

The Mercury Project: Call for Proposals

The Mercury Project is a \$10M research consortium investigating the impacts of health misinformation and evaluating interventions to prevent its spread in the United States, Africa, South Asia, and Latin America.

OVERVIEW

The Mercury Project invites letters of inquiry for research projects that address one or more of the following goals:

1. estimating the causal impacts of mis- and disinformation on online and offline outcomes in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, including health, economic, and/or social outcomes, differential impacts across sociodemographic groups, and quantifying the global costs of those impacts;
2. estimating the causal impacts of online or offline interventions in the United States, Africa, South Asia, and Latin America to increase uptake of Covid-19 vaccines and other recommended public health measures by countering mis- and disinformation, including interventions that target the producers or the consumers of mis- and disinformation, or that increase confidence in reliable information.

Proposed projects may have a duration of up to 30 months. Primary applicant organizations must be tax-exempt organizations or the equivalent in the local context (e.g., nonprofit organizations, universities, governmental units). Preference will be given to research teams that are interdisciplinary and that include a diverse set of researchers and institutions, including researchers and institutions located in the country in which the study is being conducted and that have deep contextual knowledge and connections. For proposals that seek to evaluate the causal impacts of offline interventions, preference will be given to projects that engage local public, nonprofit, and/or private organizations, and that propose interventions likely to be cost-effective at scale. Proposed budgets should be appropriate to cover project costs, with indirect costs not exceeding 15% of direct costs. There is no maximum award amount.

Letters of inquiry will be reviewed by Mercury Project staff and, as needed, outside reviewers. Applicants whose LOIs are reviewed favorably will be invited to submit a full proposal. Full proposals will be reviewed by project staff and by outside peer reviewers with methodological and domain expertise. Proposals for randomized controlled trials of interventions in the United States may be shared with Arnold Ventures for

co-funding consideration. Applicants may be asked to respond to questions from reviewers. Decisions will be made on a rolling basis. Every effort will be made to expedite the proposal review process.

Letter of Inquiry (LOI) Requirements:

Applicants submitting a LOI are asked to provide the following information:

1. Identities of primary applicant organization and any proposed subaward organizations, including organizations' tax-exempt (or equivalent) status;
2. Identities of all investigators, including disciplinary and institutional affiliations and links to investigator websites or CVs, and contact information for principal investigator;
3. Project design, including the research question/s being addressed, the proposed strategy to make causal inferences (e.g., randomized controlled trial or a specified quasi-experimental design), sample size, outcomes of interest, project duration and timeline, analytic methods, and, for projects proposing evaluations of interventions, the identities of any collaborating partners (3 pages maximum);
4. Total budget request.

Full Proposal Requirements:

Applicants invited to submit a full proposal will be asked to address the following elements:

1. Project description (6 pages maximum):
 - identities of primary applicant organization and any proposed subaward organizations, including organizations' tax-exempt (or equivalent) status;
 - Identities of investigators and contact information for principal investigator;
 - Project design, including the research question/s being addressed, the proposed strategy to make causal inferences (e.g., randomized controlled trial or a specified quasi-experimental design), potential causal mechanisms, sample size, outcomes of interest, project duration and timeline, analytic methods;
 - A discussion of the ethical considerations of the proposed research.

2. Team biographies that demonstrate expertise in the proposed methods and contexts, diversity, and interdisciplinary breadth;
3. Project budget and budget narrative, with indirect costs not exceeding 15%.

If the project is designed to estimate the causal impacts of a proposed intervention, we will also ask applicants to include as attachments:

1. Prior evidence suggesting that the intervention could produce sizable impacts on health, economic, and/or social outcomes (including full citations to prior studies), and could potentially be cost-effective at scale;
2. A power analysis;
3. Letters of collaboration from any public, nonprofit, and/or private community partners who will cooperate in delivering the intervention, including a statement of commitment to releasing the full results;
4. If the intervention will be evaluated by a randomized controlled trial, reports from any prior randomized controlled trials conducted by team members.

Post-Award Research Consortium:

Grantees will be expected to participate in the Mercury Project Research Consortium, including regular monthly virtual meetings to share research strategies, three annual international convenings of grantees and other invited parties, and the development of shared research frameworks and policy briefs. Additional funding for these activities will be provided by the Mercury Project.

TO APPLY

Letters of inquiry should be submitted through the Social Science Research Council's online application portal at apply.ssrc.org. Please contact mercury@ssrc.org if you have additional questions or for further guidance in preparing your submission.

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