Date: 8 February, 2020

Dear Fulbright Selection Committee,

I am writing once more to reaffirm my interest in serving as a host country affiliate for Kimberly Hancock’s proposed Fulbright research project. The reason for this additional letter is to address the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had in the context of Kimberly’s proposed field of research, digital gender divide. The Digital Empowerment Foundation recently published a report on a survey-study conducted from August-October 2020. The study focuses on the digital gender divide in the context of the pandemic, the negative impact of which has been disproportionately felt by adolescent girls. In the study, over four thousand respondents were surveyed via randomised tele-sampling. They were asked about their access to the following: digital devices, online connectivity, online content, and digital skills. Key takeaways from the study included the need for envisioning a gendered digital strategy, strengthening e-learning for girls in schools, establishing digital skill-building programs, etc. The overall purpose of the report is to help recommend a participatory and inclusive policy framework which brings forward the voices of adolescent girls.

Kimberly’s proposed project fits very well into the goals of this report. She plans to emphasize the struggles young women have faced in the context of COVID-19 with regards to getting access to and knowing how to use technology. She will analyze data pre and post COVID as well as design appropriate survey questions. The Soochnapreneur program is run by rural youths; there is a strong need to assess the degree to which COVID-19 has limited these youths’ ability to participate in the program and how this is disproportionately felt by women. Kimberly plans on looking into data that has been received from the existing team regarding women-based digital entrepreneurship and ultimately writing small stories about key findings. This will help her get acquainted with the type of data DEF collects and how it is analyzed.

The SoochnaPreneur program has also won an award from the World Bank for the Global Tech Challenge: Solutions for Women. This will give the program increased global visibility which only increases the need for researchers to look into various aspects of the program and ultimately see help improve and expand it. Learning more about barriers to entry for women to become Soochnapreneurs is a key aspect in achieving this goal. Kimberly plans to build on the existing data we have collected on digital gender divide in the context of COVID by bringing in data from the Soochnapreneur program. It will be great to hopefully have her as part of our team.

Sincerely,