



## **Human Trafficking Research Initiative – Request for Proposals Seed Funding Round 4 (Fall/Winter 2025) Application Guidelines**

IPA's [Human Trafficking Research Initiative \(HTRI\)](#) 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. HTRI expects to fund 3-5 proposals that aim to generate rigorous, actionable evidence to inform anti-trafficking interventions. Proposals are due by **11:59 pm US Pacific time on Thursday, December 4, 2025 through the [online application portal](#)**.

### **Overview**

HTRI is funded by the Program to End Modern Slavery (PEMS) at the U.S. Department of State's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons. The primary focus of HTRI funding is to strengthen the evidence around potentially impactful programs using rigorous research methods. HTRI will consider human trafficking research projects that fall under any or all of the four Ps (Prevention, Protection, Prosecution, Partnership).

All research proposed under these seed grants should be in service of examining data or research plans or piloting studies that lead towards impact evaluations (randomized control trials or quasi experimental studies). **Research that is primarily qualitative or descriptive will NOT be considered for funding under HTRI.** For more information on impact evaluations, please visit <https://poverty-action.org/rigorous-research>.

Funding priorities for the partnership, piloting, and seed grants are guided by HTRI's [Research and Learning Agenda](#), which outlines key research gaps under the 4 Ps. Applicants are instructed to read HTRI's Research and Learning Agenda and refer to specific research questions in the Research and Learning Agenda that their research project intends to address.

In this round, HTRI will consider proposals that include:

- **Small research pilots of promising interventions:** These are grants that would fund the cost of pilot research to assess the feasibility and value of a larger research project. These grants are intended to be the first step of formal research for promising interventions and anti-trafficking activities. Programs with monitoring and evaluation data, administrative data, and/or sound theories of change that indicate promising impact would be a good fit for this grant. Awards for pilot studies are between \$10,000 to \$75,000 per pilot.
- **Seed money for a travel grant or staff time to build on nascent research ideas:** These grants are to develop preliminary research ideas and help researchers develop subsequent proposals for pilots or full randomized evaluations. Activities may include travel, relationship development, descriptive analysis, observational analysis, and data development or collection. These grants are primarily meant for junior faculty, PhD



students, and other researchers who do not have other sources of funding for travel and exploratory work. We anticipate funding between \$10,000 and \$30,000 per award.

- **Small grants for data work using existing sources to examine program impact:** These are small grants that will support researchers to use a partner's administrative data or other existing data sets, conduct desk research to deepen previous research analysis, or create new analysis to help inform research project design and viability. We expect to see applications either explain how existing analysis could be improved or potentially be used to draw additional conclusions. Preference will be given to applicants who chart how their results can influence future research (specifically impact evaluations). We anticipate funding awards of up to \$15,000.

## Application Instructions

A complete proposal consists of: (1) a completed [online application form](#); (2) a narrative proposal; (3) a detailed budget and budget narrative; (4) CVs of all researchers; (5) letters of support from implementing partners (optional). All document templates should be downloaded, completed, and attached to the online application.

Please submit all of the following materials through our [online application portal](#) by **11:59 pm US Pacific time on Thursday, December 4, 2025**.

- 1) **Online application form:** Please complete the [online application form](#) with accurate and up-to-date information about the proposed project. Please ensure that all required sections are filled out and that all required documents listed below are attached.
- 2) **Narrative proposal:** Applicants should fill out all fields in the [narrative proposal template](#) using Calibri 12-point font, single-spaced, and ensure they stay within the maximum word limits specified for each section. Any references may be included in the appendix at the end of the document.
- 3) **Budget and budget narrative:** Please use [this template](#) for the budget (to be uploaded as a single .xlsx file titled *[PI last name] [Proposal title] Budget.xlsx*) and [this template](#) for the budget narrative (to be uploaded as a single .docx or .pdf file titled *[PI last name] [Proposal title] budget narrative*). If you are applying as part of a consortium, please note that detailed costs for partner/subawarding organizations must be included in the additional tabs provided in the budget template and described fully in the budget narrative.
- 4) **CVs of all researchers:** Please upload the CVs of each researcher on the project as a .docx or .pdf file titled *[PI last name] CV [Researcher last name].pdf*.
- 5) **Letters of support from implementing partners (optional):** Applicants for pilot funding are strongly encouraged to submit signed letters of support from implementing partners (saved as .pdf files titled *[PI last name] Letter of Support [Partner name].pdf*). If available, applicants should also include letters of support from potential scale-up partners.



## Eligibility

### Research Teams

Research teams **must** include at least one member that either holds a PhD or is currently pursuing a PhD in a relevant social science discipline, and at least one member with demonstrated experience in field research and randomized evaluations. The research team should also have knowledge and/or expertise in human trafficking or adjacent fields in the target region/country.

IPA encourages proposals from researchers from multiple disciplines, and we strongly encourage teams to include researchers from the countries where the project will take place, with clearly defined contributions from all members of the research team. Researchers with lived experience of human trafficking are strongly encouraged to apply. HTRI also encourages the contribution and input into research projects of people with lived experience of human trafficking, from the design stage through implementation and dissemination of results, at all levels of project leadership.

### Subrecipient Organization

Each application must designate one organization to receive and manage subaward funds. IPA cannot subaward to individuals.

Organizations seeking to partner with IPA Country Offices in their applications should reach out to [ipa\\_htri@poverty-action.org](mailto:ipa_htri@poverty-action.org) for special instructions regarding the application process as well as contacting the relevant IPA Country Office well in advance of the submission deadline (see “About Innovations for Poverty Action” at the end of this document for full list of country offices and contacts). IPA Country Office staff will discuss your application – including the research design, implementation plan, and project feasibility – and if approved, will work with you on the budget and application materials.

Organizations must have written and established policies and procedures regarding financial management, procurement, and human resources management, as well as Errors & Omissions insurance. If you are unsure if your organization is eligible based on these requirements, please contact [ipa\\_htri@poverty-action.org](mailto:ipa_htri@poverty-action.org) for more information.

As this funding is originating from the U.S. Department of State, organizations must also have a Unique Entity ID (UEI) issued by [SAM.gov](https://sam.gov) before grant funds can be issued. For more information, please visit <https://sam.gov>.

### Eligibility of India-Based Institutions

Due to the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA), a law in India that regulates how foreign funds are used and accepted by individuals, companies, and associations, IPA regrets that we cannot issue a subaward to an India-based institution subject to FCRA under this call for proposals.



## **Geographic Focus**

All projects must benefit people and communities in/from low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). To determine if your country is categorized as a LMIC, please visit <https://data.worldbank.org/country/XO>. Please note that project activities and interventions can take place anywhere outside of the United States, but the intended beneficiaries must be from LMICs. Projects that are proposed 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.

## **Research**

All submissions must present a clear set of hypotheses of why the research is important to the human trafficking research field. Applicants should review the key learning questions and priority areas of research outlined in HTRI's [Research and Learning Agenda](#). All applications must describe how this seed funding will help set the stage for a large future research project. Applications that do not intend to use randomized control trials (RCTs) or other rigorous experimental or quasi-experimental designs as their methodology for causal inference will NOT be considered for funding.

Awardees are expected to submit all survey modules and project design details to HTRI for review and approval by HTRI and the U.S. Department of State. Projects that may seek to measure human trafficking prevalence as part of a future RCT should review the guidance from the [Human Trafficking Statistical Definitions Prevalence Reduction Innovation Forum](#). Submissions proposing to conduct field-based data collection should specify the research implementing partner organization that will assist the research team with the management of fieldwork and data collection. For those applying for funds to travel and build relationships, we expect to see a list of potential partners.

Studies must also be willing to accommodate best practices for ethical research of human trafficking victims. Applicants must detail ethical protections and considerations as part of their application. If selected for funding, recipients will be expected to produce a project risk register that includes provisions for encountering ethical challenges in the field. We expect this plan to reflect the needs of the respondents as well as the safety, security, and wellbeing of IPA/subrecipient staff and field enumerators.

## **Funding and Allowable Costs**

HTRI research awards do not fund:

- Program or intervention implementation costs, except as necessary to support funded research. Applications that include all or most of the implementing costs for programs in their budget will be disqualified.
- Salary costs for researchers from institutions in high-income countries whose salaries are covered by their institutions. Reasonable salary costs can be considered by the review committee on a case-by-case basis. Funding for the salaries and/or time of researchers from institutions based in LMICs is allowable.



- Purely qualitative research that does not contribute to the development of quantitative or quasi-experimental impact evaluations.
- Lab in the field experiments, except as components of pilots or within the context of a broader impact evaluation.
- Research using historical datasets, except in the context of a broader impact evaluation or technical assistance engagement for policy support.
- Research in high-income countries, unless the research is focused on LMIC beneficiaries.

Applicants are encouraged to budget for activities related to the dissemination of findings, including (but not limited to) project briefs, evidence summaries, participation in panels, and other materials to ensure findings are effectively shared with relevant stakeholders to inform larger impact evaluations.

Funding for this project is subject to federal rules and regulations in line with the Code of Federal Regulations (eCFR Chapter VI, Part 600). Please note that this includes restrictions on the use of U.S. Government funding for salary compensation or direct payments to foreign government officials or sub-awards or sub-contracts to foreign government entities. If you have questions about allowable costs, please reach out to the HTRI team at [ipa\\_htri@poverty-action.org](mailto:ipa_htri@poverty-action.org).

### **Project Timeline**

Project timelines should be between three and twelve months. Projects are expected to launch in early to mid 2026 and close before the end of 2027.

Based on previous funding rounds, it takes an average of three months to fully execute a subaward following award notification. Please note that project expenses can only be incurred after the full execution of the subaward.

### **Evaluation Criteria**

Proposals will be evaluated by an expert committee of researchers. The committee's decisions will be based on the project's potential to improve evidence around anti-trafficking programs. There is no specific "type" of intervention that will be favored, but projects should propose to respond to one or more of the research gap areas identified in the HTRI [Research and Learning Agenda](#), and shed light on how to substantively reduce the prevalence of human trafficking or respond to the needs of human trafficking victims. The potential scientific and policy insights will be directly weighed against costs of the amount requested.

All research grants must focus on one or both forms of trafficking in persons as defined by the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (as amended):

- Sex Trafficking – when a trafficker uses force, fraud, or coercion to compel a person to engage in a commercial sex act or when a trafficker causes a child who has not attained 18 years of age to engage in a commercial sex act.



- Forced Labor – when a trafficker recruits, harbors, transports, provides, or obtains a person for labor or services by using force, fraud, or coercion.

**The selection committee will consider the following factors in evaluating proposals:**

- **Relevance to HTRI priorities** (use of causal inference methods to test counter-trafficking strategies that can be used to design evidence-based programs and policies): Does the study address specific knowledge gaps identified in HTRI's Research and Learning Agenda? Does the research strategy provide a bridge between a practical experiment and underlying theories about human trafficking?
- **Project viability:** Are the research question(s) and theory of change clear and realistic? Will results from the project be usable for building and designing future research projects? For pilots, do researchers describe how piloting activities would inform a full-scale randomized evaluation? For evidence analysis, what is the strategy to disseminate results and how likely are these results to inform conversations among policymakers, development professionals, and academics? Are there any logistical or political obstacles that might threaten the completion of the study (for example, government authorization or Human Subjects review)?
- **Academic contribution:** Does the study make a significant contribution toward advancing knowledge in the field of social science? Does the research strategy provide a bridge between a practical experiment and underlying theories about human trafficking? Is the proposal likely to isolate causal mechanisms or contribute to research designs for anti-trafficking work more broadly?
- **Policy and survivor relevance:** Is the research grounded in survivor-centered and survivor-informed principles, with the potential to meaningfully contribute to the empowerment of trafficking survivors? Is there clear demand from policymakers or implementers for better information to guide decisions in this area, and will the research produce timely, usable insights to meet that demand? Does the project offer strong potential for iterative learning—generating actionable findings throughout implementation and research that can inform program improvement, partnerships, and future policy or practice?
- **Research funding and value for money:** Are the proposed costs reasonable and realistic? Is the cost of the study commensurate with the value of expected contributions to science and policy? Are the proposed costs allowable under U.S. Department of State rules and regulations?
- **Relevant experience:** Does the research team have a track record of implementing successful projects similar to the one being proposed? Is the composition of the research team well-suited to carry out research on this sensitive topic, and is the level of effort proposed sufficient? Is the project adequately staffed to meet all deliverables?



## About Innovations for Poverty Action

Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA) is a research and policy nonprofit that discovers and advances what works to improve the lives of people in poverty. IPA brings together researchers and decision-makers to design, rigorously evaluate, and refine these solutions and their applications, ensuring that the evidence created is used to improve the lives of people living in poverty. Since its founding in 2002, IPA has worked with over 600 leading academics to conduct over 900 evaluations in 52 countries. This research has informed hundreds of successful programs that now impact millions of individuals worldwide. IPA is present in 16 countries with permanent offices.

## Country Program Primary Contacts

**Burkina Faso/Côte d'Ivoire:** Maud Amon-Tanoh, [matanoh@poverty-action.org](mailto:matanoh@poverty-action.org)

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**Ghana:** Salifu Amadu, [samadu@poverty-action.org](mailto:samadu@poverty-action.org)

**Kenya:** Ginger Golub, [ggolub@poverty-action.org](mailto:ggolub@poverty-action.org)

**Malawi/Zambia:** Emmanuel Bakirdjian, [ebakirdjian@poverty-action.org](mailto:ebakirdjian@poverty-action.org)

**Mexico:** Enrique Fernandez Garcia, [efernandez@poverty-action.org](mailto:efernandez@poverty-action.org)

**Nigeria:** Funmilayo Ayeni, [fayeni@poverty-action.org](mailto:fayeni@poverty-action.org)

**Peru:** Barbara Sparrow, [bsparrow@poverty-action.org](mailto:bsparrow@poverty-action.org)

**Philippines:** Aftab Opel, [aopel@poverty-action.org](mailto:aopel@poverty-action.org)

**Rwanda/Uganda:** Cassien Havugimana, [chavugimana@poverty-action.org](mailto:chavugimana@poverty-action.org) (please also copy Emmanuel Bakirdjian, [ebakirdjian@poverty-action.org](mailto:ebakirdjian@poverty-action.org))

**Sierra Leone/Liberia:** Walker Higgins, [whiggins@poverty-action.org](mailto:whiggins@poverty-action.org)

**Tanzania:** Zachary Isdahl, [zisdahl@poverty-action.org](mailto:zisdahl@poverty-action.org)

**Latin American countries not listed above:** Sergio De Marco, [sdemarco@poverty-action.org](mailto:sdemarco@poverty-action.org)

**Multi-country projects:** Pace Phillips, [pPhillips@poverty-action.org](mailto:pPhillips@poverty-action.org)

To connect with one of our country offices or questions about working with IPA, you may also contact the HTRI team at [ipa\\_htri@poverty-action.org](mailto:ipa_htri@poverty-action.org) or IPA's Project Development team at [pd@poverty-action.org](mailto:pd@poverty-action.org).

## Grant Terms and Conditions

If your proposal is accepted for award, the funds will be provided under a subaward from IPA to one prime research institution. Please refer to the terms and conditions below for more details about the conditions of the award. Awards are typically paid on a cost-reimbursable basis.

Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval is required for all studies that intend to publish. This approval may come from your host institution's IRB or from IPA's own IRB.

## General Terms and Conditions

If an applicant is awarded funding by IPA, the grant agreement may include clauses similar to the following, and the Grant Recipient must comply with them:



1. SPONSOR may review and approve materials produced for program implementation that concern respondent or beneficiary safety or wellbeing, including any training materials, awareness raising materials, and communications materials.
2. SPONSOR may review and comment on materials that are part of the design of the research project but do not directly concern respondent or beneficiary safety or wellbeing, including research plans, survey instruments and data analysis, and documents and materials on research analysis and findings, which will be made publicly available.
3. SPONSOR reserves the right to conduct a baseline assessment and/or rigorous independent evaluation of grant performance, to include the collection and analysis of timely and reliable data and information. SPONSOR has full responsibility for oversight of these evaluations to ensure an unbiased assessment of the grant activities. GRANT RECIPIENT is expected to cooperate to the fullest extent possible if selected for an assessment. No additional funds will be made available for your participation, but a SPONSOR evaluation should not add to GRANT RECIPIENT costs. IPA will notify the GRANT RECIPIENT in advance if their project is selected for an evaluation. To facilitate review and evaluation related to the performance activity, GRANT RECIPIENT shall, whenever appropriate, disclose relevant data and information. The results of the assessment may be used for the development of SPONSOR best practices, to document program impact, assess return on investment, and to assure accountability for the American people.
4. Information which might require special consideration with regard to the timing of its disclosure may derive from studies or research, during which public disclosure of preliminary invalidated findings could create erroneous conclusions, which might threaten public health or safety if acted upon. IPA may identify (based on agreement with SPONSOR) specific information and/or categories of information which the SPONSOR will furnish to IPA and GRANT RECIPIENT or that the GRANT RECIPIENT is expected to generate which is confidential. Such confidential information may be identified from time to time during the performance of the award. If it is established that information to be utilized under the award is subject to the Privacy Act, the GRANT RECIPIENT will follow the rules and procedures of disclosure set forth in the Privacy Act of 1974, and implementing regulations and policies, with respect to systems of records determined to be subject to the Privacy Act. Written advance notice of at least 55 calendar days will be provided to the IPA of the recipient's intent to release findings of studies or research, which have the possibility of adverse effects on the public or SPONSOR, as described above. If IPA (based on response from SPONSOR) does not pose any objections in writing within the 55-calendar day period, the GRANT RECIPIENT may proceed with disclosure. Whenever the GRANT RECIPIENT is uncertain with regard to the proper handling of material under the award, or if the material in question is subject to the Privacy Act or is confidential information subject to this Provision, the recipient shall obtain a written determination from IPA (based on written determination from SPONSOR) prior to any release, disclosure, dissemination, or publication.



5. Any publications or articles resulting from the award must acknowledge the support of the SPONSOR and include a disclaimer of official endorsement as follows: "This [article] was funded [in part] by a grant from the SPONSOR. The opinions, findings and conclusions stated herein are those of the author[s] and do not necessarily reflect those of the SPONSOR". The GRANT RECIPIENT must ensure that this disclaimer be included on all brochures, flyers, posters, billboards, or other graphic artwork that are produced under the terms of the award.
6. SPONSOR reserves a royalty-free, non-exclusive and irrevocable right to reproduce, publish, or otherwise use the work for SPONSOR purposes, and to authorize other entities, including other non-Federal entities, to do so. In addition, the SPONSOR has the right to obtain, reproduce, publish, or otherwise use data produced under a SPONSOR award.
7. All international travel charged to this award must be on an American flag carrier. If travel was on a foreign flag carrier, a statement justifying the use of a foreign flag carrier, which meets one of the exceptions cited in the "Fly America Act", must be included with the financial report. Travel on foreign flag carrier, which does not meet one of the exceptions of the Act, will be disallowed.
8. None of the funds made available herein may be used to promote, support, or advocate the legalization or practice of prostitution. Nothing in the preceding sentence shall be construed to preclude assistance designed to combat trafficking in persons, including programs for prevention, protection of victims, and prosecution of traffickers and others who profit from trafficking in persons, by ameliorating the suffering of, or health risks to, victims while they are being trafficked or after they are out of the situation that resulted from such victims being trafficked.
9. GRANT RECIPIENT certifies that, to the extent practicable, persons or entities providing legal services, social services, health services, or other assistance have completed, or will complete, training in connection with trafficking in persons.
10. Funds provided under an award are subject to Section 620M of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended, a provision titled "Limitation on Assistance to Security Forces" (the "Leahy Amendment"). Accordingly, none of the funds under this award may be used to provide training or other assistance to any unit or member of the security forces of a foreign country if the Department of State has credible information that such unit or individual has committed a gross violation of human rights. In signing an award, the GRANT RECIPIENT agrees to exercise due diligence to ensure compliance with the Leahy Amendment provision and Department of State policy, and to cooperate with the Department of State in implementation of the requirement. The Department of State implements the Leahy Amendment requirements by vetting units or individuals proposed for training or other assistance to check for credible information of a gross violation of human rights by such units or individuals. To facilitate Department of State vetting, the Recipient must provide a set of information for proposed participants at least sixty (60) calendar days prior to commencing award activities. The GRANT RECIPIENT must collaborate with the relevant U.S. embassy on a case-by-case basis to determine if the Leahy requirement applies to specific activities or proposed participants. Individuals who



are not members of the security forces but who participate in activities under the award (e.g., politicians, academics, etc.) generally do not need to be vetted. Submission Deadline: Each candidate must be cleared under Leahy vetting in advance of participation in activities funded under this award. The vetting process typically takes approximately one month but may take longer if there are a large number of candidates or if issues arise. Thus, all information on proposed candidates must be received by the embassy at least sixty (60) days in advance of the training event or other activity. The GRANT RECIPIENT agrees that it will not include any security forces candidate in training or other activities funded under this award until the State Department advises that the candidate has cleared Leahy vetting and is approved for participation.

11. GRANT RECIPIENT shall comply with the Department of State Standard Terms and Conditions for Federal Awards, as applicable. Electronic copies containing the complete text are available at: <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Standard-Terms-and-Conditions-for-Federal-Awards-10.1.24-15.pdf><https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Standard-Terms-and-Conditions-for-Federal-Awards-10.1.24-15.pdf>
12. GRANT RECIPIENT will be responsible for reporting on progress as in a format to be provided by the HTRI Program on a schedule to be determined by mutual agreement. Progress reports must contain a comparison of actual accomplishments to the objectives of the award established for the period. This should include information on how costs are tied to accomplishments, the reasons why established goals and targets were not met, if any, and additional pertinent information including an analysis and explanation of cost overruns or high unit costs.
13. GRANT RECIPIENT will submit a budget in detail along with a written justification sufficient to determine the need and reasonableness for the proposed costs. Indirect costs will not be allowable charges against the award unless specifically included as a line item in the approved budget for the award. Indirect cost recovery for any actual indirect costs incurred by the recipient which are greater than the indirect cost line item in the approved award budget is limited up to the award amount. A non-profit organization which has not previously established an indirect cost rate with a Federal agency, that believes the Department of State should be its cognizant agency, shall submit its initial indirect cost proposal immediately after the organization is advised that the award will be made and, in no event, later than three months after the effective date of the award. For all NICRA and indirect rate inquiries please contact [AQM-NICRA@state.gov](mailto:AQM-NICRA@state.gov).
14. GRANT RECIPIENT may charge to the award only allowable costs as incorporated in the approved budget. Reporting of expenses will be at the major category level with a frequency to be determined by mutual agreement between the parties. Any variance between major categories of 10% or greater must be explained in writing and approved by the HTRI Program.
15. IPA may modify, suspend or discontinue any payment of funding under this Agreement or terminate this Agreement upon thirty (30) days' written notice to SUBRECIPIENT if:
  - (a) IPA is not reasonably satisfied with progress on the Project or submitted deliverables;



(b) there are significant changes to Principal Investigator or any team member with substantial involvement in the Project, or other factors that the IPA reasonably believes may threaten the Project's success; (c) SUBRECIPIENT fails to comply with this Agreement or (d) for any reason. IPA may terminate this Agreement effective immediately upon written notice to the SUBRECIPIENT if the PRIME AWARD is terminated by the SPONSOR. Upon termination, SUBRECIPIENT shall be reimbursed for all approved costs and non-cancellable obligations incurred in the performance of the Project up to the effective date of termination.

This list is not exhaustive and subject to change. The Grant Recipient may be required in the grant agreement to comply with other requirements from IPA and IPA's prime donors.