

# Request for Problems



**Using  
Behavioral  
Economics for  
Postsecondary  
Success**

**Released July 2013**

Funded with generous support from  
Citi Foundation



## Invitation to Apply

ideas42 and the Citi Foundation are currently soliciting applications from organizations that are interested in partnering with us to design and test behavioral economics interventions that improve postsecondary success. Following is information about the process we are using to identify pressing problems, select participants for an upcoming Masterclass on applying behavioral economics, and choose partners for exciting pilot opportunities. Interested organizations are invited to submit a [brief application](#) by August 7.

1

### Request for Problems – Brief Application Due August 7<sup>th</sup>

This Request for Problems is a call for potential partner organizations to help us identify the most pressing problems in postsecondary education where behavioral interventions can have the greatest impact on student success. Applicants should be interested in developing a deeper understanding of applied behavioral economics and potentially piloting a behavioral economics intervention within an existing postsecondary program, service, or system. Organizations that submit the best applications will be invited to participate in ideas42's upcoming Masterclass.

2

### Masterclass – October 7 & 8 (Location TBD)

The Masterclass will provide 20-25 postsecondary education organizations with a deep, immersive experience in our framework for diagnosing behavioral problems and designing behavioral interventions. It will be a highly interactive, two-day executive education course where we delve into the best problem statements submitted to us, generate new ideas, and inspire innovation around pressing questions in postsecondary education. The Masterclass will include presentations and break-out group activities, as well as opportunities to engage with ideas42 staff, a leading academic expert, and other participants.

3

### Partnerships – Late Fall/Early Winter

Shortly after the Masterclass, ideas42 will select at least 2-3 partner organizations with which we will collaborate to design and test behavioral economics interventions that can potentially impact students' postsecondary outcomes. Preliminary design work is scheduled to get underway as early as late Fall 2013.

### Background

In the national conversation about how to improve postsecondary outcomes, what's cost-effective, and how postsecondary policies and programs should be designed to be most effective, there's a thirst for new solutions. Behavioral design has already shown potential to make programs in postsecondary education work better and has much to contribute to this critical dialogue. A recent [white paper](#) released by ideas42 presents this case in greater detail.

## Applying is Easy

ideas42 is inviting interested organizations to submit a brief application. The application will take less than an hour.

ideas42 will hold an informational Q&A webinar about the application process on **July 22, 2013 at 10 AM**. During the webinar, we will discuss the goals and structure of the Masterclass, describe ideal behavioral problems and partner organizations, and provide tips for a successful application.

ideas42 may conduct follow-up interviews or request written answers to follow-up questions with finalist organizations after the applications are due and prior to the final selection notification.

Organizations should submit applications using this [electronic form](#). Applications are due on **August 7, 2013**. Organizations may jointly apply as part of a collaborative as long as one organization is designated as the lead applicant and, if selected, could effectively coordinate the execution of a behavioral design project.

Organizations will be notified of selection outcomes on or about **August 23, 2013**. Questions about the application process should be sent to Lori Knapp ([lori@ideas42.org](mailto:lori@ideas42.org)).

A copy of the online application is on the next page—just a two page form. Some detailed advice on defining a problem from a behavioral perspective follows.

### Application Timetable

**RFP application released:**  
July 15, 2013

**Q&A webinar about application:**  
July 22, 2013 at 10 AM

**Applications due:**  
August 7, 2013

**Final selections announced:**  
August 23, 2013

## -Application to Be Submitted Online-

*Thank you for your interest in completing our brief application. Please note that no more than three representatives from the same organization may apply together. ideas42 may reduce the number of participants from any one organization in order to accommodate more organizations.*

*\*required*

**Organization name\*** \_\_\_\_\_ **Organization website\*** \_\_\_\_\_

**Organization type (choose the best fit)\***

- Four-year institution
- Two-year institution or community college
- Secondary educational institution
- Community organization or student support program
- National network or association
- Financial services organization
- Public agency/government
- Technology firm
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**Population served by your organization (numbers, characteristics, region)\*:**

**The leader of the organization (Executive Director, CEO, President, etc.) is supportive of this application and will make sure that any project that comes about through this application will be an organizational priority\*:**

- Yes
- Maybe
- No

**Representative 1\***

**Name\*** \_\_\_\_\_ **Title\*** \_\_\_\_\_ **Department\*** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Email\*** \_\_\_\_\_ (this will be the main email used for communications)  
**Phone\*** \_\_\_\_\_ (this will be the main phone number used for communications)  
**Years at organization:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Key responsibilities within organization:**

**Representative 2**

**Name** \_\_\_\_\_ **Title** \_\_\_\_\_ **Department** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Email** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Phone** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Years at organization:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Key responsibilities within organization:**

**Representative 3**

**Name** \_\_\_\_\_ **Title** \_\_\_\_\_ **Department** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Email** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Phone** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Years at organization:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Key responsibilities within organization:**

**1. Which stage of a student's life would your problem address?**

- Postsecondary access and preparation:** Long-term academic and mental preparation necessary for postsecondary success
- Transition to postsecondary education:** Period prior to matriculation when steps are taken to enroll in a postsecondary program
- Postsecondary completion:** Years during a postsecondary program

**2. Please describe a behavior change related to postsecondary success that you would like to affect among students or other stakeholders whose work ultimately impacts students. Please state your problem in the form "People are doing X, but we'd like them to be doing Y." Refer to the *Defining a Behavioral Problem* section for more guidance. (30 words)****3. Explain more fully the details of your problem statement. (250 words)****4. Elaborate on your organization's capacity to meet the seven criteria outlined in the "selection criteria" section below. (250 words)****5. What is your main reason for interest in this Masterclass and the opportunity to design behavioral interventions? (250 words)\*****6. Describe your current exposure to behavioral economics\***

- I haven't had very much exposure.
- I have had a little bit of exposure (I have read a few articles or book on the topic)
- I attended your May convening and have read the ideas42 white paper.
- In addition to attending the convening, I've heard and read a lot about behavioral economics.
- I could have written "Nudge" or "Thinking Fast and Slow" in my sleep. Do you need another speaker?

**Financial Assistance**

We understand that some applicants may require financial assistance for travel and accommodation costs. Successful applicants will be able to apply for financial assistance after we complete the selection process for the Masterclass cohort.

## Defining a Behavioral Problem

As part of the application process, you'll be asked to submit a brief problem statement that will help inform the content of our Masterclass and also the development of pilot projects. Specifically, we are soliciting problems in any of the following three stages of students' educational lives, outlined in detail in our recent [white paper](#):

### Postsecondary Preparation

Long-term academic and mental preparation necessary for postsecondary success

### Transition to Postsecondary Education

Period prior to matriculation when steps are taken to enroll in a postsecondary program

### Postsecondary Completion

Years during a postsecondary program

The goal of our behavioral design projects is to improve student outcomes. This means that often we will focus on impacting the behavior of students. However, behavioral interventions can take a variety of forms, including a change to, or adjustment of, a system, process, program, service, technology or policy. Although the beneficiary of the intervention may be the student, the intervention itself may be designed to target administration, faculty or other systems.

---

**Below are some helpful guidelines to assist you in defining the problem for this application:**

- **It's important to focus on a specific behavior rather than a general issue. Phrase the problem as "people are doing X, but we'd like them to be doing Y."** *(e.g. Students are failing to reapply for federal financial aid in preparation for their second year of their postsecondary program. We want them to resubmit their FAFSA by the deadline.)*
- **State the problem without embedded assumptions so that you're not presupposing the solution.** *(Don't assume that students are failing to apply for particular reasons, e.g. students are failing to reapply for federal financial aid because the process is too complicated.)*
- **Define at the right level - not too broadly or narrowly. Think of behavioral challenges that have broader applications beyond your specific program, but are also specific to a particular behavior change you want to facilitate.** *(Too broad: Students aren't able to find the resources to pay for school. Too narrow: Students aren't attending the yearly financial aid workshop provided by the financial aid office.)*

---

**Examples of behavioral problems that are relevant to postsecondary success include:**

1. Students do not enroll in a postsecondary program even after gaining acceptance and securing generous financial aid packages.
2. Students enroll at lower-tier institutions, even though the cost of attending higher-tier institutions, for which they are academically capable, is lower.
3. Students are working more than 20 hours per week, which impacts their ability to study.
4. Students are not maximizing all the federal loans available to them but are instead accessing more expensive private loans.
5. Students fail to graduate on time because they have not completed the appropriate classes for their major.
6. Students are not registering for the credit hours they need to maximize their financial aid.
7. Students do not reapply for federal financial aid for every school year they attend.

This list is a small sample of relevant problems. We can't begin to design behavioral interventions until we understand the particular contextual details of the problem.

## Selection Criteria

We encourage a broad range of postsecondary stakeholders to consider this Request for Problems, including colleges and universities, nonprofits, secondary institutions, financial service providers, technology providers, and government agencies. In considering which organizations to select for the Masterclass and for subsequent behavioral design projects, ideas42 will use the following criteria:

1. **The problem is behavioral:** See “Examples of Behavioral Problems” to get a sense of the type of problems we are focused on.
2. **Social impact:** The behavioral issues should have significant impact on postsecondary success, including postsecondary preparation, the transition to postsecondary education, or postsecondary completion.
3. **Problem affects a lot of people:** The specific challenges that the program or system faces, and the design interventions that are tested, must have direct and practical relevance for other programs and systems.
4. **Demonstrated leadership buy-in and commitment:** Senior leadership must believe in the potential for behavioral design solutions and convey that message throughout their organization. The staff within the organization charged with running the pilot should also be enthusiastic about the behavioral design process and the range of possible interventions.
5. **Organizational Capability:** Organizations must demonstrate the personnel capacity and time to monitor, implement and conduct quality control on the intervention
6. **Partner willing to use a Randomized Control Trial (RCT) to test effectiveness:** RCTs are our preferred method for testing whether an intervention has the desired effect, so we are looking for partners who are open to this kind of testing. Also, the program must have a large enough client pool or potential client pool to allow for meaningful data analysis.
7. **Timing:** Organizations must be able to start designing an intervention during the late fall of 2013/early winter of 2014 and be positioned to implement the intervention in 2014.

## Financial Support Available

Thanks to the generous support provided by the Citi Foundation, successful applicants will be able to apply for financial assistance for travel and accommodation costs associated with the Masterclass after we complete the selection process. Also, partners selected to pilot behavioral interventions will receive additional financial support to help offset the costs of participation. As we raise additional funds, we may increase the number of pilot projects.

## About ideas42

ideas42 is a non-profit that uses insights from behavioral economics to design innovative solutions to social problems at scale. For more information about us, please check out our website at [www.ideas42.org](http://www.ideas42.org). With generous support from the Citi Foundation, we are looking to collaborate with postsecondary practitioners whose deep knowledge of students’ access, persistence and completion problems will complement our rigorous approach to behavioral design.