Frequently Asked Questions
Human Trafficking Research Initiative Competitive Fund

What is HTRI?

The Human Trafficking Research Initiative (HTRI) at Innovations for Poverty Action is an eight-year project funded by the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (the TIP Office)'s Program to End Modern Slavery (PEMS) at the U.S. Department of State. HTRI was established in 2020 to support practitioners, policymakers, and researchers in strengthening the evidence base on effective interventions to reduce trafficking and protect victims.

HTRI brings together implementing organizations, policymakers, and researchers to build the body of evidence on interventions to reduce human trafficking and protect victims and survivors of trafficking. HTRI fosters partnerships between researchers and practitioners; innovates on and improves the research methods for studying human trafficking; initiates formative pilot testing of programs; and conducts large-scale studies on the efforts to prevent trafficking, prosecute crimes, and protect trafficked persons. You can find more information at: https://www.poverty-action.org/human-trafficking-research-initiative

What is the HTRI Competitive Fund?

HTRI funds new research that seeks to fill gaps in the evidence base and advance practitioners' and policymakers' use of effective interventions to combat trafficking. The priority themes and guiding questions for HTRI's Competitive Fund were developed through an extensive consultative process with leading policymakers, practitioners, and researchers, culminating in HTRI's Research and Learning and Agenda. This Research and Learning Agenda is continuously updated to identify gaps in current research and promote and fund new research that addresses these gaps.

How does the HTRI Competitive Fund work?

HTRI releases calls for applications for two types of funding opportunities:

- **Seed funding:** HTRI invites proposals from researchers and organizations that intend to design and carry out studies on how to reduce human trafficking or respond to the needs of human trafficking victims, but need some additional time and support to push the research project to the next stage. The objective of these small grants, ranging between $10,000 and $75,000, is to advance early-stage discussions between researchers and

implementing organizations to the point where they have viable research project designs and plans. Applicants can submit requests for small research pilots of promising interventions ($10,000-$75,000 per pilot); seed money for travel grants or staff time to build on nascent research ideas ($10,000-$30,000 per award); or small grants using existing data sources to examine program impact (up to $15,000 per award). Ultimately, the goal of these funds is to support the future development of larger-scale impact evaluations.

- **Full-scale randomized controlled trials** (partial and full funding): IPA invites expressions of interest (EOIs) for rigorous research that aims to generate credible impact information. EOI applicants will be reviewed and select applicants will then be invited to submit a full proposal for funding. HTRI's strong preference is for research designed as randomized control trials (RCTs), though quasi-experimental methods (e.g., difference-in-difference, regression discontinuity) will also be considered.
- **Specialized calls/off-cycle funding:** HTRI will release at least one call for proposals that specifically seeks to fill gaps in the evidence around human-trafficking prosecution and criminal justice interventions. HTRI expects to release that call for expressions of interest in late 2024. In addition, while most of HTRI's funding will be disbursed through scheduled funding rounds, HTRI understands that some research projects may face a significant time constraint and need to receive funding quickly to make use of an unanticipated opportunity. Off-cycle awards will be considered for a maximum of $200,000. Decisions on off-cycle proposals will be made by HTRI's Academic Leads and the HTRI Director. For more information about off-cycle funding, please reach out to HTRI at ipa_htri@poverty-action.org.

Seed funding proposals are reviewed in one stage; full-scale RCTs are reviewed in two stages (1. Expressions of interest, 2. Full proposals for shortlisted applicants from EOI stage).

When will HTRI release its next calls for funding?

- **Seed funding:** HTRI expects to release a call for applications for seed funding in 2025.
- **Full research funding**: HTRI expects to release a call for applications for prosecution-focused research in late 2024, and a general call for applications for all 4 Ps in 2025.

Where can I find calls for applications, and how do I apply?

Potential applicants can find active calls for applications for HTRI and other sector programs on IPA's website: https://poverty-action.org/research-funding.

What is the duration of HTRI research projects?

Applicants are encouraged to propose a timeline that is appropriate for completing the proposed research. More details on the expected period of performance will be included in the call for applications. Typically, seed grants run from three to six months, and full research studies range from six months to two years.

Are research projects funded in their entirety at the beginning of the project, or in installments throughout the research?

HTRI provides incremental funding as milestones are completed. These milestones are laid out in detail in subaward agreements with the lead implementing organization/university.

I am not an expert in designing and running randomized control trials (RCTs). Does HTRI have any references to help guide me in designing an RCT?

J-PAL has some excellent resources and courses on designing and implementing randomized control trials. We recommend starting here. In calls for applications for full RCTs, HTRI requires that at least one researcher on the team has experience conducting RCTs. If you need help getting connected to researchers with experience running RCTs in human trafficking or adjacent fields, reach out to ipa_htri@poverty-action.org.

Why does HTRI focus on RCTs? What are "treatment" and "control" groups?

HTRI is focused on funding research that uses rigorous quantitative and experimental methods, such as RCTs and quasi-experimental research, to examine the effectiveness of counter-trafficking interventions. While we appreciate the need for all kinds of rigorous research to take place in this field, HTRI does not fund research that is solely descriptive or qualitative in nature. This summary is a great overview of what RCTs are (and a bit about how IPA is structured).

To conduct a RCT, the group you are looking at is randomly divided into two or more groups. One group receives a program (the "intervention" or "treatment" group) and the other does not (the "comparison" or "control" group). Due to random assignment, the groups on average will be statistically identical, allowing you to attribute any difference between the two groups after the program was introduced to the *program itself*, rather than any other external or unobservable factors.

The ability to generate a "counterfactual" (what would have happened if the program hadn't been introduced) through randomization is key to why RCTs can be such a useful tool and can provide a measure of causal impact.

In addition to RCTs, HTRI also considers quasi-experimental methods, which can provide valuable insights when randomization is not feasible or ethical. Quasi-experimental designs use non-randomized approaches to approximate a counterfactual, often taking advantage of natural experiments, policy changes, or other external variations. Examples of quasi-experimental methods include difference-in-differences (which compares outcomes over time between treated and untreated groups) and regression discontinuity designs (which use a cutoff or threshold to identify causal effects).

While quasi-experimental methods do not rely on random assignment, they can still produce rigorous and credible estimates of causal impact when properly implemented. However, these methods often depend on strong assumptions about the comparability of treatment and control

groups or the nature of the external variation being used. These assumptions must be carefully validated to ensure the reliability of the results.

HTRI encourages the use of both RCTs and quasi-experimental designs as tools to generate high-quality evidence for counter-trafficking programs. Both methods contribute to strengthening the evidence base, and the choice between them depends on the specific context, feasibility, and ethical considerations of the intervention being studied.

How can I make sure my proposed research study is fully powered?

To understand what statistical power is, how to calculate it, and why it is key in the design of RCTs, this article is a good place to start. This resource from J-PAL goes a bit more in-depth. We also find this quick guide to power calculations to be useful to reference.

For applicants that are invited to submit proposals in HTRI's full RCT funding rounds, you will be required to submit a commented Stata log or similar document to show your calculations. At the seed grant and EOI stages, however, you can use something like this online power calculator to estimate whether your proposed research design will yield sufficient power, given factors such as your sample size.

What are some examples of RCTs in the counter-trafficking field?

HTRI has outlined and linked human trafficking-focused RCTs and quasi-experimental impact evaluations in HTRI's Research and Learning Agenda as well as in this prevention evidence summary and this protection evidence summary. We recommend reviewing these studies before applying to HTRI, especially if these studies overlap with your planned research topic.

Are non-governmental organizations (NGOs)/other non-academic institutions eligible to receive funding?

All types of organizations are eligible to apply, provided that there is a qualified and eligible researcher on the research project team (either in-house at the organization, and/or from an academic institution). The lead researcher must hold a PhD or be currently pursuing a PhD in a relevant social science discipline. Additionally, the research team must include members with demonstrated experience in field research and randomized evaluations, and members with a deep understanding of human trafficking in the target region/country. Consortia of organizations, including implementing organizations and universities/research institutions, are also eligible to apply, but there must be one lead institution designated to receive grant funds directly from IPA. This institution can then issue subawards and/or subcontracts to other members of the project consortium.

Where should the research projects take place? Can research on human trafficking in the U.S. be funded?

All projects funded by HTRI must benefit people and communities in and/or from low-and middle-income countries (LMICs) and take place outside the U.S. Projects can be proposed for multiple countries, but the budget cannot exceed the maximum funding amount per proposal type (see "How does the HTRI Competitive Fund work?" above). To determine if a country is categorized as a LMIC, please visit https://data.worldbank.org/country/XO.

Organizations applying to HTRI can be based in both high-income and LMICs. Projects that are proposed to take place in high-income countries that *do not* have LMIC beneficiaries as the primary target of interventions will not be considered. All intervention sites are subject to review by the U.S. Department of State.

For organizations whose programs take place in the U.S., there are other departments in the U.S. government that can fund research in the U.S. Please consult other funding opportunities such as those through the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services' Office on Trafficking in Persons (OTIP), the U.S. Department of Justice's Office for Victims of Crime (OVC), and the National Institute of Justice (NIJ).

Can I submit more than one proposal during a funding round?

Yes, you are welcome to submit more than one proposal during a funding round, provided each submission is well developed and you believe all of the research projects are viable.

If I am an implementing organization, how can I find a researcher to partner with, and vice versa?

Principal Investigators (PIs) who are part of IPA's researcher network can be found here, and J-PAL affiliated professors can be found here. These researchers have experience working on RCTs and can potentially help guide the research design process with implementing organizations.

If your intervention is meant to take place in a country where there is an IPA Country Office, we recommend looking through IPA's Country Office pages on IPA's website (under "Where We Work") for ideas about relevant studies and PIs. You are also welcome to reach out to IPA's Country Offices well in advance of a HTRI submission deadline if you are interested in collaborating with them on a project. Contact information for each office can be found here.

For researchers interested in learning about counter-trafficking interventions in their region of focus, we recommend consulting the Global Modern Slavery Directory. You are also welcome to reach out to HTRI at ipa_htri@poverty-action.org to see if we are aware of any implementing organizations working on counter-trafficking interventions in your target country.

If my organization is selected for funding, what does IPA's subaward due diligence process entail?

Once the selection committee has identified proposals that are recommended for funding and HTRI's donor has provided preliminary approval for funding those proposals, IPA will reach out to the applicant to request a series of documents to affirm an organization's controls are sufficient to manage the subaward. Note that funding is not guaranteed at this stage. Only a fully executed subaward provides the terms and conditions under which funding occurs.

Requested documentation will include - but is not limited to - the following:
- Subrecipient Questionnaire (provides general information about the organization)
- Audited Financial Statements for the most recent two years for which statements are available
- Single Audit (only required if an applicant has expended USD$750,000 or more in USG funding in the applicant's most recently completed fiscal year)
- Financial, Procurement, Safeguarding, and Human Resources (HR) Policies and Procedures, if they exist
- Official Organization Registration: This can be a national registration ID, certificate of incorporation, government charter, or other similar document that demonstrates that the applicant is a legally recognized entity approved to conduct business.
- Certification of Tax Status (501(c)(3) or other country tax registration)
- IRS W-9 Form (for U.S.-based subrecipients) or W-8BEN-E (for non-U.S.-based applicants)
- Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act (FFATA) Form (required for any subaward of USD$30,000 or more)
- NICRA or Indirect Cost Allocation Plan: For any subagreement where the recipient is requesting indirect cost recovery, IPA must receive justification for the rate used. IPA accepts NICRA documentation or an indirect cost allocation plan. Acceptable documentation shows how an external entity's rate is derived from a formula consistently applied to all projects of the subrecipient. If an indirect cost rate (ICR) is not established, the subrecipient may request a de minimis rate of 15% without documentation.