

ATAI Request for Proposals (RFP):

Rigorous Evaluations to Understand Agricultural Transformation

Spring 2020

UPDATED: March 17, 2020

ATAI is calling for proposals from J-PAL and CEGA affiliates (and ATAI invited researchers¹) to conduct randomized controlled trials (RCTs) that illuminate the mechanisms underlying “agricultural transformation” for rural poverty alleviation in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.

RCTs (and exploratory pilots) will be funded that help us understand how to accelerate the agricultural transformation process. Agricultural transformation entails increased inclusive access to productive assets, the translation of increased productivity into profits, the deepening of value chains, and transitions from subsistence farming to greater commercialization or economic diversification. Details on the overall ATAI research agenda, and all submission templates and reference documents that make up the overall RFP package are available at <https://www.povertyactionlab.org/initiative-subpage/atai-request-proposals>.

For this round, ATAI expects to award approximately \$1 million in research grants. ATAI is accepting the following categories of proposals (see an overview and related guidelines for each in the sections that follow):

- **Travel/Proposal development grants**
- **Pilot studies**
- **RCTs**

Given this funding level, projects requesting large grants (>\$500,000) should demonstrate that the study is powered to move market-level outcomes. Smaller studies will not be expected to influence market-level outcomes but should still document carefully how their results will build understanding of the agricultural transformation process.

For all proposal applications the deadlines are:

Submission stage	Date	Time	Application Form found at
Required Pre-Proposal Form (Expression of Interest)	Monday, February 24, 2020	5:00 PM U.S. Pacific time	https://tinyurl.com/ATAISpring2020
Full Proposal	Monday, April 27, 2020	5:00 PM U.S. Pacific time	See materials required , templates included at the RFP release page

To submit a proposal for consideration: [\(see a checklist of all application instructions, here\)](#)

1. Please submit the required, brief pre-proposal form at <https://tinyurl.com/ATAISpring2020> no later than Monday, February 24th.
2. Please complete the application requirements included in this document and email to atai@povertyactionlab.org by no later than 5pm U.S. Pacific Time, Monday, April 27.

¹Select non-affiliate faculty who have been nominated, approved, and notified of their eligibility to submit proposals. Note: This request for proposals has been sent directly to researchers eligible to apply for ATAI research grants. **Please do not circulate externally, given this restriction.** For graduate student applicants whose advisers are affiliated faculty, see pages 7-8. If you have questions regarding your eligibility to participate, we welcome you to inquire by emailing us at atai@povertyactionlab.org. **Among those eligible to apply, note that all applicants are limited to being named (as PI or Co-PI) on a maximum of three proposals to ATAI per 12-month period.**

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Background: *Beyond Technology Adoption to “Agricultural Transformation”*

The Agricultural Technology Adoption Initiative (ATAI) began in 2009 as a mechanism for coordinating research and policy outreach on the adoption of agricultural innovations by smallholders in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. In 2019, ATAI received funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and UK Aid to continue generating micro-economic evidence for agricultural development, now explicitly focused on directing our rigorous experimental research network toward greater understanding of “agricultural transformation,” as outlined in the initiative framing paper [“Evidence for Transformation: Framing a Research Agenda in Agriculture for Development.”](#)² ATAI considers smallholder farmers as small business owners who typically operate in isolated or otherwise poorly functioning markets. **We are calling for applications that test strategies to profitably link producers to output markets, and encourage the rural poor to engage in value-add activities and agro-processing, commercialization, and/or non-farm income generation.**

ATAI has already invested in more than 50 unique studies led by researchers in the J-PAL and CEGA networks, awarding over US \$10 million across 12 rounds of competitive grant-making thanks to generous support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, UK Aid from the British people, and an anonymous donor. For more information on previously funded studies and their outputs, see [atai-research.org](#).

Specific Thematic Areas

ATAI will focus on testing interventions within the following set of agricultural transformation themes:

- **Improving Access to Factors of Production**
- **Boosting Agricultural Productivity**
- **Building Output Market Linkages and Domestic Value Chains**
- **Adding Value, Mechanization, and Agro-Industry**
- **Promoting Local Economic Diversification**

The [ATAI 2.0 Framing Paper “Evidence for Transformation: Framing a Research Agenda in Agriculture for Development”](#) describes this landscape and establishes entry points for policy-relevant randomized evaluations.

² This RFP and future ATAI research competitions are re-oriented to ATAI’s “agricultural transformation” (AT) framework, which informs the proposal narrative guidelines, application templates, and the criteria outlined in these materials that guide scoring of submissions. We welcome feedback from our network on this “Framing Paper” (you can email us at atai@povertyactionlab.org).

We encourage our network to develop new projects, and apply in the following areas:

- **Improved inputs to production that can generate large changes in production potential:** Within research testing agricultural productivity boosting interventions, we will emphasize evaluations related to encouraging the uptake of modern improved inputs, and technologies which generate large changes in production potential. There is also interest in profitable technologies that mitigate negative environmental externalities. These include not only modern seeds and fertilizers, but also mechanical equipment, water control systems, etc. alongside studies of agro dealers or other delivery systems for these inputs.
- **Producer engagement with output markets:** Topics include, for example, quality recognition and certification incentivizing higher-value production (including horticulture), among small-scale producers for domestic value chains and/or export markets, or investigation of producer organizational forms, contracts, coordination, and governance that benefit the rural poor.
- **Market intermediaries:** Evaluations of the ways that low-income populations are, or could be, gainfully employed as part of agricultural value chains beyond working as small-scale producers. This could include intermediaries engaged in trading, transport, aggregation, quality certification, agro-processing, etc.
- **RCTs on interventions targeting seasonality, risk management, and resilience.** This includes protections from, or adaptations to, predictable lean seasons and/or sources of idiosyncratic volatility from weather, pests, disease, and market or other shocks. This applies to both crop production, and current policy interest in livestock. This includes economic diversification within and beyond agriculture, smoothing rural labor calendars through increased productive and lucrative employment opportunities throughout the year, in between peak planting and harvesting periods.
- **Engaging youth, women, and other vulnerable or marginalized groups (e.g. landless laborers) in more lucrative and/or appealing (e.g. less physically burdensome) jobs within the agriculture sector.** These populations may or may not be the same as a subset of local producers looking to transition into producing more output for markets.

There is particular interest in how constraints bind differentially for women within markets, institutions, and/or household activities (e.g. because of discrimination at markets, or limitations to mobility, access to information or financing, etc.). Evaluations should distinguish between contexts:

- where distinctions between men and women suggest alternative interventions are needed in order to engage women in programs, or
 - where it may be possible to detect different impacts for men and women (if large differences are anticipated, in which case the extra data collection costs to allow for gender disaggregation of data is encouraged).
- **Work with scale partners, with a demonstrated understanding of how a tested approach relates to country policy priorities.** Given the proliferation of ag-tech development, there is an emphasis on technologies with the potential to be more than boutique interventions for limited numbers of farmers. This suggests work with national governments or other operators who have the ability to make transformative investments. Our donors are particularly interested in generating evidence on topics that a country government has identified as priorities in their National Agricultural Investment Plan (NAIP).
 - **RCTs that can speak to multi-sectoral, market-level, or supply chain-level interventions, and/or have the statistical power to measure outcomes at the market level.** Where possible, we encourage projects to capture general equilibrium (GE) effects (or propose pilots to investigate how best to design a future study that can capture important GE effects). **Please note, however, that smaller-scale projects will also be acceptable, in cases where they will provide valuable evidence related to one of the five themes in the Framing paper in an agricultural context important to understand the AT.**

- Projects working with value chains should, if possible, provide descriptive statistics on the functioning of the value chain, for example, the volume of trade, and the steps and economic actors involved. If these figures or details are unknown, the project is likely best suited as a pilot proposal.
- Note that ATAI is open to funding research that plans for analysis beyond the core RCT, if conducting supplementary quasi-experimental analysis in the proposed context leverages the costs associated with the RCT in ways that can help us further understand aspects of agricultural transformation that may be fundamentally ill-suited for randomization. However, all full-scale studies that ATAI funds will, at their core, be RCTs.
- We urge applicants to carefully describe in their proposal how each aspect of their design and implementation will ensure a clean control group.
- **RCTs on multi-faceted programs that simultaneously relax multiple constraints** particularly (but not limited to) cases where the research design disentangles impacts across these constraints

Transformation Outcomes of Interest

Please note that we reserve the right to require applicants to add specific indicators to data collection. To help ensure that ATAI research is positioned to impact field-level agricultural transformation agendas across the RCTs we fund, we will **require that every RCT collect data on a subset of agricultural transformation-relevant outcomes:**

- The adoption of basic agricultural assets
- Any production of high value crops
- Sales as a fraction of total output
- Yields per hectare

The Proposal Guidelines outlined in the following sections (and the suggested RCT proposal narrative template) **asks applicants to discuss how they propose to measure these outcomes in ways relevant to their evaluation context.** ATAI will be in touch at the launch of funded projects to support research teams in the specific survey questions or modules to be used, and will be mindful of the additional survey time.

We may offer additional funding to the grant budget in order to support any significant additional costs of such data collection opportunities. These additional “diagnostic” data collection opportunities may be identified by reviewers and requested of applicants based on their foreseen potential to answer key agricultural transformation questions or allow for clearer comparisons across ATAI-funded evaluations.

Geographic Focus

ATAI’s primary geographical focus is Sub-Saharan Africa. ATAI network researchers are encouraged to submit proposals for research conducted in the focus region, in partnership with local implementing organizations. At its discretion, the ATAI Board **may consider projects in the South Asia region. For any project outside of Africa, it is critical that the authors provide a convincing argument of the project’s viability in, and practical transferability to, a Sub-Saharan African context and implementing partner.** Specifically, the proposal must address the institutional, financial, and administrative implications of the project’s adaptation to Sub-Saharan Africa. The proposal also must address the adaptation of the intervention to institutional, financial, and administrative conditions in a specific Sub-Saharan African context, though the sufficient quality of a proposal is the foremost concern.

Proposal Guidelines: Travel/Proposal Development grants, Pilots, and RCTs

Prior to submitting a proposal, all applicants must **submit the required [Pre-Proposal Form](#) by February 24, 2020**. The chief purpose of the Pre-Proposal Form is to help the staff team anticipate the likely volume of submissions and organize the review process accordingly. **Please note that applicants should proceed with the development of their proposal materials immediately after submitting a Pre-Proposal Form and not wait for feedback or an invitation to proceed.**

ATAI calls for **Travel/Proposal Development, Pilot, and RCT** proposals, as detailed in the following sections. You should select which classification matches your current research project objectives, and prepare your application according to the relevant guidelines and templates provided for your application to be scored appropriately. **For additional details relevant to graduate student applicants (who are advised by an eligible researcher in our network), see pages 7-8.**

A. Travel/Proposal Development grants: Proposal Guidelines

These grants are intended to facilitate very preliminary, exploratory research, and funding typically supports costs related to researcher travel.

Funding per Travel/Proposal Development grant award: a maximum of \$10,000. The typical grant is \$5,000 for one researcher. Travel grants are provided as travel reimbursements in accordance with MIT travel policies, and should use the specific budget template in their submission (see details in the Budget Guidelines section, below).

Timeline: Reviewers will expect these grants to be concluded within a single agricultural cycle. Grantees must complete their travel/project development work and submit final reports within one year of receiving the award.

Proposal Narrative submission requirements: The narrative should not exceed two pages in length, and should include the following (there is no specific template beyond this guidance):

1. A concise statement of topic. These grants are intended to facilitate very preliminary, exploratory research, so proposals need only address the general topic of interest and current ideas on how the question might be explored through a future randomized evaluation. They do not need to include a detailed program or evaluation design, but should clearly indicate how this grant will help the research team develop a strong ATAI proposal in a future competition, including a discussion of the project's connection to key questions in the framing paper.
2. Proposed partners, if available, including J-PAL regional offices, IPA country offices, or other organizations you plan to work with for both program implementation and evaluation.
3. Outline the scope and sequencing of particular proposed activities (e.g. list, table, or GANNT chart preferred).

B. Pilot Study: Proposal Guidelines

Pilot proposals should have a very clear research question that lays the groundwork and assesses the feasibility of using a randomized evaluation to answer this question. **Pilot proposals must clearly articulate the conceptual and methodological distinction between the pilot study and any future follow-on studies, and what exactly the pilot will enable researchers to learn.**

Pilot proposals should provide solid justification for why a pilot is needed, what will be learned, and what a future RCT informed by this exploratory research could contribute to specific topics addressed in ATAI's Framing Paper. As part of our program renewal, ATAI will consider funding higher-risk pilot studies that can tackle the most important, less-studied agricultural transformation questions, and therefore may have the potential to make a sizable contribution with limited investment.

Please note: Small-scale or otherwise low-cost randomized evaluations designed to measure impacts should apply using the guidance and templates of RCTs and simply budget according to the costs of completing the proposed work. While a proposal may seem to fit a pilot stage in terms of budget size, this is not sufficient reason to apply as a pilot. You should apply as a pilot if the funded work lays the ground work for a future randomized evaluation because it:

- tests the efficacy of an intervention or an evaluation design, and acquires data that is qualitative or quantitative in nature, e.g. measuring take up, and/or
- serves as a diagnostic to reveal the behavior of value chain actors, barriers to technology adoption or market access, or the potential for profitability of an intervention under “real world” conditions.

Funding per Pilot award: limited to \$75,000 or less.

Timeline: There is no specific timeline requirement for pilots, although in the past these studies have usually taken place over the course of one or two agricultural cycles. Ultimately this will depend on the project design and related outcomes of interest.

Proposal Narrative submission requirements: As part of the application process, applicants should submit a narrative, **not to exceed five pages**. Pilot applications should address all of the following sections in the Pilot Application Narrative Template (found at the RFP release page, [here](#).)

C. RCT: Proposal Guidelines

These grants are for studies at a more mature stage of development that use randomized evaluations to understand underlying mechanisms and strategies for agricultural transformation. See the suggested narrative template (found at the RFP release page, [here](#)) outlining detailed proposal narrative requirements, including how to demonstrate:

- a) a clear research question that is clearly discussed in relation to one or more ATAI Framing Paper themes
- b) a robust research design, well-defined research instruments, and sample size estimates justified by detailed power calculations for any impacts you plan to measure
- c) a feasible implementation plan, and
- d) a strong partnership commitment from implementing organizations, including indications of the potential for significant scale-up of research findings by partners or scaling organizations

Please note: if ATAI has already funded part of, or precursors to, this project in a past competition round, the project will not be eligible to receive additional funding unless some preliminary data (e.g. take up rates from a pilot) from the previously funded work is available and shared in the proposal.

Funding per RCT: We expect awards will range from \$80,000 to \$500,000 for studies that can randomize at the household or village level. We acknowledge that market-level interventions in some cases may require larger sample sizes and budgets, and proposals will be funded with larger budgets where the potential contribution is in line with the costs. **We expect projects of various sizes, and will carefully check whether the budget size accurately reflects the scope of work proposed.** Note the guidelines on allowable and unallowable costs in the Budget Guidelines section, as well as the Evaluation Criteria on “value for money” principles, below.

Timeline: Funding requests should not extend beyond 2022.

Proposal Narrative submission requirements: To submit an application for an RCT proposal, applicants should submit a narrative, **not to exceed five pages**, which **must include all of the items described in the RCT Narrative Template (found at the RFP release page, [here](#))**.

Project Costing Exercise – see the corresponding section of the RCT proposal narrative template

ATAI RCT grantees are requested to collect and share detailed program cost data. The goal of this exercise in each RCT proposal is to ensure that the research team has plans from the outset to collect costs data for all “ingredients” needed to implement a program or intervention, excluding the costs of evaluating the impact of that program.

In policy outreach activities, J-PAL and CEGA have found that policymakers often ask how much a program or intervention costs, and collecting detailed cost data allows for cost-effectiveness analysis. This can assist policymakers when they are choosing how to allocate resources between different programs, or deciding to replicate or scale up a program that has demonstrated to be effective³.

While a rigorous cost-effectiveness analysis requires very granular data, J-PAL will provide grantees a basic cost collection template, alongside basic reporting templates, which helps researchers gather the figures for the various cost categories. The template includes a sheet to assist with calculation of a “total program cost,” and a sheet to calculate high-level cost figures that are of greatest interest to policymakers. **The template, and your proposal to ATAI, should help us understand the potential for a very rough, back-of-the-envelope cost-effectiveness calculation.** When planning your cost data collection and approach to cost-effectiveness analysis, you should consider not only the costs of any inputs offered to participants (e.g. seeds, equipment, etc.), but also the costs of facilities and utilities, implementation staff, transport, and any other costs required to conduct the program. You may find it useful to consider the following questions when constructing your plan to collect relevant cost data:

- Are there costs in identifying the participant populations? (e.g. costs of doing a census, distributing flyers or other marketing materials, or holding information sessions necessary to implement the program.)
- Are there training costs for program staff implementing the intervention?
- Are there costs borne by participants (consider opportunity costs, subsidized components of the program, etc.)
- Are there activities that are reduced in size or discontinued as a result of this intervention being introduced? These might indicate cost savings from this intervention.
- Are there implementation monitoring costs involved, necessary to track progress or ensure compliance with plans to achieve effective implementation?

Additional Guidance for Graduate Student Applicants

Graduate students advised by eligible affiliated researchers can apply for ATAI funding if their eligible affiliated adviser commits to overseeing the research. However, please note that J-PAL may limit the total amount of funding a single graduate student can receive across J-PAL initiatives for their student work.

³ For more information on comparative cost-effectiveness analysis, see: <http://www.povertyactionlab.org/publication/cost-effectiveness>. If you have feedback on this exercise, the template, or the underlying rationale, please submit feedback online at: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1D8BXQm9YTXt34pbkOH9QAF2zBmBuS_ocvGIVOiW9Vd8/viewform

- **Graduate student applicants must have their J-PAL, CEGA or other affiliated adviser submit a letter of support.** The letter should signal the adviser's willingness to remain involved in a supervisory role throughout the lifetime of the project, and comment on the student's capacity to conduct the work as proposed. The letter may be sent as part of the application package, or sent privately from the adviser to atai@povertyactionlab.org as the adviser prefers (so long as they clearly signal the relevant application to append the letter).
- Graduate students should include documented evidence of their capacity to undertake relevant project activities.
- Please note that in some cases, due to restrictions at the institution that will receive the funding awarded, the adviser may be asked to add his or her name to the subaward and IRB documents.

Budget Guidelines

It is your responsibility that your budget follows your host institution's policies for costs, and **you must submit a letter from the institution to receive the award that states that they have reviewed your proposal and accept your budget.**⁴

Guidelines for completing a Pilot or RCT proposal budget: Please submit a detailed project budget using the Excel template provided. To reduce processing time, please keep the following in mind:

- Only projects with co-funding should complete both Excel sheets in the template, i.e. both "Total Project Budget" AND "Initiative Budget" (i.e. what you're requesting from ATAI) in the budget template. If the project has other funders, the proposal should clearly explain the marginal contribution of the requested funds from ATAI.
- **Applications must include a brief budget narrative document detailing the major costs within the budget. We also strongly encourage applicants to include budget notes in the column provided in the budget template, specifying input costs for line items within the budget.** Travel costs should include a breakdown of how many trips are planned, the estimated cost per trip, etc. Any computer/equipment purchases should include a breakdown of what is being purchased (e.g. how many laptops), as well as the project staff that will be assigned to the equipment.
- Applicants should review J-PAL best practices on questionnaire design and data collection/management in the [J-PAL Research Protocol Checklist](#), to ensure they have budgeted for expenses associated with piloting and surveyor training, survey translation, field spot checks, and back checking.
- **Awards are normally paid on a cost-reimbursable basis.**

Allowable Direct and Indirect Costs

- **Please note that the ATAI Initiative does not cover PI salaries.**
- **Project Implementation Costs: For full research projects, implementation costs are expected to be borne by the project partners.** However, under some circumstances where implementation costs are significantly increased due to the research design, for example a randomized encouragement design, ATAI may fund implementation. Proposals requesting funds for implementation are required to explain why the implementer cannot bear the costs in the budget narrative.
- Universities in high-income countries (generally defined as the US, Canada, Western Europe, Japan, Korea, Singapore, Australia and New Zealand, Israel, and wealthy Middle Eastern countries) can charge up to 10% in indirect costs, applied to total direct costs.
- Non-university non-profits from any location and universities from mid- or low-income countries may charge up to 15% in indirect costs, applied to total direct costs.

⁴ If the organization allows you to submit your proposal without such a letter (due to time constraints or some other reason), please note this on the proposal cover sheet (under the "Institution to receive grant funds" field). Please note that this applies to all projects, including those going through J-PAL and IPA offices. You should contact them in advance to make sure you are aware of their policies for proposal review and give them enough time to meet the proposal deadline.

- We understand that the cap on overhead or indirect costs under this initiative is low and that grantees may have reasonable project support costs included in budgets as direct costs. Such costs should be reasonable and explained in the budget narrative.
- Unallowable costs include those labeled as “incidental,” “miscellaneous,” or “contingency.” Any costs for rent should be explained in the budget narrative.

Specific guidelines for completing a Travel/Proposal Development grant proposal budget (and be sure to use the Travel budget template, providing detailed notes in the column provided in the template):

1. Travel grants are paid as reimbursements. Travel/Proposal Development grants are for a maximum of \$10,000. The typical grant is \$5,000 for one researcher.
2. International travel: J-PAL will put you in touch with an MIT travel agent who can book international travel and charge J-PAL directly. **If you choose to buy your own ticket, we will not be able to reimburse you until your flights have been completed.**
3. **Grantees must complete their work and submit final reports within one year of receiving the grant award letter.** Expenses will be reimbursed upon submission of an expense report. **All expenses must be claimed within 30 days of your return.** Expenses should be supported by receipts whenever possible, and all expenses over \$50 must be supported by receipts.
 - a. *Expenses not allowed:* J-PAL is not able to cover travel or trip protection insurance, lost luggage insurance, incidental expenses, or grantees’ time. In most cases, J-PAL is not able to directly reimburse any individuals or organizations other than the grantees awarded the travel grant.
 - b. *Per diem:* A per diem stipend of \$25/day-in-country can be claimed to cover food and miscellaneous expenses.
 - c. *Medical insurance:* All grantees are required to provide proof of emergency medical insurance coverage before travel. As many universities provide this to their students, faculty, and staff at no cost, this is not a reimbursable cost under this award. J-PAL can provide information on affordable coverage if needed.
 - d. *Survey and other in-country expenses:* Travel grants can be used to cover expenses for in-country costs such as hiring enumerators, procuring translation or transcription services, developing instruments, and others. If these expenses are in the budget, J-PAL will provide the forms necessary to document them with your award notice, and you can claim these expenses as reimbursement once the travel is completed. J-PAL is not able to directly reimburse survey firms or local organizations for these costs.

Proposal Evaluation Process

The proposal review process has been designed to ensure that all funded studies are methodologically sound and capable of identifying the causal impact of an intervention that can be isolated from other confounding factors. A two-level, blinded peer review process is used by ATAI to assess the quality and appropriateness of all proposals. The first level of blinded review is carried out by a panel of peer researchers in the J-PAL, CEGA, and ATAI networks. The second level of review is carried out by the ATAI Board Members, which include a small number of non-economist subject matter experts funding and working in African agricultural development.

Referees will score each proposal by the criteria listed in the tables below using a ranking system from 1 (very poor) to 5 (excellent) and will provide a 1-2 sentence justification for each score. To be funded, the proposal must be practically feasible. **Low scores on the logistical viability criterion may prevent projects from being funded regardless of scores on other dimensions.**

Supplementing these main scoring criteria, reviewers will mark “Yes” or “No” for particular questions shown

below. This allows reviewers to flag for decision makers that they lack confidence in a proposal’s ability to deliver on a particular important objective. **Receiving a “No” may prevent funding, or may require the Board to request clarifications or confirmations on related points before making a final decision.**

Please Note: Researchers who have previously received funding from J-PAL and are more than one month late on any reports to any J-PAL Initiative will not be eligible for consideration for funding, and may be ineligible for funding across J-PAL initiatives. In such cases, researchers are still able to submit proposals to Initiatives, but note that the proposal will not be submitted for review until all reporting requirements on previous awards are up-to-date.

Evaluation Criteria

<p>Logistical Viability (scored out of 5)</p>	<p>Does the proposal convincingly address agronomic, logistical, or political obstacles and risks that might threaten the completion of the study (<i>for example, implementation capacity, government authorization, or other funding</i>)?</p>
<p>(Yes/No)</p>	<p>Are you convinced that the implementing and/or scale-up partners are appropriate for the project and the relationship is likely to endure through the entire study? <i>Help text: Consider whether letters of support are compelling, and/or there is evidence of buy-in (e.g. cost-sharing) from the implementing partners</i></p>
<p>Technical Merit and Innovation (scored out of 5)</p>	<p>Is the research designed effectively to answer proposed questions, and is it well-articulated? <i>Help text:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What are potential threats to the internal validity of the study? Does the proposal sufficiently address those threats?</i> • <i>Will outcomes be measurable within the proposed study period, both overall and for marginalized subgroups, including women?</i> • <i>Is there academic relevance? For example, does it answer new and more difficult questions, or introduce novel methods, measures or interventions?</i>
<p>(Yes/No) only for RCTs</p>	<p>Are the indicators and sample size estimates appropriate, given the outcomes to be measured, and do the power calculations convincingly demonstrate the ability to detect each of the proposed impacts to be measured?</p>
<p>Appropriateness (scored out of 5)</p>	<p>Is compelling evidence and discussion provided suggesting that the proposed intervention(s) are appropriate for the setting and target population? And has the proposal established a plausible link between the proposed intervention and the hypothesized channel for impact? Is the proposed intervention likely to be cost effective when implemented at scale? <i>Help text:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Is it clear that the population targeted by the intervention suffers from market-related or value-chain related barriers to profitability?</i> • <i>If testing a technology, are increases in productivity and profitability validated by scientific evidence? If so, for whom is the technology profitable?</i> • <i>Does the proposed study account for potential behavioral changes, negative externalities and/or unanticipated effects that may offset hypothesized welfare gains?</i> • <i>Is the strategy or intervention likely to be cost-effective (i.e. what is the potential impact on welfare per dollar of the intervention, and will this be measured accurately)? Does this intervention appear promising (i.e. worth testing the impacts, and possible to conceive of scaling) when compared with other potential or existing solutions?</i>

<p>(Yes/No)</p>	<p>Does the project carefully consider gender roles and intra-household dynamics? <i>Help text:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the intervention show promise to engage women in more lucrative and/or appealing (e.g. less physically burdensome) jobs within the agriculture sector? • Or does the proposal convincingly discuss how constraints may differentially bind women within the markets, institutions, or household dynamics in this context? If there could be large differences in barriers and downstream impacts for women compared to men, will the research collect data on relevant indicators and disaggregate their main findings by gender? • If the proposal does neither of the above, do they provide a compelling justification?
<p>(Yes/No)</p>	<p>Does the proposal not only explicitly identify which agricultural transformation theme their proposed research targets, but also clearly discuss contributions to specific parts of the thematic framework laid out in ATAI’s framing paper “Evidence For Transformation: Framing A Research Agenda In Agriculture For Development”?</p>
<p>Policy Relevance, “Pathways to Impact” <i>(scored out of 5)</i></p>	<p>Has the proposal convincingly argued the importance of the evidence gap for policy? And is it likely that the study will engage and provide valuable information to stakeholders to affect change at scale? <i>Help text:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the proposal instill confidence in the researchers’ commitment to the timely sharing of interim outputs and final results? And does it identify explicit “end-users” including, but not limited to, their implementation partners? • Is there potential for the study to answer questions relevant for other policymakers and practitioners beyond the implementing partner? (e.g. will the results speak to commonly used approaches, and/or BMGF or DFID investments or learning agenda priorities?)
<p>For RCTs only (Yes/No)</p>	<p>Does the proposal discuss the outcomes of interest relevant to agricultural transformation that will be collected? And if this is an RCT proposal, does this include the four required outcomes below, with details on how they plan to measure the underlying relevant indicators in their evaluation context?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Indicators for the adoption of agricultural assets ○ Production of high value crops (crop diversification) ○ Sales as a fraction of total output ○ Yields per hectare
<p>For RCTs only (Yes/No)</p>	<p>Does the proposal demonstrate real capacity development potential for local researchers and implementers, particularly in ways that increase the likelihood and/or sustainability of any policy influence?</p>
<p>Do you recommend for funding? <i>(scored out of 5)</i></p>	<p>Do you recommend this proposal for funding, given your overall review, and particularly your assessment of its “value for money?” <i>(see DFID’s perspectives on this principle here: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/49551/DFID-approach-value-money.pdf)</i></p>

During the review process, applicants may be contacted by the ATAI Secretariat, on behalf of referees, for more detailed information on the proposal. Requests for more information can relate to any part of the proposal. If standardized questions are requested of multiple proposals, those questions will be presented to *all* proposals.

Following the two independent levels of review, the ATAI Board holds a meeting to discuss projects, review referee comments, and make final funding decisions. Board Members with a conflict of interest must recuse themselves from this process.

All proposals will be categorized as either: (1) unconditionally approved; (2) conditionally approved with minor revisions or clarifications required; (3) request for revise and resubmit; or (4) not approved.

Timeline for Submission and Notification

Date	Milestone
Monday, 27 January 2020	Request for Proposals Sent to Eligible Applicants
Monday, 24 February 2020	Pre-Proposal Form Due at https://tinyurl.com/ATAISpring2020
Monday, 27 April 2020	Proposal Submission Due
Week of 1 June 2020	Review Process Concludes
Week of 8 June 2020	ATAI Board Meeting and Funding Decisions
Week of 29 June 2020	Decision letters sent to applicants

Award Requirements and Process

If your proposal is accepted for award, the funding will be provided under an award from MIT to your host institution. Please review these requirements in detail as part of preparing your submission. **We expect applicants to budget sufficient time and money to meet these grant conditions and processes.**

It is **strongly recommended** that before the announcement of ATAI awards, applicants secure approval from the host institution’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) for any human subjects protocol required to implement your project. **MIT requires proof of IRB approval prior to processing any ATAI award that involves Human Subjects.**

The process MIT follows for processing ATAI awards is as follows:

1. The ATAI Board sends official award notification letter.
2. If not already submitted, you will need to provide formal institutional approval of the proposal and your institutional IRB approval.
3. In certain cases, approval from MIT’s IRB will also be required; at a minimum MIT will cede IRB authority to the host Institution. We will assist with these processes.
4. J-PAL informs MIT contracts office of the award.
5. MIT establishes a subaward with your institution.

We aim to complete this process within 60 days of receiving all your forms and IRB approvals, but delays on MIT or on the part of your host institution may delay the process. We can backdate the award to cover expenses from the Award Date or the date of IRB approval, whichever is later. If a project includes non-Human Subjects work prior to the IRB approval, please let us know following award and we may in some cases be able to cover those costs (post-award, but pre-IRB) under the award.

Trial Registration

Before starting field work, researchers must register their RCT with the AEA RCT Registry

(<http://www.socialscienceregistry.org>). Registration includes 18 required fields (such as your name and a small subset of your IRB requirements), and the entire process should take less than 20 minutes if all documentation is in order. There is also the opportunity to include more information, including power calculations and an optional pre-analysis plan. Grantees are required to submit proof of AEA registration with their three month Start-up Report. Please note that registration is only required for RCTs (not pilots). For questions and support with the registry, please contact Keesler Welch (Keesler@mit.edu).

Annual Progress Reporting, Final Technical and Financial Reports

Grantees should provide brief annual progress narrative reports and biannual financial reports using templates provided to them by ATAI for this funded project (refrain from recycling old templates to prevent having to re-submit deliverables). Biannual financial reports are due every six months from the date the award letter was issue, which is considered the date of approval. These reports are required whether or not project activities have been delayed. We will send you reminders and instructions about these reports. Upon completion of the project, you are also required to submit any survey instruments used.

Implementation Cost Collection (see “Project Costing Exercise” section)

For RCTs, researchers are required to collect data on program costs associated with this evaluation, which may be used as an input to J-PAL and CEGA cost-effectiveness analyses (we will, of course, contact you before undertaking such an analysis). We will ask for costs on an annual basis, but only expect fully complete information at the end of the project. Your award includes \$1,000 to defray expenses associated with collecting these data. ATAI will provide a costing template to collect this information. If implementing partners’ program budgets (i.e. the organizations’ costs to implement the program or intervention, exclusive of research costs) are already available, please share those with us. As part of the first annual reporting cycle, we do require submission of the above costing template.

Preliminary Results Report

Researchers are required to publish a publicly available “Preliminary Results Report” within twelve (12) months of receiving cleaned end-line data from the field. We will provide a specific template to submit this deliverable, asking for no more than 10 pages and including the following information/sections: policy issue, intervention description, research design, and preliminary results (noting that the information reported is subject to change if analysis is ongoing). Upon submission, the report must be made publicly available, and will therefore be posted to the ATAI website. Once a working or published paper is available, we will replace this "Project Results Report" posted on the ATAI website with the working/published paper.

Data Publication

Researchers are required to submit data to J-PAL from their ATAI-funded projects within eighteen (18) months of completing data collection. J-PAL has services you can access such as preparing the data and code, replicating results and tables, and uploading data for publication. In special circumstances, such as a delay in publication, researchers may request J-PAL embargo the data for up to five years, with the understanding that it will be released simultaneously at paper publication. If data is held by J-PAL under an embargo agreement, we will ask researchers each year to ask whether the dataset has been made available. If there is no response, J-PAL will keep the embargo. On the fifth year following data collection, the presumption is that J-PAL will share the data. J-PAL will again ask the researcher if the dataset can be made public. If there is no response, the dataset will be made public. In cases in which the researcher requests a further extension, s/he will be asked to submit this request to ATAI leadership for special approval. Further details outlining when a dataset should be

published and which data should be published are available in [J-PAL's Guidelines for Data Publication](#), adopted June 2015.

Working Paper "Publication"

Researchers are required to publish a publicly available working paper or other publication from their ATAI funded projects within twenty-four (24) months of completing field work. This should be coordinated with the above data publication timeline and requirements, and ATAI will similarly request a link to the posted working paper on this timeline. ATAI staff will then access the working paper and post it on the ATAI website.

For more information on the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's Open Access Policy for peer-reviewed publications and underlying data, see www.gatesfoundation.org/How-We-Work/General-Information/Open-Access-Policy. For information on DFID's Research Open and Enhanced Access Policy, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dfid-research-open-and-enhanced-access-policy>.

Expected Deliverables Submission Timeline

The deliverables and reports described above will be due based on the following timeline.

- **Before starting fieldwork:** Grantees should register their trial with the AEA RCT Registry (see details above)
- **Three months after project's start date:** a brief start-up report describing the initial stage(s) of the funded project and whether there are any delays in the implementation of the project activities
- **Annually, in either March or September:** (1) a financial update on spending relative to the project budget, and (2) a brief annual program report on project implementation
- **Within 30 days of fieldwork concluding:** (1) a final financial report and (2) for RCTs only, completed implementation costing information (see "Implementation Cost Collection" section, above)
- **Within 12 months of receiving cleaned end-line data from the field:** a final substantive narrative report with preliminary results, i.e. a submitted Preliminary Results Report template that will be posted publicly (see "Preliminary Results Report" section, above)
- **Within 18 months of fieldwork concluding:** Cleaned and anonymized data submitted to ATAI for public dissemination (or held under embargo per the Data publication policy outlined above). Data will be included in ATAI's cross-project database for harmonization work conducted by ATAI's Data Analyst with oversight from ATAI leadership. Note that ATAI invites PIs to submit data earlier where possible to do so (for example where data is cleaned and treatment identifiers have been removed).
- **[RCTs only] Within 24 months of fieldwork concluding:** Working paper publicly available (see "Working Paper Publication" section, above)

Timely submission of reports is very important. We will send reminders to you at least one month in advance of reporting due dates. **Please note that researchers whose projects are more than 30 days late on any reports or other deliverables to any J-PAL Initiative, including ATAI, and who have not received an approved extension, will not be eligible to have new projects funded by J-PAL, including ATAI.**

As the need arises, we may ask ATAI-funded researchers to:

- Peer-review proposals in future ATAI RFP rounds in which you are not applying for funding.
- Participate in a harmonization process to ensure consistency and comparability across studies.
- Share data collection instruments and methodologies with other grantees.
- Participate in one of ATAI's policy outreach activities on a mutually agreed date and place. This activity could be an evidence workshop, a matchmaking conference, or a presentation to one of the ATAI's donors.

Application Checklist

Carefully review the [Proposal Application Guidelines](#) in this document. Each proposal should follow the instructions for either a **Travel/Proposal Development grant, Pilot study or an RCT proposal**. Applicants must submit completed versions of all of the following documents by the submission deadline, and any templates are provided at the [RFP release webpage](#). No information and/or documents from applicants will be accepted or considered after the closing date unless otherwise requested by the ATAI Secretariat.

Note that according to J-PAL policy, all applicants are now limited to being named as a PI or Co-PI on a maximum of three proposals to ATAI per 12-month period.

1. **Pre-Proposal Form:** Submit the required form at <https://tinyurl.com/ATAISpring2020> by Monday, February 24th. This should take less than five to ten minutes to complete, signaling your intent to submit to ATAI's RFP. Please note that applicants should proceed with the development of their proposal materials immediately after submitting a Pre-Proposal Form and not wait for feedback or an invitation to proceed.
2. **Cover Sheet:** This document must be completed in its entirety, and combined in the Word file with the Proposal Narrative.
3. **Proposal Narrative:**
 - i. **The narrative must not exceed five pages** in length and should address all of the details indicated in the template and RFP guidelines (**Travel grants must not exceed 2 pages, and do not have a specific narrative template, simply refer to the Proposal Guidelines in this RFP**). We highly recommend (but do not require) that you use the corresponding narrative template ([Pilot narrative template](#); [RCT narrative template](#)). The subheaders and help text beneath each are provided to help you address all of the points that reviewers are looking for to score your submission.
 - ii. This should be saved as a single Word file that combines the Cover Sheet with your Proposal Narrative, with the title: [PI Last Name, First Name] [Topic Name].doc(x).
4. **Proposal Budget:** Carefully review the Budget Guidelines in this RFP, then use the matching excel template ([Travel grant budget](#); [Pilot or RCT budget](#)) which must be completed in its entirety and saved as a single Excel file with the title: [PI Last Name, First Name][Budget].xls(x).
5. **Budget Narrative:** detail the major costs within the budget, referring to the Budget Guidelines above, in a Word document with the title [PI Last Name, First Name][Budget Narrative].doc(x).
6. **Letter(s) of Support:** Please obtain a letter of support from the following, each saved as a single PDF file with the title [PI Last Name, First Name] [Name of Organization Letter of Support].pdf:
 - a. a letter/document stating the proposed grant host institution's approval of the proposal materials.
 - b. letters from each implementing partner, indicating the details of their commitment to partner on the research, and (for RCTs,) their willingness to share relevant program cost data. Consider including letter(s) from any potential scale-up partner(s).
 - c. Graduate students applying for as the primary PI are required to include a letter of support from a researcher adviser eligible for this call (see the cover page of this document). The letter should indicate the adviser's willingness to remain involved in a supervisory role throughout the lifetime of the project.
7. **Submit an email** with all of the above attachments to the ATAI Secretariat at atai@povertyactionlab.org with the subject line: ATAI Spring 2020 Proposal: PI Last Name, First Name

**Deadline for proposal submission:
5pm U.S. Pacific Time, Monday, April 27, 2020**

Appendix: ATAI Conflict of Interest Policy

A two-level, blinded peer review process is used by ATAI to assess the quality and appropriateness of all proposals. The first level of review is carried out by a panel of peer researchers in the J-PAL, CEGA, and ATAI networks. The second level of review is carried out by the ATAI Board Members. The ATAI Board comprises nine individuals from the J-PAL and CEGA networks with additional representation from external institutions. Board members have responsibility for the overall strategic direction of ATAI, to monitor projects' progress, and to select proposals for funding.

Peer Referees and Non-Officer Board Members

1. No individual named on a proposal application may serve as a peer or Board referee in the round in which his or her proposal is being reviewed.
2. No spouse, partner, or immediate family member of any individual named on a proposal application may serve as a peer or Board referee in the round in which the applicant's proposal is being reviewed.
3. Board members with a disqualifying conflict of interest may attend only the portion of the Board meeting that does *not* concern the ATAI grant-making process.
4. To replace Board members who have a conflict of interest, the ATAI Secretariat will recruit a number of auxiliary Board members, equivalent to the number of Board members with a conflict of interest, from the network of eligible ATAI applicants to score, discuss, and vote on proposals.

Current and Former Board Officers

At any given time, ATAI appoints three Board members to serve as "Officers," providing week-to-week oversight of the initiative. These individuals provide continuity and institutional knowledge for the program. Each Officer serves a renewable term of two years. In 2019, there are five current or former Board Officers. All of the above policies apply to this group, except when *fewer than two* of these five individuals are eligible to participate as referees (due to a conflict of interest under the policies stated above). In this case *only*, the following policy applies to individuals in this group:

1. When less than two current or former Board Officers are eligible to participate in scoring/discussing/and voting on proposals as all others are recused due to conflicts, the "least-conflicted" past or present Officer will be recruited to score, discuss, and vote on proposals. Least-conflicted is defined as the applicant with the lowest dollar amount requested.
2. When all current or former Board Officers are conflicted out, the two least-conflicted will be recruited to score, discuss, and vote on proposals.
3. If a conflicted current or former Board Officer is selected as a referee, the individual in question must recuse him/herself from review, discussion, and voting of the conflicted proposal(s).

General

1. Non-donor, non-partner academics must comprise a simple majority of the Board referees.
2. For the purpose of managing conflict of interest, ATAI proposals for projects of different funding categorizations (e.g. proposal development grants vs. RCTs) may be considered under a separate, parallel review process. The Conflict of Interest Policy will then apply **separately** to each of the distinct review processes.