

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

William & Mary Announces Winners of the Applied Research & Innovation Initiative (ARII) Awards

WILLIAMSBURG, VA – William & Mary is proud to announce the three recipients of the 2025 Applied Research & Innovation Initiative (ARII) awards, recognizing groundbreaking interdisciplinary applied research efforts on campus that addresses pressing global challenges. The donor-funded initiative has awarded a full research grant of \$170,000 over two years and two exploratory awards of \$14,000 each over one year. These projects span critical areas of public health, immigration policy and environmental justice, demonstrating the university's commitment to impactful research with global implications.

The full research award of \$170,000 has been awarded to the project *A Data-Driven Decision Intelligence Approach to Enhance Community and Environmental Health Resilience in Kenya*, led by Haipeng Chen (Data Science), Carrie Dolan (Department of Kinesiology/Health Sciences), Erica Garrouette (Institute for Integrative Conservation), and Julius Odhiambo (Department of Kinesiology/Health Sciences), in collaboration with Kenyan community health partners Hellen Sankaine Lemein and John Sankok. This research aims to address health disparities among nomadic communities in Narok County, Kenya, by integrating climate, ecosystem and health data to optimize resource allocation. By developing a data-driven decision intelligence framework, the team hopes to improve vaccine coverage, food and nutrition security, and resilience against climate change. The methodology could serve as a model for rural communities worldwide facing similar challenges.

One of the two exploratory awards has been granted to *Promises and Pathways: Examining the Integration of Afghan Migrants to the United States Through the Special Immigrant Visa Program*, led by Nara Sritharan (AidData/Economics), Rodney Knight (AidData), Bryan Burgess (AidData), J. Nicole Medved (Law School), Stacy Kern-Scheerer (Law School), and Jennifer Mendez (Sociology). This study examines the systemic barriers faced by Afghan migrants arriving in the U.S. under different visa regimes, particularly the inefficiencies and barriers of the Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) program, which was designed to support Afghan allies of the U.S. military. Researchers will compare integration experiences, highlighting inefficiencies and discriminatory practices within the immigration system. Findings will contribute to policy recommendations aimed at improving the SIV program, reducing asylum backlogs, and fostering fairer immigration practices. The research will also explore socioeconomic outcomes to strengthen support systems for Afghan migrants.

The second exploratory award has been presented to *Balancing Progress and Preservation: Examining the Trade-offs Between Economic Development, Cultural Preservation, and Conservation in Nepal's Riparian Indigenous & Marginalized Communities*, led by Sapana Lohani (Institute for Integrative Conservation), Patton Burchett (Religious Studies), Nara Sritharan (AidData/Economics), and Sarah A. Hart (Theatre & Performance). This project investigates the impact of hydropower development and conservation efforts on Nepal's indigenous Majhi communities, who rely on river ecosystems for their livelihoods. The study aims to analyze legal frameworks, economic shifts, and cultural resilience, offering policy recommendations for balancing infrastructure development with indigenous rights. The project will also feature a unique theatrical performance to engage broader audiences on the Majhi people's experiences and struggles.

These three projects exemplify the purpose of ARII and William & Mary's commitment to funding innovative applied research with real-world impact. The insights gained from these studies aim to contribute to more effective public policies and foster resilience in communities worldwide. By addressing urgent global challenges through collaborative research, the university continues to lead efforts in fostering sustainable, inclusive, and data-informed solutions. Furthermore, each funded project will provide substantial experiential learning opportunities for students. Each team will recruit and mentor W&M student researchers, so they gain hands-on experience of working on applied projects while also garnering significant professional experiences through the support of W&M's Office of Career Development & Professional Engagement.