The Role of Business in Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in the Global South
B Lab and B Academics

Call for Proposals Application Template 2020

Right now, the world is in the midst of a global health pandemic. Carbon dioxide levels are the highest they've been in 650,000 years, 80% of the world's original forests are gone, 844 million people still lack access to basic drinking water, 26 billionaires own as much wealth as 3.8 billion people.

In its current form, capitalism, the most powerful economic system ever created, is failing to meet both the aspirations and safety of billions alongside the needs of an increasingly globalized and warming planet. This reinforces the fact that business norms do not lead to a shared and durable prosperity. Only by recognizing our interdependence and taking concrete, measurable action to build an inclusive global economy, can we reverse this narrative.

The SDGs call for a deep transformation in which business must not only participate, but lead. Fortunately, most companies are at least interested in exploring this challenge. In 2016, the UN Global Compact Accenture CEO Study found that, of 1,000 CEOs surveyed, 87% agree that the SDGs provide an essential opportunity for business to rethink approaches to sustainable value creation. That same year, a study of B Corps in the UK yielded a similar result. It would seem that geography matters: The 2016 State of Responsible Business by Ethical Corporation found that businesses in some regions were more eager to engage with the SDGs than others, with respondents in the Global South showing the high levels of interest.[1]

Even as companies decide to engage with the SDGs, however, the framework's main strength—its "comprehensive [and] systemic approach to complex problems of sustainable development at a planetary level" —can be a barrier as "companies may struggle with where to begin."[2] For that reason, B Lab has partnered with the UN Global Compact to build the first publicly-available online management platform for companies to create and implement tangible action plans to improve their performance on the SDGs, the SDG Action Manager.

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[1] Katharine Earley. More than half of all businesses ignore UN's sustainable development goals. September 30, 2016. The Guardian. https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/2016/sep/30/businesses-ignore-un-sustainable-development-goals-survey

[2] Bhaskar Chakravorti. How Companies Can Champion Sustainable Development. March 14, 2017. Harvard Business Review. https://hbr.org/2017/03/how-companies-can-champion-sustainable-development

The SDGs are a collection of 17 interconnected goals that were agreed to by 193 United Nations member states in 2015. They serve as a blueprint to build a better world for people and our planet by 2030.

OBJECTIVE OF THIS CALL:

Using new data collected through the SDG Action Manager and existing data from the B Impact Assessment, this call seeks to support research on the contributions of the business community to achieving the SDGs by 2030 and the impact that the SDG Action Manager can have on tangibly measuring, tracking, and improving these contributions.

The SDG Action Manager is an impact management solution that enables businesses worldwide to set goals, track progress, and stay motivated on their actions towards the SDGs. This free tool allows businesses to learn which SDGs matter most to them, set goals and track improvement, and understand their impact by getting a clearer view into how their operations, supply chain, and business model creates positive impact. The data available to researchers, includes the questions and answers they have filled out and the SDGs they have started to track their progress on.

Research to be supported in this call must build on the SDG Action Manger data. Sample research questions include, but are certainly not limited to:

- Are some SDGs easier for a company to incorporate into their businesses than others? Do some SDGs require more long-term and sustained commitment? Why? Are there differences between companies operating in the north or the global south?
- Are some countries or sectors progressing faster than others on specific SDGs (for example, SDG 5)? Why might this be?
- In which SDG(s) do company efforts seem to be focused? Which specific practices are getting most attention from companies within those SDGs? Alternatively, which SDGs are being ignored by companies? Why might that be? How does that change by company size, sector and geography?
- Which company practices, across SDGs, are most prevalent? Are these contributing to one, few or more SDGs? How does that change by company size, sector and geography?
- Are company actions at the country level matching country-level SDG priorities (as formulated in country VNRs)?
- How do B Corps differ in their response/uptake to the SDGs?
- Can we predict, using data collected from the SDG Action Manager, what industries or countries will see the most progress on an SDG? Can that data help inform us where efforts should be focused?
- What are the geographic, topic, or other trends uncovered by the SDG Action Manager? Why might these be?

These are just a few of the many kinds of research questions that might be answered as part of this call for proposals. More generally this call for proposal aims to unleash the data collected from the SDG Action Manager and to catalyze research into businesses' adoption of the

Request for Proposals – The Role of Business in Achieving the SDGs in the Global South

Sustainable Development Goals in the Global South providing much needed insight into how the private sector is working toward the SDGs to drive increased action and awareness.

BACKGROUND:

Since B Lab's inception in 2006, the non-profit has been dedicated to making it easier for mission-driven companies to protect, evaluate, and improve their positive impact over time through the administration of the B Impact Assessment (BIA). Through this assessment, more than 65,000 companies have been able to analyze their impact, and B Lab believes this data can be incredibly useful in helping researchers answer a host of important questions surrounding companies' actions towards big issues in modern society.

The next major iteration of our platform launched in January 2020: the SDG Action Manager. Jointly developed by B Lab and the UN Global Compact, this web-based impact management tool can help companies to integrate the BIA's comprehensive, stakeholder-based view, with a more focused look at their performance on the Sustainable Development Goals. We hope that the data from this new tool will help researchers studying the SDGs and inform society, governments, and the economic markets regarding how companies are adopting the SDGs.

Data generated from the B Impact Assessment and the SDG Action Manager will be published on the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton Research Data Services (WRDS), a platform already familiar to many academic researchers. To get a comprehensive look at the variables that can be used in this research, please refer to the codebooks. These codebooks outline how questions were asked to the company, where the questions sit in the assessment hierarchy, what versions of the assessment the question was asked in, and what answer choices a company had the option of choosing.

INSTRUCTIONS:

Research proposals may be submitted by faculty, graduate students, or post-doctoral fellows working in traditional university settings as well as researchers affiliated with think tanks and other research institutes. Priority preference will be given to those located within the Global South. Teams may include researchers from outside the Global South and, in fact, international South-South or South-North collaborations, are encouraged. **Research proposals are due no later than 11:59 pm New York Time on June 1, 2020.**

Proposals for full research projects up to $30,000 will be considered. South-South or South-North collaborations may request up to $40,000. The total funding available is $150,000 and we expect to fund up to 3 - 5 research proposals. Project must be completed by **June 30, 2021**. Deliverables of this project include:

1. A status report update at the grant's halfway point
2. Final deliverable is a final working paper, submitted to a peer-reviewed journal. And an executive summary intended for a non-academic audience highlighting the research

      implications for policy and/or practice. We expect that the final paper will be published via that journal's open access options.
3. Share findings in a presentation (either in-person or virtual) to Sistema B and B Lab staff, if requested.

<u>In addition:</u>

4. Research proposals must include a detailed budget (please use the budget template provided below). Budgets must explicitly reflect the proportion of funds to be spent in the first fiscal year (April 1, 2020 to March 31, 2021), and those funds to be spent in the following fiscal year (April 1, 2021 to March 31, 2022).[3] Funds not spent according to the proposed allocation across fiscal years must be returned to the funder.
5. We encourage faculty to apply for grants which would include support for PhD students conducting research. Alternatively, proposals by graduate students must include a signed letter from a permanent faculty member agreeing to supervise the proposed research by the student.
6. The terms of this funding agreement do not allow us to fund university or research institutions overhead. Please do not include university overhead costs in budget proposals.
7. If the research team includes an international (South-South or South-North) collaboration, please include a signed agreement between the researchers explaining the nature of the collaboration.

Proposals will be evaluated by a committee composed of representatives from B Lab and Sistema B, B Academics, and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC). We will endeavour to make funding decisions promptly, with successful proposals announced on or around June 15, 2020. If you have any other questions about the call for proposals or submission process, please submit your questions to support+research@bcorporation.net. In light of the evolving global pandemic and related economic crises, we recognize that deadlines may need to shift. If you are interested in submitting a proposal, but are unable to meet the submission deadline, please contact us.

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[3] Noting that projects (and related funding) should be complete by June 30, 2021.

PROPOSAL TEMPLATE:

The following questions should be filled out using [this Google Form](). You can find the questions written out below:

Title of Research Project: Provide a descriptive title for your proposed project.

General Topic Area(s): List which topic areas your proposed project falls under.

Keywords: Provide several keywords describing your proposed project.

Name of Research Supervisor(s) or Principal Investigator(s):

- Name, Position
- Department/Institute/etc.
- University/Research Institution
- E-mail

Background (Problem Description): Provide background and/or description of the research problem, along with a brief overview of the relevant literature.

Research Question(s) and Objectives: Describe the research questions your project is seeking to answer and clearly state your research objectives. How does this links to the call objective. How does it contribute to the existing research literature and how could it be used to inform policies/practices?

Methodology: Explain how you plan to answer these research questions, highlighting use of the SDG Action Manager Data.

Total funds requested:

Budget Narrative and Cost Breakdown:

Item *For each item, provide further cost breakdown if necessary*	**Requested from B Lab**	**Provided (in-kind or cash) by researcher or other funders**	**Total**
Research Assistant(s)			
Research-related Travel & Accommodations			
Purchase of Data or other Data Access Costs			
Other (e.g. Software or Survey expenses, materials or other supplies.) Please specify.			
TOTAL	*$(USD)*	*$(USD)*	*$(USD)*

EVALUATION CRITERIA:

Research proposals will be evaluated in terms of clarity in formulating questions and objectives, research methodology, and potential relevance of the project. More specifically, the following criteria will be used:

- Originality of the proposal
- Alignment of the proposal to the Call objectives
- Clarity of research questions and objectives
- Ability for research to help inform policies/practices
- Use of SDG Action Manager Data
- Reasonable and Complete Work Plan
- Research Team's Qualifications
- Preference given to researchers based in the Global South, South-South or North-South collaborations

Evaluating Committee

- One or more representatives from B Lab/Sistema B
- One or more representatives from B Academics, a global network of educators and researchers working to advance the state of academic study into business as a force for good.
- One of more representatives from IDRC

Deadlines:

1. June 1, 2020: Deadline for submitting proposals.
2. June 15, 2020: Notification of selected proposals.
3. December 31, 2020: Progress report.
4. June 30, 2021: Final paper due.

ABOUT SUPPORTING ORGANIZATIONS:

B Lab is a nonprofit that serves a global movement of people using business as a force for good. B Lab's initiatives include B Corp Certification, administration of the B Impact Management programs and software, and advocacy for governance structures like the benefit corporation.

Sistema B is an agent of change that has catalysed the movement in Latin America. Their aim is to support the development of B Corps in Latin America as part of a global movement.

B Academics is a network of educators and researchers from around the world who are committed to accelerating the sustainable business movement by studying the global movement of B Corporation certification and benefit corporations. B Academics work with each other, the global B Lab network, and the B Corp community to share best practices and identify opportunities for collaboration with regard to research, teaching, and experiential learning.

IDRC (International Development Research Centre) is a Canadian federal Crown corporation that invests in knowledge, innovation, and solutions to improve lives and livelihoods in the developing world.