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Do you know better than the experts?

At Academy Award parties on Sunday across the country, people filled out sample ballots to guess the Oscar winners before they were announced. Now we're doing the same thing. We've got a new challenge for all you blog readers out there: [predict the results of our studies](#).

IPA recently conducted two studies about whether consulting services and/or cash infusions could help small businesses generate more profit or other positive measures of business success. [One study was in Ghana](#) with tailors and seamstresses with only one employee, if any; [the other was in Mexico](#) with businesses in a variety of sectors, with an average of 14 employees. The studies tested questions about what – if anything – makes a difference for these firms: is it gaining management skills, gaining the ability to use these skills, or simply gaining money? And is it possible for business owners to gain management skills through short-term consulting? Or perhaps to help the businesses do better, we need to change the environment, which includes elements like economic conditions and regulations. Are these businesses doing the best they can, given their environments?

These are really interesting questions with no clear answers. We can guess, and the principal investigators have some theories about what they think will happen- which is why they're doing these studies.

But we want to know what you think. Dean Karlan, our president, and Annie Duflo, our executive director, published [an article](#) in the [Stanford Social Innovation Review](#) about the studies and the questions they're attempting to answer, and they're asking you to predict the results of the studies by voting on what you think the answer will be.

Annie and Dean are exploring this idea as a very small step toward a market in predicting the results of randomized trials. Like the markets that predict the winners of the Academy Awards (and hundreds, if not thousands, of other competitions), such a market would hold people accountable for their predictions. As Annie and Dean said in their article, "it's always easy to say, 'I told you so' when there is no clear record of what the predictions were."

Secondly, like with markets for other kinds of bets, the wisdom of the crowds can actually help us think about decisions about poverty programs – as they surely helped some people make decisions about their Oscar ballots.

Want to be part of this experiment by predicting the outcome of the two recent IPA studies? [Vote now](#). We'll be back in touch when we have the results – of the voting and of the studies.

Oh, and by the way: randomly chosen winners get a copy of [More Than Good Intentions](#) or [SSIR](#) for a year.

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