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Frequently Asked Questions Human Trafficking Research Initiative Competitive Fund

What is HTRI?

The Human Trafficking Research Initiative (HTRI) at Innovations for Poverty Action is a five-year project funded by the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (the TIP Office) at the U.S. Department of State that 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?

In order to expand the evidence on human trafficking, IPA funds new research that advances the understanding of what works to reduce trafficking and improve current policies and practices. The priority themes and guiding questions for the Competitive Fund were developed through a consultative process with leading policymakers, practitioners, and researchers, culminating in [HTRI's Research and Learning and Agenda](#). This Research and Learning Agenda identifies gaps in current research and priority research questions that HTRI intends to answer through its competitive award funding.

[HTRI's Competitive Fund](#) includes several rounds of requests for applications for two types of funding opportunities:

- Seed funding – 3 rounds. IPA 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 \$50,000, is to advance early-stage

discussion between researchers and implementing organizations to the point where they have viable research project designs and plans. 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) – 2-3 rounds. IPA will invite 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.

When will HTRI release its next calls for funding?

- Seed funding: the first and second rounds of seed funding have been completed; a third call for applications for seed funding is expected to be announced in early 2023. Selected projects are anticipated to begin in mid-2023.
- Full research funding: the first round of full research funding has been completed; the Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) for the second round of full research funding was released in early June 2022. Selected projects for the second round of funding are expected to begin in early 2023.

Where can I find the NOFO, and how do I apply?

Potential applicants can find active NOFOs on the Competitive Fund tab on HTRI's website: <https://www.poverty-action.org/human-trafficking-research-initiative/competitive-fund>

Is there a predetermined funding amount for awards?

- Full research projects, including the continuation of completion of RCTs that have already started without HTRI funding: We anticipate funding between \$200,000 to \$450,000 per award.
- "Add-ons" for an existing research project/RCT, including additional survey rounds, survey modules, or a human trafficking-targeted treatment arm: We anticipate funding between \$50,000 to \$250,000 per award.
- Small research pilots of promising interventions: We anticipate funding between \$10,000 to \$50,000 per pilot.

- Seed money for an exploratory travel grant or staff time to build on nascent research ideas: We anticipate funding between \$10,000 and \$15,000 per award.
- Small grants for data work using existing sources to examine program impact: We anticipate funding approximately \$10,000 per award.

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 NOFO. Typically, seed grants run anywhere from six to ten months, and full research studies that can range from seven months to two years, depending on the category of funding requested.

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](#). You should also plan to include someone on your research team with experience conducting RCTs. Even if the subject of their RCTs is not strictly related to human trafficking, your team will benefit greatly from their experience running this type of evaluation, and your application is much more likely to be recommended for funding.

Why does HTRI focus on RCTs? What are “treatment” and “control” groups in an RCT?

HTRI is focused on funding research that uses rigorous quantitative and experimental methods, such as RCTs, 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. 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.

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 full proposals in HTRI’s full research 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?

There are currently not many completed RCTs (fewer than 10), but the human trafficking RCTs and quasi-experimental impact evaluations we are aware of have been included in Section A of Annex 1 in [HTRI’s Research and Learning Agenda](#). We would recommend reviewing the studies listed in this section, especially if any overlap with your planned research topic. Examples of ongoing RCTs currently funded by HTRI can be found on the [Funded Projects](#) tab of HTRI’s website. Additionally, Annex 1 (Section B) in the Research and Learning Agenda includes examples of what we would call “human trafficking-adjacent” research, such as microcredit, cash transfers, the graduation approach, and other interventions that could be adapted to counter-trafficking programs.

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

All types of organizations are certainly 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 request cannot exceed the maximum funding amount per proposal type (see "Is there a predetermined funding amount for awards?" 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 who can fund research in the U.S. and thus these projects are not eligible for funding under HTRI. Please consult other fundings opportunities such as those through the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services Office on Trafficking in Persons ([OTIP](#)), and the U.S. Department of Justice's Office for Victims of Crime ([OVC](#)) and National Institute of Justice ([NIJ](#)). Note that NIJ has recently released calls for funding specifically for research and evaluation on trafficking in persons in the U.S.

Do you value all of the "4P's" for combatting human trafficking equally?

HTRI considers all "[4P's](#)" (prevention, protection, prosecution and partnership) equally valuable for research. Because research of this type is relatively new to this field, there are many opportunities for research under each "P" category. Applicants are instructed to read [HTRI's Research and Learning Agenda](#), which outlines key research gaps under the [4P's](#), and to note in their proposal which of HTRI's priority research questions the research project intends to address.

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 thought through and you believe they are all 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, if they are interested in partnering with an implementing organization, can help guide the research design process. If your intervention occurs in a country where there is an IPA Country Office, we also recommend looking at the Studies tab of the relevant IPA Country Office page (see [here](#) for a list of IPA Country Offices). The "Researchers" field at the top of these Studies pages show all of the researchers who have led research projects in that country. 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.

This document was funded by a grant from the United States Department of State. The opinions, findings and conclusions stated herein are those of the author[s] and do not necessarily reflect those of the United States Department of State.