Risk & Equity Matrix Guide

An exercise for **academic-practitioner research teams** to systematically consider potential impacts for a wide range of actors involved in the research process.

Suggested citation:

MIT Governance Lab (MIT GOV/LAB). 2020.
"Risk and Equity Matrix". Version 1. Engaged Scholarship Tools.
Massachusetts Institute of Technology Governance Lab (United States).

Authors: Alisa Zomer & Selmah Goldberg

Engaged Scholarship Tools

MIT **GOV/LAB** is developing tools to support engaged scholarship by practitioner-academic research teams. The objective of the matrix is to ensure that risks and benefits of research collaborations are distributed in a more equitable manner. The purpose of this brief is to explain why the matrix exists and provide guidance on how to use it. This matrix is meant to be a living document and we welcome your feedback and experiences at mitgovlab@mit.edu. Other tools in the series:

- MIT **GOV/LAB** Engaged Scholarship Tools: An interactive website and workbook to facilitate collaborative research with equitable exchange.

- How to Have Difficult Conversations: A practical guide for academic-practitioner research collaborations.

- Risk and Equity Matrix: An exercise to systematically consider potential impacts for the range of actors involved in the research process.

- MIT **GOV/LAB** Learning Cases: Featuring research collaborations on civic pedagogy with Grassroot; access to Information with Twaweza; civic leadership in the Philippines; and, the Learning Collaborative.

Acknowledgements

Design: Susy Tort **&** Gabriela Reygadas

Introduction

At the MIT Governance Lab, we practice a model of **engaged scholarship**, which we define as a process of rigorous research that is co-created by practitioners and grounded in local problems.[1] We think this model results in more innovative and relevant knowledge and evidence, and ensures that both academics and practitioners benefit from the research process. Furthermore, a collaborative process makes it more likely that practitioners will use the results in their day-to-day work.

- **Kickstart difficult conversations** on topics that are often thought about, but not captured or discussed during the collaboration process;
- Systematically and transparently **lay out imbalances and power asymmetries** before research begins;
- Encourage teams to **spread risk and benefits out more equitably;**
- Help teams articulate and document common knowledge, **build trust,** and set the foundation for an open, honest working relationship;
- Provides teams a **benchmark or baseline to revisit and revise original decisions** about the collaboration design;
- **Document the collaboration process** for use in research reports for partners and in annexes for pre-analysis plans;
- Help donors **understand potential impacts** of proposed projects and processes to make better decisions about which research projects should receive funding.

To date, we have reviewed more than fifty completed matrices, which we require as part of the applications for our internal MIT **dissertation and seed funds** and **external grant program** on building evidence on citizen engagement and government accountability. The matrix is also included as a tool in our "How to have difficult conversations", a **practical guide** developed for academic-practitioner research collaborations.

Developing strong partnerships is a process[2] and as noted in our "How to have difficult conversations" guide, what type of documentation is most useful to track decisions, determine roles and responsibilities, timelines, outputs, and resources committed, depends on the nature of the relationship as well as organizational capacity and institutional requirements. Whether informal documents (e.g., work plan, a memorandum of understanding (MOU)) or a legally-binding contract is best to ensure all partners are on the same page in terms of goals and output depends on the partner and context. We find the matrix most useful in the planning and implementation phases to add detail to scenarios and budgets that can then shape broader documents like work plans and MOUs.

---

1   We define practitioners broadly to refer to organizations engaged in applied practice, such as service provision, citizen mobilization, and policy advocacy; including a diversity of non-governmental organizations, social enterprises, or governments; with extensive experience in the locality of research.

2   For a model on building organizational partnerships, see Levine, A. (2020).

How does the matrix complement traditional ethics reviews

As social science research methods have become more sophisticated, best practices for partnerships and ethics standards are advancing to keep pace, especially in regards to field experiments and in developing country contexts.[3] The American Political Science Association (APSA), for example, raises the issue of "third party actors", which includes collaborations with practitioner partners, in their professional ethics guidelines update draft.[4] This topic is also discussed in the Evidence in Governance and Politics (EGAP) response to APSA's proposed updates.[5] The EGAP memo also has some observations about tools and worksheets like the matrix (see box).

Advantages of worksheets from EGAP memo:[7]

"Stating principles is important for guiding researchers. However, it is not always clear how to apply the principles to concrete situations [...] The basic idea behind an ethical worksheet is to force the researcher to consider important dimensions for each stakeholder and document their thinking about each facet. The exercise could be routinized and required in a way analogous to pre-analysis plans. Some advantages of worksheets include:

a) **Increasing transparency** — deviations from disciplinary norms are easier to catch when researchers are required to explicate their thinking;

b) **"Forcing"** researchers to consider the relevant stakeholders — Very often research is focused on a particular group (e.g., subjects) that dominates the ethical considerations. Worksheets can remind researchers to broaden the scope of their considerations;

c) **Balance** — By explicitly stating the costs, benefits, and risks involved to all parties, the worksheet can assure that the conversation does not focus solely on perceived potential harms or sweep them under the rug;

d) **Power dynamics** — Looking across stakeholder groups, the researcher can ensure that the benefits and costs fall across groups equitably and one stakeholder does not wield undue power that is not accounted for.

e) **Actionable mitigation strategies** — By inviting researchers to state mitigation strategies for each listed cost, the worksheet nudges researchers to designs that protect subjects as much as possible.

f) **Feedback** — Sharing the worksheet provides a simple means for researchers to get feedback from their peers focused on ethical considerations. It also focuses the discussion so it is clear which assumptions or strategies are at issue should disagreements arise."

---

3   EGAP (2020); Grimm, J. et al. (2020); Kaplan, L. et al. (2020); APSA (2019); Desposato, S. (2015); Humphreys, M. (2015); APSA (2012).

4   American Political Science Association (APSA). (2019). 2019 APSA report on Human Subjects Research Professional Ethics, Rights and Freedoms. See "Issues for Future Consideration" (pg 4) and "Impact" (pg 12).

5   Evidence in Governance and Politics (EGAP). (2019). EGAP Committee Memo on the Report of the APSA AdHoc Committee on Human Subjects Research. See "Decision-making" (pg 3) and "Harms and risks" (pg 7).

6   *Ibid.*

While traditional ethics reviews and institutional review boards (IRB) focus on human subjects (the main focus of a research study), the matrix looks more broadly at partnerships and the variety of actors involved at all stages of the research process.

Relationships between partners and participants (research assistants, advisors, etc.) in the process of data collection and analysis are not governed by ethics review in the way that human subjects of the research are, and oftentimes it's assumed that partners are aware and able to assess their risks accordingly. That's not always the case, so it's useful to have a deliberate conversation to discuss the range of impacts a study could have. In this sense, the matrix complements the ethics review process by providing a practical exercise to ground discussions and decisions.

How to use the matrix

The matrix should be filled out by the academic and practitioner team together; it is not meant to be a one-sided exercise. If one partner takes the lead in drafting responses, there should be time set aside to deliberately review and discuss any tensions or tradeoffs.

Timing

We recommend using the tool in three different stages:

1. Filling out the tool in the **planning phase** of the collaboration, before major decisions on the research or intervention design, and budget, are set in stone.

2. Once the project is implemented, set a **mid-point check-in** to revisit the matrix and see if anything needs to be reconsidered or updated.

3. Finally, **at the end of the project**, take a moment to come back to the matrix and document critical lessons: What went according to plan? What changed or was unexpected? What takeaways can be noted to improve outcomes for next time? The matrix can be included in the project documentation and outputs, as part of a report written with partners, or as an annex to a pre-analysis plan.

	$ Costs	☆ Benefits	⚠ Risks	☂ Mitigation
Research Subjects				
Research Team				
Lead Researcher(s)				
Practitioner Partner				
Government Actors				
Other? (Informal Authorities, Community Leaders, Media, Civil Society, Donors, Enterprises)				

Categories

The horizontal axis includes the various dimensions of how to consider risks and equity by thinking carefully through potential costs and benefits, as well as how to mitigate any harms.

Costs include any material or intangible items that must be given up in order to achieve the study goals. This might include payments such as time, personnel, or spent political or social capital. Costs can't be directly mitigated.

Benefits should cover any expected or potential positive outcomes for the different audiences, including material or intangible gains like compensation for time, new knowledge, hard resources (services, hardware, etc.), capacity-building (skills), or reputation-building.

Risks are possible harms including a comprehensive list of expected and unexpected events that may happen in the field and that could negatively impact any actors involved. The risks can also be annotated with analysis of levels of likelihood and severity (low to high).

Mitigation references plans to alleviate any potential risks identified for specific actors. For example, addressing threats to personnel safety and well-being in the field includes both designing research protocols to be carried out in teams of two, using low-cost tech, and having regular check-ins to address any unexpected problems that may arise; as well as having a communication and escalation action plan ready in case.

Actors

Along the vertical axis are rows to cover a diversity of actors involved in the research study. These actors go well beyond the scope of human subjects, which focuses on individuals or groups that are being studied, to encompass third-party actors or anyone else involved throughout the research process. We also include examples from real projects.

1 Research subjects

2 Research team

3 Lead researcher

4 Practitioner partners

5 Government actors

6 Other actors

1 **Research subjects** are covered under traditional ethics reviews, so research teams typically already know any costs, benefits, or risks to this group. We include research subjects here first to allow researchers to detail out the costs and benefits in a more comprehensive way.

What we like about the example below:

Details possible benefits for both individual and group-level behavior.

Research Subjects: Citizen survey respondents & focus group participants

($) Costs
- Time costs of participating in survey or focus group discussion
- Survey fatigue

☆ Benefits
- Viewing information about problem-solving; likely to be interesting and informative
- Gain information through informative group discussions

⚠ Risks
- Breach of confidentiality for survey respondents
- Risk of public criticism in focus group discussions

☂ Mitigation
- Impose reasonable time lengths to survey
- Follow strict IRB protocols for confidentiality and anonymity in the survey
- Pose hypothetical scenarios in surveys and focus groups to avoid potential backlash from others in community and/or from local officials

Twaweza office in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

2 **Research team** including research assistants, field officers, and study managers, and other researchers hired for the purpose of the study, which may include people that are local to and/or outside the country or geography of study. The research team may face a number of physical risks as a result of the study, for example travel to field sites or carrying equipment that may elevate risks associated with accidents, theft, or violence. At the same time, high unemployment or job insecurity may lead local researchers to willingly take on additional risks or take shortcuts to improve outputs (i.e., emphasizing efficiency over thoroughness or accuracy). Researchers from outside the country or geography of interest may face other risks, especially related to knowledge of local contexts. Mitigating these risks and balancing performance incentives and fair compensation for high-quality field work that is conducted safely is tricky, especially given power imbalances that researchers may hold and limited knowledge of local contexts.

What we like about the example below:
The benefits are far-reaching in terms of opportunities to gain skills and experience. Risks include those that may come from the lead investigator and also the research context. High level of detail in describing mitigation strategies.

Research Team: Research assistants hired in-country and trained by the PI

$ Costs
- Time
- Travel to remote villages

☆ Benefits
- Development of research skills and professional experience
- Exposure to dynamic practitioner partner
- Potential to co-author with PI

⚠ Risks
- Miscommunication over study design and aims with local partners leads to physical or emotional conflict in the field
- Potential security risks during travel to remote locations

☂ Mitigation
- Weekly calls to facilitate regular communication both PI and research partners
- Strict travel protocols: no night travel, travel accompanied by community members

3 **Lead Researcher** refers to the academic scholars or principal investigators who are leading the study. This role is distinct from the research team because they hold decision-making power and have different motivations (e.g., academic timelines, tenure requirements, meeting journal standards) and associated risks, especially if they are coming from outside the country or communities of study. Lead researchers can include scholars based outside the country or geography of study, and/or scholars from local research and academic settings, who may have dual interests in broader knowledge production and local policy outcomes. These multifaceted roles and how they might affect the research process should be captured in the matrix.

What we like about the example below:

Benefits include a range of academic and non-academic motivations central to an engaged scholarship approach. Mitigation plans are detailed and feasible.

Lead Researcher(s) (PI from US-based university)

Costs	☆ Benefits	⚠ Risks	☂ Mitigation
• Time • Travel to remote villages	• Advancement of research agenda, informed by local partners • Data and material for academic publication	• Miscommunication with the local partner over research implementation results in reputational harm or additional field costs due to delays/ changes • Potential security risks during travel to remote locations	• Weekly phone calls with research partner to ensure regular and effective communication • Strict travel protocols: no night travel, traveling accompanied by community member

Artwork from Twaweza report

4 **Practitioner partners** can refer to a variety of implementing partners who are running the program under evaluation or groups supporting the research itself.[7] Here it's good to discuss the range of impacts a study could have, including clear articulation of potential benefits, for example, "how the results will be useful to the partner?" "what if the results are null or negative?" and potential unintended consequences. (e.g., "civil society partners' involvement may lead to increased visibility by government agencies, potentially making local operations more difficult").

What we like about the example below:

Responses are distinct for each type of practitioner partner, including headquarters and field staff. Mitigation strategies are realistic and specific.

Practitioner Partners 1. Headquarters / 2. Field staff (in communities)

💲 **Costs**	☆ **Benefits**	⚠ **Risks**	☂ **Mitigation**
• HQ: Staff time costs for research design and implementation • HQ: Communication with and coordination with staff • Field staff: time costs for participating in qualitative interviews, and in group discussions on research design	• Experience in research design and development that can inform future strategic planning exercises • New data collection strengths and expertise • Findings from research directly applicable to mentoring and training for field staff	• Miscommunication with PI over research implementation leads to reputational harm, loss of funding • Miscommunication with field staff network about aims and objectives of research leads to loss of managerial authority	• Partial compensation for staff time • Weekly calls to facilitate regular communication both PI and research partners • Regular communication staff network via mentors, WhatsApp messages, and advisory group meetings

---

7   For more on practitioner partners, see Kaplan, et al. (2020).

5 **Government actors** are traditionally exempt from human subjects ethics considerations, but it's still important to consider how both individuals and agencies might be affected by a study. For example, studying inter-government interactions or the behavior of front-line service providers may bring undue attention to the government worker and impact their standing in the community or their job security.

Government Actors: City of XX, Federal Agency

$ Costs

- Time to meet and discuss logistical set-up and implementation of survey component

⭐ Benefits

- Actors will receive reports of the research findings to assist actors to engage in best policy practices

⚠ Risks

- As government agencies are not officially partnering with the research team, no risks associated with this project will be passed on to government actors. Our findings may lead to reputational costs for these agencies, or potential loss of jobs

☂ Mitigation

- The research team and city of XX are in the process of signing a logistical support agreement. This agreement - standard between the city of XX and other academic researchers - protects the city from any legal action or responsibility as a result of harm to the researchers

6 **Other actors** including informal or traditional authorities, media, civil society, donors and/or enterprises should also be considered in filling out the matrix. **Informal authorities**, like **community leaders, religious, traditional, or tribal chiefs**, are important power brokers to document in these analyses, especially if permission is needed to operate or conduct research in a given community.

Discussion & planning

Once you've filled out the matrix, the next step is to have a discussion with your partner. Here are a few conversation prompts to get the conversation going:

- Look at the different categories, are any of them lopsided? Do risks seem equitably distributed?

- If it is lopsided, is there a way to shift the intervention or research design to change this?

- Are the mitigation plans specific enough to implement? Is there an accountability mechanism or fail safe in case something goes wrong?

- Have mitigation measures been budgeted for sufficiently?

- If actors accept the risks, schedule a time to check-in and make sure that everyone is still comfortable with the process and decision-making.

Best practices

Completing the Risk and Equity Matrix is an open-ended exercise, so how do you know when you're done? What does a completed matrix that is useful for planning and decision-making look like? The following guidelines can help you evaluate your answers:

- **Specific:** Are your responses tailored to the actor and clear about the extent to which people are being affected (e.g. "10 hours per week" instead of "time costs")?

- **Comprehensive:** Do your answers include a range of considerations beyond time, money, and physical safety? For example, political, reputational, professional, and emotional factors.

- **Realistic:** Do researchers have the time, ability, and authority to implement mitigation strategies? Are the strategies feasible and measurable (e.g., "weekly calls to facilitate communication")?

- **Balanced:** Conduct assessment at various time periods to understand immediate and long-term effects of intervention to inform larger programming goals.

You may want to add more to your answers if you find they are:

- **Vague:** Are your answers too brief, non-specific, or not concrete enough to evaluate (e.g., "no greater risks than everyday risks" or risks broadly categorized as high, medium or low without explaining what was at risk and why)?

- **Repetitive:** Are you using generic answers, or copying and pasting answers across the different actors?

- **Inconsistent:** Are you giving much more attention to one category or actor than another? For example, sometimes people give much more consideration and detail to describe benefits to various actors than costs, risks, or mitigation.

Considerations

Using a risk and equity matrix is one way to systematically predict, document and reflect on the myriad effects of engaged scholarship on individuals and organizations. The feedback we've received to date shows the matrix has been helpful in a few areas: as a tool for meaningful stakeholder engagement; to consider and plan for unforeseen outcomes; to ensure mitigation measures are budgeted for; and, to allocate funding.

Going forward, our team intends to solicit more feedback to make sure that the matrix is useful to inform decision-making throughout the lifetime of a study, and especially that practitioner partners are equipped to share in those decisions. As more people experiment with using the matrix and as proposed projects are carried out over time, our next set of questions about the matrix turns to its effects in practice:

- How do the perceived costs, benefits and risks that researchers envision compare to reality when a project is implemented (and how is this gauged)? In other words, does what you entered in the matrix line up with what actually happened with the project?

- Does completing the matrix affect whether researchers actually implement the mitigation strategies they identified? Counterfactual: Did having to think through risk mitigation in the matrix mean that you actually tried harder or did better at mitigating risks when you carried out the project than if you hadn't done the matrix at all?

- Does the matrix support practitioner-academic relationships and trust-building? For example, what topics and conversations does the matrix stimulate that otherwise wouldn't be discussed among partners?

- How can the matrix best support equitable exchange and decision-making for all actors involved in the research study design and implementation?

We welcome additional questions and reflections on how this tool can be most useful: mitgovlab@mit.edu.

References

American Political Science Association (APSA). (2019). 2019 APSA Report on Human Subjects Research Professional Ethics, Rights and Freedoms. Available online.

American Political Science Association (APSA). (2012). A Guide to Professional Ethics in Political Science, Second Edition. APSA Committee on Professional Ethics, Rights and Freedoms. Available online.

Desposato, Scott. (2015). Ethics and experiments: Problems and solutions for social scientists and policy professionals. Routledge.

Evidence in Governance and Politics (EGAP). (2019). EGAP Committee Memo on the Report of the APSA AdHoc Committee on Human Subjects Research. Available online.

Grimm, Jannis, Kevin Koehler, Ellen M Lust, Ilyas Saliba, and Isabell Schierenbeck. (2020). Safer Field Research in the Social Sciences. Sage.

Humphreys, Macartan. (2015). "Reflections on the ethics of social experimentation." *Journal of Globalization and Development*, Volume 6.

Kaplan, Lennart, Jana Kuhnt, and Janina I. Steinert. (2020). "Do no harm? Field research in the Global South: Ethical challenges faced by research staff", World Development, Volume 127.

Levine, Adam S. (2020). "How to Form Organizational Partnerships to Run Experiments"Forthcoming in: *Advances in Experimental Political Science.* Available online.

MIT GOV/LAB. (2020). "How to Have Difficult Conversations / A Practical Guide for Academic-Practitioner Research Collaborations". Massachusetts Institute of Technology Governance Lab (United States). Available online.

Sample Matrices

Sierra Leone, IGR

Example 1:

Informing Government Response for Covid-19 (Sierra Leone)

Background: In 2020, MIT **GOV/LAB** launched a nationally representative survey on Covid response in Sierra Leone, which was designed with input from multiple government agencies to ensure utility and maximize uptake of the results for decision-making. The study in Sierra Leone is a collaboration with the Institute for Governance Reform (IGR), in partnership with Sierra Leone's Directorate of Science, Technology and Innovation (DSTI), Ministry of Finance's Research and Delivery Division (MoF-RDD), and Statistics Sierra Leone (Stats-SL).[8]

---

8   For more on this collaboration, see MIT News story and preliminary research results.

Example 1:

Informing Government Response for Covid-19 (Sierra Leone)

Research Subjects

💲 Costs

- Time

⭐ Benefits

- Possible benefits to improved resource targeting
- Improved match between resource allocation and citizen priorities
- Expressive/psychological benefit to voicing their concerns and representing their community to decision makers
- Increased social status as representatives of their community to decision makers

⚠️ Risks

- Contracting Covid from enumerators
- Psychological distress due to triggers of Ebola related trauma
- Breach of private PII data and retaliation from government or other authorities
- Distress caused by approach of strangers
- Survey fatigue when findings do not trickle down to respondents

☂️ Mitigation

- Enumerators stand 2 meters away when possible
- Enumerators complete health questionnaire and temp check daily
- Enumerators conduct as short a survey as possible
- Enumerators conduct short survey interview outside when possible
- Enumerators do not touch anything in respondent house
- Match enumerators to home district and EAs where they may have some social connections
- Match same enumerators to EAs from AB
- Train enumerators to suspend conversation in case of any emotional distress
- Train enumerators to explain purpose of project very clearly and carry ample documentation and authorizations
- Make sure enumerators are accompanied by community guide (chairperson or other)
- Supply enumerators with hand sanitizer or other public health goods to give to the community

Example 1:

Informing Government Response for Covid-19 (Sierra Leone)

Research Team: **Local enumerators from Sierra Leone managed by IGR**

$ Costs

- Time

☆ Benefits

- Employment
- Contribution to national crisis response
- Opportunity for continuous learning and practice (new research and data collection skills)

⚠ Risks

- Contracting Covid from IGR staff from Freetown
- Contracting Covid from survey respondents
- Violence from hostile communities
- Security risks due to road travel during time of heightened distrust

☂ Mitigation

- Mitigation strategies to prevent Covid spread from above cell
- Train enumerators in their home district and/or via phone
- No travel after dark

Lead Researcher(s): **MIT GOV/LAB**

$ Costs

- Limited grant funds
- Time and opportunity costs
- Use of political capital for additional fundraising and repurposing of grants
- Political capital within the university for expedited paperwork

☆ Benefits

- Building relationships with DSTI, MoF, IGR
- Contribute usefully to decision making and crisis response
- Produce new data, policy briefs and visualizations
- Reputational benefits for MIT to working with policymakers on Covid response
- Experience doing applied research in Sierra Leone and learnings from Sierra Leone
- Academic papers, though this is optional for us

⚠ Risks

- Reputational costs if subjects or enumerators contract Covid as result of study activities

☂ Mitigation

- Rigorous ethics approval from MIT and Government of Sierra Leone
- Supported IGR to develop field protocols for Covid reporting and safety measures

Lead Researcher(s): **IGR**

💲 Costs

- Time and opportunity costs during emergency period
- Use of political capital for policy impact

⚠ Risks

- Reputational costs if subjects or enumerators contract Covid as result of study activities

☆ Benefits

- Contribute usefully to decision making and crisis response
- Reputational benefits for IGR to working with policymakers on Covid response
- Building relationships with MIT
- Publish policy briefs and academic papers
- Access to resources and funding
- Capacity building for new data collection methods (e.g. phone surveys)

☂ Mitigation

- Develop protocols and procedures for safety in the field

Practitioner Partner: **Government partners (DSTI, MoF-RDD, Stats-SL)**

💲 Costs

- Time and opportunity costs during emergency period
- Use of political capital for policy impact

⚠ Risks

- Reputational costs if results reflect poorly on government policies or performance

☆ Benefits

- Support and bolstered capacity during crises period to inform policies
- Potential access to additional donor support
- Reputational benefit working with MIT and IGR team
- Increased insight on possible impact of some government interventions on citizens
- Contribute to insights on citizens' trust in government messaging
- Opportunity to contribute to research design so that outputs will provide evidence on issues that are practitioners' priorities

☂ Mitigation

- Work closely with research leads to design and disseminate results most useful to audiences
- Clear communication of research methodology, innovative measures for research uptake with clear policy recommendations for government to act on

Gauteng, South Africa

Example 2:

Teaching on WhatsApp with Grassroot (South Africa)

Summary: Grassroot, a civic technology organization based in South Africa, launched a first-of-its-kind leadership development course over the messaging platform WhatsApp. The distance-learning course, Leadership through Storytelling, was designed to build the capacity of organizers for sustained community activism. In 2019, Grassroot piloted the course and collaborated with the MIT **GOV**/**LAB** to conduct mixed-methods research on the effectiveness of the course content and its potential to advance long-term community organizing goals.[9]

---

9   For more on Grassroot's collaboration with MIT GOV/LAB, see MIT News story, preliminary research results, and guide for teaching on WhatsApp.

Example 2:

Teaching on WhatsApp with Grassroot (South Africa)

Research Subjects: **Community leaders and activists**

$ Costs

- Time and opportunity costs (employment, time with family, leisure)
- Mobile phone use and airtime

☆ Benefits

- Access to educational opportunities
- Networking with other community activists
- Relationship building with Grassroot

⚠ Risks

- Educational materials cause emotional stress or lead to disengagement
- Sharing of personal stories leads to jealousy or other negative interactions within activist networks
- Negative feedback and/or treatment in the communities where they live and work due to course involvement

☂ Mitigation

- Curriculum is carefully designed and tested to fit context and audience
- Regular engagement with coaches to monitor potential negative impacts

Lead Researcher(s): MIT **GOV/LAB**

$ Costs

- Time and opportunity costs (time spent away from home)

☆ Benefits

- Relationship building with local partners
- Novel pilot outcomes for dissemination, with possibility for scaling in other contexts
- Reputation building to work with successful civic tech organization and group at Harvard

⚠ Risks

- Course fails to launch (poor recruitment or planning) leading to failed evaluation
- Partner could reject findings from evaluation or stop course mid-way
- Personal safety traveling to/from office and field sites, transporting equipment and payments for staff

☂ Mitigation

- Plan for significant iteration and time in country to work with partner
- Build in time to respond to project changes and partner needs
- Proper safety precautions for travel (taxis/ubers, limited evening travel) and electronic payment of research costs when possible

Teaching on WhatsApp with Grassroot (South Africa)

MIT**GOV**/**LAB**

Research Team: **Local enumerators hired, trained and managed by MIT lead researchers**

Benefits

- Employment
- Learn new professional skills (phone surveys, interviews, writing, Survey CTO)
- Relationship building with Grassroot and MIT

Costs

- Time and opportunity costs (longer term employment, better payment with benefits, education)

Risks

- Personal safety traveling to/from office and field sites, carrying valuable research equipment (phones, tablets)

Mitigation

- Dedicated training on research ethics and protocols for human subjects
- Open communication and protocols in case of injury or adverse event

Practitioner Partner: **Grassroot leadership, Grassroot field staff**

Benefits

- Leadership: Reputation building through rigorous evaluation of pilot by MIT to support future funding
- Novel pilot results to share with civic tech and organizing communities
- Field staff: Learn new content and skills for online teaching; employment

Costs

- Leadership: Time and opportunity costs (time diverted from other activities and main Grassroot platform, time spent iterating and in the field with MIT team)
- Field staff: Time and opportunity costs (time diverted from other employment, organizing activities)

Risks

- Leadership: Course is unsuccessful (design, ability to recruit is poor, staff unqualified)
- Misalignment with MIT researchers on questions of interest/methods
- MIT reverts on commitment to support research costs
- Donors discontinue funding due to diverging priorities
- Field staff: Negative feedback and/or treatment in the communities where they live and work due to course involvement

Mitigation

- Leadership: Engage field staff to build capacity, provide learning and growth opportunities
- Maintain consistent communications with MIT to build rapport and take shared decisions
- Provide regular updates to donors to share and clarify new direction
- Field staff: Train enumerators to identify emotional distress and suspend engagement with participant as necessary
- Maintain regular communication (meetings, WhatsApp groups) with Grassroot leadership and MIT team to provide feedback and troubleshoot any issues