

# Despite Shut Campuses, IITs Lend a Helping Hand

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**Mumbai | New Delhi:** Around mid-March, when IIT-Delhi shut its campus amid rising coronavirus infections in the country, a group of students started an initiative to collect funds to help over a dozen rickshaw-pullers, who ferried them around the campus every day and were out of a livelihood.

This initiative by Divyanshu Saxena, a final year computer science student, and a few of his friends later took the shape of a larger corpus put in place by IIT-Delhi, to help the entire pool of informal workforce such as dhobis, barbers, cobblers and tea sellers, who had a thriving business catering to the on-campus community of about 14,000 people comprising students, faculty, staff and their families.

"We have created an IIT-Delhi Benevolent Fund with contributions from students, staff, faculty and alumni," IIT-D director V Ramgopal Rao said. "The main beneficiaries of the fund are people who are not employed with the IITs but serve the institute," added MR Ravi, a faculty at the mechanical engineering department and the deputy chairperson of the fund.

## Science Of Giving

Who is raising fund

IIT Delhi  
₹25 lakh

IIT Kharagpur  
₹2.5 crore

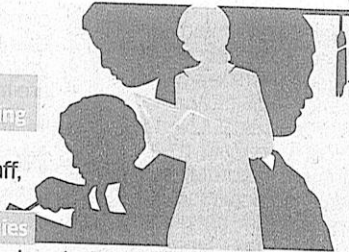
IIT Bombay  
₹18 lakh

Who's Contributing

Students,  
Faculty, Staff,  
Alumni

Beneficiaries

Informal workers including tea stall owners, cobblers, rickshaw pullers, mess workers, scrap dealers (kabadiwalas), cycle shop workers, barbers, daily wage earners working in various eateries on campus, hostel and mess workers



The institute has so far raised Rs 25 lakh and is doing a fresh drive at raising more money, this time also by tapping its alumni.

The fund will be also used to support contract workers who are not currently employed on campus but have reached out to the institute for assistance. "In the long-term, the fund may even support students from lower economic backgrounds," said Ravi.

IITs in Kharagpur, Mumbai and Roorkee are also raising funds to support the informal workers who earned their living from

the campus but many of whom are without a job now, with most students away as resumption of physical classrooms has been deferred till next year.

Premier IIT campuses on an average have a population of 12,000-15,000 people each — including students, staff, faculty members and their families. With increasing cases of Covid-19, most of the IITs have decided to conduct remote classes till December, with very few people on the campuses. This has affected a whole bunch of people who depended

on this community for their livelihood, from the neighbourhood cobblers, rickshaw pullers and tea stall owners to the scrap dealers and barbers.

IIT-Kharagpur has so far disbursed relief and monetary help worth Rs 1.5 crore to such informal workers and those employed in construction projects. Vinod Gupta, an US-based alumnus and entrepreneur, floated the idea to raise \$1 million (about Rs 7.5 crore) to create a temporary relief fund.

The fundraising was conducted by IIT Kharagpur Foundation US and it has so far raised Rs 2.5 crore. The institute is managing all the disbursement of funds, accounts distribution, and setting up camp for ration distribution. Kharagpur has one of the largest IIT campuses in the country with a population of about 25,000 people including 13,000 students. Apart from this, the students are putting in contributions to help mess and hostel staff and others.

Campus residents at IIT-Bombay have donated about Rs 18 lakh in the first phase for payment to workers, including migrant labours. "Additionally, they are making an involuntary sacrifice of about a month of equivalent salary due to freezing of dearness allowance. Currently we are running another fundraising drive for these workers on the campus," said director Subhasis Chaudhuri.