

Impact Lab Start-Up Funding RFP

Information Sessions

February 9 & 25, 2026



HARVARD
IMPACT LABS

Harvard Impact Labs Leadership



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Agenda

- Overview of Harvard Impact Labs
- Impact Lab Start-Up Funding RFP
- Q&A

Harvard Impact Labs' Mission

- Accelerate the development of scalable solutions to big social challenges
- Build increased capacity for solutions-focused research at Harvard
- Enhance Harvard's culture of public service among faculty, students, and staff
- Advance social science and collaboration across disciplines

Our Theory of Change



If we strengthen the capacity
of **university researchers** to collaborate with **practitioners and communities**,
we will **significantly increase the problem-solving capacity** of our society.



What is an Impact Lab?

1. Aimed at solving a social problem
2. Co-creation of solutions with external organization(s)
3. Designs, tests, and scales solutions



What is a Social Problem?

1. Has collective and not just individual implications;
2. Affects a large number of people;
3. Reflects a failure of markets, governments, and other institutions; and
4. Cannot be understood or solved without understanding the human behaviors and institutions involved



Overcoming the Barriers to Doing this Work

Barriers

Faculty not trained to do engaged research

Hard to raise funds to hire initial lab employees

Challenging to build relationships with initial communities

Bureaucratic obstacles such as MOUs

Components of our initiatives

Year-long faculty fellowship/workshop

On-going coaching capacity

Funding for leaves in government and nonprofits

Start-up funding

Shared capacity for outreach and for administration

Research opportunities for students

Community of scholars

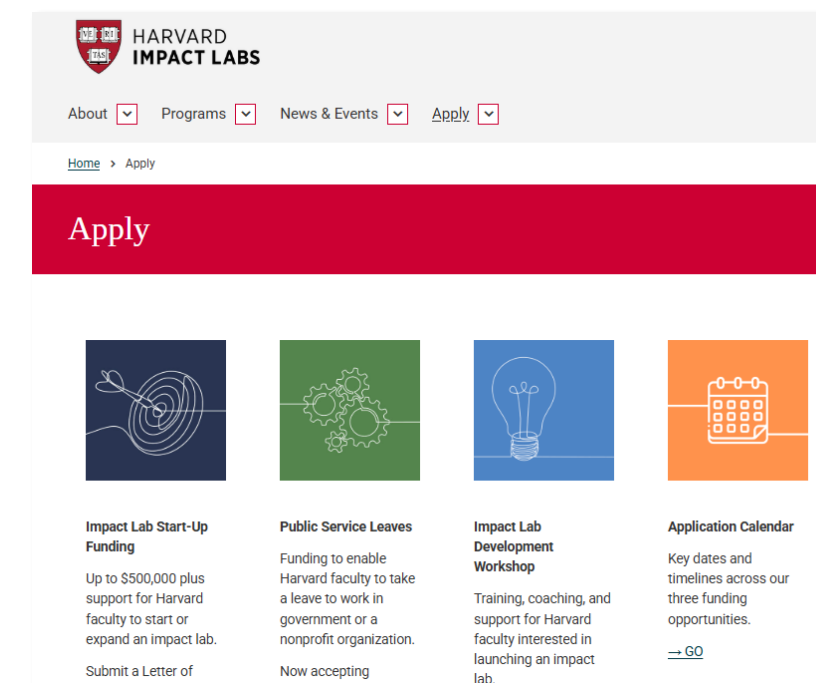


Our Three Funding Opportunities

1. Impact Lab Development Fellowship *Applications open in April*
2. Public Service Leaves *Applications open in April*
3. Impact Lab Start-Up Funding *RFP is currently open*



[Visit the Apply page](#) on our website to view the **application calendar**



Impact Lab Development Fellowship

Fellowship components

- 9-month fellowship (September to May)
- Cohort of 8-10 faculty from across the University
- Monthly 3-hour activity- and discussion-based workshop
- 1-on-1 coaching from professional staff and experienced faculty

Funding

- \$25k in flexible seed funding

Who is a good fit for the fellowship?

- Faculty who want to increase the impact of their research and are curious about how best to engage with practitioners to co-create strategies to solve a particular social problem
- An existing relationship with an external organization is not required

Timeline

- Applications open in April, due in early June

2025-26 Impact Lab Development Fellows

- Christine Desan (HLS)
- Sarah Dryden-Peterson (HGSE)
- Rita Hamad (HSPH)
- David Pedulla (FAS)
- Patrick Slade (SEAS)
- Sandeep Kumar (HMS)
- Andrew Crespo (HLS)
- Wafaie Fawzi (HSPS)



Public Service Leave

Public Service Leave components

- Support to take leave for one semester to work in a government or nonprofit organization (up to \$175,000)
- Designed to help faculty understand issues and stakeholders central to their scholarship, build key relationships, and learn to communicate with different audiences

Before you apply...

- You should already be talking to your host organization by the time you apply
- We can help you find a host organization or refine the focus of your leave before you apply

Timeline

- Applications open in April, due in September
- Expressions of interest are welcome any time

Current Public Service Leave Participants

“The way we think about problems as academics – there’s a big appetite for that in government.”

- Dr. Ingrid Bassett on her public service leave so far



Ingrid Bassett (HMS) is on leave at the Mass. Department of Public Health



Alisha Holland (FAS) is going to Argentina to work with the President’s Council of Advisors

Impact Lab Start-Up Funding

About Impact Lab Start-Up Funding

- Funding and support to start or expand an impact lab
- For new labs: support to build team and an R&D cycle
- For established labs: support for a new direction, e.g., new problem, solution, scaling strategy

Funding

- Up to \$500,000 over 2 years

Timeline

- RFP is live; letters of interest are due March 18

Who is a Good Fit for Lab Start-Up Funding?

- New or established teams that already have a relationship with an external organization
- This funding is for a sustained program of research to address a social problem over multiple years (i.e., not a one-off research study)

Impact Lab Start-Up Funding Selection Criteria

1. Scale, Depth, and Urgency of the Problem
2. Scientific Contribution
3. Potential for Impact at Scale
4. Strength of Partnership
5. Leadership and Team

[Visit our website](#) to view the complete evaluation criteria

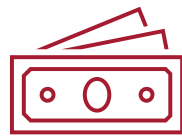


Meet Our Funded Impact Labs



Making lasting improvements in education

- Asim Khwaja (HKS), Tahir Andrabi (Pomona), Jisnu Das (Georgetown)



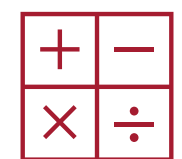
Paying workers what they've earned

- Danny Schneider (HKS & FAS) and David Weil (HKS)



Supporting good decisions in the legal process

- D. James Greiner (HLS) and Kosuke Imai (FAS)



Transforming math education in low-resource settings

- Sharad Goel (HKS), Joscha Legewie (FAS), Teddy Svoronos (HKS), Ying Xu (HGSE), Emma Brunskill (Stanford)

Who is Eligible?

The principal investigators must be Harvard faculty:

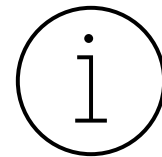
- Tenured
- Tenure-track
- Full-time Professors of the Practice or Professors in Residence
- *For Lab Funding only:* HMS and HSDM PIs must have a primary affiliation with the HMS Quad, i.e., be Harvard paid



Questions?



[View the 2026 application calendar](#)



[Sign up for updates](#)



Email us: HarvardImpactLabs@hks.harvard.edu



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