The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation – presentation about the Foundation and the Fellows Program, 6 Nov 2017

Overview

The Gates Foundation is the largest private family foundation in the world. This means the money is spent where the co-chairs think it should be spent (rather than spending decisions being constrained by external funders). The aim is to provide resources where there is the **greatest need and the greatest impact can be achieved**. The Foundation has four divisions: Global Health, Global International Development, the US Program and Global Policy and Advocacy.

Aims:

* Ensure more children and young people survive and thrive
* Empower the poorest – especially women and girls
* Combat infectious diseases that affect the poorest
* Inspire people to take action to change the world.

Grantees and partners are at the centre of the work – working for the Foundation you are in a sense quite ‘far from the action’, although still quite engaged. Your work is primarily assessing current and potential projects for funding, and evaluating the use of funding. Partnership working is essential, involving governments, the private sector, communities, non-profits and individuals. There is an emphasis on harnessing technologies to support the aims above.

The London office concentrates primarily on donor and government relations. HQ is in Seattle and employs approximately 1100 (total workforce is approximately 1400 – 80-90 in Washington DC, 50-16 in India and these workers are probably in positions closest to the field, a smattering in Nigeria, Ethiopia, South Africa). In 2016 there were 1100+ active grantees. Visa/work permit sponsorship is available.

Each year the Foundation has to give away $4.6 billion in grant payments. 49% of this goes to Global Development (which covers a range of initiatives, including family planning for example); 28% to Global Health; 13% to the US program (primarily education); 1% to communications; 3% to other charitable programmes; 6% to global policy and advocacy (although each strategy has a policy and advocacy element).

The Fellows Program

This is a 2 year program, with Fellows rotating between teams. It started 5 years ago and ran for 3 cohorts. There was then a pause and some revisions, so the current cohort is the first to have joined the re-designed program. (This means there are not yet any alumni from the program in its current form.)

The new program does not require as much experience as previously (stated requirement is 3 years but see Q2 below) and involves less specialism. Fellows might typically undertake a project to look at something in more depth (maybe a new idea) than those already working at the Foundation have time to do.

The aim is not primarily to be a pipeline for people to join the Foundation but to develop those taking part - the key measures of success are where the Fellows are in 5 years’ time (maybe working for the Foundation but maybe not) and what has changed in the way the Foundation does things as a result of the work the Fellows did.

Application/selection process for the next intake:

Online application, deadline 15 December.   
January first round of interviews (first round phone, second round skype)  
March – Fellowship offers made  
September – target start date (but flexible).

Q&A

Q: Where do Fellows work?  
A: Currently in Seattle, but there is openness to possibly locating Fellows elsewhere. The structure of the two year period is not highly defined. Fellows have a mentor manager, who helps define the projects they will work on. This is driven both by the strategic aims (where the greatest need is plus the opportunity for greatest impact) but also the Fellow’s interests. The program is not ideally suited to someone who is a deep subject matter expert and wants to continue working just with that subject matter. Fellows need to function as generalists (even if they bring a particular specialism).

Q: Is there flexibility about the requirement for 3 years’ experience?  
A: The 3 years is a bit of a minimum, most successful applicants have more.

Q: Are there particular skills you look for?  
A: You need to function as a generalist. Measuring and modelling skills are very useful.

Q: What is it like day to day? Are you working in a team? Doing a project?  
A: Currently it depends. You are always within a team though (and there are 7 fellows in the current cohort).

Q: Do you take on medical doctors? If so, is there any difference in the way they work?  
A: Yes, we take on doctors but they are not doing different work.

Q: Is it suitable for mid-career professionals?  
A: What is usually considered mid-career would be considered early career at the Foundation. In the current cohort there is someone who graduated in 2007-8. Normally you would have a maximum of 10 years’ experience to join the program.

Q: What do you look for in an application?  
A: Remember a resume will be scanned in seconds, not minutes. Keep it to two pages, very clear. The application requires a professional statement (not cover letter). It needs to be a commitment to why you would be a great Fellow and how the two years will inform what you do afterwards. We expect 600-1000 applications and will select 100 for further review. The first round of interviews will be a 25 minute phone call from someone in HR. Final round interviews will be with chief of staff, technical expert etc. We use case interviews, assessing for general aptitude to dive into something new – we think a case study approach tests that well (but not everything hangs on the case interview).

Q: Do you pay relocation costs?  
A: Any offer comes with a relocation package (and we relocate partners and dependants as well) plus there is a competitive salary.

More information is available on the website: <https://www.gatesfoundation.org>.