

Mercury Project to Boost Covid-19 Vaccination Rates and Counter Public Health Mis- and Disinformation in 17 Countries Worldwide

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The Social Science Research Council is providing USD 7.2 million to 12 teams advancing ambitious, applied social and behavioral science to combat the growing global threat posed by low Covid-19 vaccination rates and public health mis- and disinformation

NEW YORK | August 23, 2022—The Social Science Research Council (SSRC) announced it will provide an initial USD 7.2 million in direct research funds to 12 teams working in 17 countries in order to better understand how health mis- and disinformation spreads, how to combat it, and how to build stronger information systems, while increasing Covid-19 vaccination rates. Through the [Mercury Project](#)—enabled by The Rockefeller Foundation, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Craig Newmark Philanthropies, and the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation with a total of USD 10.25 million so far—the SSRC is supporting a first cohort of social and behavioral scientists from around the world to generate much-needed new research on locally tailored solutions in Bolivia, Brazil, Côte D'Ivoire, Ghana, Haiti, India, Kenya, Malawi, Mexico, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tanzania, United States, and Zimbabwe.

Following the characterization of inaccurate health information by the [U.S. Surgeon General](#) as an “urgent threat,” and by the [World Health Organization](#) as an “infodemic,” the SSRC issued a call for proposals to counter the growing global threats posed by public health mis- and

disinformation and low Covid-19 vaccination rates, and received nearly 200 submissions from around the world.

“With Covid-19 prevalent and rapidly evolving everywhere, there is a pressing need to identify interventions with the potential to increase vaccination take-up. Vaccines are only effective if they become vaccinations; vaccines are a scientific marvel but their potential is unfulfilled if they are left on the shelf,” said **Anna Harvey, President of SSRC**. “The large volume of high-quality proposals submitted to the Mercury Project underscores just how eager the social and behavioral science community is to evaluate interventions to increase vaccination demand and build healthier information environments.”

Researchers in the Mercury Project’s first cohort are affiliated with research institutions and implementing partners around the world:

- Canada: University of Regina
- Côte d’Ivoire: Centre for Research and Action for Peace
- England: The London School of Economics, London School of Health and Tropical Medicine, the University of Bristol, University of Lincoln, and University of Warwick
- France: Aix-Marseille School of Economics
- Ghana: Ghana Health Service, Innovations for Poverty Action, University of Health and Allied Sciences
- Haiti: Zanmi Lasante (Partners in Health)
- Kenya: Partnership for African Social and Governance Research
- India: Centre for Policy Research
- Malawi: Abwenzi Pa Za Umoyo (Partners in Health)
- Mexico: Center for Research and Teaching in Economics, Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de México, and Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey
- Sierra Leone: Ministry of Health and Sanitation, Ram Labs, Unicef
- Spain: University Carlos III

- Rwanda: Inshuti Mu Buzima (Partners in Health)
- Tanzania: Economic and Social Research Foundation, National Institute of Medical Research, University of Dar es Salaam
- United States: Carnegie Mellon, Columbia, Duke, Harvard and Harvard Medical School, MIT, New York University, Rutgers, St. Augustine University, Stanford, UC Berkeley, University of Southern California, the University of Chicago, the University of Pennsylvania, the University of Michigan, Vanderbilt, and Yale

“This initial cohort’s ideas exemplify the creativity and vision behind the Mercury Project,” said **Dr. Bruce Gellin, Chief of Global Public Health Strategy at The Rockefeller Foundation.** “They go far beyond quick fixes, with the goal of identifying robust, cost-effective, and meaningful solutions that can be widely adopted and scaled. We hope that more, better, and science-based knowledge about what we need to do will lead to increased uptake of reliable information—and serve as a powerful counter to the effects of misinformation and disinformation on vaccine demand.”

Funded projects will provide evidence about what works—and doesn’t—in specific places and for specific groups to increase Covid-19 vaccination take-up, including what is feasible on the ground and has the potential to be cost-effective at scale. Each of the 12 teams will have access to findings from the other teams while exploring interventions including, but not limited to:

- Conducting literacy training for secondary school students in partnership with local authorities to help students identify Covid-19 vaccine misinformation;
- Equipping trusted messengers with communication strategies to increase Covid-19 vaccination demand;
- Using social networks to share tailored, community-developed messaging to increase Covid-19 vaccination demand.

The complete list of grantees, and descriptions of each project, are at <https://www.ssrc.org/mercury-project-grantees>.

“The viral, vaccine, and information environments are all rapidly evolving—but that doesn’t mean it is impossible to make progress towards more effective and equitable responses,” said **Heather Lanthorn, Program Director at the Mercury Project**. “By funding projects on the ground around the world, this work will help us understand what works where, and why, and identify new ways to harness the power of connection and communication to advance public health goals.”

The three-year Mercury Project, which launched in November 2021 with USD 7.5 million in seed funding from The Rockefeller Foundation and additional support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Craig Newmark Philanthropies, and the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, applies the principles of large-scale, team-based science to the problem of vaccination demand. SSRC carefully selected interdisciplinary, interinstitutional, and international teams—with over 80 participating researchers—to create a network that can work in coordination to tackle the global problems of Covid-19 vaccine misinformation and low vaccination take-up.

Regular convenings, both virtual and in-person, will ensure that grantee research projects are both informed by and inform health and technology decision-makers around the world. The first convening will occur in late August at The Rockefeller Foundation’s [Bellagio Center](#) in Italy, where thousands of scientists, policymakers, authors, and artists have turned innovative ideas into action since 1959. Grantee teams will share their research designs with each other and with global health policy leaders, and will build a shared research framework to guide evaluations of interventions to increase Covid-19 vaccination demand and create healthier information environments. A second cohort of research teams will receive funding from the [National Science Foundation](#).

More information about the Mercury Project [can be found on the Social Science Research Council website](#).

About the Social Science Research Council

The Social Science Research Council, an independent and international nonprofit, mobilizes necessary knowledge for the public good by supporting social and behavioral science worldwide, generating new research across disciplines and linking researchers with decision-makers. For more information, sign up for our newsletter at ssrc.org and follow us on Twitter @ssrc_org and LinkedIn at [linkedin.com/company/social-science-research-council](https://www.linkedin.com/company/social-science-research-council).

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