

Active for Life

Improving physical activity levels in adults age 50 and older

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Active for Life is a four-year initiative of The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation® that seeks to increase the number of American adults age 50 and older who engage in regular physical activity (30 minutes a day on most days.) *Active for Life* will pursue a multi-pronged strategy that includes the replication and expansion of programs already developed that have demonstrated efficacy in increasing physical activity levels among mid-life and older adults.

Under this project, \$8.7 million has been set aside for as many as eight grants at up to \$1.1 million each, for a four-year period, to test the effectiveness of promising interventions to promote physical activity in the general population of mid-life and older persons at health risk because of their sedentary lifestyles.

The overarching goal of the National Program Office is to learn how to deliver research-based physical activity programs to large numbers of mid-life and older adults and to sustain such programs through existing community institutions including, but not limited to, community or senior centers, recreation centers, public health departments, housing authorities, religious institutions.

Background

Physical inactivity is one of the greatest modifiable threats to health and functional independence in later life. Yet many mid-life and older adults are unaware of the benefits of physical activity and remain sedentary. Under the direction of Marcia G. Ory, Ph.D., MPH, a National Program Office (NPO) at Texas A&M University System' Health Science Center, School of Rural Public Health in College Station, TX, has been established by The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) to serve as the major nexus to coordinate a grants program to adapt and translate evidence-based physical activity programs for the mid-life and older audience.

A marketing communications and policy component to support communities in their promotion of more active lifestyles for mid-life and older Americans will be managed by the AARP, headquartered in Washington, D.C., also funded by the RWJF. Successful communications and policy strategies developed under the AARP grant will be shared with the sites that are selected to receive *Active for Life* grants under this call for proposal.

The proposed grant program

Grants will be awarded to local, state or regional organizations to implement one of two proposed program models that will adapt and translate research-based physical activity programs into practice in community settings. Grant activity will be targeted to sedentary community-dwelling adults age 50 and older who are without serious health conditions or disabilities that would limit their ability to engage in non-medically supervised physical activity programs.

Active for Life has selected two previously tested program models for further examination. Both draw on similar behavioral change principles; however, as there are a variety of theories on how best to organize and deliver these interventions, the two selected programs differ in basic channels of delivery. The first uses facilitated group-based problem solving methods to integrate physical activity into everyday living. The second emphasizes participating in individually selected activities that are facilitated with ongoing, brief telephone and mail follow-up delivered to the home.

Model A: Group-based lifestyle program.



This program is an evidence-based, cost-effective intervention for increasing physical activity levels in adults developed by behavioral scientists and interventionists at the Cooper Institute in Dallas, Texas. It uses an existing manual, *Active Living Every Day*, and an extensive program delivery system developed by Human Kinetics Publishers. Public health departments, medical centers, YMCAs, recreation facilities, senior centers, churches, and other types of community centers have offered programs developed under this framework, and program participants have been adult populations that vary widely in age, ethnicity, socioeconomic, and medical status.

The program can be offered independently, or in conjunction with existing community-based physical activity programs. Participants meet weekly in small groups for six months to develop the behavioral skills they need to build moderate to vigorous physical activity into their daily lives. Facilitated discussions, a self-help workbook, and interactive activities provide the basis of the weekly sessions. Additional information, activities, and support for participants and facilitators are provided via an optional online component. This program is particularly relevant for organizations wanting to reach middle-age and older adults through group-based activities.

Model B: Individually tailored, telephone supervised program.

This program is based on twenty years of systematic research and evaluation by public health researchers and community intervention specialists at the Stanford Center for Research in Disease Prevention. It has been further tested via the CHAMPS project at UCSF, the California Health Department's Active Aging Community Mini-Grant program, as well as by public health researchers internationally. The program has been offered in more than 25 community and health settings with mid-life and older adults of diverse backgrounds, physical activity experiences, and activity preferences. Adapted versions have been developed to reach multi-ethnic and low socioeconomic status populations.

This six-month program teaches strategies that help individuals incorporate preferred physical activities into their daily lives, with a focus on individualizing the program for each person. Informational and support activities are delivered primarily via telephone and mail. Staff or volunteers are trained to provide regular, brief telephone-based guidance and support. While the essence of this program is characterized by ongoing telephone and mail-based guidance, an initial group orientation and an individual introductory planning session are included to help participants get started and exercise safely. Participants are also invited to attend regular events that cover a variety of health topics. The program is particularly relevant for mid-life and older adults who prefer the flexibility of receiving ongoing personalized advice and support delivered via telephone, in the convenience of their homes.

Desirable characteristics of potential applicants

The *Active for Life* program will accept applications from local, state, or regional entities with experience addressing the health and functional needs of populations of adults age 50 and older at risk because of their sedentary lifestyles. Preference will be given to organizations with management teams with experience in interagency collaboration, as well as strong administration, training and supervision practices.

We are looking for organizations that can demonstrate:

- Leadership commitment to the *Active for Life* models;
- Experience implementing programs and services to the target populations, including the ability to develop a business plan for program implementation;
- Capacity to market the physical activity program effectively to the target audience and recruit 1,000 people;
- Capability to generate resources that would enable successful initiatives to be sustained in the community after the grant period ends. Evidence of sustainability should include cost sharing, a commitment to continue the program made by a community foundation or other funding source, training, or other measures of institutional capacity to continue the program, and
- Experience working collaboratively with an evaluation team. Grantees will be expected to conduct an internal self-assessment and be willing to partner with other grantee sites, the NPO, and external evaluators, in an external evaluation effort. This will involve participation in the formulation of research and practice questions, providing feedback on the amount and types of data to be collected, and working within their own sites to ensure quality data collection efforts.

Application information

The call for proposals will be released 1/23/02. Organizations requesting additional information about the Active for Life initiative prior to those dates can contact Diane Dowdy, Ph.D., CHES, Deputy Program Director at activeforlife@srph.tamu.edu.

