

***Amy Mahan Research Fellowship Program to Assess the
Impact of Public Access to ICTs***

***Award Criteria and Selection
Process***

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Overview of Selection Process

Selection of Research Fellows will proceed in four stages.

The first stage will consist of a first sifting through the applications by the Program Manager and the Program Officer to make sure that eligibility requirements are met.

In a second stage the Program Manager and the corresponding Regional partner will review every application received from each region and make a first selection of the top ten applications for each region. The following **first-order selection criteria** will be used to score the applications.

1. Presentation and clarity of the proposal
2. Potential impact of research findings
3. Quality of research design and methodology
4. Scholarship record of Principal investigator.
5. Adequacy of Budget, Work Plan and Plan for the Application of Funds
6. Gender sensitivity of research proposal
7. Impact on developing country research capacity.

In the third stage a 9-member Selection Panel will apply the same 7 criteria to appraise the top 10 high-scoring applications from each region, 30 in all. The composition of the Selection Panel is as follows:

- 1 Program Manager, Universitat Pompeu Fabra (UPF)
- 1 Representative from IDRC
- 3 Regional partners
- 2 Senior UPF staff
- 2 External Reviewers

The target is to grant 4 Grants per region, provided that all research awards meet a basic standard of quality. Some adjustments in the Selection Panel's ordering of proposals may be undertaken during the third stage in order to ensure that two second-order selection criteria are also met: diversity in the origin of proposals and research topic.

In the fourth and final stage the results of the selection process and awards will be announced and formal Fellowship offers will be made to the Researchers and Support Institutions selected.

Eligibility Requirements and Selection Criteria

Stand-alone proposals will be considered, but individual researchers who wish to submit a proposal are encouraged to explore ways to collaborate with other scholars and submit a joint application to increase the chances that their proposal is selected for an award. The term Fellows is used to describe all members of a team that have been selected and awarded project support. A Research Fellowship awarded to a team covers: grant funding, training and technical advisory support as previously described.

Applications may be submitted in English, Spanish, French or Portuguese.

Eligibility Requirements

To be considered for a Fellowship the following eligibility requirements must be met.

1. The application must identify one (or more) critical research questions that will be addressed by the research investigation proposed, and justify this selection in terms of:

- i. its importance for assessing the impact of public access to ICTs; and
- ii. the likely public policy implications of research findings.

2. All members of a team submitting a proposal will co-sign their submission and designate a Principal investigator. All team members will acknowledge that, if their proposal is selected, the Principal investigator will be responsible for receiving and administering grant funds, overseeing the realization of project activities and project benchmarks, and submitting quarterly financial and performance reports as prescribed by the Fellowship contract.

3. The Principal investigator must:

- Be an emerging scholar, i.e. is presently pursuing a graduate research degree, or is a professional that received his or her doctorate degree at most 7 years prior to the submission;
- Be a permanent resident of a country in Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean or Africa and the Middle East;
- Give evidence (long term contract, tenured position, etc) of a commitment to remain at the same institution for the duration of the funding period;
- Give evidence of current involvement in research activities, a long-term commitment to a research career, be currently involved in research training or have completed research training.
- Have a formal affiliation with an institution or with a consortium or institutions based in Asia or in Latin America and the Caribbean or in Africa and the Middle East. These may be academic, public sector, private sector or civil society institutions. The Director of Research of the corresponding institution must sign the application in its behalf, endorsing the application and confirming the institution's support for the Principal investigator and the proposed research project.

4. The Principal investigator will need to certify his or her willingness and ability to travel abroad to participate in a Training and Research Planning Workshop shortly after the start of the Program; receive and administer the funds according to the use specified in this application and in a timely fashion; oversee the realization of project activities and the completion of project outputs according to the Implementation Plan presented herewith, and submit quarterly financial and performance reports as prescribed by the grant contract.

5. Any fieldwork required will need to take place primarily in one or more developing countries in the three target regions. Application should specify the total duration of the fieldwork activities and the amount of time these activities will be take in developing countries.

6. The proposed investigation will need to be completed within 12 months after the grant is awarded. The period of completion may be shorter, but may not exceed 12 months.

7. The products of research funded by this Training Program will be open access, with findings and publications freely available to the research community. Research results will be subjected to standard peer review procedures and published by Pompeu Fabra University (online and in hard copy). Researchers may also publish their findings elsewhere provided that the publisher respects the open access principle. All co-applicants must certify their accord with making the products of their research available in open access repositories.

8. The research grant request is for acceptable items of expenditure as specified in the budgetary guidelines below.

9. The Principal investigator has presented three or more suitable and verifiable references.

10. The proposed study is new and original research. Requests for complementary funding may be considered, but only on an exceptional basis and requires that a suitable justification is provided in a separate Annex specifying: i. Why funding for the proposed expansion not included in the original study? ii. How will the original study's scope be expanded using Amy Mahan Program Grant funds? iii. What has already been achieved by the original study and its findings that would now justify the proposed expansion?

11. The proposed study does not present inordinate risks that could prevent the completion of the study as described in the application form.

12. All members of a team submitting a proposal must agree to fully comply with fundamental ethical standards of research spelled out in Annex E. The Principal investigator will further agree to immediately report to the Program Manager any difficulties it may encounter in complying with these ethical standards and propose suitable corrective action, and to present in the study's final report a description of how the research team complied with the ethical standards in carrying out their study.

13. If a study proposal presented for this Fellowship is likely to result in undue duplication of efforts with the second-phase Global Impact Study's in-depth probes, it will be disallowed. In practice, duplication of efforts is improbable because in-depth probes target a limited number of countries and focus on particular hypotheses and approaches. It is more likely that some of the studies supported by this Program's Fellowships will overlap and fruitfully complement the Global Impact Study's in-depth probes.

Applicants will be advised to make sure that the study they propose for a Fellowship will make a significant contribution beyond that foreseen by the in-depth Global Impact Study probes, by reviewing the detailed description of those probes in <http://www.globalimpactstudy.org/researchdesign/methodologies/> before choosing their topic and research design.

Use of Research Grant Funds

Grant proceeds are intended to support new research. On an exceptional basis, the selection Panel may grant an award that gives supplementary support to a public access impact study already under way. In order to do so, applicants must justify such a study and specify with precision how grant proceeds will be used for the sole purpose of expanding the scope of the ongoing research.

Additional Fellowship support – e.g. participation in the training workshop, the cost of international advice, or site visits by advisors – are over and above direct research costs, and should not be included in the budget.

Grant funds may be used to reimburse the Support Institution for the cost of the staff it will allocate to the research study and up to 13 percent of grant funding to help cover indirect costs e.g. travel provided by the institution, computer facilities, meeting rooms, secretarial assistance, materials, photocopying, etc.

The grant budget attached to the Application Form should only include figures for direct cash contributions to cover those expenses to be incurred in the research. The total costs of the research study may not exceed contributions from the Fellowship, the support institution or other funders.

To help applicants prepare their grant budgets, a Guide is included in Annex E and is also available as a stand-alone document for download at:

www.upf.edu/AmyMahan/BudgetGuide.

First-order Selection criteria

Grant applications will be selected following a rigorous appraisal process that will take into account the merits of each application according to seven criteria.

1. Presentation and Clarity of the Proposal

This criterion values the extent to which an application is thorough, precise and easy to understand.

	Score per Panel Member
Excellent presentation. All the information needed to assess the proposal is covered. Proposal is well written and easy to understand.	3
Good presentation. Proposal can be understood, but there are a few departures from excellence (e.g. verbose, awkward writing, several typographical or grammatical errors, awkward page numbering, etc).	2
Satisfactory presentation. Everything needed is there, but some parts of the application are difficult to understand.	1
Poor presentation. Requires considerable work before objectives, methodology and impact can be understood and appraised.	0

2. Importance of study: Potential impact of research findings

The potential impact of the proposed study will be judged considering three attributes:

- i. **Research impact:** Extent to which the study is likely to:
 - increase our understanding of the Impact of public venues that provide access to ICT's and adequately address the attribution challenge;
 - fill important research gaps.
- ii. **Public Policy Impact:** Significance that the study's findings are likely to have on important aspects of public and donor policy and program design.
- iii. **Impact on low-income people:** Potential effects of the study's expected findings on the livelihoods and welfare of low-income people?

	Score per Panel Member
Completing the research proposed will: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- improve our understanding of one or more important research questions, addresses the attribution challenge adequately, and is likely to fill important research gaps;- inform specific high priority public policy and program design issues; and- could have a significant effect on low-income people.	3
It is a good proposal but somewhat weak in one of the three criteria used to appraise the study's importance.	2
Carrying out the research project will advance our understanding with respect to a priority research questions in a limited domain regarding the impact of public venues that provide access to ICTs.	1
Contribution of proposed investigation to understanding of the impact of public access to ICTs will be negligible.	0

3. Quality of research design

The quality of research design will be assessed, in reference to: a. theoretical framework used, b. methods and data, c. multidisciplinary perspective, d. adequate approach to financial costs and benefits, as pertinent to the requirements of their research;

a. Rigor in the theoretical sense

Proposals should have cast their research using a sound theoretical framework that is suitable for their purposes. For a thorough discussion on frameworks in ICT impact research and advantages and disadvantages under different circumstances see: <http://ict4dblog.wordpress.com/2008/12/03/impact-assessment-of-ict4d-projects>.

b. Rigor in research methods and use of data

An unfortunate of the telecentre field is that a plethora of research studies are done using qualitative approaches that are insufficiently rigorous. Quite often they are advocacy studies, carried under the auspices of a program's sponsors and intended to demonstrate the impact of the program, as opposed to providing a critical independent appraisal of the effects of a program.

Another common misconception is to associate methodological rigor exclusively with quantitative approaches that, for example, analyze the results of representative sample surveys, or of Randomized Controlled Trials (RCT) or quasi-experiments.

A research design that uses qualitative techniques (ethnographic studies, semi-structured interviews, focus groups) can be rigorous when properly conducted. Qualitative research is particularly useful when trying to understand complex dynamic phenomena, for example, to clarify the perceptions of different stakeholders, track unique events, or understand change processes. (See www.wjh.harvard.edu/nsfqual/papers.htm)

Mixed designs often work best, with qualitative tools used to understand complex phenomena and quantitative techniques used in a complementary fashion to determine the extent to which sample observations are applicable in a broader setting.

c. Integration of multidisciplinary perspectives

Appraising the impact of public access to ICTs often requires comprehensive approaches and this often means getting insights and interpretations from several disciplines. Applications with a research design that judiciously incorporates multi-disciplinary perspectives will tend to be favored.

	Score per Panel Member
Excellent. Research design is theoretically and methodologically rigorous, judiciously incorporates pertinent multidisciplinary perspectives. Data and methodology to be used are well defined, properly address the attribution challenge and are likely to be used effectively and productively.	3
Research design is good but requires some adjustments.	2
Research design is acceptable, but will need to be improved significantly.	1
The research design is unacceptable in its present form.	0

4. *Scholarship record of Principal investigator*

Prior success in conducting academic research in ICT for development and in other fields will be weighted favorably. Letters of institutional support and recommendations presented will be taken into consideration.

	Score per Panel Member
Principal investigator has an academic record of excellence and some peer-reviewed publications to their credit.	3
Principal investigator has a good academic record and has successfully conducted some prior research investigations.	2
Principal investigator has a good academic record and is a promising scholar with potential for successfully conducting research in ICT for development; but has limited prior research experience.	1
Principal investigator has not presented evidence of having sufficient academic credentials to show he or she can successfully lead the proposed research project.	0

5. *Adequacy of Budget, Outputs and Implementation and Disbursement Plan*

Each investigation will need to be completed in a period of 6 to 12 months including the time to prepare a report on findings that is suitable for publication.

The Budget presented by the applicant will include the funds being requested from the Fellowship Program as well as any parallel financing or facilities that will be available and used by the applicant in the course of the investigation.

The Implementation and Disbursement Plan for the research needs to be realistic and consistent with resources available. Disbursements will be contingent on the delivery of intermediate outputs and a final research report. Should the applicant be selected as Research Fellow, the Implementation and Disbursement Plan will be used to time the disbursement of research grant proceeds.

Risks associated with the study should be thoroughly identified and addressed by the applicants. Suitable risk mitigating measures should be incorporated in the research design, and taken into consideration when projecting expenses and implementation timelines.

	Score per Panel Member
The Budget, Outputs and Implementation and Disbursement Plan, are appropriate for the research design. Risks are well identified and addressed adequately. The sponsoring institution has certified its willingness to support the investigation and has the resources to help meet objectives in a timely fashion and to come to aid in the event of a contingency.	3
Budget, Outputs and Disbursement Plan are appropriate for the research design, but risks and contingencies are not fully assessed or provided for.	2

Budget, Work Plan and Disbursement Plan are sound but insufficiently developed, not fully compatible or not realistic in terms of what can be accomplished with planned resources.	1
The proposed budget and Disbursement Plan cannot be understood or is not realistic.	0

6. Gender sensitivity

	Score per Panel Member
The research proposal identifies key gender issues germane to the research topic addressed, and has a sensible strategy to deal with them.	3
The proposal identifies most of the key gender issues associated with the research task, but the strategy proposed to deal with them may be improved.	2
The proposal shows some gender sensitivity but lacks a well-defined strategy to address gender issues.	1
The proposal is gender insensitive,	0

7. Impact on developing country research capacity.

The first six criteria cover quality features of the application. This seventh criterion seeks to recognize the value of high quality proposal that, in addition, are likely to make a significant contribution to the build up of local research capacity.

To grade this criterion, two aspects will be taken into account:

Impact on participating researchers: number of emerging researchers from developing countries involved meaningfully in the investigation and practical implications of their involvement (e.g. whether it will help them complete a higher degree or increase employment opportunities, get a promotion, etc);

Impact on sponsoring institution: extent to which the award will help strengthen the sponsoring institution. This is difficult to anticipate or measure, and will vary according to the interest of the institution and its staff. Participation in the Fellowship may, for example, provide an opportunity to strengthen ICT research networks within the institution and with researchers abroad, by improving skills of research staff, by leveraging funding from local governments, by extending research services to neighboring communities, by enhancing the institution's dialogue with policymakers, by reinforcing existing programs of research on the impact of public access to ICTs, by facilitating presentations and conferences by participants and advisors, etc.

Only applications that satisfy basic standards of excellence will benefit from this criterion. Panel Members who assigns a grade of 1 or more to each and every one

of the previous criteria (1 through 6), may add one, two or three additional points to the total score, applying the following guidelines:

	Score per Panel Member
Application comes from a research team or network that engages three or more researchers in the project, each in a substantive way , and gives evidence that its realization will strengthen ICT research in a developing country institution.	3
Application comes from a research team or network that engages three or more researchers in the proposed investigation, each of them in a substantive way; but the impact on the sponsoring institution is limited.	2
Application comes from a research team significantly engaging at least two researchers, but with limited impact on the support institution.	1

Second-order Selection Criteria

The ideal distribution of the **origin** of Fellowships (country of residence of Principal Investigator and Support Institution) would be 4 per region; and, within each of the 3 regions, one Fellowship to each of 4 applicants, each residing in a different country within the region. It would also be ideal if **topic** diversity were achieved by awarding Fellowships that addressed 12 different high priority topics.

If after applying the 7 first order criteria diversity in origin and topic is achieved by First Round Rankings, no further adjustments in rankings will be made, and the top 4 ranked applications from each region will be awarded a Fellowship.

In practice, an adjustment in first order rankings may be necessary to achieve diversity in country of origin or research topic. If adjustments in first order rankings are necessary, a number of rules will be followed. A description of these rules and of the way they will be applied is given below in connection with Stage III of the selection process.

Stage I: Verification of Eligibility

The Program Manager assisted by the Program Officer will review every application received to verify that they meet eligibility requirements. Eligible applications will be proceed to Stage II – regional review.

Stage II Regional Review

This intermediate stage is intended to expedite the review process by dividing the workload. For each of the 3 regions, the corresponding regional Partner will work together with the Program Manager appraising every eligible application from the region.

The maximum score an application may receive during the regional review is:

$$7 \text{ criteria} \times 3 \text{ (maximum score/criterion)} \times 2 \text{ reviewers (Program Manager + Regional Partner)} = 42$$

The Program Manager will forward the top 10 highest scoring applications from each region, and forward them for grading by the full Selection Panel.

Stage III Appraisal of Top 10 Regional Candidates

At the start of this third stage, each of the 3 Regional Partners will have graded already the top 10 applications from their own region and the Program Manager will have graded all 30 applications.

To complete the appraisal of the top 10 applications from each region, the IDRC representative will during this stage grade 30 applications, and each of the regional partners will grade 20 applications (i.e. the top 10 from each of the other 2 regions).

Basic Quality Standard

To satisfy the basic quality standard an application will need to fulfill two conditions:

- i. It must receive a score of 63 or more from the Selection Panel.
- ii. Not more than three criteria receive a grade lower than 9.

The first condition may be met, for example, by an application with a score of 1 by every one of the 5 panellists on every criterion.

$$1 \text{ (score)} \times 9 \text{ (Panel Members)} \times 7 \text{ (criteria)} = 63$$

Such an application would:

1. Have a satisfactory presentation.
2. Advance our understanding of a priority research question (perhaps in a limited sphere).
3. Have an acceptable research design.
4. Have a promising scholar with a good academic record as Principal investigator (even if with limited prior research experience).
5. Present a sound Budget and Implementation and Disbursement Plan (even if insufficiently developed).
6. The proposal shows some gender sensitivity but lacks a well-defined strategy to address gender issues.
7. Application comes from a research team significantly engaging at least two researchers.

The second condition will ensure that award recipients present proposals that are

balanced in quality; i.e. that they meet basic quality levels (a score of 9 or more) in at least 4 of the 7 selection criteria.

An application that performs poorly (e.g. a score lower than nine) in one or two of the 7 criteria, may still meet the basic quality standard by compensating through a higher rating in the others.

Criterion number 7 does not measure quality, but is included to encourage collaboration between researchers by holding sole-researcher submissions to a higher quality standard. Unlike a group proposal, a sole researcher would not be able to meet the minimum rating of 63 by getting a score of 1 in every criterion because the seventh criterion would be graded zero by every Panel Member.

A sole-researcher may however meet the first condition of the Basic Quality Standard, for example, by getting from each Panel Member a grade of one in 5 of the first six criteria and a score of two in another one.

$$1 \text{ (score)} \times 9 \text{ (Panel Members)} \times 5 \text{ (criteria)} + 2 \text{ (score)} \times 9 \text{ (Panel Members)} \times 1 \text{ (criteria)} = 63$$

Such applicant would also meet the second condition defining the Basic Quality Standard, since he or she would receive a grade of 9 in 5 criteria and a grade of 2 in another one.

R1. Only applications that meet the Basic Quality Standard will be considered for an award.

First Round Ranking of Applications

The First Round Ranking is the ordering of all applications that satisfy the Basic Quality Standard, according to the total score they received by the 9-member Selection Panel.

The maximum first-round score an application may receive by the 9-member Selection Panel is:

$$7 \text{ criteria} \times 3 \text{ (maximum score for each criterion)} \times 9 \text{ Panel Members} = 189$$

The "First Round Pool" is the group of at most 4 top scoring proposals from each of the 3 regions that also meet the Basic Quality Standard; i.e. they each must have received a score of at least 63 points.

R2. If the First Round Pool consists of the 4 top ranked proposals from within each region meet the Basic Quality Standard, and if diversity in country of origin and in research topic is also met by these within-region top ranked applications, then these 12 applications will be awarded a Fellowship.

Although unlikely, it is possible that fewer than 4 applications within a region achieve the Basic Quality Standard score, in which case a lower number of applicants will be chosen from that region, and a higher from other regions among those that meet the Basic Quality Standard.

Adjustments and Second Round Rankings

The desired diversity in geographic origin and in research topic may not be achieved in practice in first round rankings. It may be necessary to adjust first-round rankings to achieve two second-order selection criteria of the Program: achieving a balance in country representation and in research topic. Adjustments in rankings, however, **should not compromise research quality**.

The need for adjustments in rankings to achieve geographic balance or diversity in research topics will be identified by the Program Manager. The Project Manager will propose the necessary adjustment for consideration by the Selection Panel. Should the need to adjust rankings arise, the following six Rules (R3 through R7), applied in the order listed, will guide the adjustment process.

R3 Quality Precondition to Adjustment Rankings: In order for any non-first round proposal to substitute a first pool choice application, its total score must not be lower than the application it replaces by more than 63 points.

The country of residence and work of the Principal investigator and of the Support Institution is considered to be the country of origin of a proposal. If these two differ, the usual place of work of the Principal Investigator will be regarded to be the country of origin.

R4 Only 1 proposal may be selected from any one country. If more than one proposal received from the same country are ranked among the highest within the first round regional pool, the lower scoring proposals from the overrepresented country may be replaced by the next highest ranking application from other countries within the region, provided the difference in Quality of the prospective replacement proposal is not large (i.e. provided the Quality Precondition to Adjustments in Rankings is satisfied).

R5. Within any given region no more than one proposal will be selected addressing the same or a very similar topic. Within any one region, the highest ranked proposal addressing a given topic will be chosen over other next ranking proposal within the region that addresses the same priority topic.

R6. Applicants from different regions may address the same topic, provided that dealing with a geographically different target study is a valuable contribution to the understanding of impact of public access to ICTs. If this is not the case the lower ranked applications may be substituted by another within the same region, provided that topic diversity and country diversity is further enhanced, and that the difference in Quality of the prospective replacement proposal is not large.

R7. The application of adjustments (for either geographic or topical diversity) within a region will proceed as long as it is possible to obtain at least 4 proposals that meet the Basic Quality Standard by choosing runner up alternatives. No adjustments in Rankings will be made beyond this limit.

R8. Any and all adjustments made in the selection that depart from First Pool Rankings must be approved by the Selection Panel (majority vote).

Adjustments to Meet Budget Constraints

R9. In the event that the support amount required by proposals selected for Fellowships exceed the Program's total budget available for grant awards, the Program Manager, in consultation with the Selection Panel, may explore together with highly ranked applicants the possibility of adjusting research scope and targets and reduce grant amounts in order to meet budget constraints without unduly affecting research quality.

Stage IV Announcement of Results and Awards

Every Principal investigator will be informed of the results of the appraisal process.

Applicants selected for award with project support will be asked to respond by accepting the application and agreeing to the terms and conditions of the Fellowship within a 10 working day period after the award is announced.

Applicants discarded in Stage I will be informed of the requirement they failed to meet. All other applicants will be informed of the stage they reached in the competition and of their own score from either the Regional Review, or, in the case of applications that reached Stage III, of their Selection Panel Score. This information will give applicants a professional assessment of how they fared and should help them improve their research proposals.

For highly ranked submissions, this information should also encourage applicants to continue pursuing their research and perhaps help them find alternative sources of support.

If adjustments in First Order Rankings are made, applicants affected will be informed and the nature of the adjustment made will be explained.

All Selection Panel decisions by the Selection Panel are final and are not subject to appeal.