

Grants Call - Developing Partnerships for Research and Policy

Dear X,

LACLEARN invites local, regional and international organizations to submit concept notes for research grants focused on studying the democracy, human rights, and governance (DRG) implications of "tough-on-crime" (Mano Dura) policies in Central America. These grants aim to broaden the understanding of these policies beyond immediate security outcomes, exploring their impacts on democratic processes, human rights observance, and potential avenues for policy resilience and reform.

Research Themes: The grant(s) will support research on one or more of the following themes:

- Citizen Perspectives on Mano Dura Approaches: Understanding citizen views, gender differentiated impacts of “mano dura” and how they resonate in women and LGBTQ+ populations, factors driving public support and the role of pro-Mano Dura narratives.
- Mano Dura Impacts: Implications on human rights, rule of law, civic space/opposition voices, gender, independent media, and citizen perceptions of security.
- Communication strategies: Developing strategic behavior-change communication strategies reflecting on the impacts of “mano dura” policies.

Crosscutting themes include the trajectories of Mano Dura policies, their gendered effects, and overall impact on democratic resilience.

Research may involve developing a design with qualitative methods for grassroots consultations on the perceptions of Mano Dura policies and their links to official narratives.

Analytical Priorities and Products

- Understanding the broader impacts of Mano Dura policies on democracy, human rights, citizen participation and governance.
- Exploring local and regional perspectives and narratives in response to Mano Dura approaches.
- Identifying evidence-supported alternatives to Mano Dura policies.

Resulting Illustrative Products May Include

- Reports analyzing the socioeconomic, political, and human rights implications of Mano Dura policies at both national and local levels.
- Policy papers on citizen perspectives and narratives regarding Mano Dura policies.
- Comparative analyses of Mano Dura policies and their alternatives.

About LACLEARN

The LACLEARN Grants Under Contract (GUC) Program is intended to support LACLEARN’s objectives with complementary work in the LAC region. The grants funded through this program will contribute to the achievement of LACLEARN’s programmatic objectives:

1. Provide support for rapid response to crisis situations, including short-term democracy, human rights, and governance (DRG) programming through local organizations to promote inclusion, participation, citizen-responsive approaches, and transparency/accountability during the transition phase.
2. Pilot innovative DRG technical approaches, implement research, disseminate DRG learnings, support democracy, human rights, and good governance, or other learning and analysis objectives.

Additional information regarding LACLEARN can be accessed here:

<https://developmentpi.com/news/laclearn-fy24-annual-program-statement-for-grants-under-contract>

Background

In recent years, Central America has seen a resurgence of “tough-on-crime” policies, characterized by mass incarceration, extended states of exception, and heavy reliance on military forces for public security. Notably, in El Salvador, the government has aggressively advanced pro-Mano Dura narratives, gaining significant public support despite evidence suggesting that such policies may exacerbate conflict dynamics, undermine the rule of law, and impede human rights. This trend, exemplified by the so-called “Bukele model,” is gaining traction across the region.

These policies, while sometimes effective in the short term, have historically shown limited long-term success in addressing crime and violence. They pose significant challenges to democratic stability, including the suppression of civil society and media, erosion of interpersonal trust, and centralization of power in the executive branch. The popularity of tough-on-crime narratives, often irrespective of their long-term effectiveness, underscores a need for comprehensive research to understand and potentially mitigate their adverse effects on democracy, human rights, and governance.

In response to the growing traction of Mano Dura policies in Central America, LACLEARN is undertaking a comprehensive activity to analyze and understand the broader implications of these security strategies. This initiative aims to scrutinize the effects of such policies on democracy, human rights, and governance. Through this activity, LACLEARN seeks not only to deepen the understanding of Mano Dura narratives among governments and citizens but also to explore alternative security policies. A significant aspect of this effort involves identifying practical strategies to mitigate the potential negative consequences of these policies on the rule of law and human rights. To achieve this, LACLEARN is amplifying ongoing research, facilitating policy analysis, and creating opportunities for dialogue by integrating diverse perspectives and forming partnerships with regional organizations.

Available Funds

Subject to the availability of funds, the total level of funding available for awards under this call for concept notes is **up to \$125,000** for up to two grants. Each grant should span no more than five (5) months in duration. LACLEARN may issue more than one award from this call for concept notes. Concept note submission is voluntary and LACLEARN will not reimburse applicants for expenses incurred during concept note development.