

# Request for Student Research Proposals supervised by Faculty Members

August 1, 2019

The last date for submission of proposals has lapsed

## Background

The National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) is one of India's oldest and largest independent, non-profit, economic and social research institute. It does grant-funded research, and commissioned studies for governments and industry, and is one of the few think tanks globally that also collect primary data. NCAER with its consortium partners, the University of Maryland and University of Michigan, has set up a new National Data Innovation Centre (NDIC). Initial funding for NDIC is provided by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

The main objective of NDIC is to serve as a laboratory for experiments in data collection, interfacing with partners in think tanks, Indian and international universities, and government. NDIC forms an important core of NCAER's long-standing data collection activities.

## Request for Proposal (RFP)

The focus of the current RFP is to seek for proposals on methodologies for data collection and analysis across the following domains: gender equity, health system, health insurance and healthcare expenditure, employment and unemployment, family planning, and financial inclusion.

The proposals should focus on innovative ideas to improve data quality pertaining to the following aspects:

- Fulfilling data needs and bridging gaps: In the context of the above-mentioned domains, this would entail identifying the key sub-domains that have hitherto received little attention, and developing and evaluating scalable data collection modules.
- Mode of data collection: This would involve experimenting with alternative modes of data collection such as telephone interviews, various computer-assisted methods, self-administered mode of data collection for sensitive topics, web-surveys and comparing these with the traditional methods of data collection in India.
- Questionnaire designing: The main question that needs to be addressed during designing of a questionnaire is: What are the elements of a good questionnaire, and how can these be integrated to elicit accurate responses from the target respondents? In this context, the components that require special attention are: framing and wording of the questions, use of open versus closed questions, number of points on rating scales, labelling of the rating scale points, order of response alternatives, use of the 'don't know' response, sequence of the questions, the recall period, and skip patterns, among other things.
- Social desirability bias: Since it has been observed that a significant number of people provide false information to stay within the socially desirable framework than be seen to be part of the socially undesirable one, it is important to identify methods of overcoming this problem in data collection. This phenomenon may also be related to the interviewer characteristics and interviewing techniques, as often people report

what they perceive is considered desirable by the interviewer instead of giving an honest response. In this context, the self-administered mode of data collection could be a viable alternative to reduce social desirability bias.

- Interview setting: This implies assessment of the interview setting and how it can play a role in improving reporting by the respondents, particularly in the case of questions pertaining to sensitive behaviour (e.g., semi-private setting versus complete privacy).
- Survey implementation: The method of data collection and survey implementation may also affect the quality of data. This necessitates identification of the key elements of survey implementation for enhancing data quality, such as interviewing techniques, developing a feasible field plan, monitoring and supervision of the fieldwork, and remote monitoring of process data and survey data.

### **Eligibility**

Students pursuing their PhD degree or equivalent in any Indian academic or research institute are eligible to apply. We seek proposals from student–faculty teams in order to promote innovations, build skills, and foster collaborations between the researchers and senior faculty both during and after the grant implementation phase.

### **Funding**

The Centre will support a budget of up to Rs 6 lakhs for a period of 12 months. The budget should clearly indicate the actual needs and modes of utilisation of the funding for the proposed project. There is provision for five such grants. Only one grant from each applicant will be considered for funding.

### **Application Procedure**

All applications must be emailed to Arpita Kayal, Programme Manager, NDIC (akayal@ncaer.org), in a single PDF document (with the text in 'Georgia' font, point size 12), comprising the following components:

- A) The proposal (not longer than four pages of text in single space) on research work falling under the Centre's focus areas outlined above. The proposal should include the following sections:
1. Project Summary;
  2. Specific Aim(s);
  3. Research Strategy, which would further specify:
    - a. Significance
    - b. Innovation
    - c. Approach and Implementation Plan, indicating how the proposed questions / innovations will be tested;
  4. Expected Outcomes;
  5. Potential Challenges and Alternative Strategies;
  6. Timeline; and
  7. Budget.

(The page limit is inclusive of the first six components delineated above, while additional pages may be used, if needed, for detailing the budget.)

B) Curriculum Vitae of both the applicant and the respective research guide/faculty member.

C) Support letter from the research guide/faculty member.

## **Selection Criteria**

The selection of students will be based on the merit of the proposal and the CV of the applicant. The merit of the proposal will be judged based on the following criteria:

- Alignment of the proposal with the RFP focus areas
- Innovativeness in method
- Rigour and feasibility of approach
- Clarity of thought
- Clarity in writing
- Selection will also be guided by the distribution of proposals across various domains and components that determine data quality.

## **Other Requirements**

The student and faculty should first check the institutional policies of their respective universities/institutes regarding such grants before applying.

It is mandatory that the selected students spend some time at NCAER to make themselves familiar with the activities undertaken by the Centre and also to discuss and present their research findings. Optionally, the selected students may wish to spend the entire project period (one year) at NCAER.

At the end of the grant, selected students will have to submit a research/working paper authored by the student. The research/working paper will be uploaded on NCAER-NDIC website after it has been peer-reviewed. All research outputs are expected to follow the open access policy of the Gates Foundation.

The selected students and their supervisors will also be encouraged to contribute to the NCAER-NDIC blogs based on their experiences of working on the grant.

## **Key Dates:**

Proposal submission due date: 1st August, 2019

Announcement of the successful candidates: 1st September, 2019

Contract signing: 1st October, 2019

Project period: 1st October, 2019 to 30th September, 2020