

Susilo Institute for Ethics in the Global Economy

Call for Proposals

“Organizing for Impact: Institutions, Incentives, and the Pursuit of Social Change”

The Susilo Institute for Ethics in the Global Economy, in partnership with the Mehrotra Institute, invites proposals for a new research initiative on how organizations can be structured and governed to drive meaningful and sustainable social change. It will prioritize interdisciplinary initiatives that:

- Complement the Mehrotra Institute’s work on the role of business and markets in society by examining the *internal mechanics* of impact.
- Add depth to the theme of corporate governance by focusing not just on shareholders, but on institutional *structures*, *managerial practices*, and *norms* that integrate a broader set of internal and external stakeholders to enable sustainable and just outcomes.
- Complement initiatives on capitalism, short-termism, and purpose by grounding them in organizational practice and design.

Core Research Themes

To align with faculty expertise and advance the mission of the Susilo Institute, proposals should address one or more of the following core themes:

1. Institutional Design for Social Good

- How does the ecosystem of formal and informal institutions shape the capacity of organizations to generate social impact? And how can organizations shape their institutional ecosystems to better enable the pursuit of social impact?
- How do organizational structures and management practices enable effective delivery of public and social value?
- What is the balance of responsibility between business, civil society, and government in ensuring that product, service, and algorithmic market offerings preserve and enhance the social good?

- How can organizations build and maintain the legitimacy of their purpose in contested, political, and high-stakes environments (e.g., criminal justice, immigration, sustainability, DEI, ESG finance)?
- What is the relationship between organizational purpose and broader principles of ethics, justice, and fairness? How can organizations reflect this relationship in their products, structures, and processes?
- What distinguishes “high-performing institutions” and “managerial excellence” in the provision of public services such as education, health, and criminal justice? What is the role of cultural, economic, and political contexts in shaping management and performance?

2. Leading and Organizing for Purpose

- What does it mean to lead with purpose? Is this the same as values-driven leadership? How is leading with purpose perceived differently from within and outside organizations?
- How do organizations construct and maintain identities, algorithms, products, managerial practices, and organizational processes that balance profitability with purpose?
- How do organizations manage the tradeoffs, dilemmas, and paradoxes created by the pursuit of multiple objectives (e.g. purpose and profit)?
- What role do narratives and culture play in enabling social impact within organizations?
- How can organizations respond to internal and external challenges to their purpose? How can organizations enable collaboration and manage internal and external conflicts across intergroup and political divides?
- What role do algorithms and AI play in enabling or undermining social impact within organizations?

3. Power, Trust, and Accountability in Organizational Processes

- How can organizational processes in public and not-for-profit organizations be designed to establish an inclusive high-performance culture based on trust and accountability?
- How do organizations establish, structure, and manage relationships with external stakeholders to jointly pursue broader social impact?

- What are effective measurement, reporting, and accountability mechanisms in organizations operating at the intersection of public and private sectors?
- How do organizations measure, report, and hold themselves internally and externally accountable to broader objectives including sustainability, climate risk, and other social impacts?
 - How do organizations design approaches to effectively identify, measure, and track purpose-aligned objectives?
 - How do organizations gain legitimacy from relevant internal and external stakeholders for the use of such alternative approaches?
 - How do organizations build algorithms and systems that can be held accountable and are aligned with their values?

4. Scaling Social Impact without Losing Integrity

- How do small, mission-driven organizations preserve their social mission as they grow? How do they adhere to values and core stakeholders as they expand to new products, segments, and markets?
- What are the structural and governance adaptations necessary for scaling impact? What are the intended and unintended consequences of reform and scaling efforts?
- How do organizational members' identities, beliefs, attitudes, emotions, and cognitions shape their acceptance or rejection of organizational purpose? How can organizational members influence organizational purpose?

5. Methods: Organizational Experiments and Design Thinking

- Use design-based and participatory approaches to test institutional innovations.
- Collaborations with government agencies, NGOs, and businesses to prototype and study organizational reforms.
- Collaborations with think tanks and other research initiatives.
- Development of action-research methods that blend academic rigor with practical impact.
- Case studies on failures and successes in scaling socially transformative interventions.

- Comparative studies to understand what distinguishes “high-performing” versus “high-potential” social impact institutions across different cultural or political contexts.

Selection Criteria

This award is open to all Boston University faculty. The Susilo Institute seeks to seed new, interdisciplinary collaborations with the potential to grow into long-term research partnerships or programs.

Funding

Funding will be commensurate with the scope of the project, with awards anticipated in the range of \$10,000 to \$100,000. Uses of funds might include:

- Graduate student or postdoctoral researcher support
- Activities in direct support of research such as data purchases, equipment, or incentives
- Publication/dissemination costs
- Conference or research travel
- Faculty salary and related fringe

Proposal Requirements

In a proposal of at most two (2) pages in length (not including references), please include:

- Project Title and investigators (PI, Co-PI's)
- Societal Importance: Why does this project matter? (2-3 sentences)
- Interdisciplinary contribution: Which disciplines does it combine and why?
- Overview: 3-5 sentences describing the project aims and approach.
- Duration: Of up to 2 years.

- Stage and scaling potential: e.g. small pilot that may turn into a larger field experiment.
- Description: Readiness, dependencies, expected outcomes and deliverables, and potential future extramural funding sources.
- Budget: Requested amounts and justification.

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- Please upload your proposal narrative and budget by December 5 using this google form:
 - If you have any questions about your submission, contact Sandy Keldsen at zarotney@bu.edu . For budget specific questions, contact Sophie Zschirnt at sophiezs@bu.edu

Deliverables and Activities

Successful projects will contribute to one or more of the following ongoing activities of the Institute:

- **Flagship Research Projects:** Longitudinal and comparative case studies, field experiments, data partnerships, and qualitative research in business and in sectors such as education, criminal justice, and economic development.
- **Organizational Design Lab:** A cross-sector partnership platform where organizations co-design and test new institutional models.
- **Fellowship Program:** Postdocs and practitioner fellows embedded in organizations to conduct action-oriented research.
- **Annual Conference:** Present your research at our next annual conference --Bringing together scholars, policymakers, business leaders, and NGOs on “Organizing for Impact.”
- **Policy White Papers & Toolkits:** Translating research into actionable tools for institutional leaders.

Proposals are due by December 5, 2025. Please submit your narrative and budget via this form: <https://forms.gle/F9zSmsa72xSYmhNf8>.

For questions about submissions, contact Sandy Keldsen (zarotney@bu.edu); for budget-related inquiries, contact Sophie Zschirnt (sophie@bu.edu).