



From COVID-19 Response to Equitable Recovery: A Call for Research and Action to Boost Workers' Economic Security and Mobility

WorkRise, a research-to-action network for jobs, workers, and mobility hosted by the Urban Institute, is launching a drive to rapidly develop and share actionable evidence about what works to shore up workers' economic security in the short-term and promote upward mobility in the medium- and longer-term.

The initiative will:

1. Provide up to **\$2 million for pilot initiatives and other research** to rapidly develop rigorous evidence that can inform and drive effective action toward a labor market that boosts workers' mobility;
2. Create a **clearinghouse for innovative responses to the current labor market crisis** taken by the private sector, civil society, and government;
3. **Elevate promising policies and practices to key decision-makers**, including philanthropy, policymakers at the local, state, and federal level, worker advocates, and business leaders.

To achieve these objectives, we are issuing both a **Request for Proposals (RFP)** and a **Request for Information (RFI)** to identify and accelerate innovative solutions—including programs, policies, and practices—that not only provide immediate economic relief to struggling workers and those who are out of work, but also create pathways for greater economic security and upward mobility in the long term. The RFP is designed for those with research projects in need of funding, while the RFI is designed for those who have identified promising, scalable practices in need of additional support and/or research and evaluation.

Both the RFP and the RFI are open to all—practitioners, policy makers, researchers, advocates, employers, and others. Select RFI respondents will be offered support in developing a response to the RFP that includes a research or data-focused outcome and, where appropriate, additional program funds.

Please note that the RFP and RFI are two distinct processes, each with their own submission requirements. The RFP requires applicants to submit a brief form-based Letter of Inquiry (LOI), and is designed for those interested in receiving funding for a specific research project with a well-defined research question and research team. The RFI requires respondents to fill out a short survey form to share information about a specific practice, policy, or program that supports workers, and offers respondents the opportunity to indicate whether they are interested in partnering with a research team to evaluate their practice, policy, or program. WorkRise seeks to engage a wide variety of applicants and stakeholders with both the RFP and the RFI. For those with multiple projects or ideas, applicants may respond to both or either the RFP or RFI. Neither submitting an RFP LOI form nor responding to the RFI survey is a guarantee of funding from WorkRise.

The deadline to respond to both the RFP and the RFI is 11:59 pm ET, June 29, 2020.

Background and Motivation

The COVID-19 pandemic has made long-standing inequities in our labor market impossible to ignore. The health and economic well-being of low-income people and communities of color—populations that were hit hard by the Great Recession and saw few gains during the booming labor market of the last decade—are under severe stress. The pandemic has already spurred an economic relief effort of historic proportions, including the \$2 trillion federal CARES Act, worker-relief funds, and shifts in employer practices ranging from hazard pay to enhanced benefits. Innovative responses are being developed by employers, advocates, service providers, tech innovators, and policy makers at every level of government.



In the immediate near term, these actions must prioritize survival and security, enabling people who have lost their jobs to pay their bills, keep their homes, and care for their families. But a genuine recovery requires more than a return to the recent past, with too many workers living paycheck-to-paycheck and stuck in low-paying jobs despite a booming labor market. It requires breaking down longstanding structural barriers and inequities and rebuilding the labor market into one that offers all workers real opportunities for upward mobility.

Recovery from the current economic crisis is likely to involve a sustained period of experimentation and adaptation. This creates an unprecedented opportunity to identify, assess, and implement reforms and innovations that achieve a more equitable and resilient labor market and boost upward mobility for all workers. To that end, we seek both proposals for research on and information about promising policies and practices with the potential for transformative results, particularly for vulnerable workers and those who are out of work.

Request for Proposals (RFP)

WorkRise seeks Letters of Inquiry (LOIs) for two types of proposals:

1. Research projects utilizing existing data (including survey and administrative data; proprietary and publicly-available data; qualitative data) to generate new analysis about how to strengthen vulnerable workers' economic stability and economic mobility;
2. Pilots and other efforts that could be put into action and/or scaled quickly to generate new data and analysis.

Examples of potential topics can be found below (see **Topics of Interest**). Projects that explicitly consider racial/ethnic inequities, gender disparities, geographic inequalities, and the role of systems or policies in perpetuating such inequities will be received with particular interest, as will those that distinguish between new labor market entrants and incumbent workers. Projects with potential to create new, high-quality, large-scale, longitudinal open-source datasets with the ability to disaggregate by key demographics, including race, earnings, local labor market geography, industry/occupation, skills, education, gender, and/or family structure also are strongly encouraged to apply.

Interested parties should use the link below to submit a short form-based Letter of Inquiry that includes:

- A description of the key research question;
- A description of the data source or proposed data source, and, if applicable, plans for securing access to the required data;
- If applicable, a description of the proposed pilot or other effort that will be used to generate new data and analysis;
- A description of key outcomes to be measured, and an explanation for how these outcomes provide meaningful insights about strengthening vulnerable workers' near-term economic stability and longer-term mobility prospects;
- A list of key project partners, including brief descriptions of their roles;
- An estimate of the project's duration;
- Total funding request, total project budget, and (where relevant) anticipated funding from other sources.

LOIs in response to the RFP are due by 11:59 pm ET, June 29, 2020.

Selected applicants will be invited to submit a full proposal (invitations will be made on a rolling basis). Award decisions will be made on a rolling basis beginning in mid-July. Award amounts are anticipated to range between \$50,000 to \$500,000 for a 12-18 month grant period.



To submit a Letter of Inquiry in response to this Request for Proposals, please [click here](#).

For questions about the RFP process, please see the [FAQs page](#). Please address additional questions to workrise@urban.org. **Questions about the RFP process and LOI form are due by 11:59 pm ET, June 12, 2020.** The FAQs page will be updated with additional information based on questions WorkRise receives from interested applicants by June 19, 2020.

Request for Information (RFI)

In addition to seeking Letters of Inquiry for proposed research projects, we also are interested in learning from those who have identified promising approaches they believe should be further tested or evaluated, but who currently lack the capacity or the desire to conduct related research themselves. We seek information from local officials, service providers, employee groups, employers and employer associations, advocates, researchers, and others. Respondents might include:

- Implementers who seek *both* funding to begin or expand an intervention *and* a research partner to assess the effectiveness of the intervention.
- Implementers who seek a researcher partner *and/or* funding to assess an existing, already-funded program or intervention.
- Researchers who seek an implementing partner *and/or* funding for project implementation or evaluation of a promising intervention.
- Implementers or researchers who simply wish to suggest a promising approach for *others* to replicate or research.

We have designed a brief RFI survey form to collect responses, with the aim of making information-sharing quick and easy. The form asks for a brief description of the intervention and its target beneficiaries, a brief explanation of whether the intervention could be scaled readily, and includes a check-box for respondents interested in being matched with a partner for research, implementation, or data acquisition. **The Request for Information will be open through 11:59 pm ET, June 29, 2020.**

Where appropriate, WorkRise will pair select innovations/innovators with research teams in order to generate new data and analytics and to support the development of effective programs on behalf of vulnerable workers. **Select innovators/research teams will be invited to submit an LOI to the RFP noted above.**

In addition, this RFI as well as relevant information from RFP submissions will serve as the basis of a **clearinghouse that elevates innovations in policy and practice to key decision-makers from the public, private, non-profit, and philanthropic sectors** seeking to understand the range of interventions designed to shore up vulnerable workers' economic security and bolster longer-term economic mobility during this extraordinary moment in American history.

To respond to the Request for Information, please [click here](#).

Topics of Interest for the RFP and RFI

A *non-exhaustive* list of topics of interest include:

- **Direct assistance:** How do the provision and design of unemployment benefits, cash assistance from worker support funds, hybrid public-private supports such as short-time compensation, paid sick leave, paid family and medical leave, hazard pay, portable benefits, and other forms of cash to vulnerable workers impact near-term economic well-being and longer-term mobility outcomes? How

and why do the mechanisms and effects vary by race/ethnicity, gender, and/or geography? What are the costs and benefits associated with these various interventions?

- **Employment practices and benefits:** How do employer practices such as flexible scheduling, hiring for skills, remote work policies, and emergency savings funds impact near-term economic well-being and longer-term economic mobility outcomes for vulnerable workers? How and why do the mechanisms and impacts vary by race/ethnicity, gender, and/or geography? How do these practices affect firm profitability in the near-term and the long run?
- **Market structures:** How do recent changes in market structure (including changes in market concentration, fissuring, contract work, temporary work, and other alternative work arrangements) shape the economic security and longer-term mobility prospects of vulnerable workers? How and why do the mechanisms and effects vary by race/ethnicity, gender, and/or geography? How have such changes affected overall economic growth? How have they affected the distribution of growth by race and/or gender?
- **Worker voice:** How do varying forms of worker voice impact the economic security and mobility outcomes of vulnerable workers, including unions as well as non-traditional forms of organized worker power? How and why do the mechanisms and effects vary by race/ethnicity, gender, and/or geography? How do varying forms of worker voice affect firm profitability in the near-term and the long-run?
- **Wraparound supports:** How are innovations in worker supports such as childcare, transportation, housing support, food security, broadband access, and coaching/mentorship contributing to the short-term economic stability and longer-term economic mobility of vulnerable workers? How and why do the mechanisms and impacts vary by race/ethnicity, gender, and/or geography? What are the benefits and associated costs of different worker supports?
- **Skills, training, and matching:** How are interruptions to learning-in-progress impacting vulnerable workers outcomes, and are innovations designed to bridge these interruptions succeeding across different types of students/industries/programs? How is the accelerated use of remote/distance-learning impacting economic security and mobility outcomes? How are innovations designed to better match existing workers' skillsets to promising/high-wage/high-growth jobs shaping (1) economic security and mobility outcomes, for which workers, and at what scale, and (2) the growth and profitability of firms? How and why do these mechanisms and effects vary by race/ethnicity, gender, and/or geography?
- **Regulatory Environment:** What are the effects of different regulatory enforcement regimes on outcomes for vulnerable workers? How and why do the mechanisms and effects of the regulatory environment vary by race and/or gender? What are the public costs of these different approaches? How do they affect outcomes for businesses?



Frequently Asked Questions

UPDATED JUNE 22, 2020

NEW RFP or RFI. Which should I use?

Apply to the RFP if:

- You are seeking funding from WorkRise for a specific research project with a well-defined research question; AND
- You have a research team ready to conduct the project if your idea is funded; AND
- You have secured any necessary partnerships for the proposed project or are reasonably confident such partnerships will be secured by fall 2020.

Submit a response to the RFI if:

- You are looking to be matched with a research partner; OR
- You are NOT seeking funding but believe an intervention you know of should be featured as part of a clearinghouse WorkRise will build.

Grants are only available through the RFP. RFI respondents may be invited to submit an LOI or a proposal for funding.

NEW Oh no! I accidentally hit submit too early and need to change or finish my responses! It happens!

Please create and submit a new response through the RFP/RFI form and email workrise@urban.org to note that the earlier submission should be disregarded. We will only review completed submissions.

NEW What kinds of “private nonprofit organizations” qualify to submit LOIs? Any kind, as long as the activities you are seeking funding for are for research or pilots that could advance understanding of how to improve workers’ economic security and mobility. Grant funds cannot be used for lobbying or for business activities (e.g., developing a product or service the organization intends to sell for a profit).

NEW Do you support payments for graduate assistants? We’re open to considering support for graduate assistants if they are part of the research team you are assembling. Please be sure to include as much information as possible about these cost items in your rough budget estimate to help us understand how proposed grant funds will be used.

NEW Do research projects and pilot evaluations need to focus on the United States? Yes. WorkRise is only accepting submissions for research projects and pilots of interventions in the United States. We are open to reviewing research projects that take a comparative approach drawing lessons from other countries, but your submission should directly make the case for how lessons will be applied in the US context.

NEW Do all organizations have to be based in the United States? Interested organizations need to be able to receive grant funding from the US and comply with relevant US laws and regulation around receiving such funds.

NEW What outcomes are of most interest to you? We left both the RFP and RFI open-ended in order to encourage responses from a variety of fields related to workers and economic mobility. In your submission, please make the case for how the outcomes you seek to measure relate to workers’ economic security and mobility.

NEW Are you only funding evaluations or is the RFP open to related research questions? We are funding evaluations, pilots, and research projects.



NEW Does the proposal have to be about work and workers? We welcome submissions that address how other systems (e.g., criminal justice, health care) interact with labor market outcomes, but all proposals should ultimately tie back to and explicitly address economic security and mobility for workers or people seeking work.

NEW Do you support dissemination and engagement activities? Yes, however please note we cannot fund lobbying activities. Please describe in as much detail as you can the kinds of dissemination and engagement activities you envision and how grant funds will be allocated across supporting activities in the relevant sections of the LOI form.

NEW “Mobility” is an outcome that usually takes longer than 12-18 months. How should we think about mobility in our proposed measures and outcomes? We know mobility is a long-term outcome, and that outcomes like wage gains might take longer than one year. We have deliberately left these terms open in order to generate a full range of responses from innovators and researchers with a variety of perspectives. Respondents should include their own definitions and an explanation for why they have defined the terms in the way(s) that they have chosen.

NEW Do I need to specifically address COVID-19 in my response? No. We believe the pandemic created a unique moment by highlighting vulnerabilities that existed before the virus. LOIs and RFP responses should directly address how they would improve policies, programs, and practices to overcome those vulnerabilities and support mobility, regardless of whether the idea directly relates to the COVID-19 context.

NEW My idea doesn’t specifically target vulnerable workers. Can I still apply? Yes, but please include in your research design whether and how you will study the intervention’s impact on vulnerable groups.

NEW Will WorkRise fund projects longer than 18 months? We can fund projects slightly longer than 18 months, but please explain the need for a longer time period in your submission (e.g., a planned pilot does not officially start until a few months into the grant period).

NEW When should projects start? Our aim is for projects to start as quickly as possible—launching in fall 2020. But we understand implementing projects takes time and coordination and will consider projects with start dates as late as the first quarter of 2021.

Can I respond to both the RFP and RFI? Yes. However, if you have a project, pilot, or research question but do not have a research team already identified for your project, we strongly encourage you to submit an RFI only.

How do you define your terms? For example: “economic security,” “economic mobility,” “vulnerable workers”? We have deliberately left these terms open in order to generate a full range of responses from innovators and researchers with a variety of perspectives. Respondents should include their own definitions and an explanation for why they have defined the terms in the way(s) that they have chosen.

What is the deadline to submit a Letter of Inquiry (LOI) in response to the RFP and submit a response to the RFI survey? The deadline to submit an LOI and respond to the RFI survey is 11:59 pm, June 29, 2020.

Who should I contact if I want to learn more about WorkRise? Please email questions to workrise@urban.org.



For the RFP:

NEW What is your indirect cost rate policy? We're assessing proposed indirect costs on a case-by-case basis since we expect a wide variety of organizations to apply to the RFP. Please be sure to include as much information as possible about these cost items in your rough budget estimate to help us understand how proposed grant funds will be used.

NEW Can I submit more than one LOI? Yes, as long as each LOI describes distinct projects and research questions. Please note that it is unlikely that WorkRise will fund more than one grant per organization.

NEW What are the expected award amounts? Awards amounts are anticipated to range between \$50,000 to \$500,000 for a 12-to-18-month grant period. A total of \$2 million will be awarded.

NEW Are there are preferred award amounts? Will smaller/larger proposed budgets be penalized? We expect to award grants of varying amounts and aren't giving preference to awards of any particular amount. That said, our aim is to make many investments to advance knowledge on worker economic security and mobility, so it is unlikely that we will award more than one or two very large (e.g., \$500,000) grants. Your proposed budget should match the project and the expected value of research findings contributed to the field.

Who is eligible to submit an LOI? Eligible applicant organizations include academic institutions; public entities; private nonprofit organizations; state and local government agencies; and for-profit organizations. All organizations must be based in the United States or its territories. Applicants also may represent partnerships between service providers or practitioners and researchers. *We request that only one lead partner fill out the LOI form on behalf the partnership and indicate partnering organizations in the relevant field.*

We strongly encourage applications that include researchers who are from groups that are underrepresented in policy research and/or who are affiliated with institutions that serve underrepresented groups, such as historically Black colleges and universities; academic institutions serving primarily Latinx students such as the Hispanic Centers of Excellence; tribal colleges; and other similar institutions.

As a researcher, do I have to be affiliated with an organization in order to submit an RFP? In general, we prefer applicants to be affiliated with an organization to ease the grantmaking process, but we will assess individual applicants on a case-by-case basis.

How will my LOI be evaluated? A selection committee of experienced labor and mobility researchers including but not limited to the WorkRise research team will review submissions on a rolling basis. LOIs will be evaluated on a number of factors, including:

- relevance to RFP policy topics and goals;
- potential to advance knowledge for key stakeholders in ways that improve policies, program, or practice;
- feasibility of the proposed research design within the proposed timeframe and budget;
- credibility of the research team;
- LOIs consideration of racial, ethnic, gender, and/or geographic inequities or the role of systems or policies;
- value and accessibility of any data assets created to broader field;
- cost of the proposed work relative to anticipated outcomes.



My research project is partly funded. Can I still submit an LOI? Yes. We ask that applicants provide details on existing funding as part of the request for support.

What if I don't have a practitioner partner to pair with, but I know the intervention or policy I want to study? Where appropriate, WorkRise will work to match researchers with well-designed research projects with practitioner partners. Please submit an LOI and indicate in as much detail as possible how your research would benefit from partnership with a practitioner partnership, keeping in mind that practitioners could include employers, service providers, advocacy groups, or government policymakers/agencies.

I run a program. Can I submit the RFP in partnership with a researcher? Yes.

Does my research project have to have a specific geographic focus? Can it be federally focused? We are open to projects at a variety of geographic levels, so long as researchers can make a compelling case for why they have chosen the appropriate geographic unit of analysis for their question. Hyper-local projects will need to demonstrate the potential for scale. Projects looking at national-level interventions will need to address the potential for geographic diversity in outcomes/mechanisms.

Are grant funds available to support programs or operations? Yes, but projects must include a data collection and/or evaluation component as well.

I conduct research in partnership with community members, can funds be used to pay stipends to my community partners? Yes.

Can research proposals consider multiple units of analysis? (i.e. individual-level, institution-level, community-level) Yes. We are most interested in economic security and mobility outcomes as they relate to the individual or the family/household unit, but we welcome projects that address the multi-level systems within which individuals and families are nested.

Can I start the LOI and return to where I left off at a later time? No. We designed the LOI form to be short enough to complete in one session, but feel free to draft responses in a separate document (being mindful of character limits) and paste them into the form when you are ready.

When will I know whether I have been invited to submit a full proposal? Selected applicants will be invited to submit a full proposal (invitations will be made on a rolling basis). Award decisions will be made on a rolling basis beginning in mid-July. Awards amounts are anticipated to range between \$50,000 to \$500,000 for a 12-18 month grant period. We will attempt to notify all LOI submissions of the final status of their submission, but if you have not heard from us by the end of July, it is safe to assume your submission was not selected.

What will the full proposal process look like? Selected LOIs will be asked to submit additional information about their research proposal, methodology, research team, budget, and other items.

Who do I contact if I'm having technical difficulties or questions about the LOI? Please email questions to workrise@urban.org no later than 11:59pm ET, June 12. Please write "WorkRise LOI" in the subject line of your email to help us distinguish questions about the RFP from those about the RFI.

We will attempt to resolve technical issues as quickly as possible. This FAQ will be updated with answers to questions submitted on Friday, 12:00pm ET, June 19.

For the RFI:



NEW How does the RFI matchmaking process work? RFI responses will be reviewed by WorkRise and other relevant experts in the field. Select respondents who indicate interest in having their intervention or idea matched with a research partner may be contacted by a member of the WorkRise team for an intake interview, in order to learn more detail, and to assess the role a researcher might play in adding value to the work. WorkRise will work closely with promising initiatives to identify a research partner with appropriate skills and expertise. In some cases, WorkRise also will invite these matched partners to develop a full proposal to be considered for funding.

NEW What information should researchers provide if they would like to be paired up with a practitioner? Researchers interested in potentially being paired with a practitioner partner should reach out directly to workrise@urban.org to indicate interest in being considered for pairing. Emails should include a description of areas of substantive expertise as well as methodological expertise, and a CV.

How long will it take to complete the survey? No more than 15 minutes. Promising respondents may be contacted by a WorkRise team member for a brief follow-up conversation to learn more about your project/idea.

Why should I fill out this survey? First, sharing information will provide potential exposure to key influencers. Responses will help inform a clearinghouse that will serve as a resource for key decision-makers looking to learn about innovations in the field. Promising practices will be elevated by the WorkRise team to a wide range of private- and public-sector leaders. Second, information sharing creates the potential for funding support, as well as a partnership with a research team who can help boost the efficacy of the project for the target population.

Who should fill out this survey? Anyone who is aware of a promising innovation—public, private, or otherwise—that has the potential to generate meaningful economic security and longer-term economic mobility for vulnerable workers.

How will the WorkRise use the information collected? In addition to analyzing responses to the RFI in order to surface promising potential grantees, WorkRise will share information with funders and others who may be interesting in supporting the work and/or learning more. WorkRise may also develop a publicly-accessible version of this information clearinghouse and select promising practices/policies may form the basis for publications that elevate creative, promising, and/or high-impact interventions related to supporting low-wage workers through recovery and building pathways to opportunity.

How will WorkRise's funding partners use the information collected? WorkRise will use the information to better understand the evolving landscape of policies and practices that may impact the economic well-being of low-wage workers, particularly their labor market mobility, and to inform grantmaking efforts in this space.

I run a small program that provides direct supports to families. Do you want to hear from me? Yes, if you believe your program is capable of making transformative change in vulnerable workers' lives at scale.

I am advocate and do not provide direct support services. Do you want to hear from me? Yes, if you believe your ideas/your program is capable of making transformative change in vulnerable workers' lives at scale.

My organization is an intermediary and provides Technical Assistance (TA) and capacity building. Do you want to hear from me? Yes, if you believe your ideas/your program is capable of making transformative change in vulnerable workers' lives at scale.



I run a regionally-focused foundation. Do you want to hear from me? Yes, if you believe your ideas/your program is capable of making transformative change in vulnerable workers' lives at scale.

I work for national/state/local government. Do you want to hear from me? Yes, if you believe your ideas/your program is capable of making transformative change in vulnerable workers' lives at scale.

I run a business or work in an organization in the private sector. Do you want to hear from me? If you believe your ideas/your program is capable of making transformative change in vulnerable workers' lives at scale.

My program/policy was not created in response to COVID-19, but we re-shifted our focus to respond, can I still submit? Yes, though you will need to explain how/why your program is relevant given the current economic context. Many programs created prior to the crisis are still highly relevant and we are interested in understanding whether/how pre-existing policies and programs are supporting vulnerable workers.

If I'm interested in being paired with a researcher for evaluation, do I have to also submit an RFP or can I simply fill out the RFI and indicate my interest? Simply fill out the RFI. You do not need to also complete the RFP.

If I'm interested in being paired with a researcher for evaluation, what will be the cost to my program and what is the time commitment? Programs successfully paired with researchers will not incur additional costs due to the research component of the work. The time commitment will vary depending on the project specifics.

My program is still in proposal phase and/or not yet operational. Can I still submit a response and indicate that I'm being interested in being paired with a researcher for evaluation? Yes, but please indicate in your timeline how you anticipate generating meaningful results with the proposed grant period.

If I conduct my program in partnership with other organizations and I'm interested in being paired with a researcher for evaluation, do these other organizations also have to submit a response? No, but if your program is selected to partner with a researcher, then we will require confirmation that all partners are on board.

Can I start the survey and return to where I left off at a later time? No. We designed the RFI survey to be short enough to complete in one session, but feel free to draft responses in a separate document (being mindful of character limits) and paste them into the form when you are ready.

Will all responses to the RFI receive a response? No. While we will make every effort to follow up with all submissions to the RFI, we cannot guarantee that all will receive a response, especially those that are not relevant or provide insufficient information to assess their merit. Further, we cannot guarantee that everyone who requests to be matched with a researcher or other support will be matched.

Who do I contact if I'm having technical difficulties or questions about the survey? Please email questions to workrise@urban.org. Please write "WorkRise RFI" in the subject line of your email to help us distinguish questions about the RFI from those about the RFP.

About WorkRise's funding

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information on funding principles of the Urban Institute, WorkRise's parent organization, is available at urban.org/fundingprinciples.