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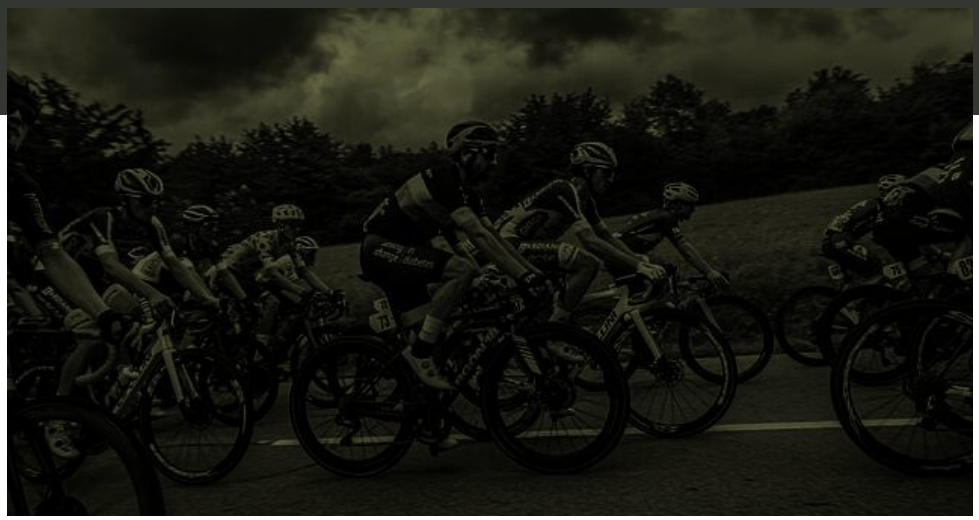
GENERAL

MacArthur $100-Million Contest Semifinalists Announced

05.24.17 | Linda J. Rosenthal, JD



Early last summer, we reported in "The MacArthur $100-Million Grant Contest," on the launch by the highly regarded MacArthur Foundation of an exciting contest: there is to be a $100-million award for a "single proposal that will make measurable progress toward solving a significant problem.

Challenge and Early Skepticism

"Big problems require bold solutions."

That was the pitch for "proposals from any sector" with no preferred "single field or problem." The sole parameter is that the proposal must "have a charitable purpose" and be focused on a present-day "critical issue."

Excluded from consideration are individuals or government entities; otherwise, "eligible organizations may be of any type, for-profit, nonprofit, or other, from anywhere in the world." The only limitation is that "[e]ach must show the capacity to manage and deliver on the proposed solution."

While there was some early skepticism and criticism of plunging such an enormous amount of money into a single project, the contest generated enormous interest. Within the few months of the contest-application period, some 1900 applications were filed "for an incredibly diverse range of creative, thoughtful, and potentially effective projects" were received. Foundation officials were "inspired by the number of people and teams who had taken the time and energy to participate, and who shared [...the...] belief that solutions are possible for even the most daunting global problems."

Winnowing Down

These initial submissions were winnowed down to about 800 proposals that met all of the conditions and qualifications.

A requirement of each submission was inclusion of a 90-second video summarizing the proposal. Many have been posted online via YouTube; they are quick and easy peeks into the exciting proposals under consideration for this prestigious prize.

This video clip includes a provocative selection of remarkably creative projects:
https://www.macfound.org/press/perspectives/look-100-change-through-video/
On February 16, 2017, the Foundation announced eight semi-finalists for the global "100&Change" competition:

- "Catholic Relief Services, which, in partnership with Lumos and Maestral International, proposes to unite children in orphanages with supportive and nurturing families and transform orphanages into family service providers
- HarvestPlus, which hopes to eliminate so-called hidden hunger — diets lacking vitamins and minerals that can lead to blindness, stunting, cognitive impairment, disease, and death — by fortifying staple crops such as corn, cassava, and wheat
- Himalayan Cataract Project, which will work to deliver sustainable eye care in Nepal, Ethiopia, and Ghana using an adaptable, replicable, and scalable "train-the trainer" model
- Human Diagnosis Project, which has proposed to provide three million underserved patients in the U.S. with virtual access to a hundred thousand volunteer specialists
- the Internet Archive, which hopes to expand free and long-term public access to knowledge by providing libraries and learners with free digital access to some four million books
- Rice University's Rice 360° Institute for Global Health, which hopes to boost newborn survival rates in Africa with low-cost solutions and technologies that enable clinicians to provide quality newborn care in low-resource settings
- Sesame Workshop and the International Rescue Committee, which propose to develop and deliver multimedia content to meet the educational needs of children displaced by conflict and persecution in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria
- the Carter Center, which is focused on eliminating transmission of river blindness in Nigeria by administering ivermectin through community-directed distribution systems."

To browse project summaries and watch a video overview of the eight semi-finalist projects, see the MacArthur Foundation website.

For the next step, each semi-finalist group will "work with an expert team to address questions about its technical and organizational capacity and refine its proposal" and have to "demonstrate authentic engagement with their target communities and stakeholders."

Finally, the expert teams will prepare and submit an assessment to the MacArthur Foundation's Board of Directors which will choose up to five finalists in September 2017. Following presentations by these finalist-applicants in December 2017, the Board will select a single winner that will receive the $100-million.

Conclusion

"Big problems require bold solutions." We look forward to seeing which entrant's bold solutions will get a $100-million chance to succeed.

— Linda J. Rosenthal, J.D., FPLG Information & Research Director