



Request for Proposals

Just Tech Covid-19 Rapid-Response Grants RFP

Date of RFP Posting:
July 1, 2020

Last date revised
July 1, 2020

Deadline
Rolling submissions with first review beginning August 31, 2020

CONTACT INFORMATION

Please direct all inquiries to: just-tech@ssrc.org

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Call for Proposals

The Social Science Research Council (SSRC), as part of its Just Tech program, seeks proposals from across the social sciences and related fields that address the risks, opportunities, and challenges posed by public health surveillance stemming from the Covid-19 pandemic. We specifically encourage proposals that interrogate the role the public and private sectors may play in mitigating or exacerbating the health crisis, the effects of which are already unevenly distributed.

Overview

From Hurricane Katrina to Covid-19, disasters often exacerbate social inequalities, having disproportionate effects on historically marginalized populations. Indeed, the Covid-19 pandemic has already laid bare the vast differences in available infrastructure, long-term support, and economic security available to different segments of society. As we sprint to devise solutions that will necessarily marry state intervention with technological development—exposure notification, wearables, contact tracing, and the federation of varied forms of personal data, such as electronic health records, geolocation information, and consumer data—we must also pause to reflect on how choices made now will structure political, social, and public health risks and opportunities on the horizon. As societies expand efforts to conduct contact tracing and mass testing, or engage in rapid transitions to remote work and learning, it is imperative that social researchers ask critical questions and provide frameworks and methods that address these interventions with focused attention to issues of power, inequality, and social impact.

While new knowledge is urgently needed, in the conditions of the present moment many social research methodologies are either not possible or require adaptation in order to protect the health and safety of both researchers and research subjects. The Just Tech Rapid-Response Grants will thus support innovative research projects that deploy remote research methods to shed light on both the short- and potential long-term implications of public health interventions for a range of rights, liberties, and public goods. Subjects may include, but are not limited to:

- Contact tracing and public health surveillance
- Voting access and rights amid “lockdowns” and widespread social distancing
- Disparities in the collection, representation, and use of health data
- The digital divide in remote work and learning, education, and public health
- Precarity of labor and work in the tech industry or gig economy
- Remote organizing, campaigning, and social movements
- The impact of predictive algorithms on the provision of social welfare and policing

These topics are illustrative. Applicants are welcome to propose others. Projects illuminating the experiences of historically marginalized people are especially encouraged, as are those that can constructively inform policy responses across communities and institutions.

ELIGIBILITY AND CRITERIA

The Just Tech program invites proposals for Rapid-Response Grants from researchers—based at both academic and nonacademic institutions—who hold a PhD in any social science discipline or related interdisciplinary field. The grants offer up to six months of support toward research-related expenses. These include, but are not limited to, access to datasets, archives, and relevant publications; costs related to conducting online research of various kinds; and research assistance. Applications are welcome from any country around the world. Awards will range from USD \$5,000 to \$10,000, with larger amounts directed to projects committed to research partnerships grounded in principles of ethical collaboration and equity, composed of partners who might not otherwise work together. In this regard, strong teams will not simply be interdisciplinary, but multi-method or cross-sector, joining, for example:

- humanists and social scientists
- social and natural scientists
- qualitative and quantitative methodologists
- academic researchers and practitioners
- researchers from different parts of the world

Proposals will be evaluated by a multidisciplinary review committee based on their relevance to the topic, quality and intellectual merit, potential for innovation, the fit between their research question and research design, and feasibility under current constraints on research. Applicants should describe in some detail how they intend to address these constraints in the methods they propose, as well as the ethical dimensions of their research plans and methods. Applicants should specify their intended outputs for the project and the audience(s) for those outputs. Successful applicants will be expected to participate in an online workshop with other grantees and are required to contribute at least one brief essay to the SSRC's digital forum *Items: Insights from the Social Sciences*. Detailed eligibility requirements may be found on the [FAQs page](#).