

War on Drugs Study Proposal 08.04

1. Describe your project idea, including clearly defining the problems and specific policy questions to be addressed.

My idea would be to study the negative effects that the War on Drugs has caused to society. The hope would be to shed some light on this billion dollar quagmire that is not only failing to stop illegal drug use, it is filling our prisons with non-violent offenders and bankrupting our country. The question is how (and why) can this system that is failing on so many levels continue to be supported?

2. Why is this problem important?

With new studies out showing 1 in 100 American adults are incarcerated, this problem has become much larger than narcotics. With a soaring debt, the money spent enforcing these draconian laws could be transferred to any number of more positive venues. With a slowing economy, why are we spending billions of dollars fighting a hopeless battle that results in more prisons being built than schools? When 1 in 9 African American male between 20-35 is in prison, there is an epidemic permeating from somewhere within our culture. Our country cannot be strong if we are crippling entire communities with outdated, heavy handed laws.

3. How could the Citizens League make a unique contribution?

Doing further research would be a first step, but bringing this controversial issue to light would be the overarching goal. If people took a serious look at this issue, people from every walk of life would come to realize that this is a failed plan, plain and simple. A problem is that no one in a position of power wants to be the first to challenge something that on premise is supported by a majority of people.

4. What are prospects that project would yield recommendations that could be implemented and have a major impact on the problem?

It is hard to say. If a group that has respect and authority can bring a controversial issue to the public's attention, it just may be the push it needs to have a earnest debate. If the American public can see the facts about what this initiative is costing in by dollars and lives, there may be a sea change in opinion.

5. Explain how this problem can be addressed by data, research, and reason? Identify probable sources for data and research.

Exposing the real costs by finding how many people in our packed prisons are there for non-violent drug offenses. This would involve prison statistics, court records, and budgets for different city-state organizations forced to enforce these rules.

6. Explain how this proposal can be framed without partisan bias.

It may seem difficult at first, but this proposal is not advocating legalizing drugs. It is trying to stop our country from running our economy off of the rails and destroying entire communities. Fixing this conundrum would not only help heal communities, it would help balance budgets. I believe if framed correctly, it would appeal equally to people from every perspective.

7. Why would this project be attractive to members?

This is an issue that has been ignored for too long. Your organization could make a bold step to address a grave concern that is ripping our country apart. This issue is either going to get better or get worse, and I cannot fathom much worse than 1 in 100 Americans in prison.

8. How would this project reach out to under-represented segments of the community?

It would give a voice to the communities that have been ravaged by these unfair laws. This failed program has destroyed millions of lives and families and done irreversible damage to entire communities. Large corporations have many sonorous voices representing their interests, why are the poorest and most disadvantaged not offered that same privilege?

9. What is the potential for making this issue visible to a broader public? Why?

It is a controversial issue that is often brushed under the rug because there is no easy answer. This topic must be framed in an educated fashion that shows both sides. It is always easy for proponents to use the “drugs are bad” argument, but that is not the argument here. The real problem is much more nuanced than right or wrong but a deeper issue of unfair and unjust punishments that set up people to fail.

10. What resources—funding, experts, etc. might be available to support this project?

There are some groups working to enlighten people on this subject. Without doing extensive research, I would assume there are academic papers speaking on this subject readily available.