

THE FORD FOUNDATION
Office for Vietnam and Thailand
Inter-Office Memorandum

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Subject: **Vietnam PHE grants**

I am extremely pleased with the set of grants encompassed within this request memo. The long-term goals of the Pathways program in Vietnam are to develop an effective program for, through and with disadvantaged students and to use these programs as a means of reforming higher education. This strategy is drawn from the specific context of this country, where the rapid massification of higher education has created crises of quality and access. Quality issues are being addressed through Foundation support for research, scholarships, curriculum redevelopment, journal acquisitions, conferences and publications targeted to particular fields and university departments. Access issues are being addressed through Pathway's emphasis on programs and policies directed to rural, ethnic, poor and female students.

Each of the proposals included in this funding request has been developed within a collective effort to build on experience in providing services, institutionalizing lessons learned, and developing local and national policies for the support of disadvantaged students. One important lesson garnered from Phase 1 and 2 involved student access. Each of these proposals continues to address access issues through the creation of recruitment networks, outreach programs in rural high schools and ethnic minority boarding schools, support programs for rural high school teachers, and tutoring for university entrance exams. Over the past two years, Pathways partner institutions have learned that programs such as these not only make it possible for more disadvantaged students to enter into universities, but have also increased high school completion rates. Observation of the outcomes has resulted in offers of financial support from rural school districts for the continuation and expansion of the program. Second, from the inception of the program in Vietnam, grantees have worked closely with Students Affairs Offices and Ministry of Education and Training officials in charge of implementing the Government of Vietnam's priority system for targeting disadvantaged students. Phase 3 of the Pathways program will place even greater emphasis on the linkage between services to disadvantaged youth and institutional reform, with a particular emphasis on teaching. Research, conferences and public media strategies will also be used to influence education policy related to poor, ethnic, and rural young women and men.

The total request for Phase 3 of the Pathways program in Vietnam is \$1,600,000. A budget overview is included below. The budget includes roughly \$200,000 in support from local People's Committees and the universities themselves.

Table 1. Pathways Phase 3 Budget Estimate

Grantees	Phase 3	University contributions	Local contributions
An Giang University	\$160,000		
Da Lat University	\$170,000	\$22,000	\$26,250
Dong Thap University	\$90,000		
Hanoi Agricultural University	\$305,000		\$63,250
Hanoi Agricultural University (coord)	\$300,000		
Hue University	\$225,000		
Tay Nguyen University	\$125,000		
Thai Nguyen University	\$225,000	\$90,500	
	\$1,600,000	\$112,500	\$89,500

Goals and Activities

The goals of the Pathways program in Vietnam is to increase disadvantaged students’ access to and success in higher education institutions, and to use what is learned through these efforts to reform higher education. These goals are being met through a comprehensive set of activities developed and tested during the second phase of this program. These activities include:

- University examination test preparation in school and community outreach settings
- Pre-university counseling of students and families in remote, rural high schools and ethnic minority boarding schools
- Tutoring programs for disadvantaged university students with low or falling grade point averages
- Computer and English classes
- Self-help student groups and community generated support funds
- Short courses and seminars in academic, life and job search skills
- Support for student research and senior thesis defense

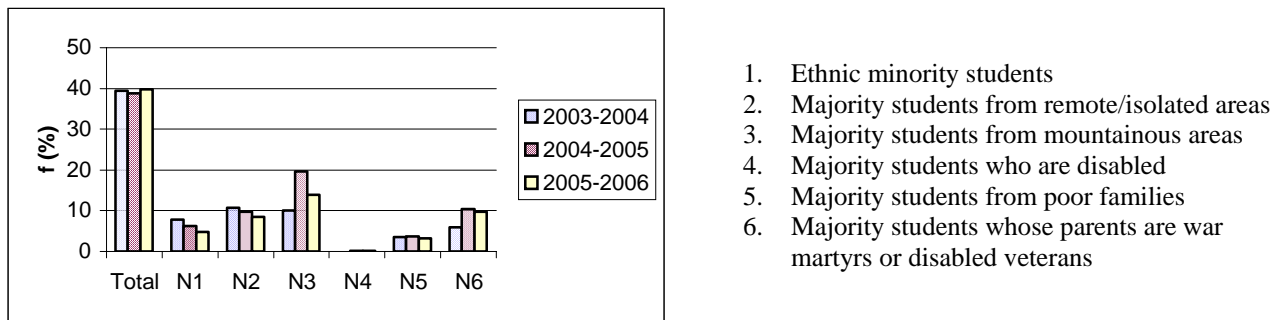
While none of the proposals included in this request apply all of these activities, each type of activity has been discussed in regular evaluation and training meetings. This approach has allowed universities to select activities that match student needs and faculty capacities in their particular institutions. In an effort to increase the enrolment of disadvantaged young, each of the Pathways institutions has included in their proposals funds for outreach programs to ethnic minority boarding schools and high schools in disadvantaged areas. These outreach programs, which were given very positive consideration by independent evaluators, combine local teacher training, with provision of reference books, fees for entrance examination tutoring, and counseling. Some of these programs have already received financial support from district level school boards who have seen high school completion rates and higher education enrolment increase. Over the longer term, grantees expect districts to cover the costs for tutoring while Pathways grants cover training and the provision of limited sets of resource materials. Within universities, the current round of grants are applying lessons learned in outreach programs to improve the tutoring, training and counseling of disadvantaged students. This is seen as a means of shifting from a lecture and curriculum based model currently in use within Vietnamese universities, to a more student based model of pedagogy that requires students and faculty to become engaged in the learning process.

Target Population

The Government of Vietnam’s priority system targets potential university students that fall within categories of ethnicity, service to the nation, and geography. Students that fall into *any one* of these categories are eligible for policy priority status. Universities within the Pathways program have added two additional categories to these, one based on social equity (students identified as poor by local commune authorities) and one based on disability. Women are taken as a priority across all categories.

Most Vietnamese students seeking entrance to a regional university would fall within at least one of these categories. In order to reduce the number of eligible students, universities within the program use a cumulative score approach in which students are marked according to the number of categories through which they qualify. Ethnicity is regarded the highest priority. The result of this scoring process is to both reduce the number of students in the Pathways program as compared to the government's priority list, and to add to it particular groups of students, such as the disabled, who are not included.

Figure 1. Disadvantaged Students in Pathways Institutions as Percent of Full-Time Students



1. Ethnic minority students
2. Majority students from remote/isolated areas
3. Majority students from mountainous areas
4. Majority students who are disabled
5. Majority students from poor families
6. Majority students whose parents are war martyrs or disabled veterans

This subset of high priority students who are offered a chance to participate in the Pathways program forms the core student body of each project proposal.

Rationale and Strategy

Over the past 15 years, higher education in Vietnam has shifted from an elite model of access to the beginnings of a system of mass higher education. During this time, the student population has grown from 2 percent of the population of 18-24 years olds in 1990-1, to 13 percent in 2005-6. In that school year, there were 1.4 million students in colleges and universities in Vietnam. Despite the growth in enrolment, competition for placement continues to exceed supply. Vietnamese universities routinely accept less than 1 in 15 applicants while many universities have acceptance ratios greater than 1 in 30. In addition, due to rapid growth in the number of higher institutions and their student populations, both the qualifications of faculty and the ratio of faculty to students remain low. Currently, only 18 percent of university faculty have doctoral degrees and, within the university system overall, there are 32 faculty members for every 1,000 students.

Over the past year, the higher education debate in Vietnam has focused on quality and access. Much of the discussion has focused on one issue, the creation of an international standard, top tier university in Vietnam. This idea has its proponents within the faculty and leadership of the Fulbright Economic Program in Vietnam. Fulbright adviser Thomas Vallely argues that the creation of an independent, international standard university, exempt from regulations that govern curriculum, faculty hiring and advancement, student enrolment, library acquisitions, tuition, student aid, and other features of the higher education system, would serve as a testing ground for higher education reform throughout Vietnam. He also suggests that such a university would provide academically successful students, deserving students who might have gone abroad for study, access to quality education in Vietnam.

The World Bank takes a different approach to higher education reform in Vietnam. Through the first phase of the Higher Education Program (\$80 million), the World Bank office in Hanoi attempted to consolidate the higher education system through mergers of smaller and mid-sized colleges; to reform university governance and finances; to promote quality, and, through an

innovations program which granted funds to universities themselves, to promote internal reform. In spite of (or perhaps because of) the failure of the first higher education program, the World Bank has carried over funding for a second phase (\$103 million) which focuses on fewer and larger universities while repeating its emphasis on governance, financial management and quality assurance. Funding will be distributed to and through departments within the Ministry of Education and Training that deal specifically with these issues and, at the insistence of the new Minister of Education, will follow recommendations contained within the recently approved Higher Education Reform Agenda.

Proponents of the ‘model university’ approach have argued that the \$80 million in loans already provided by the World Bank could have been better spent on creating one, private, international standard university. They argue that funding existing institutions to reform themselves serves as a means of institutionalizing failure. They also point out the successes of private enterprise in building the Vietnamese economy of the past 20 years as a means of emphasizing the need for autonomy. They neglect, however, to point out that such a school would take at least a decade to build out and would likely divert funds and faculty from the public higher education system.

Neither of these approaches to higher education reform in Vietnam can succeed on its own. The debate over creation of a “top tier” university has, in fact, created a context for discussion on the reform process. There are now at least five proposals for creation of a new, private top tier university either on the table or underway. But more than this, the principles of academic independence, fiscal responsibility, merit based advancement, and improved governance have all become issues within the debate, incorporated now into the World Bank Higher Education Project through the government’s Higher Education Reform Agenda.

In both the World Bank approach and the approach taken by proponents of an independent top tier university, the focus is on improving quality, and providing university education to quality students, in an effort to support Vietnam's development process. The approach taken by the Ford Foundation has also emphasized both quality and access, albeit with a different focus. Quality issues are being addressed through a long-term commitment to the reform of specific fields, disciplines and departments within the social sciences that can both represent and offer policy input into the rapid social and spatial change taking place in Vietnam. Over the past decade, a combination of scholarships, joint research and training programs, curriculum redevelopment initiatives, improvement in intellectual resources, conferences and support for journals and publications has served as a means of building capacity in these fields to transform themselves. This has been a quiet approach that began when all aspects of education reform were considered to be politically sensitive. Now, as returned graduates of MA and PhD programs abroad have begun to return to fill positions within their departments and institutes, this strategy has begun to reveal its depth. These people, and others like them, now provide the resources for internal reform.

In terms of access, the Foundation has not focused on high quality students, but rather those who are most likely to be left out of the higher education system. While the World Bank and Fulbright School have focused on academically deserving students who will fill positions on the leading edge of development, the Foundation has been more concerned with students from poor or ethnic minority families, students living in remote areas, and women who have limited access to higher education opportunities that could transform both their own lives and the lives of others in their home communities. As competition for university placement has increased, so have the minimum entrance exam score requirements. Thus, despite a rapid increase in the number of higher education institutions and departments, poorer, more rural, and ethnic young men and women, students who often suffer from poor academic preparation, have limited family finances to support their preparation for university, and no networks of college educated friends and relatives to call on for advice, find it difficult to either enter or advance through the higher education system. As a

result, the student bodies of both national and regional universities have become increasingly skewed in favor of students from more well-off, generally urban and lowland households. This is particularly disturbing in the case of highland schools that formerly served regional populations or rural and ethnic young people. With competition for placement increasing, these schools have been targeted by lowland and urban youth whose exams scores are not high enough for entrance into more prestigious, urban universities.

To address this problem, the Government of Vietnam has offered priority to special categories of students. These include ethnic minority students, children of war martyrs and disabled veterans, and those living in remote and mountainous areas. These students have varying degrees of points added to their entrance exams, may receive tuition waivers, and in some cases, also receive small stipends. Nevertheless, rising minimum scores for entrance into higher education institutions, including vocational colleges and universities, remains an important barrier to admission. Recognizing this, the National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam has waived entrance examinations for a select group deemed necessary for the development of their home regions. These nominated students have created a new problem within the system in that the nomination process is subject to favoritism and, given the limited places available within the higher education system, some universities have been forced to deny other, qualified students in their stead.

In reality, the priority system supports only a relatively small number of young people considered to be disadvantaged. Among those that do enter higher education institutions in this way, many experience academic difficulties and some experience stigma, leading to failure in their studies and early withdrawal.

The Pathways program in Vietnam has responded to these problems through a combination of strategies that offer both a means of improving access and completion, as well as reforming institutions through improvement in the quality of teaching. First, working through a Vietnamese coordination board, regional universities with high proportions of disadvantaged students have been identified and linked through periodic meetings and frequent Internet exchanges. In the past, individual universities that have attempted to implement innovative programs for disadvantaged students have worked in isolation, and information exchange with other universities has been limited and informal. They have thus lacked any systematic way of measuring their own efforts against the work of others or of learning from the experiences of others. The second part of the Vietnam Pathways strategy is, therefore, to use this network to develop a set of strategies that can be applied to the diverse conditions of each university in the program. Finally, in order to promote the sustainability of the Pathways program, each university and the coordination board work closely with a variety of institutions and organizations. This includes district and provincial level ethnic minority boarding schools and high schools, Departments of Education and Training, and Associations for Educational Promotion; university level Departments of Student Affairs, implementers of the Vietnamese government's priority system, and national level institutions, in particular, the Ministry of Education and Training's Department of Higher Education. By including these institutions in program activities and in evaluation and training meetings, the grantees anticipate acceptance of many features of the Pathways program into the Government of Vietnam's developing strategy of Higher Education Reform.

Previous Funding

During the first and second phase of the Pathways program in Vietnam, a total of 10 institutions were funded for pilot interventions and program development with a total of \$1,835,000, of which \$463,000 (25%) was contributed through the Hanoi office.

Table 2. Pervious Pathways Funding

Grantee Name	Grant Description	GM or Pool	Action End Date	Amount
Hanoi Agricultural University	Technical advice, networking and convening activities regarding the eight Vietnamese universities participating in the Pathways to Higher Education program	Salemink	2003-11-30	\$100,000
An Giang University	Pathways grant to increase the admission rate for disadvantaged students, improve their English proficiency and computer skills and increase their graduation rate	Pathways pool	2004-01-31	\$80,000
Can Tho University	Pathways grant to improve the English language and computer skills of disadvantaged students, increase their graduation rates and prepare them for the labor market	Pathways pool	2004-01-31	\$75,000
Danang University	Pathways grant to enhance English language and computer skills of disadvantaged students, improve their academic performance, and prepare them for the job market	Pathways pool	2004-01-31	\$80,000
Hanoi Agricultural University	Pathways grant to improve enrollment, retention and performance rates for disadvantaged students	Salemink	2004-01-31	\$81,000
Hue University	Pathways grant to increase the number of disadvantaged students passing its undergraduate and graduate entrance exams and improve the performance of those entering through special programs	Pathways pool	2004-01-31	\$70,000
Thai Nguyen University	Pathways grant to increase access to higher education in six northern provinces, increase the university's intake of disadvantaged students and enhance their academic performance	Pathways pool	2004-01-31	\$65,000
University of Da Lat	Pathways grant to narrow the gap between disadvantaged and other students through campus-based support and skills training and increase access for ethnic minorities and students from remote areas	Pathways pool	2004-01-31	\$80,000
Vinh University	Pathways grant to increase the university's intake of disadvantaged students and enhance their English language, computer and social skills	Salemink	2004-01-31	\$5,000
Vinh University	Pathways grant to increase the university's intake of disadvantaged students and enhance their English language, computer and social skills	Pathways pool	2004-01-31	\$50,000
Hanoi Agricultural University	For technical assistance, networking and convening activities with respect to the eight Vietnamese universities participating in the Pathways to Higher Education	DiGregorio	2003-10-31	\$97,000
Tay Bac University	To improve access, enhance academic performance and build the self-confidence of disadvantaged students	DiGregorio	2004-06-30	\$63,000
Tay Nguyen University	To improve access, enhance academic performance and build the self-confidence of disadvantaged students	DiGregorio	2004-06-30	\$54,000
Da Lat University	To improve access, enhance academic performance and build the self-confidence of disadvantaged students	DiGregorio	2006-11-30	\$14,522.00
Hanoi Agricultural University	To improve access, enhance academic performance and build the self-confidence of disadvantaged students	DiGregorio	2006-11-30	\$31,187.50
Hue University	To improve access, enhance academic performance and build the self-confidence of disadvantaged students	DiGregorio	2006-11-30	\$13,822.00
Thai Nguyen University	To improve access, enhance academic performance and build the self-confidence of disadvantaged students	DiGregorio	2006-11-30	\$3,612.00
An Giang University	To improve access, enhance academic performance and build the self-confidence of disadvantaged students	Pathways pool	2006-11-30	\$112,500
Da Lat University	To improve access, enhance academic performance and build the self-confidence of disadvantaged students	Pathways pool	2006-11-30	\$100,478
Hanoi	To improve access, enhance academic performance and	Pathways pool	2006-11-30	\$168,813

Agricultural University Hue University	build the self-confidence of disadvantaged students			
	To improve access, enhance academic performance and build the self-confidence of disadvantaged students	Pathways pool	2006-11-30	\$99,178
Thai Nguyen University Hanoi	To improve access, enhance academic performance and build the self-confidence of disadvantaged students	Pathways pool	2006-11-30	\$92,888
Agricultural University Hanoi	Technical advice, networking and convening activities regarding the eight Vietnamese universities participating in the Pathways to Higher Education program	Pathways pool	2006-11-30	\$193,000
Agricultural University	To design and implement a national evaluation of the Pathways program in Vietnam	Pathways pool	2007-04-30	\$105,000
	Total			\$1,835,000
	<i>Pathways Pool</i>			<i>\$1,371,857</i>
	<i>Hanoi Grant makers</i>			<i>\$463,143</i>

An independent evaluation conducted in October 2006 concluded that the Pathways program in Vietnam had a positive effect in increasing the number of disadvantaged young people able to enter into higher education institutions, and also improved the quality of their education while in school. The outreach programs to remote high schools and ethnic minority boarding schools received exceptionally high praise for their effectiveness in increasing both high school completion rates and enrolment in higher education institutions. At the same time, the evaluators regarded the large numbers of activities carried out by individual universities as part of the program as weakening its effectiveness. They suggested paring down the activities as a means of extending the program to a larger group of students with more cost effective management. In an evaluation review session, it was further noted that the creation of better tracking system would make it possible for Pathways institutions to better portray the effectiveness of the program in policy dialogs.

The evaluators further noted that Pathways has made a strong impression on those who know of it or have participated in it, and have thus induced changes within the system. These changes include:

Changes in Pathways institutions: Disadvantaged students, their parents, local teachers and university lecturers have changed their perception of disadvantaged students' capacities to enter higher education institutions and to succeed in them. In a very clear way, they have come to understand weak study habits and poor entrance scores as outcomes of the particular contexts in which these students live and study. By offering better educational services to these young people, whether in rural high schools or in universities, their capacities to learn can be improved. Thus, as teachers in ethnic minority boarding schools and high schools in mountainous and remote areas improve their knowledge and teaching methods, and the quality of education improves, distinctions between disadvantaged and better-off students begin to dissipate. At the same time, educational administrators in high schools and universities have focused more attention on disadvantaged students and have begun to introduce activities and policies to support them. These include priorities on dormitory space, as well as scholarships and allowances from other financial resources.

Changes outside Pathways institutions: Leaders of district level Departments of Education and Training and local Government Officials in mountainous provinces have become better acquainted with the purposes of Pathways, and have strongly recommended institutionalization of some Pathways activities. For example, Hanoi Agricultural University and An Giang University currently have cost sharing agreements with People Committees in some districts to use local funds to replicate high school outreach programs.

Based on the independent evaluation, in Phase 3, *a smaller set of strategic activities within each of the Pathways member institutions will be built-out to larger scale, project management and organization will focus on integration with faculties of education, new universities will be added to the group, and a larger proportion of the budget will be devoted to activities that support the transformation of these universities and influence the course of higher education policies with respect to disadvantaged students.*

Sustainability

Sustainability is the chief issue of interest at this point in Pathways development in Vietnam. Having developed a group of effective activities, and having built relationships with governmental and university administrators, the next step for the Pathways program is to engage their own institutions and the national policy dialog on higher education. This set of grants will do both through a focus on teacher training, through institutionalization of Pathways activities, and through the inclusion of Pathways experience in the higher education policy dialog.

Assessment

An independent evaluation of the Pathways program in Vietnam was conducted by senior staff members of the Ministry of Education and Training's Higher Education Strategy Institute in October 2006. One outcome of this evaluation has been an agreement among Pathways institutions to make a more concerted effort to track student progress. A Management Information System will be piloted by Hue University in the spring of 2007. There is now some discussion about using another part of these "pilot project" funds to develop a case system that includes counseling and support for a subset of disadvantaged students facing difficulties in adjusting to the university, in their academic progress, or in their future career or continuing education choices. In addition, each of the Pathways institutions participates in semi-annual, topic based meetings. Members of the Coordinating Board conduct spot checks at each site at least once per year.