

**International House Chicago**  
**Ram Itani and Sujan Shrestha**  
*Community Center to Empower the Youths of Rural Nepal*  
**Nepal**

**PROPOSAL NARRATIVE**

The objective of the project is to restore peace and harmony in Panchthar by tackling the issue of rapid outmigration among the youths. We plan to achieve this goal by setting up a fully operational community center that provides opportunities for middle to high school students to engage in various activities and workshops, thus retaining these youths by equipping them with skills to contribute to the local workforce and empowering them to be leaders in their community.

Panchthar is a rural village in eastern Nepal with a population of approximately 200,000. Like many rural settlements in Nepal, Panchthar suffers from rapid outmigration of the youth and hence, its most able workforce. Most of the emigrants are high-school graduates and dropouts. Unfortunately, due to their poor education background, many are unable to compete in the domestic labor market. Nepal's tight labor market for unskilled workers pushes these low-education youths to consider working abroad. An estimated 6 million Nepalese work abroad, primarily in Gulf countries, Malaysia and India, but a whopping 75% are unskilled. In addition to the perceived idea of lucrative livelihood which does not always materialize as expected, the endeavor of finding employment abroad is riddled with corruption in a complex labor brokerage system. A large portion of Nepalese migrant workers is exploited, which is an extreme violation of human rights. Nepalese migrants are dying at a rate of one in two days while doing construction work in the Gulf.<sup>1</sup> A loss of family members in addition to a hefty debt incurred due to a corrupt system is significantly affecting the peace and harmony of the rural Nepali community. A village without youth is also susceptible to social unrest, for example, petty crimes, looting and abuse of children and senior citizens. Youth force changes political, economic, and social aspects of the society and through this project we hope to retain youth in Panchthar, equip them with skills needed for sustainable development and peace.

A community center is one of the missing community fulfillment aspects in Panchthar. Our partner Nepal Tea Foundation (NTF), a 501(c)(3) registered nonprofit, realized this in 2018. They worked diligently to build a four-room Panchthar Youth Community Center (PYCC). However, the COVID-19 pandemic severely affected their funding effort and the community goal of bringing the center into operation had been stagnant for the last two years. Davis Peace Project provides us with the financial resources to jumpstart the project and partnership with NTF, who brings expertise from their volunteers in various skills such as financial education and rural development, will assure sustainability of the project. As part of our collaboration with NTF, we aim to create an engaging and interactive space for students in middle and high school and organize workshops and training on community building, problem solving and creating economic opportunities. More specifically, with the funds we plan to upgrade the four rooms in the following manner:

- a) **E-learning Room:** Station 4 laptops in the room for the children to have access to e-learning to supplement the traditional school curriculum. Conduct a workshop on internet literacy and train the teachers and students who will train others.
- b) **Recreational Room:** Station musical instruments (guitar, madal, flute), board games (chess, scrabble) and sport equipment (badminton, table tennis, volleyball) for the children to promote physical and mental health and wellbeing. Form a youth club to oversee future recreational activities and events.
- c) **Counseling Room:** Setup counseling room to facilitate both professional advising and social/emotional support from trained professionals at NTF.

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<sup>1</sup> Hajariya, Ambar. "NEPALESE MIGRANT WORKERS AND THEIR HARDSHIP IN THE DESERT." (2016).

- d) **Conference Room:** Station projector and lounge area to host conferences, vocational training and educational events geared towards high school students.

### **Timeline, Sustainability and Teamwork**

Our project duration is expected to be 4 weeks in the summer, but the preparation begins in late spring. We will remotely recruit teachers from 3 local schools to collaborate with us in the project. They will solicit feedback from the high school students and local community members on how to best use the community center. We will review their feedback before traveling to Nepal with a team of experts from NTF and design a sustainable operation model that consists of weekly programs to be conducted at the center. Upon arrival in Kathmandu, we will purchase all the equipment for the project and travel to the project site. We will spend 3 weeks in the community center working directly with the high-school students, teachers and locals. In the first week, we will co-lead a workshop on internet literacy where we train teachers and selected students on accessing, understanding, and communicating content online. The workshop will include inspirational stories of youth who returned to their village to be successful entrepreneurs after going through stressful time working abroad. We will hold Q&A session with some of them remotely. We hope this workshop will play an integral role in reducing outmigration and hopefully encourage them to be creative about finding economic opportunities locally. After the workshop, we will assign the teachers and NTF volunteers as mentors to oversee future training for other students, thus contributing to the sustainability aspect of the project. In the second week, we will establish a youth club consisting of students. An expert from NTF will hold a leadership workshop for the members of the youth club and provide them guidance to oversee the recreational programs at the center. We will work with the club to organize an inaugural sporting event - a friendly volleyball tournament between the students and the teachers, and a chess competition between the elderly locals and the students. We will host several other sporting events that week. We hope this engagement will strengthen the bonding in the community and lead to reduction in out-migration. For the final week of the project, we will give a glimpse of future services and activities to be held at the center and officially hand over day-to-day operational duties to NTF. We will continue to hold regular meetings with NTF to seek updates and provide feedback on the PYCC's progress.

Teamwork between Sujan and Ram is crucial for the successful completion and sustainability of this project. Sujan, cofounder of NTF, who led the team that built the four-room building is dedicated to bringing this community center to life. Likewise, his connection with NTF makes it a long-term partnership, thus making the project sustainable. Ram brings a wealth of knowledge and experience both from being raised in rural area and having opened a community resource center in rural Nepal as a part of Davis Project for Peace in 2015. His perspective on rural life will be influential in persuading youth during the workshops.

### **Indicators of Success**

There are a couple of metrics of success for our project:

- 1) Institutional upgrade of the PYCC - successful completion of the 4-room revamp and passing over the facility to NTF
- 2) Davis-NTF Partnership
  - a) Increase in high-school retention and graduation rates
  - b) Annual survey in partnership with NTF to examine out migration trend in post high-school demographics and community satisfaction with the PYCC

Name: Ram Itani & Sujan Shrestha  
 Project Name: Community Center to Empower the Youths of Rural Nepal  
 School: International House Chicago

TOTAL FUNDS REMAINING:  
 0

Total Additional Funding:

TOTAL EXPENDITURES:  
 10,000

Student Expenses					Project Expenses				
Travel (Airfare to Nepal - two people - and transportation to and from project site)	Lodging (Hotel for 3 weeks)	Communications	Food (While on project site)	Miscellaneous	Non-Student Travel and Lodging (Volunteers from partner institution)	Direct Equipment and Supplies (Electronics: 4 laptops, 1 projector & sound system, music instruments: 2 guitar, 4 madal, 5 flute, sports equipments and board games.	Marketing and Event Support	Staffing Costs	Miscellaneous
1500	400				200	2000	100	200	100
1500						1000			
						2000			
						1000			
<b>Total</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Total</b>
3000	400	0	0	0	200	6000	100	200	100

Total Student Expenses:  
 3400

Total Project Expenses:  
 6600

## **Community Center to Empower the Youths of Rural Nepal**

Nepal, Summer 2022

International House of Chicago

Ram Itani & Sujan Shrestha, University of Chicago

### **PROPOSAL APPLICATION**

We, Ram Itani and Sujan Shrestha, request a Davis Projects for Peace grant to restore peace in rural Nepal by tackling the rapidly growing trend of rural to urban migration among youths. Funds from this grant would provide institutional upgrades of the Panchthar Youth Community Center (PYCC) to empower middle to high school students to encourage and find economic opportunities in Panchthar or locally through educational and recreational programs.

Nepal, once a largely rural country, has seen a staggering growth of 50% in urban population in the last decade, primarily fueled by the adolescent population migrating to urban cities and other countries in search of economic opportunities - mostly in the form of gruesome labor works. As a result, much of rural Nepal has almost turned into ghost towns while others have a majority geriatric population whose economic contribution and social involvement in rural Nepal is limited, severely impacting the peace and harmony of the community.

Our project aims to restore peace and harmony in Panchthar by empowering their youth to create economic opportunities locally and discourage outmigration. The funds from Davis will be utilized to upgrade the Panchthar Youth Community Center. The center consists of an empty four-room building completed recently by Nepal Tea Foundation (NTF), a local 501(c)(3) registered nonprofit and our partner in the project. These rooms will be revamped to transform into recreational, conference, e-learning and counseling rooms. The center will host a variety of training and vocational education with the support from active volunteers of NTF to help youth discover their potential and passion in the local community.

# RAM C ITANI

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## EDUCATION

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### THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

*Ph.D. in Physical Chemistry, GPA:3.89/4.0*

Chicago, IL  
Sep 2017- Jun 2023

*Dissertation: Developing rapid mixer for spectroscopic study of DNA*

- Booth MBA Courses: Competitive Strategy, Lab to Launch
- PME Venture Fellow (1 of 5 students selected to take scientific innovations into high growth businesses)
- International House Ralph N. Fellow (1 of 4 students demonstrating leadership skills for more just and peaceful world)
- Arts, Science + Culture Fellow (1 of 8 faculty nominated students based on ability to cross disciplinary boundaries)

### EARLHAM COLLEGE

*BA in Chemistry, Physics, and Math, GPA: 3.89/4.0*

Richmond, IN  
Aug 2013 – May 2017

- Presidential Honor Scholar (\$40.5k/year merit-based, top 1% incoming class)
- Davis Project for Peace (\$10k funding to for independent project to promote peace in Nepal, 1 of 90 recipient across the US)

## EXPERIENCE

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### UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

*Research Assistant*

Chicago, IL  
Sept 2017 – Present

- Developed a novel flow-based measurement method that overcame damage to DNA, saving \$1000+ on expensive samples and simplified data acquisition/processing, thus increasing efficiency by 50%
- Initiated collaboration with 2 labs at Colorado State University to pioneer a versatile rapid mixing technology for applications in DNA-nanotechnology and drug discovery: 2 talks given at competitive conferences and a paper in preparation
- Mentoring 5 undergrads on weekly basis, to provide guidance on their research projects, internships, and fellowship applications: helped secure \$5k in scholarship, and internships at prestigious institutions

### BELDEN INC. (No.1 Wire & Cable Manufacturer in the US)

*Research and Development Intern*

Richmond, IN  
May 2014 – Aug 2014

- Analyzed quality of copper to provide data-driven recommendations to switch from mined to recycled copper, resulting in a 15% reduction in costs without compromising in the wire quality
- Developed industry leading cable jackets partnering with a Canadian firm that is 20% more strong, yet 10% more flexible than 4 competitors; performed rigorous testing in a week to expedite the certification process

## LEADERSHIP AND OUTREACH

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### CHICAGO SOUTH SIDE HIGH SCHOOL OUTREACH

Jan 2019 – Present

*Lead Instructor*

- Leading a team of 2 postdocs, 6 graduate students to run a weekly colloquium aimed at sparking science interest among 15 minority students (72% African Am., 25% Hispanic, 70% low income), which directly motivated 5 to take on paid internships
- Develop curriculum, organize scheduling, manage recruitment, and negotiated to secure benefit package for volunteers

### COMMUNITY PROGRAM ACCELERATOR, UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

March – May 2021

*Consultant*

- Collaborated with four consultants to develop online marketing and funding strategies for a homeless shelter in Chicago
- Grew revenue by 15% in six months via two tactics: improving online marketing and convincing CEO, CFO, and board of directors to leveraged multiple donation channels including subscription- based donations

### PHYSICAL SCIENCE SOCIAL COMMITTEE, UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

Nov 2018 – Jan 2020

*Board Member, Secretary*

- 1 of 3 key decision makers for vetting and approving 100+ events and sustainably managing \$175k budget dedicated to organizing social events to improve work-life balance among graduate students
- Negotiated a 10% discount for U-Chicago student, staff, and faculty at Mariano's grocery stores across Chicago

### NEPAL EARTHQUAKE RELIEF FUND, EARLHAM COLLEGE

April – Aug 2015

*Organizer*

- Raised \$15k funding in two days and disbursed funds in a week to supply emergency supplies to earthquake victims in Nepal
- Installed a high-speed internet connectivity in a rural school for the first time after an 8.1 earthquake by negotiating a one-year deal with the largest internet provider in the country

**INTERESTS:** *Adventure* (Bungy Jump, Rafting, Trekking), *Cooking* (Ethnic food), *Soccer* (Intramural), *Languages:* Nepali, Hindi, Urdu

# SUJAN SHRESTHA

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## EDUCATION

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### THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO BOOTH SCHOOL OF BUSINESS

Chicago, IL

*Master of Business Administration*

Sep 2021 – Jun 2023

- Concentrations in Business Analytics, Finance and Strategic Management
- Selected as Graduate Fellow at International House
- Active member of Management Consulting Group, Net Impact Group and Booth Cricket Club

### COLBY-SAWYER COLLEGE

New London, NH

*Bachelor of Science in Business Administration*

Aug 2011 – May 2015

- Full-Tuition Scholarship - Recipient of Founders Scholarship and Wesson Honors Scholarship
- Wesson Honors Scholar (Highest college merit program) and Dean's List (2012, 2013, 2014)
- Designed two sustainability courses that led to building an on-campus classroom with locally-sourced, non-toxic materials; Secured \$2,400 grant for sustainable plant-based biofuel project in Nepal

## EXPERIENCE

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### NEPAL TEA FOUNDATION (*501c3 nonprofit focused on poverty and illiteracy issues*)

Kathmandu, Nepal

Co-Founder

Mar 2019 – Present

- Designed organization expansion model and digital footprint strategy by managing Operations and Technology teams, resulting in an increase of annual donations by 280% YoY in 2020
- Led 'Sponsor a Child' flagship program ensuring fully funded education for 98 children; Achieved 27% YoY increase in 2020 through new partnerships with inner-city Kathmandu public schools and local governments
- Fundraised and managed construction of \$10,200 budgeted New Namuna School in a community of 600+ tea farmers; Negotiated school operation and pre-K certification approval with multiple stakeholders
- Created and managed \$3,000+ education fund by tailoring donation campaigns to interested Nepali expats

### JPMORGAN CHASE & CO.

New York City, NY

Investment Banking Analyst

Dec 2017 – Mar 2019

- Built and analyzed cashflow forecasting and valuation analyses (DCF, trading and transaction comparables and LBO analyses) for M&A, equity and debt capital related deals for 40+ multinational Real Estate, Gaming and Lodging clients
- Selected transaction experiences as lead analyst:
  - \$1.2bn notes offering for a multinational lodging company to support its recent acquisition consolidation, share repurchase and dividends payment
  - \$1.26bn debt recapitalization for a multinational information management services company to fund an acquisition to strategically align its data business function to approximately 7% of total revenue
  - \$880mm and \$850mm debt recapitalization for two US homebuilders to support growth strategies
- As first-year analyst, presented annual portfolio risk review to 50+ senior management and advised steps to limit potential credit risks for all Real Estate, Gaming and Lodging clients
- Spearheaded working groups to lead financial spreading automation and to train 10+ back-up analysts in Asia

Corporate Analyst

Dec 2015 – Dec 2017

- Led development of underwriting guidelines and policies under OCC's criteria for Leveraged Lending, FDIC and Heightened Standards covering global and industry specific portfolios worth \$25bn+
- Developed credit underwriting technology that enables Investment Banking underwriters to assess any given transaction within 30 mins (previously 1-2 hrs) for credit approval and presentation to senior management
- Devised measures to analyze and review wholesale bank transactions and clients to minimize credit risk
- Steered JPMorgan's Leveraged Lending and FDIC rollout by creating partnership frameworks encompassing 9 cross-functional teams

## ADDITIONAL

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- Raised \$2,000 for 20 hardest Covid-hit farming families in Nepal to support medical costs and lost wages
- Provided pro bono investments consulting to Patan Multiple Campus, Tribhuvan University (2019-2020) and operations consulting to House of Wings restaurant (2019)
- Fluent in English, Nepali, and Hindi; Proficient in Urdu
- Passionate about cooking Nepali seafood cuisines and Momos; Distresses via road-trips (completed Maine to Florida coastal drive in one week; drove through Denali National Park from Anchorage to Fairbanks)