

## J-PAL Gender and Economic Agency Initiative: Overview and Instructions

Round 2- Summer 2021

*J-PAL's Gender and Economic Agency Initiative (GEA) funds randomized evaluations of strategies to enhance women's economic agency. GEA is now calling for proposals from J-PAL affiliates, J-PAL postdocs, and GEA invited researchers for full research projects, pilot studies, travel/proposal development grants, and methodological advances in measurement grants. Proposals are due by **11:59 p.m. ET on Monday, August 2, 2021.***

### Background

Women around the world are less likely than men to participate in the labor force, with 47 percent of women in the global labor force compared to 74 percent of men as of 2019.<sup>1</sup> Among those women in low- and middle-income countries that have entered the labor force, they are more likely to earn less than men and be unemployed.<sup>2</sup> They are also overrepresented in informal employment, which often comes with greater risks and more limited opportunities due to limited legal protections.<sup>3</sup>

A key challenge policymakers and the private sector face is a lack of evidence about which approaches to increasing economic agency are effective and scalable, in what contexts they are successful, and why certain approaches work. This type of information can help policymakers work to ensure women's work and economic agency are at the forefront of economic development efforts. To address this challenge, GEA aims to build a strong body of evidence on policies and programs to promote women's work and enhance women's economic agency.

### Focus

GEA focuses on developing research on three priority themes:

1. **Workplace arrangements and labor policies to promote formal and informal employment for women**, including: generating work opportunities targeted to women, ensuring equal access to jobs through gender-equitable hiring practices, improving workplaces to better support women (e.g., accommodating domestic responsibilities or addressing violence/harassment, etc.), and leveraging technology to improve the “future of work” for women
2. **Enhancing women's labor potential and work readiness (including self-employment)**, including: skills development (including hard and soft skills), promotion

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<sup>1</sup> International Labour Organization. 2019. “Labor Force Participation Rate, Female (% of Female Population Ages 15+) (Modeled ILO Estimate).” ILOSTAT Database. April 2019. <https://data-worldbank-org.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/indicator/SL.TLF.CACT.FE.ZS>

<sup>2</sup> International Labour Organization. 2018. “World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends for Women 2018 – Global Snapshot.” Geneva: International Labour Organization.

<sup>3</sup> International Labour Organization. 2018. “World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends for Women 2018 – Global Snapshot.” Geneva: International Labour Organization.

and management training, interventions to support female jobseekers, leveraging social networks, and collective enterprise

3. **Addressing restrictive gender norms and attitudes related to women's work**, including: women's work and roles, unpaid care work, public safety, violence and harassment, and occupational sex segregation

Please refer to the [GEA framing paper](#) for more information on potential research topics and questions of interest to GEA.

As there is a growing need to identify and test key indicators for women's empowerment and agency, GEA also works to enhance the availability and scale of improved metrics for these outcomes. GEA partners with [EMERGE](#) (Evidence-based Measures of Empowerment for Research on Gender Equality), a project focused on gender equality and empowerment measures across multi-country settings to monitor and evaluate programs and to track progress on SDG 5, to identify promising metrics in need of future research.

If a researcher is uncertain about whether a research project is eligible for GEA, please email [GEA@povertyactionlab.org](mailto:GEA@povertyactionlab.org).

## Geographic Focus

GEA prioritizes funding in the following priority countries: Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Kenya, India, Pakistan, Tanzania, and Uganda. GEA also has limited funding available for projects in other countries in East Africa and South Asia, as well as in Nigeria and the Central America<sup>4</sup> and Southeast Asia regions.

## Funds

Four types of proposals will be considered in this round:

*(1) Full Research Projects:* These grants are for research projects at a mature level of development. Not only must the research question be clear, but applicants must also demonstrate a commitment from implementing partners, a method of randomization, well-defined instruments, and sample size estimates. Proposals can also be submitted for funding the continuation of research projects that have already started without GEA funding (including those for which field data collection has been completed). The expectation is that these projects will result in a paper publishable in a top economics journal. These grants will generally be for a maximum amount of \$300,000 given GEA's limited resources. Awards greater than \$300,000 will be considered in special cases.

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<sup>4</sup> GEA includes the following countries in Central America: Mexico, Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, and Colombia.

*(2) Pilot Studies:* These grants are for studies with a clear research question, but for which the design and implementation require further testing and pilot data.<sup>5</sup> The expectation is that these projects will ultimately develop into full-scale randomized evaluations. The maximum amount awarded for pilot studies is \$75,000.

*(3) Travel/Proposal Development Grants:* These grants cover exploratory work related to preliminary research ideas, such as conducting background research, developing partnerships, visiting field sites, and collecting preliminary data. The expectation is that these funds will be used to support costs related to PI travel to develop a proposal for a pilot or full-scale randomized evaluation during a subsequent call for proposals. The maximum amount awarded for travel/proposal development grants is \$10,000.

*(4) Methodological Advances in Measurement Grants:* These grants offer additional funding to projects to develop, field test, and validate promising metrics of women's empowerment and agency to advance the understanding of how to best measure these concepts, which can help other researchers improve their measurement. Based on evidence gaps identified by EMERGE's review, GEA encourages proposals that seek to test or develop metrics on social norms related to women's economic empowerment, including in the following areas: income generation and labor force participation, enterprise and entrepreneurship, economic autonomy in household, financial inclusion, and unpaid care. Proposals that link to EMERGE's [Roadmap for Measuring Agency and Social Norms in Women's Economic Empowerment](#) will be particularly valued.

Measurement grants are available for researchers to add to existing research projects, including those independent of other GEA funding. Researchers requesting full or pilot funding may add funding for measurement projects in their budgets. The maximum amount award for measurement grants is \$20,000.

Please note that GEA was established to fund randomized impact evaluations of programs and policies being implemented in the field. As a general rule, GEA does not fund pure lab experiments. A proposal may be considered if there is a randomized field evaluation of an underlying program or policy which supplements a lab experiment.

### **Off-Cycle Proposals**

GEA offers off-cycle grants for projects outside of the regular RFP cycle. These grants are intended for research projects that face a significant time constraint 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 an evaluation). Eligibility for these proposals is the same as for the regular funding cycles. Proposals must clearly

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<sup>5</sup> Please note that full evaluations requesting less than \$75,000 are considered full research projects and evaluated accordingly. The criteria for pilot funding apply only to proposals requesting funds to conduct piloting, or pre-randomization, activities.

justify the need to receive a decision on an expedited schedule. The maximum amount awarded to an off-cycle proposal is \$75,000.

## Eligibility

J-PAL affiliates, J-PAL postdocs, and GEA invited researchers are eligible to apply for any type of GEA funding. For the Summer 2021 RFP, GEA also welcome proposals from India-based researchers through the Indian Scholars Programs, details below. Please note that GEA invited researchers are nominated and reviewed on a semi-annual basis, with the review based on a nominee's previous research with a particular emphasis on randomized evaluations related to women's economic agency. All proposals may include collaborators outside of this network.

In addition, PhD students may be eligible to apply for up to \$50,000 in funding. To be eligible, PhD students must have a J-PAL affiliate or GEA invited researcher on their thesis committee at their host university. This adviser must provide a letter of support and indicate willingness to remain involved in a supervisory role throughout the lifetime of the project.<sup>6</sup> If the student is pre-thesis, the letter should state "I am actively responsible for supervising this project/research and anticipate being on the student's thesis committee." In order to apply for up to \$50,000 for pilot or full-scale funding, graduate students must provide documented evidence of successful pilot activities, funded either through a GEA travel/proposal development grant or other sources. Please note that PhD students are not eligible to apply for off-cycle funding.

Please note that any applicant can submit **a maximum of three pilot or full-scale proposals within a 12-month period to GEA**, either as a main PI or co-PI in the proposal. For example, if a researcher submitted two pilot or full-scale proposals in our Spring 2021 round, they were only eligible to submit a maximum of 1 pilot or full-scale proposal in our Summer 2021 round.

*Applications from our COVID-19 off-cycle round will not count towards this number.*

## Indian Scholars Program

J-PAL South Asia is invested in creating opportunities for India-based researchers to drive and participate in the development research agenda in India through the use of randomized evaluations. As part of this effort, J-PAL South Asia is launching the [Indian Scholars Program](#), a program that offers funding and capacity building opportunities for Indian researchers who have completed a PhD in Economics, Public Policy, Public Health or a related empirical discipline, and currently hold an academic or research position at an Indian university.

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<sup>6</sup> Please note that PhD students are eligible to submit a maximum of two travel/proposal development grant applications and two pilot/full study proposals during their time as graduate students. All else equal, priority will be given to graduate students who have not applied before. Please note that applicants who received travel/proposal development funding as graduate students but have since moved to another institution may not apply for funding unless they have since become a J-PAL affiliate or GEA invited researcher (following the GEA invited researcher nomination and review process), or unless the proposal includes a J-PAL affiliate or GEA invited researcher as a co-author.

Through the Indian Scholars Program, researchers are eligible to apply for up to \$75,000 in funding for projects based in India. Please note that the publication record of the applicants will be considered during the review process.

**To participate in the program and apply for funding, all interested researchers are required to attend the Indian Scholars Program Launch Webinar on June 14, 2021.** To attend the webinar, please [register your interest](#) in advance.

## **Applications**

In advance of applying, please **submit a letter of interest no later than 11:59 p.m. on Friday, July 9, 2021. Proposal applications are due by 11:59 p.m. ET on Monday, August 2, 2021.** All J-PAL initiatives, including GEA, use an online portal for all application submissions, proposal reviews, invoice submission, and grantee reporting.

If you do not already have a portal account, you will first need to register via [our online portal](#). Please navigate to the portal and follow the instructions listed to complete your registration. To submit a letter of interest (LOI), please sign into the portal after confirming your registration, and click [this link](#).

The GEA team will notify you via the portal once we have reviewed your LOI and you are clear to begin your proposal. In the interim, to facilitate your proposal development, we have hosted [reference application documents online](#) that outline in detail all required information that applicants will be asked when submitting a full proposal to GEA via our online portal system. You are welcome to begin drafting your proposal materials using these templates. Please, however, do not complete or submit these reference documents to GEA for consideration.

## **Review Process**

Proposals are reviewed along five broad criteria: academic contribution, policy relevance, technical design, project viability, and value of research. In addition, GEA prioritizes proposals that have involvement of researchers from locally-based institutions. For Indian Scholars Program applicants, the prior publication record of the researcher will also be taken into account.

*Full and Pilot Proposals:* Selection of awards follows a two-stage process. First, proposals are distributed for peer review to referees selected from a roster of researchers and policy experts assembled by the GEA co-chairs. Each application is reviewed by up to three referees: one member of the GEA Review Board, one J-PAL affiliate not on the board, and one policy expert on women's economic agency. Second, application proposals are reviewed and scored by members of the Review Board.

All board members submitting a proposal in the current round of funding are required to recuse themselves from this review.<sup>7</sup> Based on the scores and the comments of the referees, the review board votes on the status of the application. The status of an application can fall into four categories: (1) approved, (2) conditional approval (with minor revisions or clarifications), (3) revise and resubmit during this or a subsequent round, and (4) not approved.

Travel/Proposal Development Proposals: The GEA co-chairs review the proposals and make final funding decisions.

Methodological Advances in Measurement proposals: The GEA co-chairs review the proposal and make final funding decisions.

Off-Cycle Proposals: The GEA co-chairs review the proposals and can decide to award funding, reject the proposal for funding, or include the proposal in the regular review process for the next RFP round.

If you would like to appeal a decision of the GEA Review Board, please email the GEA Initiative Manager at [GEA@povertyactionlab.org](mailto:GEA@povertyactionlab.org) within one week of the announcement, detailing the reasons for the request for reconsideration (maximum two pages in length). This request will then be communicated to the reviewers.

## Timeline

Week of June 7, 2021	RFP is issued
Friday, July 9 2021	Letter of interest deadline
Monday, August 2 2021	Proposal submission deadline
Week of August 30, 2021	Funding decisions announced

Please note that all funded activities need to be completed before the end of April 2024. Any funds not spent by that date will need to be returned to GEA. There is no scope for a no-cost extension for this source of funding. GEA prioritizes funding projects that can produce some results or outputs that will become available within a short timeframe.

## Grant Conditions

Full, Pilot, and Measurement Grants: If your proposal is selected for funding, the terms of the award will be as follows:

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<sup>7</sup> 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.

1. **Research conduct:** Grantees will be required to have IRB approval or exemption from the IRB of Record. Specific instructions will be given in the Notice of Award. In addition, they are expected to adhere to MIT's community-wide policies that are available [here](#).
2. **Peer-review proposals:** Grantees may be requested to peer-review proposals in future GEA rounds.
3. **Project registration:** Within three months of the start date indicated on the proposal, grantees must register their trial with the [AEA RCT Registry](#). Registration includes 18 required fields, such as your name and a small subset of your IRB requirements. There is also the opportunity to include more information, including power calculations and an optional pre-analysis plan. (*Full studies only*)
4. **Reporting:** Grantees will be requested to provide a brief start-up report, policy memo on preliminary findings, semi-annual financial updates; annual progress reports; a final financial report within 60 days of completion of the award period; and (*Full studies only*) a final substantive report with preliminary results within 12 months of completion of the award period, which will be made public on the J-PAL website.
5. **Collecting and reporting program cost data:** 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 analysis \(CEA\)](#), which J-PAL may conduct (with permission from the researchers), even if such analysis is not part of an academic paper. In order to facilitate cost collection, GEA awards include \$1,000 to defray expenses associated with collecting cost data. GEA will provide a costing worksheet for grantees to update annually. If grantees are unable to collect detailed cost data, grantees are still required to provide estimates of total program cost, average cost per beneficiary, and marginal cost to add another beneficiary. (*Full studies only*)
6. **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 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. 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.

7. **Data publication:** Grantees may be requested to share data collection instruments and methodologies with other grantees. Furthermore, researchers funded through this grant will be required to publish de-identified data in accordance with J-PAL's [Data and Code Availability Policy](#). J-PAL's research team can work with you to clean, label, de-identify, document, and replicate datasets collected as part of a randomized trial before publishing them in the [J-PAL Dataverse](#) or another data repository of your choice. (Full studies only)
8. **Participate in GEA activities:** Grantees may be requested to participate in one of GEA's activities at a mutually agreed time and place. Activities may include evidence workshops, matchmaking conferences, or presentations to GEA donors.
9. **Credit GEA:** Any presentations and publications, including academic papers, policy briefs, press releases, blogs, and organizational newsletters, that emerge from this project should credit the J-PAL Gender and Economic Agency Initiative. The exact wording on crediting GEA and donor support will be provided in the terms of your award.

Travel/Proposal development grants: Recipients will be required to submit a brief progress report after completing travel and may be asked to participate in one of GEA's activities on a mutually agreed date and place.

### **Administrative Notes**

Full, pilot, and measurement grants are provided under an award from MIT to the Institute to Receive Award. Travel/proposal development grants are paid as travel reimbursements. For more information on budget, requirements, and process, please see instructions in the respective application form and instructions documents. These and all other materials needed to apply for full research, pilot, travel/proposal development, or measurement grants are available on the [GEA webpage](#).

### **Related Initiatives**

Please do not submit the same proposal to more than one J-PAL initiative at the same time. Before applying to GEA, consider whether your proposal may be better suited for the J-PAL Jobs and Opportunity Initiative or J-PAL/CEGA Agricultural Technology Adoption Initiative. Please see more information on the other initiatives below. If you are uncertain about which initiative to apply to, please contact [GEA@povertyactionlab.org](mailto:GEA@povertyactionlab.org).

J-PAL Jobs and Opportunity Initiative (JOI): JOI funds randomized evaluations of strategies to improve employment outcomes. JOI aims to generate a body of policy-relevant rigorous research that addresses pressing labor market challenges. Knowledge gaps include questions about supply and matching, job creation, and the future of jobs. JOI aims to offer guidance for implementing

organizations, governments, and donors, so that policies can be guided by scientific evidence to improve employment outcomes.

[J-PAL/CEGA Agricultural Technology Adoption Initiative \(ATAI\)](#): The ATAI initiative aims to generate a body of rigorous evidence that illuminate the mechanisms underlying “agricultural transformation” for rural poverty alleviation in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. This includes 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. It also includes strategies to engage 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.

[Women’s Economic Empowerment and Digital Finance \(WEE-DiFine\)](#): WEE-DiFine is a research initiative aimed at generating a comprehensive body of evidence on the causal impact of digital financial services on women’s economic empowerment. Based at the BRAC Institute of Governance and Development in Dhaka, Bangladesh, the Initiative supports rigorous research projects exploring this theme in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa.

For measurement grants, [EMERGE invites submissions](#) from investigators who focus on social norms and women’s economic empowerment measurement to develop and pilot test social norms measures related to women’s economic empowerment. EMERGE especially encourages investigators from low- and middle-income countries and organizations/universities, as well as investigators who are members of the Social Norms Learning Collaborative.

## **Funding**

Support for the Gender and Economic Agency Initiative is provided by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Target Foundation.