



The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

CHALLENGE

Break away from the foundation's traditional National Program Office model to create a new, internally run initiative targeting black men and boys.

APPROACH

- ▶ develop and manage a new RFP process that reaches into new nonprofit networks
- ▶ create a system of virtual site visits for 20 finalists
- ▶ share lessons learned from this new process

OUTCOME

The foundation launched its new Forward Promise initiative by internally coordinating the review of 1,200 proposals, narrowing them down to 10 flagship grantees and moving on to Phase II.

Manage a Record-Breaking New RFP Process

DARE TO DIFFER

Although the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) frequently relies upon experts in various National Program Offices (NPOs) to manage its grantmaking initiative, its newest endeavor, Forward Promise, targeted at improving outcomes for young men and boys of color, required a different approach. "While our NPOs have been very successful, in this case, we wanted to learn about the field in a more intimate way," explains Maisha Simmons, Program Officer. "Once we decided to run Forward Promise internally, we knew we'd need a partner that had the organizational skills and efficiencies to provide the backbone support for our RFP process."

With an estimated 800+ proposal responses anticipated, this undertaking would be no small feat. Simmons and her colleagues called on Putnam Consulting Group to get the job done.

MAKE IT MANAGEABLE

The Putnam team worked closely with RWJF's Application and Review department to manage the online application and review process. Putnam managed RWJF's

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Advisory Committee to review proposals and make funding decisions. From an initial 1,200 applicants (the largest number of proposals for a single program in RWJF's history), Putnam helped narrow the field to 20 finalists, then developed an innovative series of virtual site visits to connect Advisory Committee members to applicants' locations. From those visits, RWJF was able to choose 10 finalists, announced publicly in August 2013.

"Working with Putnam is extremely beneficial. Their attention to detail — specifically in analyzing and sharing information to support our decisionmaking — helped us to stay organized and on time, and really

made a process that was so overwhelmingly big seem well organized to all participants," says Simmons.

Putnam also provided a breadth of expertise that added value for RWJF. "Putnam brought a full complement of experts to help us with the review process," says Simmons. "It's like having a whole suite of external experts in a supportive role. You don't usually get that."

BUILD ON SUCCESS

Now that the first round of grantees are beginning their work, Simmons and her team are working with Putnam to document the new RFP process and its lessons and successes to share with the rest of the RWJF staff. They've also working with Putnam to develop and organize a second round of grants, including creating and circulating a new Call for Proposals, coordinating an applicant conference call, developing a list of Frequently Asked Questions for applicants and responding to their questions about the proposal process. As a result, RWJF can focus on the big picture — and keep Forward Promise moving forward.