

CALL FOR EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST

Weiss Family Program Fund for Research in Development Economics

The Weiss Family Program Fund for research in development economics is interested in supporting research by undergraduates, graduate students and junior faculty at Harvard, MIT, and Boston University working in development economics, broadly defined. Projects may address a wide range of issues that affect less developed countries.¹

The goal of the Weiss Family Program Fund, and its funder, Child Relief International, is to sponsor research that will positively affect the lives of poor people in poor countries. It does not have a direct objective of facilitating the publication of papers in prestigious journals. Child Relief International is not motivated by propagating the reputation of the foundation or of the researchers it funds. The production of well-published articles may have indirect benefits in positively affecting the lives of poor people in poor countries, and Child Relief International understands that this will be an important objective to many applicants, but the prospects for well-published articles will not directly enter into funding decisions.

The potential impact of research on the poor can be long run, it can duplicate an existing study in a different context, or it can investigate a negative result – showing that something that is

¹Examples of potential projects range from assessments of various health and education initiatives, such as the health effects of indoor spraying of DDT, adding folic acid and iron to foods, or dispensing Norplant; to evaluations of the impact of programs that promote human rights, refugee rights or empowerment of women and minorities; to projects that assess the total effects of participation of NGOs or public foreign institutions or for-profit companies in providing services normally provided by domestic institutions; to the macro-economic effects of capital inflows (including remittances, aid, or expenditures by NGOs); to understanding the impact of NGO's policies regarding local hiring and purchasing on wages, cost of commercial property, and the exchange rate; to redoing previous randomized evaluations to control for micro-economic spillover effects such as the effects of micro-finance and remittances on expenditures on weddings, funerals, festivals and other status goods.

widely done has no impact or less impact than is normally believed. The research could seek to discover flaws in past research findings. Research that challenges the conventional wisdom is encouraged. Cross disciplinary work is welcome.

The Fund is calling for expressions of interest. The Weiss Family Program Fund is interested in minimizing the bureaucratic effort required to apply for funding, and therefore we request only expressions of interest at this stage. Details of the content of the expressions of interest are given below. Individuals whose projects are deemed likely to receive funding will be asked to submit formal proposals. Typically we expect any substantive revisions to be minor, with more substantial revisions referred to the next round of funding. BU and MIT applicants from whom a formal proposal is requested may need to submit these proposals through their institutions, which may have their own procedural requirements.

Eligibility:

All applicants should have sufficient training to conduct research using current techniques and methods in economics.

Undergraduates must be enrolled as regular students in a program leading to a bachelor's degree at one of the three participating institutions. They may major in any field but must have taken intermediate micro, statistics and econometrics (or the equivalent). Their research must be supervised by a faculty member with expertise in economics.

Master's students should be enrolled in a program leading to a master's degree with a specialization in development and a strong quantitative/economics component. Their research must be supervised by a faculty member with expertise in economics.

PhD students should be working under the supervision of a faculty member with expertise in

economics.

Junior faculty should be working on research projects on economic issues that affect developing countries.

Postdoctoral Fellows and non-ladder faculty are not eligible unless they have already obtained a position from one of the three institutions as ladder faculty.

Funding limits:

Funding is limited to covering the cost of specific projects and is not available for tuition, researcher salary and/or stipends. Typical expenses covered include travel to collect data or other direct data collection costs, materials and research assistants. While there may be exceptions, funding will typically not exceed \$5,000 for undergraduate and master's students and \$40,000 for PhD students. Junior faculty may apply for grants to incubate larger projects for which they expect to seek funding elsewhere or supplement other funding to allow important questions to be addressed that cannot be addressed through other funding channels. These grants will typically not exceed \$75,000. We take into account the cost of the project relative to perceived benefits for projects of lower costs. We will not look favorably on proposals that appear budgeted to hit the maximum limits.

Grants will not include any indirect costs. Thus proposals should not include a percentage for overhead. They can, if appropriate, include costs for items such as rent in the developing country or accounting services but only if these are directly attributable to the project and itemized in the budget. Thus, for example, an applicant who plans to work with an organization like Innovations for Poverty Action should ask that organization to itemize and justify specific expenses and not

simply include overhead or a “country management fee” as a fixed percentage of other costs.

Submission of expressions of interest:

Applicants should describe their proposed project sufficiently to allow reviewers to determine its feasibility and potential impact on development policy. The expression of interest should include a timeline and a detailed estimated budget. Students should provide evidence of their ability to complete the project by describing their research background and include a letter of support from their advisor with a statement that he or she will supervise the project and support it intellectually. Expressions of interest should be no more than 1500 words, in 12 point font double-spaced, and should include the following: an outline of the research hypothesis, an identification strategy (for empirical proposals intended to estimate a causal effect), a budget narrative, and an explanation of the availability of data to be used in empirical proposals. They should also include a CV and, in the case of students who are applying, an unofficial transcript which do not count towards the word limit.

We request only expressions of interest at this stage. Expressions of interest should be emailed to Gia Petrakis (gpetrakis@fas.harvard.edu) by November 23rd for consideration in Fall 2014. The committee may exceptionally consider off-cycle expressions of interest, particularly for time sensitive or low-cost projects. Off-cycle expressions of interest that are deemed to be time-sensitive should include a cover email explaining why they are time sensitive and why it was impossible to submit the project in response to the prior call. The possibility of an off-cycle expression of interest is intended for exceptional cases such as an unanticipated election or

policy change.

The committee will aim to notify those submitting on-cycle expressions of interest whether or not they should submit a full proposal within three weeks of the application deadline. We currently expect that full proposals will be due ten days following this notification. Typically those invited to submit full proposals would not be asked for extensive revisions. If extensive revisions are requested and applicants need more time, they should ask for this. Actual receipt of funding cannot take place until procedures at the relevant institution have been completed (including human subjects review where applicable).

If the proposal is to support work with a private firm, the applicant will have to make a convincing case that the Weiss Family Program Fund support is necessary to achieve the objectives of the fund. For example, we will want to know why the firm cannot fund the project itself. The Weiss Family Program Fund seeks to avoid giving a competitive advantage to any particular private firm.

Evaluation criteria:

Projects will be judged by a committee of PhD economists. Projects will be judged based on:

1. The ability of the applicant(s) to successfully implement the proposal.
2. Potential long-run impact on the well-being of people in less developed countries
3. Appropriateness of proposed budget, alternative sources of funding being adequately pursued, and catalyzation of additional funding.
4. The letter of recommendation from the applicant's advisor and his or her ability/willingness to

supervise the project.

Applicants whose expression of interest is deemed sufficiently promising will be asked to submit a formal proposal through their institution. The committee may ask for clarification of aspects of the research not addressed in the expression of interest. While a request for a submission of a formal proposal will not be a guarantee that the project will ultimately be funded, it is anticipated that the success rate of proposals will be very high.

Winners of awards will be expected to share interim results such as materials used in presentations and draft papers with the committee, which may offer advice and feedback.

Winners of awards will also be expected to be available to meet with a representative of Child Relief International in Boston to discuss the progress of their work and the research design.

Award recipients will also be expected to present the results of their research to seminars attended by other award recipients. However, once grants have been awarded, researchers will have complete academic freedom, subject to the normal rules of their institution.

Exploratory Travel Grants

PhD students and junior faculty members are eligible to apply for exploratory grants to finance trips to meet with organizations working in the developing world (non-profit organizations, for-profit organizations, and governments are all eligible) that are interested in collaborating with researchers on a project that could potentially qualify for Weiss Fund support. If interested, please inquire about some organizations that would like to work with researchers and expressions of interest are welcome for both those and other organizations. Such expressions of

interest should only be submitted after initial email and phone conversations to establish potential feasibility of a project. The expression of interest should be under 500 words and should include a detailed budget as well as a transcript. They should explain what the organization does, what potential research project or projects would be explored, and what communication the researcher and the organization have already had. PhD students should explain any prior previous field experience and should obtain an endorsement of the trip from an advisor. Expressions of interest can be on-cycle, submitted under normal deadlines, or, if time-sensitive, off cycle , but in the latter case only if there is evidence that reliance on an off-cycle expression of interest was unavoidable.