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# Research Grant Program

The Internet Society Foundation's Research Program supports global research collaborations that advance understanding of the Internet and its value for all. Furthering our 2030 strategic objectives (<https://www.internetsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/2030-Strategy-EN.pdf>), the program fosters ideas and innovation that further the long-term goal of a world where people everywhere enjoy affordable, reliable, resilient Internet access and a safe, secure, and trustworthy online experience.

# Program Objectives (<https://www.isocfoundation.org/>)

- Promote novel methodologies that generate solutions to Internet-related challenges
- Identify and support a diverse and collaborative group of researchers and research institutions
- Facilitate access to intersectional research that can be applied to decision-making in government and industry

This program is intended for research that is applied and open, meaning the research seeks to answer a real-world question and should be openly published and made available to the scientific community at no cost. The Foundation supports research involving human or animal subjects when the project has been certified by a responsible body to be ethical and in compliance with local law. It is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator of the project to obtain these certifications.

## Areas of Focus

Statements of interest and subsequent proposals should address topics related to one of the following thematic areas:

### **Inclusive Internet**

The Internet is a powerful amplifier of capabilities and is growing in its potential all the time. For those with affordable access and the skills to take advantage of it, the Internet can be a powerful social and economic catalyst. However, for one-third of the world's population still without access, the unfortunate corollary is that the gap between those with and without access is likely to grow, worsening global inequality.

Although network coverage has continued to expand each year, the rate of Internet adoption is slowing, as those without access now live in some of the poorest and most challenging environments to build and maintain infrastructure sustainably. Therefore, it is crucial to research and find ways to ensure the entire global population has equitable and affordable access to the Internet and that its benefits are inclusive for everyone, regardless of location, income, or ability. This includes identifying and addressing the various barriers that contribute to the digital divide. Issues such as infrastructure ownership, costs, socioeconomic status, geographic location, locally relevant content, gender divides and other barriers to adoption can affect digital inclusion. Research on inclusive Internet should explore these barriers and challenges to universal Internet access.

*Special Note: The **Inclusive Internet** research theme focuses on the structural and systemic barriers that prevent one-third of the world from participating in digital ecosystems. How can we ensure that geography, poverty, gender, or lack of foundational skills do not result in digital exclusion? The focus here is on the preconditions for digital participation, such as affordable infrastructure and technologies, effective regulation, community-led networks, and the basic digital literacy required for a person to adopt the Internet as a tool for the first time.*

### **Greening the Internet**

The Internet is influenced by and has an impact on environment and climate change. These effects are unevenly distributed across communities, regions, and geographies. The 'Greening the Internet' theme aims to understand these impacts while developing and promoting solutions to ensure the Internet's resilience and sustainability for generations to come.

We seek interdisciplinary, novel proposals focusing on Internet infrastructure that is resilient, affordable, and environmentally sustainable. This may include examining the energy use and resource extraction associated with Internet infrastructure, assessing who bears these environmental costs, and understanding the impact such investments have on communities. We also encourage proposals that research the effects of climate change and extreme weather on connectivity, particularly for vulnerable communities already facing Internet access inequities.

### **Measuring Meaningful Connectivity**

As global connectivity continues to expand, there is growing recognition that being "online" is no longer a sufficient indicator of digital inclusion or Internet health. The concept of meaningful connectivity seeks to capture not just whether people are connected, but whether their connectivity enables them to effectively participate in economic, social, cultural, and civic life. However, meaningful connectivity remains an inherently abstract and multi-dimensional concept, shaped by subjective user experiences, local contexts, and evolving technological paradigms.

This research theme invites proposals that explore measurement frameworks, methodologies, and empirical approaches for assessing meaningful connectivity across diverse environments—especially in light of emerging paradigms such as artificial intelligence, cloud-based services, real-time collaboration tools, and increasingly platform-dependent digital ecosystems. As these technologies change how people interact with the Internet, traditional metrics may no longer reflect whether connectivity actually meets users' needs and should move past simplistic notions of bandwidth or headline speeds.

*Special Note: The **Measuring Meaningful Connectivity** research theme focuses on the functional quality and depth of the digital experience for those already online. Just as the definition of “meaningful connectivity” (<https://www.internetsociety.org/blog/2025/10/what-is-meaningful-connectivity/>) goes beyond just affordable access to the Internet, this theme seeks to identify indicators that suggest that the experience of being connected is translating into tangible human agency and economic power.*

## A Trustworthy Internet

The Internet is trustworthy only if it's completely resilient, reliable, accountable, and secure in a way that consistently meets users' expectations for information and services. Trustworthiness involves all layers in the network, and it is possible that some aspects of the Internet are trustworthy while other parts are not. For example, while the application layer may be reliable or secure, there may be gaps in the logic or infrastructure, or there may be mistrust in the content.

Research engaging the idea of A Trustworthy Internet should attempt to explain how the Internet does or does not meet user expectations and what should or shouldn't be done about it. We invite proposals examining emerging risks and threats that challenge the idea that the Internet remains an open and reliable platform for free expression and the exchange of ideas. We envision solutions from this research to contribute towards building an open and trustworthy Internet, so that people are empowered to participate in the myriad opportunities offered by the Internet.

## Eligibility

- Independent researchers should have a postgraduate research degree (PhD, Masters) and peer reviewed publications, patents, academic or independently published work in the relevant area.
- Public research institutions should be 501c3 or equivalent and should have a mission that is aligned to that of the Foundation. (Private institutions are not eligible entities to receive funding).

Additional eligibility requirements for all Foundation grants are outlined here. All applicants must ensure that they meet these basic requirements. Underrepresented groups and applicants from the Global Majority are highly encouraged to apply

## Selection Criteria

Researchers are encouraged to submit a full application to be reviewed by the independent External Reviewers. Final submissions will be selected based on the following criteria:

- Is the research in line with one of the Foundation's thematic areas?
- Is the research novel?
- Is the research applied and can inform decision making?
- Is the research collaborative?
- Is the research intersectional in its approach?

See more information on the independent External Reviewers. (<https://www.isocfoundation.org/resources/application-review-process/>)

## Funding

The program provides for two levels of funding:

- Independent researchers may apply for funding up to US\$200,000. Grants will be awarded directly to individuals who are identified as the principal investigator on the project and he/she will be responsible for grant management including

all reporting requirements during the life of the grant.

(<https://www.isocfoundation.org/>)

- Organizations and institutions may apply for funding up to US\$500,000. One or more awards in each of the thematic areas are anticipated subject to fiscal year funding.

## Timeline

Applications will be accepted from **7 April to 22 May 2026, at 21:00 UTC**. Applications are reviewed by the Internet Society, the Internet Society Foundation, and external experts to determine if they meet the eligibility requirements and are aligned with the focus areas. Please note that this process could take up to fourteen (14) weeks.

## How to Apply

Applicants are strongly encouraged to register their organization in the Foundation's grants management system ([https://isocfoundation.fluxx.io/user\\_sessions/new](https://isocfoundation.fluxx.io/user_sessions/new)) prior to the application window opening. Applicants must be registered in Fluxx, and applications must be submitted prior to the deadline to be considered for funding. No e-mail submissions will be accepted. Prospective applicants can view the Example Application form (available soon).

Applications may be submitted in English, French, or Spanish. Incomplete submissions that do not meet eligibility requirements will not be considered (see "Eligibility" section above).

## Questions

If you have questions about this program or the application process, please email [foundation@isocfoundation.org](mailto:foundation@isocfoundation.org) (<mailto:foundation@isocfoundation.org>).

Due to limited staff capacity, we cannot guarantee a response to questions about the application process received after the end of the working day, one day before the application window closes.

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Explore our Funding Areas (<https://www.isocfoundation.org/funding-areas/>) to see how we support the global Internet community, and subscribe to our newsletter (<https://www.isocfoundation.org/subscribe/>) for the latest news and announcements from our projects.

## The Internet is for Everyone

The Internet Society Foundation supports the vision (<https://www.internetsociety.org/mission/>) of the Internet Society and its work for an open, globally-connected, secure, and trustworthy Internet for everyone.

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