

The Cornell Center for Behavioral Economics in Child Nutrition Programs Small Grants Program

Center Co-Directors: David R. Just and Brian Wansink

Cornell University

Overview:

The Cornell Center for Behavioral Economics in Child Nutrition Programs is pleased to announce a new award program to support research involving the possible applications of behavioral economics to improvement of the food choices American children make at school as participants in USDA's National School Lunch Program. The Center has \$150,000 in available funds and will support 5-12 proposals ranging from \$5,000-\$40,000. Proposals will undergo a rigorous review process by center staff and other invited peer reviewers. Proposals will be scored based upon academic rigor, relevancy, innovation and applicability, and demonstrated ability to complete the proposed project. Although secondary data studies will be considered, innovative and feasible field experiments will be given priority.

Proposal Submission and Selection Schedule:

A short letter of intent will be due on Monday January 16th, 2012. Invited Applicants will be notified by February 1st, 2012. Proposals will be due by March 15th, 2012 with projects beginning no earlier than June 1st. Proposals selected for funding will be notified by May 1st, 2012.

Introduction:

With more than 31 million children served each school day, USDA-sponsored school meals provide an important opportunity to improve diet and health. Behavioral economics offers a way to encourage healthier behavior without inducing the resistance and reactance often associated with restrictive policies (Just and Wansink 2009). Rather, behavioral policies offer the potential of creating long lasting habits and attitudes. Schools can exert considerable control over the food choices they offer and the manner in which they are presented—the “choice architecture” in behavioral economic terms. Behavioral economic theory suggests several possibilities to structure school cafeteria environments in a non-coercive manner to encourage healthy choices. Examples of studies that have applied behavioral economic theory to food choice in cafeterias can be found on the Center website at www.ben.cornell.edu.

The goal of The Cornell Center for Behavioral Economics in Child Nutrition Programs Small Grants Program is to fund innovative research projects that apply the principles of behavioral economics to improving food choices made by children at school as participants in the USDA Child Nutrition Programs. During its first year, the grant program will focus on the National

School Lunch Program. Successful proposals will combine academic rigor with a strong foundation in behavioral economics theory, reasonable methodology, and feasible policy or program relevance for policy makers, food service professionals and other Federal, State, or local program staff.

Eligibility

Because the grants are intended to fund research, to be considered proposals must be submitted by (or in partnership with) faculty, senior research associates, post-doctoral fellows or doctoral candidates at a higher educational institution. Doctoral candidates must apply with their faculty advisor as a Co-PI on the proposal. If you do not fall within these criteria and would still like to apply, please contact the Center at ben@cornell.edu. Proposals demonstrating ability to conduct research in a school setting will be given priority.

Priority areas:

Although secondary data studies and economic experiments in non-field settings will be considered, innovative and feasible field experiments that have the potential to produce applications that can be easily implemented at a low cost and on a large scale will be given priority. Proposals that involve minority populations such as Native American, Hispanic, or African American are encouraged. Proposals that focus on schools serving a large proportion of low-income students (e.g. as demonstrated by high receipt of free or reduced-price school lunches) are also encouraged.

Scope of Research Funded Under This Announcement

The intent of this announcement is to support research that will apply behavioral economics to the challenge of encouraging children participating in USDA's National School Lunch Program to make healthful food choices. Responsive proposals must be based on behavioral economics theories and concepts. Proposals that are primarily about nutrition science or food science—for example, developing a new food product for school meals—are outside the scope of this announcement. Similarly, development or delivery of nutrition education programs is outside the scope of this announcement.

To be considered responsive, proposals must draw a clear link to application in the USDA school meal program setting. Proposals that focus on changing food behavior in settings outside of USDA school meal programs—for example, focusing on changing food purchasing behavior at fast food restaurants or grocery stores—are outside the scope of this announcement. Basic research with no clearly identified link to children's food behavior in the school meal setting is outside the scope of this announcement.

Proposal Details:

Letters of intent must be submitted by 5PM on Monday January 16th, 2012. Letters of intent (not to exceed 2 pages double space, Arial or Times New Roman font size and 1 inch margins) should be sent in PDF form to ben@cornell.edu. The letter of intent should include a brief description of the proposed project including: the primary research question, methodology, qualifications of primary investigator and proposed relevance to child nutrition and school lunches. The letter of intent should not include budget information, but rather focus on the innovation of the research question and its relevance to school meal program needs. Full proposals will be invited based upon innovation, program and policy relevance, and possible applications of the proposed research.

Full Proposals should include:

1. Cover Page
 - a. PI name & contact information
 - b. Organization & contact information
 - c. Authorized representative & contact information
 - d. Tax identification or Dun & Bradstreet Number
 - e. Funding amount requested
2. Abstract- overview (1 page, double spaced)
3. Project Narrative (7 pages, double spaced max.)
 - a. Objectives
 - b. Hypotheses
 - c. Research Design and Methodology
 - d. Potential for Implementation and Impact
 - e. Plan for disseminating research findings
4. Bibliography (1 page max.)
5. Two page NIH-style biosketch for PI and all senior investigators (can be found at www.grants.nih.gov/grants/funding/phs398/biosketchsample.doc)
6. Budget
7. Budget Justification
8. Copy of an approved Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA)
9. Proposed Timeline
10. Applicable Letters of Support (e.g., if research involves an intervention in a school lunch program, a letter of support from the school lunch director would be required.)

Project narrative should be double spaced. All documents should use 12 point font (Arial or Times New Roman). All pages should have 1 inch margins. All full proposals must be approved and submitted by an Authorized University representative from the institutions Office of Sponsored Research or equivalent.. Proposals will not be accepted from individuals or from foreign institutions.

Full proposals should be submitted electronically in one PDF document to ben@cornell.edu by 5pm ET on March 15th, 2012

Deliverables

If a proposal is awarded, the primary investigator will be responsible for the following:

- 1. Submitting a midterm report (or as requested)
- 2. Participating in two center sponsored workshops, one as participant and one as a presenter
- 3. Submitting the Final Report that includes a policy brief based on results and a future dissemination plan

Budget:

Grants will be awarded in the amount of \$5,000-40,000. Larger awards will be considered based upon the merit of the proposal. Indirect costs are limited to the lesser of 15% of direct costs or the institutions approved rate per their Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement. Budgets must include travel for 2 two-day workshops in Ithaca NY. Total awards, including indirect costs, will not exceed \$40,000. The small grants program is considered federal flow-through and will be subject to the same spending restrictions and regulations as all federal grants. (A-110 – Uniform Administrative Requirements for Grants and Agreements with Institutions of Higher Education, Hospitals and Other Non-Profit Organizations and A-21 – Cost Principles for Educational Institutions). The Center reserves the right to suggest changes to proposed budgets before awarding the proposals.

Review of Applications and Evaluation Criteria

Prior to technical examination, a preliminary review of all proposals will be made. Proposals that do not meet eligibility requirements or fall within the scope of this announcement will be notified.

Proposals will be evaluated by review panels consisting of economists, nutritionists, and food service professionals. In addition to reviewers' comments, the Center will consult with experts from USDA's Economic Research Service and Food and Nutrition Service. Final selections will be based on reviewers' evaluations, priority policy and program needs.