

Capstone 2: RCT Proposal (mini-grant)

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The objective of this capstone is to provide an opportunity to connect the in-class topics with real-world challenges, to strengthen your skills in communicating clearly and concisely about an issue, and to develop your abilities in thinking critically about writing and providing constructive feedback.

PROMPT

Throughout this class we've discussed a lot of problems facing the world's poor and potential solutions. The Global Innovation Fund provides up to **\$230,000 in funding** for pilot projects that provide "social innovations that aim to improve the lives and opportunities of millions of people in the developing world." Your assignment is to write an adapted mini-grant proposal to GIF. Pick a problem of interest to you, think about one possible "innovation" that is testable, and think about how you would evaluate it.

GIF considers four criteria in its funding decisions¹

1. Target market

- Innovation brings benefits for those who live on the equivalent of \$5 per day, with extra interest in solutions that affect those living on \$2 or less per day or other vulnerable or disadvantaged groups

2. Innovation and impact: Will your intervention meaningfully improve the lives of those living on less than \$5 PPP per day?

- Does your innovation have the potential to deliver substantially greater results per dollar than standard development practice?
- What is your evidence of impact to back this claim?
 - As these are pilot funds, "We value any relevant evidence or research findings that demonstrate why the innovation is needed, such as evidence of customer demand or interest in the innovation. We do not expect that strong evidence already exists to prove the value of the innovation, but we do need a clear rationale for why the innovation could have a greater impact or be more cost effective than existing approaches."
- Will your current request substantially strengthen or test your case for impact?
- Does your innovation test, challenge, or improve on business as usual?

¹The fifth criteria is team composition, but we'll skip that for now

3. **Measuring success and lessons learned:** How will you measure your success? Monitoring and evaluation? Impact evaluation? *For our class, the correct answer is **to conduct an impact evaluation**. Provide details (see below).*
4. **Potential to scale:** If the pilot is successful, how could the model scale and grow?

GIF only funds innovation which have the potential to scale to benefit millions of people. Scaling can take place through in any number of ways– growth of a successful business or uptake by a government partner, for example. The **million lives club** showcases some of the innovations supported by GIF and others which are either reaching millions of clients or on their way to doing so.

Note that you don't need to propose anything at scale, just discuss how one might do it if your intervention was successful

FORMAT

1. Title of project:
2. One-sentence pitch *That's right, just one sentence*
3. Application summary
4. Grant proposal, in one of the following forms
 - a. 2-4 page proposal (12 point font, single spaced, 1" margins)**OR**
 - b. 8-15 slide deck + video in which you narrate your slides
5. References

Application summary

Provide a 1-2 paragraph summary of your application in the space below, **maximum 300 words**. Summarize why your approach is innovative and the expected impacts and potential to scale.

Grant proposal

In addition to the application summary, your proposal should have **four** distinct, labeled sections.

- (1) Overview of the innovation you propose: What is it, how does it work?
- (2) Innovation and impact: Demonstrate that your project meets the **four** criteria above
- (3) Measuring success and lessons learned: Describe a plan to implement a randomized impact evaluation to evaluate your innovation. It should include the following details:
 - (a) Theory of change: Inputs, Activities, Outputs, Intermediate Outcomes, Final outcomes (a diagram is fine)

- (b) Sampling frame: who will be in your sample, how will you recruit them
- (c) Randomization strategy: individual, clustered, explain why
- (d) Treatment arms: how many arms are there, what does each arm (and control) receive?
- (e) Outcomes of interest: What are the outcomes you will measure to determine if your intervention is effective?
- (f) Measurement strategy: How will you measure these outcomes? Surveys, administrative data?

(4) Potential to scale

As a rough guide, I would expect that section 3 would be about twice as long as sections 1 and 2, and that section 4 would be very short.

Written grant proposal Your document should meet the following criteria:

- Include elements described above
- Be 2–4 pages, single spaced
- 11 or 12 point reasonable font, 1" margin

In order to make this work, you'll note that you won't have much room for long paragraphs with nice connecting topics sentences. Don't worry about transitions. Use bullet points when appropriate to make your points clearer.

Slide deck grant proposal *Note that you still need to prepare the 300-word application summary if you choose this option!*

Your presentation should contain the following:

- Include all elements described above
- Consist of 8–16 slides
- Slide deck should be attractive, easy to read
- You should record a video of yourself narrating your presentation. This is not the same as reading your slides. You can do a screencast via Teams or something fancier. I'm just looking for a video of your slides w/ an audio component
- Because you are narrating, don't try to cram a written proposal into 16 slides. It will look awful and be no fun for you. Use bullet points to touch on key elements, and then talk us through those points in detail
- You don't need to script your narration (though you can) – but you may want to give yourself a few talking points to ensure it goes smoothly
- The presentation should be 10–15 minutes.

Do I need references?

Yes, and not just for your grade. Depending on your problem/innovation, you will need to consult data sources, reports and/or academic articles for any of these three reasons:

- (1) To argue why your policy problem matters. It's not sufficient to say that "I believe hunger is a major problem, because when I'm hungry it's hard to do anything." Rather, "Malnutrition kills more than 10 children each year and limits the future of millions more (Yosemite and Buggles 2005)"
- (2) To argue why your innovation is innovative. While Smith and Patel (2012) have tested the roll-out of microinsurance to protect against flooding in Senegal, no one has considered that microinsurance can also be adapted to help the poor pay costly veterinary bills."
- (3) To argue why your innovation will work. "Ho and Gutchow (1988) show the promise of inspirational cat posters on children's health and iron levels."

For grading purposes, you must cite at least 3 peer-reviewed academic papers, at least two of which must be non-assigned course readings (bonus pack course readings are fine).

Documenting your references Your sources can include readings from class or readings outside of class, but all should be properly documented in a **References** section at the end of the proposal or your slide deck. *The references section does not count toward the page limit or slide deck limit.* You can use any standard method of formatting references (APA, MLA, Chicago), but it should be implemented correctly.

Do I need a budget?

No!

However, it can be hard to know what \$230k would buy you in terms of an intervention and evaluation (less than you would think, unfortunately :no_mouth:). And often, governments will provide inputs if your innovation builds upon an existing program they are interested in. For example, if you want to add a component to a conditional cash transfer program, you could assume the cash transfer program is already paid for. In general, think bigger than distributing flyers to 1000 people but smaller than a test of universal basic income for the nation of Kenya.

The biggest costs are usually the interventions themselves (ie you give \$100/person, that adds up!) and staffing needed for surveys. We just priced out a 1.5 hour 2400-person survey conducted in person in fairly rural areas in the Philippines at ~\$100k (including all staff costs, transportation, help w/ analysis, etc.).

For this assignment, don't worry about this too much unless you are *wildly* off (ie could be implemented for < \$10k or more than \$5 million).

I HAVE NO IDEAS!

A few approaches:

1. Topic-centric: Pick a general topic that interests you (education, sanitation, reproductive health), and dive into the *Poor Economics* chapter – keep an eye out for the papers that catch your fancy. Or, if you find someone's work you like, visit their research website and see what other stuff they're up to more recently. There are lots of summaries of completed and in-progress projects at [IPA's](#) and [JPAL's](#) websites, and you can search by topic
2. Recent stuff: Browse [VoxDev.org](#) – it has heaps of quick policy briefs on things people are trying.
3. GIF: Check out what GIF is [funding](#) at the moment
4. Dig around for NGOs that work in areas you're interested in. [GiveWell](#) has a list of effective charities.

You don't need to revolutionize the world by inventing the next big idea or building a better bed net. But, you can look at what people have tried or are trying and propose an improvement, an expansion, a new context, etc. Since it's a pilot, you don't need to know whether it will work, but you should be able to argue (using evidence) that it *probably* will make peoples' lives better.

In that vein, you shouldn't take someone's project as is. But, you could think about what addition/change you might make to someone's intervention, whether you could apply it in a different context (If cognitive behavioral therapy helps mothers, could it also help children? Maybe it would lead to better education outcomes?), etc.

GRADING

See separate grading rubric. Use it as you work on your proposal.

Note that the rubric will be the same for both methods, with the exception of the "Appearance and style" block. For the written proposal, that will be graded based on producing a proposal that is concise, clear, and has minimal grammatical errors. The recorded video proposal will be graded on the quality of the slides (visually attractive, concise) and of the narration (makes points clearly, easy to follow)

Deliverables

Your assignment will be submitted in three stages. You will be graded on your proposal idea (5%, for completion), draft brief (10%, for completion), and your final brief (85%)

RCT proposal idea

Submit on Blackboard by **October 15 (Friday) @ 1:10pm**

Prepare a 1–2 paragraph "pitch" of your idea. This is fairly informal, but it should include the following:

- Location of study: Specific country, region within country, etc
- Description of the innovation that you want to test. What is it, is this derived from something else (and if so, what's different about your study vs. previous work)?

- A sentence or two about how you might evaluate it.

RCT proposal draft

Submit on Blackboard by **October 29 (Friday) @ 1:10pm**, and we will peer review in class

What counts as "complete enough" for a rough draft:

- Content in all four sections of grant proposal (as written document or presentation)
- At least 1 page single spaced
- Theory of change present and filled out
- At least 2 peer-reviewed academic journal articles included (you need 3 for final)

RCT proposal final draft

Submit on Blackboard by **November 7 (Sunday) @ 11:59pm**

Review rubric before submission!