

GENDER AND ECONOMIC AGENCY INITIATIVE: RFP OVERVIEW

Winter 2025 Request for Proposals (RFP)

The Gender and Economy Agency Initiative (GEA) funds randomized evaluations of strategies to enhance women's economic agency. In a unique opportunity, GEA will broaden its focus to explore the causal relationship between women's economic empowerment and family planning as well as a broader range of topics in women's economic agency than in previous rounds. GEA calls for proposals from J-PAL affiliates, J-PAL invited researchers¹, J-PAL postdoctoral fellows, and PhD students of J-PAL's affiliates and invited researchers to conduct innovative, policy-relevant research on:

1. **WEE and Family Planning.** Understand the bi-directional causal relationship between women's economic empowerment and family planning, and the broader impact on women's and children's health outcomes, with a regional focus in Africa and South Asia.
2. **Women's Economic Agency and Livelihoods.** Promote women's work and enhance women's economic agency across a wide range of topics and intervention types in Central America, Southeast Asia, and South Asia.

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

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TIMELINE FOR WINTER 2025 RFP

Announce RFP to J-PAL research network	January 9, 2025
Required Letter of Intent (LOI) Deadline *All applicants will receive an <i>invitation to proceed</i> with full proposal development	February 6, 2025

¹ Select 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 the Initiative's research grants.
Please do not circulate externally, given this restriction. If you have questions regarding your eligibility to participate, we welcome you to inquire by emailing us at gea@povertyactionlab.org.

Full Proposal Deadline <i>*By invitation</i>	March 17, 2025
Anticipated Notification Date	Early May 2025

OVERVIEW

J-PAL's Gender and Economic Agency Initiative (GEA) funds randomized evaluations of strategies to enhance women's economic agency. In a unique opportunity, GEA will broaden its focus to explore the causal relationship between women's economic empowerment and family planning. GEA is now calling for proposals from eligible researchers for full research projects, and pilot studies grants.

BACKGROUND

Women's agency continues to be severely limited in many contexts around the world. As of 2024, no country provided equal opportunity for women, when taking into account legal differences involving violence and childcare ([WB, 2024](#)). According to the Sustainable Development Goals Report, progress to achieve gender equality has been sluggish. For example, at the current rate, they estimate it would take 140 years for women to be represented equally in positions of power and leadership in the workplace ([UN, 2023](#)).

Increasing women's economic agency is widely considered to be a key component of achieving gender equality and improving women's outcomes in multiple intersecting domains ([UN, 2024](#)). Globally, women are less likely than men to participate in the labor force, with 49 percent of women in the global labor force compared to 73 percent of men as of 2023 ([ILO, 2023](#)). Among those women in low—and middle-income countries (LMICs) who have entered the labor force, they are more likely to earn less than men and be unemployed. They are also overrepresented in informal employment, which often comes with greater risks and more limited opportunities due to limited legal protections ([ILO, 2018](#)).

Likewise, advancing women's economic empowerment (WEE) and health outcomes, including family planning, is essential for advancing gender equality and reducing poverty globally. An estimated 257 million women in LMICs who want to avoid pregnancy still lack access to safe and effective family planning, with rural and low-income women particularly affected ([UNFPA, 2020](#)). High unmet needs for contraception not only increase the risk of unintended pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections but also restrict women's reproductive rights and choices. For example, access to contraception can enable women to plan their families, thereby allowing them to pursue education, gain autonomy in their households, and improve their earning potential ([Finlay and Lee, 2018](#)).

A key challenge policymakers and the private sector face is a lack of evidence about which approaches to increasing women's economic agency are effective and scalable, in what contexts

they are successful, and why certain approaches work. In particular, understanding the causal relationship between fertility, labor force participation, and women’s economic empowerment is essential to shaping policies that support women’s economic and personal goals across diverse settings. 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:

- 1) **WEE and Family Planning.** Understand the bi-directional causal relationship between women’s economic empowerment and family planning, and the broader impact on women’s and children’s health outcomes, with a regional focus in Africa and South Asia.
- 2) **Women’s Economic Agency and Livelihoods.** Promote women’s work and enhance women’s economic agency across a range of topics and intervention types in Central America, Southeast Asia, and South Asia.

Please refer to the [Research Agenda](#) section, the [WEE and Family Planning Framing Paper](#), and [GEA’s overview of research opportunities](#) for more information on potential research topics and questions of interest to GEA.

If you are uncertain about whether a research project is eligible for GEA, please email gea@povertyactionlab.org.

GEOGRAPHIC PRIORITIES

Topics	Geography	Eligible Researchers
WEE and Family Planning	Priority geographies: India, Kenya, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Niger, Senegal, Côte d’Ivoire, and Uganda ²	J-PAL affiliates, J-PAL postdocs, J-PAL invited researchers, and PhD students of J-PAL’s affiliates and invited researchers

² We will also consider evaluations of relevant interventions outside those priority geographies in instances when there is a strong case that the policy lessons could be applicable more broadly and support the research agenda.

Women's Economic Agency and Livelihoods	Central America ³ South Asia Southeast Asia	J-PAL affiliates, J-PAL postdocs, J-PAL invited researchers, and PhD students of J-PAL's affiliates and invited researchers
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AWARD TYPES

For the Winter 2025 RFP, GEA invites proposals under full research projects, including add-on funding to existing full RCTs, and pilot studies award types. Please note that our “WEE and Family Planning” funding window will prioritize full research projects and add-on funding.

Full Randomized Research Projects (typically up to \$250,000, suggested period of performance: 24 - 30 months)

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 from power calculations. Proposals can also be submitted for funding the continuation of research projects that have already started with other funding (including those for which field data collection has been completed). The expectation is that these projects will result in a publicly available paper that is eventually submitted to a top economics journal. De-identified data should be made publicly available within three years of the end of data collection (sooner if required by donors), or within 60 days of a paper's acceptance in a journal. These grants will generally be for a maximum amount of \$250,000, given GEA's limited resources. Awards greater than \$250,000 will be considered in special cases.

Pilot Studies (up to \$75,000, suggested period of performance: one year)

These grants are for studies with a clear research question, but for which the design and implementation requires further testing and pilot data.⁴ The expectation is that these projects will ultimately develop into full-scale randomized evaluations.

However, pilot grants can also fund more foundational work that intends to inform a future full-scale randomization, including the refinement of measurement strategies, operationalizing logistics of implementing a research design, and collecting pilot data to inform the design of future research or hone research questions. Grants may also be used for activities intended to facilitate access to administrative data for designing or conducting an RCT, including but not

³ GEA includes the following countries in Central America: Mexico, Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, and Colombia.

⁴ 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.

limited to, negotiating data use agreements, conducting exploratory data analysis and cleaning, or setting up technical access mechanisms.

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.

ELIGIBILITY

J-PAL affiliates, J-PAL invited researchers, J-PAL postdoctoral fellows, and PhD students of J-PAL affiliates and invited researchers are eligible to apply for GEA funding. All proposals may include collaborators outside of this network.

PhD students who have a J-PAL affiliate or invited researcher on their thesis committee are eligible to apply for up to US\$50,000 in funding. The affiliate or invited researcher can be based at the same institution as the student, or at a different institution. Alternatively, PhD students may also be co-PIs on grant applications submitted by a J-PAL affiliate or invited researcher, in which case the expectation is for co-PIs to be full and equal collaborators.

Notes for All Award Types

- To prevent concentration of awards to any specific researchers, and to reduce the burden on initiative review boards, applicants are limited to submitting three proposals, inclusive of all proposal types, per 12-month period per initiative (either as PI or co-PI). **For example, if a researcher submitted two pilot or full-scale proposals in our Spring 2024 round, they can then only submit a maximum of 1 pilot or full-scale proposal in our Fall 2024 round.**
- In order to be considered for new initiative grants, applicants must be current on reporting for all their other grants, across all J-PAL initiatives. **Researchers whose projects are more than 2 months late on any reports to any J-PAL Initiative despite reminders from J-PAL and who have not received an approved extension will not be eligible to have new projects funded by J-PAL.** You may submit applications to the Initiative, but your application will not be considered for funding until your deliverables become current.

PROJECT TIMELINE

Funding requests should not extend beyond:

- 1) **WEE and Family Planning:** June 2027
- 2) **Women's Economic Agency and Livelihoods:** November 2027

Please note that all funded activities need to be completed before the dates above. Any funds

not spent by that date will need to be returned to GEA. GEA prioritizes funding projects that can produce some results or outputs that will become available within a short timeframe.

SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS

To respond to this RFP, please follow the directions listed below.

1) WizeHive, the new grant management system (GMS) J-PAL is using for our proposals, is more user-friendly. It will, however, require a new login. Please use the [Application Instructions](#) and follow the prompts in the links on the Initiative RFP webpage to create a new login. Or, if you have already successfully submitted an LOI or proposal to a J-PAL competition, simply log into WizeHive with your credentials.

2) Submit **a required Letter of Intent (LOI) by the deadline above.**

3) **If you receive an invitation to apply to the main application**, please follow the next steps outlined in the relevant proposal guidelines documents linked below.

Please read the relevant [Proposal Guidelines](#) documents on the [RFP release page](#) in detail *before answering the proposal questions in WizeHive*. Each of the following documents includes a checklist and guidance on what to address within each narrative prompt—guiding your completion of all required submission materials based on the appropriate proposal type.

- [Proposal Guidelines: RCTs](#)
- [Proposal Guidelines: Pilot studies](#)

4) Upon completing your proposal and uploading proposal attachments (budget, letters, etc.), submit the proposal by the deadline above.

Research Agenda

GEA funds randomized evaluations of strategies to enhance women's economic agency. In a unique opportunity, GEA will broaden its focus to explore the causal relationship between women's economic empowerment and family planning, as well as a broader range of topics in women's economic agency than in previous rounds. In this RFP, we aim to build a strong body of evidence on policies and programs to:

- 1) **WEE and Family Planning.** Understand the bi-directional causal relationship between women's economic empowerment and family planning, and the broader impact on women's and children's health outcomes, with a regional focus in Africa and South Asia.
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Central America, Southeast Asia, and South Asia.

While this list is not exhaustive, some of the open questions this initiative seeks to address are described below.

1) The WEE and Family Planning funding window will put an emphasis on projects that acknowledge that variations in social norms and women's labor force participation may shape how family planning impacts women's economic outcomes and vice versa. More specifically, this includes projects measuring relevant contextual factors and examining how these factors might mediate the effectiveness of family planning interventions.

In this funding round, GEA focuses on developing research on the following themes:

1. WEE and Family Planning

- a. Understanding how family planning impacts women's economic empowerment
- b. Understanding how women's economic empowerment impacts family planning and women's and children's health outcomes

Please refer to the [WEE and Family Planning Framing Paper](#) for more information on potential research topics and questions that are of interest to GEA for this RFP.

2) The Women's Economic Agency and Livelihoods funding window will focus on projects seeking to advance women's economic opportunities. While maintaining a broad approach, GEA will place emphasis on the care economy and cost-effective interventions that ensure access to care and flexible work, explore the role of technology in unlocking economic opportunity, and understand effective strategies to shift restrictive gender norms, such as through media and social media. These topics are informed by lessons from GEA's research portfolio and key policy-relevant issues.

In this funding round, GEA focuses on developing research on the following themes:

2. Women's Economic Agency and Livelihoods

- **We will prioritize cutting-edge research focused on the care economy.** For instance, what are the most cost-effective interventions that ensure access to care and flexible work to generate economic opportunities for women?
- **GEA encourages projects exploring the role of technology in unlocking economic opportunities for women.** For instance, how can technology support interventions to be effective and inclusive? How does technological skills development influence women's labor potential and employment outcomes? How can social networks be developed for the most vulnerable social groups?
- **GEA seeks to unpack the levers we can pull to change restrictive gender norms effectively.** For example, does engaging men and boys result in sustained changes, empowering women to access sustainable livelihood opportunities?

GEA encourages projects exploring such levers, for instance, how mass and social media can advance women's economic opportunity.

- In terms of interventions, we focus on strategies to enhance women's economic agency and livelihoods, including (but not limited to):
 - Generating work opportunities targeted to women, ensuring equal access to jobs through gender-equitable hiring practices, and improving workplaces to better support women,
 - Skills development (hard and soft skills), promotion and management training, interventions to support female jobseekers, leveraging social networks, and collective enterprise,
 - Interventions addressing restrictive gender norms and attitudes related to women's economic agency and livelihoods,
 - Interventions to support women's leadership, other training interventions (life skills, self-efficacy), enabling women's financial access and inclusion (considering control of resources), and interventions enabling community empowerment.

Please refer to [GEA's overview of research opportunities](#) for more information on potential research topics and questions of interest to GEA.

ADMINISTRATIVE NOTES

PAYMENTS AND SUBAWARDS

RCT, pilot, and scaling grants are provided under an award from MIT to the grantee's host institution. PLEASE NOTE: MIT now requires that at least one project PI be employed by the organization receiving the subaward and funds.

Please be mindful that MIT requires that the IRB determination must be held by the institution that enters into the subaward agreement with MIT (also known as the Institute to Receive Award or ITRA). The PI at the ITRA must be listed as the main PI on the IRB. If the institution does not have its own IRB, the institution must engage the services of a commercial IRB to review and provide oversight for the research activities. [Heartland](#) and [Solutions](#) provide review of international research and satisfy J-PAL's IRB requirements; fees can be found on their respective websites. Furthermore, MIT requires that the PI named on the IRB must be employed by the institute receiving the award (ITRA). Information about this MIT policy can be found [here](#) and [here](#). Please consult with J-PAL regarding including the cost of this commercial entity in the project budget. J-PAL also requires that the reviewing IRB have IRB Organization (IORG) status with the US Office of Human Protections. [You can look up the IORG status of an IRB here](#).

Subaward Setup: For grants with human subject research, once all materials including IRB approvals/exemptions have been received, MIT typically takes 90 days to establish the subaward. Please provide conservative rather than optimistic estimates for start and end dates to reduce the likelihood of needing to submit no-cost extension requests.

For more information on budget, requirements, and process, please see instructions in the relevant application forms, for which reference documents exist on the [RFP page](#).

CODE OF CONDUCT

Since J-PAL is part of MIT, everyone who is associated with J-PAL, including all researchers worldwide affiliated with J-PAL (affiliates and invited researchers), as well as all co-authors on J-PAL funded or implemented studies are considered part of the broader MIT community. It is therefore our hope and expectation that they will adhere to the [MIT code of conduct](#), as well as the [J-PAL code of conduct](#). MIT's section titled "Relations and Responsibilities Within the MIT Community" contains specific provisions regarding personal conduct, harassment, discrimination and retaliation, violence against community members, and substance use. Please take some time to review these.

Because almost all researchers we work with are also part of other university communities, they may also be subject to their host universities' policies and procedures. Many of these policies may be very similar to the MIT policies above. Finally, many researchers are separately affiliated with other academic associations and organizations, including the American Economic Association, and they should continue to abide by the codes of conduct established by the associations and organizations to which they belong. The AEA's code of conduct is available [here](#).

We continue to encourage all staff and researchers to have a direct and open dialogue with each other if they have concerns about interactions between researchers, staff, or partners on any of the above issues, or about any aspect of a research project (e.g., adherence to minimum must dos, IRB protocols, or finance/operation rules). But if staff do not feel comfortable holding such discussions, or if the concern cannot be resolved at this level, they can reach out to the individuals and offices identified in the relevant policies linked above.

Violations of MIT community guidelines or of J-PAL research/operations rules can also be directly reported to any of the J-PAL contacts for further action: (i) Global Executive Director; (ii) any of the regional Executive Directors; (iii) [Cindy Smith](#) (Global Director of Finance and Operations); or (iv) [Anna Omura](#) (Global Associate Director of Finance and Operations).

GRANT CONDITIONS

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

1. **Research conduct:** Grantees will be required to have IRB approval or exemption from the IRB of Record. **The IRB approval must be held by the institution that enters into the subaward agreement with MIT** (the ITRA). Similarly, **the Principal Investigator (PI) of a subaward issued by MIT's Research Services Administration must be employed by the organization receiving the subaward and funds** ([see here for further details and FAQ](#)). Specific instructions will be given in the Notice of Award. In addition, grantees are expected to adhere to [MIT's community-wide policies](#).
2. **Peer-review proposals:** Grantees may be requested to peer-review proposals in future GEA rounds in which they are not applying for funding. Acceptance of funding signals the grantee's consent to peer-review proposals upon GEA's request.
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, 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. **Policy Memo:** In addition to the reports above, grantees with projects focused on **WEE and Family Planning** will be required to provide a two-page policy memo due 30 days after receiving the award letter, including a brief literature review, relevant contextual factors, and framing related to the project's focus. This will enable GEA to identify emerging insights across funded studies to share with stakeholders.
6. **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. GEA requires grantees to collect and report the cost of the program they are evaluating separately from all research costs in their final narrative report. We recommend research teams regularly track costs as they are incurred to maximize accuracy. While not required, many teams also find it easier to submit cost data reports on an annual basis. *(Full studies only)*

7. **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.

8. **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)*
9. **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.
10. **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.

LINKS TO ALL RFP MATERIALS

Details on the overall Initiative research agenda, as well as all submission templates and reference documents that make up the overall RFP package, are all available at:
<https://www.povertyactionlab.org/initiative/gender-and-economic-agency-request-proposals>.

OTHER FAQs

For questions on RFP priorities, application and review processes, eligibility, and general inquiries, please reach out to: gea@povertyactionlab.org, or visit the [Gender and Economic Agency Initiative website](#).

For questions on award set-up and administration, please reach out to gea_grant_admin@povertyactionlab.org.