

Respondent: Pace Phillips, Innovations for Poverty Action

What is your role at your institution?

I am the Director of Program Development at IPA. My primary role is to help get research projects started by bringing together all the components of a study including the researchers, the implementing partners, and the grant funding.

What types of projects does your organization fund? (Including broad topic areas, though I know specific priorities might change over time. Academic research, books, conferences, policy engagement?)

IPA primarily is a research and evidence-based policy organization that works with academic researchers to secure grants from external donors and to carry out field studies. However, IPA often acts as a donor by housing research funds and issuing requests for proposals. These research grants are typically to fund field experiments and impact evaluations of development programs in low and medium income countries. We have recently held open request for proposals and dispersed grants from our Financial Inclusion, Consumer Protection, Peace & Recovery, Human Trafficking, Intimate Partner Violence, Small and Medium Enterprises, and Research Methods Programs.

Does your organization offer smaller grants for early-stage projects?

Yes. IPA's research funds often support travel, project development, and pilot grants for early stage projects. Whether we provide early-stage grants on a given topic really depends on the state of the evidence in that sector and what is determined to be most needed by the field.

How do you find/identify projects of interest? (Calls for proposals? Invitation?)

We typically issue open calls for proposals and advertise these widely. We then select the studies to fund through a competitive process.

If some/all proposals are by invitation, how do you learn about projects and scholars you might want to fund?

All IPA's research funds are open to any researchers who would like to apply. However, the vast majority of IPA's funding is targeted towards rigorous (primarily RCT) field studies, which can have the effect of limiting which types of researchers apply.

Do you send proposals out for review? If so, how do you choose reviewers?

Each research fund has academic leads. Our Sector Program staff that administer the research fund will work with the academic leads to determine who to invite to be part of the review

committee based on their relevant experience. We try to establish diverse review panels that are composed of researchers and practitioners that are active in each particular sector.

Who decides whether to fund a particular proposal?

The review committee makes recommendations of which projects to fund. The review committee selections are almost always the projects that receive funding except if there are extenuating operational, contractual, or donor constraints.

If someone does not receive funding based on an initial proposal, what feedback do they receive, if any? Can they submit a revised proposal?

This really varies fund by fund. However, it is quite common that the program staff will work with research teams to improve their project plan, and proposal, so that it will be more competitive for future rounds. Unlike typical donors, IPA is a research organization so we often are more hands on with supporting researchers in planning a study as well as carrying it out.

Can scholars reach out to you to discuss ideas before submitting a proposal? Is this something you recommend/encourage?

Yes, almost all of our research funds would encourage project teams to reach out to discuss their proposal and project plans. Depending on the fund, and how much demand there is for initial consultation, IPA staff will have varying willingness to engage with researchers at an early stage.

What are the most common mistakes you see scholars making in their proposals?

In a given year, IPA develops and submits hundreds of grant proposals to donors. IPA also receives hundreds of proposals to access our research funds. The most frequent mistake I see scholars make is some version of "burying the lead" by either structuring the proposal like an academic paper or just having a general lack of clarity about why the research study matters. Many academics wrongly assume that their proposal will be read like an academic paper, where the reader really cares about a particular topic and is willing to slog through some long winded details with careful caveats. Donor's open requests for proposals often receive 50+ applications so "what the project will accomplish" and "why the project is great" really need to jump off the page.

If you could give potential applicants one piece of advice that might not be obvious on your website, what would it be?

The most simple piece of advice I can give is to thoroughly read the request for proposal documents and decide if your proposed project meets all the criteria. Far too often researchers do not scrutinize the request for proposal documents and realistically assess if their project is

aligned with the donor priorities. This can lead to a lot of wasted time developing proposals that have no chance of winning or proposals that don't highlight the aspects of a project that a donor would be most interested in funding.

In economics, organization like CSWEP have been working to reduce harassment and discrimination in the profession. Does your organization have any safeguards in place to avoid funding individuals who engage in misconduct? How do you handle such cases? (e.g. Do you require applicants to disclose ongoing or past investigations by their employer or a professional organization like the AEA? What happens if a victim reports harassment by a grantee?)

IPA has put in place policies to reduce and address harassment and discrimination within our organization. In addition, we have staff devoted to increasing diversity and inclusion among our principal investigators and research teams, including expanding the number of researchers we work with from low and middle income countries. We are in the process of developing additional policies for how to screen, monitor and address misconduct by grantees who IPA funds.