

J-PAL Crime and Violence Initiative RFP overview

Round 6 (Spring 2020)

*J-PAL's Crime and Violence Initiative (CVI) will foster experimental research on crime and social and political violence. The CVI is now calling for proposals from J-PAL affiliates and invited researchers for travel/proposal development grants, pilot grants, and full RCT grants. Proposals are due **March 20, 2020**.*

December 18, 2019 version

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The Crime and Violence Initiative (CVI) will foster experimental research on crime and social and political violence. Crime and violence can hinder economic development and urban growth, and exacerbate governance challenges by fostering corruption and draining public sector resources. The initiative will fund evaluations that focus on preventing, mitigating, and responding to the effects of crime and violence.

I. Beyond simple program evaluation: Generalizability and innovation

First and foremost, this initiative aims to support the most innovative and generalizable experimental studies on crime and violence. Innovation can mean producing evidence where little exists, especially where little experimental work has been done. While there is more and more micro-level work on violence, there remains little on crime outside the OECD. And there is little experimental research on either subject.

Some recent examples of work on new topics include Jasper Cooper's study of whether [transferring policing power to community members might improve legal protection in Papua New Guinea](#). Another comes from Salma Mousa, who is [evaluating the impact of mixed Christian- Muslim soccer teams on social cohesion and interactions between Christians and Muslims in an ISIS-affected area of Iraq](#).

www.povertyactionlab.org/cvi

Yet large gaps remain in this area. To name a few examples, there is currently little international experimental research on: the psychological and behavioral roots of aggression; dispute resolution; gangs; criminal networks; “disorganized” crime; and the role of social alienation in driving crime and violence.

Innovation also includes studies that tackle common interventions and test the fundamental assumptions and prior beliefs that underlie them. For example, reconciliation programs and ceremonies have become routine after violence. Yet a randomized evaluation in Sierra Leone shows that [truth and reconciliation programs implemented 10 years after the end of violence had positive and negative effects, improving relations between people from rival sides but also increasing symptoms of traumatic distress](#).

Almost every major program or policy is founded on reasonable but untested assumptions. Employment programs for criminals assume that criminal labor supply is responsive to non-criminal wages. Rehabilitation programs assume that specific skills or norms can be learned or adopted through short training courses or other interventions. Testing these assumptions in one context, and across contexts, aids generalizability.

For instance, [recent studies of cognitive behavioral therapy programs in Chicago and Liberia](#) suggest that self-control skills and social identity not only affect decisions to commit acts of crime and violence, but that these skills and identities are malleable in adults and can be shaped by short courses of intervention.

Naturally, it is difficult to generalize the results of any single evaluation. That said, some studies have more general lessons than others. We believe it is the studies that pursue “basic science,” while at the same time answering important policy questions, that will have the greatest intellectual and policy impacts in the long run.

For example, Abhijit Banerjee and coauthors recently studied the crime displacement effects of enforcement, but used the experiment to structurally estimate the [strategic response of drunk drivers to police presence in Rajasthan](#). We encourage studies that attempt to assess more fundamental assumptions or policy parameters, or that develop or test theories.

Flagship programs of great national and international importance are also strong candidates for funding, although even here we encourage applicants to carefully consider generalizability. For example, as part of the Rajasthan drunk driving experiment, Abhijit Banerjee and coauthors

developed a cross-cutting analysis of various interventions to [improve overall police performance and public perception](#). This deep partnership with the Bureau of Police Research and Development and other government entities ultimately resulted in [dedicated funds for police skills trainings](#) in the state.

Other frontiers of experimentation apply new methods. One example is the estimation of spillovers. For instance, Chris Blattman, Donald Green, Daniel Ortega, and Santiago Tobón used a [large-scale policing intervention in Bogota](#) to estimate design-based spillovers. Their analysis shows that in the presence of interference between units, conventional estimation techniques produced biased estimates and inaccurate standard errors. This work builds on [extensive US evidence](#) from much smaller samples, where it is not possible to estimate spillovers precisely.

Bringing new types of data or measurement to bear is also an important contribution, especially when those data will become available to others, they can be replicated in other contexts, or the measurement strategy can be mimicked by others. For example, Claudio Ferraz and Joana Monteiro (with support from [J-PAL's Government Partnership Initiative](#)) are currently working with the Citizen Security Institute of the State Government of Rio de Janeiro to build a police violence dataset to subsidize randomized evaluations that will be proposed in the future. Other frontiers include new forms of data (including “big data”), new behavioral games, and new survey modules.

Finally, CVI is also accepting proposals for research on violence and homicide reduction in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), supported by a grant from the Open Society Foundations (OSF), which is run through and managed by IPA's Peace & Recovery Program (P&R). With just eight percent of the world's population, LAC accounts for over a third of all homicides. Seventeen of the 20 countries with the highest homicide rates in the world are in LAC, as are 43 of the top 50 cities. To date, little evidence exists on what kinds of programs and policies can contribute to a reduction in this rate.

To that end, CVI has expanded its core research themes to include homicide in LAC. The special fund seeks to support some of the first rigorous studies, and policy and program pilots, on the impact of homicide and violence reduction interventions. Funding for this theme is subject to and conditioned upon OSF's grant to IPA.

II. Scope of the initiative

Crime and social and political violence are wide-ranging phenomena. By crime, broadly speaking, we invite proposals related to the following phenomena:

- Violent crime and property crime
- Organized crime
- Interpersonal violence (such as between-household disputes, identity-targeted violence, and domestic violence)
- White collar crime (although please note that corruption research is generally the focus of the [J-PAL Governance Initiative](#))

By social and political violence, we invite proposals related to the following phenomena:

- State-supported violence and repression, including the regular and extreme use of force by arms of the criminal justice system
- Electoral violence
- Riots, protests, and other collective action (violent and nonviolent)
- Intergroup violence, including ethnic and sectarian violence
- Terrorism and violent extremism
- International and internal conflict (including insurgency and counterinsurgency)

III. General research priorities

There is relatively little international experimental evidence on “bread and butter” interventions and approaches to reducing crime and violence. We anticipate that the next decade will see the replication and evaluation of common US and European anti-crime strategies in developing countries. This initiative is open to funding high-quality interventions in this vein. In line with our emphasis on generalizability, however, we strongly encourage a focus on fundamental questions rather than narrow program evaluation. We also encourage work on challenges and policy strategies that are unique to the developing world which supersede national and regional boundaries.

In particular, we encourage research that:

- Helps develop or test theories of crime and violence, including causes and consequences
- Seeks to disentangle interventions to isolate and understand the underlying assumptions and theoretical mechanisms

- Tries to challenge common prior beliefs, which could lead to a new understanding of crime and violence or new programs and priorities for mitigation
- Uses and develops novel measurement strategies

IV. Priority questions

We encourage submissions that aim to push the frontiers of research and policy and that ask new or otherwise important questions. Questions where there is an established literature will be held to a higher standard of innovation and generalizability.

Research themes and questions that are especially relevant or in need of evidence include:

Motivations behind participating in crime and violence. A fundamental research area is “who participates in criminal activities?” and “why do they engage in violence?” We encourage research that sheds light on a range of material and nonmaterial incentives, such as:

- Psychological factors and behavioral motivations
- Economic opportunities (e.g. in labor markets)
- Social norms, as well as social networks and relationships
- Injustice, rights, and political representation
- Governance and the provision of public goods
- Opportunities and connections to criminal networks (and interventions that are designed to alter or break those connections)
- The role of groups (including but not limited to the provision of material and nonmaterial club goods, the role of social networks, and the role of group dynamics and social norms)

Organizational strategies of criminal and armed groups. We also encourage research that sheds light on the internal organization of entities such as criminal gangs and extremist social movements, including questions of leadership, funding, organization, as well as internal principal-agent problems. For example, field experimental work may help shed light on radicalization, including strategies used to recruit radicalized youth.

Security provision and the efficacy of the justice sector. We hope the initiative will generate evidence on the role of justice sector institutions and policies. Relevant topics include:

- Peacekeeping
- Formal policing (practices, capacity, technical expertise, etc.)

- Criminal justice and judicial reform
- Sentencing and incarceration
- Alternatives to incarceration
- Informal (e.g. community) policing and security

Building and maintaining stability after violence. We encourage research that uncovers how peace and stability can be maintained after episodes of violent crime and conflict.

At the community level this encompasses:

- Conflict resolution, to bring organized violence to an end
- Peacebuilding initiatives, such as methods for alternative dispute resolution
- Reconciliation among groups engaged in violence
- State capability and public service delivery
- Participation and the peaceful exercise of political voice

At the individual level this encompasses:

- Rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders and perpetrators, socially and economically
- Social and psychological recovery from trauma
- (To a lesser extent, because of the larger existing literature) Recovery in terms of economic well-being (home production, labor market participation) and human capital (education, physical health)

Understudied topics and groups. Finally, there are a number of extremely important but understudied topics and groups where we wish to encourage research.

- Migrants, displaced persons, and refugees
 - Social conflicts engendered by migration (voluntary or forced)
 - Strategies for dealing with and mitigating the effects of forced migration
- Exploitation of women and human trafficking
- Violent speech and extremism

As long as proposals fall within this focus, the CVI does not prioritize certain research questions over others. If you are uncertain about whether a proposal may be eligible, e-mail cvi@povertyactionlab.org.

V. Focus countries

Funding for this initiative comes from the UK Department for International Development (DFID). As such, no funds can be spent in high-income countries (generally defined as the US, Canada, Western Europe, Japan, Korea, Singapore, Australia, New Zealand, Israel, and wealthy Middle Eastern countries). A majority of funds must be spent in [DFID priority countries](#), which has recently been expanded to include the following Sahel countries: Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger.

The CVI will consider proposals in non-DFID priority countries, but these proposals will have a lower probability of funding. In general, the CVI and DFID are interested in expanding beyond countries where most RCTs are concentrated and are especially interested in evaluations in fragile states. If you are uncertain about whether a country may be eligible, e-mail cvi@povertyactionlab.org.

Lastly, only projects in LAC are eligible for competitive funding from OSF. While we would be particularly excited to receive proposals for projects in Brazil and the Northern Triangle (El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua), proposals for projects across the region will be considered.

VI. Proposal types

The CVI will consider the following proposal types:

Travel/Proposal development grants: These grants are to develop preliminary research ideas. Activities may include background research, travel, relationship development, descriptive analysis, observational analysis, and data development or collection. Travel/Proposal development grants are intended for those who may not otherwise have access to this type of funding. PhD students, junior researchers, and those from institutions with limited funding are especially encouraged to apply. The review board will consider how this proposal helps researchers develop subsequent proposals for pilots or full randomized controlled trials (RCTs). Maximum award: \$10,000.

Pilot grants: These grants are for studies with a clear research question, but for which the design and implementation requires substantial upfront investments, including: further trial-and-error piloting; developing new measurement strategies or instruments; analysis of existing

data; or new descriptive or experimental data development or collection.¹ The review board will consider how this proposal helps researchers develop subsequent proposals for full RCTs. Maximum award: \$75,000.

Full RCT grants: These grants are for research projects with a clear research question, committed implementing partner(s), randomization design, well-defined instruments, and sample size estimates.² Grants can also fund the continuation or completion of research projects that have already started without CVI funding (including those for which data collection is complete). This includes long-run follow-ups from previously published trials, as well as "downstream studies" that use a randomized evaluation designed for a non-CVI priority to answer a CVI-relevant question. The expectation is that this work will result in a paper publishable in a top economic, political science, or science journal. Maximum award: \$400,000, including any previous CVI funding of any type for the same project. Other J-PAL and IPA funding may also affect award sizes.³

VII. Off-cycle proposals

CVI also offers two types of funding outside of the regular RFP cycles:

Off-cycle Projects: These grants are intended for research projects that face a substantial time constraints and need to receive funding before the end of a regular funding round to make use of an unanticipated opportunity (e.g., a newly announced policy change that will go into effect soon, creating an opportunity for a randomized evaluation). Proposals must clearly justify the need to receive a decision on an expedited schedule. The maximum amount awarded to off-cycle proposals is \$50,000. PhD students are not eligible for off-cycle funding.

Evidence use and policy outreach support: These funds are intended to support the take-up and dissemination of evidence from CVI-funded evaluations, or other randomized evaluations conducted by J-PAL affiliates and CVI invited researchers that address the initiative's research priorities. Funds can be used to support activities such as conferences, workshops, or events to disseminate results and policy lessons from evidence, as well as to support the take-up of evidence, such as by providing technical assistance to or embedding staff in an organization, either with a partner from the original study or with other entities interested in using evidence.

¹ Full RCTs requesting less than \$75,000 are considered full RCTs and evaluated accordingly.

² As a general rule, CVI does not fund pure lab experiments. In very rare cases, a proposal may be considered if a lab-in-field experiment supplements an underlying randomized evaluation, or if the lab-in-field experiment has direct policy implications. For example, Edward Miguel and coauthors' [lab-in-field evaluation of ethnic bias in Kenya](#) was implemented during Kenya's national elections to understand how proximity to election dates might affect participants' ethnic biases.

³ Proposals with a reason for requesting more than \$400,000 may be considered on a case-by-case basis.

The suggested budget range for these requests is \$10,000-20,000 and applications can be submitted on a rolling basis.

VIII. Eligibility

J-PAL affiliates, J-PAL postdocs, and a list of invited researchers are eligible to apply for any type of CVI funding. PhD students who have a J-PAL affiliate or invited researcher on their thesis committee may be eligible to apply for travel/proposal development grants, pilot grants, or up to \$50,000 for full RCT grants.⁴ All proposals may include collaborators outside of this network.

IX. Grant conditions

Travel/Proposal development grants:

- 1. Submit report:** Grantees are required to submit a brief report within 30 days of completing travel. If the travel/proposal development work results in non-initiative-funded follow-on projects, grantees should inform CVI as part of their final report or upon receipt of additional funding.
- 2. Participate in CVI activity:** Grantees agree to participate in one CVI activity or event. The CVI will cover associated costs.

Pilot studies and Full RCTs:

- 1. Register project (full RCTs only):** Before starting fieldwork, grantees must register their trial with the AEA RCT Registry (www.socialscienceregistry.org). Registration takes approximately 20 minutes. For support with registering projects, e-mail support@socialscienceregistry.org.
- 2. Submit progress/final reports:** Grantees are required to submit a brief start-up report, semi-annual financial update, an annual progress report, a final financial report within 60

⁴ A PhD student's adviser must provide a letter of support and indicate willingness to remain involved in a supervisory role throughout the project. For J-PAL affiliate or invited researcher advisers who do not reside at the student's host university, the application must also include a formal letter of confirmation from the student's department head confirming the adviser is a member of the student's official thesis committee. To apply for up to \$50,000 for pilot studies or full RCTs, PhD students must also provide evidence of successful pilot activities, funded either through a CVI travel/proposal development grant or other sources. PhD students are eligible to apply for a maximum of two travel/proposal development grants and two pilot study/full RCT grants during their time as graduate students. All else equal, priority will be given to graduate students who have not applied before. Applicants who received travel/proposal development grants as graduate students but have since moved to another institution may only apply for funding to continue that same project.

days of completion of the award period, and a final project report with preliminary results within 6 months of completion of the award period. For questions regarding annual reporting, e-mail Beth Ann Turnquist (bturnquist@povertyactionlab.org).

- 3. Publish project datasets and instruments (full RCTs only):** Grantees are required to submit data within 18 months of completing data collection, to be held by J-PAL under an embargo agreement. Each year thereafter, J-PAL will ask grantees whether the dataset has been made available. If there is no response, J-PAL will keep the embargo. On the fifth year following the completion of data collection, J-PAL will again ask the grantee if the dataset can be made public. If there is no response, the dataset will be made public. The grantee may request a further extension from the CVI co-chairs. Grantees are also required to publish survey instruments and data collection methodologies. In cases where legal or ethical reasons preclude data publication, J-PAL may grant exceptions to this requirement.⁵

J-PAL Global’s research team can provide assistance in publishing data, such as preparing the data and code, replicating results, tables, and uploading it for publication.⁶

- 4. Collect program cost data (full RCT only):** Policymakers are interested in program costs, as it is one of the key factors in their decision to support a program. Cost data also allows for [cost effectiveness analyses \(CEA\)](#), which J-PAL may conduct (with permission from the researchers) even if such an analysis is not part of an academic paper. To offset the cost of collecting program cost data, the budget template includes a \$1,000 line item. CVI will provide a costing worksheet for grantees to update annually.

If researchers are unable to collect detailed cost data, researchers are still required to provide estimates of total program cost, average cost per beneficiary, and marginal cost to add another beneficiary.

- 5. Collecting and reporting Gender-disaggregated data:** J-PAL, through its Gender sector, is making an effort to study heterogeneity in program impacts by beneficiary/participant gender more systematically. Please note that the following request only applies to J-PAL internal reports and does not extend to the academic paper or online J-PAL summary.

Many studies funded by J-PAL initiatives already collect study participants’ gender. In such cases, and when outcome data are individual-specific, we request that grantees conduct heterogeneity analyses by beneficiary gender for the study’s main results for internal reporting to J-PAL (to be shared in the final grant report). A single study might be underpowered to detect heterogeneous treatment effects, or null results might not seem interesting in one study, but these findings may be meaningful when included in an analysis

⁵ See [J-PAL's Guidelines for Data Publication](#) for full details.

⁶ See [J-PAL's Research Transparency and Reproducibility](#) page for more details.

across studies. J-PAL will use the reported results for (a) determining potential pooled statistical analyses to conduct across studies and (b) generating gender-related policy lessons in [insert topic area of initiative]. Our reporting template will include a question on this, which researchers are encouraged to fill it in when applicable. We recognize that there will be cases where this reporting is not applicable, for various reasons. In these cases, the PIs can just provide a brief explanation to be shared with the Gender sector.

- 6. Participate in CVI activities:** Grantees agree to participate in one CVI activity or event such as an evidence-sharing workshop, matchmaking conference, or donor presentation. The CVI will cover associated costs.
- 7. Credit CVI:** Any presentations and publications, including academic papers, policy briefs, press releases, blogs, and organizational newsletters that emerge from this project must include the following text and link: “This research is funded by the [J-PAL Crime and Violence Initiative](#).”

X. Review process

Proposals are reviewed along five criteria: academic contribution, policy relevance, technical design, project viability, and value of research.

Travel/Proposal development grants: The CVI co-chairs review proposals and make final funding decisions.

Pilot and full RCT grants: The CVI review board, consisting of the CVI co-chairs and three other J-PAL affiliates selected by the co-chairs, reviews proposals. Co-chairs submitting a proposal in the current round of funding are required to recuse themselves from reviewing the same proposal type (travel/proposal development, pilot, or full RCT), and any board member submitting a proposal in the current round of funding is required to recuse him/herself from the overall review.⁷ The CVI review board makes a decision to (1) approve, (2) conditionally approve (with minor revisions or clarifications), (3) request a “revise and resubmit” during this or a subsequent round, or (4) not approve.

If applicants would like to appeal a CVI review board decision, they must e-mail cvi@povertyactionlab.org within one week of the announcement detailing the reasons for the appeal (maximum two pages). The CVI review board considers all appeals.

⁷ In addition, no spouse, partner, or immediate family member (parent, child, or sibling) 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.

XI. Timeline

The CVI has two regular funding cycles per year. RFPs are released in June and December, and funding decisions are announced around November and May, respectively. See below for the current round's timeline:

December 19	RFP is issued
March 20	Proposal submission deadline
Week of May 11	RFP decisions announced

XII. To apply

Proposals are due **March 20, 2020**. Follow the instructions in the travel/proposal development grant application instructions or the pilot studies and full RCTs application instructions, available [on the CVI RFP webpage](#).

XIII. Related initiatives

When applying to the CVI, consider whether your proposal may also be suited for the [J-PAL Governance Initiative](#) or [Innovations for Poverty Action's Peace & Recovery \(P&R\) program](#). These initiatives share the same geographic focus and emphasis on supporting innovation and basic research that maximizes generalizability (and with it broad policy relevance). The priority questions of CVI and P&R are especially overlapping, although the CVI has a much greater emphasis on crime and criminal justice issues, and P&R has a broader focus on state and institution building, humanitarian crises, and post-crisis recovery. If you are uncertain about whether your proposal falls within the CVI's scope, e-mail cvi@povertyactionlab.org.

J-PAL Governance Initiative (GI): GI funds randomized impact evaluations of programs designed to improve participation in the political and policy process, reduce leakages in public programs, and improve state capacity. GI's research priorities are identified in the [Governance Review Paper](#), which is currently being revised to include a new section on improving state capacity based on [Finan, F., Olken, B., and Pande, R. 2015. "The Personnel Economics of the State." Elsevier, Forthcoming.](#)

IPA Peace & Recovery (P&R) program: IPA's Peace & Recovery program is designed to support field experiments and related research in several broad areas: reducing violence and promoting peace; reducing "fragility" (i.e. fostering state capability and institutions of decision making); and preventing, coping with, and recovering from crises (focusing on conflict, but also including non-conflict humanitarian crises).

XIV. Funding

The [UK Department for International Development \(DFID\)](#) has co-funded J-PAL's [Governance Initiative](#) since 2011. DFID has approved a further £12m of UK Aid to increase its support for the Governance Initiative; and also to fund new research, particularly experiments, in crime and violence (J-PAL's Crime and Violence Initiative), and conflict (IPA's [Peace and Recovery Program](#)), together called the Governance, Crime, and Conflict Initiative (GCCCI). GCCCI also receives funding from the Open Society Foundations (OSF) for projects on violence and homicide reduction in Latin America; applicants are able to apply for these grants through CVI and P&R.