



## Call for Concepts: Youth Economic Agency

### About Us

The Agency Fund makes philanthropic investments in ideas and organizations that help people navigate difficult choices and exert greater agency over their lives. We welcome relevant project ideas through our open call. We also periodically issue calls for concepts (such as this one) for projects in selected thematic areas that are a strategic priority for specific affiliate funders, and where “agency approaches” appear to have elevated potential.

### Background for this Call for Proposals

Young people who come of age in low- or lower-middle-income countries are usually confronted with substantial uncertainty about the future. Many cannot count on stable employment and will need to rely on entrepreneurial activities to make a living. These realities are not well addressed by existing education systems. What are the likely ingredients of maximally cost-effective interventions that build the capabilities for youth to thrive economically in such challenging conditions? Given existing evidence<sup>1-8</sup>, there are a number of factors that would make us optimistic about the expected returns to a given program:

- If it engages with young people’s **beliefs and perspectives** about their capabilities and imaginable futures (for example, through exposure to role models or new & encouraging experiences); and/or it builds **skills** (for example, entrepreneurial & metacognitive skills) that enable the navigation of uncertainty;
- If it is **customized** to a given context, target group, or even individual (for example, through personalized counsel and mentorship);
- If it **leverages data and technology** to increase impact or reduce costs (for example, by leveraging social media, offering remote advisory, or using big data to for improved targeting and interaction).

Research has identified particularly high impacts from bootcamps and mini-MBAs such as [Skills for Effective](#)

[Entrepreneurship Development](#) by UC Berkeley and Educate! or [Personal Initiative Training](#) by the University of Lüneburg and the World Bank.

### What and How We Fund

We seek to support projects that help young people in low- and lower-middle income countries exert greater agency over their economic lives and livelihoods. This could involve, for example:

- Guidance on the quality (e.g., placement rates) of available training programs
- Bootcamps that provide both in-demand skills as well as coaching, feedback, or social capital
- Career counseling approaches that are grounded in local conditions
- Entrepreneurship coaching, including on the formation and management of new livelihoods
- Digital tools that reduce the frictions to managing an entrepreneurial initiative and provide insights to improve management
- Social support for low-income entrepreneurs, including peer mentoring networks and professional advice

We are interested in work with a range of target populations, from highly disadvantaged out-of-school youth to relatively privileged high school graduates. The strongest applications will demonstrate:

- Alignment with the Agency Fund’s [approach](#);
- A path to massive scale (by leveraging existing platforms, technologies, or policy mechanisms);
- A commitment to rigorous and transparent impact measurement as well as cost accounting;
- Rich data sources and analytical capabilities;
- Ambitious timelines;
- A team that works at the cutting edge of social or technological innovation and has a deep understanding of local context.

This call will close on 15 August 2022 at 11:59PM Pacific Time. For FAQs and to apply, visit [www.agency.fund](http://www.agency.fund)



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### Citations

1. D McKenzie (2020). Small Business Training to Improve Management Practices in Developing Countries : Reassessing the Evidence for 'Training Doesn't Work'. World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 9408
2. F Campos et al (2017)" Teaching Personal Initiative beats Traditional Training in Boosting Small Business in West Africa, Science, 357(6357)
3. L Chioda et al (2021): Making Entrepreneurs: Returns to Training Youth in Hard Versus Soft Business Skills. NBER Working Paper 28845
4. N Ashraf, A Banerjee, V Nourani (2020): Leaning to Teach by Learning to Lean. mimeo
5. N Ashraf, N Bau, C Low, K McGinn (2020): Negotiating a Better Future: How Interpersonal Skills Facilitate Intergenerational Investment. Quarterly Journal of Economics 135(2)
6. E Riley (2022): Role Models in movies: The Impact of *Queen of Katwe* on Students' Educational Attainment. Review of Economics and Statistics
7. W Brooks, K Donovan, TR Johnson (2018): Mentors or Teachers? Microenterprise Training in Kenya. American Economic Journal; Applied Economics 10(4)