

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

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Introduction

[Instructions](#) are available online to help candidates complete the Application Form to the Amy Mahan Research Fellowship Program to Assess the Impact of Public Access to ICTs. Three parts of the Form, however, warrant special consideration:

The choice of topic in PART I of the Form.

The description of the study proposal in PART II.

The Research Grant Budget in PART III.

The purpose of this document is to help applicants complete these three important PARTS of the application. In addition, a list of resources available to help candidates strengthen their application is included at the end of the document.

For additional Program details, please refer to a separate document, [Benefits, Eligibility and Procedures](#).

Suitable Research Topics

A public access venue is a facility that is open to the public at large, where users can access information and communication technologies. They can be established via government or donor institution support (i.e. using public funds), or via support from a private institution or foundation (i.e. using private funds). The primary determinant is that access to ICT and ICT-based services at these venues should not be exclusive to a particular group, but are open to the general public.

A research topic is deemed suitable for Fellowship support if it is expected to contribute to our understanding of the impact of public access to ICTs; and does not duplicate efforts of the Global impact study's in-depth probes.

Only facilities and programs that provide **shared public access to the Internet** qualify as a subject of study under this program.

Consideration may be given to ways of providing access to ICTs other than through computers – e.g. mobile phones, WiFi, home computer use – but only to the extent that these other technologies are compared to shared computer access to the Internet.

The choice of research topic and the research questions addressed will be determining factors in the awarding of Fellowships. Applicants should take special care articulating and justifying their choice of topic.

Sample Research Priority Topics

Twenty-two (22) research questions on the impact of public access to ICTs have been identified as deserving priority consideration. The Global Impact Study identified the first eighteen of these during its First Phase, and an additional four were identified in the process of developing the Amy Mahan Fellowship Program. Out of the first eighteen topics, the Global Impact Study has selected five for in-depth probe during its second phase.

The document [Sample Research Topics and Overview of Global Impact Study Probes](#) presents the 22 priority topics. This document should be used as an illustrative guide of the types of topics suitable for Program funding, but **should not be regarded as an**

all-encompassing list nor should it constrain researcher initiative in the choice of a topic.

Other valuable sources on public access may help researchers choose their own research topic. One pertinent source is the telecenter community forum at www.telecentre.org.

Global Impact Study Probes

Applicants should propose topics that make a significant contribution beyond that foreseen by the Global impact study in-depth probes.

Some overlap between the in-depth studies and the investigations selected for an Amy Mahan Fellowship is likely, even desirable, provided that research findings are complementary. Duplication of efforts is improbable because the in-depth probes target a limited number of countries and focus on particular hypotheses and approaches.

Nevertheless, proposals that duplicate efforts with in-depth study probes of the Global Impact Study will be disallowed. When choosing a topic applicants are urged to review the description of research design for both the survey studies and the in-depth studies presented in [Sample Research Topics and Overview of Global Impact Study Probes](http://www.globalimpactstudy.org/researchdesign/methodologies/) and their up to date status at: www.globalimpactstudy.org/researchdesign/methodologies/.

Diversity of research topic is one of the Program's selection criteria. Accordingly, similar proposals from different research teams could end up competing with each other. Unfortunately, the prospects of duplicate efforts between applicants are difficult to anticipate.

Research Teams can enhance their prospects of winning a Fellowship by coordinating efforts with other applicants planning a similar study.

The Program has instituted a special consultation procedure to help applicants identify research teams planning to work on a similar topic and facilitate the coordination of research proposals. Principal Investigators are encouraged to consult the suitability of their research topic with the Program Implementation Team by submitting a [Topic Query](#) with some lead-time before submitting their application.

The Attribution Challenge

The attribution challenge is the extent to which the impact on long-term **development outcomes** (as opposed to immediate outputs) of a given intervention is attributable to the intervention itself, and not to other factors. For purposes of this Program, the interventions of interest may be defined broadly to include, for example, public access venues (of different kinds), programs that set up and give support to venues, services that are offered and delivered through the venues, support networks, etc.

Addressing the attribution challenge is a central concern of modern impact research in support of public policy and program design. Study proposals that adequately address the attribution challenge will tend to be favored by the Selection Panel.

The attribution challenge is discussed at length in Smutylo 2001, Iverson 2003, IDRC 2004, and White 2009.

The Study Proposal: Suggestions for Completing Part II

This section suggests suitable discussion topics for describing a research study proposal. These suggestions take into consideration the Program's selection criteria described in the document [Award Criteria and Selection Process](#).

Applicants are free to organize Part II of the Fellowship Application Form to suit the requirements of their own proposal and their own presentation style. Nevertheless, it will be to their advantage to use the list of topics and the discussion that follows in the following ways:

First, applicants may use the topics and discussion presented here as a **checklist**, to make sure that they cover all of the important issues on PART II of their Application.

Second, applicants **should feel free to use the same headings used here, in whole or part**, to organize the discussion of their proposal in Part II of the Application Form.

Part I of the Application Form has two sections with direct bearing on the content of the study proposal to be described in Part II. These are: Essential Background and Priority Research Questions and Justification. Applicants need not repeat what is already in these two sections. Part II should however build on and link to these two previous sections of Part I.

Research Design

Theoretical framework

Describe the theoretical perspective that will be used by the study. Justify the choice of theoretical framework (or combination of frameworks) in terms of strengths and weaknesses, suitability for addressing the priority research questions given the context, data and methods to be used and available resources. Specify:

- i. The research hypothesis to be tested by the study and how these are linked to the priority research questions;
- ii. The literature that justifies the theoretical framework used and how the study approach uses or builds up from this literature (include citations in the body of the application and full references in Annex 3).
- iii. Extent to which multidisciplinary perspectives are incorporated in the research design.

The compendium of ICTD impact assessment frameworks described in Heeks and Molla 2009 is a useful reference for applicants.

Any plausible theoretical framework - including data driven approaches such as grounded theory; may be used provided the choice is well articulated and justified.

Methods and data

Describe and justify the methods and data to be used by the investigation in terms of their compatibility with the chosen theoretical framework, the hypotheses to be tested, and how the chosen methods are suited to meet the challenge of attribution of impact.

Discuss, as pertinent:

- i. The secondary sources of data that will be used.
- ii. The primary sources of data that will be used (e.g. randomized trials, surveys, previously unpublished data previously collected).
- iii. The methods for gathering data to be used.
 - If quantitative data will be collected through surveys justify sample size and identify target population.
 - If qualitative data will be collected, specify approach and techniques to be used.
 - Describe the development and use of any instruments like questionnaires to be used.
 - If both quantitative and qualitative data is used, specify how the analysis from both kinds of data will be used to support hypothesis testing and address the priority research questions.
- iv. The methods and techniques that will be used to analyze the data.
- v. How will the study assess impact? What indicators will be used or developed?

A broad range of methodologies may be used, but those that purposefully address the attribution challenge will be favored.

Study Approach to Costs, Revenues and Financial Sustainability

Specify as pertinent how the study will deal with financial costs, revenues, and financial sustainability of public access venues or of interventions that invest in or add value to public access venues (e.g. providing connectivity, training, content etc).

Financial sustainability and impact are different concepts. A program's impact may extend beyond quantifiable revenues or financial benefits, and at times it may be inappropriate or even misleading to use financial indicators to determine impact. But impact is often linked to financial sustainability. If people do not get their money's worth they will not sponsor a cybercafé and its survival will be in jeopardy. Governments will be more likely to subsidize public access venues that have high impact. This is why studying financial sustainability may be useful to understand impact.

The term sustainability may be defined in many ways, for example, in connection with other attributes of stability and feasibility (e.g. institutional sustainability or technical sustainability) or community engagement (e.g. "social sustainability"); see Heeks 2009, page 105. The focus here is on financial sustainability, which may be affected by other types of sustainability, but is operationally easier to measure.

A "static" or short-term conception of financial sustainability is common and some times useful. It leads to comparisons between benefits and costs and helps determine whether

a particular public access venue over a given period of time gets sufficient funds to function. A public access venue is said to be operationally sustainable (financially) if its revenue exceeds recurrent costs. It is fully sustainable if revenue also covers the replacement of equipment to cover breakdowns or obsolescence.

Financial sustainability thus defined is often used interchangeably with self-sustainability, but this is misleading. Self-sustainability is one way to achieve financial sustainability, but there are other ways, such as through sustained government funding. This is common, for example, in the case of public libraries that provide public access to the Internet.

Financial costs and returns usually cannot be ignored when policy or program design are a central concern. If a public access venue brings high benefits (i.e. has impact, however defined) but is too costly to maintain, it may not be worthwhile to fund, or may lie beyond a government's means to do so. This is especially true for large-scale projects; donors and Governments tend to give more leeway to small-scale experimental or pilot initiatives.

When thinking about long-term impacts of public or donor funding, a dynamic or systemic conception of financial sustainability may be more appropriate, even if in practice such a concept is more difficult to measure. Cybercafes are not all individually sustainable; some fail while others thrive. It is the system that is resilient, as long as there is a demand for their services. Similarly, not all of the telecenters set up by a Government program need to survive over time in order for a program to have high impact. It is more important that the services provided be valued by the public and, if there is widespread demand, that they continued to be provided by either the initially government sponsored venue or by a cybercafé, or by the people in a locality through their own means (e.g. home computer or mobile phone) or by other means perhaps motivated indirectly by the program.

Gender

Fellowships will be awarded to study a broad range of priority questions provided they help assess the impact of public access to ICTs. Gender may be a central theme in some cases but not in others. **Having gender issues as main topic of research is not a selection criterion.**

It is important, however, to identify the gender issues that are germane to the chosen topic, and to demonstrate a suitable research strategy to address these issues is in place, in terms of theory, methods or data.

Specify the study's approach to gender issues.

Is gender a priority research question to be addressed by this study? If this is the case, much of the discussion regarding their suitability should be presented in the application.

Have significant gender issues relevant to the chosen research topic been identified? If this is the case, please explain how the study will address these issues.

Does the theory on which the study is based take into consideration feminist or gender perspectives? Please explain why and how, or why not.

Will data collection and analytical methods make allowance for differences in impacts according to gender? Please explain why and how, or why not.

Risks and Mitigating Measures

Every study carries risks. Rural telecenters, for example, tend to be small and are frequently found empty or with only a few users, rendering user surveys time consuming and costly. Some study ideas carry such high risks as to render them impracticable. Studying telecenters in conflict areas, for instance, may involve the risk of injury or death of researchers and it may be best to discard them.

The risk of partiality is common and often vitiates the results of impact studies. It arises when principals in an agency with a vested interest in a study's outcome have the means to exercise undue influence on researchers. To mitigate this risk it is usually necessary for research to be conducted by institutions operating at arms length of implementing agencies (e.g. academic institutions) and that reporting be done to parties that are not directly involved in project execution.

- i. Identify the risks that could prevent or undermine successful implementation of the study; and
- ii. show how the proposed institutional arrangements, research design, cost estimates and Implementation and Disbursement Plans adequately address and make provision to mitigate these risks.

Why is the proposed study important?

Improved understanding of impact of public access to ICT's

Describe how the proposed study would improve our understanding of the impact of public access to ICTs. Special attention should be afforded to the way that theory, methods and data used will address the attribution challenge.

Potential public policy impact

Explore the potential public policy significance of the study's findings and recommendations.

- i. Discuss how, in general, it is expected that the lessons learned and findings of this study will help public officials and donors improve the effectiveness of their interventions (investments, programs, policy).
- ii. Discuss how the study's findings are expected to inform and influence public policy in the study countries.

Potential impact on low-income people

To the extent possible discuss how low income people could benefit from the research findings. Identify what would be the target population that could benefit from the findings of the research and discuss the potential effects that the study's expected findings could have on the livelihoods and welfare of this target group.

Grant Budget Guidelines

Study Costs and Funding Sources

Total study costs should be equal to total resources available, including the Research Grant amount requested plus cash contributions from other sources.

No financial contribution is required of the Support Institution or of any other institutional participant; but if cash contributions are foreseen from sources other than the Research Grant, please specify these in separate budgets (using the same budget template below), one per each funder.

All participating partners must adhere to the Open Access principles under which the products of this research will be made available free of charge to the public.

By adding to the research resources available, the Support Institution may facilitate a study that is greater in scope. Making a material contribution to the research proposal is one way that a Support Institution may use to signal a commitment to the proposed study; but there are other meaningful ways of signaling commitment, such as seizing the opportunity to build up the institution's ICT research capacity.

Grant Budget and Study Budget

The Research Grant Budget itemizes projects expenses that the Research Team expects to incur and to pay for using the Program's Research Grant if awarded a Fellowship.

The Study Budget includes all expenses that a study will incur. The Study Budget will normally be the same as the Research Grant budget, unless other funding sources are foreseen. Both the Study and the Research Budget should only consider **direct cash expenses**. **In-kind contributions** may be described in PART III of the [Application Form](#).

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

Eligible Expenditures

Human Resources

1. In principle researchers are expected to carry out their investigations and learn from the process. Hiring of specialized consultants to satisfy special requirements may be allowed on an exceptional basis, but only for highly specialized activities not commonly available in the academic community.

During implementation, staff changes require prior written request for authorization from the Program Manager.

2. Grant funds may be used to pay for the salaries of researchers working on the study, including the Principal Investigator and Associate Researchers, who plan to spend up to 100% on the project, provided they are not doing anything else but are dedicated full time to carrying out their approved research study. This means in practice that the Support Institution is being compensated for the researcher's salary while he or she is spending time on the project instead of teaching or performing other work for the institution.

If prior to the grant award, the institution only employs a researcher part-time, grant funds may be used to pay the additional amount of their time that is reasonably required to carry out the research study. In such a case, an explanatory note should be attached to the budget submission.

3. The Principal Investigator will need to commit to working on the study for the planned duration of the research. Ideally, he or she should be dedicated to working full time on the study. Full time dedication may not be feasible in practice because of prior commitments, such as teaching responsibilities, but at least 50% dedication by the Principal Investigator is expected.

When preparing Research Grant Budget proposals, applicants should specify the level of dedication of each participating researcher: the number of work days per year and what this represents as a proportion of full-time dedication equivalent. For consistency, please assume full time dedication to be equal to 240 workdays per year.

In the case of the Principal Investigator, departures from full time dedication to the study should be explained in the budget, or if an extensive explanation is needed, in a separate additional Annex to the Application Form.

Failure to inform the Program Manager of any departure from the level of dedication to the study by the Principal Investigator indicated in the application may lead to the disqualification of the applicant or be cause for revocation of a grant.

4. In general, Grant funds may not be used to remunerate students who participate in the Program. An exception may be made in cases where engaging a student full time in the research study is only possible if he or she has to forego paid employment. Such an exception requires an explanatory note in the budget or, if extensive, in a separate additional Annex to the Application Form.
5. Grant funds may not be used to pay for overtime, general staff insurance or recruitment costs or to "top-up" salaries. There will be no exceptions to this rule.
6. Associate researchers working for the study may have only a part time dedication to the study. The specific amount of time involved and the rate of remuneration must be specified.
7. Grant funds may be used to pay temporary staff required for research related activities (e.g. survey staff, data entry, data processing).
8. Remuneration of all human resource inputs should be priced at the rate that staff are presently receiving or, if a new hiring is involved, at comparable market rates of researchers or staff doing similar work.

Departures from market rates may result in the disqualification of the proposal as misleading and, therefore, too risky.

Project Specific Equipment and Capital Expenditures

9. Grant funds may be used to purchase specialized non-capital equipment, indispensable for the specific purposes of the investigation (e.g. digital cameras, specialized books, specialized software).

10. New equipment required to carry out the investigation is allowed. Each item should be identified and its total costs (including delivery, installation etc.) estimated.
11. In general, IT equipment is to be provided by the support institution. Some items – e.g. computers, PDAs, mobile phones, printers, etc – may be funded by the grant, but only if indispensable to carry out the study's field work.
12. Other than indirect expenses, which are limited to up to 13% of the Grant Budget, Program funds may not be used for activities that should be provided by the institution with which the applicant is affiliated. Accordingly, the following items may not be paid for using grant funds:
 - a. purchase of vehicles;
 - b. Buildings or constructions, other than temporary housing that may be needed for fieldwork;
 - c. general furniture or office equipment, such as facimile machines, photocopying machines, etc.

Operating Research Expenses

13. Grant funds may be used to pay operating costs required by the research, such as:
 - a. travel costs of researchers and study project staff, as needed to carry out the investigation or to coordinate research activities ;
 - b. training needed to carry out the study (e.g. data entry, survey procedures, etc.);
 - c. paper, photocopying and other consumables needed to carry out the research;
 - d. rent and utilities of temporary housing needed for field work.
14. Allowable travel expenditures include economy airfare, local transportation, daily subsistence allowances, tourist-class hotel accommodations and conference registration fees).

Where travel is a significant cost item, please give an itemized account of all travel expenditure items involved.

Daily subsistence allowances (per diem) normally cover short-haul mobility costs (e.g. taxi fares within a Metropolitan areas). Where a daily subsistence amount is used, these values should be those normally used by the Support Institution and should be specified in the Budget.

Departures from usual per diem rates may lead to the disqualification of the proposal as misleading and therefore too risky.

Indirect Costs

15. IDRC regulations prevent Program funds to be used to pay overhead.
16. The Support Institution may charge a percentage of up to 13% of the total funding requested, to recover indirect costs it incurs in the process of supporting the Research Team, e.g. travel provided by the institution, computer facilities, meeting rooms, secretarial assistance, materials, photocopying, etc.

Any other indirect expenses over this amount must be borne by support institutions and should not be included in the grant budget.

Sample Grant Budget Template

Please present the Fellowship funding cash requirements of the proposed study using the [Sample Budget Template](#).

If the Support Institution or some other donor or partner is expected to make a significant financial contribution in support of the study, these contributions should be specified in the summary budget on PART III of the application form. Please note that all participating partners must adhere to the Open Access principles under which the products of this research will be made available free of charge to the public.

Clarity of use and purpose is essential. A clear link between an expenditure item and the realization of the study is paramount. A brief explanatory note of the purpose of a piece of equipment or of an activity or work to be performed should be included for every line item in the Grant Budget. Where an allowable exception (as noted above) is involved, it is **strongly recommended** that a separate explanatory note justifying said exception be attached to the Grant Budget or, should a relatively extensive explanation be required, that it be presented in a separate additional annex to the application.

Assistance and Resources for Applicants

Consultation with Program Staff

Fellowship candidates are encouraged to review the Program's [Frequently Asked Questions](#) section of the Program's [website](#) where they will find answers to common queries regarding basic Program features. Candidates who have a particular query for which they cannot find an answer may send an email with their query to the Program Manager at: AmyMahanFellowship@upf.edu.

A special [Topic Query](#) form is also available to assist prospective Principal Investigators in their choice of research topic.

Within five working days after submitting a Topic Query, participants will receive a **confidential** email from the Program Manager indicating:

- i. Whether the chosen topic is deemed suitable or not, and if not why this is the case.
- ii. The Program Implementation Team may also make suggestions regarding possible adjustments in the chosen topic, to strengthen the research issues addressed by the study.
- iii. Whether other known candidate applicants are addressing a similar topic. If other Principal Investigators are found to be working on a similar topic, they will be introduced to each other by email and encouraged to explore ways to collaborate by either joining forces in one research team or by submitting separate applications covering complementary aspects of the research.

Queries (either general or topic queries) may be submitted for consultation up to 30 November 2009. After this date only very specific procedural queries will be entertained, on an exceptional basis.

Resources

Below is a complete list of resources that have been prepared to inform prospective applicants and help them strengthen their proposals and submit their application.

Resource	Description or Purpose of Resource
Benefits, Eligibility and Procedures	Describes key Program features and procedures
Submission Guidelines	Guidelines for applying for a Program Fellowship.
Award Criteria and Selection Process	Describes in detail the Program's selection criteria and selection procedures.
Sample Research Topics and Overview of Global Impact Study Probes	Gives examples of research topics that the Program would support and a summary description of the Global Impact Study's in-depth research probes.
Draft Ethical Standards that will Guide the Conduct of the Research	Draft ethical standards to be adhered to by all Fellows. Applicants may need to adjust the text (in a separate Annex to the Application Form) to suit the particular requirements of their investigation.
Frequently Asked Questions	Common questions and answers about the Program.
General Query via email to: AmyMahanFellowship@upf.edu	Researchers interested in the Program who have particular questions for which they cannot find an answer may send an email with their query to the Program Manager. (Please review Program documents and FAQs before submitting a query.)
Topic Query	Principal Investigators may consult their (preliminary) choice of topic with the Program Implementation Team by filling out and submitting this form prior to 30 November 2009.
Application Form	Application form with instructions and sample budget template. The submission deadline is midnight Eastern Standard Time, 31 December 2009.

Works Cited

- IDRC, "Evaluation Guideline No. 1: Addressing the question of Attribution in Evaluation", 2004. (www.idrc.ca/en/ev-61946-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html)
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