



Citizen Security Research Initiative (CSRI)

Call for Proposals

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ipa Innovations for
Poverty Action

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Photo

Simon Mayer, Shutterstock, [Colombian police officer seen from behind while talking on the phone](#), 2024.

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I. Overview

By 2023, [83% of the world's population](#) lived in countries where organized crime had significant influence over society, yet rigorous evidence on how to build safer communities and strengthen justice systems remains limited. In response, Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA) is actively working to fill these evidence gaps. Through the [Citizen Security Research Initiative \(CSRI\)](#), supported by the United States Department of State's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL), IPA aims to improve security outcomes by building the evidence base on reducing crime and violence, disrupting illicit trafficking, and strengthening justice institutions.

This document covers the aims, research and learning priorities, and types of research funded by CSRI through these calls. The fund supports generalizable, rigorous impact evaluations and related research, as well as bolsters the infrastructure available for research. CSRI prioritizes rigorous research that generates actionable evidence to inform policy and programming in the citizen security and justice sector, particularly studies that challenge common beliefs, pioneer innovative interventions, and produce evidence where little currently exists.

CSRI's first call for proposals is now open. CSRI accepts proposals for rigorous impact evaluations, pilots, infrastructure and public goods projects, and foundational and contextual research projects. More information on our research priorities and project types can be found in sections [IV](#) and [V](#), below. **Proposals are due April 15, 2026.**

II. Motivation & Background

Global insecurity is a deepening crisis affecting communities worldwide. Although [70% of adults globally](#) report feeling safe in their communities, this sense of security varies dramatically by region, dropping to just 51% in sub-Saharan Africa and 47% in Latin America and the Caribbean. Organized crime, corruption, drug trafficking, and weak institutions are undermining the foundations of community safety, impeding economic development, and obstructing the delivery of justice.

These threats create a high-stakes environment where, without credible solutions grounded in rigorous evidence, security interventions frequently fail to deliver lasting improvements. Policy dialogue has increasingly recognized that more resources must go towards evidence-based approaches to citizen security, yet funding for rigorous impact evaluations in this sector remains limited compared to need.

Security interventions that lack rigorous empirical foundations frequently fall short in creating sustainable change, risking unintended consequences and perpetuating community insecurity. While there has been growing interest in understanding what works to reduce crime and

violence and strengthen justice systems, the evidence base remains fragmented. Before we can confidently recommend "good buys" or "[best bets](#)" to cost-effectively improve security and justice outcomes, [as is possible in other sectors](#), there is much more we need to know.

Despite this recognized need for evidence, existing research on citizen security and justice is concentrated primarily in OECD countries, where many evaluated solutions have shown modest impacts at best (e.g. [National Academy of Sciences 2022](#)). This geographic concentration reflects real challenges: administrative data on crime and justice outcomes is frequently unreliable or politically sensitive, research infrastructure gaps can increase study costs and complexity, and safety and security concerns must be carefully managed in research design. These challenges leave significant knowledge gaps for low- and middle-income contexts despite high rates of violence and crime in these regions. Even when effective programs are identified, decision-makers often struggle to adapt evidence from high-income settings or draw actionable policy implications for implementation at scale.

However, a growing body of work demonstrates that rigorous research in these contexts is both possible and essential. Since 2019, IPA has funded and implemented some of the first rigorous studies on [crime](#) and [violence reduction](#). This work has shown that well-designed impact evaluations can generate actionable evidence even in challenging security environments, and that such evidence can inform policy and practice. Building on this foundation and expertise, CSRI was established to systematically expand the evidence base across a broader range of security and justice topics and geographies, addressing critical knowledge gaps where decision-makers need rigorous evidence to design effective programs.

Going forward, we aim to support some of the most innovative and generalizable research in citizen security and justice, build the infrastructure for research on these topics, and encourage policymakers and practitioners to apply the results to their work.

III. Scope

Given the significant gaps in rigorous evidence on what works to reduce crime and violence, disrupt illicit trafficking, and strengthen security and justice institutions, CSRI supports innovative and generalizable research that addresses the most pressing policy questions facing practitioners and policymakers working to build safer communities and strengthen justice systems. This research will generate actionable evidence of direct relevance to the design, targeting, and implementation of security programs and policies, including a particular focus on program effectiveness, the mechanisms underpinning these interventions, and the barriers to impact. CSRI also supports pilots, descriptive and contextual research, and tools and data that support future impact evaluations and strengthen the research infrastructure.

Thematically, supported research projects will be related to:

- Countering organized crime, including gang recruitment, violence, territorial control, illicit trafficking activities, and revenue streams of criminal organizations
- Combating drug trafficking and production, including drug market dynamics, supply chains and trafficking routes, and synthetic drugs and emerging threats
- Preventing crime and violence, including enforcement strategies, and emerging forms of crime such as cybercrime and technology-enabled offenses
- Strengthening law enforcement and criminal justice systems, including efforts to improve policing institutions, justice system performance, and address corruption and institutional fragility

By filling critical evidence gaps in these areas, CSRI aims to equip policymakers and practitioners with the rigorous, actionable evidence they need to design more effective programs, allocate resources wisely, and achieve lasting improvements in citizen security.

IV. Research and Learning Priorities

This section provides a list of indicative research areas and questions related to citizen security and justice that proposals may address. Based on extensive consultations with experts and leaders in the security and justice spaces working across North America, Latin America, Asia, Africa, Europe, and on global initiatives, as well as IPA experience, CSRI has identified priority areas where rigorous impact evaluations can most effectively inform policy and programmatic decision-making.

Rather than simply framing their study within this list of priority areas, which may overlap and are not mutually exclusive, we encourage applicants to link their research to questions that they believe are of fundamental importance to our understanding of citizen security and justice. The questions listed under each priority area are illustrative rather than exhaustive, and we welcome research on complementarities between interventions, ways to optimize the sequence of interventions, or learnings that will help prioritize resource allocation given limited budgets.

The questions listed below span a range of research stages, from descriptive and contextual questions to those focused on intervention effectiveness and impact. Questions that are more descriptive or methodological in nature are particularly well-suited for infrastructure support and public goods creation projects and foundational and contextual research. We encourage researchers submitting these types of proposals to consider how their work may inform future impact evaluations.

Research Areas

1. Countering Organized Crime

Organized crime undermines public safety, stifles economic progress, and erodes democratic governance in countries worldwide. A growing body of research examines how to prevent gang recruitment and reduce violence, suggesting that intensive, culturally adapted family-based programs, focused deterrence strategies, psychosocial interventions, and programs offering education and employment opportunities can be effective. Yet critical knowledge gaps remain—most existing research has been conducted in high-income countries, leaving significant gaps for low- and middle-income contexts where organized criminal groups continue to evolve, leveraging social media for recruitment, broadening revenue sources, and expanding trafficking operations. Questions could include:

1. Organized Crime Recruitment and Membership

- a. What are the key motivations and life trajectories that drive individuals to join and exit criminal groups, and how can this knowledge inform more effective prevention, desistance, and reintegration policies?
- b. What are the different pathways through which criminal organizations recruit various types of members into their structures at distinct levels? How dynamic and context-specific are these pathways? Who seems to be the most susceptible to being recruited? What is the role of local drug markets?
- c. How do organized criminal groups identify and leverage individual vulnerabilities and contextual factors to facilitate recruitment into violent activities? Specifically, how do recruiters target and leverage factors such as economic precarity (e.g., unemployment, income shocks, or limited economic opportunities), peer networks and social status dynamics, and prior exposure to violence, trauma, or family instability to draw individuals into joining criminal groups and taking on violent roles?
- d. Which interventions, or combinations of interventions, are most effective at preventing recruitment into criminal groups? What are the critical windows for disrupting criminal pathways, and what interventions effectively mitigate vulnerabilities associated with these pathways? How do programs designed to counter recruitment disrupt the labor supply and operations of transnational criminal organizations, and how do these effects interact with enforcement pressure?
- e. What strategies can effectively disrupt criminal group recruitment on social media? How can these strategies minimize the displacement of criminal activity to encrypted channels or alternative platforms?
- f. How is the emergence of synthetic drug markets changing criminal recruitment profiles, and what are the implications for the skillsets and motivations of new recruits across age groups?

- g. What factors seem to normalize and facilitate criminal recruitment (e.g., normalization of violence, narco-culture, etc.) and how can prevention programs address both individual attitudes and broader social norms?

2. Illicit Trafficking Activities

- a. What strategies can effectively disrupt trafficking operations while minimizing and mitigating violent competition between criminal groups?
- b. How should interventions account for trafficking networks' ability to adapt their operations, routes, and structures in response to enforcement pressure?
- c. How should interventions account for the structural characteristics of different trafficking supply chains to increase effectiveness and minimize displacement to alternative routes, markets, or mechanisms?
- d. How can tech-based strategies, including imagery intelligence technology, maritime domain data, or GPS for security forces, help locate, infiltrate, disrupt, and dismantle illicit economic activities?
- e. How can governments improve institutional security responses to cross-border trafficking and drug smuggling? How can customs officers improve risk profiling practices for containers or people to better curb levels of illicit trade across borders? What priority skills and capacities should training programs for customs officers and coast guard personnel emphasize?
- f. How can leveraging administrative or big data improve the forecasting of threats and actions that affect international security, in particular, illicit trafficking?

3. Organized Crime Revenue Streams from Sources Different from Trafficking

- a. What are the principal revenue streams of organized criminal groups, including those derived from legal and illegal activities? How do these dynamics vary across specific groups or cities, particularly in contexts where evidence remains scarce? How do different revenue sources shape the operations, resilience, and adaptability of organized criminal groups?
- b. How can criminal revenue streams other than trafficking (e.g., extortion, financial crimes, kidnapping for ransom, illegal mining, among others) be effectively disrupted while reducing unintended consequences?
- c. What non-enforcement approaches (such as financial transparency measures, fiscal policies, screening mechanisms, asset blocking, or recovery strategies) effectively reduce criminal revenue or prevent criminal groups from legitimizing their revenue through legal systems?
- d. How does reducing criminal revenues lower the demand for labor workers in illicit activities, and, in turn, reduce employment in these sectors?

- e. How do criminal organizations structure and execute money laundering operations, and what tools can improve the tracking of illicit financial flows?
- f. How effective are anti-money laundering frameworks in detecting, deterring, and disrupting illicit financial flows across different contexts?
- g. How do variations in the governance capacity, market structure, and territorial control of organized criminal groups influence the outcomes of interventions targeting their revenue streams?
- h. How can interventions be tailored to contexts with differing levels of state capacity and local governance strength to enhance effectiveness?
- i. What factors drive the emergence and evolution of new criminal markets, and how can early detection improve state responses?

4. Additional Research Priorities in Organized Crime

- a. How do the origins, structures, and strategic environments of criminal organizations shape their evolution and relationships within the broader criminal ecosystem?
- b. How do criminal groups establish and sustain territorial control and governance, and what institutional weaknesses enable and perpetuate these dynamics?
- c. How do variations in local institutional capacity, criminal group organization, and territorial context shape which evidence-based interventions or combinations thereof are most effective in reducing criminal governance?
- d. How do organized criminal groups exert influence over state institutions and decision-making processes? What pathways, weaknesses, and entry points enable them to infiltrate, intimidate, influence, or co-opt these institutions? What institutional safeguards, accountability mechanisms, and broader governance reforms can effectively prevent or mitigate the capture of state functions and corruption driven by organized crime? What role can negotiated agreements or structured communication channels between state actors and criminal organizations play in reducing violence, and under what conditions can enforcement strategies leverage these arrangements to weaken and dismantle transnational criminal organizations?
- e. How are organized criminal groups structured and governed across countries, and how do these structures vary across cities and national contexts? Through what mechanisms do criminal organizations expand their operations to new cities and regions, what factors determine whether these expansions succeed or fail, and how do such dynamics shape broader transnational security landscapes?
- f. What interventions are most effective in disrupting organized criminal groups' operations, territorial control, and governance structures? How can these interventions reduce violence while minimizing unintended consequences such as displacement or escalation?
- g. How can focused deterrence strategies be designed and implemented to disrupt the operational capacity of organized criminal groups in urban settings? Under what conditions do these strategies effectively reduce violence, territorial control, and recruitment?

- h. What enforcement "levers" (including credible threats to disrupt revenue streams, targeted sanctions on leadership, and coordination with intelligence systems) are most effective at weakening urban criminal organizations? How can city- and metropolitan-level authorities deploy these levers in coordination with national and international enforcement efforts?
- i. What lessons can be drawn from current and historical enforcement, military, and secondary prevention campaigns against urban criminal organizations (including anti-mafia operations, gang suppression strategies, targeted dismantlement efforts, targeted counter-recruitment and exit/reentry programs) across different national contexts? Which operational approaches, institutional arrangements, integration with secondary prevention, and sequencing strategies have proven most effective at durably weakening organized criminal groups, and which have backfired or produced unintended escalation?

2. Combating Drug Trafficking and Production

Established and emerging drug markets present a significant challenge for societies worldwide. While traditional plant-based drugs remain dominant, synthetic drug markets are expanding globally, fundamentally transforming trafficking dynamics by lowering barriers to entry for a range of criminal actors. These supply-side transformations intersect with rising drug consumption worldwide, underscoring the urgent need for rigorous research to inform effective responses. Research indicates that hardline law enforcement approaches have proven ineffective at dismantling trafficking activities and frequently escalate violence, yet significant evidence gaps remain in understanding which strategies can effectively disrupt trafficking networks while avoiding triggering violence. Questions could include:

1. Drug Market Dynamics and State Responses

- a. Can state-led interventions effectively disrupt and dismantle drug markets while minimizing violence stemming from power vacuums, territorial disputes, and market destabilization?
- b. Under what conditions are crop substitution programs effective at reducing the farming of illicit crops? What unintended consequences (e.g., recultivation, violence, displacement) can arise from crop substitution programs? What implementation approaches or contextual factors determine whether these programs succeed or fail?
- c. How do drug seizures and other illicit substance interventions affect citizen security? What are other effective alternatives?

2. Supply Chains, Trafficking Routes, and International Cooperation

- a. How do the organizational origins, structures, and capacities of different criminal groups shape their ability to participate in, organize, or innovate within various illicit supply chains?
- b. How can illicit supply chains of synthetic narcotics and their chemical precursors be mapped and analyzed? What are the dynamics, innovations, gaps, and weaknesses that allow them to persist? How can improved intelligence on these networks inform and support anti-trafficking efforts by governments and other stakeholders?
- c. How effective are regulatory and enforcement measures (e.g., pre-export notification systems, purchase quantity thresholds, licensing requirements) in drug-producing and transit countries at controlling precursor chemicals? What characteristics improve the effectiveness of these measures?
- d. How can partnerships with chemical suppliers, logistics firms, and customs authorities be designed to improve the detection and reporting of suspicious precursor transactions? What incentives, technologies, or coordination mechanisms most effectively increase compliance and information-sharing among firms and enforcement agencies involved in precursor chemical regulation? How can partnerships with logistics companies or warehouse operators improve early detection of illicit chemical use?
- e. How do changes in drug supply (e.g., price, purity, or availability) affect demand patterns and user behaviors?
- f. What are the effects of criminal market disruptions (e.g., interdiction, arrests) on patterns of drug use and substitution among consumers?

3. Synthetic Drugs and Emerging Threats

- a. How do small-scale producers, transporters, or distributors decide whether to enter synthetic drug markets compared to traditional drug markets?
- b. How do local enforcement efforts (e.g., targeted police operations, community policing) affect local market structures, dealer behavior, or geographic displacement of synthetic drug activity? How do changes in enforcement intensity, perceived risks, or input costs shape the adoption of synthetic drug production methods?
- c. How have synthetic drug markets transformed the organizational structures and business strategies of transnational criminal organizations? How do synthetic drug markets act as a source of rents for new products for transnational criminal organizations?
- d. What institutional, legal, or policy innovations would enhance the capacity to anticipate, adapt to, and respond to evolving synthetic opioid markets

3. Preventing Crime and Violence

Violent crime costs tens of thousands of lives around the world every year, with organized crime and other crime-related homicides claiming approximately 167,000 lives per year between 2015 and 2021, significantly more than were attributed to global conflicts in the same period. Beyond the massive loss of life, crime and violence result in major losses of capital and act as powerful drivers of migration. Research shows that enforcement and non-enforcement strategies produce varying results: hot spots policing has demonstrated mixed outcomes across different contexts, while approaches such as cognitive behavioral therapy and early childhood interventions have shown promising but sometimes temporary effects. Policymakers require more evidence on how to prevent individual participation in violence and how to prevent future violence for individuals deemed high-risk. Questions could include:

1. Enforcement Strategies: Balancing Crime Reduction, Community Trust, and Accountability

- a. How effective are enforcement strategies that have proven successful in high-income countries in preventing crime and violence in low- and middle-income countries? What types of adaptations are required to make them effective?
- b. How can enforcement strategies (e.g., focused deterrence, hotspot policing, intelligence-led policing, curfew and truancy enforcement, increased penalties for gang-related crimes) be implemented in ways that maximize effectiveness, cost-efficiency, and sustainability while minimizing negative spillover effects and social costs?
- c. How do enforcement strategies that reduce crime and violence within a specific country contribute to international security outcomes, including reductions in illicit migration and human smuggling?
- d. What policing models effectively balance public safety, accountability, and community trust across different contexts?
- e. What is the impact of elite policing units on public safety, accountability, human rights, or public trust?
- f. How does police militarization affect public safety and community trust? Under what conditions is the use of military-style tactics and equipment by police effective or counterproductive?

2. Emerging Forms of Crime

- a. How do emerging technologies influence the nature and scope of transnational crime, including cybercrime?

- b. What interventions can effectively build public awareness of cybercrime? What strategies work best to ensure this information reaches the right people, especially those most at risk?
- c. What mechanisms or cooperative approaches can help strengthen prevention, detection, and response to technology-enabled transnational crimes?

4. Strengthening Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice Systems

Effective law enforcement and criminal justice systems are essential for citizen security, yet many low- and middle-income countries face significant capacity constraints across the entire justice chain—from under-resourced police forces to court systems undermined by delays, backlogs, and corruption. Research shows that targeted interventions can strengthen both policing and courts, from skills training and procedural justice programs for law enforcement to redesigned court procedures and community paralegals that improve access to justice. Yet critical gaps remain in understanding how to strengthen institutions across varied contexts, where sustainable impact requires political will, coordination, and locally tailored solutions. Questions could include:

1. Strengthening Law Enforcement Institutions

- a. What interventions are most effective at improving law enforcement officers' knowledge, skills, and decision-making processes in criminal investigations and case management? How do these measures affect law enforcement performance and community outcomes?
- b. How can police training (including academy curricula, in-service training, and specialized programs) be designed or modified to improve law enforcement response to crime? What is the impact of tactical training and equipment support on police response to specific security threats? Does technical assistance and equipment provision to specialized units improve their operational effectiveness?
- c. How can technology (e.g., AI-driven case prioritization tools) improve law enforcement decision-making across different stages of investigation, case management, and prosecution?
- d. How can intelligence systems be designed and implemented to improve the identification, targeting, and disruption of organized criminal groups? How can non-state organizations contribute to these intelligence systems? What institutional and technological investments yield the greatest improvements in actionable intelligence for law enforcement operating in high-crime urban environments?
- e. How do organizational characteristics, managerial practices, leadership, and human resource management systems shape police force capacity and operational effectiveness? Which combinations of these organizational elements (including structural configurations, performance management, supervision practices, and recruitment and

retention policies) are most critical for ensuring that institutional strengthening investments yield sustainable improvements in law enforcement performance?

2. Strengthening Justice Systems

- a. Do specialized training programs in complex crime areas (e.g., financial crimes, cybercrime, trafficking) improve prosecutors' ability to successfully prosecute these cases? Does training prosecutors in evidence handling, witness examination, and legal writing improve case quality and outcomes? How do different training delivery methods (e.g., short-term workshops vs. long-term mentoring programs) compare in their effectiveness?
- b. What is the impact of institutional strengthening strategies (e.g., case management systems, equipment, office infrastructure) on prosecution outcomes, including conviction rates, case dismissal rates, and case processing times?
- c. What is the effect of training programs on substantive criminal law, criminal procedure, or complex evidentiary issues on the quality and consistency of judicial decisions, case processing times, and rates of case overturns on appeal?
- d. What is the impact of joint training programs for prosecutors and police on evidence quality, case preparation, and conviction rates?
- e. How can judicial information systems be designed to facilitate data-driven decision-making and improve justice system performance? How can the modernization and digitalization of judicial information systems enhance efficiency and reduce bottlenecks in case management and decision-making?
- f. How can an international criminal record-sharing system be designed and implemented, and what impact would it have on crime prevention and the effectiveness of criminal justice systems?
- g. How can judicial performance be measured beyond efficiency metrics or quantity-based indicators (e.g., number of prosecutions, cases processed, rulings issued)? What alternative indicators can better capture the quality of judicial decisions?

Measurement and Design

Learning about the design, implementation, and evaluation of citizen security programming is critical for achieving effective and sustainable outcomes. If programs and policies are not based on evidence, adapted to local contexts, and implemented with clear theories of change, they risk falling short of their goals or producing unintended harm. This cross-cutting section identifies a set of relevant questions on how to improve programming and policy across the areas encompassed in CSRI's research priorities, including how to target, deliver, monitor, evaluate, and scale citizen security interventions. Questions could include:

- a. How can programs effectively identify and engage individuals and communities most at risk without causing stigmatization or unintended harm?
- b. What strategies most effectively sustain engagement of high-risk populations in programs over time?
- c. What program design elements (including intervention timing, intensity, duration, sequencing, and service combinations) and delivery approaches are most effective at achieving sustained effects?
- d. How can multi-sectoral programming be coordinated and implemented to maximize effectiveness in addressing citizen security challenges? What coordination mechanisms and governance structures enable successful collaboration across agencies?
- e. What factors determine whether intervention effects persist, fade, or strengthen over time? How can programs be designed to maximize the durability of impacts?
- f. How do interventions affect non-participants, neighboring communities, and broader crime dynamics? How can program design leverage positive spillovers while minimizing displacement and other unintended consequences?
- g. Existing methods of measuring crime and violence are often flawed, incomplete, and subject to systematic biases. Given these limitations, what indicators best capture the effectiveness of citizen security interventions? How can measurement approaches be designed to reliably assess program impacts across different contexts?
- h. What types of data (e.g., administrative records, victimization surveys, ethnographic research, big data such as social media or mobility data) are most reliable and feasible for assessing program outcomes?
- i. Which interventions achieve the greatest reduction in citizen security outcomes per dollar spent?
- j. How can programs be systematically adapted across different contexts while maintaining their core effectiveness? Which adaptation elements (such as modifying content, training providers on local contexts, or integrating community resources) are most critical for program effectiveness?
- k. What are the most efficient delivery mechanisms or incentives for adoption at scale across different contexts? How can interventions be delivered at scale while maintaining effectiveness?

V. Project Types

The initiative will consider proposals for the following types of projects. Please choose the grant type that best represents your project stage.

- **Pilot Studies:** These grants are intended to lay the groundwork for **future full impact evaluation studies**. Eligible projects must have a clear research question, defined intervention, and established partnerships, but require substantial upfront investments in

design or measurement before a full evaluation can proceed. Activities may include A/B testing, uptake and feasibility studies, refinement of power calculations, development of new measurement approaches, analysis of existing data, piloting survey instruments, or new data collection. *These awards support research pilots, not the interventions themselves.* (Maximum award: US\$75,000)

- **Full Impact Evaluation Studies:** These grants are for rigorous impact evaluations that assess the causal effects of an intervention, program, or policy. Projects must include committed implementing partners, a well-defined research design, and statistical power estimates. Both experimental and quasi-experimental approaches are eligible, provided they identify a valid control or comparison group. Studies may use existing data, collect new data, or integrate multiple sources. CSRI will also consider requests for supplementary funding to extend ongoing studies or measure the long-term impacts of completed ones. (Maximum award: US\$400,000)
- **Infrastructure Support and Public Goods Creation:** These grants are for the creation of data or tools that can support several research projects or types of analyses, ultimately supporting the design or implementation of future impact evaluations, other research projects, interventions, and/or policies. Examples of this ‘infrastructure’ include the creation or development of panel datasets, administrative datasets, surveying or analytical software, measurement strategies, and similar assets. Projects will represent a ‘public good’ for the research community and/or policy and practice stakeholders. (Maximum award: US\$250,000)
- **Foundational and Contextual Research:** This category supports studies that build foundational, empirical, or conceptual understanding of emerging or understudied issues in citizen security. These projects are not designed to estimate causal effects but to map actors, dynamics, and trends in complex or evolving settings. They can include a range of descriptive and exploratory approaches, such as qualitative research (e.g., in-depth interviews, focus group discussions), quantitative analysis of primary or secondary data (e.g., surveys, administrative records, or observational data), or mixed-method designs. Their goal is to inform future research and policy innovation. (Maximum award: US\$75,000)

CSRI funds are restricted to research-related costs and may not be used for program or intervention implementation. Eligible expenses include data collection and analysis, dissemination, and research staff time, including research assistants and research managers. Principal investigators (PIs) whose institutional salary does not fully cover their time on the project may request supplemental salary support, which will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Implementation or operational costs for interventions, services, or programs are ineligible.

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 CSRI team at justice@poverty-action.org.

Although funding requests should remain within the established category caps, it is important to note that these caps represent maximum award amounts, and many grants will be smaller. CSRI applies a strong value-for-money approach and prioritizes proposals that demonstrate efficient use of resources relative to their expected contribution to evidence and policy impact. In cases where higher budgets are justified by the study's unique policy relevance, methodological rigor, or operational complexity, exceptions may be considered. However, proposals requesting larger amounts will be held to a correspondingly higher standard of justification, feasibility, and anticipated impact. Requests exceeding the category cap must include a clear justification of the additional resources required and their added value.

VI. Achieving Impact

This initiative will be successful if the knowledge generated through supported studies is used to inform changes in research, policy, and practice on citizen security and justice. Examples of impactful studies include those that challenge the conventional wisdom on a subject, especially the assumptions that academics, policymakers, and practitioners typically bring to problems; those that inform changes to the studied programs; those that probe the mechanisms underpinning programs; those that generate evidence on under-researched contexts or topics; and those that identify scalable solutions.

To that end, in addition to publishing an academic journal article and presenting in academic forums, we expect grantees to engage meaningfully with their implementing partners, publish non-technical research summaries and briefs with actionable policy recommendations, participate in broader dissemination events convened by IPA, and engage in dialogues with policymakers or practitioners supporting or designing similar programs. CSRI staff will support grantees with many of these activities.

All supported impact evaluations will be required to collect cost data that can be used for cost-effectiveness analysis, following IPA's costing guidelines and provided templates. Cost-effectiveness analysis can assist policymakers when choosing how to allocate resources between different programs, or deciding to replicate or scale up a program that is demonstrated to be effective. Projects demonstrating positive impacts on the outcomes of interest will be required to make cost-effectiveness data publicly available, and all evaluations will be required to make the per-unit cost of programs public.

VII. Funding Criteria

Evaluation Criteria

Proposals are reviewed by a rotating group of academic researchers and, in some cases, policy reviewers. Projects are assessed against five equally weighted evaluation criteria:

Academic Contribution	<p>Does the study address CSRI’s priority research areas? Does the study make a significant contribution toward advancing knowledge in the field? How does the study integrate existing research, and how does it contribute? For pilots and full studies, is the research designed to identify causal mechanisms (i.e., how an intervention achieves impact)? Does it answer new questions, evaluate new interventions, or introduce novel methods or measures? Does the research strategy provide a bridge between a practical experiment and underlying academic theories?</p>
Policy Relevance	<p>Is there demand from policymakers or practitioners for more/better information to influence their decisions in this area? Will the results from this study have generalizable implications? For pilots and full studies, what is the estimated cost of the intervention? Is the intervention scalable? Is it replicable?</p>
Technical Design	<p>Does the research design appropriately answer the questions outlined in the proposal? Are there threats that could compromise the validity of results? If so, does the proposal sufficiently address those threats? For impact evaluation studies, are designs appropriately powered to detect results?</p>
Project Viability	<p>Is the project’s implementation plan realistic and achievable? Is the proposed project design feasible given the available resources, timeline, and context? Does the research team have a track record of implementing successful projects similar to the one being proposed? Are there any other logistical or political obstacles that might threaten the completion of the study, such as government authorization or Human Subjects review?</p> <p>For full studies, is the relationship with the implementing partner strong and likely to endure through the entire study? What is the credibility and policy influence of the implementing partner? Does the implementing partner have committed or prospective sources of funding for the intervention? What is the implementing partner’s prior experience implementing this type of program?</p> <p>For pilots, do researchers describe how piloting activities would inform a full-scale impact evaluation?</p> <p>For infrastructure support and public goods creation projects and foundational and contextual research, are the planned outcomes achievable</p>

with the proposed budget and timeframe? Are there any anticipated barriers to accessing, producing, and analyzing the needed data?

Value for Money

Is the cost of the study commensurate with the value of expected contributions to the body of evidence and policy? Does the study leverage funding from other sources?

Additional Considerations

When reviewing proposals, staff and researchers will also consider:

- **Ethical Considerations:** Reviewers will consider whether there is any risk of harm to research participants and staff, what the proposed risk mitigation strategies are, and how the possible benefits of the research compare to the possible harms. Projects are required to have secured all necessary research approvals from all relevant local, national, and international ethics committees before beginning fieldwork. Given the particular security risks of many people in the contexts CSRI focuses on, we ask applicants to elaborate on the ethical considerations underpinning their work in addition to fulfilling IPA’s regular IRB review requirements, with a particular focus on the safety and security of research participants and staff. We ask that researchers keep the best interests of the target population in mind throughout all stages of their research activities.
- **Team Quality:** CSRI prioritizes proposals with the highest quality research teams. We value proposals from teams with researchers or other research team members (research associates, managers, enumerators, etc.) from the countries where the project will take place and/or with lived experiences related to the topic, as it facilitates projects that are appropriately tailored to local contexts, and therefore more viable. We also encourage prospective applicants to work across disciplines. Ultimately, CSRI is dedicated to selecting teams based on merit.

Researcher Qualifications

Proposals for **pilot** and **full impact evaluation studies** must be submitted by a Researcher (or Principal Investigator/PI), in collaboration with an Implementing Partner(s), and a Research Management Team. These are the eligibility criteria for each of these actors:

- **Researchers:** Applicants must demonstrate experience in conducting academic-quality research, using relevant impact evaluation methodologies, and have relevant sector expertise. At least one researcher per project must be affiliated with a university and hold or be pursuing a PhD.
- **Implementing Partners:** Program implementers may include civil society organizations, governments, multilateral agencies, or private sector entities implementing the program or policy that will be evaluated. They must demonstrate their support for the proposal

and their commitment to the rigorous implementation of the proposed intervention and evaluation. CSRI can support matchmaking between researchers and implementing partners when necessary. If you are an implementing organization searching for a researcher, please fill out [this form](#) or contact justice@poverty-action.org for more information.

- **Research Management:** Projects collecting primary data should specify the research management organization that will assist with data collection and study oversight. The organization must demonstrate experience conducting fieldwork in the location(s) where the study will take place. Projects taking place in countries where IPA has a [presence](#) are expected to be run through the local IPA Country Office or respective team, as these teams have the experience and long-term presence to ensure that projects meet excellent research quality standards, maintain strong partner relationships, and integrate with the work of the initiative and IPA as a whole. Applicants should provide a clear motivation if they choose to work with another research management organization in a country where IPA is present.

For **infrastructure and public goods** and **foundational and contextual research proposals**, an implementing partner is not required. These proposals must be submitted by a Researcher (or PI) meeting the same qualifications outlined above, and should specify a Research Management Team if primary data collection is involved.

In limited and exceptional cases, CSRI may consider proposals where the relevant researcher is affiliated with a recognized research institution other than a university, provided that this affiliation demonstrates standards of academic rigor and research capacity comparable to those of a university. Such institutions may include independent research institutes, think tanks, or other entities with a demonstrated experience conducting rigorous and policy-relevant impact evaluations and a clear track record of publishing these studies in academic journals. To support this assessment, applicants should provide documentation such as the organization’s research portfolio, relevant publications, and evidence of prior externally funded research projects of a similar scope or nature to the proposed study.

For further eligibility information, please see our [Application Instructions](#).

Subrecipient Organization

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

As this funding originates 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>.

VIII. Timeline and Application Process

Dates for Round I

- **March 2, 2026:** Call for Proposals released
- **April 15, 2026:** Full proposal deadline
- **July 2026:** Results released

Application Instructions

Please find our application instructions [here](#), with more information on eligibility, research management expectations, submission procedures, and grant terms.

IX. Related Initiatives

When applying to CSRI, consider whether your proposal may be better suited for one of the following initiatives managed by IPA and J-PAL, which often cover similar geographies and also emphasize supporting innovation and basic research that maximizes generalizability and policy relevance.

IPA's funding is open to all academic researchers, whereas J-PAL's funding is restricted to J-PAL affiliates, invited researchers, and, in some cases, Low- and Middle-Income Countries (LMIC) based scholars. If you are uncertain about which initiative to apply to, please email justice@poverty-action.org.

IPA Peace & Recovery Initiative (PRI): PRI aims to improve outcomes for conflict- and crisis-affected populations by building the evidence base on reducing violence and fragility, promoting peace, building social cohesion, and preventing, managing, and recovering from crises. Ultimately, research supported by the initiative is intended to contribute to the design of better policies and programs that contribute to stability and resilience in fragile and violence-affected states.

IPA Human Trafficking Research Initiative (HTRI): HTRI is dedicated to supporting the generation of rigorous research on counter-trafficking programs and strategies to inform future counter-trafficking interventions. The initiative funds research across the 4Ps of human trafficking (Prevention, Protection, Prosecution, and Partnership) to fill priority evidence gaps and guide the field toward solutions that are ethical, effective, and responsive to the needs of trafficking-affected communities.

J-PAL Crime and Violence Initiative (CVI): CVI fosters experimental research on crime and social and political violence. Crime and violence can hinder economic development and urban growth, and exacerbate governance challenges by fostering corruption and draining public sector resources. Given the wide reach of these adverse effects, the initiative funds evaluations that focus on preventing, mitigating, and responding to the effects of crime and violence. (Limited to J-PAL affiliates, invited researchers, and [LMIC-based scholars](#))

J-PAL Governance Initiative (GI): GI funds randomized impact evaluations of programs designed to improve participation in the political and policy process, reduce leakages in public programs, and improve state capacity. GI's research priorities are identified in the [Governance Initiative Review Paper](#) or its [Executive Summary](#). (Limited to J-PAL affiliates and invited researchers)

X. Contact

Please direct all inquiries to justice@poverty-action.org.

XI. About IPA

[Innovations for Poverty Action](#) is a research and policy nonprofit that discovers and advances what works to improve the lives of people living in poverty. With a long-term presence in 16 countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, and research and policy engagements in a number of other countries across the globe, IPA leads the field of development in cutting-edge research quality, innovation, and impact. In recent decades, trillions of dollars have been spent on programs designed to reduce global poverty, but clear evidence about which programs succeed is rare, and when evidence does exist, decision-makers often do not know about it. IPA exists to bring together leading researchers and these decision-makers to ensure that the evidence we create leads to tangible impacts on the world. Since our founding in 2002, IPA has worked with over 600 leading academics to conduct over 1,400 evaluations in more than 60 countries. This research has informed hundreds of successful programs that have impacted hundreds of millions of people worldwide.

Annex: Research Resources

The resources below were identified in consultations with researchers, practitioners, and policymakers, or through IPA’s work, as valuable resources for applicants to consider when researching citizen security- and justice-related topics. The list is by no means exhaustive.

Literature Reviews and Reports

Governance, Crime, and Conflict Initiative Evidence Wrap-up (2021), J-PAL and IPA	This evidence review offers a broad review of the rigorous impact evaluations on reducing crime, violence, and conflict, and seeks to capture emerging insights from across studies.
New Evidence on Crime and Violence: Insights from Low- and Middle-Income Countries (2025), IPA	This brief highlights completed and ongoing evaluations supported and/or implemented by IPA on interventions to reduce crime and violence through both direct pathways, such as policing, and indirect pathways, such as strengthening health systems, preventing gender based violence, and shifting public attitudes toward victims.
Organised Crime and Development (2025), Santiago Tobón & María Micaela Sviatschi	This evidence review summarizes research on the causes, development impacts, and policy responses to organized crime, highlighting how criminal groups harm economic and social outcomes and what approaches can reduce violence and recruitment.
Rule of Law Evidence Gap Map , International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie)	This evidence gap map systematically maps and categorizes the available impact evaluations and reviews of interventions aimed at strengthening the rule of law and justice, showing where evidence exists and where gaps remain for future research.

Research Implementation Resources

IPA Research Protocols , IPA	Every research project that IPA conducts or funds is required to follow the linked research protocols, or "Minimum Must Dos," in order to ensure that IPA produces high-quality research.
Low-cost, Automated WhatsApp Surveys , Immigration Policy Lab	This is a public survey tool for deploying surveys on WhatsApp, which has been used with hard-to-reach and highly mobile populations.
Repository of Measurement and Survey Design Resources , J-PAL	This repository provides a list of resources on measurement and survey design relating to various topics.

Ethics Resources

<p>Ethical conduct of randomized evaluations (2022), J-PAL</p>	<p>This resource is intended as a practical guide for researchers to use when considering the ethics of a given research project.</p>
<p>IPV Field Research: When All the Questions Are Hard Questions (2020), IPA</p>	<p>Understanding how to keep people safe from violence and trauma is critically important, yet violence research is fraught with challenges. This resource from IPA's Intimate Partner Violence Initiative shares some strategies from the initiative on conducting responsible and ethical IPV research.</p>
<p>The Ethical Contours of Research in Crisis Settings: Five Practical Considerations for Academic Institutional Review Boards and Researchers (2019), International Rescue Committee</p>	<p>This paper seeks to describe five issues particular to humanitarian settings that IRBs should consider and on which they should provide recommendations to overcome associated challenges: staged reviews of protocols in acute emergencies, flexible reviews of modification requests, addressing violence and the traumatic experiences of participants, difficulties in attaining meaningful informed consent among populations dependent on aid, and ensuring reviews are knowledgeable of populations' needs.</p>
<p>The Safe and Ethical Conduct of Violence Research (2018), IPA</p>	<p>This document provides a brief overview of the policies and best practices for ensuring the safe and ethical conduct of violence research at IPA. It is intended for principal investigators and research staff who are already familiar with the ethics of human subjects research but are interested in more specific guidance related to the collection of violence data.</p>