Open Call for Research & Innovation

About the Agency Fund

We fund ideas and organizations that leverage data, science, and technology to support people in the navigation of economic and life choices. Our innovation investments focus on time-limited projects that pilot, experimentally test, or scale and iteratively improve specific innovations that advance human agency. Our open call invites concepts that fall within the general scope of our approach, regardless of the exact social or development outcome that they aim to advance.

Background for our Open Call

Recent advances in experimental social science show that even people who live in extremely difficult conditions, and who appear to have very limited options, can derive major benefits from insights that engage their consciousness, affirm their dignity, and support them in charting a path forward. Remarkable impacts can follow on subjective indicators like self-efficacy and life satisfaction, as well as with objective development outcomes like income,[1-3] health status,[4] and educational attainment.[5]

The expansion of mobile technology, along with the falling cost of data in low-income settings, makes it possible to bring evidence-based guidance to people in poverty as well. A number of organizations are already pioneering this approach. For example:

- Non-profit Precision Development provides smallholder farmers in India and Africa with agricultural advisory services that are tailored to local agronomic conditions.[6]
- Non-profit ConsiliumBots helps Latin American students and their families navigate the public education options that are available to them.[7]
- Shujaaz, a social venture, builds digital tools that help East African micro-entrepreneurs seek and share advice on informal street hustles.

We are interested in these and similar ideas that give people access to localized, actionable insights that may prove useful to them in the navigation of their difficult economic prospects.

What and How We Fund

This call supports research and innovation projects.

- A Pilot round is suitable for untested ideas. The expected output is a proof-of-concept. The maximum contribution is $200k.
- Advanced funding rounds are suitable for ideas with a degree of existing evidence or scale. The expected outcomes are greater evidence and greater scale. There are no defined contribution limits.

The strongest applications will demonstrate:

- Direct relevance to the planning and decision challenges of individuals, households, or communities in poverty.
- A compelling hypothesis about specific informational or psychosocial barriers that can keep people from realizing their full potential.
- A team that works at the cutting edge of social or technological innovation, follows an evidence-based approach, and has a deep understanding of the context it operates in.
- A path to scale, a framework for measuring cost and benefits at scale, and ambitious timelines.

This call is open-ended. Submissions will be reviewed on a quarterly basis.

For FAQs and to apply, visit www.agency.fund

Citations

1. Banerjee, A. et al. (2015). A multifaceted program causes lasting progress for the very poor: Evidence from six countries. *Science 348(6236)*
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3. Brooks, W., Donovan, K, Johnson, T. R. (2018): Mentors or teachers? Microenterprise training in Kenya. *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics 10(4)*
4. Dupas, P. (2011). Do teenagers respond to HIV risk information? Evidence from a field experiment in Kenya. *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics 3(1)*

5. Jensen, R. (2012). Do labor market opportunities affect young women's work and family decisions? Experimental evidence from India. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics 127(2)*

6. Fabregas, R., Kremer, M., Schilbach, F. (2019). Realizing the potential of digital development: The case of agricultural advice. *Science 366(6471)*

7. Arteaga, F., Kapor, A. J., Neilson, C. A., Zimmerman, S. D. (2021). Smart matching platforms and heterogeneous beliefs in centralized school choice. *NBER Working Paper 28946*

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