

# Applying for a research grant as a PhD student & planning your own survey

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# Introduction

- ▶ I am a PhD student studying development economics
- ▶ These slides are based on an informal seminar that I organised for PhD students at UCL
- ▶ It is for cases where you want to establish your own research (not under senior faculty's project/budget)
- ▶ If you have suggestions/comments, feel free to email me [yasuka.tateishi.21@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:yasuka.tateishi.21@ucl.ac.uk)
- ▶ All errors are my own

# Agenda

## 1. Applying for a research grant

- ▶ Purpose of funding
- ▶ Institutional vs. private contracting
- ▶ List of funding for PhD students (in development economics)
- ▶ Our case

## 2. Planning a survey

- ▶ Timeline
- ▶ Budget items
- ▶ Developed countries vs. developing countries

## Application to research grant

# Why do we need funding?

- ▶ Some research projects can be costly
  - ▶ Travel costs to visit a field
  - ▶ Data acquisition cost
  - ▶ Survey
  - ▶ Hiring an RA
  - ▶ Attending conferences
- ▶ Hard to get subsidies from your advisors if it is not a co-authoring project with them
- ▶ Your university may have limited internal funding for PhD students
- ▶ A good signal of your research quality

# Things to bear in mind before applying

- ▶ It takes **A LOT** of time
- ▶ You need to:
  - ▶ Write a proposal + get feedback
  - ▶ Write a budget narrative
  - ▶ Ask your advisor to write a reference letter (if necessary)
  - ▶ Ask the finance team about the pre-award procedure (if institutional contracting)
- ▶ Timeline: You need a few months to receive the funds
  - ▶ After submission, it can take 3+ months to hear results
  - ▶ The post-award contract process can sometimes take 1+ month
- ▶ Frequency
  - ▶ Call for proposals: 1-3 calls/year from each organisation
  - ▶ Rolling basis: open to application anytime (may take less time)

# Type of funding – contracting process

## Private contracting

- ▶ Directly sign a contract as an individual
- ▶ Easy to handle
  - ▶ Just keep your receipts and get reimbursed
  - ▶ No need to go through the university's pre-award process
- ▶ Likely to be a small amount of money
- ▶ Be careful with what you are legally allowed to do under the contract
  - ▶ Particular concern when hiring someone (e.g. RA)
  - ▶ The grant institution may not be liable for any conduct of researchers

# Type of funding – contracting process

## Institutional contracting

- ▶ Very time-consuming and requires many steps
- ▶ Can incur overhead fee
- ▶ Many large grants are contracted through universities
- ▶ Can ensure that your work is complying with the law
- ▶ How it works at UCL:
  - ▶ The grant institution needs to be registered with both the econ department and the UCL research service centre **before the application deadline**
  - ▶ You need at least 2-3 weeks for both parties to coordinate.
  - ▶ Once registered, you should share your budget plan, which is to be approved by the research service
  - ▶ Better to consult with econ finance team at least one month before the deadline.



# List of funding calls to look up

*NB: My knowledge is very limited to development economics*

Check CV of a PhD student/junior faculty of your field

## ► IGC

- Small research grants: max. £30,000 (£20k for explanatory ones)
- Small projects facility (rolling basis): max. £20,000
- Priority on IGC countries: Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Ghana, Jordan, Mozambique, Pakistan, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Uganda, and Zambia
- [Institutional contracting](#)

## ► PEDL

- Explanatory grants: £10,000 to £40,000
- Priority on LICs and FCDO-focus LMICs
- [Private contracting](#)

## ► STEG

- PhD research grants: up to £15,000
- Small research grants: £10,000 to £25,000
- Focus on structural transformation in Sub-Saharan Africa
- [Private contracting](#)

# List of funding calls to look up

## ▶ Weiss Fund

- ▶ Research grants: max \$50,000
- ▶ Travel and piloting grants (rolling basis): max \$25,000
- ▶ Implementation and policy grants (rolling basis)
- ▶ Open to students at specific universities / Otherwise your advisor needs to be a BREAD affiliate
- ▶ [Institutional contracting](#)

## ▶ J-PAL

- ▶ Funding calls by each [initiative](#), mainly for RCT
- ▶ Pilot grants, Travel/Proposal development grants
- ▶ PhD students must have J-PAL affiliates in thesis committee
- ▶ [Institutional contracting](#) (at least one PI needs to be employed)

## ▶ IPA

- ▶ Funding calls by each [initiative](#)
- ▶ Less eligibility constraints compared to J-PAL
- ▶ You cannot apply to both J-PAL and IPA for similar initiatives
- ▶ [Institutional contracting](#) (country office can also handle)

# After winning funding

- ▶ Receiving money
  - ▶ Some funding pays a fraction of the grant at the beginning, while others pay only upon submission of receipt.
  - ▶ For [institutional contracting](#), your university may be able to pre-finance your expenses
- ▶ Re-purpose of the budget
  - ▶ Change how much you want to spend in each category
  - ▶ Need to submit a new budget breakdown and have it approved
- ▶ Mid-term and Final Report
  - ▶ Report activities undertaken and amount spent (with receipts)
  - ▶ Sometimes you need to report policy engagements as well

# Our case

- ▶ Topic: Climate change and firm performance in Uganda
- ▶ Building network in Uganda (summer 2022)
  - ▶ Got interested in admin data in Uganda
  - ▶ Talked with IGC country economists online
  - ▶ IGC invited me to visit Uganda for a policy event
- ▶ Explore data access / funding application (winter 2022-23)
  - ▶ Was advised to travel for networking with policymakers
  - ▶ Applied to a few funding calls and were successful
  - ▶ Networking visit with the IGC grant
- ▶ Start of research (summer 2023)
  - ▶ Our data access was approved but physical presence in Kampala was required
  - ▶ Application to additional funding
  - ▶ A life of travelling every few months for data analysis

# Why were we successful?

- ▶ Prior engagement with stakeholders in Uganda
  - ▶ Grant proposal often requires you to explain how you have developed a relationship with local partners
  - ▶ Signals feasibility of the research
- ▶ A clear reason for travel necessity
  - ▶ Physical presence in Uganda required for data access
  - ▶ In-person meeting is really important in Uganda
- ▶ Good fit with the priority area of the funding
- ▶ Small amount requested (= value for money)

But of course, we had some unsuccessful applications...

# My advice

- ▶ Start planning ahead
  - ▶ It took us one year (!) to get data access since the beginning of the project
  - ▶ I was lucky to have started at the end of my 1st year of PhD
- ▶ Having a local connection is very important.
  - ▶ Look up funding for a scooping visit (IGC, Weiss...)
  - ▶ You can learn how to align your work with policy interests
- ▶ Always consult with the finance team of your department for institutional contracting

## Planning a survey

# Types of survey (broadly classifying)

- ▶ Purpose
  - ▶ RCT
  - ▶ Collection of quantitative information
  - ▶ Qualitative interview
- ▶ Format
  - ▶ In-person
  - ▶ Phone
  - ▶ Online
  - ▶ Mail posting
- ▶ Country
  - ▶ Developed country
  - ▶ Developing country



# Survey – what needs to be done?

## (1) Planning

- ▶ **Ethical review with Institutional Review Board (IRB)**
  - ▶ Additional ethical review may be required by the government of the survey country
- ▶ **Find a local collaborator/ survey company**
- ▶ **Secure funding**
  - ▶ Ideal to get a quote at the time of application
- ▶ **Power calculation (if necessary)**
  - ▶ For determining sample size and minimum detectable effect size (MDES).
  - ▶ Particularly important for RCT
- ▶ **Pre-analysis plan [only for RCT]**
  - ▶ Registration at AEA RCT Registry

# Survey – what needs to be done?

## (2) Preparation

### ▶ **Sampling**

- ▶ Survey companies can often extract samples from their monitor group
- ▶ You can also select from secondary data if it has contact information conditional on getting approval from a provider
- ▶ Physical tracking may be necessary in a developing country

### ▶ **Pilot interview**

- ▶ Asking a potential respondent helps improve the survey design

### ▶ **Prepare a questionnaire**

- ▶ Need to consider what variables you can get from a question and how they contribute to the research question
- ▶ Computer-Assisted Personal Interview (CAPI)  $\approx$  face-to-face survey with tablets is popular [in-person survey]
- ▶ The shorter, the easier it is to respond + less expensive

# Survey – what needs to be done?

## (3) Implementation

- ▶ **Enumerator training** [in-person survey]
  - ▶ Prepare a manual for enumerators in advance
  - ▶ Briefing of the survey questionnaire and practice survey
- ▶ **Survey**
  - ▶ Monitoring of enumerators is highly recommended, at least for a few weeks after launching the survey [in-person survey]

# Survey cost

- ▶ In most cases, payment to a survey company would suffice
  - ▶ They will send a survey request/questionnaire to potential respondents and get back to you with data
  - ▶ Get a quote and seek the best option for survey sample, length of questionnaire, etc.
- ▶ An online survey would be the cheapest option
  - ▶ A survey company sends out a request to their monitors via email and they fill out an online form
  - ▶ Surveying individuals or firms outside their monitoring group could incur higher costs

# Survey cost

## In-person survey in a developing country

- ▶ Example from a quote we got for the project in Uganda
  - ▶ Training cost: venue hire, refreshments, transport
  - ▶ Enumerators' wage, transport, subsistence
  - ▶ Incentive for respondents (cash or in-kind)
  - ▶ Internet and phone plan for enumerators
  - ▶ Tablet rental
  - ▶ Translation of questionnaire / consent form
  - ▶ Stationary (e.g. printing out consent forms)
  - ▶ Fee for personnel (field coordinator, ICT manager)
  - ▶ Server fee
  - ▶ Ethical review in Uganda
  - ▶ Overhead charges for the survey company

# Challenges in developing countries

## ► Sampling

- It is unlikely that you have access to a census of whatever you want to survey (esp. informal context)
- Even with the formal context, registration record is not necessarily accurate
- Not everyone has internet access / device to use an online form
- In a very rural area, literacy rates may not be high

⇒ Physical tracking may be the best way

- You can probably create a census of population group if it is geographically not too sparse & have enough budget
- Even with limited budget, define enumeration areas and select respondents by physically visiting the location
- Consult with a survey company for feasibilities

# My advice

- ▶ Talk to anyone with survey experience
  - ▶ Very helpful to know the timeline and necessary preparation
  - ▶ Understand which survey company is suitable for your context (even get introduced to them)
- ▶ Ask someone who knows the context before setting up the survey
  - ▶ Life of PhD students is so isolated from the real world
  - ▶ Ask them to review a questionnaire
- ▶ Again, start planning ahead
  - ▶ You typically start from a pilot survey and use the result to apply for a larger funding
  - ▶ Surveys in developing countries don't work so smoothly...
  - ▶ You should start applying for fundings from 2nd or 3rd year if you want to use it for JMP

# Useful links

- ▶ World Bank blog post: [Survey methods — curated blogs](#)
- ▶ World Bank blog post: [A Curated List of Our Postings on Technical Topics – Your One-Stop Shop for Methodology](#)
- ▶ Newsletter of the Japanese Association of Development Economics (JADE)
  - ▶ [“Economics Fieldwork”](#) by Prof. Yuki Higuchi
  - ▶ [“Economics Fieldwork2”](#) by Prof. Yuko Nakano