

Innovations for Successful Societies



Jennifer Widner

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CURRENT RESEARCH

Making Government Work in Hard Places

ISS research spans a broad spectrum of situations and challenges—some that make headlines and others that are below the radar. Take the massive effort to establish legal property titling across Rwanda, where the lack of clear land ownership spawned frequent conflict and limited the economic participation of citizens. Following up on a four-year project that mapped more than 10 million parcels, the program, which launched in 2012, established a system for registering and transferring land ownership. Rwanda struggled to persuade its newly titled landholders of the need to register all property transactions — a novel idea that gained credence only slowly in the East African country.

Rwanda's experience highlights a crucial aspect of ISS's work: to isolate the reasons why one government initiative succeeds while others fail, and why some lead to long-term improvements while others fade away. ISS researchers explore the importance of high-level, continuing support, the value of credibility and consistency, and the complexities presented by cultural norms. It is never simple.

Since 2008, the program's research has helped public servants improve cabinet coordination, streamline service delivery, reduce corruption, strengthen the security of property rights, mediate conflict, and respond to infectious disease outbreaks. Widner seeks to expand assistance to cover requests from leaders in Afghanistan, Myanmar, South Africa, and other countries. ISS also seeks to extend its reach to some of the challenges facing low-income communities in the United States.

Out of Research: Practicality

Leaders rarely have the time to identify and investigate...

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AFFILIATION

 Princeton University

EDUCATION

- Ph.D. Yale University, Political Science
- M.A. Yale University, International Management

RESEARCH AREAS

Humanities, Economics, Global Policy, Political Science

FUNDING REQUEST

Widner aims to raise \$2.8 million to support a three-year collaboration with the G7+ and other partners, while also taking the program closer to home in Appalachia.

The aim is to create a pool of resources that can support all or part of the program's annual agenda and increase flexibility in responding to time-sensitive requests from global leaders. The total steady-state annual cost of the program is \$932,000 (covers 4 lines of research and one major meeting with costs shared by the UN or another organization).

On a smaller-scale, Widner seeks investors who want to assist with a single project/case series (\$229,000), a reformer summit/MOOC expansion (\$65,000 annually for two trial years), or the experimental associates program to draw other practitioners and academics into its work (\$70,000 annually).

ISS bases cost estimates on historical averages for related work, adjusted for inflation. Major costs are salary and benefits for research specialists, overseas travel and related expenses.