



Equitable Access in Child Nutrition Programs Project

Request for Proposals

Deadline to Apply: 11:59 p.m. ET on Tuesday, October 3, 2023

For questions or requests for assistance regarding the Request for Proposals instructions, applicant criteria, and deadlines, please contact EACN@frac.org. Responses to questions sent before the proposal deadline will be posted on the project website at [FRAC.org/EquitableAccessCN](https://frac.org/EquitableAccessCN).

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Section 1: Overview of the Equitable Access in Child Nutrition Programs Project

A. Background

In November 2022, the Food Research & Action Center (FRAC) entered into a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service (USDA FNS) to support and conduct research activities that identify barriers to equitable access in the Child Nutrition Programs, as well as strategies to help overcome these barriers.

Funding for the Equitable Access in Child Nutrition Programs (EA-CN) Project is part of FRAC's and USDA FNS' broader commitment to ensuring that all children can access the Child Nutrition Programs that they are eligible for, and that services are equitably delivered to all program participants and school nutrition departments, programs, and operators, especially those belonging to underserved communities.

The EA-CN project will take place from November 2022–December 2025, during which time the FRAC Project Team will solicit, review, award, and evaluate subgrantees' research projects. (Note that the USDA cooperative agreement under which the activities of successful applicants will be conducted is *not* designated a “Research and Development (R&D)” award for purposes of federal grant management requirements under 2 C.F.R. Part 200, Subparts D, E, or F.)

B. Purpose

The Child Nutrition Programs, which include the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), School Breakfast Program, Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), and Summer Food Service Program/Seamless Summer Option, provide nutritious meals at no or low cost to children across the country. Despite their many benefits, these programs may be underutilized by, or unevenly available to, eligible participants, especially historically and currently marginalized and underserved communities because of systems of oppression, including but not limited to systemic racism.

The purpose of the EA-CN project is to support research activities that increase the understanding of and ability to improve equity in access to the Child Nutrition Programs, including program participation and receipt of high-quality foods and services.

To identify the most pressing and promising areas for needed research, FRAC conducted a literature review and organized a series of listening sessions with a variety of program stakeholders and experts in spring 2023. At the end of this project, FRAC will develop and release a summary report on the project, which will include an overview of the subgrantee projects and overarching findings.

C. Key Definitions

For the purposes of this funding opportunity, “equity” and “underserved communities” are defined by USDA FNS as follows:

- The term “equity” means the consistent and systematic fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals, including individuals who belong to underserved communities that have been denied such treatment, such as Black, Latino, Indigenous and Native American persons, Asian Americans, and Pacific Islanders, and other persons of color; members of religious minorities; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer persons; persons with disabilities; persons who live in rural areas; and persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality.
- The term “underserved communities” refers to populations sharing a particular characteristic, as well as geographic communities, that have been systematically denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic, social, and civic life, as exemplified by the list in the preceding definition of “equity.”

Additionally, FRAC defines a disparity as follows:

- A disparity is a difference that is closely linked with social, economic, and/or environmental disadvantage.

D. Overview of the EA-CN Subgrant

USDA FNS and FRAC have conducted an extensive review of equity in the Child Nutrition Programs through a scoping review of scientific and grey literature, a series of listening sessions with diverse program stakeholders, and each organization’s expertise in program administration and policy. As a result of this review, a number of priority areas for research to understand and improve equity in the Child Nutrition Programs have been identified and are the focus of this funding opportunity. Further details can be found in Section III-C and Appendix B. Broadly, to evaluate and improve equitable access to and service delivery within the Child Nutrition Programs, this funding opportunity will support research projects that address one of following priority areas:

- understanding the disparities that exist in the Child Nutrition Programs;
- understanding the barriers that lead to disparities; and
- understanding the tools, resources, and interventions that reduce/eliminate disparities.

The EA-CN project subgrant proposals will include the following key components:

- a clear description of the research project and how it fits into the priority area(s) of interest;
- demonstrated experience working with the Child Nutrition Programs or other nutrition assistance efforts;
- plans to design and implement research that center equity and address disparities throughout the project (applicants will be expected to demonstrate equity-promoting practices through their subgrant proposal, including strategies for community-engaged research; and
- procedures that maintain the quality and integrity of all data and analyses.

Priority will be given to subgrantees representing underserved communities (see definitions in Section 1-C), especially those that have experienced disproportionate barriers to accessing Child Nutrition Programs.

Section 2: Award Details

A. Eligibility

Eligible EA-CN project applicants include the following:

- public or private academic organizations;
- not-for-profit organizations; and
- state or local government organizations.

An organization must apply as a singular applicant. Other organizations that are partnering in the project should be listed as contractors and their role explained in the application and budget narrative. Community partners who are compensated for their time are included in this category.

B. Key Funding and Dates

- Total funding available: Up to \$1.1 million will be available under this Request for Proposals (RFP).
- Minimum request amount: \$100,000
- Maximum request amount: \$250,000
- The amount of funding requested will *not* impact scoring priority: A proposal for a \$100,000 project is just as likely to be chosen as a proposal for \$250,000. Instead, projects will be scored according to the Selection Criteria (see *Selection Criteria* in Section 6).
- Subgrant length and dates: 24 months, November 6, 2023–November 6, 2025

C. Other Eligibility Criteria

The FRAC Project Team will accept only one proposal from each applicant. [Suspended or debarred organizations](#) are ineligible to submit proposals in response to this grant solicitation.

D. Pre-Award Screening Requirements

In reviewing proposals in any discretionary grant competition that will result in an award of federal funds, FRAC, in accordance with 2CFR 200.332(b), is required to review information available about each subrecipient's risk of noncompliance with federal statutes, regulations, and the terms and conditions of the subaward for purposes of determining the appropriate subrecipient monitoring. The FRAC review of risk posed by applicants will be based on the following:

- Registration in the System for Award Management (SAM.gov), the official U.S. government system that consolidated the capabilities of CCR/FedReg, Online Representations and Certifications Application, and Excluded Parties List System.
- Unique Entity Identifier (UEI), a number that is used by the federal government to better identify related organizations that are receiving funding under grants and cooperative agreements.
- FRAC’s Financial Management Systems Questionnaire, which allows FRAC to evaluate aspects of the applicant’s financial stability, quality of management systems, and history of performance, reports, and findings from audits.

The evaluation of the information obtained from the designated systems and the Financial Management Systems Questionnaire may result in FRAC imposing special conditions or additional oversight requirements that correspond to the degree of risk assessed.

E. Application Process

Only those applicant organizations that submit a proposal by the time and date deadline indicated below will be considered for funding. All applications must be submitted through the online application process detailed in Section 6.

Table 1: Key Proposal and Project Dates

Date	Event
August 14, 2023	Request for proposals opens
September 5, 2023	Webinar for interested applicants
September 9, 2023	* <u>Letter of Intent</u> due by 11:59 p.m. ET
October 3, 2023	Proposals due by 11:59 p.m. ET
Early November 2023	Grantees notified of award
November 6, 2023	Project start date
Early November 2023	Kick-off meeting
November 6, 2025	Project end date

*EA-CN subgrant applicants are *highly encouraged*, but not required, to submit a nonbinding Letter of Intent to Submit a Proposal (LOI) by 11:59 p.m. ET on September 9, 2023. This document will *not* be considered in the review process but provides useful information to the EA-CN Project Team in preparing for providing technical assistance to applicants as well as ensuring that the RFP is being adequately disseminated through diverse channels. EA-CN applicants who do not submit an LOI by the specified deadline may still apply by the proposal due date of October 3, 2023.

Section 3: EA-CN Subgrant Project Design

The goal of the Equitable Access in Child Nutrition Programs project is to increase the understanding of the barriers to equitable access in the Child Nutrition Programs, as well as innovative interventions to address them. The Project Team will prioritize for award those proposals that use research methods that center a community-engaged approach.

Following these goals, the proposal involves a brief equity assessment, identification of the research gap the project aims to address, and a description of the subgrant project design.

A wide range of projects have the potential to be funded under this proposal. These may include, but are not limited to, analysis of administrative data to monitor trends in disparities that are poorly understood, projects to develop appropriate measures for documenting disparities, qualitative studies to understand barriers faced by a particular population, pilot projects to test an intervention, or mixed method approaches (see Section 3-C and Appendix A for examples of priority research questions). The following requirements for project design should be tailored for the type of research project being proposed.

In the section below, you will find descriptions for each section of the fillable online template, as well as examples of priority research areas that have been identified by USDA FNS and the FRAC Project Team. If you have questions during the proposal process, please refer to this section or reach out to the Project Team at EACN@frac.org.

A. Project and Equity Assessment

Questions 1–4 in the Proposal

The assessment section asks applicants to describe the disparities their projects aim to identify and/or address and how the chosen research approach is appropriate for context, challenges, and resources.

Applicants will be asked to identify:

1. the group experiencing disparities in the Child Nutrition Programs (e.g., disparities in access or services received by children, disparities in working conditions for staff, or disparities in the quality of the support services from state agencies/sponsors offered to schools/program operators);
2. barriers that disproportionately affect access for the group described in Question 1, which barriers are a priority to address, and why (e.g., lack of familiarity with a program, barriers that prevent sponsors from participating in a CN program, lacking a common understanding of what constitutes a “rural” population, etc.) If students are not the study population, include why addressing these barriers will ultimately impact low participation and/or receipt of low-quality services among underserved children in the program;
3. strengths and resources that could be leveraged in the proposed project (e.g., state agency resources, local agency or school district resources, trusted community organizations that connect families with programs, active parent organizations, sponsors that serve children in multiple languages); and

4. the applicant team’s past experience working with the Child Nutrition Programs or other nutrition assistance efforts.

Note, for projects focused at the community level, applicants should describe the disparities, barriers, and resources in their community, while broader projects should describe overall trends at the appropriate level (e.g., national, regional, state, county, school district).

The information for the equity assessment can come from a variety of sources, including, but not limited to, the knowledge and experience of the applicant(s), including that gained incidentally from conducting other research/projects, discussions with eligible families, survey data, and/or program administrative data. Stakeholders who would be directly impacted by the proposed project can offer a wealth of knowledge from their lived experience, and where possible, should be engaged during the assessment. This could include families eligible for the Child Nutrition Programs, child care providers, school food service workers, program sponsors, state agency employees, etc. These stakeholders offer key perspectives on barriers and resources and whether any proposed research projects will have outcomes that are relevant, effective, and actionable for addressing disparities and increasing equitable access.

B. Community-Engaged Research

Question 5 in the Proposal

An equitable approach to research is key to ensure that trust is built between those who are conducting the research and those who are being studied. The most effective way to build trust is through authentic and sustained community engagement.

For the purposes of this RFP, “community” refers to the population that would be directly impacted by the results of the research project. For example, this could include, but is not limited to, underserved students, school food service workers, or state or local agency employees responsible for collecting data and/or making decisions based on data monitoring disparities.

Community-engaged research can build trust, establish long-term collaboration, and facilitate future research opportunities. Community-engaged research is proven to result in research that is more relevant to community needs, more likely to be put into practice, and more likely to be translated and disseminated within the community.

Community-engaged strategies about improving equitable access to the Child Nutrition Programs can range from soliciting community perspectives (e.g., advisory boards, focus groups) to involving community members in each step of the research process. See Appendix A for examples of community-engaged research. The figure below presents a spectrum of community-engaged strategies.

Figure 1: Continuum of Community-Engaged Research

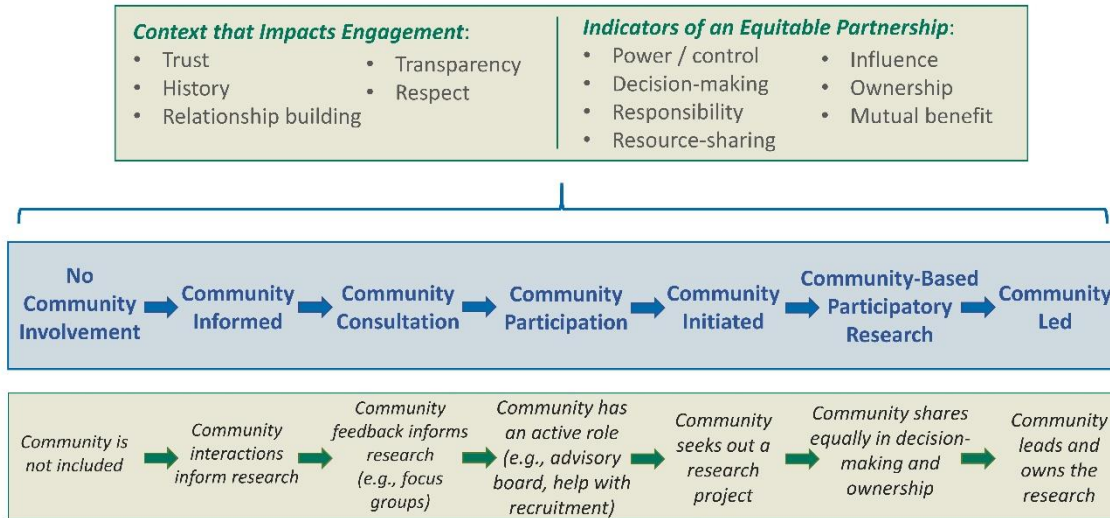


Figure adapted from Key, et al (2019). The Continuum of Community Engagement in Research: A Roadmap for Understanding and Assessing Progress. *Progress in Community Health Partnerships: Research, Education, and Action*. Vol 13, pp 427-434

For Question 5, applicants should describe where their project falls on the continuum of community-engaged research, and how they plan to engage stakeholders throughout various stages of their proposed projects. Applicants are encouraged to submit proposals that fall anywhere along the continuum of community-engaged research.

As part of the process of technical assistance during the first two months of the subgrant, the Project Team will advise subgrantees on the use of effective communication strategies when working with community, how to apply an equity lens to their research process and strategies, including minimizing biases, and how they can advance along the continuum of community-engaged research by the end of their two-year project. Subgrantees will be required to participate in these training activities.

Although subgrant projects will cover a range of issues and Child Nutrition Programs, this focus on community-engaged research and equity will be constant across projects. Data related to community engagement and equitable research practices will be gathered by the Project Team and be synthesized in an overarching evaluation of the Equitable Access in Child Nutrition Project. Subgrantees will be required to collaborate with the Project Team on collecting relevant data for this overarching evaluation (e.g., meeting minutes, interviews with the study population and subgrant project staff).

C. Priority Research Areas

Question 6 in the Proposal

After the equity assessment, the applicant should identify the priority research area and specific topic the project seeks to address. USDA-FNS and the FRAC Project Team have identified those research priorities that are timely, and if addressed, would make the most progress in

understanding of disparities in access to and/or delivery of the Child Nutrition Programs are and how to reduce them. These priority research topics were identified from a synthesis of published scientific literature and reports and findings from a series of listening sessions with stakeholders from CACFP, school meal programs, and out-of-school time programs. More details about this process can be found in Appendix A.

Priority research topics are organized into three areas, or categories. Under each category below, select research topics are offered as examples. These particular topics have been highlighted because the Project Team feels they have the highest potential for impact. In addition, other potential, fundable priority research topics of interest can be found in Appendix A. Research priorities that have not been identified by USDA FNS and FRAC, but are timely and high-impact, will also still be considered for funding.

a) Understanding disparities that exist in the Child Nutrition Programs: This area of research may include, but is not limited to, documenting trends in enrollment of children from different demographic groups, the quality of the foods they have access to, or the types of providers who are able to offer the programs. This category can also include the development of measurement tools if such data does not exist.

Examples of priority research topics on understanding disparities include:

- characterizing trends in disparities in access and/or service delivery for families/children by race, ethnicity, rurality, geography, gender, family income, etc., at the state, local or school/program level, including research on how to set up data collection mechanisms at the provider/school level, and/or data collection systems at the state agency level to gather demographic data to understand and monitor disparities;
- understanding the disparities in access and/or service delivery, including exploring differential access for providers (e.g., CACFP providers, schools) based on geographic location, demographic characteristics, including race/ethnicity and immigration status, licensing requirements, provider type, or state policy;
- collecting, developing, and/or testing strategies or tools for best practices to collect racial/ethnic data of program participants and providers; and
- developing a survey instrument to determine school meal quality and appeal and using the instrument to conduct research to identify variation between schools based on economic, racial, and ethnic demographics with the schools.

b) Understanding the barriers that lead to disparities: This may include, but is not limited to, barriers that disproportionately impact underserved communities when participants, potential participants, and/or program operators, schools, or sponsors access or attempt to access any Child Nutrition Program. It may also include situations or circumstances that may result in inequitable delivery of services within Child Nutrition Programs, especially for children and families from underserved communities.

Examples of priority research topics on barriers include:

- investigating how CACFP’s regulations and policies impact disparities, including a cost-benefit analysis;
- investigating and developing strategies to address real and perceived barriers to the use of the Community Eligibility Provision and Provisions 1 and 2 by School Food Authorities (SFAs) with different student demographics; and
- developing strategies to engage parents, staff, and children/students to provide feedback in a way that is transparent and accountable.

c) *Understanding the tools, resources, and interventions that reduce/eliminate disparities:* This may include, but is not limited to, strategies that can address barriers to operating programs, child participation, and/or equitable service delivery. This may also include generating evidence of efficacy of interventions to improve equitable access to Child Nutrition Programs and/or equitable service delivery within programs.

Examples of priority research topics on facilitators and interventions include:

- investigating and testing the use of the FNS online meal benefits application prototype to improve access to meal benefits (e.g., exploring user experiences of different types of applications, documenting state and SFA successes and barriers when implementing an online application);
- documenting the impact of universal meals on disparities and equitable access to school meals;
- exploring the impact of state CACFP agency interventions focused on underserved providers/communities, including targeted outreach and technical assistance, maximizing administrative flexibilities and options to reduce paperwork, and strengthening access to culturally appropriate resources;
- researching and identifying the characteristics of successful rural summer and afterschool congregate feeding sites; and
- collecting, developing and/or testing strategies to improve summer meals awareness among participants and caregivers for different racial/ethnic communities.

D. Subgrant Project Plan

Questions 7–13 in the Proposal

Research Aim(s)

Applicants should explain the aim(s) of their research project. For this proposal, one to two research aims are suggested.

Research aims should reflect the research question the project is trying to answer, yield actionable results, and be specific about the child nutrition program and disparity to be studied. We provide three examples, one from each priority research area:

- Area A example, disparities: Develop a protocol for collecting self-identified race and ethnicity data from caregivers of children in CACFP.

- Area B example, barriers: Understand how student perception of meal quality in school lunch impacts participation rates, and how this differs by circumstances related to urbanicity.
- Area C example, interventions: Determine best practices for gaining buy-in from administrators, teachers, custodians, and other staff for Breakfast in the Classroom, with a focus on those schools with a lower percentage of students who qualify for free or reduced-price meals.

Study Population and Setting

Applicants should describe the population they intend to study and/or the setting in which the study will take place.

For the purposes of this RFP, “population” may refer to the population being studied, the population to whom research findings can be generalized, and/or the population that would benefit from the findings of the research project.

Details should include:

- information about the study sample population (students, parents, staff, type of sponsor/provider/agency/school district, etc.), including demographic information (race, ethnicity, income level, etc.), geographic scope, and the size of the sample;
- demographic information about the children/students they serve, if providers or sponsors are being studied; and
- details about the setting in which the study will take place and information will be gathered (e.g., child care center, school, community, state agency), if relevant.

Note that study setting may not apply to certain study designs (e.g., analysis of quantitative data, such as large-scale surveys). In these cases, the source of the data should be identified.

Research Strategies and Measures

For this question, applicants should describe the outcomes that will be studied or the type of result. Examples from each priority area may include, but are not limited to:

- Area A example, disparities: the magnitude of a disparity, a validated measure to track a disparity, a tested procedure, or protocol for data collection/management;
- Area B example, barriers: themes from qualitative data (interviews or focus groups), cost-benefit analysis; and
- Area C example, interventions: change pre/post or between a control and study group in a measure of interest (e.g., participation, meal quality) after an intervention.

The strategies for generating those outcomes should be described in detail. This is the “how” of the research project. This should make up the bulk of the work plan activities, which should include timelines and who will be responsible for completing each step.

Strategies should include how data will be generated, gathered, organized, and if relevant, how this data will inform the development of any tools or resources as part of the project.

Potential data sources include, but are not limited to:

- surveys
- focus groups
- administrative databases
- Census data

Data Analysis

Applicants should describe the analytical approach. Examples include, but are not limited to:

- summarizing data from focus groups or surveys
- using statistical methods to characterize trends in disparities
- using statistical methods to analyze the impact of an intervention
- using focus groups to validate a measure of disparities

Dissemination of Findings

Describe how findings will be shared to the population(s) studied and to other stakeholders, including program staff or policymakers: Strategies may include community meetings, factsheets, briefs and reports, presentations, data visualizations, etc. Include when these activities will take place and who will be responsible for executing them. The dissemination of findings should be provided with cultural awareness and in a manner sensitive to the population being addressed.

Institutional Review Board

While the nature of this project does not require Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval to comply with federal IRB regulations, a project must abide by their unique institutional or other jurisdictional protocols related to IRB. The FRAC team will provide technical assistance to subgrantees as needed to complete the review and approval process according to those specific protocols.

Section 4: Technical Assistance and Project Responsibilities

The Project Team is committed to providing support throughout both the proposal process and the subgrant period. Technical assistance will be provided at two levels:

- The Project Team will provide assistance during the proposal period and provide general resources and training throughout the grant period.
- Throughout the project, a subset of FRAC's Project Team will be assigned to each subgrantee, covering technical expertise in the relevant child nutrition program and in research.

A. Responsibilities for the EA-CN Project Team and Subgrantees

This table summarizes the responsibilities of the EA-CN Project Team compared to the responsibilities of the subgrantees. It is meant to provide subgrantees with a full picture of their responsibilities over the course of the project and the range of technical assistance that will be provided. It is also meant to help subgrantees plan for required staff time and project management activities.

Technical Support	FRAC EA-CN Project Team	Subgrantee
Project Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Work with subgrantee to ensure that the research process has been considered through an equity lens. Identify potential modifications to the proposal’s data collection methods, analytical process, and dissemination strategies. Discuss and agree upon changes with subgrantee. ● Identify any additional protocols around data collection and analysis that are needed to safeguard confidentiality. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Work with FRAC EA-CN Project Team to finalize research strategy, including data collection methods, analytical process, dissemination strategies, and confidentiality protocols.
Preparation and Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provide support, guidance, and training to subgrantees to carry out research and data collection activities, including through bimonthly technical assistance webinars. ● Establish data reporting requirements and timing for all subgrantees. ● Organize and facilitate a virtual kick-off, midpoint, and closeout meeting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Attend bimonthly webinars and engage in other technical assistance and training opportunities. ● Attend a virtual kick-off, midpoint, and closeout meeting. One person from each project is required to attend.
Project Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provide expertise on Child Nutrition Programs that may impact project implementation. ● Develop a Community of Practice portal for subgrantees and continually update with program information, including a calendar of events, reporting documents and deadlines, and links to previous webinars, child nutrition resources, and other program information. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Dedicate sufficient staff time to project management and research activities following agreed upon timeline. ● Participate in the Community of Practice portal as desired to share project updates, document lessons learned, and describe challenges/ask questions for peer and Program Team input.

Data Collection, Evaluation, and Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide technical assistance to subgrantees on research analysis and data collection. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct analyses on any data that the team opted to collect for the research project and/or ask the EA-CN Project Team for analysis assistance.
Reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop quarterly and overall reports to submit to FNS. • Provide templates for subgrantee quarterly and final reports. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submit all required quarterly and final reports to FRAC.
Financial Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Define payment schedule based on milestones and dispersing payments. • Provide guidance on financial management, auditing, and pacing how funds are spent by the end of the grant period. • Conduct grant close out activities at the end of the grant period. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide information necessary to disperse funding. • Track expenses as part of quarterly reporting.

B. Resources and Trainings

In addition to technical assistance, other capacity-building opportunities will be provided to funded subgrantees during the grant period by the FRAC EA-CN Project Team, including:

Activity	Description
Kick-Off Orientation, Midpoint, and Closeout Meetings	To further orient subgrantees to the program and set the stage for effective peer learning among the community of practice, a whole-group kickoff meeting with subgrantees will occur within 30 days after awards are announced. Midpoint and closeout meetings will also be scheduled during the project.
Peer Learning Community of Practice	An online portal will be accessible only to subgrantees and include forums where subgrantees can regularly share project updates, document lessons learned, and describe challenges or ask questions for peer and Project Team input.
Webinars	Regular training will be held on topics applicable across subgrantee projects. Subgrantees will be invited to participate and share their own experiences. These will be recorded and available through the Community of Practice.

Section 5: Additional Requirements

A. Monitoring and Reporting

Subgrant recipients must submit quarterly reports to reflect efforts to date on their projects. These interim updates will include a brief narrative report reflecting on the previous quarter's activities. Quarterly financial reports will also be required for disbursement of subgrant funding. Subgrant recipients must also submit a final report on their project. The final report must include a narrative of the research project, key findings, evaluation results (if applicable), description of any materials or resources developed, key challenges and risks faced and how they were overcome and mitigation efforts, successes, lessons learned, and recommendations for ensuring equitable access to Child Nutrition Programs.

Subgrantees will also submit any materials (e.g., educational, promotional, interview guides, data codebooks) developed as a part of this project with their final reports.

The EA-CN Project Team will provide a specific format and template for all reports. Subgrantees must consent to the sharing of these reports with FNS.

B. Acknowledgments of Funding Source

As outlined in 2CFR 415.2, subgrantees should include acknowledgment of USDA FNS support on any publications written or published with grant support, and if feasible, on any publication reporting the results of, or describing, a grant-supported activity. Recipients shall include acknowledgment of USDA FNS support on any audiovisual that is produced with grant support and has a direct production cost of over \$5,000.

When acknowledging USDA FNS support, use the following language: "This project has been funded at least in part with Federal funds from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The contents of this publication do not necessarily reflect the view or policies of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government." Subgrantees should follow the USDA Visual Standards Guide when using the USDA logo.

Guidelines for written and visual acknowledgment of the Project Team will be provided at the time of the award.

C. Ensuring Confidentiality of Participants

All applicants must document procedures used to maintain the quality and integrity of all data, particularly in protecting data privacy if data is shared between partners. No personally identifiable information should be saved to public websites, online document files (e.g., Google files), or shared with the Project Team.

The FRAC EA-CN Project Team will provide technical assistance to develop:

- protocols for storing and using confidential data
- data-sharing agreements or protocols between organizations/agencies that wish to share confidential data to facilitate outreach efforts

D. Use of Grant Funds

Budgets may include expenses related to personnel, contractors, equipment and supplies, food, meeting expenses, travel, and trainings. All funding requests should be in whole dollars.

Examples of allowable program expenses include, but are not limited to:

- salary (personnel, contractors) and fringe benefits
- incentives for participation of community partners and/or Child Nutrition Program sponsors and operators
- software
- communication tool development (e.g., tools to track social media metrics)

Budgets may not include:

- reimbursement for pre-award costs
- lobbying or advocacy:
 - Publicity or propaganda purposes, for the preparation, distribution, or use of any material designed to support or defeat the enactment of legislation, appropriations, regulation, administrative action, or Executive Order before any legislative body.
 - The salary or expenses of any grant or contract recipient, or an agent acting for such recipient, related to any activity designed to influence the enactment of the legislation, appropriations, regulation, administrative action, or Executive Order proposed or pending before any legislative body.
 - Supporting events where elected officials will be present.

The budget will be scored on whether items are appropriate for the description of the proposed subgrant project, meaning that applicants should not request funds for items that are beyond the scope of the subgrant, but should also allocate sufficient staff time and funds for the proposed work.

If an applicant has established a Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA) with a cognizant federal agency, indirect costs may be budgeted in accordance with the applicant's NICRA. If an applicant does not have a federally approved NICRA, it may elect to use the *de minimis* rate of 10 percent over Modified Total Direct Costs as defined in 2 C.F.R. Part 200. A detailed explanation of how to calculate indirect costs for your budget request is included in the budget template.

The FRAC EA-CN team will work with subgrantees to ensure that funding is spent down over the course of their subgrants. Any funds that the subgrantee does not spend by the end of the approved project period shall be returned to FRAC.

Section 6: Submitting a Proposal

A. Proposal Checklist

At least four weeks prior to submission, you should:

- Register the applicant in the System for Award Management (SAM) and obtain a Unique Entity Identifier number.
- Create an account through the online submission portal for the EA-CN Project at https://webportalapp.com/sp/login/frac_eacn.
- Submit a [Letter of Intent](#) to apply (*highly encouraged*, but not required to submit a full proposal).
- Attend the informational webinar hosted by the EA-CN Project Team (*highly encouraged*, but not required to submit a full proposal). Webinar details can be found in the *Technical Assistance During the Proposal Process* section below.

When submitting your proposal, ensure you have submitted the following:

- answers to all the proposal questions (available through the proposal portal at https://webportalapp.com/sp/login/frac_eacn; proposal questions also provided in RFP Appendix)
- workplan (template provided in the application portal)
- budget (template provided in the application portal)
- budget narrative (template provided in the application portal)
- Financial Management Systems Questionnaire
- two-page maximum resume or biosketch for each key project staff member (a maximum of five)
- letters of support from project partners (required if multiple partners are applying as part of a team) and other organizations/individuals demonstrating the applicant's commitment to equitable access and collaboration with communities (not required)
- NICRA from a federal agency, if applicable
- applicant's most recent audited financial statements (If not available, please explain the reason.)
- applicant's most recent IRS Form 990, if applicable (This is required for nonprofit organizations but is not applicable to public agencies.)
- Unique Entity Identifier number from SAM.gov

B. Letter of Intent (optional but highly encouraged)

EA-CN subgrant applicants are *highly encouraged*, but not required, to submit a nonbinding Letter of Intent to Submit a Proposal (LOI) by 11:59 p.m. ET on September 9, 2023. This document will *not* be considered in the review process but provides useful information to the Project Team in preparing for providing technical assistance to applicants as well as ensuring that the RFP is being adequately disseminated through diverse channels.

The Project Team will not provide feedback on LOIs beyond confirmation of receipt of the LOI. EA-CN applicants who do not submit a LOI by the specified deadline may still submit a proposal by the due date of October 3, 2023.

The Letter of Intent is a brief survey, which can be [accessed here](#).

C. How to Submit a Full Proposal

To submit a proposal, you must:

1. Register in SAM.gov and obtain a UEI number.

- SAM.gov combines federal procurement systems and the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance into one system. For additional information regarding SAM.gov, see the following link: <https://www.sam.gov/SAM>.
- All applicants must have a current, active registration on SAM.gov at the time of proposal submission and throughout the duration of a Federal Award in accordance with two CFR Part 25. They must also have a UEI number, which is obtained during the SAM.gov registration process. Existing entities can log on to SAM.gov to [find their UEI number](#), check whether their registration is active, and renew if their registration has expired. It may take 3–5 business days to register in SAM.gov; however, in some instances the SAM process to complete the migration of permissions and/or the renewal of the entity record will require 5–7 days or more. For this reason, we strongly encourage applicants to begin this process **at least four weeks** before the proposal submission due date.

2. Register and apply through the FRAC application portal:

- Applicants must submit the full proposal via the FRAC online portal at https://webportalapp.com/sp/login/frac_eacn. If you have not already done so, you will be required to register before you begin the proposal process. All applicants should log in to the system and familiarize themselves with online proposal requirements.

Proposals must be submitted by 11:59 p.m. ET on Tuesday, October 3, 2023. Late submissions will *not* be reviewed. Please email EACN@frac.org with any questions, including technical difficulties with the submission.

D. Selection Criteria

Project Team staff and select external reviewers will conduct a review of all proposals that have not been disqualified. Disqualifications may occur due to one of two reasons: (1) failure to prove eligible entity status or (2) failure to submit by the closing deadline.

All proposals cleared for review will be reviewed using the same criteria regardless of project focus. Criteria are as follows:

Total Possible Point Value	Section	Scoring Criteria
5 Points	Section 1: Proposal Summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary Contact • Budget Manager Contact • Summary of Project
15 points	Section 2: Project Design <i>Project and Equity Assessment</i> (Q1-4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearly defines the priority population and the disparities they face • Clearly identifies the barriers that disproportionately affect access for the population being studied • Clearly identifies which barriers are a priority to address and why • Clearly identifies the strengths and resources that have increased access to the Child Nutrition Programs that could be leveraged in the proposed project • Demonstrates experience working with the Child Nutrition Programs or other nutrition assistance efforts
15 points	Section 2: Project Design <i>Community- Engaged Research</i> (Q5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates where their project falls on the continuum of community-engaged research, if applicable • Demonstrates how they plan to engage their study population throughout various stages of their proposed projects, if applicable
10 points	Section 2: Project Design <i>Priority Research Areas</i> (Q6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearly identifies a priority research area that, if addressed, would lead to a better understanding of disparities to access in the Child Nutrition Programs, and how to address them
45 points	Section 3: Subgrant Project Plan	<p>Research Aim or Project Goal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearly articulates the aim of their research project • Clearly articulates the research question that the applicant is trying to answer

Total Possible Point Value	Section	Scoring Criteria
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearly specifies which child nutrition program is being studied, and the disparity being addressed <p>Study Population and Setting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearly describes the population they intend to study and the setting in which the study will take place, including demographic information and details about the setting in which the study will take place and information gathered <p>Research Strategies and Measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearly describes the outcomes that will be studied and describe the strategies for generating the outcomes • Articulates a clear and feasible plan of how the data will be generated, gathered, organized, and if relevant, how this data will inform the development of any tools or resources as part of the project <p>Data Analysis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Articulates a clear and feasible approach to analyzing outcome data, such as summarizing data from focus groups or surveys or using statistical methods to characterize trends in disparities or the impact of an intervention <p>Dissemination of Findings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Articulates a clear and feasible plan for sharing the findings with the population(s) studied and to other stakeholders, including program staff or policymakers
10 points	Section 4: Budget and Budget Narrative (Q12-15)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Demonstrates costs that are reasonable, necessary, and allocable to carry out the project’s goals and objectives ▪ Includes a line-item description for every allowable cost and shows how it supports the research project goals ▪ Compensates community partners appropriately, where applicable

Total Possible Point Value	Section	Scoring Criteria
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provides complete budget calculations and documentation to show clearly how the budget components were developed and costs estimated ▪ Clearly identifies a bona fide need to justify the cost for any subcontractor or consultant expenses, if applicable

E. Selection Process

Following an initial screening process for confirmation of the applicant organization’s eligibility (see “disqualifications” above), members of the Project Team and select external experts will review and determine the technical merits of each proposal. Reviewers will independently score each proposal based on the criteria outlined in the above selection criteria. Reviewer scores will be averaged and discussed among the reviewing team. This process will generate a list of fundable, competitive proposals for consideration.

FNS will review the recommendations and approve final subgrantee award decisions. FNS reserves the right to accept the review panel’s recommendations or to select a proposal for funding out of order to meet agency priorities, program balance, geographical representation, project diversity, and variety of applicant organizations.

Selection for funding and approval by FNS does not constitute a final subaward decision. Rather, it indicates selection of an intended subrecipient, subject to execution of a final subaward agreement in a form reasonably required by FRAC. If the parties cannot agree to subaward agreement terms, no subaward will be executed.

F. Technical Assistance During the Proposal Process

The EA-CN Project Team will hold an optional webinar to provide additional details about this subgrant opportunity. The webinar will include time for potential applicants to ask questions, and the webinar will be recorded and posted to FRAC’s YouTube webpage and the EA-CN website.

[September 5, 2023, 4 p.m. Eastern Time: Overview of the EA-CN Subgrant RFP Webinar Registration](#)

Any questions related to the proposal process can also be directed to the EA-CN Project Manager at EACN@frac.org.

To ensure that all technical assistance provided to applicants is uniformly available to all, the questions received will be collected, summarized, and answered in a regularly updated FAQ list on the [EA-CN webpage](#).

Section 7: Project Direction

Funding for this opportunity is provided by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service. Direction and technical support for this opportunity are provided by FRAC. Please direct all inquiries to:

Clarissa Hayes
EA-CN Project Manager
Food Research & Action Center
Website: <http://www.frac.org/equitableaccesscn>
Email: EACN@frac.org

Project Team members at the Food Research & Action Center are:

- EA-CN Project Co-Principal Investigator: Crystal FitzSimons, MSW, Director of School and Out-of-School Time Programs
- EA-CN Project Co-Principal Investigator: Geraldine Henchy, MPH, RD, Director of Nutrition Policy and Early Childhood Programs
- EA-CN Research Lead: Allison Lacko, PhD, Research Scientist
- EA-CN Subgrant Lead: Eli Yussuf, MPA, Grants Manager

Please visit the EA-CN website at <http://www.frac.org/equitableaccesscn> for background information and resources, frequently asked questions related to this Request for Proposals, and general updates on the project.

Section 8: Appendices

- Appendix A: Priority Research Areas
- Appendix B: Examples of Community-Engaged Research on the Child Nutrition Programs
- Appendix C: Application Questions

APPENDIX A: Priority Research Areas

Introduction

The purpose of this Request for Proposals (RFP) is to conduct research in three different priority areas: to better understand disparities in access to the Child Nutrition Programs, the barriers that cause these disparities, and the tools and interventions that can overcome them.

This brief summarizes areas where further research is needed. These priority research topics were identified through:

1. expert input from program staff at the U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service (USDA FNS);
2. a review of the scientific literature published between 2008 and 2022; and
3. listening sessions with stakeholders from state agencies, advocates, sponsors, and providers conducted in April 2023, which included separate sessions for the early childhood Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) (46 participants, including seven Spanish language participants), School Breakfast Program and National School Lunch Program (27 participants), and the Summer and Afterschool Nutrition Programs, which include the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), the Seamless Summer Option, National School Lunch Program Afterschool Snack Service, and the CACFP At-Risk Afterschool Meals Program (26 participants).

Proposed subgrantee projects are highly recommended to address one of these research topics, which are organized in order under each priority area by child nutrition program. However, this list is not exhaustive, and applicants are free to propose a different research project not included here that is timely and policy relevant. Importantly, all proposed projects should have an explicit focus on equity.

Early Childhood CACFP

Summary Findings From Listening Sessions

Many barriers exist to operating CACFP in under-resourced areas, particularly for small, at-home providers and child care centers. Thousands of child care programs across the nation do not participate in CACFP due to systemic barriers. Many child care programs do not participate in CACFP because (1) the benefits are inadequate, (2) the program is wrought with burdensome paperwork, and (3) the potential reimbursement losses and/or penalties are too detrimental to child care programs that operate on razor-thin margins. The brunt of these barriers disproportionately impacts both communities of color and providers with fewer resources, contributing to gross inequities in child care quality and nutrition.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, all child care home providers received the higher Tier 1 funding reimbursement rates. Providers, sponsors, and state agencies expect the return to a two-tier system will result in a drop off in participation, creating long-term barriers and disparities for family child care providers. In addition, the temporary 10 cent reimbursement rate increase for all CACFP meals and snacks ended on June 30, 2023. Phasing out of this reimbursement increase and other pandemic flexibilities, especially virtual monitoring, will also place disproportionate barriers on smaller providers, rural providers, and providers best served in a language other than English. The lack of targeted CACFP outreach to nonparticipating child care centers is a barrier to participation in some areas. Overburdensome paperwork and standard meal requirements with limited flexibility make it harder to modify or create inclusive reimbursable CACFP meals that comply with the provider's/children's cultural and religious foodways.

Addressing equity in CACFP can be achieved by identifying and removing systemic barriers that often give advantages to better-resourced programs. Flexibilities and increased reimbursement rates during the pandemic are examples of effective interventions for increasing provider participation. Key interventions to increase equitable access to nutritious food for children include administrative flexibility; options to maximize technology and other means to reduce the CACFP paperwork burden; targeted outreach; technical assistance and mentoring for providers; and making CACFP providers aware of existing resources to provide, and be reimbursed for, healthy, culturally-appropriate meals and snacks.

Priority Research Areas From Literature Review and Listening Sessions

A) Understanding disparities that exist in CACFP:

- Exploring differential access to CACFP for providers and/or sponsors (e.g., based on geographic location, demographic characteristics, including race/ethnicity and immigration status, licensing requirements, provider type, other state policy)
- Exploring families'/children's differential access to child care programs operating CACFP (e.g., based on geographic location, other demographic characteristics, administrative burdens)
- Collecting, developing, and/or testing strategies or tools for best practices to collect racial/ethnic data of providers and/or program participants
- Examining equity in labor and workforce practices among CACFP program operators (e.g., in child care centers, child care homes)

B) Understanding the barriers that lead to disparities:

- Investigating how CACFP's regulations and policies impact disparities, including a cost-benefit analysis. CACFP regulations and policies of interest include:
 - state agency and sponsoring organization monitoring policy and regulation
 - child care home tiered reimbursement rates
 - monthly versus yearly eligibility determination for proprietary child care centers
 - serious deficiency processes
- Understanding barriers to participation and retention for different types of CACFP providers (e.g., child care homes, family friend and neighbor care, adult care centers, unaffiliated child care centers) and families in their care, and how barriers are inequitably distributed

C) Understanding the tools, resources, and interventions that reduce/eliminate disparities:

- Exploring the impact of state CACFP agency interventions focused on underserved providers, including targeted outreach and technical assistance, maximizing administrative flexibilities and options to reduce paperwork, and strengthening access to culturally appropriate resources
- Piloting interventions to reduce paperwork and administrative burden, including modernizing applications, direct certification, electronic data collection/reporting, and virtual oversight monitoring visits by state agencies and sponsoring organizations
- Exploring the impact of temporary COVID-19 pandemic waivers, flexibilities, and enhancements on disparities and equitable access to CACFP, including:
 - waivers of area eligibility for family child care homes to receive Tier 1 reimbursement rates
 - increased meal reimbursement rates for school year 2022–2023 by 10 cents for each meal served through CACFP
 - onsite monitoring requirement waivers for state agencies and sponsors of CACFP

- expanded emergency shelter reimbursements for meals served to children and young adults under 25 years old through CACFP (previously limited through age 18)
- Exploring mechanisms for stakeholders to regularly provide feedback into administration of CACFP at the child care site, CACFP sponsor, and/or state agency level
- Identifying best ways to promote equitable language access, specifically for refugees and other minority groups
- Identifying cost-effective strategies to accommodate special diets (e.g., for children with a disability, allergy, or health condition)
- Determining strategies to ensure equitable access to CACFP programs during emergency situations

School Meals: School Breakfast and School Lunch

Summary Findings From Listening Sessions

While all school meal programs face challenges balancing compliance with nutrition standards, sourcing a variety of healthy and sustainable foods, recruiting sufficient and specialized staff, and adjusting to the dramatic inflation in the price of food that has occurred over the past few years, certain school districts are more likely to face unique barriers that lead to disparities in student access to meals. School districts with students from many different ethnicities find it difficult to engage parents in their preferred languages, dispel misconceptions, and provide culturally appropriate foods. These schools are often under-resourced, which can exacerbate inequities. Rural districts are not able to leverage economies of scale to negotiate lower prices with food distributors or vendors, and often have limited food service staff who must take on several roles within their schools.

It is also well documented that stigma is a barrier to participation, particularly for older students. This does not only apply to those students who are enrolled in free and reduced-price meals. Those students whose families do not qualify but are struggling to make ends meet will decline to participate in school meals to avoid the stigma of school meal debt and lunch shaming. These barriers can be the most salient in districts that are higher income, where the share of students qualifying for free and reduced-price meals are low, and there is often less willingness from school staff to support efforts like Breakfast in the Classroom (BIC).

Many interventions are known to work against these barriers, including Universal School Meals or participation in the Community Eligibility Provision, (for eligible schools and districts). Codifying school wellness policies, investment in scratch cooking at schools or centralized kitchens, culinary training for cooks, and removing the reduced-price copay are other examples of measures that improve access to high-quality school meals for all students.

Priority Research Areas From Literature Review and Listening Sessions

A) Understanding disparities that exist in school meals:

- Characterizing trends in disparities in access to school meals across the state and at the state level, including research on how to set up data collection mechanisms at the school level and/or data collection systems at the agency level to gather demographic data to understand and monitor disparities, in a way that minimizes burden on families, school staff, or agency staff
- Understanding disparities in access to high quality school meals, especially among high school students, and the extent of compensating with unhealthy snacks during and after school
- Developing a survey instrument to determine and measure school meal quality, whether such a measure would vary across different populations, and using the instrument to conduct research to

identify variation between schools based on economic, racial, and ethnic demographics with the schools

- Characterizing disparity in participation among eligible students and understanding the role of stigma
- Investigating differential access to farm to school programs (i.e., nutrition, agricultural, and food education, and provision of local foods in the cafeteria) and the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program across schools and school food authorities (SFAs)
- Identifying measures of equitable access to program benefits, including indicators that could be collected by FNS in national and state surveys.

B) Understanding the barriers that lead to disparities:

- Investigating and developing strategies to address real and perceived barriers to use of the Community Eligibility Provision and Provisions 1 and 2 by SFAs
- Exploring school-level barriers to access for students from their perspective (e.g., stigma, meal period length, meal timing, foods offered)
- Understanding how school meal nutrition standards impact the cost-effectiveness of meals, especially in rural areas
- Understanding how school meal debt impacts a school's relationship and engagement with families
- Developing strategies to routinely engage staff, parents, and students to elucidate barriers to equitable school meals and provide feedback about progress on addressing them, in a way that minimizes burden
- Understanding and measuring the appeal and cultural appropriateness of meals and the impact on access

C) Understanding the tools, resources, and interventions that reduce/eliminate disparities:

- Determining strategies to ensure equitable access to school breakfast and school lunch during emergency situations
- Determining strategies to ensure equitable access to school breakfast and school lunch in rural areas
- Investigating and testing the use of online state meal applications to improve access to meal benefits (e.g., exploring user experiences of different types of applications, documenting state and SFA successes and barriers when implementing an online application)
- Exploring the success of directly certifying kids/streamlining applications through Medicaid and other mechanisms
- Documenting the role of school meal nutrition standards in ensuring equitable access to healthy meals
- Exploring mechanisms for stakeholders to regularly provide feedback into administration of school breakfast and school lunch at the school/site, SFA/sponsor and/or state level
- Exploring mechanisms to specifically involve students from diverse backgrounds in providing feedback on school meals and improving the attitudes of their peers towards school meals and prioritizing youth-led solutions
- Documenting the impact of universal meals on disparities and equitable access to school meals, including:
 - the financial health of a school meals program
 - stigma and unpaid school meal fee policies

- Developing training for food service staff in rural districts, who often have several roles to manage, to have a foundational understanding of the federal nutrition requirements and of strategies to increase participation in school meals
- Developing leadership training for food service directors to create buy-in across school staff (e.g., food service workers, teachers, janitors) for initiatives to increase equitable access to the school nutrition programs, such as Breakfast in the Classroom
- Developing strategies to implement the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program in areas where students are less likely to have access to fresh fruits and vegetables at home
- Investigating the cost of creating scratch cooking infrastructure at a school or at a centralized school kitchen and gathering successful models and case studies
- Investigating the strategies that schools can use in rural areas to form co-ops to enhance purchasing power and gathering successful models and case studies
- Testing strategies to close the gap between the nutrition of the food offered at schools and what children serve themselves/consume off their trays, especially among those children who consume different cultural foods at home

Summer and Afterschool Nutrition Programs¹

Summary Findings From Listening Sessions

Participation in and access to the Summer and Afterschool Nutrition Programs is historically lower than that of school meals. Some barriers to operating the Summer or Afterschool Nutrition Programs include managing the duplicative paperwork required for stakeholders to participate. These administrative processes are especially difficult for rural sites with less staff. Disparities also exist across programs by socioeconomic status, based on sites being able to afford equipment, facility cost, and proper staffing. Insufficient reimbursement rates result in disparities because of differential access for sponsors to seek additional funding to support the program or cover any costs above the federal reimbursement.

The difference in administrative requirements across the summer and afterschool nutrition programs also leads to barriers for sponsors with fewer resources. Sponsors often can't operate year-round, which results in confusion for families because they do not have consistent access to sites. The need to travel to a site can also be a barrier to access for families. Receiving meals that are not culturally appealing can create disappointment and lead to racial/ethnic disparities in participation.

Identified interventions for increasing equitable access to the out-of-school time programs include increasing the reimbursement for meals served, streamlining and coordinating programs across agencies (i.e., CACFP and SFSP agencies), identifying local vendors, and transforming the sites to be more participant centered.

Priority Research Areas From Literature Review and Listening Sessions

- A) *Understanding disparities that exist in Summer Nutrition Programs and Afterschool Nutrition Programs:***
- Analyzing the location of sites in comparison to racial/ethnic data of the community surrounding the site

¹ The Summer Nutrition Programs include the Summer Food Service Program and Seamless Summer Option. The Afterschool Nutrition Programs include the NSLP Afterschool Snack Service and the CACFP At-Risk Afterschool Meals Program.

- Collecting, developing and/or testing strategies for best practices to collect racial/ethnic data on program participants
- Researching strategies to forecast shifts in site eligibility
- Researching whether schools and non-school sponsors with fewer resources are limited in their abilities to provide out-of-school time meal programs

B) Understanding the barriers that lead to disparities:

- Exploring program operators' (i.e., sponsors, sites) decisions to terminate their participation
- Exploring families' perceptions of the programs and preferred meal patterns
- Exploring emergency food assistance programs' (e.g., food banks) decisions not to participate in the summer and afterschool nutrition programs

C) Understanding the tools, resources, and interventions that reduce/eliminate disparities:

- Collecting, developing, and/or testing strategies to improve awareness of summer meals among potential participants and caregivers, including effective outreach
- Exploring mechanisms for stakeholders to regularly provide feedback into administration of FNS summer and afterschool nutrition programs at the school/site, SFA/sponsor, and/or state level
- Exploring the impact of temporary COVID-19 pandemic waivers, flexibilities, and enhancements on disparities and equitable access to the Summer Nutrition Programs and Afterschool Nutrition Programs, including:
 - waiver of area eligibility requirement for SFSP and CACFP
 - waiver of congregate site requirement for SFSP and CACFP
 - waiver of onsite monitoring requirement waivers for state agencies and sponsors
- Researching and identify the characteristics of successful rural summer and afterschool congregate meal sites
- Researching best practices for grant writing, funding strategies, and funds allocations for summer and afterschool program operators
- Exploring best practice procurement policies for meals that are culturally appropriate
- Researching the success of state summer meal legislative mandates and the effects on participation
- Exploring opportunities for consolidated paperwork and reducing administrative burden
- Determining strategies to ensure equitable access to out of school time programs during emergency situations

APPENDIX B: Examples of Community-Engaged Research on the Child Nutrition Programs

Some examples include: improving farm to school programs^[3] and healthy menu options^[4] in early childcare education in Native communities; understanding the role of fathers in WIC;^[5] exploring barriers and facilitators to school meal distribution during COVID-19 from the perspective of families and school administrators;^{[6],[7]} understanding the perceived limitations and opportunities for school meals to improve nutrition equity from youth and school administrators;^[8] and involving students, parents, and school nutrition staff in integrating more culturally appropriate foods into school meals.^{[9],[10]}

^[1] CDC, A. (2011). Principles of community engagement, Second Edition.

^[2] Luger, T. M., Hamilton, A. B., & True, G. (2020). Measuring community-engaged research contexts, processes, and outcomes: a mapping review. *The Milbank Quarterly*, 98(2), 493-553.

^[3] Taniguchi, T., Haslam, A., Sun, W., Sisk, M., Hayman, J., & Jernigan, V. B. B. (2022). Impact of a Farm-to-School Nutrition and Gardening Intervention for Native American Families from the FRESH Study: A Randomized Wait-List Controlled Trial. *Nutrients*, 14(13), 2601.

^[4] Sisson, S. B., Sleet, K., Rickman, R., Love, C., Williams, M., & Jernigan, V. B. B. (2019). The development of child and adult care food program best-practice menu and training for Native American head start programs: The FRESH study. *Preventive medicine reports*, 14, 100880.

^[5] Dychtwald, D. K., Kaimal, G., Kilby, L. M., Klobodu, C., & Milliron, B. J. (2021). “When a Father feels Excluded”: A Qualitative Study Exploring the Role of Fathers in the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Supplemental Nutrition Program. *International journal of qualitative studies on health and well-being*, 16(1), 1932026.

^[6] McLoughlin, G.M., McCarthy, J.A., McGuirt, J.T., Singleton, C.R., Dunn, C.G. and Gadhoke, P. (2020). Addressing food insecurity through a health equity lens: A case study of large urban school districts during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Urban Health*, 97(6), pp.759-775.

^[7] Jowell, A. H., Bruce, J. S., Escobar, G. V., Ordonez, V. M., Hecht, C. A., & Patel, A. I. (2021). Mitigating childhood food insecurity during COVID-19: A qualitative study of how school districts in California’s San Joaquin Valley responded to growing needs. *Public health nutrition*, 1-11.

^[8] Asada, Y., Hughes, A., & Chriqui, J. (2017). Insights on the intersection of health equity and school nutrition policy implementation: an exploratory qualitative secondary analysis. *Health Education & Behavior*, 44(5), 685-695.

^[9] Mutiga-Waititu, M. (2021). *Osseo Health and Wellness Project: A Community-Driven Model to Address Inequities in Students’ Nutrition, Health and Wellness in a Culturally Diverse School District* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Minnesota).

^[10] Chatterjee, A., Daftary, G., Campbell, M., Gatison, L., Day, L., Ramsey, K., Goldman, R. & Gillman, M.W. (2016). “Can’t we just have some Sazón?” student, family, and staff perspectives on a new school food program at a Boston high school. *Journal of School Health*, 86(4), pp.273-280.

APPENDIX C: Application Questions

Section 1: Profile Information

Organization Information

- Applicant Organization Name
- Mailing Address
- Phone Number
- Website
- Employer Identification Number (EIN)
- Unique Entity ID from SAM.gov

Primary Contact Information (for questions about the proposal)

- Name
- Title
- Email
- Phone Number

Applicant Budget Manager Information

- Name
- Title
- Email
- Phone Number

Applicant Authorized Signatory (authorized to sign grant agreements)

- Title
- Email
- Phone Number

Applicant CEO/Executive Director

- Name
- Title
- Email
- Phone Number

Applicant Type (check all that apply):

- Public or Private Academic Organizations
- Not-for-Profit Organizations
- State or Local Government Organizations

Brief Description of Agency/Organization

(300 word limit)

Amount: \$_____ (must be numeric whole number no less than \$100,000 and no more than \$250,000)

Project Priority Area (check all that apply)

- Area A: Understanding disparities that exist in the Child Nutrition Programs
- Area B: Understanding the barriers that lead to disparities

- Area C: Understanding the tools, resources, and interventions that reduce/eliminate disparities

Child Nutrition Program Focus (select all that apply)

- National School Lunch Program
- School Breakfast Program
- Summer Food Service Program
- Seamless Summer Option
- Pandemic EBT/Summer EBT
- CACFP: Afterschool Meal Program
- CACFP: Centers or Daycare Homes
- Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program
- Other

Summary: Briefly describe the proposed project, including how it will increase the understanding of barriers to equity in the Child Nutrition Programs, as well as innovative interventions to improve equitable access. *(400 word limit)*

Section 2: Project Design

Project and Equity Assessment

1. Identify the group experiencing disparities in the Child Nutrition Programs (e.g., disparities in access for or services received by children, disparities in working conditions for staff, or disparities in the quality of the support services from state agencies or sponsors offered to schools or program operators). *(300 word limit)*
2. Identify and explain the barriers that disproportionately affect access for the group being studied, the barriers that are a priority to address, and why. *(300 word limit)*
3. Explain how the proposed project will leverage community assets, including any organizational and/or community strengths and resources that have increased access to the Child Nutrition Programs. *(300 word limit)*
4. Describe the applicant’s experience working with the child nutrition program(s) or nutrition assistance benefits, and how this relates to the group experiencing disparities and any existing relationships/partnerships. *(300 word limit)*

Community-Engaged Research

5. Describe how the project will center an equitable approach to research, including:
 - Where the project falls on the continuum of community-engaged research.
 - How the project plans to engage relevant stakeholders who would be impacted by study findings throughout the various stages of their proposed projects.

(500 word limit)

Priority Research Areas

6. Describe the priority research topic(s) this project seeks to address, including:
- What is(are) the priority research area and topic(s)?
 - How will addressing this priority area impact program or policy changes relevant to the Child Nutrition Programs?
 - Why is this project timely? Why is it needed now?

(500 word limit)

Section 3: Subgrant Project Plan

Research Aim(s)

7. Describe the research aim of the project. Research aims should reflect the research question the project is trying to answer, yield actionable results, and be specific about the child nutrition program and disparity to be studied. *(300 word limit)*

Study Population and Setting

8. Describe the population that the project intends to study and/or the setting in which the study will take place, including:
- Demographic information (race, ethnicity, income level, geography, or if relevant, the type of sponsor, agency, or school district) about the population being studied
 - The study sample size
 - Details about the setting in which the study will take place and information will be gathered, or about where the data will be sourced from

(300 word limit)

Research Strategies and Measures

9. Describe the research strategies and measures that will be used throughout this project, including:
- What outcomes will be studied?
 - How will the project data be generated, gathered, and organized? By whom?

(400 word limit)

10. How will data collected during the project be used to monitor progress, shared with project partners, and if needed, change the project's approach? If applicable, what protocols will be used to maintain data privacy? *(400 word limit)*

Data Analysis

11. Describe the project's approach to analyzing outcome data. This may include, but is not limited to:
- Changes in data collected over time (qualitative data, such as opinions expressed through interviews, or quantitative data, such as participation by demographic group)
 - Formal statistical testing

(300 word limit)

Dissemination of Findings

12. What tools or resources will be developed as a result of this project? *(300 word limit)*

13. Describe your dissemination plan, including:

- How will findings be shared with the population(s) studied?
- How will the findings be shared with other stakeholders, including program staff or policymakers?
- What strategies will you use to share the findings?
- When will these activities take place, and who will be responsible for executing them?

(400 word limit)

Section 4: Management Plan

Staffing Needs

14. List the key staff/positions that will be involved in the project. For each, include:

- Title, organization, and core responsibilities
- Full-time equivalent (FTE) commitment planned
- Relevant expertise and experience (for current employees or qualifications for employees to be hired)
- How personnel will be managed throughout the project

15. My organization/agency(s) will hire additional staff to assist with this project.

- Yes
- No

16. Detail any training that will be required for key project staff.

(300 word limit)

Contracting

17. Does your project involve any subcontracting to other organizations?

- Yes
- No

If yes, please describe the subcontracting process and timelines that you would need to complete to obtain subcontracts and launch your subgrant. *(300 word limit)*