Applying for the Institutional Challenge Grant: Proposing Strategies to Foster Institutional Change

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PART I
• Motivating the Institutional Challenge Grant
• Institutional change
• Questions

PART II
• The Award and Application process
• Resources
• Questions
Youth ages 5 to 25 in the U.S.

- Improve the use of research in policy and practice in ways that benefit youth
- Programs, policies, and practices to reduce inequality in youth outcomes
Too often the capacity is lacking to bridge these gaps

Too often policymakers’ and practitioners’ ideas fail to shape research agendas

Too often researchers lack incentives to undertake research to inform policy and practice
Institutional Challenge Grant

**PARTNERSHIP**
- Build a sustained institutional partnership with a public agency or nonprofit organization

**RESEARCH**
- Pursue a joint research agenda to reduce inequality in youth outcomes

**INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE**
- Create institutional change to value research-practice partnerships and their work

**CAPACITY**
- Develop the partners’ capacity to collaborate, and to produce and use high-quality relevant research
Research-practice partnerships are long-term, mutually beneficial collaborations that promote the production and use of rigorous and relevant research evidence.
Why Partnerships?

• Researchers
  o understand the local context
  o learn about policymakers’ and practitioners’ needs and questions
  o provide insights that facilitate groundbreaking research

• Policymakers and practitioners
  o gain access to existing research
  o contribute to research that is relevant to their context
  o receive assistance with their efforts to use research
First Funded Partnerships

• Cornell University and Cooperative Extension of Tompkins County
  ✓ a series of studies to learn how to disrupt connections between the opioid epidemic and poor outcomes for low-income rural youth

• University of Colorado-Boulder and the Denver Public Schools
  ✓ bolster their data system
  ✓ evaluate two programs that aim to level the quality of instructional-practices within the district and in turn reduce achievement gaps on the basis of race and ethnicity

• University of Toronto and the Puerto Rico Department of Education
  ✓ evaluate a principal management training and school consolidations as two potential strategies for improving students educational experiences and their learning and academic performance
Shifting

• Grantees efforts:
  ✓ build a supportive infrastructure
  ✓ establish compelling incentives to reward RPP work
  ✓ change the image of a “successful researcher” to include those who work in partnership

• Other ideas to meet the challenge of institutional change
  o Adam Gamoran, William T. Grant Foundation
  o Michael Gottfredson, University of California-Irvine
Adam Gamoran
Universities Under Attack

The Washington Post

PostEverything

Everyone thinks the current state of higher education is awful. Who is to blame?

The New York Times

Stop Universities From Hoarding Money

Aug. 19, 2015

The Economist

Higher education
Is college worth it?

Forbes

Bureaucrats And Buildings: The Case For Why College Is So Expensive

The New York Review of Books

Our Universities: Why Are They Failing?

NOVEMBER 24, 2011 ISSUE

Los Angeles Times

Professors are overwhelmingly liberal. Do universities need to change hiring practices?

GALLUP

The Political Divide Over Higher Education in America

GALLUP BLOG DECEMBER 12, 2017

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

OPINION | COMMENTARY

The Diminishing Returns of a College Degree
Institutional Support for Social Impact Research

- Supporting faculty research for social impact can be an effective counter to the criticisms
  - In medicine and engineering, faculty are rewarded for “tech transfer”
  - In social sciences, policy relevance is often met with disdain

- It is time for this to change!
Overcoming Barriers to Social Impact

- University researchers are insulated from external criticisms
  - Rewarded for contributions to academic fields
  - Generate knowledge for its own sake
  - Revealed in journal articles, books

- Innovations in the *content* of research

- Little imagination when it comes to the *use* of research
  - Universities offer little incentive for social impact
Rigor and relevance in research are often seen as in opposition to one another.

- “Rigorous” research, theoretically-driven and using methods that fit the question, is valued.
- “Relevant” research, addressing problems in the real world, is disrespected.

This is a false dichotomy!

- Research benefits from engagement with problems of the real world.
- Research is *only* relevant when it is also rigorous.
Overcoming Barriers to Social Impact

- Because research aimed at practical problems is devalued, it is often structurally marginalized within the university
  - Counted as “service” instead of as research
  - As a result, applied social science is more often found in research firms than in universities
- But universities have much to gain from addressing social problems in research
  - Public universities: serving their public mission
  - Private universities: engaging their communities
Institutional Support for Social Impact Research

Not a new concept

- The “Wisconsin Idea”
  - Boundaries of the university are the boundaries of the state
- Rice University
  - “Engage Houston and empower its success”
  - Example: Houston Education Research Consortium
    - Partnership with local school district
    - Addresses challenges of local population
    - Research reports inform decision-making
- Has attracted philanthropic $$$ from civic-minded allies
Meeting the Institutional Challenge

Potential examples of institutional change

- Teaching releases for partnership faculty
- Summer salary for faculty who collaborate with external partners on research
- Reconsider how research contributions are judged in career advancement decisions
  - Consider applied research as *research*, not *service*
  - Obtain measures of contribution of applied research
    - Quantitative: mentions in media or deliberations
    - Qualitative: letters from policy leaders
Meeting the Institutional Challenge

Pursuing positive social impact by harnessing talent & knowledge of faculty is the key to the future of universities

- Faculty will need to become more engaged in responding to real-world problems
- Universities can help by re-orienting incentives
  - Not to diminish theory-driven, internationally-recognized studies
  - To enhance visibility of work that meets the challenges of today
- The Institutional Challenge Grant can help drive this change
Michael Gottfredson
Institutional Change

Institutional change is a key element and essential feature of this grant program.

- What are the obstacles in your institution that are barriers to fully engaging in partnership research?
- How are these engaged in the proposal? With what level of commitment from key actors and key policies and key financial aspects of the university?
- Is there evidence of institutional concern and commitment that can be cited?
- Structural change is sought.
Observations from previous review periods

In more competitive proposals, the institutional change component is significant and plausible; it is likely to extend beyond the period of the grant.

Examples:

• A review of the university tenure and promotion guidelines that includes partnership members and includes, in part, the question of fully crediting this form of scholarship.

• New forms of faculty positions that have partnership scholarship as the focus and which employ the same compensation, review, and continuing appointment provisions as “regular tenure-eligible” faculty.

• Creating and funding an institutional element (i.e., center) to support partnership research

• Fully affiliate the partnership program and provide support with a structural element currently in the university

• Fully embeds partners within the institution of the other partner for a period

• Creates an on-going mechanism within the university to encourage and facilitate faculty from other units to engage in the scholarship of the partnership
Less competitive proposals feature ordinary or relatively weak institutional commitments without evidence of institutional change efforts.

Examples:

• “Standard” letters of support from university or research organization leaders: “my office is fully supportive, as the research is consistent with the mission of the university to serve … ”

• “We will allow course release as indicative of our support”

• “We will ensure that this partnership research is fully credited to the service obligation that our faculty are required to demonstrate”

• A research project that implies significant research design questions for proper scientific inference that are unaddressed in the proposal and not obvious in staffing.
Questions?
INSTITUTIONAL CHALLENGE GRANT

The Award & Application
Institutional Challenge Grant

- $650K for 3 years
  - ✓ with a possible 2-year renewal
    - Up to a 9-month planning period
    - The partnership’s research to reduce inequality
    - Mid-career fellows
    - Capacity-building activities
    - Indirect cost allowance of up to 15% of total direct costs
- In-kind support for one fellow for one year
At the end of five years,

- Established set of strategies that facilitate sustained research partnerships with public agencies or nonprofits

- The public agency or nonprofit has increased its capacity to use research evidence

- Researchers have improved their partnership skills

- The research generated has been used in decision making and is likely to lead to improved outcomes for youth
Review Process

- Applications due September 6th, 2019 (3 pm ET)
  - Full proposal and all agreements

- Senior Staff Reviews
  - Four-page structured abstract

- Selection Committee Reviews
  - Two in-depth committee reviews
  - Selection of three finalists

- Finalists
  - Written response
  - In-person interviews
APPLICATION

Selection Committee
Who Applied in 2018?

- **Partnerships at different stages of maturity**

- **A variety of systems and concerns about youth**
  - Education 50%
  - Community 25%
  - Immigration-related 15%
  - Justice or child welfare 10%

- **One-quarter of the partnerships were led by a researcher of color**
2018 Institutional Challenge Grant Competition

Public = ⬇️

Private = ⬇️
Updates for 2019

- Program unchanged!
- Notable changes to the application guide include:
  - Brief descriptions of the first three grantees
  - An updated description of the foundation’s focus on reducing inequality
  - More detail about the selection criteria for the research plans
  - Ideas for addressing the tension between engaging stakeholders and presenting well-developed research plans
Research-Practice Partnerships

✓ The plan for partnering demonstrates mastery of the literature on partnering to promote research use

✓ There is evidence of public agency or nonprofit’s commitment to the partnership and to use the research
Research Agenda to Reduce Inequality in Youth Outcomes

- The research questions and findings will significantly advance the public agency or nonprofit organization’s efforts to reduce inequality in youth outcomes.
- The research plan reflects rigorous methods that are appropriate for the proposal’s goals.
- The quantitative and/or qualitative analysis plan should demonstrate awareness of the strengths and limits of specific techniques.
- The methods, time frame, staffing plan, and other resources are realistic.
Institutional Change

- Changing Institutional Policies and Practices
  - A thoughtful discussion of potential obstacles that may limit participation in research-practice partnerships
  - A plan for overcoming these obstacles
  - Assurances that the research institution will alter policies or enact new practices to attract and reward experienced investigators to conduct partnership research
Developing the Capacity of Fellows and Partners

- The rubric proposed for selecting fellows ensures they will have the requisite skills to carry out the proposed work.

- There is a feasible plan for increasing the capacity of the public agency or private nonprofit organization to use research in decision making to improve outcomes for youth.

- All fellows must be mid-career.
On Our Website

wtgrantfoundation.org/grants/institutional-challenge-grant

√ Institutional Challenge Grant Application Guide
√ Information about the selection committee
√ Relevant papers and essays
√ Research-practice partnership website
√ FAQs
√ Webinar recording and slides
• Structuring a partnership
• Developing a joint research agenda
• Developing data sharing agreements
• Communicating research and engaging stakeholders
• Using research
• Staffing
• Funding
• Evaluating partnerships for improvement and impact
Noteworthy

• We encourage proposals from teams with African-American, Latinx, Native American, and Asian American members in leadership roles

• We welcome partnerships across a range of domains, including child welfare, mental health, housing, justice, and education

• Resubmissions welcome!
Questions?
THANK YOU!

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