

The Ash Institute for Democratic Governance and Innovation

Research Grants Available for Kennedy School Faculty

The Ash Institute is pleased to announce its annual research competition open to all Kennedy School faculty.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The research of the Ash Institute is focused on identifying and exploring democratic governance and innovation. The Institute's current research examines how democratic institutions and processes are being adapted to the conditions of diverse nations, and investigates the sources and stimuli for public innovation and best practices.

Guided by its Faculty Advisory Committee, the Institute has identified five broad themes as its priorities for the next few years. The research project should address some aspect of one of the following areas:

- 1. Democratic Governance in Plural, Divided, or Multicultural Societies:** The central problem is how to rule in the interest of all, while allowing and protecting the cultural specificity present in most pluralist societies. "Tyranny of the majority" is one potential problem, if minority rights and participation in public life are not respected. Deadlock is another if institutions are not developed that can encourage consensus. Social conflict and inter-group violence are a third possibility, especially where intolerance toward differences prevails.
- 2. Democratic Governments as a Guarantor of Social Justice:** Although conceptions of social justice include both equality of opportunity and equality of outcome, our primary concern is for equality of opportunity. Adequate food, healthcare, education, and security are necessary to human dignity and enable citizens to maximize individual development. The challenge for us therefore is to find ways in which democratic governments can regain popular legitimacy by creating an even playing field so that all citizens are equally empowered.
- 3. Accountability in Democratic Governments:** Accountability requires that public officials remain answerable and accessible to the people they serve. It also requires citizen participation which gives citizens a stake in the outcome and provides the government with popular legitimacy. Political, legal, and administrative systems exist to ensure that government officials are acting in the public interest and to limit opportunities for corruption. Less available are systems that increase public participation. A challenge for democratic government is to find ways in which to regain popular legitimacy by creating new opportunities for citizens to participate in governing. Rapidly improving and expanding information technologies offer greater transparency and opportunities for increasing citizen participation. As online opportunities for citizens evolve, the unequal distribution of access threatens to undermine newly won popular legitimacy. How should governments insure that new online initiatives level the playing field and do not broaden the digital divide?
- 4. Restoring the public trust in democratic governments:** This area addresses restoring public trust in the fairness and effectiveness of public institutions and the probity of government officials. Expectations and hopes for a better future which followed the Third Wave of democratization, have slowly been replaced by apathy and distrust in government. The growing influence of money in the electoral process and the strong role of special interests on public policy decision-making may be leading to both loss of trust in government as well as growth in the informal sector and corruption. The inability of governments to deliver adequate services, to promote employment opportunities, and to improve living conditions have resulted in widespread disappointment in democratic governments among their population.

5. Innovations in Government: The Ash Institute's Innovations in American Government Awards Program has played a unique role in identifying and promoting excellence and creativity in the public sector. The Program identifies and promotes best practices and exemplary projects that can be adopted in other settings, providing public officials and senior executives with innovative leadership models. The Institute supports research into the motivations for innovating as well as parameters for success.

PROGRAM GUIDELINES

Proposal Deadline: **Monday, January 28, 2008.**

To be considered for a research grant, please send a research proposal of approximately five pages, describing your research project, the expected results of your research – book, article, case study, etc. – and any additional funding you may have received for the project. Please include an excel spreadsheet budget highlighting in separate categories, your administrative, personnel, and travel costs. The materials should arrive by Monday, January 28, 2008.

Please send your application to: bruce_jackan@ksg.harvard.edu. If you have further questions, please feel free to contact Bruce by email or by phone at 617-495-7548.

The Institute will award \$300,000 in research grants. The average grant will be between \$15,000 and \$50,000. Decisions will be made by a committee composed of the Academic Dean, the Ash Institute Director, the Chair of the Faculty Advisory Committee, and a faculty member at-large.

Sincerely,

Gowher Rizvi
Director
Ash Institute for Democratic Governance and Innovation
Kennedy School of Government
Harvard University