

Indian Scholars Program: Child Health, Maternal Health and Family Planning Window

Proposal Guidelines

Release Date: May 2021

I. Background

J-PAL South Asia is invested in creating opportunities for researchers based in India to drive and develop the development research agenda in the country. As part of this effort we are launching a Request for Proposals for researchers based at Indian universities to apply for funding for grants that will enable them to lead random evaluations in the country. This program is being funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Under the Child Health, Maternal Health and Family Planning Window (supported by J-PAL South Asia Cash Transfers for Child Health initiative) the program will fund proposals that aim to contribute to the academic literature and generate policy-relevant evidence on the following themes and topics:

Child Health, Maternal Health, Family Planning: Through this call we invite proposals on studies that seek to address child and maternal health, and family planning outcomes, as well as gender differentials in health care access and outcomes in India. This may include interventions that aim to address barriers to take-up of health services, including but not limited to incentives, information and counselling interventions, nudges, etc. It will also include interventions and programs that seek to improve delivery of health services that address the above outcomes. Additionally, to meet project timelines, all funded projects should complete activities **by February 2022** at the latest.

Geographic Focus:

The program will fund proposals for studies to be implemented in India.

Researchers who submit the Expression of Interest will be invited to submit a full proposal for the Child Health, Maternal Health, and Family Planning Window by IST 11:59 PM, June 20th, 2021.

II. Proposal Types

Under this funding window we will fund studies designed to test scalable, cost-effective interventions addressing themes described in the previous section. Three types of proposals will be considered:

1. *Travel/Proposal Development Grants:* These grants are limited to a maximum of \$5,000. Proposal development grants enable interested researchers to visit implementing partners in order to secure support for potential projects, as well as conduct initial research (including analysis of administrative data or limited primary data collection). Travel grants should ideally aim towards supporting a future pilot study proposal or a full research project proposal.
2. *Pilot Studies:* These grants are limited to a maximum amount of \$25,000. Pilots are defined as studies with a clear research question, but require piloting for one or more of the following
 - a. the design and implementation of an evaluation requires further testing, pilot data, and/or partnership development;

- b. the feasibility of some aspect of program design has not yet been demonstrated under “real world” conditions.
3. *Randomised Evaluations*: These grants are for rapid full evaluations that will be completed by February 2022. The proposal should include a clear research question, a robust randomization design and description of the treatment, a theory of change, well-defined research instruments, and sample size estimates. The proposal should also include a description of how the research may be used to inform specific policies and programmes related to child health, maternal health or women’s work and economic agency. These studies are capped at a maximum of \$67,500.

III. Researcher Eligibility

- *Who can apply?*
 - The funding opportunity is available for researchers currently holding a position at an Indian university who completed their PhD (in Economics, Public Policy, Public Health or related empirical discipline).

IV. Implementing Partner Commitment

For proposal development grants, no implementing partner commitment is required at this stage of the project, since these grants are intended to facilitate partnership development. Pilot projects should be at more advanced stages of development with support from potential implementing partners. A letter of support or documentation from the partner *is not required at this stage*. However, if you do have a document along these lines available, please do submit it along with your proposal materials.

VI. Proposal Evaluation Criteria

In this round of grant making, referees will score each pilot proposal on the five criteria listed in the table below and will provide a 1-2 sentence justification for each score. Submissions for proposal development grants will be evaluated based on their relevance to the theme and prior publication record of the researcher:

| | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| <i>Relevance to Program Theme</i> | <i>Does the study address questions crucial to understanding which programs and policies may be effective in improving child and maternal health and family planning outcomes?</i> |
| <i>Academic Contribution</i> | <i>Does the study make a significant contribution toward advancing knowledge in the field? Does it answer new questions, or introduce novel methods, measures, or interventions? Is there academic relevance? How does the study compare with the existing body of research? Does the research strategy provide a bridge between a practical experiment and underlying economic theories?</i> |
| <i>Technical Design</i> | <i>Does the research design appropriately answer the questions outlined in the proposal? Are there threats that could compromise the validity of results? If so, does the proposal sufficiently address those threats?</i> |
| <i>Scalability</i> | <i>Will results from the intervention have broader policy implications? How, if at all, will the “lessons learned” be relevant beyond this test case? Can the intervention be effectively replicated or scaled up?</i> |
| <i>Prior publication record</i> | <i>Researchers applying for funding should share their prior publication record along with other application materials, since this will be taken into account when making funding decisions.</i> |

VII. Proposal Application Guidelines

Your narrative (not to exceed six pages in length for pilot proposals) should clearly describe the underlying intervention and evaluation, including a summary of the policy problem that motivates this research, description of the treatment, evaluation design, target population, and implementing partners. The narrative should also address each of the topics in the Proposal Evaluation Criteria listed above. Proposal narratives should also include a 100-150 word abstract of the study, which will be uploaded to our web page if the project receives funding. The proposal should clearly describe the policy relevance of the analyses, background context, target population, and data collection plan.

There are three main proposal types:

1. Travel/Proposal Development Grant:

Award ceiling: \$5,000

Proposal development grants enable interested researchers to visit implementing partners in order to secure support for potential projects, as well as conduct initial research (including analysis of administrative data or limited primary data collection). Travel grants should ideally aim towards supporting a future pilot study proposal or a full research project proposal. The funds can be used towards within-country travel in India. In order to apply, interested researchers should complete the proposal cover sheet and budget template (available on the website), along with a 1-page description of the purpose of the travel/proposal development grant.

2. Pilot Studies:

Award ceiling: \$25,000

We will also accept pilot proposals for projects that are at an early stage of development and that lay the groundwork for a full research proposal.

Pilot studies can be qualitative or quantitative in nature, and can serve as a diagnostic to reveal barriers for effective programs aiming to improve child health, maternal health, and family planning. Pilots may test the feasibility of some aspects of program design that has not yet been demonstrated under “real world” conditions. Proposals can also be designed to test the efficacy of an intervention or an evaluation design, to acquire pilot data, and/or to pilot a project in the same form in which it would be scaled-up if successful. The research question should be very clear. Pilot proposals are not expected to fully elaborate on their project design but should explain how they are a necessary step in the development of a full evaluation. In particular, they should explain the conceptual and methodological distinction between the pilot study and any future follow-on studies as well as what exactly the pilot will enable researchers to learn. These funds may be used towards the partial costs of pilot implementation as well as any scoping, evaluation, or data collection. Please use the proposal narrative, cover, and budget templates, available on the website, for your submission.

The proposal should clearly provide the following information:

- A summary of the policy problem that motivates this research and how it fits the themes covered by the program;
- The project’s potential contribution to academic literature;
- A description of the potentially proposed treatment;
- A description of research goals;
- A description of the target population;
- A comment on whether the proposal addresses gender issues in any way or if you plan to disaggregate results by gender;
- A description of implementing partner in India, if applicable;
- A comment on whether the project has scale-up potential and whether the program costs and impacts may be suitable for a cost effectiveness analysis; and
- If the project has other funders, the proposal should clearly explain the marginal contribution of these requested funds.
- A letter of support from the implementing partner, indicating their commitment for the project, if applicable.
- **Potential ethical risks [Optional]:** Please discuss, if applicable, any ethical considerations that you feel warrant discussion but are not covered by your existing or planned IRB review. It is fine to leave this section partly or entirely blank; please detail only issues that are not or will not be covered by your IRB that you feel are potentially important enough for the review committee to be aware. For more details, see [here](#).

3. Full evaluation proposals:

Award Ceiling: \$67,500

Full evaluation proposals should address all of the topics noted above for pilot and scoping studies, and also include:

- A clear explanation of the evaluation design and program intervention;

- A theory of change demonstrating impact on outcomes related to maternal and child health and family planning;
- Power calculations

Applicants may also choose to discuss the project’s potential for scale-up and potential cost-effectiveness.

VIII. Proposal Evaluation Process

Grant making will follow a two-stage process to assess the quality and appropriateness of all proposals. First, proposals will be distributed for peer review to referees selected from a roster of researchers and policy experts. The roster will be assembled by the three permanent members of J-PAL South Asia’s CaTCH initiative and will not have a conflict of interest.¹ Each application will be reviewed and scored by three referees consisting of academics and/or policy experts, at least one of whom is also a Review Board member. Proposals will be scored using the evaluation criteria described earlier in this document in this stage.

Second, following peer review, proposals will be reviewed by the members of the off-cycle CaTCH Review Board, which includes: (i) two permanent CaTCH Review Board members², and (ii) a policy expert from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. During the review process, we may contact applicants to clarify certain aspects of a proposal. Review 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; (4) reject and resubmit; or (5) not approved.

If you would like to appeal a decision of the Review Board, you may contact the CaTCH Initiative (CaTCH@povertyactionlab.org) within one week of the results’ announcement with a document detailing the reasons for appeal (maximum two pages in length), which will then be communicated to the Review Board.

IX. Timeline for RFP

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|---------------------------|---|
| 20 June, 2021 | Expression of Interest Deadline |
| 9 July, 2021 | Proposal Submission Deadline |
| 25 July, 2021 | Peer Review Process Concludes |
| 28 July, 2021 | CaTCH Board Meeting and Funding Decisions |
| First Week of August 2021 | Decision Letters Sent to Applicants |

X. Grant Conditions

Applicants who are awarded a grant will be asked to do the following:

- **Start-up report:** Grantees must submit a brief start-up report due 3 months after the project’s proposed start date as indicated on the application cover sheet. This will allow J-PAL to monitor the

¹ Please see CaTCH Conflict of Interest Policy, Appendix 1

² The permanent Review Board members are Pascaline Dupas (Stanford University), Seema Jayachandran (Northwestern University), and Karen Macours (Paris School of Economics).

initial stage(s) of Initiative-funded projects and whether there are any delays in the implementation of the project activities.

- **Trial Registration:** For full evaluations, grantees must register their trial with the AEA RCT Registry (<http://www.socialscisearch.org>) before starting field work. 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. There is also the opportunity to include more information, including power calculations and an optional pre-analysis plan. J-PAL will reach out to grantees during the process of establishing the award and ask for confirmation of registration. For questions and support with the registry, please contact Keesler Welch (Keesler@mit.edu).
- **Implementation Cost Collection:** For full projects, you are required to collect data on program costs associated with this evaluation, which may be used as an input to J-PAL and 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. We 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.
- **Annual Progress Reporting:** Grantees should provide brief annual progress narrative and semi-annual financial reports using templates provided to them by J-PAL.
- **Data publishing and availability:** Full randomized evaluation studies funded by the initiative are required to make any survey data available (without identifiers and treatment assignment) *within 18 months of the completion of that survey's activities*.³ All de-identified datasets (baseline, follow-ups, with unique ID for merging) shall be made available *with treatment assignment within 18 months of completion of the endline survey activities*. Researchers can request for a waiver to the data publication policy from the Initiative Co-chairs (for either the entire survey data or part of the survey data), which will be granted in special instances. An example of such an instance would be if the government partner does not permit publication of data until after completion of study. In addition, full randomized evaluations should also adhere to J-PAL's Data and Code Availability Policy, which can be found [here](#). Please note that CaTCH requires data publication and availability of funded projects earlier than the standard J-PAL policy.
- **Gender-disaggregated results:** 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

³ Completion of survey activity implies that all activities related to data collection have been completed successfully and the data set is ready for cleaning and data processing. This includes verifying data quality (by re-checking a subset of survey responses), tracking non-respondents to improve the survey response rate, verifying select survey responses with respondents in case of any anomaly in the responses, and other such activities.

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 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 child health. Our reporting template will include a question on this, which researchers are encouraged to fill 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.

- **Data Methodology and Instruments:** Share data collection instruments and methodologies with other grantees, as needed.
- **Credit to CaTCH:** Any presentations and publications that emerge from this research project should credit the J-PAL CaTCH Initiative with the following text: “Funding provided by the J-PAL South Asia Cash Transfers for Child Health Initiative”
- **CaTCH Activities:** Participate in at least one of CaTCH’s activities on a mutually agreed date and place. This activity could be an evidence workshop, a matchmaking conference, or a presentation to one of CaTCH’s donors, or at a conference that is attended by sector experts and/or practitioners.
- **Final Technical and Financial Reports:** J-PAL SA requests a final technical report and a final financial report within 60 days of completion of the award period, and a final project report with preliminary results within a maximum of 2 months of completion of the award period for full evaluations and pilot studies, and within 30 days for travel grants. We will send you reminders and instructions about these reports. Survey Instruments: At the completion of your project, we request any survey instruments used for this project.

XI. Budget Details

As CaTCH is based out of J-PAL South Asia’s office hosted at IFMR, applicants will have to follow particular guidelines provided by our host institution. It is the applicant’s responsibility to submit a complete, accurate budget. Due to limitations arising from host country regulations, J-PAL South Asia cannot award the entire grant to a host institution outside of India and costs will be settled through J-PAL South Asia on a cost-reimbursable basis. Additionally, this limitation means that CaTCH will not be allowing applicants to budget for the time or salary of Principal Investigators. Researchers may budget travel and accommodation as necessary in order for them to visit the project.

Additionally,

- All applications must include budget notes in the column provided in the budget template, specifying the costs within the budget. For example, Travel Costs should include a breakdown of how many trips are planned, the estimated cost per trip, etc. Field costs that are detailed clearly in the budget (e.g., # of respondents times \$/respondent = total \$) do not require additional justification in the budget notes.
- Any large computer/equipment purchases should include a breakdown of what is being purchased, e.g. how many laptops, and the project staff that will be assigned to said equipment.
- CaTCH funds may not be used to cover materials and supplies at the PI’s host university.

- Unallowable costs include: Costs labeled as “incidental”, “miscellaneous”, or “contingency” and rent, unless a separate project office is to be covered specifically for this effort;
- If there is co-funding for the project, then applicants must complete both the “Total Project Budget” and the “CaTCH Budget” spreadsheets in the budget template.

X. Award Requirements and Process

It is **required** that alongside applications to the initiative, applicants secure approval from IFMR’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) for any human subjects protocol required to implement your project in addition to an IRB approval from investigator institutions. Additionally, grantees will have to secure IRB approval from their own university **before** beginning the project and drawing funds. Full and pilot grants are provided under an award from J-PAL South Asia at IFMR to the grantee’s host institution. Proposal development grants are paid as travel reimbursements.

XI. Application Instructions

Applicants must submit completed versions of all of the following documents by the submission deadline. No information and/or documents from applicants will be accepted or considered after the closing date unless otherwise requested by CaTCH.

- **Cover Sheet:** This document must be completed in its entirety;
- **Proposal Narrative:** This document must not exceed six pages in length and an additional one page technical appendix for full evaluations and must address all of the items discussed in the relevant Proposal Application Guidelines table above. Please save the cover letter and proposal narrative as a single Word file with the title: [PI Last Name, First Name] [Topic Name].doc(x).
- **Proposal Budget:** This Excel spreadsheet must be completed in its entirety using the enclosed table and saved as a single file with the title: [PI Last Name, First Name][Budget].xls(x);
- **Letter(s) of Support (if available):** In case you are submitting any letters of support from your implementing partner, save each as a single PDF file with the title [PI Last Name, First Name] [Name of Organization Letter of Support].pdf. Letters of support from the implementing partner may include the following:
 - a. The implementing partner’s support for the activities proposed
 - b. How the results of the research or other activities may strengthen its policymaking
 - c. How it sees a partnership with J-PAL South Asia to be valuable
 - d. What costs will be shared by the implementing partner and an initial total budget amount (if exact costs are not available, then a broad commitment to pay for implementation or other costs is sufficient)
 - e. Willingness to share program implementation cost data with project for the purpose of conducting program cost analysis

Note: We understand that in some cases it may not be feasible or appropriate to have the partner include all of the items above in their letter. In such cases, you can submit a more general letter of

support and address the remaining points in your proposal narrative. If you are unable to submit any of the required documents before the RFP deadline, please write to the initiative manager at catch@povertyactionlab.org to request an extension.

- **Letter from the institution that will receive the award:** Along side your application materials, for all proposals, researchers should submit a letter of support from the institution that will receive the award and implement the project, indicating their commitment to carry out the activities outlined in the proposal.
- **Submit an email** with all of the above attachments to CaTCH at CaTCH@povertyactionlab.org. In the subject line, please write: CaTCH Indian Scholars Program 2021 Proposal: [PI Last Name, First Name]

**The deadline for submission is:
11:59 PM IST, 9 July, 2021**

Appendix 1: CaTCH Conflict of Interest Policy

A two-stage peer review process is used by CaTCH to assess the quality and appropriateness of all proposals. The first level of review is carried out by a panel of peer researchers selected from a roster of researchers and policy experts with experience in topics related to CaTCH. The second level of review is carried out by the CaTCH Review Board, which comprises five individuals including the CaTCH Co-Chairs, a J-PAL affiliated researcher, a policy expert from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and a senior policy expert from J-PAL South Asia.

Peer Referees and CaTCH Review 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 conflict of interest may attend only the portion of the Board meeting that does *not* concern the review of their proposal.