



Digital Impact Grants Webinar #1

[Introduction]

Hello. My name is Lucy Bernholz, and I'm the director of the Digital Civil Society Lab, which is part of the Stanford Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society. We're excited and proud to be the managers of the Digital Impacts Grants Program, and that's what we're here to talk about this morning.

I'm going to take about 20 minutes or so to walk through some slides with some basic information about applying for the grants. We'll then open it up for questions which I will respond to. I'll read out the question, and I'll do my best to answer it. I want to say right up top that the contents of this webinar will be recorded and the recording and the slides and the questions and answers will all be posted up to the digitalimpact.org website so that you can reference them again in the future. You can share them with colleagues and people who might have expressed to you their desire to attend this but who weren't able to make it will be able to get that information. There's also another one of these webinars scheduled so there's another opportunity as well.

We are very excited about this program, the Digital Impacts Grant Program. This is the first time we'll be opening it up to applicants from outside of the United States. I hope there's some of you on the phone, and we're excited about the possibilities of being able to support that work and those projects.

[Digital Impact Grants Program Overview]

So, let's get started. First of all, the Digital Impact Grants Program is in its second year. Last year it was known as the Good Data Grants Program but it's part of the overall effort of the Digital Impact Projects. So, let me tell you a little bit about that. Digital Impact also had a previous name. It used to be called the Markets for Good Initiative. It's an initiative of the Digital Civil Society Lab at Stanford's PACS, and we're focused on improving the digital infrastructure for civil society and helping social sector practitioners and policymakers use digital data safely, ethically, and effectively and for maximum impact in line with their missions.

We have a number of different initiatives and a lot of work that we do. I'll just give you a little bit of a headline here. There's the digital impact online community of which the grants program is a piece, and we welcome you to join us in those conversations on that community. We host a number of in-person events that build on the research that happens at Stanford and universities around the world. We focus as a research center—at Stanford, we focus on scholarly research through the grants and as well as partnerships with practitioners in the field and through the digitalimpact.io toolkit we have been working with organizations in the field, in the US and around the world to develop ready-to-use policies, tools, and resources for the safe, ethical and effective use of digital data in civil societies.

So, we invite you to take advantage of and participate in all of those communities and resources and opportunities to connect with others around the world. Specifically, to the grants program, let me say that the Digital Impact Grants Program as I mentioned is in its second year. It's focused very specifically on projects and research that get to the heart of digital data and infrastructure as they are used to improve decision making in philanthropy. We have a particular interest in the ways individual people can use digital data and online resources to improve their giving, but we look at the social sector writ large.

[Grant Program Focus]

With the grants, we aim to support research, prototypes, and shared learning that donors and non-profit organizations can use and will improve their use of digital data. I want to emphasize this. This is a program focused on shared efforts, not on dashboards or projects that benefit one organization or even a subsector of organizations necessarily, but the kinds of research or standards or cross-sector learning that actually can be taken up and put into practice as sector-wide behavior change, sector-wide standards, or the sector-wide use of research.

It's a very important distinction between this grants program and others, and I want to draw your attention to that now as well as when we go through the actual requirements for the grants. There are two types of grants within the grants program and they focus on the generators of—two of the core communities we're trying to connect with all of our work in Digital Impact. We are focused on the research community and we are focused on sector practitioners, non-profits, foundations, civil society associations, and individual donors. So, the grants program accepts applications within each of these two categories and in the research category in particular, these are proposals and projects that tend to be generated specifically from the scholarly community.

We welcome applications from any academic discipline as well as from cross-disciplinary teams, and we're looking for research that directly engages partners from the non-profit or philanthropic community and that it's very clear—the research is being done in partnership with the field and would direct application to field practice in mind. From the sector side, as I mentioned, we're looking for proposals and ideas and projects that think about the sector-wide opportunity to use digital data safely, ethically, and effectively. We want projects that align with or deepen the four principles for digital data use that are outlined on the digital impact website and in the Digital Impact Toolkit. These four principles are consent, privacy, openness and pluralism, and there's a good deal more information about those on the digitalimpact.org website and the digitalimpact.io website which is the specific toolkit.

I'm going to emphasize here again that these grants are meant to support projects that can change behavior, improve connection, improve practice across the social sector not within a single organization, not within a single collaboration or partnership but that have both relevance to and a clear path to adoption across the sector as a whole. To help make that extraction a little more concrete, let me share with you some sample grant ideas. These are things that have been discussed at great length by the digital impact community. For more information on sample ideas and to see last year's grantee lists, you can go to the digitalimpact.org/grants website page, and you'll be able to see last year's, a map of all the applicant ideas as well as a list and a description of the projects that have been funded.

[Research Category Grant Examples]

So, in the research category because of the changing nature of how we fund charitable action and how we fund social sector research, we're quite interested in investigations of how public good activity or charitable activity is being funded on crowdfunding platforms. There's quite a bit—many interesting questions to be asked there. We're interested in research on algorithmic governance specifically as it relates to the non-profit sector or social sector context. We're interested in ideas that are innovations or research on community based governance about data assets. So, new governance forms that are developing or that might be developed specific to the nature of managing digital assets. Back up to the crowdfunding idea, we're interested in policy research that thinks about the reporting standards from crowdfunding platforms and how that fits with or doesn't fit with the reporting standards for other forms of charitable and social sector platforms. Again, these are just suggestions. These are not things that we're requiring anybody to focus on but if you have a research interest that fall into any of those areas, I do hope you'll consider submitting an application. Please also take a look at the application ideas and grants that were funded in this category last year.

[Sector Grant Category Examples]

So, let's switch over to the sector grants. These are, again, applications that most likely will be led by non-profit organizations or exempt equivalent organizations from outside the US because we are focused on those things that are sector-applicable, we're quite interested in efforts to develop principles or practices or even structures that are purpose built to share digital data across non-profits, governments, and industry. So again, we're not looking for a specific partnerships or collaborations between a few non-profits and a specific public sector organization but for the principles and practices that might have been generated from such a partnership that could be scaled or tested across the sector writ large. Because as I mentioned at the top, we're delighted that these grants are now available to organizations outside of the US and there are some major policy changes under way, specifically in the European Union. We're very interested in advances or innovations that might, for example, help non-profits and social sector organizations comply with the 2018 coming of the new GDPR requirements in the EU. So, efforts that could be turned into specifications for use and adaption across the sector on how to comply with those new regional and globally significant policy requirements that will affect charitable solicitation and non-profit fundraising efforts. Every organization around the world is facing challenges of comprehensive digital literacy capacities and skills, and, or digital security capacities and skills. So, projects that have addressed that issue and can show the development of tools or processes or standards that can be openly shared and widely adopted. That's another area where there's great interest.

And we're also quite interested continuingly with the resources for data governance policies that are already available on digitalimpact.io or on github for example. We're interested in continuing to build out those kinds of easily replicable, easily shared sector-wide tools and templates for governing digital data. So, we can come back to these. If you have any questions, you can start submitting them now using the chat function, but again, these are here really just to spark your thinking. You can go to digitalimpact.org/grants, and you'll find more information, more ideas. It's also available in the RFP which is located in the same place.

[Program Size and Key Numbers]

So, as far as the grant program is concerned in terms of funding size, we have a total of 200,000 US dollars for this round of grantmaking. The grants that will be made will be made for a one year time period with the start dates pegged to the fall of 2017. So, this fall. And we anticipate that we'll be able to make between 5 and 15 grants from that grant cycle. Obviously, that number actually winds up depending significantly on the number of applications we receive and the quality of those applications. Last year we were delighted to be able to fund a total of seven projects. There are a number of grantee requirements that you should orient yourself to before considering submitting an application. The funding for this grants program comes from the Gates Foundation, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and they align and require all applicants and grantees to abide by the open access policy of the foundation.

[Open Sharing Policy]

So, you can see here on this slide, the URL for that specific policy, and we pass onto our—the grantees of this program must also abide by this policy. So, if you're involved in anything that's creating proprietary standards or has a business model built around it that requires not open sharing, open and free sharing of your innovation, this is not the funding program for you. This is very much focused on building things that can be openly shared and widely adopted. We're also using these grant dollars to help support the creation and the cartelization I should say, of new networks that cross silos from scholars to practitioners, practitioners in one field to other fields, try to weave together the data science community as well as the digital infrastructure community. So, we will bring all of the grant to the successful grantees and require someone from each grantee partner to be able to join us in February of 2018 at Stanford's annual -- the Stanford Social Intervention Reviews annual

Data Conference. The dates for that are in February 2018. We'll ask the grantees to be prepared to present their work at Stanford in the fall of 2018. There are grant reporting both narrative and budget requirements that successful applicants will need to meet. This is structured by our being nested at Stanford University as well as managing funds on behalf of the Bill and Melinda's Gates Foundation. So, those requirements are important to be met, and we encourage all successful applicants to contribute to the Digital Impact community by a blogpost or participating in virtual roundtables. We try to be helpful to the successful grantees in helping them learn from others in the community and share their work with that community.

[Grant Program Timeline]

So, here's the basic timeline for the program. We'll hold this webinar and at least one others, and again, as I said at the top, the outcomes of this conversation and other information will be loaded up on the website so you'll be able to access it after the call is over. The application to apply is June 12th of 2017. That's Pacific Standard Time. We'll notify grant recipients on August 7th. The February conference at Stanford is where we try to -- one opportunity where we try to bring grantees together, and then they'll be an expectation that grantees will present their research and innovations to the broader community by some forum hosted at Stanford in the fall of 2018. So, that's the basic timeline for this year. Finally, the RFP is located at this weblink. It has the links to previous grantees, previous applicant's ideas, more information on this open access requirements, and my colleague Laura Seaman, who manages the program can be reached by email with any questions. So, that's the material I have to share with you. I am hopeful that if you have any questions, you'll take this time to submit those through so I can try to answer them for you. I will just leave this slide here so you have the contact information that you need, but again, the most important piece is this URL because of digitalimpact.org you'll be able to find the RFP, the additional application information, the list of previous year's grants, the map of previous years applicants. All of the information about the four principles is all linked off of digitalimpact.org which takes you to digitalimpact.io. There's one question coming in.

[Attendee Questions]

Have you funded any sharing economy applicants in the past?

Given the nature, the contentious nature of the definition of sharing economy, that's a broad question, but I believe the answer to that is no. You can actually look at the grants project, the funded grants from last year. We're only two years in so that will show you the list of grantees. Now having said that, what we're interested in is the digital data and infrastructure that powers different kinds of collaboration. So that's not to say that we wouldn't fund sharing economy applicants. I do want to emphasize that the organization's we fund must be 501C3 non-profits in the US or their exempt equivalents outside of the US. So, this is not a grant's program that's focused on commercial—the creation of commercial prototypes or anything like that.

There is a question about translating research and data methodologies into a public product. Would it be considered research or sector?

Great question. Probably going to depend more on who the we is in that question. If you are a university based, if you're scholarly based and you're going to be partnering with some non-profits to make sure you're hearing what they actually use, probably qualifies as a research grant. If in fact, you're a non-profit based, then the research and data that you're talking about were built outside of the university category. I think those fall into the sector grants. I should emphasize an answer to that question just so it's very clear that there is a total pool of \$200,000 for both types of grants, and then the requirements are only slightly different depending on the research and the sector, so I hope that's helpful. Okay.

The question about, if the notifications go out on August 7th, when would the actual funding become available to grant recipients?

Because the grants project is managed through Stanford University, there are a couple of layers of bureaucracy that have to happen. The notifications go out on August 7th, and we do our very best to then be able to turn around payment in a few weeks. That is not always possible because there are likely to be some additional requirements especially for organizations outside of the US, and there's an invoicing process that happens after the notification of the grant, and then there's an invoicing process where the grantee has to actually send an invoice to us so that we can process that through the Stanford University system. That being said, we would be aiming within about a month's time, but it requires expeditious action on both the grantee's part and on our part. We're set up to do that. This year, we'll do better than we did last year, but I can't give you an exact date.

Can you give examples of how grantees are able to create revenue streams from their creations without it being a proprietary IP?

I could say to that in the context of this grants program, we're not interested in your being able to create revenue streams from the other creations without it being a proprietary IP. There are lots of ways this happens. We could talk about this at length in another context, but that's not the purpose of this webinar. Let me just say that the purpose of this webinar is to support this grants program, and the purpose of this grants program is to support non-proprietary intellectual property. So, we're looking for things that will generate and prove the field as a whole. We are absolutely only funding projects that are designed for and committed to being open access intellectual property. So, the question of creating proprietary IP and the question of developing revenue streams off of it, not a factor for this grant's program because we're not going to be funding anything that's proprietary. Statewide collective impact effort on bridging the digital divide and improving digital citizenship. Hard to answer that question without a little more detail but remember we are not interested. The grant funds are for things that would benefit others outside of the actual collective. Let's think about it that way. The products of these grants whether research grants or sector grants, the products of the grants have to be things that others who weren't involved directly in creating them can benefit from. These are geared toward improving sector-wide practice. So, if such an effort is actually structured so that its final products are beyond itself, then it's possible that it could qualify, but if the effort is focused on trying new ideas, helping to strengthen that particular collective, deepen that work, then that's not a fit for this grant's program. I'm trying to read as fast as I can here so hold on for a second while I read through these questions.

A good question about crowdfunding sites, it's listed within the research category rather than the sector category.

I should say that simply as an example. So, if you're doing something with crowdfunding and you don't think it's research, that doesn't disqualify it. So, the question—yes, this is an effort to—sector-wide efforts focused on crowdfunding platforms that are specific to, again, producing something that benefits those outside the actual existing partnership. Not just testing something in a new partnership but building something so that others can use it. Don't feel bound by the fact that our crowdfunding examples were in the research categories. It's completely possible to propose a sector grant that's focused on crowdfunding efforts that are outside of the research efforts. It's just that most of the questions that we have thought of, that have been brought to us is of interest in the community are still, to be perfectly honest, quite skeptical about crowdfunding and the effort is -- the reason they're falling into the research category is because of that skepticism about how applicable they can be. I hope that's a helpful answer. So, good question.

On a sector of non-profits adopting something from another sector: Does it meet the open-tool sectors component?

Only if your work in turn is taking that model and making it available to others. The key thing to focus on in all applications here is the product you're creating, the lessons you're learning, the tools you're building going beyond yourself. So, taking something from Sector A and applying it to Sector B is not, in and of itself, sufficient. It would have to be about advancing that adoption process, building something that would then make it available to sectors C, D, and E, for example. Thanks for the question. Let's see. Now we're getting some very specific, content specific questions, so just give me a second to read them.

There's a question here, ecological design program and a number of learning efforts here.

Good question. Hard to answer in a general conversation. It might be worth a follow-up email, but it does begin to sound not unlike the previous question which is about taking something that's worked in one place and broadening it within a specific other communities. So again, from sector A to sector B, but this grant's program is most designed then really to scale it to sector C, D, and E. The outputs of such an effort would need to be focused on building things that go well beyond the participant's in the actual grant. I think the best way to think about these grants is for your partnership or your research group to be creating things that others, those not involved in your actual work are going to be in a position to take up for their work. So, it's really focused on that adoption process or that creating of new standards or practices process. You might be testing it within your own group or collective or the grantees but you're building something with an eye that goes far beyond your own experience.

Are there restrictions on what the grant can be used for? Salaries, data acquisition, et cetera?

No, we've not run into these in the past. As long as they're legal activities and they're fundamental to producing the actual product, we have not run into these yet. Now, because we're expanding the program globally, I do want to just be honest that we'll be working with exempt equivalent organizations. There will be some careful reading of grant line items but this is to say, no, there's no restrictions as we've designed it in the past on using these for just the human costs or the raw material costs of getting something done. That being said, data acquisition, that's a one-off and can be covered in a one year grant project, is all that these funds would be able to cover. And, if you're building something that's going to need ongoing access to a data stream, you need to take that into account.

Do we fund data collection effort as a part of a larger project?

Absolutely. Especially again, if that data collection is about what's the uptake likelihood? Who are the next users of whatever it is we're building? That kind of data collection absolutely fits in as part of the work.

Do we preference teams versus individuals?

The preference is for teams. This work is about the sector and sectors, and so, because it's really about adoption and having work taken up by others, chances are better that it will work better if you've got some kind of cross sector team. The research grants actually require demonstration of legitimate sector participation so that it's not ivory tower thinking with no connection to the real world. The sector grants don't require partnerships but most of them are demonstrations of legitimate existing partnerships across organizations.

Is there a preference giving to projects that benefit both non-profit and government organizations?

The way that's written, and the way I just said it, I assume that means as opposed to either or. So, there's definitely a preference given to projects that benefit the social sector. Non-profits and governments are fine. Non-profits are fine. Civil society organizations and associations are fine. This is not focused on government since they're clearly almost always a part of any data sharing effort, their benefit doesn't preclude them but it's not a public sector grants program.

I think there were a few more details added to some of the questions up and above. So, let me just check again, and my good colleagues who are writing these down and passing these on as fast as they can may be typing. I've tried to answer what I have here. Thank you very much for those 13 or 14 questions. I will stay on the phone while people think and folks type. I'll point you also back to the websites for you to check out. If I did say something in attempting to answer your question about we need more information or, you know, that's probably not worth taking everyone else's time to answer, I encourage you to email Laura at the email address on the screen, and we'll do our best to provide you with some guidance there. So, why don't I—now I'm just filling dead space. If we're out of questions, I'm happy to give you back your day or evening not knowing where you're calling from.

Let me scroll back through here so you can see the deadlines right here. I do check out the Gates Foundation open access policy before taking the time to submit anything. If your work isn't going to align with this, this is not the grant's program for you. The \$200,000, again, on the sample grant ideas is just to emphasize these are simply suggestions. These are not meant to be limiting in any way. Hopefully, they're simply, perhaps sparking some ideas. The best place to get ideas may be looking at last year's grantees. We made a map of all the applicants, not just the successful grantees. That's a process we will repeat this year. We do that on an opt-in basis. As you'll see on the RFP, there's a question right up on top: Are you willing to share the basic project information so that we can make that map? Last year we were delighted that out of the full poll of proposals we received which were in the low triple digits, high double digits if I recall correctly, only two organizations opted out. So, it is an opt-in but we hope you will opt-in because what it allows us to do is show—is make sense of the world from your perspective and the questions that are being asked.

Can we send the paragraph project description by email for feedback?

I cannot promise that if all of the hundreds of people who've asked about this, that we'll be able to provide that. You can go ahead but I cannot guarantee that we'll actually be able to field those. I wish we could but there's only a few of us. I should mention here that the grants are actually reviewed in two cycles that involve people from the academy, scholars, researchers, as well as social sector organizers and other members of the Digital Impact community. So, we value and welcome their input, and we have a broad community of folks helping us, but I cannot commit that group to being able to answer emails in a timely fashion from all of the hundreds of people who might apply.

The question here about algorithmic bias, automated decision making. This is a topic of great interest from the little bit that's been put into this question.

Yes, the answer is that that's precisely the kind of research we're interested in. There is a current project we're funding that's looking at something similar, as long as the path to application in the social sector itself is clear. So, just academic research on this without a path to organizational policy change, organizational advocacy or some effort to address the problem beyond the research. It needs that kind of clear articulation as well as a solid methodological basis and not the skills and capacities to do the work. I'm sorry. I'm just trying to catch my breath here. Creation of a research methodology to be used by policy advocates. That's the kind of thing that the emphasis—the deciding factor for the reviewers I can say is going to be based on both the feasibility and credibility of the research methodology whether or not it's something that sector advocates could actually repeat and refine and use. Feasible in all the definitions of that word meaning cost, capacity, skills, digital infrastructure, bias consideration, all of those things, and whether or not the policy—we're talking about advocacy writ large, not policy in a particular domain. So, it's an interesting idea. It has some big challenges in the need for that, but certainly strengthening civil society organization's ability to advocate using credible data is an interesting opportunity and delighted to think about interventions that could improve that capacity. It's a very challenging problem so it'd be great to have somebody try to take it up.

Is there any back and forth with applicant's during the review process?

Great question. The review process goes through a couple of different cycles. There's an immediate selection to winnow out things that we know are really, despite the best efforts of the best applicants, really going to focus on building something for just the applicants. That the focus isn't on the adoption. There is a review process of these volunteer scholars and sector participants who do the next run. Then we bring in the process of making sure that in fact the—what is the word I'm looking for? That in fact Stanford can manage these grants, that we take on the physical review and the responsibility to the organizations, and that that's possible, so that process happens, and then there is a second review cycle from an additional set of reviewers that are looking across the entire pool. We try at that stage or we will at that stage undertake phone interviews with that small list of finalists. Because again, we only have \$200,000. We're not going to be making—we can't imagine we'll be making more than 15 grants from that tiny pool of funding. That's the only verbal communication we have at that point. An exception would be if there's something of great interest to the reviewers and it's a question of clarification. But I'm afraid given the demands, that that's as much as we can do. We will plan to speak via Skype or phone with that set of finalists, and then the finalist list is called—by that set of reviewers, for both our ability to make good fiscal investments based on the amount of money we have and the total budget ask of that final pool, and again as well as the ability of the university to manage within the bounds of legal compliance, grants to those organizations.

Once again, folks taking a break. Probably typing as madly as they can. I appreciate that. I'll catch my breath. If there are any other questions, while we do have this platform for another 20 minutes. Again, we'll hang up as soon as it feels like questions have been answered. I want to thank everybody who submitted a question. These will be—the transcription and the answers being captured by my colleagues, we'll get it up on the website as soon as possible, along with the audio. I think the audio of this webinar goes up live as well and the slides. I would much prefer that if you've got a question, you share it here. And make sure you're using the chat function to send in your questions. The phone calls are muted. You'll get an answer as best as I can if you ask the question now, and I can't guarantee that will happen otherwise. So, please take this opportunity or join us again on the next webinar. It looks like we might have another question.

A question about partial funding. Great question.

When we get to that final stage in review, when we have the final pool of projects that we'd like to fund and we're balancing it against the amount of funds available, we did last year—and we would do this again next year, enquire with projects, what might be able to be done at a reasonable smaller grant size. Obviously, we trust that you're putting in the budgets that you need. We're not going to make haphazard budget hacking choices on our end, and we would prefer to fund the largest pool of possible work that we can given the budget restrictions we have. So, chances are we would try to get on the phone and talk to people and make some hard tradeoffs there to the best we can. That's what we did last year, and we wound up with a really exciting group of grantees. We will not make arbitrary one-sided budget whacks on your behalf, and it may not be possible given that we have \$200,000 and have opened up the applicant pool globally. We just don't know how much of an overall budget ask that will be. I will say that last year when this was just a US based program, we had about 10X the budget requests for the dollars available. So, I don't imagine that that ratio is going to improve, but thanks for the question.

[Conclusion]

Got anymore? We've still got a few minutes. If not, thanks for your time. Let me just speak as slowly as I can. I do encourage you to check out digitalimpact.org. There's much more up on that site besides just the grants project, and the more familiar you are with the community last year's grantees, the principles for safe ethical and effective digital practice that we've been developing. With last year's grantees as well with others, the more information you have from there, the more aligned you are, the better your chances. I'm going to say that it looks like there aren't any more questions coming in and

emphasize that you can join us on the next webinar. You can check out the website in the next day or so, and all of the transcripts will be available there. Seeing no additional questions, I'm going to thank you for your time. You've got the URL for additional information, and I'm going to suggest that it's time to close out this webinar. So again, this Lucy Bernholz from Stanford. Thank you so much for joining us. Do check out the website for the transcripts of this. I hope I was able to answer your questions and thank you so much for your interest. Bye-bye now.