

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

2017 Healthy Food Behavior Research Grants

Using Behavioral Economics to Promote Healthier, Economical Food Choice by Low-Income Consumers

Funding for the Period from July 1, 2017 to June 30, 2018

Deadline for proposal receipt: June 9, 2017 by 5:00 pm EST

Purpose

The BECR Center seeks proposals for Healthy Food Behavior Research Grants that draw on behavioral economics theory to develop and test strategies for improving food choice behavior in low-income populations, particularly SNAP participants, using field experiments that leverage existing research activities. Policy relevant research projects related to SNAP participants that employ behavioral economic strategies in the food retail environment, are encouraged. In particular, we are interested in approaches that could feasibly be scalable, possibly via such strategies as integration into the USDA SNAP-Ed program. SNAP-Ed operates in all U.S. states and promotes healthier food purchasing by SNAP and SNAP-eligible households via a range of strategies which can include retail interventions that meet its program guidelines.^{1,2} We are also interested in research to test the feasibility and effectiveness of larger-scale implementation of a strategy previously shown to be efficacious in a smaller-scale experiment.

The Duke-UNC USDA Center for Behavioral Economics and Healthy Food Choice Research (BECR Center)

The USDA Center for Behavioral Economics and Healthy Food Choice Research (BECR) at Duke University and the University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill (PI: Peter Ubel, Duke University) strives to apply behavioral economics theories and concepts to uncover potential interventions to improve food choice behaviors contributing to improved nutrition, food security, and the health of American consumers, and to increase the effectiveness of policies and programs designed to improve diets, especially for low-income households. The team will build the field of behavioral economics around food consumption choices with a particular focus on identifying the most successful levers required to motivate healthy food choices and quantifying their effectiveness with regard to the individual consumer, food retailers, and the food industry. The Center has three areas of focus -- the Special Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) clients, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) clients, and the general population. With this Request for Proposals, we are seeking external investigators to propose projects designed to include focused field experiments that could identify effective, behavioral-economics-based strategies to promote purchase of healthy, economical foods by SNAP participants and other low-income consumers.

Background on Behavioral Economics and Healthy Food Behavior Research

Though research on food choice behavior has been conducted by a number of researchers targeting both the individual consumer level and the policy level, the Center focuses on utilizing behavioral economics techniques in real world settings to develop low cost nudges that can be utilized to influence healthy, economical food choices, particularly in the SNAP and WIC populations.

Traditional economic theory assumes that humans are rational and self-centered, driven to maximize their personal utility. Economists believe that the invisible hand guides markets to efficiency and assume that people make reasoned, well-informed choices in their best interests - so long as they have all the necessary information.

By contrast, behavioral economics recognizes that people and organizations do not always make rational decisions and thus aims to explain how and why people make the (rational and irrational) decisions they do. The field of behavioral economics emerged in response to well-documented behavioral anomalies and marked deviations from the standard economic models. For example, behavioral economics research has shown that individuals are more sensitive to the possibility of a loss than they are to the possibility of an equivalent gain, thereby explaining two well-documented phenomena in consumer behavior: the endowment effect (i.e. the tendency to overvalue owned goods) and the status quo bias (i.e. the tendency not to deviate from the current option). Similarly, behavioral economists have shown that individuals mentally segregate assets into non-fungible accounts (e.g. clothing, food) significantly impacting the utility that they assign to each asset.

Behavioral economics utilizes a wide range of theoretical tools from the behavioral sciences, from economics to psychology and marketing.³⁻⁷ These include non-standard preferences (risk preferences, time preferences, social preferences), non-standard beliefs (overconfidence, over-projection of current tastes), and non-standard decision-making (framing, inattentiveness, responsiveness to social pressure and persuasion, emotiveness). By examining cognitive, emotional, and social aspects of the decision-making process, behavioral economics aims to predict actual behavior and design strategies that help people make decisions that are truly in their best interest. Behavioral economists have shown that small changes in the environment, such as changes in the default setting, or in the context of a decision (e.g., priming) can strongly affect the outcome of that decision.³⁻⁷ These small changes have resulted in increased participation in savings programs and organ donation programs, and many other benefits to society.

By utilizing behavioral economics techniques, individuals can develop a large-scale experimental approach to uncover the behavioral levers required to motivate healthy food choices. Using these techniques, we aim to identify the most successful behavioral levers and to quantify their effectiveness, when applied at the individual consumer or program levels, as well as “upstream” via the food industry and food retailers.

Healthy Food Behavior Focusing on Behavioral Economics Approaches Grant Request

BECR will award up to 2 grants (of up to \$50,000 each) to teams of researchers to develop and implement focused field experiments using behavioral economics theory and strategies to promote healthy, economical food purchasing by SNAP participants and other low-income consumers. “Healthy” food choices are expected to be consistent with Federal policy, as defined in the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*.^{2,8} “Economical” choices should consider the budget constraints of low-income consumers when making food purchase decisions.² Funding will span a 12-month period so proposals that can build upon ongoing research activities are encouraged. We are interested in approaches that could feasibly be scalable, possibly via such strategies as integration into the USDA SNAP-Ed program, which includes retail interventions that meet program guidelines among its list of allowable strategies.^{1,2} We are also interested in research to test the feasibility and effectiveness of larger-scale

implementation of a strategy previously shown to be efficacious in a smaller-scale experiment. In particular, policy-relevant research projects in the retail setting with populations containing a high volume of SNAP participants are encouraged. Projects that utilize behavioral economics and are feasible in the current policy environment are of particular interest. We are interested in interventions using non-monetary interventions, such as changes in the choice architecture, social norms, etc., not in manipulation of price.

We are expecting that the proposals will include clearly presented ideas for innovative interventions, based on behavioral economics theory, that are feasible within the current food environment.

Areas of Research

1. Focused Field Experiments Using Behavioral Economics Methods
 - a. Focused field experiments should explore novel behavioral interventions related to healthy food choices. The focus should be on identifying behavioral interventions that utilize behavioral economics methods and have potential to be policy-relevant, scalable in a cost-efficient manner, and persist over time.
2. Mixed Methods Approach Using Behavioral Economics Methods
 - a. A mixed method approach will utilize a focused field experiment coupled with secondary data analysis.
3. Translation Research
 - a. Research to test the feasibility and effectiveness of larger-scale implementation of a strategy previously shown to be efficacious in a smaller-scale experiment. Proposals should show evidence of the demonstrated efficacy of the approach and a plan for translation into a larger scale test of effectiveness, with necessary partnerships (e.g. retailer and/or other implementer such as SNAP-Ed) established.

Total Awards

Up to *two* (2) grants will be awarded. The total award of each grant may be up to \$50,000 (inclusive of direct + indirect costs) for the 12-month funding period (July 1, 2017 to June 30, 2018). Please note that the funds are federal dollars and indirect rates are capped at 25%.

Eligibility Criteria

- Applicants can be researchers at institutions of higher learning, private research enterprises, state or local public health practitioners, and programmatic staff. Funds will be granted as subawards to the applicant's institution.
- Applicants are encouraged from a broad range of disciplines including, but not limited to, economics, public health, nutrition, marketing, business, psychology, or a related field.
- The BECR Center is dedicated to supporting emerging researchers. Thus, we encourage applications from emerging researchers in the behavioral economics and food choice fields. The BECR Center embraces diversity and inclusion across multiple dimensions, such as race, ethnicity, gender, disability, age, sexual orientation and identity, and socioeconomic status.
- Applicants must be based in the United States or its territories.

- Applicants should demonstrate an understanding of behavioral economics and its application to healthy food behavior.

Application Instructions

The proposals are due by **Friday, June 9, 2017 by 5:00 pm EST**. Proposals should include the following.

Section	Length	Format
1. Application Information		See full proposal form for required information.
2. Project Abstract	500 word limit*	1.5 spaced with 1-inch margins and 12-point font.
3. Project Narrative	6 page limit	1.5 spaced with 1-inch margins and 12-point font, not including references and appendices**
4. Scope of Work (include research team summary with project roles)	2 page limit	1.5 spaced with 1-inch margins and 12-point font.
5. Project Timeline	1 page limit	See full description.
5. Human Subjects Approval	1 page limit	1.5 spaced with 1-inch margins and 12-point font.
6. Key Personnel Biosketches	5-page limit per key individual	Please use new NIH biosketch format
7. Budget and Narrative		See budget template for required information.
8. Letter(s) of Support	No Limit	See full description.

*Please note that abstract may be shared on the BECR website if funded. Upon funding, PIs may be asked to submit an electronic photograph to Hilary Campbell to be included on the Center’s website with the announcement of funded grants.

**Please keep supplementary materials as concise as possible to facilitate a timely review process.

Complete proposals should be converted to PDF in order and submitted via email, all as one document (Application information, project narrative, references, appendices, scope of work, key personnel biosketches, and budget and narrative). Please submit your completed application to the BECR Center at becr@duke.edu.

For questions related to this RFP please contact Hilary Campbell, PharmD, JD, at hilary.campbell@duke.edu.

Selection Criteria

1. Demonstration of an understanding of behavioral economics and low cost nudges to influence food behavior.
2. A clear explanation and application to behavioral economics.
3. We have a particular interest in policy relevant research projects related to SNAP participants.
4. A clear proposal for innovations to be tested in the food retail environment that are feasible in the current policy environment without requiring major policy changes and have the potential to be scalable.
5. The qualifications and experience of personnel, including an understanding of behavioral economics and established connections to food retailer(s) or other research partners. Where partnerships are necessary to the conduct of the research (e.g. with a food retailer), letters of support from the partner are expected.

6. Projects defined as “translation research” should provide evidence of the demonstrated efficacy of the approach being considered for larger scale implementation; a plan for translation into a larger scale test of effectiveness, with necessary partnerships (e.g. retailer and/or other implementer such as SNAP-Ed) established; and a plan for measurement of effectiveness of the larger-scale trial.
7. Reasonableness of estimated cost and time commitments in relation to anticipated results and the necessity of the funds for the completion of the research. Feasibility to complete within the 12-month time frame. Budget clearly described and appropriate to the study.

Reporting Requirements

Recipients of the grants will be required to attend a virtual kick-off meeting, provide a mid-year progress report, and provide a final activity and financial report. Researchers will be required to present final results during a meeting in Washington, D.C. that will be hosted by the Center in 2018. **Recipients should budget for travel costs to this 1-day meeting.** In addition to the usual academic papers resulting from the research effort, recipients will be required to present their findings in a webinar for the appropriate audience, which will be identified with support from the Center. Each grant recipient will also be required to provide a non-technical Research Review which the Center will post on its website and distribute to appropriate stake holders. Invoicing for project expenses will occur at least quarterly, but monthly invoicing for project expenses is preferred.

Proposal Follow Up

The selection process and follow up on proposals will be made by the BECR Center Director, Peter Ubel, MD, assisted by the Center’s assistant director and faculty collaborators. Applicants will be notified via email June 30th, 2017, if their proposal is accepted.

IMPORTANT DATES

- Proposals are due: *June 9th, 2017 by 5:00 pm EST*
- Notification of Awards: *June 30th, 2017*
- Start Date of Funded Projects: *July 1st, 2017*
- End Date of funded projects: *June 30, 2018*

References

1. Hartman, T., et al. (2016, November). *Choosing Foods and Beverages to Promote in Healthy Retail Research*. Retrieved from <https://becr.sanford.duke.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/BECR-Choosing-Foods-and-Beverages.pdf>
2. Uslan, D. et al. (2016, June). *Uses of Behavioral Economics Nudges within Healthy Retail Interventions in the SNAP-Ed Program: Research Opportunities*. Retrieved from: https://becr.sanford.duke.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/SNAP-Ed_BE_ResearchOpps.pdf
3. Johnson EJ, Shu SB, Dellaert BG, Fox C, Goldstein DG, Häubl G, Larrick RP, Payne JW, Peters E, Schkade D, Wansink B, Weber EU. 2012. Beyond nudges: Tools of a choice architecture. *Marketing Letters*, 23(2), 487-504.
4. DellaVigna S. 2009. Psychology and Economics: Evidence from the Field. *Journal of Economic Literature* 47: 315-72.

5. Kahneman D, Knetsch J, Thaler R. 1991. The endowment effect, loss aversion, and the status quo bias. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 5:193-206.
6. Thaler R. 1980. Toward a positive theory of consumer choice. *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization*, 1:39-60.
7. Thaler R, Sunstein, CR. 2008. *Nudge: improving decisions about health, wealth, and happiness*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
8. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Agriculture. (2015) *2015–2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. Retrieved from <http://health.gov/dietaryguidelines/2015/guidelines>

Proposal Form

1. Applicant Information

Project Title	
Organization Information	
Organization Tax Identification Number	
Address	
Website	
Principal Investigator (name and degrees)	
Phone	
Email	
Administrative Contact	
Phone	
E-mail	

2. Project Abstract

A project abstract must be included with your application. This abstract may be shared on the BECR website or in other BECR communications if your proposal is selected for funding. In addition to the abstract, the PI's name and primary institution will be included. The abstract must be less than 500 words. This abstract must also include the project title and following headings — Background, Specific Aims, and Research Design and Methods. Headings are not included in the word limit.

3. Project Narrative

In this section, be sure to include the following information. This section of the proposal should not exceed 6 pages, excluding references and appendices.

- 1) Background and significance
- 2) Proposed specific aims and hypothesis/research questions, how the application relates to the RFP, and how the findings align with the interests of the BECR Center.
- 3) Methods, including data sources and quantitative or qualitative measurement strategies you propose to use to test the hypothesis/research questions

The methods section should provide a thorough outline of how your project will be designed and implemented. Specifically, you should be sure to include:

- the theoretical framework or conceptual model to be used;
- research methods and data sources, including the primary and secondary outcome measures, the proposed data sources, and the measures you will use for your major dependent and independent variables;
- quantitative or qualitative methods that you propose to use to test your hypothesis/question, including estimating the statistical power to detect the proposed effects where appropriate;
- the target population(s), institution(s) or communities and key characteristics (e.g., race and ethnicity, income level, rural/urban location); and
- anticipated opportunities and challenges that are likely to affect the research project, including a plan for how challenges will be addressed.

5) Potential impact of the research on improving healthy eating in low income populations

6) References

7) Appendices as appropriate (**Please keep supplementary materials as concise as possible to facilitate a timely review process.**)

4. Scope of Work

Include roles of research personnel with FTEs (Full Time Equivalency). This section of the proposal should not exceed 2 pages.

5. Project Timeline

Please include a timeline of major tasks proposed for your project. This timeline should be presented in chart form and include major milestones or deliverables.

6. Human Subjects Approval

Note whether human subjects approval is needed and describe how institutional human subjects approval and child/parental consent (if needed) will be obtained. If not applicable, please indicate. Please note that funding is conditional on the appropriate human subjects approval, if applicable.

7. Key Personnel Biosketches

Please include a biosketch in the new NIH format for all relevant key personnel (5 page limit on individual biosketches).

8. Budget and Narrative

The selected applicants should demonstrate the manner in which funds will be allocated to best serve the BECR's goals to provide financial support for research, including, but not necessarily limited to, the level of indirect costs (1) charged by the applicant and (2) allowed to the institutions of researchers receiving subawards.

Project Title:		
Category	Narrative	Amount Requested
Personnel		
Please include base annual salary and full time equivalent (FTE) information for each person/role where funds are being requested in this category.		
Principal Investigator		
Co-Investigators		
Administrative Staff		
Other Staff		
Fringe Benefits		
Other Direct Costs		
Supplies		
Travel (Including D.C. meeting)		
Equipment		
Other		
Purchased Services		
Consultants		
Subcontracts *		
Indirect Costs		
Indirect Costs (may not exceed 25%)		
In-kind Support		
Total Amount Requested (Including Indirect Costs):		

*If subcontracts are a part of your proposed budget, please include the information about each subcontract, including Name, start date, end date, scope of work, deliverables, cost, and justification.

9. Letter(s) of Support

You must include a letter of institutional support from the PI's primary institution that also acknowledges the indirect cost rate to which the institution agrees and a signature from the institution's signing official. Please also include letters of support from any subcontract institutions or locations of any planned interventions. Funding is conditional upon the successful completion of the licensing procedures for data use and agreement of any locations of any planned interventions.