Session Description:
Randomized control trials (RCTs) are often considered the gold standard for measuring impact. Implementing RCTs, however, presents unique challenges to project implementation: • identifying control participants • designing a research model before you know your exact enrollment • sampling when you have multiple cohorts • managing the tension between the need to stay agile and adapt your program to what is happening on the ground with the researchers’ need for you to follow the timeline exactly and keep implementation consistent • dealing with the time lag in getting results • selecting a research firm that aligns with your values and working cooperatively with it This session will provide participants with insights into how real entrepreneurship projects have worked to address these challenges in an RCT.

Panelists:
James Tinker and Tina Byenklya, Technoserve

Key Takeaways:
1. While RCTs can be complicated and controversial, they provide key data that investors want to see
2. When contracting out for a measurement specialist, ensure that their goals and ethics are aligned with yours before beginning the project
3. Perform a thorough risk assessment and form a mitigation plan prior to beginning project

Conversation:
• Technoserve primarily tries to find a place for RCTs but listens to feedback from clients
• Case Study I – Business Women Connect
  o provides women with access to economic success
  o **Designed as an RCT from the beginning
  o 1000 women in control group, 1000 with program access, 100 with mobile banking access and business training
  o Results – women saved substantially more money with the program and business training
  o Next steps – will the short term impacts translate overtime and make long term business impacts
• The pros of RCTs
  o Rigor, transparency, accountability – provides confidence in what you are doing
- Powerful fundraising tool – people need rock hard evidence
- Some stakeholders just need experimental evidence
- It can clear the air to move on to other research priorities

- The challenges of RCTs
  - Relationship Management
    - The evaluator should be external to be objective – but that means that the evaluator is not super familiar with your organization – project teams might be intimidated to share
    - Secret interest of the researcher – sometimes just want information for their own research/publications
    - Speak the same language for project managements (the person going out to implement
    - You are giving the project team more work and they cannot see the immediate benefit
    - Mitigation
      - Select a research firm that aligns with your values
      - Have an interpreter
      - Communicate early and often – include frequent check-ins and updates in the contract
  - Getting buy in from the implementing team
  - Tension with Adaptive Management
    - HUGE lag time – academic researchers tend to be slower
    - Can place restriction on integrating new participants or altering program design – telling program team (who cares deeply about the cause) cannot work with certain people
    - Tension between project M&E team and evaluators
    - Mitigation
      - Only conduct RCTs on mature project models
      - Design project as an RCT
      - Have parallel systems. Don’t rely on RCTs to solve all your informational needs
      - Make sure project team sees big-picture value
  - Using a control Groups
    - Explaining to control why they are ineligible (but we still need to survey them)
    - Ethical hurdles
    - Reputational risk – don’t want to be seen as exclusive
    - Designing the experiment when you don’t know total number of eligible applicants
    - Mitigation
      - Provide the treatment to control participants in second round – providing training to control group later – make sure you are on the
same page with researchers....they often want perfect control groups for a long period of time

- Be transparent and consistent in telling the same story about why we are doing this (we need to learn if this program is working)
- Listen to the project team, discuss risks in advance
  - Question: How do you ensure that it is random?
    - Stata and SAs have a function you can use, random function on excel

Q&A:
- Are you there during RCT?
  - I prefer to be there before baseline data is collected