



## **SESAME WORKSHOP & INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE AWARDED \$100 MILLION FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION OF SYRIAN REFUGEES**

### **Three Finalists Awarded \$15 Million Each in Global Competition for Bold Solutions to Critical Problems of Our Time**

CHICAGO, December 20, 2017 – The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation today awarded a \$100 million grant to [Sesame Workshop and International Rescue Committee \(IRC\)](#) to educate young children displaced by conflict and persecution in the Middle East.

The Foundation’s Board, deliberating among four finalists in [100&Change](#), MacArthur’s global competition for bold solutions to critical problems of our time, decided to award additional grants of \$15 million to each of the other three finalists, based on the strength and potential impact of their proposals. The Foundation remains committed to helping the finalists attract the additional support their critical work requires.

Sesame Workshop and IRC will use the \$100 million grant to implement an evidence-based, early childhood development intervention designed to address the “toxic stress” experienced by children in the Syrian response region—Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, and Syria. The project will improve children’s learning outcomes today and their intellectual and emotional development over the long term.

“We are compelled to respond to the urgent Syrian refugee crisis by supporting what will be the largest early childhood intervention program ever created in a humanitarian setting,” said MacArthur President Julia Stasch. “Less than two percent of the global humanitarian aid budget is dedicated to education, and only a sliver of all education assistance benefits young children. The longer-term goal is to change the system of humanitarian aid to focus more on helping to ensure the future of young children through education.”

Each of the project’s three components is designed in consultation with local child development and curriculum experts, and each will help caregivers restore nurturing relationships and give their children the tools they need to overcome the trauma of conflict and displacement.

- Customized educational content and a new local version of *Sesame Street* – Delivered through television, mobile phones, digital platforms, and direct services in homes and communities, pan-Arab content will help provide an estimated 9.4 million young children the language, reading, math, and socioemotional skills they need to succeed in school and later in life. Embedded in the content, Sesame’s Muppets will model inclusion and respect, and gender equity, and they will provide engaging educational messages, always from a child’s perspective. All the content that is created will ultimately be publicly available at no cost.

- Home visits reinforced with digital content – Home visitation and caregiving support sessions will connect trained local outreach and community health workers to 800,000 caregivers. Home visit content will promote caregiver responsiveness, early learning, mental well-being, and resiliency. The content will engage families through storybooks and picture books, parent brochures, caregiver guides, toys, developmentally appropriate games, digital content, and parenting resources via mobile devices. Direct services in homes and centers will reach 1.5 million of the most vulnerable children.
- Child development centers – Sesame and IRC will transform community sites, formal and informal schools, and other points of aid into nurturing care and learning centers. Centers will be equipped with storybooks, video clips on pre-loaded projectors, activity sheets, and training guides to enable age-appropriate, play-based learning.

“The Syrian refugee crisis is the humanitarian issue of our time and we are deeply grateful for this incredible opportunity,” said Jeffrey D. Dunn, President & CEO of Sesame Workshop. “For almost 50 years, Sesame has worked around the world to improve the lives of children and help them to grow smarter, stronger and kinder. This may be our most important initiative ever and we are humbled by the trust and confidence that has been placed in us. These children are, arguably, the world’s most vulnerable and by improving their lives we create a more stable and secure world for us all.”

Sesame Workshop has a long record of developing local versions of *Sesame Street* in places like Bangladesh, India, Afghanistan and South Africa. And the IRC brings its long and deep engagement in the refugee community and an established network of community workers and local facilities to the partnership. Sesame and IRC will receive the \$100 million grant over five years and in accordance with established milestones that ensure the project remains on track. The success of the project will encourage a redirection of existing humanitarian aid, excite new donors, and provide a working model for local government support.

David Miliband, President and CEO of IRC, called the *100&Change* grant “a transformational investment that will bring hope and opportunity to a generation of refugee children. This MacArthur grant will create a model for investment in early childhood services around the world. IRC’s partnership with Sesame is an incredible validation of our determination to put education center-stage in humanitarian settings. I hope the new kind of philanthropic thinking embodied by this grant will be an inspiration to others seeking to tackle the world’s largest problems. At a time when governments are in retreat, NGOs and philanthropists need to step up, and that is what we are seeing here – and in a big way.”

The *100&Change* finalists receiving grants of \$15 million each over five years are:

- [Catholic Relief Services](#) – changing how society cares for children in orphanages;
- [HarvestPlus](#) – eliminating hidden hunger in Africa by fortifying staple crops; and
- [Rice 360° Institute for Global Health \(Rice University\)](#) – improving newborn survival in Africa.

“Collectively, these projects identify the opportunity for action to improve long-term prospects for the world’s children. They propose feasible and durable solutions to remediate the effects of

family and community disruption, the lack of dietary diversity, and premature birth. All four projects proved worthy of MacArthur’s support,” said Cecilia Conrad, MacArthur’s Managing Director who leads *100&Change*. “MacArthur is deeply committed to helping all of them attract the support their critical work requires and finding partners to realize these impactful solutions.”

To help draw attention to and support for the many strong proposals submitted to the competition, MacArthur partnered with Foundation Center to develop the [100&Change Solutions Bank](#), a website where nonprofits can find collaborators and funders can search for projects in which to invest. The Solutions Bank is searchable by topics such as geography, subject, strategy, population served, sustainable development goal alignment, and linked research. MacArthur also supported the Center for High Impact Philanthropy (CHIP) at the University of Pennsylvania’s School of Social Policy & Practice, which analyzed the [top 200](#) scoring proposals using its lens of social impact. CHIP’s “[Bold Ideas for Philanthropists to Drive Social Change](#)” guide showcases 81 proposals that stood out for the clarity of their goal and the logic of their proposed solution. Eleven “best bets” were highlighted as having the greatest potential for impact. Third, MacArthur worked closely with [Charity Navigator](#), which identified *100&Change* participants that it rated with four stars, and shared its analysis with its broad audience of individual donors.

*100&Change* is a distinctive competition that invited proposals promising real progress toward solving a critical problem of our time in any field or any location. There was [robust participation](#): 7,069 competition registrants submitted 1,904 proposals. Of those, 801 passed an initial [administrative review](#) and were evaluated by a [panel of judges](#) who each provided ratings on [four criteria](#): meaningfulness, verifiability, durability, and feasibility. MacArthur’s Board of Directors then selected [eight semi-finalists](#) and, later, four finalists.

*100&Change* was designed to be fair, open, and transparent. The [identity of the judges](#) and the [methodology](#) used to assess initial proposals are public. Applicants received comments from the judges. Key issues in the competition are discussed in a [blog](#) on MacArthur’s website. A searchable [database](#) of all the proposals is available online, and the [top 200](#) scoring proposals are identified.

Information about the next round of the *100&Change* competition will be made available in late 2018.

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The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation supports creative people, effective institutions, and influential networks building a more just, verdant, and peaceful world. MacArthur is placing a few big bets that truly significant progress is possible on some of the world’s most pressing social challenges, including [over-incarceration](#), [global climate change](#), [nuclear risk](#), and significantly increasing [financial capital for the social sector](#). In addition to the [MacArthur Fellows Program](#) and the [100&Change competition](#), the Foundation continues its historic commitments to the role of [journalism](#) in a responsible and responsive democracy, as well as the strength and vitality of our headquarters city, [Chicago](#).

Media contacts

MacArthur Foundation:

Kristen Mack, [kmack@macfound.org](mailto:kmack@macfound.org)  
Andy Solomon, [asolomon@macfound.org](mailto:asolomon@macfound.org)

Sesame Workshop:

Hallie Ruvn, [Hallie.Ruvn@sesame.org](mailto:Hallie.Ruvn@sesame.org)

International Rescue Committee:

Flavia Draganus, [Flavia.Draganus@rescue.org](mailto:Flavia.Draganus@rescue.org)

Catholic Relief Services:

Tom Price, [tom.price@crs.org](mailto:tom.price@crs.org)

HarvestPlus:

Jane Hardey, [jane@marathonstrategies.com](mailto:jane@marathonstrategies.com)

Rice 360°:

David Ruth, [david@rice.edu](mailto:david@rice.edu)