

2014 Call for Impact Evaluation Proposals on Non-State Actors in Basic Education
Promoting expansion and quality of education

The Strategic Impact Evaluation Fund (SIEF) is a multi-donor trust fund at the World Bank promoting evidence-based policy making in areas critical for human development.

SIEF is pleased to announce a Call for Proposals for impact evaluations of programs to promote the expansion and quality of primary and secondary education services in developing countries through **non-state actors** (ranging from for-profit private schools to NGO operated schools, and faith-based providers). The thematic focus on non-state actors was also part of previous SIEF calls for proposals launched in 2012 and 2013 (both closed). SIEF expects to be able to finance 1-to-3 additional impact evaluations in this area as part of the current 2014 Call.

Impact evaluations of World Bank supported programs are welcome, but no program affiliation with the World Bank or the funding organizations is required. While the call is focused on the impact of programs for low-income countries, research in middle-income countries will be considered as long as results will be clearly relevant to low-income countries.

The deadline for applications is **Friday, January 30, 2015 at 6pm (1800 hrs) Eastern Standard Time (EST)**. All applications should be submitted [online](#). Please click [here](#) to visit the [Call for Proposals website](#). Note that the application must be submitted by a World Bank staff member partnering with the impact evaluation team. Detailed information on the application process, requirements and SIEF priority research areas are available in the full Call for Proposals. The information is also on the [SIEF website](#). This call is open to researchers worldwide and no affiliation with either the World Bank or the funding organizations is required.

Website: www.worldbank.org/SIEF

Email: SIEFimpact1@worldbank.org

Application Details, Frequently Asked Questions, and Background Information

The Strategic Impact Evaluation Fund is soliciting applications through its 2014 Call for Proposals. This call is focused on impact evaluations of non-state primary and secondary education programs that are managed and operated by non-state actors and groups, such as for-profit private schools, NGO operated schools and those run by faith-based providers. SIEF is supporting rigorous impact evaluations of innovative programs and policies that will provide critical evidence for improving lives.

Funding priority will be given to impact evaluations that meet SIEF research criteria in terms of (A) program design, (B) evaluation design, (C) geographic coverage, (D) timeline, and (E) applicant eligibility. Applications will be measured in regards to how well they meet SIEF's priority interests for this call and the potential for policy impact, both locally and globally. Impact evaluation teams are expected to demonstrate a strong commitment to policy outreach and selected teams will be expected to coordinate communications and outreach with the SIEF team.

(A) Program Design.

The overall aim of this research cluster is to contribute to the knowledge base on interventions and combinations of interventions that improve student learning and retention. The priority area to be addressed within the cluster is the non-state sector in basic education service delivery.

Evidence on how and under what circumstances the non-state sector can contribute to more accountable and efficient education service delivery - particularly in low-income settings - remains thin. By and large, the global research on various private service delivery models fails to adequately account for selection bias.

Alternative strategies for combining public financing with privately-managed service delivery support take different forms, but two of the most common are contracting out public services to private for-profit, non-profit, or community-run providers in a charter-school model; or channeling public financing to private providers through the demand-side in a voucher-type model. Independent private schools are also increasingly serving low-income populations.

Key research questions relating to the non-state education sector include, among others:

- Do private service providers outperform public service providers?
- Does non-state provision help in reaching the poor with quality services or merely displace state provision?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of different approaches to using public finance to leverage the non-state sector involvement in different contexts - public contracting or voucher/choice models?
- How does the cost-effectiveness of private for-profit, private non-profit (NGO or community-run) and public schools serving low-income populations compare to education provision in public schools?
- Are there models for increasing access to finance among private schools in a pure micro-finance environment?

- Do government subsidies for private schools generate competitive pressures that improve the performance of public schools? Do they distort the price and quality of services in the market?
- How much impact does information on school performance have on parental choice? Are household school choices driven by school quality, cost, proximity, or other factors?
- Do lower wages in the private sector impact the ability of schools to attract high-quality instructors?
- What are the most the appropriate regulations to encourage private provision while assuring quality standards?

SIEF will give priority to the following:

- **Innovative programs** and policies that leverage non-state providers **to target the most disadvantaged groups and promote equity and social inclusion**. This might include examples of where the private sector is encouraged through the use of public finance (direct public finance or vouchers), or where other sources of finance are leveraged to support private provision. Proposals that include considerations of equity, social exclusion, class, race, mother tongue language and language of instruction, and other factors that may affect demand side behavior.
- **Replication** of interventions that have been successful in small-scale settings at a regional or national level, or in other country contexts.
- Impact evaluations that seek to measure the **critical mechanisms and drivers of successful programs**, including factors such as provider qualifications and training, teacher behavior, curriculum, parent involvement, teacher incentives, monitoring programs, and support services.
- **Specific interventions** designed to improving the cognitive and socio-emotional development of young children **may be narrowly focused or holistic**.
- Impact evaluations of World Bank supported programs are welcome, but no program affiliation with the World Bank is required.
- In the case of proposals that focus on relatively small pilot interventions, priority will be given to programs with high potential for cost-effectiveness and a clear articulation of the pathway to large scale implementation.

(B) Impact evaluation design. The elements that guide SIEF's research priorities include the following:

- **Student learning gains as the primary outcome of interest.** We would expect to see measures of student learning in all proposals. However, in countries that lack student assessment systems and have to yet to achieve universal enrollment or completion, indicators of student attendance, enrollment and completion will also be considered. Gender-disaggregated indicators are required.
- **Only rigorous impact evaluation designs** will be considered. This means having a well-identified and statistically powered comparison group. *Usually this will mean a*

prospective randomized control trial (RCT), although SIEF will consider impact evaluations based on rigorous non-experimental designs.

- Inclusion of a **research component that seeks to understand the mechanisms** linking intervention activities with student learning outcomes, collection of *relevant intermediate outcome data capturing service delivery and contextual settings level information*—such as classroom observations of teacher practice, teacher absence rates, parent attendance at school council meetings. Mixed methods research is also encouraged.
- Inclusion of an **operationally focused research component** exploring approaches for successful implementation and affordable scale-up of programs. *Each evaluation is required to capture cost data in order to accurately assess affordability of the program for successful implementation and/or scale-up.*

(C) Geographic Coverage. SIEF is interested specifically in impact evaluations of programs that:

- Aim to improve our understanding of the types of policies, programs, and mechanisms that are effective in improving education outcomes in **low-income countries**.
- Focus on poor populations from **middle-income countries if results will be relevant to low-income countries**.
- Focus on **fragile and conflict affected states**.

(D) Timeline for application, awards and completion of impact evaluations.

- 30 January 2015: Applications must be submitted via the [online portal](#) by 6 p.m. Eastern Standard Time.
- 16 March 2015: Seed-funding recipients will be announced
- 1 June 2015: Final deadline for submission of full technical proposals. Early submissions welcome.
- June 2015 – September 2015: Winners announced
- 31 December 2019 – Closing date for all evaluations. All funded impact evaluations must have final results complete by this date.

(E) Applicant eligibility.

- Impact evaluation research teams from around the world are eligible. No prior affiliation with the World Bank or SIEF's funding organizations is needed.
- However, to submit an application, **the impact evaluation team must partner with a World Bank staff member** who will, if the application is successful, manage the SIEF grant and provide fiduciary responsibility. The World Bank staff member can also act as an investigator on the project and support policy outreach.
- **The application must be submitted electronically by the partnering World Bank staff member (TTL).**
- **To identify potential World Bank TTLs**, we encourage interested researchers to reach out to World Bank staff in the country office where the evaluation will take

place. Working relationships at the country level are key for the success of the research projects. Interested applicants can also liaise with sector and regional colleagues at the World Bank. The SIEF team welcomes inquiries from impact evaluation teams seeking assistance to identify a World Bank staff member (TTL) to partner with. To enable sufficient time, inquiries must be received by **December 15, 2015**. Please contact: siefproposals1@worldbank.org.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Can I get technical support in designing the evaluation? We suggest that applicants reach out to the impact evaluation research community at large. For World Bank projects, the SIEF core team (siefproposals1@worldbank.org) may also be able to suggest some researchers who can provide guidance.

Are there any other requirements to receive SIEF funding? Evaluations must comply with requirements stated in the announcement of the call for proposals, including:

- Adhering to research ethics principles and protection of human subjects enumerated in Annex 1 below.
- Adhering to data storage and access requirements enumerated in Annex 1 below.
- Developing and implementing a dissemination and engagement strategy (technical report, policy note, final dissemination event, details of other engagement with government and other stakeholders).

How does the review process work? Proposals submitted by the January 30 2015 deadline will first be assessed independently by teams of technical experts from the World Bank and from DFID. Next, these assessments, alongside the proposals, provide the basis for the seed funding decisions, which are made by a panel of senior managers.

How much funding can I receive? The exact amount of funding will be determined by the particulars of each evaluation proposal. SIEF expects to be able to fund 1-3 evaluations through this call for proposals on non-state actors.

Does SIEF pay for the costs of the intervention being evaluated? No, funding is only available to cover the costs of the evaluation.

Annex I: Requirements

All evaluation teams must agree to the following requirements:

1. Ethics Principles

SIEF evaluation teams must adhere to the highest standards of research ethics. They are expected to uphold the Ethics Principles for Research and Evaluation established by the United Kingdom's Department for International Development, which have been adopted by SIEF.

ETHICS PRINCIPLES FOR RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

- 1. Researchers and evaluators are responsible for identifying the need for and securing any necessary ethics approval for the study they are undertaking.** This may be from national or local ethics committees in countries in which the study will be undertaken, or other stakeholder institutions with formal ethics approval systems.
- 2. Research and evaluation must be relevant and high quality with clear developmental and practical value.** It must be undertaken to a sufficiently high standard that the findings can be reliably used for their intended purpose. Research should only be undertaken where there is a clear gap in knowledge. Evaluations might also be undertaken to learn lessons to improve future impact, or in order to meet DFID's requirements for accountability.
- 3. Researchers and evaluators should avoid harm to participants in studies.** They should ensure that the basic human rights of individuals and groups with whom they interact are protected. This is particularly important with regard to vulnerable people. The wellbeing of researchers/ evaluators working in the field should also be considered and harm minimized.
- 4. Participation in research and evaluation should be voluntary and free from external pressure.** Information should not be withheld from prospective participants that might affect their willingness to participate. All participants should have a right to withdraw from research/ evaluation and withdraw any data concerning them at any point without fear of penalty.
- 5. Researchers and evaluators should ensure confidentiality of information, privacy and anonymity of study participants.** They should communicate clearly to prospective participants any limits to confidentiality. In cases where unexpected evidence of serious wrong-doing is uncovered (e.g. corruption or abuse) there may be a need to consider whether the normal commitment to confidentiality might be outweighed by the ethical need to prevent harm to vulnerable people. DFID's fraud policy will apply if relevant.
- 6. Researchers and evaluators should operate in accordance with international human rights conventions and covenants to which the United Kingdom is a signatory, regardless of local country standards.** They should also take account of local and national laws.
- 7. DFID funded research and evaluation should respect cultural sensitivities.** This means researchers need to take account of differences in culture, local behavior and norms, religious beliefs and practices, sexual orientation, gender roles, disability, age and ethnicity and other social differences such as class when planning studies and communicating findings. DFID should avoid imposing a burden of over-researching particular groups.
- 8. DFID is committed to publication and communication of all evaluations and research studies.** Full methodological details and information on who has undertaken a study should be given and messages transmitted should fully and fairly reflect the findings. Where possible, and respecting confidentiality requirements, primary data should be made public to allow secondary analyses.
- 9. Research and evaluation should usually be independent of those implementing an intervention or program under study.** Independence is very important for research and evaluation; in fact evaluations in DFID can only be classified as such where they are led independently. Involvement of stakeholders may be desirable so long as the objectivity of a study is not compromised and DFID is transparent about the roles played. Any potential conflicts of interest that might jeopardize the integrity of the methodology or the outputs of research/ evaluation should be disclosed. If researchers/ evaluators or other stakeholders feel that undue pressure is being put on them by DFID officials, such that their independence has been breached, this should be reported to the Head of Profession for Evaluation who will take appropriate action

10. All DFID funded research/ evaluation should have particular emphasis on ensuring participation from women and socially excluded groups. Consideration should be given to how barriers to participation can be removed.

2. Protection of Human Subjects

If your proposal is successful and selected by SIEF in 2015 for seed-funding to develop a full technical proposal, then (and only then) SIEF will require:

- A description of the human subjects protocol and a plan for securing ethical clearance in the technical proposal.
- Principal investigators and research coordinators must provide evidence of human subjects training within the last 2 years. Technical proposal should include a list of the ethical research training taken by the PI and co-PI. The National Institute of Health (NIH) online course (<http://phrp.nihtraining.com/users/login.php>) includes a test and will produce a certificate number that can be used for this purpose.
- Principal investigators will be responsible for securing in-country ethical clearance or providing an official memo from client counterparts stating the absence of a local ethical review board. In case the country of study does not have a review board, the evaluation team will be required to contract an external review board.

3. Data Storage and Access

In accordance to the World Bank's Open Data and Open Knowledge Initiative, all datasets must be fully documented. Datasets should be in compliance with international good practices and with the Data Documentation Initiative (www.ddalliance.org).

To promote broad and diverse use of the data, and to ensure transparency and credibility of the results, microdata will be made **publicly accessible** within **two years** from the submission of the final evaluation report. Data and documentation will be stored and documented in the World Bank Data Catalog within six months of completion of data collection.

Annex II: Background Note on Non-State Education Research through SIEF

The Contributions of the Non-State Sector to Education

School systems in most developing countries largely fail to deliver quality primary education to poor children. While many countries have successfully boosted enrollment and attendance, children often learn very little when they are in school.

Until recently, efforts to improve education typically focused on providing more or better inputs to schools—such as (i) improved infrastructure, pedagogical resources, and education expenditures; (ii) higher levels of training, qualification, and experience for school leaders and teachers; and (iii) smaller class sizes. However, a large body of evidence from experimental and non-experimental research (Glewwe et al. 2011; Hanushek 2003) suggests that such input-based policies have had little impact on the production of student learning outcomes.

The Strategic Impact Evaluation Fund's (SIEF) education cluster is providing new evidence on education interventions that work to improve student learning outcomes through *systemic* change in low-income countries. The thematic focus of this evidence centers around the World Development Report's (2004) framework for the delivery of educational services, which acknowledges relationships of accountability between the state, service providers, and the citizens and clients they serve as the drivers of high-quality educational outcomes (World Bank 2004). This framework is informed by the growing evidence of poor service delivery in low-income contexts (for example, high levels of teacher absenteeism and low time on task) and the knowledge that additional education spending, by itself, has little systematic impact on student learning. As such, educational programs are now focusing their attention beyond the inputs in the system and towards the processes within the school and the classroom. Within this framework, various models of non-state education provision have the potential to positively impact student learning outcomes through more direct levels of accountability between providers and consumers.

By and large, the global research on various private service delivery models fails to adequately account for selection bias. As such, the rigorous evidence on the educational contributions of private providers is greatly limited. Unfortunately, nearly all of the empirical evidence on the impacts of private sector service delivery comes from the United States. A handful of quasi-experimental evaluations from Chile find mixed results from the country's large-scale voucher program (Hsieh and Urquiola 2006; Bravo et al. 2010; Mizala et al. 2009). Overall, voucher school students in Chile seem to perform on par with their counterfactual public school peers. However, both a voucher program and a private management contracting program in Colombia were found to have a positive student learning effects (Angrist et al. 2002; Barrera-Osorio 2006). In addition, a program in Pakistan that offered public funding to low-cost private schools was found to significantly raise student learning. The mechanism of impact in this instance was an accountability standard that required schools to perform above minimum performance thresholds to receive the subsidy (Barrera-Osorio and Raju 2011). In India, low-cost private schools have been found to produce similar learning outcomes to public schools at one-third the cost (Muralidharan & Sundararaman, 2013).

SIEF Impact Evaluations on Non-State Actors in Education

Previous rounds of SIEF funding have supported a substantial portfolio of innovative impact evaluation research driven by the accountability conceptual framework (World Bank 2004). The majority of evaluations have investigated or are investigating mechanisms of accountability in

public schools, with some focused on the impacts of non-state service delivery. Overall, SIEF education evaluations have primarily contributed evidence in the areas of public school accountability, information, and teacher incentives. And, while a critical mass of rigorous research on the private education sector is still being developed, SIEF is contributing some particularly innovative individual studies to add to the current knowledge of what works (see Box 1 and Box 2). Such is the backdrop for the current call for proposals, which emphasizes evaluations of interventions related to non-state education delivery.

Box 1: Investing in the Education Market: Strengthening Private Schools for the Rural Poor in Pakistan

In recent years, the private sector has grown significantly in its role supporting learning for all. Private schools have emerged in many developing countries (eg, India, Pakistan, Nigeria, Kenya, Ghana) in response to demand for affordable quality education services. Families at the low end of the income ladder are often consumers of fee-based private education. This phenomenon has generated policy interest in what have come to be known as “low-cost private schools.” Such non-state schools could be a viable means of providing low-income households in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia with quality education. However, much more research is needed. The extent to which affordable fee-based school services are spread across and within countries is still being investigated. The existing research on the low-cost private school model fails to adequately account for selection bias; as such, there is little-to-no reliable research on the relative quality of their provided education services.

As the number of these schools increases rapidly in countries like Pakistan, India, and Nigeria, questions have arisen as to the most appropriate means for government to leverage the contributions of these providers. Approaches for effectively and affordably subsidizing this education market have been of particular policy interest; however, up to this point, no rigorous research has been carried out.

SIEF is currently supporting the evaluation of a program in Pakistan that will compare the impacts of providing grants and loans to low-cost private schools in randomly selected educational markets. The findings from this program will show the impact on student attendance, learning, and school operating models and, as such, will be of considerable import for potential funding partnerships between governments and private school providers in many low-income contexts.

Box 2: Impact of a Private Comprehensive Schooling Model on Low-income Children and Families in Mexico

In Mexico, a SIEF-funded evaluation is measuring the student learning impacts of a private school for disadvantaged students: Christel House. The educational philosophy and practices of this private school are similar to some of the top-performing charter schools in the United States. As such, the findings on the mechanisms (e.g., longer school day, additional support services for students, etc.) behind the high performance of Christel House will have direct relevance for the existing knowledge on best practices in private (and potentially public) schools.

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