# ORDE "KNOW YOUR AGENCY" SERIES:
# GRAND CHALLENGES EXPLORATIONS (GCE)

**GCE Web Site Address:**
http://gcgh.grandchallenges.org/Explorations/Pages/Introduction.aspx

## OVERVIEW
To involve the best people in solving big problems to improve health for people in developing countries, the Grand Challenges in Global Health (GCGH) Initiative was founded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Foundation for the National Institutes of Health in 2003. Since that time, the GCGH has enlarged to a "Family of Grant Programs" as their tagline indicates (see Grand Challenges News, Issue 3, October 2013). One of these new grant programs is Grand Challenges Explorations (GCE), established in 2008 by the Gates Foundation to encourage bolder, less conventional projects at an earlier stage than the original GCGH Program.

### Specific Interests
While early round GCE topics focused almost exclusively on infectious disease, today GCE topics have expanded to include family health, sanitation, agriculture, and communications as related to the developing world. For the most recent competition (November, 2014), topics focused on universal acceptance of mobile money payment, measuring brain development and gestational age, and better ways to implement community-based interventions in addition to the infectious disease-related topics – vector control, malaria transmission, and reducing pneumonia fatalities.

### Approach
All GCGH programs aim to fund breakthrough projects focused on the developing world. The Grand Challenges Explorations (GCE) initiative, as an extension of the GCGH, is designed to fund projects at an earlier stage of development. Pictured as a more agile grant making platform, GCE features a short application, two deadlines per year, and quick funding decisions. Researchers in all disciplines are encouraged to apply (Source: GCE Annual Report, 2013).

## AGENCY ORGANIZATION
Gates Foundation staff head review panels, and are also responsible for researching receiving institutions to ensure they have the capacity to manage grant funds. Final award decisions are made by Gates Foundation Executive Committee.

## AGENCY GRANTS PROCESS
GCE solicits applications twice per year, announcing specific topics of interest in February and September with application deadlines following in about eight weeks. Individual researchers are limited to serving as principal investigator on only one application per round, but may be involved in different capacities on others. There is no limit on the number of applications an institution may submit. The Foundation has no citizenship requirements; applications are accepted via an online portal from non-profits, international organizations, government agencies, and academic institutions around the world. Features of the GCE Program include:

- A two-page application with no required formal budget or preliminary data
- Two deadlines per year
- Quick funding turnaround (five months)
- Emphasis on innovation
- Encouragement of researchers outside global health area to apply
- Single-investigator and collaborative applications

GCE is a two-phase grant program. Phase I awards are made for $100,000 over an 18-month award period. Successful Phase I awardees then have one opportunity to submit for a Phase II project, featuring awards up to $1 million over 2 years.

### Awards
More than 1,000 awards have been made through GCE as of September, 2014. The Foundation typically makes about 80 GCE awards per funding round.

*Contact with Agency Program Staff:*
Questions about the process may be submitted via email to the GCE Program. Note that Foundation personnel do not comment on appropriateness of proposed projects in relation to topic areas or answer science-based questions.

*Typical GCE Application Process:*
1) Foundation releases GCE topics twice per year
2) PI determines suitability of proposed project to Foundation mission and specific topic area
3) PI sends questions to the Foundation via email
4) PI submits two-page application via online portal
5) Innovation Panel performs blinded review of applications on innovative approach and implementation plans
6) Topic specific panel performs second blinded review of applications and makes funding recommendations
7) The Foundation Executive Committee makes final funding decisions
8) Foundation staff vet all finalists to ensure capacity to perform project
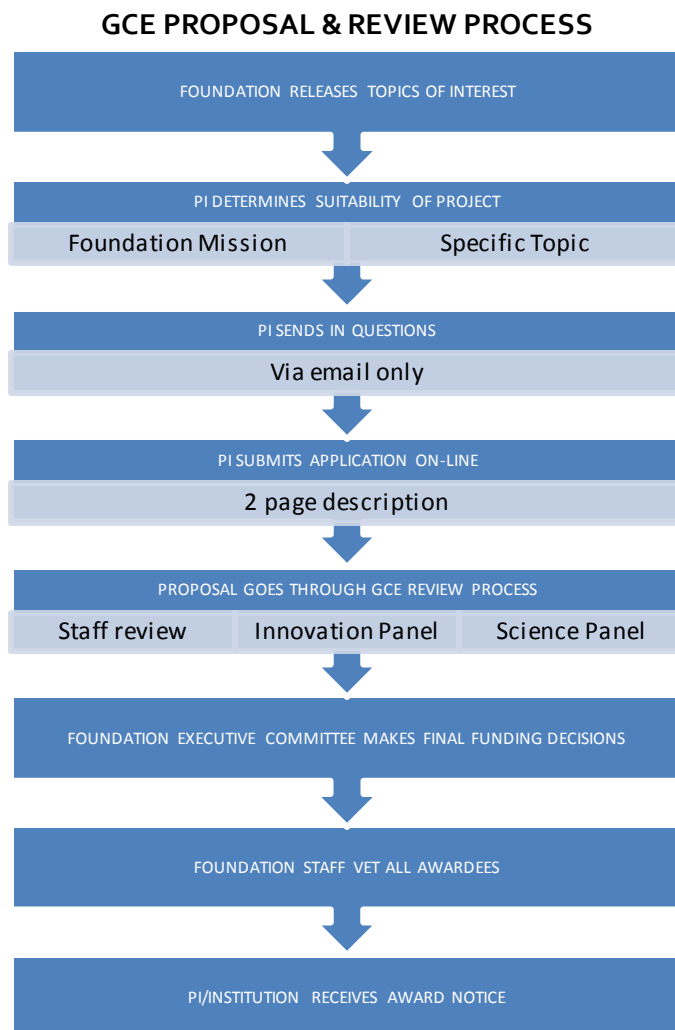9) Successful PI/institution receives award notice

*Proposal Review Process:*
GCE applications go through a four-step review process (Source: GCE Round 14 Rules and Guidelines):

**Step 1:** Applications are screened by Foundation staff as to whether the topic is addressed in innovative versus incremental ways. Unsuccessful applicants are notified.

**Step 2:** Remaining applications are reviewed by an Innovation Panel comprised of proven innovators; these panels are headed by a Foundation Program Director. Evaluation criteria used are topic responsiveness, innovative approach, and execution plan. Reviewers read the applications and then advocate for or champion specific ones. Generally, a second review by a Topic Expert Panel is also conducted. Both reviews are conducted as blind reviews – no information is provided to reviewers about the applicant's background and expertise or the sponsoring institution's reputations and capabilities.

**Step 3:** The Foundation Executive Committee makes final award selections using the expertise provided by both review panels.

**Step 4:** Foundation personnel perform "due diligence" reviews, ensuring that the investigator and organization have the capacity to carry out the project.

### GCE PROPOSAL & REVIEW PROCESS

FOUNDATION RELEASES TOPICS OF INTEREST

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PI DETERMINES SUITABILITY OF PROJECT

| Foundation Mission | Specific Topic |

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PI SENDS IN QUESTIONS

Via email only

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PI SUBMITS APPLICATION ON-LINE

2 page description

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PROPOSAL GOES THROUGH GCE REVIEW PROCESS

| Staff review | Innovation Panel | Science Panel |

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FOUNDATION EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MAKES FINAL FUNDING DECISIONS

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FOUNDATION STAFF VET ALL AWARDEES

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PI/INSTITUTION RECEIVES AWARD NOTICE

*What Happens Next?*
Applicants who are not selected for funding receive notice but no feedback on their proposed project or reasons for declination. They are encouraged to consider applying in future rounds.

Those who receive GCE Phase I awards have 18 months and up to $100,000 to complete projects. Those whose projects demonstrate exceptional promise are then invited to submit applications for Phase II GCE awards to continue their projects with up to $1 million for 2 years.