

Fieldwork and Field Experiments

Chris Grady

Senior Metrics Advisor

United States Agency for International Development

Bocconi University

October 06, 2021

Introduction



Introduction



Introduction



Introduction



Introduction



Introduction



Introduction



Pouvoir 3G
4 Days Standby

Introduction



Roadmap

- ▶ Implementation Partners
- ▶ Being in the Field
- ▶ Intervention and Evaluation
- ▶ Running the Show

Questions

Ask now!

Implementation Partners

How to get involved with implementers

- ▶ Professor throws you a project
- ▶ Meet at a conference
- ▶ Pro bono “cold call” from you
- ▶ University collaborations
- ▶ Sites that connect researchers and implementers:
research4impact, egap, others
- ▶ Implementers want prior RCT experience, experience in-country
- ▶ Bigger NGOs will want established professors

Implementation Partners

How to work with non-academics

- ▶ Theoretical vs. practical divide
- ▶ Compromise away from perfection
- ▶ Avoid jargon
- ▶ Explain how long data work can take
- ▶ Expect Googledocs

Implementation partners

Priorities and incentives

- ▶ Implementing organizations will want you to do a lot of work that is irrelevant for you
- ▶ Look our for your own interests
- ▶ Implementers *need* to make themselves look good to maintain grant funding

Being in the Field

- ▶ You need to go
- ▶ You want to go
- ▶ Establish personal relationships or you will be in the dark and nothing will get done
- ▶ Bring gifts that are identifiably *American*
- ▶ Implementer priority: show their project is successful, not to evaluate if the project was successful.

Being in the Field

- ▶ Learn the language actively
- ▶ Learn and follow cultural etiquette
- ▶ Calm yourself when you want to start an argument

Being in the Field

- ▶ Don't bring anything you are afraid to lose
- ▶ If not staying in a fancy hotel, be ready for lack of water/electricity
- ▶ Start slow and increase intake of local food each day
- ▶ Learn what you can and cannot get in-country
- ▶ Get a local phone and simcard
- ▶ Get personal wifi connection

Being in the Field

- ▶ Learn to get around without help
- ▶ Find amenities and activities – gyms, basketball/soccer club, local bars
- ▶ Travel when possible – do **not** watch TV in a hotel room
- ▶ Hang out with locals
- ▶ Bring books to read

- ▶ Enjoy it! Make friends!

Interventions and Evaluations

What is a field experiment?

- ▶ An experiment done outside of a lab, with real people who don't know they are part of an experiment
 - ▶ Lab: show people video, survey those people
 - ▶ Field: Show a video in a local theatre; survey people who attended
- ▶ Researchers assign and administer experimental intervention
- ▶ Different than natural/quasi-experiment where intervention is incidentally random or as-if random

Interventions and Evaluations

- ▶ Don't let the tail wag the dog – don't change the intervention so that it can be evaluated more easily
- ▶ Make implementers part of design discussions so it is a *team* design, not *your* design
- ▶ Be flexible where things are not imperative
- ▶ Be firm where things are necessary

Interventions and Evaluations

- ▶ Field experiments are a mess – multiple things will go wrong
- ▶ Randomization at multiple levels
- ▶ Simple designs are more likely to be implemented faithfully; complex designs are beautiful and fragile
- ▶ Feasibility extends to survey questions and implementation, observational monitoring procedures, everything
 - ▶ Survey experiments are hard on enumerators because the question wording changes every interview
- ▶ To NGOs, two-arm RCTs are already complicated.
- ▶ Difficult to pitch more complicated things, like multi-arm designs, saturation designs, etc. . .

Interventions and Evaluations

- ▶ Everything is clustered
- ▶ Everything spills over

- ▶ Get the Gerber and Green book.

Data Collection Methods

- ▶ Surveys
 - ▶ In person
 - ▶ Mobile phone “IVR” surveys
- ▶ Observational measures
- ▶ Naturalistic behavioral games
- ▶ Focus groups and “Key Informant” interviews
- ▶ Others?

Running the Show

- ▶ You are in charge and there is no reset button or second chance
- ▶ Putting your money into it – sometimes necessary (get per diem)
- ▶ Staying up until 3am every night for two weeks
- ▶ Hard deadlines

Running the Show

- ▶ Lead by example: get sweaty, get cold, get uncomfortable
- ▶ Don't ask others to do what you will not do
- ▶ Be SUPER ORGANIZED

Conclusion

- ▶ Fieldwork and field experiments are great opportunities for researchers
- ▶ Working with implementation partners can be difficult but rewarding
- ▶ Enjoy experiencing another country
- ▶ Keep your designs simple
- ▶ Use multiple methods of data collection
- ▶ Lead by example

Conclusion

- ▶ Do you really want to do a field experiment/RCT?
- ▶ Take a lot of time
- ▶ Require a lot of non-academic work
- ▶ High fail rate