

March 1, 2019

Dear Friends,

During his life, the late Hymen Milgrom donated substantially towards improving urban education, most significantly through the Urban Teacher Education Program at the University of Chicago, a program that has since progressed to a large scale with federal funding. The Hymen Milgrom Supporting Organization (HMSO), created with a \$17-million gift to the University of Chicago from the estate of Hymen T. Milgrom (AB, Accounting, '35), was established to seek ways that public education can help children become more highly skilled and more successful as adults.

In his will, he stated the following: "My specific request is that the funds be used to promote public education in pre-school, elementary and high school only. The specific projects to be funded will be determined by the executor of the will in keeping with my philosophy of advancing the quality of public education. All funding will be to further research and development and offer scholarships to promote this goal."

In service of this, the HMSO launched the Successful Pathways from School to Work research initiative in 2013, which supports rigorous inquiry on how educators can become more effective in fostering the skills, dispositions, and experiences essential for success in the modern labor market, as well as society as a whole. This document describes the need for the research that the HMSO will fund in 2019, the research topics that will be eligible for funding, who may apply for funding, the likely duration and level of support for funded projects, the process by which proposals will be reviewed, and the deadlines for submitting proposals.

Sincerely,

Paxton Quigley, daughter of Hymen Milgrom

# Successful Pathways from School to Work

A Request for Proposals

March 1, 2019

## **The Challenge**

Children living in America's urban centers face severely limited opportunities to improve their life circumstances through education and hard work. Indeed, many young people growing up in segregated, low-income sections of the nation's largest cities experience extraordinarily high unemployment rates and poor prospects for upward mobility. According to widely shared American ideals, the school should be a place where children of all backgrounds can gain the skills, dispositions, and information they need to connect to the modern economy. However, schools serving children in disadvantaged urban communities fall massively short of these ideals and have proven notoriously difficult to improve (see Payne 2008). Only about 78 percent of students graduate from high school nationally, and trends have been mostly flat for over 40 years—declining since the 1960s, and increasing only slightly in recent years (Heckman and LaFontaine 2007; Warren and Halperin-Manners 2007). Racial-ethnic minority students, who are over-represented in the nation's largest cities, are particularly unlikely to graduate (NCES 2013).

Over the past 30 years, the costs of failing to graduate high school have become severe, with dropouts earning dramatically less income and being more likely to experience unemployment than ever before, compared to high school graduates (Sum et al., 2009; Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013a; Day and Newburger, 2002; Heckman and LaFontaine 2007). At the same time, simply graduating from high school is no longer enough to guarantee a middle class life. Following the recession of 2008, the unemployment rate of high school graduates was more than double that of college graduates (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013a). Approximately 63 percent of US jobs in 2018 will require some form of postsecondary education or training (Carnevale 2010). Indeed, low-skill, high-wage manufacturing jobs continue to disappear while the economy produces an array of new jobs, some of which pay well but require high levels of skill (Levy and Murnane 2004; Goldin and Katz, 2009). The decline in factory jobs has disproportionately affected those with low educational attainment and contributed to the persistence and increase of racial inequality in earnings, especially for black men at the bottom of the income distribution (Bayer and Charles 2016).

This situation constitutes a national crisis. Yet we have little solid data that would enable us to connect children's schooling experiences with their prospects as young adults in the labor market or in society. Crucially for the initiative we describe here, the nation's researchers and policy makers have evaluated school improvement efforts primarily in terms of impacts on test scores, high school graduation rates, or, in rare instances, success in enrolling students in college. We know very little about the impact of school improvement efforts on success in the modern labor market and success in other broad aspects of adult functioning such as mental well being, pro-social behavior, and effective parenting. We have some exciting experimental evidence that intensive pre-school programs lead to elevated adult earnings and reduced incarceration

(Carneiro and Heckman, 2003), but we know little about the comparative effectiveness of schools in leveraging the success of early interventions in order to promote adult success. We have encouraging evidence that certain innovative schools produce dramatic gains in test scores (see Hassrick, Raudenbush and Rosen 2017; review by Dobie and Fryer 2011), and while test scores predict economic productivity, other skills and dispositions learned in school are at least as important as test scores in predicting sustained success in later schooling and in the labor market (Bowles, Gintis, and Osborne, 2001). We know that teachers vary quite dramatically in their effectiveness, and that the best teachers help children gain academic skills and earn more money as adults (Chetty, et al., 2011) but we know too little about how to improve the quality of teaching so that many more students can benefit, and too little about how effective teaching affects non-academic skills that count greatly in the labor market. We need to know much more than we do about how to shape social policies to address this crisis. Reflecting the strong interests of Hymen Milgrom, the focus of our work is on better understanding the potential contribution of education in meeting this challenge.

The gap between the demands of the labor market and the skills, dispositions, and information that a large fraction of urban children are developing is vast and deeply disturbing, motivating this project. The research we envision will ask about (a) how schools, starting in pre-kindergarten can become more effective in fostering the skills—not only academic, but also social and emotional—that are most essential for labor market success; (b) how schools can be more effective in motivating persistent, reliable effort to attend school, complete work on time, progress from grade to grade, accumulate credits, and graduate; and (c) how schools can become more helpful in making available information and experiences that enable youth to envision and successfully carry out post-secondary plans of action that lead to stable, productive employment.

### **Request for Proposals**

The HMSO seeks to support a wide range of relevant, innovative, projects, including those focused on early schooling (beginning in pre-Kindergarten and extending through the elementary years) and projects asking how secondary schools can best prepare heterogeneous students for successful pathways into the modern labor market. Examples of topics include: how to improve attendance at every level of schooling, how instruction at each level fosters a wide range of skills and dispositions needed in the labor market, and how interventions to improve parental and student health affect student engagement. Studies of transitions into secondary school and beyond might include how to measure preparedness for success at work, how to increase information and experiences that can guide career choices, how to mobilize support and engagement of local employers, and how schools can reduce barriers to productive employment such as illegal activity, substance use, risky sexual behavior, and early pregnancy. The HMSO is especially interested in dual generation research (i.e. studies that target both children and families) and studies that cross boundaries, such as those between home and school.

### **Who May Apply**

In 2019, the HMSO will fund two categories of research: (1) field-initiated faculty projects with a University of Chicago faculty member as principal investigator, which may involve work by faculty, graduate students, and practitioners both within and outside the University of Chicago; and (2) field-initiated pre-doctoral projects by students at the University

of Chicago, working under close supervision of faculty mentors.

### **Field-initiated Faculty Projects**

The HMSO will offer two categories of support for the 2019 faculty grant competition: (1) **major research grants** of up to \$100K per year for two years, with the possibility of renewal for a third year; and (2) **seed grants** of up to \$50K for one year to support pilot studies, proof of concept studies and other exploratory projects. These funding limits may be increased for projects of exceptional scientific importance, but we anticipate such exceptions to be rare. Recipients of one-year seed grants will be eligible to apply for a larger grant in subsequent years. The HMSO anticipates awarding up to three seed grants and three major grants for the 2019 competition. As discussed below (see “Process of Application and Review for All Field-initiated Projects”), the application process begins with the submission of brief letters of interest (LOI). The HMSO will invite formal proposals for those LOI that are particularly promising. Preference for faculty grants will be given to early-to-midcareer scholars over more senior faculty members.

All research projects must include a Principal Investigator (PI) who is a faculty member at the University of Chicago with a genuine intellectual investment in the project, significant input on the project’s budget, and appropriate financial support to the University of Chicago commensurate with his or her role. Previous grantees are especially encouraged to submit proposals to develop interventions that build on findings from their previously funded research.

*Connections with Practice.* The HMSO is especially interested in proposals from teams that involve meaningful partnerships between researchers, practitioners, educators, community based organization, and/or community members. The HMSO strongly encourages University of Chicago faculty applicants to develop their ideas in partnership with practitioners and/or community-based organizations, prior to seeking funding. Outside faculty, researchers, policy makers, educators and practitioners can also submit LOI that they have developed collaboratively with a University of Chicago faculty partner, who will serve as the PI. If invited to submit a full proposal, they would then do so as a team. However, full administrative responsibility and accountability for funded projects lies with the University of Chicago PI(s). All faculty proposals must include plans for sharing findings with practitioners and obtaining practitioners’ interpretations of the findings and their implications, and practitioners’ suggestions for future research.

*Monitoring and Funding Renewal of Faculty Projects.* Research funds for multi-year projects will be provided in two installments: a) initially; and b) after 12 months, conditional on review of a progress report due after 9 months. For multi-year projects, *continuation of funding is contingent on grantees’ achievement of project milestones* in keeping with the time schedule detailed in the LOI and proposal, which should offer a detailed plan for accomplishing these milestones.

### **Field-Initiated Pre-doctoral Projects**

The HMSO will offer two categories of support for doctoral students at the University of Chicago: (1) research support of \$10,000 per year for up to two years, for research-related

expenses only; and (2) stipend support of \$25,000 for one year, for advanced graduate students requiring such support to complete their projects. Students may also apply for a combination of funds (for example, one year of research support and one year of stipend support), if desired. Students applying for stipend support may include living expenses in their project budgets. *Student LOI must be accompanied by a CV and a letter of recommendation from a faculty mentor.* The HMSO anticipates awarding up to four pre-doctoral research grants in 2019. The HMSO is especially interested in projects that graduate students initiate that are not part of their mentors' funded research: i.e., independent projects driven by students' own interests and agendas.

Grant funds for two-year projects will be disbursed in two installments: a) initially; and b) after 12 months, conditional on review of a progress report due 9 months after the start of the study. Living expenses will be disbursed quarterly, consistent with University policy for graduate student stipends. Students should plan to complete not only the data collection, but also the analysis and "writing up" of their results within the time frame of their grant. The HMSO expects students to have an academic article either published or submitted to a scholarly journal by the end of the grant period. The "time schedule" section of the LOI should state clearly the plan for accomplishing this. Projects conducted by doctoral students from outside the university require a local faculty mentor and a partner from within the University of Chicago; these will be considered "Field-initiated faculty projects" (see above) even though the doctoral students may be central to the project.

### **Special Projects**

The HMSO will occasionally request proposals to answer specific questions of particular relevance to the aims of the overall project. We anticipate that these will often involve collaboration between researchers at U of C and persons from other institutions.

### **Process of Application and Review for All Field-initiated Projects**

We now seek LOI that cannot exceed three single spaced pages (or 1,500 words) in length, excluding references. Potential candidates should schedule a pre-submission consultation with Lisa Rosen, Research Program Director, prior to submitting an LOI, by sending an email to: [rosen@uchicago.edu](mailto:rosen@uchicago.edu).

LOI must include the following headings in the following order:

- Specific Research Question(s)
- Rationale and Significance
- Data
- Personnel
- Time Schedule
- Approximate Total Budget

Faculty applicants should indicate whether applying for a major grant or seed grant. Applicants should also submit CVs for all key project personnel. *No funds will be available for university overhead expenses.*

All LOI, letters of recommendation (for students), and CVs must be submitted by April 29 via the University of Chicago Funding Portal <http://fundingopportunities.uchicago.edu/>

The HMSO will invite formal proposals from those applicants whose LOI show a high promise of advancing the aims of the overall research program. Formal proposals, not to exceed 12 single spaced pages (or 6,000 words) in length, will clearly specify central research questions; elaborate the background and significance of the proposed work; describe relevant preliminary work; propose appropriate research design and methods, including a theory of action for expected outcomes of intervention studies; and present a plan for disseminating findings. Proposals should also include a detailed budget and a budget justification.

### **Peer Review**

All projects will be subject to scientific review. The HMSO will only send out for review those proposals we are interested in and have the capacity to fund. A peer-review panel composed of distinguished scholars with relevant expertise will review the proposals and provide recommendations to the HMSO. The peer review group will comment on the scientific merits of each proposal, the qualifications of their investigators, the importance of the questions being asked, the originality of the projects, and the appropriateness of their budgets. However, these reviews are advisory and final decisions regarding funding are at the discretion of the HMSO. The HMSO may also negotiate the budgets of specific projects.

### **Learning Network**

Those engaged in funded projects must make a commitment to attend periodic research seminars that will enable participating researchers to learn from each other's work. The HMSO will convene conferences and workshops periodically that will engage scholars and practitioners in synthesizing findings from the funded studies, characterizing their implications for action, and setting new agendas for research.

*Please direct queries about the application process to Lisa Rosen, Research Program Director, via email ([rosen@uchicago.edu](mailto:rosen@uchicago.edu)) or phone (773-834-7561). For information on current and previously funded projects, go to: <https://successfulpathways.uchicago.edu>*

### **Time Line**

**April 29, 2019:** Deadline for submission of LOI.

**May 15, 2019:** Requests for a full proposal for most promising LOI

**July 1, 2019:** Deadline for full proposals

**October 30, 2019:** Announcement of Grant Awards

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