

**Request for Letter of Interest: Follow-up survey to measure long-term impact of group-based empowerment models for adolescent girls**  
**March 19, 2021**

The Gender Equality team at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation is soliciting brief Letters of Interest (“LOI”) (up to 5 pages) from interested partners to conduct a follow-up survey to generate additional longitudinal data on the long-term effects of group-based models that have shown promise in economically empowering adolescent girls. A LOI is requested by April 16, 2021, with finalist(s) notified by May 7, 2021. Full proposal(s) from the selected finalist(s) will be due by June 4, 2021.

Anticipated timeline of grant: 18-24 months

## Overview

### Background and Opportunity

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (‘the Foundation’) Gender Equality Division works to achieve gender equality by integrating gender across the Foundation’s global work and investing in women’s economic empowerment (WEE), women’s leadership, and removing the barriers for women and girls to thrive. The mission of the Gender Equality Division is a world in which women and girls have equal opportunity. Our WEE strategy is underpinned by the belief that gender-intentional programming and the opportunity to participate in, contribute to, and benefit from economic growth are essential for women to gain access to income, control their assets, and have the power to make decisions. By lifting the barriers to women’s economic access, control, and power, women can attain more years of education; exercise choice over marriage and children; and drive social, economic, and health benefits for themselves and their families, helping to break inter-generational cycles of poverty.

The Foundation’s strategy to achieve women’s and girls’ empowerment focuses on areas where we believe we can make the biggest difference, including by leveraging women’s empowerment collectives and girls’ groups to strengthen women and girls’ voices, skills, and knowledge.

### Testing group-based models for adolescent girls & young women

The Gender Equality Division works with partners in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia to design and test group-based programs for adolescent girls and young women that meet their unique economic and social empowerment needs. Through our learning-oriented portfolio of investments, we test and generate evidence on pathways to scale for group-based models that provide economic and social empowerment outcomes for adolescents and young adult women and aim to help close some of the evidence gaps.

We define “group-based models” as models that intentionally bring girls together in a cohort to meet regularly in girls-only groups, facilitated by a mentor, and serve as a platform to deliver holistic content and build girls’ social, health, cognitive, and economic assets. We are specifically interested in girls’ group programs that take place in a community-based setting or as an extra-curricular activity/club in a school-based setting. Girls’ groups expand girls’ connections with peers and mentors, and can foster solidarity, leadership skills, empowerment, and social support (Haberland et al, Forthcoming 2021). Girl-only groups target girls by age, marital status, education levels, or other criteria. Groups focus on girls’ empowerment and often incorporate a combination of livelihood/vocational training, health, and life skills to improve economic, health, and social empowerment outcomes for girls. Girls’ group models are based on the theory that girls will find it easier to build self-confidence, knowledge, and skills in girls-only groups (Marcus et al., 2017) and that holistic interventions, with targeted content and mentor-led group meetings, can empower girls and build their protective assets (Temin and Heck, 2020).

A recent review of 10 reviews encompassing 270 studies found that the effects of girls' groups were promising for improving the following economic and empowerment outcomes: employment, self-efficacy, gender attitudes, and SRH / HIV knowledge (Haberland et al, Forthcoming 2021). However, numerous evidence gaps persist, for example, around isolating the effects of program components, costs and cost-effectiveness, and how long effects persist.

We seek to fund an additional round of longitudinal survey data collection to generate greater evidence on long-term effects of group-based programs for girls. We are specifically interested in girls' group programs that have shown promise in economically empowering girls. Interventions must have either demonstrated positive economic empowerment outcomes and/or economic outcomes must have been intended as part of the program's original theory of change. Programs must have been previously rigorously evaluated through impact evaluations using randomized control trials or quasi-experimental design. We will consider interventions that have already been the subject of past long-term follow-up surveys as well as those that have not yet been studied following the intervention endline.

Through supporting a follow-up survey round to generate additional longitudinal data on long-term girls' group program impacts on adolescent girls, we hope to be able to:

- Generate greater evidence on the longevity of program effects on adolescent girls and understand to what extent girls' group programs strengthen economic empowerment
- Understand if, how, and to what extent programs may have been able to offer protection to girls in light of COVID-19 and help to mitigate COVID-19's negative impacts

## Project Scope

This grant will fund one additional round of longitudinal survey data collection in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia to generate evidence on the long-term effects of girls' groups programs. It will help close evidence gaps on the longevity of girls' group program impacts, specifically on economic and social empowerment outcomes, and will guide policymakers and practitioners on what works to empower girls.

The questions that we seek to answer through this grant include, but are not limited to:

1. To what extent are girls' groups program effects long-lasting? For example, are economic effects sustained over time? Do social and health interventions delivered through girls' groups lead to positive economic outcomes over time? If data permits, we are interested to shed light on the question of "for whom" and differentiate analysis by age or other criteria (for example, how do outcomes differ for different segments of girls?).
2. If the intervention was multi-arm and tested different intervention approaches, how do girls' group program variations result in different outcomes over time? Which intervention approaches appear to sustain outcomes over time?
3. If, how, and to what extent have girls' groups been able to offer protection to girls in light of COVID-19 and help mitigate negative impacts?
4. If the program previously included a costing or cost-effectiveness analysis, how does the cost-effectiveness change over time and what are the drivers of change?
5. What individual, household, community, and market, and/or policy characteristics influence the above outcomes?

We are specifically interested in measuring long-term economic and social empowerment effects of group-based programs. Our outcomes of interest include a) economic outcomes, e.g. transition to economic activity, financial literacy, savings, and income, and b) social empowerment outcomes, e.g. agency, decision-making, self-efficacy, gender attitudes. In addition, we are also interested in effects on health outcomes (e.g. delayed pregnancy and marriage, decreased experience of violence), education outcomes (e.g. continuation in schooling), or other outcomes that were measured through past survey rounds and are relevant to the program's theory of change.

In their LOI, we expect applicants to articulate their learning questions and share their planned approach. We expect brief details on how the applicant will approach each of the following suggested phases of work:

**Phase 1: Research protocol preparation and data collection**

- Sharpen and finalize the workplan and quantitative and qualitative data collection methodology.
- Adapt and refine research protocol (adding any COVID-specific modules as needed). Finalize survey tools, drawing input from external experts/resources and the Foundation, as appropriate. Finalize decision on whether data collection will be virtual or in-person (or hybrid) in light of COVID.
- Obtain relevant IRB approvals, train enumerators, and begin data collection.

**Phase 2: Data analysis**

- Clean, analyze, and synthesize data.
- Preliminary "previews" to share findings in a real-time manner if/as appropriate.

**Phase 3: Dissemination**

- Ensure the evidence generated informs discourse and guides policymakers and practitioners.
- Detailed report with survey findings and potential publication in a peer reviewed journal.
- Presentation of clear, digestible summary findings through a mix of other outputs and/or forums, for example, policy briefs and stakeholder convenings.

We welcome creative adaptations and additions to these phases. We anticipate a 18-24 month period for this grant.

## Rules & Guidelines

### Selection Criteria

Our goal through this investment is to make a modest contribution to help close the global evidence gap on long-term effects of group-based programs. The girls' group intervention proposed for one round of follow-up survey must meet the following criteria:

- The intervention must use a group-based model<sup>1</sup> and have shown promise in economically empowering girls aged 10-24 during the time of study. We will only consider models that take place in a community-based setting or as an extra-curricular activity/club in a school-based setting. We will not consider classroom-based programs that take place during formal classroom time.
- The intervention needs to have been completed within the past 10 years, and have been previously rigorously evaluated through impact evaluations using randomized control trials or quasi-experimental design and have shown positive effects.
- The program needs to have been implemented in sub-Saharan Africa or South Asia, with a preference for implementation in one of our target countries in sub-Saharan Africa (Nigeria, Ethiopia, Kenya, or Uganda) or South Asia (Bangladesh, India, Pakistan). If the program proposed for follow-up survey is not in one of our target countries, the applicant must demonstrate that the model or approach is relevant to at least one of our countries of interest.
- The total budget proposed is no higher than \$150,000 - \$200,000.

We welcome LOI submissions from qualified organizations or consortia; LOIs can be submitted by a single organization or by a consortium clearly represented by one lead partner. Submissions can be from both implementing organizations or evaluators external to the program; if the latter, we encourage a consortia that includes representation from the implementing organization.

<sup>1</sup> As stated in the "Background" section, we define "group-based models" as models that intentionally bring girls together in a cohort to meet regularly in girls-only groups, facilitated by a mentor, and serve as a platform to deliver holistic content and build girls' social, health, cognitive and economic assets.

LOI responses will be evaluated by their project approach, and capabilities and relevant experience:

Project approach:

- Approach and design to meet the purpose and scope outlined in the Request for LOI, including quality and rigor of technical approach, quality and clarity of methodology, and engagement with key actors and stakeholders
- Feasibility and scope of plan, timeline, team structure, and allocated budget
- Analysis of challenges and suitability of risk mitigation plan
- How existing evidence and/or data from previous survey rounds will be leveraged, and how findings from the proposed additional round will add to the evidence base and inform decision-making
- Proposed budget is justified by the description of activities and methods; overall reasonableness of proposed costs

Capabilities and relevant experience:

- Awareness of issues and challenges in collection, measurement, and evaluation of adolescent girls' group programs in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia; operational capabilities to conduct field work in light of COVID-19 pandemic or security-related issues
- Strong intellectual leadership with an emphasis on rigor in research and evaluation of adolescent girls' group programs
- Leadership and/or integration of expertise from a local entity, with partnership based on mutual trust and collaboration
- Experience managing large-scale evaluations and data collection
- Established partnerships with survey firms experienced in data collection, if needed

The relative weighting of these criteria will be at the foundation's discretion. Depending on the quality of the submission, the foundation may award up to five grants or may elect not to award any grants.

## How to Apply

### Letter of Interest Guidelines

The applicant is expected to propose the approach, design, and activities described in the previous section, building on their experience and perspectives.

The following are key areas to be addressed in the LOI. The applicant is encouraged to elaborate as they see fit.

1. Strategy and approach to the follow-up survey, including learning questions and example of indicators and/or outcome areas to be measured. Brief summarized findings from prior evaluation(s) of the girls' group program proposed for follow-up survey, with links to full evaluation documents.
2. Expertise and skills in research and evaluation related to adolescent girls' groups; the applicant should describe the proposed team and their expertise.
3. Key collaborators and stakeholders to ensure success in all phases of the project.
4. Risks and risk mitigation, including discussion of attrition and previous success in tracking program participants.
5. High-level timeline and budget (anticipated topline budget for the key expense categories is sufficient at this stage, e.g., personnel, consultants, sub-grants, travel, other direct costs).

LOIs should not exceed 5 single-spaced pages in length. Other attachments will not be reviewed.

The total budget proposed should not exceed \$150,000 - \$200,000.

Applicants should submit a LOI for funding an additional survey round in one program. If applicants are interested in pursuing funding for additional survey rounds in multiple programs, each needs to be submitted through a separate LOI (with a limit of 2 LOIs submitted per applicant).

## Submission Instructions

A grantee will be selected through a call for letters of interest (LOIs), with finalist(s) invited to proceed to the full proposal stage. Please submit a LOI by 5pm PDT, April 16<sup>th</sup>, 2021 for consideration to [shubha.jayaram@gatesfoundation.org](mailto:shubha.jayaram@gatesfoundation.org) and [anna.abelson@gatesfoundation.org](mailto:anna.abelson@gatesfoundation.org).

Please submit any questions to [anna.abelson@gatesfoundation.org](mailto:anna.abelson@gatesfoundation.org) by 5pm PDT, March 31<sup>st</sup> 2021. We will post responses to all submitted questions [here](#) by 12pm PDT, April 7<sup>th</sup> 2021.

Upon review of LOIs, we will select the finalist(s) to submit a full proposal by May 7<sup>th</sup> 2021.

## Timeline

March 19, 2021: Request for Letter of Interest launched  
March 31, 2021: (optional) questions submitted via email  
April 7, 2021: Responses to submitted questions posted online [here](#)  
April 16, 2021 5pm PDT: LOI submitted  
May 7, 2021: Finalist(s) notified, full proposals requested  
May 21, 2021: Proposals due from selected finalist(s)  
May 24 - June 4, 2021: Iteration and revision on proposal  
June 4, 2021: Final revised proposal(s) submitted  
Late-June / early-July 2021: Grant agreement(s) finalized

## Key Terms & Conditions

### A. Disclosure Notice

To help the foundation with its review of RFP responses, the foundation may disclose proposals, documents, communications, and associated materials submitted to the foundation in response to this RFP (collectively, "Submission Materials") to its employees, contingent workers, consultants, independent subject matter experts, and potential co-funders. Please carefully consider the information included in the Submission Materials. If you (the "Applicant") have any doubts about the wisdom of disclosure of confidential or proprietary information, the foundation recommends you consult with your legal counsel and take any steps you deem necessary to protect your intellectual property. You may wish to consider whether such information is critical for evaluating the submission or if more general, non-confidential information may be adequate as an alternative for these purposes.

Notwithstanding the Applicants characterization of any information as being confidential, the foundation the foundation is under no obligation to treat such information as confidential.

### B. Disclaimer

This RFP is not an offer to contract or award grant funds. The foundation assumes no responsibility for the Applicants cost to respond to this RFP. All responses generated by this RFP become the property of the foundation.

### C. Release and Verification

In exchange for the opportunity to be awarded a grant or contract, the Applicant agrees that the foundation may, in its sole discretion: (1) amend or cancel the RFP, in whole or in part, at any time; (2) extend the deadline for submitting responses; (3) determine whether a response does or does not substantially comply with the requirements of the RFP; (4) waive any minor irregularity, informality or nonconformance with the provisions or

procedures of the RFP; (5) issue multiple awards; (6) share responses generated by this RFP with foundation staff, consultants, contingent workers, subject matter experts, and potential co-funders; and (7) copy the responses. Applicant agrees not to bring a legal challenge of any kind against the foundation relating to the foundation's selection and award of a grant or contract arising from this RFP.

Applicant represents that it has responded to the RFP with complete honesty and accuracy. If facts provided in Applicant's response change, Applicant will supplement its response in writing with any deletions, additions or changes within ten days of the changes. Applicant will do this, as necessary, throughout the selection process. Applicant understands that any material misrepresentation, including omissions, may disqualify it from consideration for a grant or contract award.

By responding to this RFP, you are representing: (i) that you have authority to bind the named Applicant to the terms and conditions set forth above, without amendment; and (ii) that you agree to be bound by them.

#### **D. Global Access and Intellectual Property**

Intellectual property (IP) rights and the management of IP rights are likely to play an important role in achieving the goals of this project. To this end, the foundation requires that, even at this stage, all applicants seriously consider their willingness to submit a response in compliance with the foundation's response requirements, a portion of which may ask for certain information and intentions regarding intellectual property concerns and Global Access. Specifically, the foundation requires that;

*You will conduct and manage the Project and the Funded Developments in a manner that ensures Global Access. Your Global Access commitments will survive the term of the Agreement. "Funded Developments" means the products, services, processes, technologies, materials, software, data, other innovations, and intellectual property resulting from the Project (including modifications, improvements, and further developments to Background Technology). "Background Technology" means any and all products, services, processes, technologies, materials, software, data, or other innovations, and intellectual property created by You or a third party prior to or outside of the Project used as part of the Project. "Global Access" means: (a) the knowledge and information gained from the Project will be promptly and broadly disseminated; and (b) the Funded Developments will be made available and accessible at an affordable price (i) to people most in need within developing countries, or (ii) in support of the U.S. educational system and public libraries, as applicable to the Project.*

The foundation will be selecting applicants based on the conclusion that their technologies and expertise will be most appropriate for the success of this RFP.

As part of the foundation's review and evaluation of each response, the foundation will conduct due diligence with respect to each applicant's ability and commitment to manage intellectual property in a manner consistent with the stated scientific and charitable goals of the foundation. Due diligence activities may include inquiry into an applicant's:

- 1) Freedom to operate (FTO) and ability to freely use and acquire needed background technology;
- 2) Commitment to promote the utilization, commercialization and availability of Funded Developments for public benefit

The foundation encourages you to include this information in your response.

## About the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

Guided by the belief that every life has equal value, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation works to help all people lead healthy, productive lives. We work with partner organizations worldwide to tackle critical problems in four program areas. Our Global Development Division works to help the world's poorest people lift themselves out of hunger and poverty. Our Global Health Division aims to harness advances in science and technology to save lives in developing countries. Our United States Division works to improve U.S. high school and postsecondary education and support vulnerable children and families in Washington State. And our Global Policy & Advocacy Division seeks to build strategic relationships and promote policies that will help advance our work. Our approach to grant making emphasizes collaboration, innovation, risk-taking, and, most importantly, results.

To learn more about the foundation's work, visit [www.gatesfoundation.org](http://www.gatesfoundation.org).