, including policy makers (whether in Washington D.C., state capitols or PTA meetings), the targets of social policy (young people, their communities and families) and the advocates shaping social policy.

The goals of this effort are to develop the capacity of social science researchers, their students and research partners to inform public policies, strategically frame and conduct public conversations in print and new media venues, and strengthen community voices advocating for issues of sexuality, health and rights.

Objectives

With this proposal process the foundation seeks to foster the integration of social science research, graduate student training and strategic communications work to deepen the evidence base for public policy, programs and public understanding of sexuality, health and rights. We aim to support research and public engagement efforts addressing sexuality, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) among young people (up to age 25) in the United States.

Sexuality, Health and Rights Among Youth in the United States

Our work supporting sexuality research has three objectives:

- Build knowledge regarding the role of intersecting structural inequalities and social dynamics that influence SRHR outcomes for youth.
- Train graduate students to work in research teams and research-advocacy-policy maker-community collaborations.
- Develop the capacity of researchers, students and community partners to utilize strategic communications to inform public policy and shape public understanding of youth, sexuality and rights.

Background

From 1996 to 2005, the Ford Foundation supported the Sexuality Research Fellowship Program, which provided dissertation and research support to more than 150 doctoral and post-doctoral fellows. The fellows' work expanded the conceptual boundaries of the sexuality field and contributed to an overall paradigm shift that emphasized socially grounded understandings of human sexualities. The foundation also provided support for investigator-driven research projects and, through a global initiative, support for regional centers and an international network of scholars active in sexuality research. Building on this legacy, the foundation continues to support work that sits at the intersection of academic excellence and shifting public policy and public discourse as it relates to human sexualities and their connection to health and rights.

Current Focus

The foundation is interested in proposals that integrate social science research, graduate student training and strategic communications in order to deepen public understanding and inform policies that impact sexuality and reproductive health and rights of adolescents and young adults. Proposals that explore the role of structural inequalities, stigma and discrimination, and mechanisms of social exclusion related to gender, sexual orientation, class, race and ethnicity and their intersections are of particular interest, as are proposals exploring how youth and adults in local communities seek to understand and address sexuality, health and human rights through a range of individual and collective actions. Proposals that seek to inform current or new policy at the federal and/or state levels will be considered as well as efforts to understand better how sexuality is both addressed and impacted by large-scale service or program interventions.

In addition, proposals that seek to further develop a human rights lens on youth, sexuality and health, particularly in relation to U.S. domestic policies, services and programs will be considered. All proposals must demonstrate how they would inform public policy or public dialogue on targeted sexuality or reproductive health and rights issues.

Sexuality, Health and Rights Among Youth in the United States

Core Components: Research, Training and Strategic Communications

Through this RFP the foundation will support research projects that combine three areas of activity: social science research; training of graduate students; and strategic communications to inform public policy or public conversations. Each project must include plans for all three areas of activity. The Ford Foundation recognizes the diverse institutional contexts of applicants, particularly the different degrees of support available for research, training and strategic communications efforts.

We would like to emphasize the flexibility that this request for proposals leaves in the hands of applicants to design budgets that address applicants' current resource gaps in support for research, graduate training and/or strategic communications.

However, we underscore that each applicant must demonstrate strong research capacity, prior experience in graduate training and mentorship, and prior experience in strategic communications efforts, and must provide plans for all three activity areas.

While each applicant may differ in their proposed distribution of grant resources across these three activity areas, each applicant must propose plans for all three activity areas.

Component 1: Social Science Research on Sexuality, Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

As an overarching guideline, areas of inquiry will be assessed in relation to their fit with the Ford Foundation's mission and values as described at www.fordfoundation.org.

Areas of Inquiry, Scope and Impact: The foundation aims to support areas of inquiry with the potential to inform public policy and/or public conversation. The RFP aims to support research, whether qualitative and/or quantitative, that will generate insights that can be used to stimulate public dialogue or shape public policies in this area. For purposes of this RFP, the foundation is not interested in research to characterize or intervene with a small group of people without attention to the possibilities for broader reflections, connections to public policy or catalyzing public dialogue. Regardless of proposed sample sizes, areas of inquiry with significant potential to inform public policy and public dialogue are welcomed.

Following are some examples of research inquiry which might be addressed within applicants' proposals. **Please note that these are only provided as examples and do not represent the areas that Ford will prioritize in its selection process.** Examples include social science research projects that:

Sexuality, Health and Rights Among Youth in the United States

- Aim to inform key policy areas impacting young people and sexuality, such as comprehensive sexuality education, the foster care system, welfare reform, juvenile justice, school systems, policing, residential segregation or immigration.
- Seek to shape effective programs, particularly by examining structural inequalities and social realities shaping young people's sexual and reproductive health and their vulnerabilities to poor sexual and reproductive health outcomes.
- Stimulate new ways of conceptualizing and implementing youth development (or related) policies and programs which recognize and address the synergies between social and economic factors and youth sexuality.
- Advance public understanding and public conversation regarding the role of new social media as it relates to sexuality, health and rights among youth, including work that examines assumptions about current attitudes, behaviors and contextual factors.
- Empower young people to represent their own experiences of and perspectives on sexuality, health and rights, at the levels of research design, research participation/data collection, data interpretation and strategic communications.

Innovative Use of Mixed Methods in the Social Sciences: Successful applicants will demonstrate experience training students in and facility in the use of quantitative and qualitative methods. Applicants may propose standard mixed method approaches to research and training, or may propose mixed method approaches that include participatory action, ethnographic or narrative research methodologies, as examples. While partnerships and collaborations across disciplines and fields are welcomed, this RFP is squarely focused on social science research and training in the areas of sexuality and sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Research Partnerships: Successful applicants will demonstrate a history of effective research partnerships with community-based organizations, governmental agencies, activist organizations or other types of appropriate partner institutions. Demonstration of partnership must go beyond working through another organization to gain access to their constituencies (be that a particular community or group of policy makers as examples). The Ford Foundation considers partnership to include meaningful participation of constituencies in the research design and research activities, including the interpretation, framing and strategic communication of research findings for public impact. Applicants should describe their partners in the proposed research program and demonstrate their involvement and commitment to this effort. (Details regarding the process of how the proposed partnership was conceived, constructed and will be implemented will be required in the full proposal. Additionally, the appropriate sharing and distribution of resources across the proposed partners will be evaluated in the full proposals.)

Sexuality, Health and Rights Among Youth in the United States

Component 2: Graduate Student Training

Support for graduate student training in social science research is the second core component of this funding effort. There is a need to build capacity among emerging social science researchers to critically and rigorously examine the social contexts that inform sexuality and sexual and reproductive health policies and programs for youth. There is also a need to develop the capacity of emerging researchers to engage with communities, policy makers and other stakeholders not only to design and conduct research, but also to translate research findings into clear and concise messages for public debate, to inform public understanding and develop accessible information and materials for public policy makers, program managers and activists.

We encourage applicants to consider and integrate the following areas of graduate student training within their proposals:

Building, Training and Recognizing Research Teams: Whether graduating students go on to pursue tenure-track faculty positions or conduct applied research in nonprofit or governmental sectors, successful research careers increasingly demand facility for working in and directing research teams. Yet, the opportunities for graduate students to gain the skills necessary for effective team-based research remain few. Successful applicants will demonstrate experience building, training and providing mentorship to effective research teams. These teams may include the lead researcher(s), students, community members, policy makers and/or the research subjects themselves.

Mechanisms for Graduate Research Training Support: Some examples of the types of mechanisms for research training which will be considered for support in response to the RFP include, but are not limited to: graduate research assistants, fellowships for graduate students or post-doctoral fellows, research internships in community-based or governmental organizations and dissertation research awards. Specific students to be trained through the award do not need to be identified within the Letters of Intent.

Component 3: Strategic Communications

Support for strategic communications is the third core component of this effort and in many ways sets it apart from other available forms of research and training support. Innovative plans to design and lead public conversations might take place in print media, the blogosphere or other media venues, with an interest in engaging in state, regional or national conversations. While we recognize the global reach of policies and public dialogue, the proposal process focuses in particular on policy and public conversations relating to sexuality and sexual and reproductive health and rights in the United States.

History of Designing and Translating Research for the Public Sphere: We aim to support innovative efforts to translate research findings to inform policy debate and/or public understanding related to young people and sexuality, sexual and reproductive health and rights. Successful applicants will have a history of designing and translating their research to inform public policy or public dialogue. Letters of Intent will describe previous research communications and/or policy engagement efforts.

Sexuality, Health and Rights Among Youth in the United States

Interest in Building Capacity for and Participating in Coordinated Strategic Communications: Successful applicants and their research teams will also be interested in and committed to receiving technical assistance in strategic communications, including building relationships with reporters, bloggers and policy and/or opinion leaders, and in producing messaging and materials to stimulate and strengthen public dialogue. The Ford Foundation will identify a communications partner to work closely with grantees to strengthen their research team's capacity and plans for strategic communications as well as facilitate participation of all research grantees in a coordinated communications effort.

Foundation support will enable individual research teams and the initiative grantees as a cohort to develop and sustain a set of core public conversations on themes related to their research, with the goal of promoting public understanding and public engagement from a rights perspective on sexuality and sexual and reproductive health.

Successful applicants will identify a research communications strategy that addresses the following types of questions, as examples:

- What are the local, state, regional and/or national opportunities to inform public policy in the applicant's research area(s)?
- What policy bodies might use (directly or indirectly) the findings from the applicant's proposed research and how will the information be conveyed?
- What are the local, state, regional and/or national opportunities to frame and inform constructive public dialogue related to the applicant's proposed research topics?
- Which local, state, regional and/or national organizations might partner with the applicant in framing and informing public dialogue on the applicant's research topics?
- Which traditional and new media venues might best support research engagement with public policy and public dialogue?

Lastly, successful applicants will also be able to demonstrate an institutional commitment regarding internal resources, including staff and administrative support and costs, which will be made available to them to assist with strategic communication efforts.

Sexuality, Health and Rights Among Youth in the United States

Information for Applicants

Key Dates:

Release/Posted Date:	December 16, 2009
RFP Revised:	January 11, 2010
Letters of Intent Receipt Date:	February 1, 2010
Anticipated Start Date:	August 1, 2010 to October 1, 2010

To register for informational Q and A calls to be held on January 5 or January 7, 2010, please send an email to: RFPinfo@fordfoundation.org with the subject line "Informational Call."

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Funds Available and Anticipated Number of Awards: During the Ford Foundation's 2010-2011 biennium we anticipate up to \$4 million will be available for this research-focused RFP. We anticipate making all awards for this RFP in 2010.

Budget and Project Period: Maximum budget per institution will be \$500,000 in total costs (direct and indirect combined). Grant budgets will have a 15 percent cap on indirect costs. We expect that the proposed projects would be completed in a two- to three-year time frame. Innovative projects proposing smaller budgets are encouraged.

Qualifying Institutions: Awards will be made to institutions, rather than individuals. In addition to considering accredited U.S. college and university-based applicants, the foundation will also consider proposals from university consortia and nonprofit research institutions. Nonprofit institutions must have affiliations or partnerships with colleges or universities, and must demonstrate expertise and capacity for providing mentorship and training to teams of enrolled graduate students. The foundation will accept multiple Letters of Intent per university, consortium, research institution or nonprofit organization. In addition, the foundation may invite multiple full proposals per university, consortium, institution or organization. However, the foundation will most likely only make one award per institution.

Eligible Researchers: We anticipate that successful applicants will hold a Ph.D. or equivalent degree in the social sciences, public health or a related field and have significant experience in designing and implementing social science research to inform public policies, programs and/or public conversations related to youth and sexuality. Lead researchers should also have significant experience in providing social science training, mentoring and technical assistance to graduate students to help them develop both the research and partnership skills necessary to ensure that research findings are strategically communicated to and utilized by public officials, program managers and key community stakeholders and organizations. Individuals from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups as well as individuals with disabilities are encouraged to apply.

Sexuality, Health and Rights Among Youth in the United States

More than one lead researcher may be designated on an application, but an individual may only be a lead researcher on one application. Lead researchers may be from different institutions in the case of cross-university collaborations or in the case of academic and non-academic institutional collaborations. There are no rank or tenure requirements for lead researchers; however, the prior graduate student training and/or mentorship experience of the lead researchers will be evaluated by reviewers. Graduate students who will benefit from the proposed research-training plans are not eligible to apply directly for this RFP.

Letters of Intent: Applicants should submit a Letter of Intent to the Ford Foundation, for receipt by 8pm EST on February 1, 2010. Letters of Intent should be submitted as an attached PDF file by email to: RFPinfo@fordfoundation.org.

The Letter of Intent should include:

- The title of the proposal
- Names of the lead researcher(s) and their institution(s)
- A brief (no more than three single-spaced pages) description of
 - The proposed research
 - The proposed student training support and activities
 - The proposed strategic communications effort
- The proposed total budget amount and project timeframe
- A statement of the anticipated impacts on
 - Professional development
 - Graduate student training
 - Public policy and/or public conversation

Maximum length of Letters of Intent is four single-spaced pages. All Letters of Intent will be reviewed and screened to ensure relevance to the RFP.

Qualifying applicants will be informed in writing that they have been invited to submit full proposals and will be provided with updated full proposal guidelines and requirements.

Sexuality, Health and Rights Among Youth in the United States

Applicants whose Letters of Intent are not found to meet the substantive or technical criteria established above will be informed in writing.

Review Process: All full proposals will be reviewed by internal foundation staff and external expert peer reviewers working in the areas of social science, sexuality research, public policy and strategic communications. Proposals will be assessed for their merit based on the criteria described above and elaborated on in the RFP directions as well as their overall fit with the Ford Foundation's mission and values. The Ford Foundation may request to interview applicants either by phone or in person after the peer review process to further assist in determining finalists. Ford Foundation staff will advise finalists in preparing a formal grant application for executive review. Grant awards are anticipated to have start dates ranging from August 1, 2010 to October 1, 2010.

Renewal of Grant Awards: These are non-renewable grants.

Expectations of Grant Recipients: In addition to meeting their proposed research, training and communications objectives, grant recipients will be expected to: 1) participate in two peer-exchange events each year as organized by the Ford Foundation or a third-party organization with the intent of stimulating cross-project learning and collaboration; 2) take advantage of technical assistance regarding strategic communications efforts related to the funded research and training activities; 3) participate in a shared evaluation framework for all awardees; and 4) develop efforts to make their research findings widely accessible by utilizing strategic communications in collaboration with community, program and/or policy-related stakeholders, the proposal's communications partner and other initiative awardees.

Questions and Communications: Any questions regarding this RFP process can be directed to: RFPinfo@fordfoundation.org. We will also host call-in informational sessions to answer general questions; dates for informational sessions will be available at www.fordfoundation.org. We will not be able to answer questions specific to a particular project but will clarify the priorities and parameters of the Sexuality, Health and Rights Among Youth in the United States RFP.

The Ford Foundation is an independent, nonprofit grant-making organization. For more than half a century it has worked with courageous people on the frontlines of social change worldwide, guided by its mission to strengthen democratic values, reduce poverty and injustice, promote international cooperation and advance human achievement. With headquarters in New York, the foundation has offices in Latin America, Africa, the Middle East and Asia.