



FACT SHEET

Voices for Economic Opportunity

Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
Grand Challenge In U.S. Economic
Mobility and Opportunity

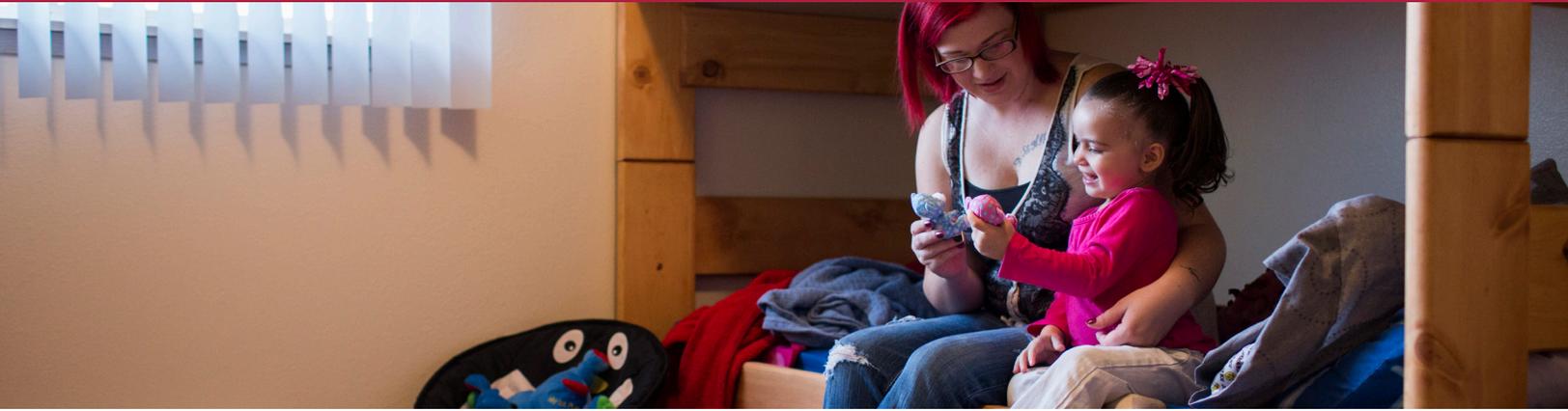
OVERVIEW

In May 2018, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation launched a new strategy on Economic Mobility and Opportunity, which seeks to increase the number and diversity of actors working in coordination to address barriers to economic mobility. Among the projects funded so far are: the [Opportunity Atlas](#), a database that demonstrates which neighborhoods in America offer children the best chance to rise out of poverty, developed by a team of researchers at [Opportunity Insights](#) including Raj Chetty; and the [Eviction Lab](#), which under the direction of Matthew Desmond built the first publicly accessible national database of evictions.

This effort seeks to build on the understanding of poverty gleaned from the U.S. Partnership on Mobility from Poverty Initiative and to identify promising ideas to combat widespread, harmful and inaccurate assumptions about poverty, deservingness, income, and wealth gaps. We are grateful to have the Robert Wood

Johnson Foundation, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and the Raikes Foundation join us on this endeavor. Each of these funders will bring to this collaboration their unique expertise and experience working to address inequity in the United States. Moving from prevailing stories rooted in misconceptions and stereotypes to ones rooted in shared values, history, systemic solutions, equity, and human dignity is a crucial step in dramatically increasing economic mobility.

We're seeking creative, compelling ideas from individuals and organizations from all sectors in the United States to elevate diverse voices and broaden the national conversation about poverty and economic mobility. Anyone with a great concept is welcome to apply for a \$100,000 grant to develop their idea.



PURPOSE AND NEED

Over the past few years, our team at the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has been travelling to communities across the U.S. to better understand the nature of poverty in our country and the barriers to economic opportunity faced by many. We've spent time with individuals, families, and communities experiencing poverty and we've spent time with those working every day to create pathways to opportunity. These conversations have given us a deeper understanding of the scope and scale of the challenge and the nature of the barriers involved, including systemic racism, neighborhood structures, the criminal justice system, and access to affordable housing and career pathways. These discussions have helped us learn more about what it will take to work effectively alongside the many successful organizations that have spent years fighting for more opportunity for all. We heard many individuals and families tell stories of deeply rooted, entangled challenges and bias that make these issues so complex. One important theme of those conversations was the huge gap between longstanding assumptions about poverty and the reality of millions of Americans' lives. These ingrained but inaccurate assumptions, we heard over and over again, lead to a misdiagnosis of the problem, which in turn generates ineffective and inadequate solutions. This call for ideas is designed to support individuals and organizations interested in contributing to the long-term work of correcting mistaken assumptions and improving understanding of poverty through the actual stories of those that experience poverty – in a way that represents the core factors and challenges.

THE FUNDING OPPORTUNITY

The goal of this challenge is to elevate diverse voices that can help broaden the conversation about the issues inhibiting economic mobility and generate deeper awareness and actionable understanding. Most Americans believe it is right to help others, so that they may have the opportunity to live healthy and productive lives. Yet skepticism exists about the efficacy of anti-poverty programs in the U.S., and deep-seated stereotypes remain about people experiencing poverty and about who deserves to rise out of poverty. Many community practitioners and social-movement leaders in the U.S. are already working to address this challenge. Still, there is a need for new ways of bringing personal stories to life to help others better understand why people fall into or remain stuck in poverty and what the obstacles to building and maintaining economic security are.

We seek proposals for creative, scalable, strategic new ways to generate awareness of the structural and historic barriers to economic mobility; to communicate that poverty is not just something that happens to other people and everyone is deserving of the chance to move out of poverty; and to change the predominant misconceptions about poverty in a way that creates the conditions for effective programs and policies to be adopted by the public and private sectors.



We will give highest priority to proposals that:

- Highlight barriers to economic mobility as well as the impact of biases, intersectionality, and ideas around deservingness related to race, gender, ethnicity, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, age, physical and mental health, ability, and geography
- Highlight the voices of individuals experiencing poverty
- Highlight ideas for distributing these perspectives

We seek to fund a portfolio of projects that:

- Shift the conversation from one that stigmatizes to one that demonstrates “this could be someone I know and value,” signifying that we all have a common interest in expanding economic mobility and dignity
- Move from a depiction of individuals as victims to protagonists with agency who are deserving of opportunity
- Change from a sole focus on lack of money to money, power, agency, and dignity

- Pivot from characterizations of personal failures and deficits to the ongoing importance of individual and collective responsibility and a general consensus that the status quo undermines American democracy and society
- Creatively use citizen voice and data to support communications in a way that generates a deeper understanding of structural and historic barriers to mobility
- Provide insight into workable solutions for overcoming intersecting stereotypes and deep seated values of deservingness that generate biases based on race, gender, ethnicity, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, age, physical and mental health, ability, and geography
- Engage partners with diverse expertise and types of resources



A few of the many types of concepts we will consider include (but are not limited to):

- Integrating lessons learned from past or present poverty-alleviation programs, both successes and failures
- Engaging a range of voices that highlights the causes and consequences of poverty and identifies key windows of opportunity for the most effective change
- Incorporating technology, digital platforms, or social networks with demonstrated value in enhancing dissemination of ideas in support of positive social change

We will not consider funding for:

- Projects centered entirely around donations made by individuals
- Projects focused on emergency relief or crisis response
- Academic research without a clear objective to solve a public understanding problem
- Initiatives limited to specific organizations
- Projects earmarking foundation funds for lobbying activity (e.g., attempts to influence legislation or legislative action) or efforts to influence political campaigns for public office

The Grand Challenge will launch on:

SEPTEMBER 18, 2019

Applications will be accepted until:

**11:30 AM PACIFIC TIME,
NOVEMBER 13, 2019**

For more information, visit:

<https://gcgh.grandchallenges.org/challenge/voices-economic-opportunity>

For questions, please contact Edward Wyatt, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, at 202-662-8182, or by email at:

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