Weiss Fund for
Research in Development Economics
CALL FOR EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST
Fall 2018
Application deadline: October 31, 2018

The Weiss Fund for Research in Development Economics supports research by students and ladder faculty at Boston University, Harvard, MIT, Northwestern University[1], Stanford University, and the University of California, Berkeley working in development economics, broadly defined. The program funds projects that address a wide range of issues affecting less developed countries.

Fall 2018 Call for Research Projects Expressions of Interest

The Weiss Fund invites Expressions of Interest for the Fall 2018 funding cycle. Eligibility details and application instructions, as well as the types of projects that have been funded in the past, are outlined below. Please email the Weiss Fund (wfp@fas.harvard.edu) with any questions.

Application Process

Eligibility:

PhD students enrolled as degree-seeking students, and junior and senior ladder faculty at the participating institutions (Boston University, Harvard, MIT, Northwestern University, Stanford University, and University of California, Berkeley) who meet the following criteria are eligible to apply and serve as the corresponding principal investigator (PI) for the project. Visiting or temporary students and faculty are not eligible.

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[1] Note for Northwestern University affiliates: before awardees from Northwestern U. can be supported or awards can be processed, the institution must join the master agreement governing the Weiss Fund.

All applicants should have sufficient training to conduct research using current techniques and methods in economics. The PI applying for funding (i.e., corresponding PI) must also meet the following criteria:

- *PhD students* should be working under the supervision of a faculty member with expertise in economics and should have sufficient time to devote to completing the project before graduating. The Weiss Fund ordinarily will not provide support to new projects being started by PhD students during their last year of the program.

- *Postdoctoral fellows* and *non-ladder faculty* are only eligible if they have already obtained a position from one of the participating institutions as ladder faculty.

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

- *Senior Faculty* proposals should be for long-term projects and projects that are designed to capture spillover effects. Applications that do not meet this criterion will not be considered.

Submitting your Expression of Interest

To apply for funding within the Fall 2018 funding cycle please submit each of the following documents by October 31, 2018.

A) Online application form

B) Student applicants: A recommendation letter from the project advisor. This should include a statement that s/he will supervise the proposed project, support it intellectually, and the expected time commitment (e.g., weekly or monthly meetings.) The recommendation letter should be emailed by the advisor directly to Weiss Fund (wfp@fas.harvard.edu). Please ask your recommender to use the following naming convention: last name of primary PI, last name of recommender, then "_rec" (e.g., Smith_Doe_rec).

C) Expression of Interest packet, to be emailed by the applicant to the Weiss Fund (wfp@fas.harvard.edu) as one PDF document to wfp@fas.harvard.edu. The file should use the following naming convention: last name of primary PI, then "_F18_EOI" (e.g., Smith_F18_EOI.pdf). The packet should include the following components:

1) CV for each principal investigator

2) For each student applicant: unofficial transcript

3) Proposed detailed itemized budget (see budget guidelines below for instructions). [The budget should also be sent in Excel format.][2]

4) If a revision of a previously submitted proposal: A cover letter describing how the reviewers' feedback has been addressed within the revised proposal. (Cover letter excluded from proposal word count).

5) Research proposal. Maximum 8 pages total, double-spaced, Times New Roman 12-point font, 1-in margins. The proposal should include the sections described below and use this template.

The research proposal should include the following components and ensure adherence to recommended maximum page limits for each section:

1. Introduction and background (1.5 pages)

i) An outline of the research hypothesis and relevance to the Fund's mission (see Project Guidelines below).

ii) Very concise background/motivation.

2. Methodology and research approach (5 pages)

i) Detailed description of methods and identification strategy (for empirical proposals intended to estimate a causal effect).

ii) Detailed explanation of outcome variables, and their measurement

iii) Explanation of the availability of data (for empirical proposals).

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[2] The proposed budget file created in Excel should also be emailed a separate document as part of the application and use the naming convention "_F18_budget" (e.g., Smith_F18_budget.xls).

iv) If a randomized trial: power calculations, sample size and description of sample stratification (to achieve similar control and treatment groups). We strongly encourage stratification to provide more power for given sample size and cost. **EOIs that do not incorporate stratification should state why stratification is not appropriate for the proposal.** [3]

v) If the proposal is to work with a private firm: a convincing case that Weiss Fund support is necessary and why the firm cannot fund the project itself. The Fund seeks to avoid giving a competitive advantage to any particular private firm and may disqualify proposals on these grounds. Any distortion of the market towards a particular firm would be considered as subtracting from the net social benefit of the project and hence the benefits to society beyond the private firm would have to be commensurately greater for the project to be considered favorably.

3. Timeline and budget (1.5 pages)

i) Project timeline

ii) Budget narrative and cost-effectiveness explanation (see budget guidelines below for instructions).

iii) If student applicant: description of research background and evidence of ability to complete the project.

4. Appendix (optional). This can contain tables, figures, survey questions/instrument, protocols, devices used, etc. Appendix will not count towards page limit but may not include a continuation of the proposal narrative.

The Expression of Interest proposal document should describe the project in sufficient detail to

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[3] EOIs that do not meet this rule will be considered ineligible and will not be evaluated by the committee.

allow reviewers to determine its feasibility and potential impact on development policy. The background/motivation section is to be extremely concise. The proposal should focus on the nuts and bolts of the study and the proposed budget. For example, if the project includes a survey, description of survey content (and survey questions, if these have already been developed), and detail about the data collection approach should be provided; if the project involves a game, the game design should be described in sufficient detail for reviewers to judge it. The maximum length for the proposal is 8 pages, excluding Appendices, if any.

**Note:* UC Berkeley applicants must submit a full proposal through the Sponsored Projects Office (SPO) in accordance with SPO policies and deadlines.

Project guidelines

The Weiss Fund is funded by Child Relief International and aims to sponsor research that will positively affect the lives of poor people in poor countries. The potential impact of research on the poor can be long run, research can duplicate an existing study in a different context, or it can investigate a negative result – showing that something that is 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 Program only funds research in countries, regions, or populations with per capita GDP below $10,000 in 2015 USD; and has a preference for supporting work in countries, regions, or populations with per capita GDP below $5,000. The Program does not fund research in developed countries, even on low-income populations within these countries

Examples 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 effects of specific programs on civil society, 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 NGOs' and aid agencies' policies regarding local hiring and purchasing on wages, cost of commercial property, and the exchange rate; to redoing previous randomized evaluations to control for spillover effects such as the effects of micro-finance and remittances on expenditures on weddings, funerals, festivals and other status goods. The program seeks to avoid financing research that should be funded by for profit companies that will directly benefit from the results.

The projects that have received funding from the Weiss Fund in the past are listed here: http://projects.iq.harvard.edu/wfrde/weiss-awardees.

The publication and dissemination of well-designed and implemented research on programs affecting the poor is important in helping donors, governments and NGOs improve their policies and programming. However, the prospects for publication in top journals will not directly enter into funding decisions.

Budget guidelines

Funding amounts:

Funding decisions will be based on the balance of the benefits and cost of the project. The Selection Committee will not look favorably on proposals that appear budgeted to hit the maximum limits. While there may be exceptions, funding will typically not exceed $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. There is no pre-set budget limit on proposals from senior faculty. We recognize that senior faculty proposals may have higher costs, given their proposals should be for longer-term projects and projects designed to study geographic regions, rather than individuals, so as to capture spillover effects. However, applicants should bear in mind that the Weiss Fund has never in the past funded grants over $75,000 and that it takes value for money seriously.

The EOIs will be judged based on expected return per dollar of funding requested. Budget narratives should include a short explanation about the proposed work's cost effectiveness.

Eligible costs:

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, data purchase, and research assistant time. Any equipment purchased with the grant should be donated to a non-profit organization after completion of the study; if the applicant has other plans, these should be described briefly within the proposal. While data entry and data aggregation costs are eligible, graduate students will not normally receive funding to hire research assistants.

Indirect costs (e.g., a percentage for overhead) are not eligible. If appropriate, costs for items such as office rent in the developing country or accounting services are eligible, but only if directly attributable to the project and itemized in the proposed budget. Thus, for example, an applicant who plans to work with an organization like Innovations for Poverty Action must itemize and

justify specific expenses. Do not simply include overhead or a "country management fee" as a fixed percentage of other costs.

Budget and budget narrative:

The proposal is to include a *detailed* budget spreadsheet (in Excel) describing the anticipated budget, including project costs and sources of funding obtained or requested. The budgeted costs should be as frugal as possible and clearly justified; budgets that appear to be padded will be viewed negatively by the committee. We would also like to see evidence that alternative sources of funding are being pursued and that there are efforts to catalyze additional funding.

Funding should be disaggregated by source and status (e.g., obtained, requested), and the allocation of funds to costs should be specified. An example budget submitted by successful applicants from a previous round is provided here. The accompanying budget narrative should list the period for which the award is requested, explain the proposed project budget and provide justification for the amount being requested from the Weiss Fund in the context of other funding obtained or to be sought. The narrative should include brief justification/context for the main budget items such as enumerator or RA costs (including appropriateness of the level of compensation). It should also describe the contributions expected of the research partner(s) (e.g., NGO, government, for-profit firm), if any, whether monetary or in-kind. If no contribution is expected of the research partner, this should be stated clearly.

Evaluation Criteria

Projects will be judged by a committee of PhD economists. Expected impact per dollar spent will be the overriding criteria. Projects will be judged based on:

1. The ability of the applicant(s) to successfully implement the proposal.

2. Letter of recommendation.

3. Potential long-run impact on the well-being of people in less developed countries.[4]

4. Appropriateness of proposed budget, alternative sources of funding being adequately pursued, and catalyzation of additional funding. The budget should be as frugal as possible and clearly justified.

The Weiss Fund will aim to notify applicants of their decision within five to six weeks of the application deadline. The review committee will evaluate each submitted application and either 1) approve project funding, 2) decline the request, or 3) ask the applicant to revise and resubmit a full proposal either in the same round, or the following round. BU, MIT, Northwestern[5], Stanford University, and UC Berkeley applicants may need to submit final research proposals through their institutions, which may have their own procedural requirements.

Award Rules

Actual receipt of funding cannot take place until procedures at the relevant institution have been completed. Awardees must provide evidence of human subjects' review approval, or of an exemption. Winners of awards will be expected to share both interim and final results with the Weiss Fund committee, such as materials used in presentations and draft papers, and the committee may offer advice and feedback. Winners of awards are expected to meet with a representative of Child Relief International to discuss the progress of their work and the research design. Award

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[4] Proposals led by senior faculty should focus on longer-term projects, and projects designed to capture spillover effects

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

Off-cycle Applications

The committee may 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 a research project that needs to be put in place quickly to evaluate the impact of an unanticipated policy change.

Fall 2018 Call for Exploratory Travel Grant Expressions of Interest

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 with the Weiss Fund (wfp@fas.harvard.edu) about some organizations that would like to work with researchers. Expressions of Interest for exploratory travel grants are welcome for both those and other organizations. Such Expressions of Interest should only be submitted after initial email and phone conversations with the NGO have taken place to establish potential feasibility of a project and a likely match between the researcher(s) and the NGO.

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A) Online application form

B) If student applicant: An endorsement letter from an advisor. This letter should be emailed by the advisor directly to Weiss Fund (wfp@fas.harvard.edu). Please ask your recommender to use the following naming convention: last name of primary PI, last name of recommender, then "_rec" (e.g., Smith_Doe_rec).

C) Expression of Interest packet, to be emailed by applicant to the Weiss Fund (wfp@fas.harvard.edu) as one PDF document to wfp@fas.harvard.edu. The file should use the following naming convention: last name of primary PI, then "_F18_EG " (e.g., Smith_F18_EG.pdf). The packet should include the following components:**

1) Applicant's CV.

2) If student applicant: unofficial transcript.

3) Proposed detailed itemized budget (please see budget guidelines for more details).

4) Research proposal. Maximum 750 words total, double-spaced, 12-point font, including footnotes. Proposal 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.

Off-cycle Applications

The committee may consider off-cycle applications for Exploratory Grants particularly for time-sensitive projects. Off-cycle Expressions of Interest that are deemed to be time-sensitive should include a cover note explaining why they are time sensitive and why it was impossible to submit the project in response to the prior call.