February 9, 2012

Dear Friends,

Happy New Year! We are writing with some good news! Firelight will be accepting new partners this year in Lesotho, Malawi, and Tanzania. As this is the first time we are open for new partnerships in many years, we are starting small, planning to add between 3 and 5 partners in each country. Guidelines for Letters of Inquiry ("LOI") can be found on our website (http://www.firelightfoundation.org/application-information.php) and are due on 15 February 2012. As you know, Firelight partners do not need to have big budgets or fancy cars, we are looking for small committed organizations, strongly rooted in the community. Please feel free to pass these guidelines on to organizations you think might be a good fit for partnership with us. Thank you for your help in spreading the word!

We hope you enjoy this week's edition of the Newsflash!

Sincerely,

The Firelight Team
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(Call for Proposals) Dell Social Innovation Challenge Competition
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(Call for Proposals) Dell Social Innovation Challenge Competition

Beginning January 3, 2012 Dell Corporation invites all undergrad or graduate students in any field of study, from any country, to enter the Social Innovation Challenge competition.

Purpose of the Challenge

The Dell Social Innovation Challenge identifies and supports promising young social innovators who dedicate themselves to solving the world's most pressing problems with their transformative ideas. We provide university students interested in social entrepreneurship with world-class teaching and training, as well as with start-up capital and access to a network of mentors and advisors.

Awards

Since its launch, more than 15,000 students from 90 countries have proposed more than 3,000 ideas. They've awarded more than $350,000 to 13 student teams around the world. Each year, the organizers fly challenge Finalists and Expertise Award winners to Austin for a weekend of mentoring, workshops, and other activities, as part of the DSIC Global Awards Event. Semi-Finalists are also matched with mentors for one-on-one coaching and feedback.

The 2012 challenge will present 27 awards, more than $140,000 in cash prizes and more than $500,000 worth of in-kind prizes.

Eligibility

Any undergrad or graduate student in any field of study, from any country, can enter this challenge. This isn't your traditional business plan competition – you can enter a project at any stage, whether you've just thought of an idea or are already running an organization. It doesn't matter if your idea is nonprofit or for-profit. Great ideas come from anywhere and everywhere.

Most projects are lead by teams of students. If you need more help, the full challenge website (launching January 3) will let you to connect with potential team members.

Challenge Categories
There are four entry categories under which the innovations will be rewarded and supported at all stages of development. You can submit as many
project proposals as you'd like.
Define: Project exists mainly in your head or a few sketched ideas, with limited research at this point.
Design: Project captured in a written plan, with some more formal market research, the beginnings of formal internal and external teams and more detailed elements such as financial model, pricing, marketing, customer segmentation and risk assessment.
Pilot: Product/service has been tested with a small group of clients/customers. Team continues making revisions based on field knowledge.
Scale: Product/service has proven successful and is being deployed in more than one geographic area. Enterprise has strong and sustainable financial and human resources models, plus a strong board of directors and strategic partners.

Deadline for Submission: February 13, 2012

For more go to: http://www.dellchallenge.org/
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(Call for Nominations) Nominations Invited for the 2012-2013 Communication for Sustainable Social Change Award

Communication for Sustainable Social Change (CSSC) is an independent organization that was created as a "Center of Excellence" within the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, in response to an urgent need for close study of society and culture in formulating communication and media strategies in order to ensure that target audiences are reached in an appropriate manner that most effectively enhances knowledge transfer and brings about sustainable social change.

CSSC is currently inviting nominations for its prestigious 2012- 2013 Communication for Sustainable Social Change Award. This annual Award honors outstanding contributions by individuals or organizations to the theory and practice of Communication for Sustainable Social Change.

Inter-governmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, international, regional and national academic and professional communication associations, international media networks and communication and social change consortia are strongly encouraged to submit nominations for this Award.

About CSSC Awards and Selection Criteria

The Award comprises an artwork and $500, and winners are selected by an independent jury consisting of senior academics, media and aid and development representatives.

In selecting the Award Winner, the CSSC Jury will consider both significant contributions to the theory of CSSC, and notable achievements in applied communication practice. The theoretical and practical work of Award nominees should reflect and/or be directly relevant to contemporary international work being done in the field of CSSC.

The jury will also consider the pioneering contributions made by theorists and practitioners to CSSC. Nominations that demonstrate an innovative approach and a strong commitment to long-term sustainable development are also sought.

The CSSC Award:

    • Recognizes major theoretical innovation and knowledge generation in the field of communication for sustainable social change
    • Acknowledges innovative and practical communication and social change projects that have contributed to sustainable development, and
    • Appreciates the contributions made by individuals and organizations whose moral courage and extraordinary commitment to communication for sustainable social change expands the boundary of what is possible in this field.

Award Ceremony

The Award will be presented to the winner at an official ceremony to be held at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, hosted by the SBS Center 'Communication for Sustainable Social Change' (CSSC). The winner of the Award will be announced in the media prior to the formal Award presentation ceremony. The Award nominee will deliver a keynote address at the award ceremony. The Center 'Communication for Sustainable Social Change' (CSSC) will meet the Award winner's travel and accommodation expenses to attend the Award presentation ceremony and deliver guest lectures.

Additional Conditions

Award-winners may also be:

- asked to present a public lecture (or lectures) at the University of Massachusetts
- expected to contribute the award ceremony address he/she delivers for publication,
- invited to join CSSC as a Senior Fellow, and
- prepared to be interviewed by the media.

Deadline for Submission of nominations: May 1, 2012

For more go to: http://www.csschange.org/content/about-cssc-award

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(Call for Applications) UNCCD inviting Applications for Land for Life Award 2012

UNCCD (United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification) is currently inviting applications for 2012 Land for Life Award with the aim of rewarding and recognizing the leadership for sustainable land management. This award is an initiative to honour sustainable land management efforts that foster gender equality, cultural diversity and social inclusion. The winners of the award get support from UNCCD to expand their work towards sustainable land management in any region of the world. The efforts which help in reducing land degradation through sustainable land management, or are outstanding examples of political leadership, policy, business, advocacy campaigns or scientific research become the proud winner of the award.

Award Objective

- Recognize excellence and innovation in sustainable land management
- Provide winners with visibility and support to expand their work

• Inspire leadership for the restoration of soils' natural health and the transformation of degraded land

• Encourage international cooperation in support of sustainable land management, particularly in the drylands

• Encourage political measures that foster sustainable land management and enhance soils

• Raise awareness of the global benefits of soil generation and preservation

• Promote understanding that the drylands are part of the solution to today's most pressing problems

The Prize

The award will be given to up to three outstanding applicants based on the selection criteria. The winners will receive:

• A healthy soils medal

• Three awards will be granted from a total prize fund of up to USD 100,000.

• Free travel and accommodation to attend the award ceremony.

• In the case that the award is granted to an underage person, free travel and accommodation to attend the award ceremony for one accompanying family member.

• A "Healthy Soils Gold Medal" label to use on related products and communications.

• A video will be made of the winning projects and published on the UNCCD website.

The jury reserves the right to award the prize without providing a monetary reward. This would occur if the honor is bestowed to a business or other organization that is not in need of financial resources to scale-up their initiatives. In this case, the prize would include a medal and the honor and publicity that accompany winning the Land for Life award. It would also include, where appropriate, flights and accommodation to the award ceremony and the creation of a video about the project.

Selection Criteria

Selection criteria includes:

• Innovation: fresh thinking and practical solutions to the problems of land degradation

• Inspiration: shows leadership and inspires others to change behavior

• Impact: measurable improvements to the land, soils and livelihoods

• Replicability: lessons learned for sustainable land management can be reproduced by others

Demonstration of results is required in any of the following areas:

- Technical implementation
- Policy Measures and Leadership
- Business Practices
- Advocacy, Education and Empowerment
- Scientific Finding and Knowledge Sharing

Deadline for Submission: February 29, 2012

For more go to: http://www.unccd.int/land4life/menu.php
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(Article) What is Collective Impact?

COLLECTIVE IMPACT: the commitment of a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem.

Collaboration is nothing new. The social sector is filled with examples of partnerships, networks, and other types of joint efforts. But collective impact initiatives are distinctly different. Unlike most collaborations, collective impact initiatives involve   a centralized infrastructure, a dedicated staff, and a structured process that leads to a common agenda, shared measurement, continuous communication, and mutually reinforcing activities among all participants.

Consider Shape up Somerville, a citywide effort to reduce and prevent childhood obesity in elementary school children in Somerville, Mass. Led by Christina Economos, an associate professor at Tufts University's Gerald J. and Dorothy R.   Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy, and funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts, and United Way of Massachusetts Bay and   Merrimack Valley,

the program engaged government officials, educators, businesses, nonprofits, and citizens in collectively defining wellness and weight gain prevention practices. Schools agreed to offer healthier foods, teach nutrition, and promote   physical activity. Local restaurants received a certification if they served low-fat, high nutritional food. The city organized a farmers' market and provided healthy lifestyle incentives such as reduced-price gym memberships for city   employees. Even sidewalks were modified and crosswalks repainted to encourage more children to walk to school. The result was a statistically significant decrease in body mass index among the community's young children   between

2002 and 2005.

Even companies are beginning to explore collective impact to tackle social problems. Mars, a manufacturer of chocolate brands such as M&M's, Snickers, and Dove, is working with NGOs, local governments, and even direct competitors to   improve the lives of more than 500,000 impoverished cocoa farmers in Cote d'Ivoire, where Mars sources a large portion of its cocoa. Research suggests that better farming practices and improved plant stocks could triple the yield per hectare,   dramatically increasing farmer incomes and improving the sustainability of Mars's supply chain. To accomplish this, Mars must enlist the coordinated efforts of multiple organizations: the Cote d'Ivoire government needs to provide more   agricultural extension workers, the World Bank needs to finance new roads, and bilateral donors need to support NGOs in improving health care, nutrition, and education in cocoa growing communities. And Mars must find ways to work with its   direct competitors on pre-competitive issues to reach farmers outside its supply chain.

These varied examples all have a common theme: **that large-scale social change comes from better cross-sector coordination rather than from the isolated intervention of individual organizations.** Evidence of the effectiveness of this   approach is still limited, but these examples suggest that substantially greater progress could be made in alleviating many of our most serious and complex social problems if nonprofits, governments, businesses, and the public were brought   together around a common agenda to create collective impact. It doesn't happen often, not because it is impossible, but because it is so rarely attempted. Funders and nonprofits alike overlook the potential for collective impact because they are   used to focusing on independent action as the primary vehicle for social change.

VERSUS

ISOLATED IMPACT: an approach oriented toward finding and funding a solution embodied within a single organization, combined with the hope that the most effective organizations will grow or replicate to extend their impact more widely.

Most funders, faced with the task of choosing a few grantees from many applicants, try to ascertain which organizations make the greatest contribution toward solving a social problem. Grantees, in turn, compete to be chosen by emphasizing how their individual activities produce the greatest effect. Each organization is judged on its own potential to achieve impact, independent of the numerous other organizations that may also influence the issue. And when a grantee is asked to evaluate the impact of its work, every attempt is made to

isolate that grantee's individual influence from all other variables.

In short, the nonprofit sector most frequently operates using an approach that we call isolated impact. It is Funders search for more effective interventions as if there were a cure for failing schools that only needs to be discovered, in the   way that medical cures are discovered in laboratories. As a result of this process, nearly 1.4 million nonprofits try to invent independent solutions to major social problems, often working at odds with each other and exponentially increasing the   perceived resources required to make meaningful progress. Recent trends have only reinforced this perspective. The growing interest in venture philanthropy and social entrepreneurship, for example, has greatly benefited the social sector by   identifying and accelerating the growth of many high-performing nonprofits, yet it has also accentuated an emphasis on scaling up a few select organizations as the key to social progress.

Despite the dominance of this approach, there is scant evidence that isolated initiatives are the best way to solve many social problems in today's complex and interdependent world. No single organization is responsible for any major social problem, nor can any single organization cure it. In the field of education, even the most highly respected nonprofits—such as the Harlem Children's Zone, Teach for America, and the Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP)—have taken decades   to reach tens of thousands of children, a remarkable achievement that deserves praise, but one that is three orders of magnitude short of the tens of millions of U.S. children that need help.

The problem with relying on the isolated impact of individual organizations is further compounded by the isolation of the nonprofit sector. Social problems arise from the interplay of governmental and commercial activities, not only from the behavior of social sector organizations. As a result, complex problems can be solved only by cross-sector coalitions that engage those outside the nonprofit sector.

We don't want to imply that all social problems require collective impact. In fact, some problems are best solved by individual organizations. In "Leading Boldly," an article we wrote with Ron Heifetz for the winter 2004 issue of the Stanford Social Innovation Review, we described the difference between technical problems and adaptive problems. Some social problems are technical in that the problem is well defined, the answer is known in advance, and one or a few organizations have   the ability to implement the solution. Examples include funding college scholarships, building a hospital, or installing inventory controls in a food bank. Adaptive problems, by contrast, are complex, the answer is not known, and even if it were, no single entity has the resources or authority to bring about the necessary change. Reforming public education, restoring

wetland environments, and improving community health are all adaptive problems. In these cases, reaching an effective   solution requires learning by the stakeholders involved in the problem, who must then change their own behavior in order to create a solution.

Shifting from isolated impact to collective impact is not merely a matter of encouraging more collaboration or public-private partnerships. It requires a systemic approach to social impact that focuses on the relationships between organizations and the progress toward shared objectives. And it requires the creation of a new set of nonprofit management organizations that have the skills and resources to assemble and coordinate the specific elements necessary for collective action to succeed.

THE FIVE CONDITIONS OF COLLECTIVE SUCCESS

Research shows that successful collective impact initiatives typically have five conditions that together produce true alignment and lead to powerful results: a common agenda, shared measurement systems, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and backbone support organizations.

1. COMMON AGENDA: Collective impact requires all participants to have a shared vision for change, one that includes a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving it through agreed upon actions. Take a close look   at any group of funders and nonprofits that believe they are working on the same social issue, and you quickly find that it is often not the same issue at all. Each organization often has a slightly different definition of the problem and the ultimate   goal. These differences are easily ignored when organizations work independently on isolated initiatives, yet these differences splinter the efforts and undermine the impact of the field as a whole. Collective impact requires that these   differences be discussed and resolved. Every participant need not agree with every other participant on all dimensions of the problem. In fact, disagreements continue to divide participants in all of our examples of collective impact. All   participants must agree, however, on the primary goals for the collective impact initiative as a whole. The Elizabeth River Project, for example, had to find common ground among the different objectives of corporations, governments, community   groups, and local citizens in order to establish workable cross-sector initiatives.

2. SHARED MEASUREMENT SYSTEMS: Developing a shared measurement system is essential to collective impact. Agreement on a common agenda is illusory without agreement on the ways success will be measured and reported.   Collecting data and measuring results consistently on a short list of indicators at the community level and across all participating organizations not

only ensures that all efforts remain aligned, it also enables the participants to hold each other accountable and learn from each other's successes and failures.

It may seem impossible to evaluate hundreds of different organizations on the same set of measures. Yet recent advances in Web-based technologies have enabled common systems for reporting performance and measuring outcomes. These systems increase efficiency and reduce cost. They can also improve the quality and credibility of the data collected, increase effectiveness by enabling grantees to learn from each other's performance, and document the progress of the field as a whole.

3. MUTUALLY REINFORCING ACTIVITIES: Collective impact initiatives depend on a diverse group of stakeholders working together, not by requiring that all participants do the same thing, but by encouraging each participant to undertake the specific set of activities at which it excels in a way that supports and is coordinated with the actions of others.

The power of collective action comes not from the sheer number of participants or the uniformity of their efforts, but from the coordination of their differentiated activities through a mutually reinforcing plan of action. Each stakeholder's efforts must fit into an overarching plan if their combined efforts are to succeed. The multiple causes of social problems, and the components of their solutions, are interdependent. They cannot be addressed by uncoordinated actions among isolated organizations.

4. CONTINUOUS COMMUNICATION: Developing trust among nonprofits, corporations, and government agencies is a monumental challenge. Participants need several years of regular meetings to build up enough experience with each other to recognize and appreciate the common motivation behind their different efforts. They need time to see that their own interests will be treated fairly, and that decisions will be made on the basis of objective evidence and the best possible solution to the problem, not to favor the priorities of one organization over another.

Even the process of creating a common vocabulary takes time, and it is an essential prerequisite to developing shared measurement systems. All the collective impact initiatives we have studied held monthly or even biweekly in-person meetings among the organizations' CEO-level leaders. Skipping meetings or sending lower-level delegates was not acceptable. Most of the meetings were supported by external facilitators and followed a structured agenda.

The Strive networks, for example, have been meeting regularly for more than three years. Communication happens between meetings too: Strive uses Web-

based tools, such as Google Groups, to keep communication flowing among and within the networks. At first, many of the leaders showed up because they hoped that their participation would bring their organizations additional funding, but they soon learned that was not the meetings' purpose. What they discovered instead were the rewards of learning and solving problems together with others who shared their same deep knowledge and passion about the issue.

5. BACKBONE SUPPORT ORGANIZATIONS: Creating and managing collective impact requires a separate organization and staff with a very specific set of skills to serve as the backbone for the entire initiative. Coordination takes time, and none of the participating organizations has any to spare. The expectation that collaboration can occur without a supporting infrastructure is one of the most frequent reasons why it fails.

The backbone organization requires a dedicated staff separate from the participating organizations who can plan, manage, and support the initiative through ongoing facilitation, technology and communications support, data collection and reporting, and handling the myriad logistical and administrative details needed for the initiative to function smoothly. Strive has simplified the initial staffing requirements for a backbone organization to three roles: project manager, data manager, and facilitator.

Collective impact also requires a highly structured process that leads to effective decision making. In the case of Strive, staff worked with General Electric (GE) to adapt for the social sector the Six Sigma process that GE uses for its own continuous quality improvement. The Strive Six Sigma process includes training, tools, and resources that each SSN uses to define its common agenda, shared measures, and plan of action, supported by Strive facilitators to guide the process.
In the best of circumstances, these backbone organizations embody the principles of adaptive leadership: the ability to focus people's attention and create a sense of urgency, the skill to apply pressure to stakeholders without overwhelming them, the competence to frame issues in a way that presents opportunities as well as difficulties, and the strength to mediate conflict among stakeholders.

FUNDING COLLECTIVE IMPACT
Creating a successful collective impact initiative requires a significant financial investment: the time participating organizations must dedicate to the work, the development and monitoring of shared measurement systems, and the staff of the backbone organization needed to lead and support the initiative's ongoing work.

For example, as successful as Strive has been, it has struggled to raise money, confronting funders' reluctance to pay for infrastructure and preference for short-term solutions. **Collective impact requires instead that funders support a long-term process of social change without identifying any particular solution in advance. They must be willing to let grantees steer the work and have the patience to stay with an initiative for years, recognizing that social change can come from the gradual improvement of an entire system over time, not just from a single breakthrough by an individual organization.**

This requires a fundamental change in how funders see their role, from funding organizations to leading a long-term process of social change. It is no longer enough to fund an innovative solution created by a single nonprofit or to build that organization's capacity. Instead, funders must help create and sustain the collective processes, measurement reporting systems, and community leadership that enable cross-sector coalitions to arise and thrive.

In "Catalytic Philanthropy," we wrote: "Mobilizing and coordinating stakeholders is far messier and slower work than funding a compelling grant request from a single organization. Systemic change, however, ultimately depends on a sustained campaign to increase the capacity and coordination of an entire field." We recommended that funders who want to create large-scale change follow four practices: take responsibility for assembling the elements of a solution; create a movement for change; include solutions from outside the nonprofit sector; and use actionable knowledge to influence behavior and improve performance. These same four principles are embodied in collective impact initiatives.

Until funders are willing to embrace this new approach and invest sufficient resources in the necessary facilitation, coordination, and measurement that enable organizations to work in concert, the requisite infrastructure will not evolve.

For more go to: http://www.ssireview.org/articles/entry/collective_impact?utm_source=Enews12_01_26&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Collective_Impact
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As part of the Firelight Foundation's Capacity Building Program, Firelight provides "Newsflashes" to share relevant resources and information with our active grantee-partners via weekly emails and via post on a monthly basis. We hope that by facilitating access to information for grassroots, community-focused organizations, programming for children and families, as well as organizational development, is enhanced. Past editions of the Firelight Newsflash can be found on our website: http://www.firelightfoundation.org/newsflash.php.

We welcome your comments, feedback and ideas for upcoming Newsflashes at newsletter@firelightfoundation.org.