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Striking a Match: Collaborating toward impactful research

Editor's note: This cross-post with the [Next Billion blog](#) was written by Aishwarya Lakshmi Ratan, who directs IPA's [Global Financial Inclusion Initiative](#), and Beniamino Savonitto, director of the [Citi IPA Financial Capability Research Fund](#) supported by Citi Foundation.

Creating a space for financial service providers and researchers to sit together and engage in deep problem-solving conversations that are both operationally critical and knowledge enhancing is no easy task. And yet, it remains an important component of conducting impactful research. As Gordon Cooper, head of the Emerging Market Solutions division at VISA, put it in a [recent CGAP blog post](#): “there’s no better way to produce good research than to have both parties sign off...” What is the missing ingredient to developing these types of strong collaborations? We’ve found that a little investment in matchmaking between researchers and practitioners can go a long way.



Last August, we brought together practitioners like [FINO Fintech Foundation](#) in India and the [Kenya Financial Education Centre](#) with faculty from Harvard Business School and the National University of Singapore for a conference we organized in Bangkok. It was the first time these professionals had a chance to interact, as researchers and practitioners rarely cross paths. Once in the same room though, they quickly began exploring ideas around two very specific challenges: identifying cost-effective ways to encourage beneficiaries of a government cash transfer program to increase their personal savings by incentivizing agents in India, and testing whether product-linked interventions through payday reminders and

educational messages can improve the financial management of municipal workers in Nairobi.

These teams are two examples from a group of 24 researchers and practitioners from around the world who were pre-selected to participate in our two-day matchmaking program, which linked researchers and practitioners with similar interests in finding ways to improve financial capability. The research ideas that they developed together in Bangkok were awarded a grant through the Citi IPA Financial Capability Research Fund for preliminary research and piloting activities. These funds allowed both the researchers and practitioners to take the conversation to the next level and start assessing the feasibility of the research idea by conducting preliminary qualitative and quantitative background research. The result in both cases was a strong design for a randomized evaluation that competed for full project funding as part of the first round of competitive research grants awarded by our research fund.

These are just examples from one meeting that resulted in new ideas that could lead to new and dynamic strategies for financial innovation. We hope to see several more fruitful matches. If you are a **provider of financial services in emerging economies or developing countries** and would like to find a research partner to develop and test cost-effective ways to improve the way your clients manage their money, please check out more details on our [matchmaking program](#) and apply [here](#). Meanwhile, researchers interested in evaluating such innovations can apply [here](#). Our next matchmaking program will take place on **May 29-30 in Lima, Peru**.

Participants will have the opportunity to learn about and discuss the latest evidence on innovations in financial capability at a [regional conference](#) that follows the matchmaking program at the same venue on May 31 and June 1.

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In June 2012, the [Global Financial Inclusion Initiative](#) at IPA launched the Citi IPA Financial Capability Research Fund, a program supported by the Citi Foundation to incubate and rigorously study products and product-linked interventions to improve the financial capability of the poor. To achieve these goals, the program's competitive fund invited researchers and financial service providers, as well as other financial inclusion practitioners to jointly submit proposals for rigorous research in financial capability. The first wave of projects is just getting under way; visit our webpage to learn about the main ideas we are pursuing in the coming weeks: www.poverty-action.org/financialcapability.

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