

MANDELA WASHINGTON FELLOWSHIP CATALYST GRANT

2024-2025

Public Services Challenges

Improve Accountability of Public Officials and Services

Do you have an idea for reducing corruption in public services? Such corruption disproportionately harms the poor. Fortunately, citizen-reporting platforms can reduce it by holding government officials accountable. Through this partnership between IREX and D-Prize, up to \$20,000 will be awarded to teams with a plan to launch a pilot of this work, and who have a vision to scale country-wide.

The Poverty Problem

Provision of public services in less-developed countries is rife with corruption problems. On the 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index score, sub-Saharan African countries average a score of 33, whereas the 10 least corrupt countries in the world averaged about 86.¹ Corruption at the local level is particularly problematic and directly harms the poor.

Corruption can manifest itself in many ways. For instance, it may be a lack of public service that citizens pay for through taxes, such as police or hospital staff members being absent from their jobs, or sanitation services not occurring. It may also be through bribery, where officials require bribes to access services that should be available freely. For instance, almost one third of people in the Middle East & North Africa region (ranked 4th out of 6 on the index) paid a bribe in 2015 to access basic services like water and education.²

The Proven Intervention

There is a clear link between citizen voice, transparency, and accountability.³ Over the past decades, several countries have used public monitoring, often facilitated by citizen-reporting platforms, to successfully reduce corruption.

¹ Corruption Perceptions Index 2015, Transparency International.

http://files.transparency.org/content/download/1955/12832/file/2015_CorruptionPerceptionsIndex_Report_EN.pdf

² <https://www.transparency.org/en/news/50-million-people-in-the-middle-east-and-north-africa-paid-bribes-last-year>

³ The impact of strengthening citizen demand for anti-corruption reform. U4.

<http://www.u4.no/publications/the-impact-of-strengthening-citizen-demand-for-anti-corruption-reform/downloadasset/377/>

For example, organizations like I Paid a Bribe offer an online platform where people can share objective data when bribes are requested by corrupt officials and public offices at the local level.⁴ A similar reporting service in Morocco, named Mamdawrinch (which means “We will not bribe.” in Moroccan dialect), and another in Zimbabwe, allow citizens to report bribes onto Facebook and Twitter via mobile phone. The project in Zimbabwe received 150 cases within the first 24 hours of the service launching.⁵

Citizen reporting only works when combined with actionable change. For example, a program in India which monitored teacher attendance and incentivized good behavior cut teacher absenteeism in half and increased student graduation rates by 40 percent.⁶ The program required teachers to submit a daily time-stamped photo of themselves in their classroom before receiving pay. The main issue was lack of data (school administrators previously did not know when a teacher was absent), and there was a clear decision maker who could enforce better behavior (school administrators).

Your Distribution Challenge

The Mandela Washington Fellowship Catalyst Grant will award up to \$20,000 to teams that can create or scale an initiative that holds government offices accountable for the services owed to citizens, who otherwise are not served.

You must have a vision to scale and ensure your selected public service is held accountable nation-wide within 5 years. The Mandela Washington Fellowship Catalyst Grant is meant to enable the first step toward this vision by supporting a small test pilot of your idea that holds 1-3 government offices or public officials accountable, engages at least 5,000 citizen voices, and improves service for a few thousand people.

Designing Your Social Enterprise

There are several elements that D-Prize believes define a successful Transparency organization. D-Prize recommends you design your pilot after considering these questions.

1. *What is the specific public service you plan to address?* The Mandela Washington Fellowship Catalyst Grant is particularly interested in corruption related to the provision of quality of elected officials (i.e., a report card that rates public officials). D-Prize is also interested in reporting on key services, such as police services (e.g., police corruption report card), justice services (e.g., corrupt judge report card), education (e.g., reporting of teacher attendance), and health (e.g., reporting of doctor and nurse job attendance).

⁴ I Paid a Bribe. <http://www.ipaidabribe.com/>

⁵ Fighting Bribery Online, Transparency International 2012 Annual Report. https://www.transparency.org/files/content/publication/Annual_Report_2012.pdf

⁶ <http://www.povertyactionlab.org/publication/solving-absenteeism-raising-test-scores>

2. *What data will you collect, and how will you collect it?* D-Prize is particularly interested in teams that can collect objective and binary data. For instance, asking people whether they paid a bribe meets these criteria (they either did, or did not). In comparison, asking people to rate their satisfaction of service tends to be highly subjective.

Collecting this data is also critical. D-Prize encourages data collection methods that are simple, inclusive, and cost-effective. A key consideration is whether the people who should be reporting data are able and motivated to do so. For instance, if data submission requires a smart phone, the world's poor will generally not be able to participate.

3. *How does this data drive change?* Based on D-Prize's experience, driving changes requires two things: (1) a responsible official who has the capacity to drive change, and (2) a clear theory on why your data will motivate them to change their current behavior.

Finding the right official is the key to change. This person should be a clear decision maker. They must also have the capacity to make the desired change. For example, a school headmaster, who can fire absent teachers, is a potential changemaker.

A clear theory on how your data motivates is also critical. This may take several forms. You might find the right official who wants to make a change and is eager to partner with you. Alternatively, you may find that the right decision maker is not proactively interested in making changes, and thus your data may need to put pressure on them to motivate new behavior.

You may also consider whether you need to gain local support and buy-in from other levels of government. Initiatives in Ghana, Liberia, Mozambique, and Sierra Leone have shown that local community participation is necessary to turn data into actual impact.⁷

4. *How will you know if you are driving change?* Proving your efforts lead to improved service can be difficult. D-Prize recommends that you invest early in simple data collection to show your work is achieving the outcomes you desire.

Market Conditions

- Past D-Prize winners include [Social Cops](#) (India), [Rimay](#) (Ecuador), [Sauti](#) (East Africa), [Please Disturb the Driver!](#) (Mexico), [Pardafas!](#) (Nepal), and [Citizen Help Desk](#) (Nepal).

⁷ Poverty and Corruption in Africa, Community Voices Break the Cycle. Transparency International. 2012. http://www.transparency.org/files/content/activity/2012_PCA_brochure_EN.pdf

Ready To Apply?

Complete your Round 1 Mandela Washington Fellowship Catalyst Grant application at www.d-prize.org/MWFRound1.

Need More Information?

Learn more about the Mandela Washington Fellowship Catalyst Grant timeline, evaluation process, and eligibility at <https://mwfellows.info/CatalystGrant2025>.

Questions? Email MWFAumni@irex.org.