

MacArthur \$100-Million Grant Finalists Announced

10.03.17 | Linda J. Rosenthal, JD



In the summer of 2016, we reported on the [launch of an exciting \\$100-Million Grant Contest](#) by the respected MacArthur Foundation. “Big problems require bold solutions” is the theme of this search for a [“single proposal](#) that will make measurable progress toward solving a significant problem.”

The pitch was for [“proposals from any sector”](#) with no preferred “single field or problem,” the sole parameter being that the proposal must “have a charitable purpose” and be focused on a present-day “critical issue.”

Individuals and government entities were excluded from consideration; 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.”

Grant Proposals Flowed In

Though there was [initial skepticism from some quarters](#), the response was overwhelming – and exciting. In the first round during 2016, some 1900 applications were filed “for an [incredibly diverse range](#) of creative, thoughtful, and potentially effective projects.”

The initial barrage of applications was [narrowed down to some 800 proposals](#) that met all qualifications and conditions.

A requirement of the application process was inclusion of a 90-second video summarizing the idea. Many have been posted online via YouTube, and are quite remarkable. The selective clip [here](#) shows a huge range of innovative projects that were under consideration:

Grant Semi-Finalists (First Round) Announced

In February 2017, the MacArthur Foundation announced eight semi-finalists for the #100&Change contest. The Foundation website includes project summaries and a video overview of these lucky applicants here.

In the following months, each semi-finalist worked “with an expert team to address questions about its technical and organizational capacity and refine its proposal” and to “demonstrate authentic engagement with their target communities and stakeholders.” These teams then submitted an assessment to the Foundation’s Board of Directors to review in connection with the selection of up to five finalists in September 2017.

Four Finalists Selected

In anticipation of the announcement of the finalists, which occurred at the end of September 2017, The Nonprofit Quarterly teamed up with MacArthur Foundation officials to host a Facebook Live Event with that will take place on October 4, 2017 at 1 pm, and will likely be available for replay afterward. Details are at “Giving Away \$100 Million: A Peek Behind the Curtain at MacArthur Foundation and at NPQ’s Facebook Page. will be hosting a special Facebook Live event with Cecilia Conrad, Managing Director of the MacArthur Foundation on October 4th at 1:00 pm. Sign up today!

From the initial 1900 submissions, the MacArthur Foundation has chosen four semifinalists, extensive details about which are at the #100&Change section of the MacArthur website. According to MacArthur President Julia Stasch: “The proposals are creative, ambitious, and driven by a passion to make the world a better place for millions of people. Together, they demonstrate that, even in challenging social and political times, solutions are possible and worthy of significant investment.”

- Catholic Relief Services: Changing how society cares for children in orphanages **More**
- HarvestPlus: Eliminating hidden hunger in Africa by fortifying staple crops **More**
- Rice 360° Institute for Global Health (Rice University): Improving Newborn Survival in Africa **More**
- Sesame Workshop and the International Rescue Committee: Educating children displaced by conflict and persecution **More**

In conjunction with the announcement for October 4th’s Facebook Live Event, NPQ published an article by Cecilia Conrad, Managing Director of the MacArthur Foundation, Giving Away \$100 Million: A Peek behind the Curtain at MacArthur Foundation. It is a reflection on this innovative grant contest well worth a read: “The MacArthur Foundation’s 100&Change competition began as an experiment in openness, in response to criticisms that the philanthropic sector is too insular, not sufficiently focused on impact, and too risk averse,” Ms. Conrad wrote. “A single grant of \$100 million is admittedly a very risky proposition—but ...“philanthropy is best positioned to provide society’s ‘risk capital’.”

She continued: “As we [approach naming a winner], we want to share the many lessons we have learned through our approach to giving away \$100 million, and we want to share the data we have gathered—a rich repository of creative, thoughtful, and impactful ideas.”

Conclusion

The four finalists will make presentations and the Board will choose a single winner to receive the \$100-million grant before the end of this year.

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