

William & Mary's Global Research Institute - Impact Fellows

From Research to Real-World Impact

The mission of William & Mary's Global Research Institute is to accelerate research from ideas to impact.

To do this, GRI incubates research teams, accelerates them, and graduates them into permanent homes where they can thrive to make room for the next idea. Think of it as a venture fund for global impact.

The model already works. AidData started as a small project here and is now a global leader informing the State Department and the World Bank. The Robert M. Gates Forums were piloted at GRI and are now institutionalized as the Gates Initiative in American Statecraft.

To help research move from ideas to impact, we need people from outside W&M sitting at the center of the work. That's why we have created the GRI Impact Fellows: a select network of accomplished professionals who can reach the people and organizations who use ideas to change policies, solve problems, and improve lives.

What You'll Get

The program builds on a community of creativity and innovation and is designed to accelerate your own professional growth while advancing GRI's mission. Your cohort may include former Ambassadors, leading journalists, technologists, or development experts, drawn from local government, international organizations, and the private sector. The small cohort size means you'll know everyone in the room.

In this role you're helping faculty-student teams have an impact, advising them of areas where their research might be relevant or helping them make connections with those who might use their data. That might mean organizing a policy briefing on Capitol Hill or in Richmond or writing public commentary that help translates academic work for a broader audience.

Impact Fellow selection signals that you're joining a community at the intersection of research and impact. It connects you to William & Mary's broader leadership network. You'll have access to a designated Fellows office in the newly built Gates Hall (ribbon cutting this October) for any of your Williamsburg visits. And the program is designed to be a beginning, as fellows can be connected to future opportunities at William & Mary or take on deeper collaborative roles within the Institute's growing network.

How the Program Works

We match Fellows with up to three active projects across our investment tiers, based on where their expertise can most sharpen the work.

Depth will vary across your matched projects. You might be a sustained contributor to one (reviewing policy oriented materials, helping organize a Hill briefing), and a lighter-touch advisor to another (joining a roundtable, participating in an early brainstorm call on potential funding areas). Both kinds of contributions are valuable.

Impact Fellows may also be invited to serve on review panels for GRI's research funding programs, helping shape the Institute's research portfolio. Fellows may also opt-in to mentor GRI students as students do applied work and learn to take risks and develop skills connected to future career pathways.

What the Year Looks Like

September: Annual Fellows Conference in Williamsburg. Two days of keynote discussions with W&M research labs and leaders, deep-dive sessions, and cohort-building. This is where you'll meet your cohort, see the full project portfolio, and begin conversations about which projects you'll support. Every year, this will be the last Friday and Saturday of September. In 2026, this is September 25 and 26, with an optional kick-off dinner on Thursday evening, September 24.

November & February: Virtual Research Roundtables. Small-group sessions advancing work within each matched project, with faculty PIs and fellow practitioners. You'll be invited to the roundtables for each of your matched projects and are expected to join those most relevant to your contribution arc.

April: Workshop & Executive Session. Progress reports, working group presentations. Virtual or in-person option.

Ongoing: Between convenings, depending on project needs, you may be in touch with your matched project teams. Most Fellows should expect the occasional hour or two per month outside the formal convenings. These will be opt-in and coordinated by GRI's Senior Research Manager assigned to each project.

Who Should Apply

You're at least five years into a career in government, international affairs, NGOs, business, technology, journalism, or related fields. You want to stay connected to cutting-edge research, and you want that research to have an impact beyond the academy. You care about mentoring talented students. And you want to be part of a small, high-caliber community where you'll build lasting professional relationships and produce work that matters.

Program Details

- *Duration:* One-year terms, renewable annually for up to five years.
- *Size:* 15 to 20 new Fellows are accepted each year.
- *Completion:* At the end of their engagement, Fellows receive Emeritus status with continued invitations to DC events and mentorship opportunities.

How to Apply

Submit your CV, a brief statement of interest (250 words max), an indication of your interest and fit with current GRI research projects (project information provided in portal), and the names of two references that GRI can reach out to for a recommendation. Applications for the inaugural cohort open will be reviewed July 2026.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the time commitment? The core commitment is the in-person convenings (two days in Williamsburg), virtual roundtables for your matched projects in November and February, and then the research wrap-up in April (in-person and virtual option). Between convenings, your work with matched project teams will typically involve a few hours per month, such as reviewing drafts, making introductions, or advancing deliverables. If you opt into student mentorship, the recommended commitment is four 30-minute check-ins across the academic year. All told, most Fellows should expect roughly 4–6 days of engagement per year, with flexibility to go deeper in areas that interest you most.

What research areas does GRI focus on? Application windows will include descriptions of active research projects so you can indicate where your expertise aligns.

How does project matching work? At the start of each year, GRI projects define the kinds of external input they most need. Fellows review these and indicate where they can contribute. GRI's Senior Research Managers, in consultation with leadership, suggest matches based on Fellow interest, project needs, and portfolio balance. Depth of engagement will vary across your matches, and you'll be able to explore how you can best assist over the course of the upcoming year during the fall meetings in Williamsburg.

What do Impact Fellows actually produce? This will be a collaboration with the research team, as each project will have specific outputs to move their work from ideas to impact. The most common outputs are practitioner briefs, policy translation memos, and organized briefings for policymakers or practitioners. However, implementation playbooks, pilots, or practitioner-facing tools might be just as important depending on the project. If it makes sense for the Fellow and the research team, we want the Fellow to have the chance to leave with specific, portfolio-quality products.

What if I can't attend every meeting? We understand that professional schedules are demanding. We ask that Fellows commit to attending at the in-person convening in the fall and participating in at least half of the virtual roundtables for their matched projects.

Is there a pathway to deeper involvement with GRI? Yes. The Impact Fellows program is designed to be the front door to a longer relationship with the Institute. Fellows may be invited to join GRI's Advisory Board or serve in other W&M leadership capacities.

Do I need to be a William & Mary alumnus? No. The program is open to any professional whose experience aligns with GRI's research portfolio.

Is this a fundraising program? No. This is a substantive program focused on increasing impact of research in the world outside the academy. Of course, if your experience as a Fellow inspires you to support GRI in other ways, we'd be glad to have you.

Can I renew? Yes. Terms are one year, and renewal is a formality for Fellows in good standing, up to a maximum of five years. After five years, Fellows transition to Emeritus status.

What happens after my engagement ends? Fellows who complete their engagement receive Emeritus status. Emeriti receive annual invitations to the Spring DC evening event and can continue mentoring W&M students. We're also exploring expanded benefits for Emeriti as the program matures.

How are Fellows selected? You submit a CV, a brief statement of interest (300 words max), your alignment with current GRI research projects, and two reference letters. For the inaugural cohort, selections are made by GRI leadership. In future years, the review panel will include current and former Fellows. We select with an eye toward building cohorts that represent a diversity of sectors, disciplines, and perspectives.

What makes a good reference?

In the age of AI, the strongest references come from people who have seen you operate, not just people with impressive titles or a well-written letter. We are more interested in what your references can say specifically about you and how you might help move research from ideas to impact.

I'm under 28. Can I still apply? The program is designed for professionals with at least five years of career experience, with a minimum age of 28. If you're a recent W&M graduate interested in staying connected to GRI, we'd love to talk about other ways to engage.

What if I am not selected? We anticipate a higher number of qualified applicants than we can seat. Decisions will be made based on the research projects' needs, and so the types of individuals and their backgrounds will shift from year to year. Because of that, we encourage re-applications in future years.

Who can I contact with additional questions? Reach out to David Trichler at dmtrichler@wm.edu. We're happy to set up a conversation.