**J-PAL Governance Initiative: Overview and Instructions**

*Round 22 - Fall 2023*

*J-PAL’s Governance Initiative (GI) funds randomized evaluations of strategies to improve governance in low- and middle-income countries. GI is now calling for proposals from J-PAL affiliates, J-PAL postdocs, and GI invited researchers for full research projects, pilot studies, travel/proposal development grants, and policy outreach support grants.* ***We are also opening a call for multidisciplinary research proposals, with further details*** [***online***](https://www.povertyactionlab.org/initiative/governance-initiative-request-proposals)***.*** *Proposals are now due by* ***5:00 p.m. ET on Thursday, October 5, 2023.***

**Background**

Governments around the world spend billions of dollars annually to provide basic services and development programs aimed at improving the lives of those living in poverty. At the same time, a large number of foundations and international aid organizations channel their development dollars through government-run programs. The effectiveness of such public spending is often compromised by a number of connected factors: policies that do not reflect the needs or preferences of the people, leakages due to corruption, lack of community participation, or poor oversight of public spending. Despite the crucial importance of good governance for development, many questions about how to improve governance remain unanswered. As a response to this need, GI funds randomized impact evaluations of programs designed to improve participation in the political and policy process, reduce leakages in public programs, and strengthen state capacity. **For this round, all proposals must relate to political participation.**

**Focus**

GI funds randomized evaluations of programs and policies aimed at improving governance in low- and middle-income countries, building a better bridge between field experiments and underlying governance theories. GI’s research priorities are identified in the Governance Initiative Review Paper (full paper [here](https://www.povertyactionlab.org/review-paper/governance-initiative-review-paper); executive summary [here](https://www.povertyactionlab.org/review-paper/governance-initiative-review-paper-executive-summary)) which summarizes existing evidence in governance from primarily economics and political science, with an emphasis on field evaluations. The Governance Review Paper is organized around the following themes:

1. The impact of political participation on policy outcomes, growth, and citizen satisfaction.
2. The determinants of political participation: institutions, demographics, information, participation in government programs, and technology.[[1]](#footnote-1)
3. Reliable measures of corruption and leakages.
4. The impact of corruption and leakages on individuals, firms, the provision of goods and services, and the correction of externalities.
5. The determinants of leakages and corruption: the incentives and structure of bureaucracy, technology, transparency, the judiciary system, demographics, and anticorruption in the long run.
6. The selection and recruitment of public officials: the effects of wages and compensation, and government screening.
7. Using incentives to improve the performance of public officials: compensation, financial incentives, and nonfinancial incentives.
8. Monitoring public service delivery: information flows, government monitoring, and citizen monitoring.
9. E-governance and demographics as cross-cutting factors.

**For this round, all proposals must be related to the topic of political participation** (items 1 and 2 in the above list). Multidisciplinary research teams that meet the eligibility requirements are welcome to apply for any of the below proposal types, in addition to our dedicated multidisciplinary grants. If a researcher is uncertain about whether a research project is eligible for GI, please email [GI@povertyactionlab.org](mailto:GI@povertyactionlab.org).

**Funds**

Several 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 GI 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 or political science journal. The total amount awarded to a single project, including any GI funding for proposal development or piloting, will not exceed $400,000.[[2]](#footnote-2) Please note that, in general, full research project proposals with budgets exceeding $250,000 are rarely funded given the high quality and volume of all proposals received and GI’s limited resources.

*(2) Pilot Studies*: These grants are for studies with a clear research question, but for which the design and implementation requires further testing and pilot data.[[3]](#footnote-3) 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) Multidisciplinary Research Grants:* These grants cover research activities that incorporate theory, methods, and/or analytical frameworks from outside applied economics and political science. In particular, priority will be given to research teams that include a scholar outside the applied economics space (this space includes PhD holders in economics as well as public policy, political science, or similar programs if their focus is on applied microeconomic methods). For more information, please see our [Multidisciplinary Research Application](https://www.povertyactionlab.org/initiative/governance-initiative-request-proposals) document online. The maximum amount awarded for an multidisciplinary research grant is $30,000.

Please note that GI was established to fund randomized impact evaluations of programs and policies being implemented in the field. As a general rule, GI 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.

*Cost-extension requests by active grants:*Please note GI is ***not***currently accepting cost-extension requests from active grants, either through this regular RFP or off-cycle. Should your GI-funded study require a no-cost extension, please refer to our no-cost extension request template in the [GI RFP webpage](https://www.povertyactionlab.org/initiative/governance-initiative-request-proposals). Please reach out to [GI@povertyactionlab.org](mailto:GI@povertyactionlab.org) with any questions.

**Off-Cycle & Policy Outreach Proposals**

*(1) Off-Cycle Projects*: GI is not accepting off-cycle proposals at this time.

*(2) Policy Outreach Support*: GI is not accepting proposals for policy outreach grants during this round.

**Eligibility**

J-PAL affiliates, J-PAL postdocs, and GI invited researchers are eligible to apply for any type of GI funding. Please note that GI invited researchers are nominated and reviewed on a yearly basis, with the review based on a nominee’s previous research with a particular emphasis on randomized evaluations related to governance. All proposals may include collaborators outside of this network.

In addition, PhD students may be eligible to apply for travel/proposal development grants or up to $50,000 in pilot or full-scale funding. To be eligible, PhD students must have a J-PAL affiliate or GI 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.[[4]](#footnote-4) In addition, 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 GI travel/proposal development grant or other sources. Please note that PhD students are not eligible to apply for off-cycle funding.

For multidisciplinary grants, priority will be given to research teams that include a scholar from outside the applied economics space (this space includes PhD holders in economics as well as public policy, political science, or similar programs if their focus is on applied microeconomic methods).

Please note that any J-PAL affiliate, J-PAL postdoc, GI invited researcher, or eligible PhD student can submit **a maximum of three pilot or full-scale proposals within a 12-month period to GI**, 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 Fall 2021 round, they were only eligible to submit a maximum of 1 pilot or full-scale proposal in our Fall 2022 round.

**Applications – Regular Call for Proposals**

J-PAL initiatives, including the Governance Initiative, are now using an online portal for all proposal submissions, proposal reviews, invoice submissions, and grantee reporting.[[5]](#footnote-5) To apply to GI’s Fall 2023 RFP, you will first need to register via [this online portal](https://jpal.force.com/portal/apex/FGM_Portal__CommunityApplication?id=7013m000001dizz). Please navigate to the portal and follow the instructions to complete your registration.

**Letter of Intent**: GI’s Letter of Intent (LOI) form is due by **5:00 p.m. US ET on Thursday, September 7**, **2023.** All applications are required to have submitted an LOI by this deadline in order to submit a full proposal.

**Full proposals**: The GI 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, please feel free to review the sample application templates available online, which roughly detail information that applicants will be asked when submitting a full proposal to GI via our online portal system. Please, however, **do not** complete or submit these sample documents to GI for consideration. All proposals for full, pilot, and travel/proposal development grants are due by **5:00 p.m. US ET on Thursday, October 5, 2023.**

**Applications – Multidisciplinary Research Proposals**

To apply for a multidisciplinary research grant, please follow the instructions in the **GI Multidisciplinary Research Application** document on the [GI RFP webpage](https://www.povertyactionlab.org/initiative/governance-initiative-request-proposals) and submit your proposal by email to [GI@povertyactionlab.org](mailto:GI@povertyactionlab.org).

Please note that multidisciplinary research proposals *do not* require an LOI, and will not be conducted through the online platform described above. Applications are due via **email** by **5:00 p.m. ET on Thursday, October 5, 2023.**

**Review Process**

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

*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 on governance issues assembled by the GI co-chairs. Each application is reviewed by three referees: one member of the GI Review Board, one J-PAL affiliate not on the board, and one policy expert in governance. Second, application proposals are reviewed and scored by the five members of the Review Board, consisting of the GI co-chairs and three other J-PAL affiliates chosen by the J-PAL Directors. All board members submitting a proposal in the current round of funding are required to recuse themselves from this review. [[6]](#footnote-6) 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 GI co-chairs review the proposals and make final funding decisions.

*Multidisciplinary Research Proposals:* Proposals will be evaluated by the GI co-chairs and a panel of reviewers that reflects the breadth of disciplines represented in the proposals.

*Cost-extension requests by active grants:* GI is not currently accepting cost-extension requests.

If you would like to appeal a decision of the GI Review Board, please email Initiative Manager Alex Chen (achen@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**

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| Wednesday, August 2, 2023 | RFP is issued |
| Thursday, September 7 | LOI submission deadline |
| Thursday, September 14 | LOI decisions communicated with applicants |
| Thursday, October 5 | Proposal submission deadline |
| (Tentative) December 11 | Results announced |

**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. Specific instructions will be given in the Notice of Award. In addition, grantees are expected to adhere to MIT’s community-wide policies that are available [here](https://policies.mit.edu/policies-procedures/90-relations-and-responsibilities-within-mit-community), as well as policies put in place by the [UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/foreign-commonwealth-development-office).
2. **Peer-review proposals:** Grantees may be requested to peer-review proposals in future GI 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](http://www.socialscienceregistry.org). 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. **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)](https://www.povertyactionlab.org/conducting-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, GI awards include $1,000 to defray expenses associated with collecting cost data. GI 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 in Governance. 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](https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B97AuBEZpZ9zZE5ncHEzTWZnNjg/view). 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](https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataverse/jpal) or another data repository of your choice. (Full studies only)
8. **Participate in GI activities:** Grantees may be requested to participate in one of the GI’s activities at a mutually agreed time and place. Activities may include evidence workshops, matchmaking conference, or presentations to one of the GI’s donors.
9. **Credit GI**: 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 Governance Initiative. The exact wording on crediting GI and donor support will be provided in the terms of your award.

*Travel/Proposal Development & Multidisciplinary Research grants:* If your proposal is selected for funding, the terms of the award will be as follows:

1. **Research Conduct:** Grantees are responsible for following appropriate IRB protocol and providing GI copies of any IRB approvals or exemptions, if any are necessary. In addition, they are expected to adhere to MIT’s community-wide policies that are available [here](https://policies.mit.edu/policies-procedures/90-relations-and-responsibilities-within-mit-community), as well as policies put in place by the [UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/foreign-commonwealth-development-office).
2. **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 GI as part of their final report or upon receipt of additional funding.
3. **Participate in GI activity:** Grantees agree to participate in one GI activity or event. GI will cover associated costs.
4. **Credit GI**: 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 Governance Initiative. The exact wording on crediting GI and donor support will be provided in the terms of your award.

**Administrative Notes**

Full, pilot, and multidisciplinary research grants are provided under an award from MIT to the Institute to Receive Award. Please note that at this time, per MIT's subaward requirements, **the institute to receive the award and the administrative PI at that institute must be listed on the IRB**, or else MIT will not be able to process any subawards granted.

Travel/proposal development grants are paid as travel reimbursements. For more information on budget, requirements, and process, please see instructions in the **online submission portal** and on the sample Full/Pilot Proposal Application Form or the Travel/Proposal Development Grant Application Form available on the [GI webpage.](https://www.povertyactionlab.org/initiative/governance-initiative-request-proposals) **As noted above, please apply through the online portal, NOT through the Word document versions of the Full/Pilot Proposal Application Form or the Travel/Proposal Development Grant Application Form**.

**Only the multidisciplinary research grant proposals must be submitted via email,** as described in the GI Multidisciplinary Research Application document on the [GI webpage.](https://www.povertyactionlab.org/initiative/governance-initiative-request-proposals) Full instructions to apply for full research, pilot, travel/proposal development, or multidisciplinary research grants are also available at <http://www.povertyactionlab.org/GI>.

**Related Initiatives**

**Please do not submit the same proposal to more than one J-PAL or IPA initiative at the same time.** Before applying to GI, consider whether your proposal may be better suited for the J-PAL Crime and Violence Initiative (CVI), J-PAL Digital Identification and Finance Initiative in Africa (DigiFI), J-PAL Social Protection Initiative (SPI), or Innovations for Poverty Action's Peace & Recovery (P&R) program. These initiatives share similar themes and geographic focus and support rigorous research that will lead to policy relevant findings. If you are uncertain about which initiative to apply to, please contact [GI@povertyactionlab.org](file:///C:\Users\afahey\Downloads\GI@povertyactionlab.org).

[J-PAL Crime and Violence Initiative (CVI)](https://www.povertyactionlab.org/cvi): CVI fosters 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 funds evaluations that focus on preventing, mitigating, and responding to the effects of crime and violence.

[J-PAL Digital Identification and Finance Initiative in Africa (DigiFI):](https://www.povertyactionlab.org/africa/digital-identification-finance-initiative) DigiFI Africa aims to grow the evidence base around innovations in identification and payments by supporting governments in Africa in their efforts to monitor and evaluate relevant reforms.

[J-PAL Social Protection Initiative (SPI):](https://www.povertyactionlab.org/initiative/social-protection-initiative-spi) In collaboration with [Evidence for Policy Design (EPoD)](https://epod.cid.harvard.edu/initiative/social-protection-initiative) at the Harvard Kennedy School, SPI funds randomized evaluations of social protection programs in low- and middle-income countries and supports policy engagement to share insights from completed research.

[IPA Peace & Recovery (P&R) program](http://www.poverty-action.org/program-area/peace-and-recovery): The P&R 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 (including conflict and non-conflict humanitarian crises).

1. For proposals related to political participation in elections, please note that U.S. federal tax law prohibits GI from using funds for any political campaign that is not candidate or position neutral. GI will screen all elections-related proposals to ensure that they are in compliance with this regulation. More information on this regulation can be found on the [IRS website](https://www.irs.gov/charities-non-profits/charitable-organizations/the-restriction-of-political-campaign-intervention-by-section-501-c-3-tax-exempt-organizations). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. In rare circumstances, proposals with a compelling reason for requesting more than $400,000 may be considered on a case-by-case basis. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. 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. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. 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 GI invited researcher (following the GI invited researcher nomination and review process), or unless the proposal includes a J-PAL affiliate or GI invited researcher as a co-author. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. With the exception of multidisciplinary research grants, which must be submitted through a separate application, as detailed in the next section. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. 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. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)