Heartland Children's Nutrition Collaborative

AN INITIATIVE SUPPORTED BY
THE RICKS FAMILY FOUNDATION
THROUGH RILEY CHILDREN'S FOUNDATION

PURDUE UNIVERSITY

INDIANA UNIVERSITY

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Submission Due Date: **Thursday, May 7, 2026**

Purdue University PIs, Contact **Senay Simsek, PhD** **ssimsek@purdue.edu** with questions.

Indiana University School of Medicine PIs, Contact **Carmella Evans-Molina, MD, PhD** **CDMD@iu.edu** with questions.

WebCAMP portal, Contact **Julie Driscol** judrisco@iu.edu with questions.

UPLOAD via the Start a Submission found here

If awarded, this will be considered internal funding for both IU and Purdue applicants and submission does not require prior approval from ORA or Purdue Pre-Award prior to submitting through WebCAMP.

Program Description:

The Heartland Children's Nutrition Collaborative will leverage the combined strengths and expertise of Purdue's College of Agriculture, including the Department of Food Science, along with insights from other departments such as Biomedical Engineering and Nutrition, and the IU School of Medicine's Department of Pediatrics, along with members of the Child Health Research Institute and members of the Indiana Diabetes Research Center. This collaboration aims to explore how early-life food intake can impact both short-term and long-term health. This initiative seeks to unravel the intricate relationship between food and health, specifically during the formative years of life – from neonatal stages to young adulthood. The transition from neonatal stages to young adulthood marks a period of rapid growth, development, and vulnerability. During these formative years, the food intake of individuals has profound ramifications, not just for immediate health but in establishing metabolic, physiological, and cognitive trajectories that influence long-term health outcomes. Recognizing the intricate interplay between food and health during this period, the Heartland Children's Nutrition Collaborative sets out to bridge the gap between pioneering scientific research and tangible clinical applications.

With the alarming rise in pediatric conditions such as obesity, diabetes, and other food-related illnesses, understanding the underlying biochemical, physiological, and metabolic mechanisms becomes paramount. This initiative is particularly timely and essential given the shifting global dietary patterns often influenced by socioeconomic, cultural, and environmental factors. We aim to fund research projects investigating relationships between nutrition and early-life food intake with health and disease in children. Examples of projects responsive to this initiative may include but are not limited to the following topics:

Uncover Molecular Mechanisms: Understand how various foods interact at the cellular and molecular levels during different pediatric stages, influencing gene expression, metabolic pathways, and physiological responses.

Gut Health & Microbiome Dynamics: Explore the nexus between dietary intake, gut health, and the microbiome, understanding how these factors converge to affect overall pediatric health.

Obesity & Chronic Disease Onset: Investigate the etiological underpinnings of early-onset obesity and how it links to chronic diseases later in life, aiming to decipher the role of early dietary patterns in these processes.

Personalized & Designer Foods: Harness the power of genomics, metabolomics, instrumentation science, and other advanced fields to pave the way for more personalized food intake recommendations for children, ensuring optimal health outcomes.

Translational Impact: Ensure that the insights gleaned from this research are not confined to academic circles but translate into actionable strategies, dietary guidelines, clinical measurement capabilities, screening strategies, and interventions that researchers can apply in clinical settings and public health initiatives.

Ultimate Goal:

Central to this collaborative effort is a dual-purpose mission that unites a broad spectrum of academic and research disciplines, focusing on enhancing health and wellness from early life. The initiative commits to an in-depth exploration of how early-life nutrition impacts comprehensive health trajectories, covering everything from immediate physiological reactions to long-term wellness outcomes. Furthermore, the endeavor aims to set a new standard in academic and research excellence, reflecting the priorities of major funding bodies and establishing benchmarks for future projects.

This initiative is led by IU School of Medicine's Department of Pediatrics and Purdue University's Department of Food Science and follows other successful initiatives between IU and Purdue, including the recent Crossroads Pediatric Device Consortium. The goal of this initiative is to fund collaborative teams that include at least one investigator from the IU and one investigator from Purdue. On the Purdue side, principal investigators (PIs) from the Department of Food Science, as well as from other departments within the College of Agriculture, the College of Health and Human Sciences, and Biomedical Engineering, are encouraged to participate. On the IU side, eligible investigators include those from the Department of Pediatrics, the Child Health Research Institute, and the Indiana Diabetes Research Center.

Together, these interdisciplinary team will leverage pilot funds from Heartland Children's Nutrition Collaborative to develop larger projects that will successfully compete for extramural funding. We expect that projects funded by the Heartland Children's Nutrition Collaborative will be exceptionally well-placed to attract multimillion-dollar grants from external funding agencies, including the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) under the USDA, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

Funding Structure and Application Process

Funding Structure:

The pilot project program will commit a maximum of $100K/year to support each pilot project. The $100K total grant allocation will be divided equally between IU and Purdue Budget submissions should factor in this distribution of $50k each.

Proposals will be reviewed by Purdue University and the IU School of Medicine or external evaluators identified by the leaders of the initiative. Those awarded funds must submit an annual progress report and present their findings at the annual research update meeting.

Prior awardees from the first RFA may participate as collaborators on an application but are not eligible to serve as a Principal Investigator or Co-Principal Investigator under this second RFA.

If awarded, IU will provide IU awardees an account and Purdue will provide Purdue awardees with an account. For Purdue, your main point of contact for accounts will be Jairo Marmolejos (jairo@purdue.edu), and for IU, your main point of contact for your accounts will be Laura Oxford (loxford@iu.edu).

Application Requirements:

Applications soliciting support from the pilot project program should encompass:

Cover Page:

- Proposal Title
- Principal investigators' names and affiliations
- Please note eligible investigators will have a primary or secondary affiliation in the following departments or Centers:
    - IU School of Medicine Department of Pediatrics
    - Members of the Child Health Research Institute
    - Members of the Indiana Diabetes Research Center(from all campuses)
    - PU College of Agriculture
    - PU Biomedical Engineering
    - PU College of Health and Human Sciences

- Prior awardees from the first RFA may participate as collaborators on an application but are not eligible to serve as a Principal Investigator or Co-Principal Investigator under this second RFA.
- Eligible teams must have at least one IU and one Purdue investigator.
- IUSM: All faculty at or above the Assistant Professor level; all research professors; all clinical faculty (assuming they meet all other eligibility criteria)
- Purdue: All tenured or tenure-track West Lafayette faculty at or above the Assistant Professor level; all research professors; all clinical faculty; Non-faculty approved must seek approval from the Dean of the College of Agriculture (assuming they meet all other eligibility criteria).

Scientific Proposal: (max 3 pages, not including references)

- Please include relevant background, Specific Aims, and a brief description of methods, including a discussion of pitfalls and alternatives. Preliminary data is not required, but it will be accepted.

Milestones and Deliverables:

- Elucidate how the venture will pave the way for potential future funding prospects.
- Detail expected outcomes for the project, including a plan for submission of external funding applications. (max 1 page)

Budget:

- A detailed breakdown of the anticipated expenses for the project, including personnel salaries, equipment costs, travel expenses, and any other relevant costs. Please submit an individual budget for Indiana University work equaling 50k, and a second one for Purdue work equaling 50k.

Budget (template provided on application document)

Additional Pages Requirements

- **Key Personnel**
- **Other Support** for each key personnel in new NIH Commons format
- **NIH Biographical Sketch Commons Form for** each key personnel in new NIH Commons format
- **Description of Facilities and Resources** available to the applicant
- **Approved current institutional vertebrate animal care form** (if applicable)
- **Approved current institutional human subjects selection criteria form** (if applicable)
- **Supporting documentation** (if applicable)
    - 5 page limit
    - Could include but not limited to manuscript text, abstracts, links, unique figures, etc.

Submission Deadline and Contact Details:

Applications will be accepted up to **May 7, 2026, at 11:59 PM**. Application requirements should be submitted via the CTSI WebCAMP portal. Funding is anticipated to start on July 1, 2026.

If awarded, this will be considered internal funding for both IU and Purdue applicants and submission does not require prior approval from ORA or Purdue Pre-Award prior to submitting through WebCAMP.

For any queries, please don't hesitate to get in touch with Senay Simsek (**ssimsek@purdue.edu**) or Carmella Evans-Molina (**CDMD@iu.edu**). On March 13th, 2026, Purdue University will be hosting a Heartland Initiative-Purdue Medical Networking Event. The event will showcase posters from year 1 awardees & remarks from leadership. The event will be from 3-5pm. Any interested applicants for this RFA are welcome to attend, though not required. For inquiries, please contact Coreen Brenner (cdbrenne@purdue.edu).

Budget and Justification Template

A. Purdue Budget

Personnel (acceptable personnel include technicians, research staff, and students. Faculty salary should not exceed $5k, or 10% of total budget allowed, i.e. $5,000 + fringe).

Supplies (Specify expected reagents and supplies cost and quantities)

Core Facilities Usage (included hourly rates, expected hours, etc.)

Travel (The travel budget proposed must be clearly specified for how it relates to the proposed project. Travel budget should not exceed $2k. Allowable travel includes any relevant travel domestic or international for conferences, speaking invitations, etc.)

B. IU Budget

Personnel (acceptable personnel include technicians, research staff, and students. Faculty salary should not exceed $5k, or 10% of total budget allowed, i.e. $5,000 + fringe).

Supplies (Specify expected reagents and supplies cost and quantities)

Core Facilities Usage (included hourly rates, expected hours, etc.)

Travel (The travel budget proposed must be clearly specified for how it relates to the proposed project. Travel budget should not exceed $2k. Allowable travel includes any relevant travel domestic or international for conferences, speaking invitations, etc.)