

GOVERNANCE INITIATIVE PROPOSAL GUIDELINES: TRAVEL/PROPOSAL DEVELOPMENT GRANTS

Round 25 - Spring 2025 | Request for Proposals (RFP)

This document contains an [Overview](#), [Budget Guidelines](#), an [Application Checklist](#), and an [Application Template](#) for the Governance Initiative's (GI) Travel/Proposal development grants. Please read this document carefully before submitting your proposal.

OVERVIEW

Submission instructions: All applicants must first **submit the [required Letter of Interest](#) on our grant management system (GMS)**. Successful applicants will receive an invitation to proceed with their full proposal materials.

These grants are intended to facilitate very preliminary, exploratory research, and funding typically supports costs related to researcher travel and/or facilitating access to administrative data for designing or conducting a future RCT. Examples of these activities include, but are not limited to, negotiating data use agreements, conducting exploratory data analysis and cleaning, or setting up technical access mechanisms.

Funding per Travel/Proposal development grant award: a maximum of \$10,000. Travel grants are provided as travel reimbursements in accordance with MIT travel policies and should use the specific budget template (see details in the Budget Guidelines section, below). If you cannot bear the costs out of pocket, we recommend that you apply for a pilot grant.

Timeline: Grantees must complete their project development work and submit final reports within six months of receiving the award.

BUDGET GUIDELINES

Funding awarded by GI is conditional on continued support from our own core donors. If GI's scheduled funding is reduced, GI may need to reduce or cancel your award

Survey and other in-country expenses: While designed for travel reimbursements, travel grants can in some cases be used to cover expenses for in-country costs such as hiring enumerators, procuring translation or transcription services, developing instruments, and others. If these expenses are in the budget, J-PAL will provide the forms necessary to document them with your award notice, and you can claim these expenses as a reimbursement once the travel is completed. **J-PAL is not able to directly reimburse survey firms or local organizations for these costs. If you need a fieldwork organization to be reimbursed for such work, we encourage you to reach out to gi@povertyactionlab.org and gi_grant_admin@povertyactionlab.org before finalizing your proposal materials to**

confirm whether we will need you to submit pilot proposal materials instead (to avoid requiring you to rework your proposal materials, thus slowing down award set up).

Please note: If your scope of work requires reimbursing your host organization (e.g. for fieldwork conducted with a partner such as focus groups or limited surveys) it is your responsibility that your budget follows your host institution's policies for costs, and **you must submit a letter from the institution to receive the award that states that they have reviewed your proposal and accept your budget.**¹ MIT now requires that at least one project PI be employed by the organization receiving the subaward and funds.

Guidelines for completing a Travel/Proposal development grant proposal budget:

Be sure to use the Travel/Proposal Development Budget Template on the [GI RFP release page](#), providing detailed notes in the column provided in the template):

1. Travel grants are paid as reimbursements. Travel/Proposal Development grants are for a maximum of \$10,000.
2. International travel: J-PAL will put you in touch with an MIT travel agent who can book international travel and charge J-PAL directly. If you choose to buy your own ticket, we will not be able to reimburse you until your flights have been completed.
3. J-PAL will only reimburse the lowest available economy/cabin/coach flights. Please review [J-PAL's travel reimbursement policies](#) before completing your budget.
4. Grantees must complete their work and submit final reports within six months of receiving the grant award letter. Expenses will be reimbursed upon submission of an expense report. All expenses must be claimed within 30 days of your return. Expenses should be supported by receipts whenever possible, and all expenses over \$50 must be supported by receipts.
5. **If your project includes human subject research:**
 1. **IRB Requirements:** MIT requires that the IRB determination must be held by the institution that enters into the subaward agreement with MIT. 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. Further information about this MIT policy can be found [here](#) and [here](#). Consult with J-PAL regarding including the cost of this commercial entity in the project budget.
 1. J-PAL 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](#).

¹ If the organization allows you to submit your proposal without such a letter (due to time constraints or some other reason), please describe this in the notes section. **Please note** that this applies to all projects, including those going through J-PAL and IPA offices. You should contact them in advance to make sure you are aware of their policies for proposal review and give them enough time to meet the proposal deadline.

2. **Institute to Receive Award (ITRA) Requirements:** If your project requires paying an organization directly, MIT requires that at least one project PI have an official affiliation with the organization receiving the subaward.
6. **In most cases, J-PAL is not able to directly reimburse any individuals or organizations other than the grantees awarded the travel grant.**
1. **Please note that J-PAL Initiatives do not cover PI salaries with the exception of PIs who completed a PhD and are based at an academic institution in a middle- or low- income country.** There are no individual PI limits, but the total budgeted amount for LMIC researcher PI time in aggregate across all co-PIs should not exceed \$3,750 per award.
7. *Allowable Direct and Indirect Costs*
 1. **Purchase of Assets:** Depending on the source of your J-PAL funding and should your proposal be successful, you may be required to remove any assets (i.e., laptops, tablets, etc.) from your budget. Please create your budget with this in mind. Rentals of such items are allowed and the preferred way to address needs for assets like laptops.
 2. **Unallowable costs** include those labeled as “incidental,” “miscellaneous,” or “contingency.” Any costs for rent should be explained in the budget narrative.
 3. *Medical insurance:* All grantees are required to provide proof of emergency medical insurance coverage before travel. As many universities provide this to their students, faculty, and staff at no cost, this is not a reimbursable cost under this award. J-PAL can provide information on affordable coverage if needed.
 4. *Per diem:* A per diem stipend of \$25/day-in-country can be claimed to cover food and miscellaneous expenses.
 5. Universities in high-income countries (according to the World Bank classification) can charge up to 10% in indirect costs, applied to total direct costs.
 6. Non-university non-profits from any location and universities from mid- or low-income countries may charge up to 15% in indirect costs, applied to total direct costs.
 7. We understand that the cap on overhead or indirect costs under this initiative is low and that grantees may have reasonable project support costs included in budgets as direct costs. Such costs should be reasonable and explained in the budget narrative.

APPLICATION CHECKLIST

Please complete all sections in the [GMS](#) by the full proposal deadline. You must upload several documents to complete your full proposal. All templates for these documents are provided at the [RFP release webpage](#) and listed below.

1. **Travel Narrative:** Guidance pertaining to the narrative prompts is included in the [Narrative Template](#) below.
2. **Proposal Budget:** Carefully review the Budget Guidelines in this document, and then use the matching excel template, Travel/Proposal Development Budget Template on the [RFP website](#), which must be completed in its entirety and saved as a single Excel file with the

title: [PI Last Name, First Name][Budget].xls(x).

3. **Budget Narrative:** Detail the costs within the budget, referring to the Budget Guidelines above, in a Word document with the title [PI Last Name, First Name][Budget Narrative].doc(x). This document is required in addition to the Proposal Budget -- i.e. notes included in the Excel sheet do not suffice.
4. **Letter(s) of Support:** Please obtain a letter of support from the following, each saved as a single PDF file with the title [PI Last Name, First Name] [Name of Organization Letter of Support].pdf:
 - a. (*optional*) a letter from any implementing partner(s) indicating the details of their commitment or willingness to engage in discussions to partner on the research
 - b. (*required*) a letter/document stating the proposed grant host institution's approval of the proposal materials (if anything beyond PI travel is included in the scope of work).
 - c. **Graduate students applying as the primary PI are required to include a letter of support from a researcher adviser eligible for this call.** The letter should indicate the adviser's willingness to remain involved in a supervisory role throughout the lifetime of the project

APPLICATION TEMPLATE

The text provided below each bolded subsection helps provide guidance on what the GI Board is looking for to effectively evaluate your proposal.

LETTER OF INTEREST QUESTIONS

Important Information

1. **Primary Eligible Researcher*** - Please identify one researcher who is eligible for J-PAL Initiative funding. This may be the principal PI or any eligible co-PI. Details for only one primary eligible researcher are required in cases where there's more than one eligible researcher. Other PIs who are eligible can be added as co-PIs.
2. **Select PI Eligibility Category*** - Indicate how the researcher is eligible for J-PAL Initiative funding. If applying through the Regional Scholars program, please select "Regional Scholars." [J-PAL Affiliate; Invited Researcher; PhD Student; J-PAL Postdoc]
3. **PhD Student Applicants*** - If you are a PhD student, please indicate the J-PAL-affiliated researcher who serves or will serve as an advisor on your dissertation committee.
4. **Organization Name of Eligible Researcher*** - Please tell us the name of the organization the eligible researcher (i.e., the professor or PhD student) is affiliated with
5. Below, if you choose "Other" instead of "University," please contact the initiative team to provide more details. The organization mentioned below is the eligible researcher's organization type. **Organization Type of Eligible Researcher*** [University; Other]
6. **Organization Website of Eligible Researcher***
7. **Country Where Organization is Based or Headquartered***

8. Please add all your project team members and indicate their role(s) on the project/application below. Please copy and paste the role exactly as it is written below so that it matches our internal database. Role options are:

- Applicant
- Primary PI
- Co-PI
- PI at Institute to Receive Award
- Reporting Contact
- Secondary Reporting Contact
- IRB Contact
- Finance Contact
- Collaborator
- Contact for Contracting (e.g., grant manager or research administrator)

If the person who is the applicant has another function related to the proposal, such as PI, indicate their additional role as well.

Team Members & Roles* Please choose roles from the options listed above.

9. PI Certification

- I certify that any listed eligible researchers have agreed to be active, engaged, and responsive PIs or advisors on this project. Eligible researchers who are involved have confirmed they will be dedicated to guaranteeing quality control on all aspects of this research and that their participation is not merely to provide access to resources and funding to other project team members who would otherwise be ineligible.

- I certify that all eligible researchers are up to date on reporting for all existing grants, across all J-PAL initiatives."

PI Certification* - Do you certify the above statements? [Yes; No]

10. Demographic Information - J-PAL is collecting information about all project teams, including demographic information, to better understand and support our research network. As the applicant, please send the language and [link](#) included below to all PIs/co-PIs on your proposal research team. Provide your proposal name and each member's role (as you listed them on the application) when you send out the blurb. Completion of this step is required for all primary investigators on your research team. If you have any technical problems with completing this step please email help@povertyactionlab.org and the initiative team directly.

Feel free to cut and paste this suggested language in an email to send to the PIs and co-PIs on your team:



J-PAL is collecting information about all project teams, including demographic information, to better understand and support our research network. J-PAL is requiring all PIs and co-PIs on our research team to complete this [short form](#). This data will only be accessible in disaggregated, identifiable form to select J-PAL staff. Aggregate, anonymized data will be used to report to key partners such as donors and may be included on our website.

Demographic Information Confirmation* - Please confirm that every PI/co-PI has completed the questions in the above-linked survey. You may select "Not Yet" so as to finish other questions. However, if you submit the application without "Yes" selected, your application will not be considered (until the surveys are complete). If you select "Yes" and PIs or co-PIs have not completed their surveys, their applications will not be considered until the surveys are complete. [Yes; Not Yet]

Project Details

11. Full Title of Proposal* [30 words max]
12. Past and Future Submissions to J-PAL* - Have you submitted or do you plan to submit this LOI and proposal to any other J-PAL Initiative RFP, including in any previous [initiative] round of funding?

If you answered yes above, please state which initiative(s), year/season of RFP, and the name of the LOI/proposal you submitted or plan to submit. Example: GI Spring 2019 Using Mobile Phones to Improve Service Delivery. Are the PI team, context, and research question the same as in the previously submitted proposal? Did you receive funding? [350 words max]

13. Funding Amount* - Amount of requested funding in USD.
14. Abstract* - Write a study abstract, including the project description, research question, and intervention or treatment to be evaluated. Discuss the project's technical design, what is going to happen during the project, the practical value of your project, the conceptual value of your research, and the distributional implications of your work. Provide context about proposed partners. Please note that this abstract will be added to the Initiative's webpage if the project receives funding. [250 words max]
15. Research Focus Areas and/or Cross-Cutting Themes* - Please indicate which Initiative focus areas or themes your proposal relates to; these are described in detail in the RFP materials.[political participation, corruption and leakages, and state capacity]
16. Initiative Alignment* - Please briefly describe how the project aligns with the initiative's research focus areas and/or cross-cutting themes, as described in the RFP materials, initiative research agenda, or initiative review paper. [250 words max]
17. National Location* - In which country or countries will your research project or travel take place?

TRAVEL/PROPOSAL DEVELOPMENT APPLICATION QUESTIONS

Important Information

Applicants are encouraged to take advantage of the full space provided for questions pertaining to elements of the study that are particularly unique or complex. But for aspects of the study that are more conventional and straightforward, concise answers (which may be well below the word limit) are appreciated. If a question asks for information you have already provided elsewhere in this form, simply indicate this and reference the title of the question where your answer can be found.

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.

1. Proposed Period of Performance Project Start Date* - What is the proposed start date for this J-PAL grant's subaward activities?
2. Proposed Period of Performance Project End Date* - What is the proposed end date for this J-PAL grant's subaward activities?
3. Timeline* - Please write out a timeline with key project activities. [250 words max]
4. Name & Role of Partner Organization - Indicate the name and role of the partner organization on this project, if known at this time [100 words max]
5. Existing Research Project Funded by J-PAL* - Are you applying to fund additional research as part of an existing research project previously funded by J-PAL (e.g., a second proposal development grant continuing from a prior proposal development grant, a pilot grant building on a travel/proposal development, a full RCT building on a pilot, etc.)? [Yes;No]

Existing Research Project Details* - Please provide the title and/or J-PAL grant number of your previously funded project. Please explain how the project has progressed since it was last submitted to the initiative. [250 words max]

Narrative

6. Change of Research Focus Areas and/or Cross-Cutting Themes* - Please tell us if your focus areas or themes have changed since submitting your Expression of Interest by adding this information here. GI research focus areas and/or cross-cutting themes are political participation, corruption and leakages, state capacity, and multidisciplinary research. [250 words max]
7. [Long Answer] Changes to Abstract* - If your project's abstract has changed since submitting the LOI, please provide an updated abstract. If there are no changes, please copy and paste the abstract from your LOI below. [250 words max]
8. If this project takes place in a country that has a J-PAL office but it is not the host institution, please detail the reasoning. Your answer will help us understand how J-PAL offices can be more competitive and better respond to the needs of PIs.

9. **Topic Statement*** - Travel/proposal development grants are intended to facilitate very preliminary, exploratory research, so proposals need only address the general topic of interest and current ideas on how the question might be explored through a pilot and a randomized evaluation in the future. They do not need to include a detailed program or evaluation design, but should clearly indicate how this grant will help the research team develop a strong proposal in a future RCT. If there is any survey component, please explicitly include the number of individuals surveyed. Please list activities, which could include preliminary data collection such as focus groups or small sample surveys to understand the barriers that program participants may face, working to set up data sharing agreements and/or MOUs. [500 words max]
10. **Policy Motivation*** - Provide a summary of the policy problem that motivates this preliminary research and how it fits with the topics outlined in the RFP materials. [250 words max]
11. **Potential Policy Impact** - Please briefly describe the potential policy impacts of this potential intervention (policies, programs, processes, or delivery mechanisms), including whether and how the project could inform policy or program design in this context or more broadly. [250 words max]
12. **Anticipated Target Population and Context*** - What population(s), if known at this time, will the intervention attempt to impact? What characteristics do they have? If applicable, do you have any comments on the target population and context's alignment with the initiative's priorities? [350 words max]
13. **Unique Contribution to the Field*** - What knowledge gap are you addressing, and how will it advance the field? Explain the project's potential to provide a unique scientific contribution. Provide a brief literature review to demonstrate the uniqueness of your project. Note that a full reference list can be attached in the "Additional attachments" section. [500 words max]
14. **Pathway to an RCT*** - Describe how results from this grant would inform a future RCT. Will it provide qualitative data to inform intervention design? How could the findings meet the needs of policymakers or development practitioners? In what specific ways will the travel/proposal development grant prepare researchers for a full RCT project? [300 words]
15. **Implications on Equity and Social Inclusion** - Please provide a comment on whether the research proposal addresses equity or social inclusion, in any way. Topics of social inclusion include, but are not limited to, gender, income level, location, ethnicity, race, language, citizenship status, disability, and at the intersection of those factors. Explain whether and how the project design allows us to learn about baseline differences between and differential impacts on groups mentioned above. Explain what reasons (if any) there are to expect that the potential intervention(s) studied may have disproportionate benefits for disadvantaged groups. [500 words max]
16. **Local Researcher Involvement** - Please describe whether/how the project involves researchers local to the project context. [500 words max]
17. **AI Validation and Test Accuracy Data*** Proposals that include Artificial Intelligence (AI) or any new specialized technology should include validation and test accuracy data in the proposal, showing that the technology successfully does what it intends. If applicable, please provide that validation and test accuracy data here, or attach it in the "additional attachments" section. If not applicable, please write "N/A." [300 words max]

Potential Risks

To protect children, research participants, staff, and community members to comply with donor requirements, and to maintain a strong reputation for ethical research, J-PAL wants researchers to think carefully about the risks their research projects could face and how they will address such risks. The below questions provide an opportunity for researchers to do that. Successful applicants must provide updated answers in annual narrative reports only if there have been substantial changes since their proposal or last annual narrative report. Please answer the applicable, please provide that validation and test accuracy data here, or attach it in the

following questions in detail. If none of these issues are applicable (e.g., this is purely a travel grant), please feel free to note that.

17. Completion - Are there any technical, logistical, ethical, or political obstacles and risks that might threaten the completion of the project (e.g., implementation capacity, government authorization, or other funding)? How do you plan to monitor and prevent/address these types of risks throughout the project? [200 words max]
18. Implementing Partners - Please discuss any information about the implementing partner(s) that could pose ethical, reputational, or legal risks (e.g., child safeguarding, corruption or misuse of funds, etc). If applicable, what proactive measures have you taken or will you take to assess, monitor, and mitigate/prevent any such potential risks? [150 words max]
19. Child Safeguarding - Particularly for projects working with children, what child safeguarding risks exist? [200 words max]
20. Participants, Staff, Community Members - For each of the groups below, please describe any potential unintended consequences or risks of this project to them. What proactive measures have you taken or will you take to assess, monitor, and mitigate/prevent any such potential risks? i. Program and research participants ii. Staff (e.g., implementing partners, research assistants, enumerators) iii. Community members (e.g., untreated members of a household, untreated neighbors, or broader communities if the treatment might have spillover or downstream effects beyond the study sample) [300 words max]
21. Contractual Limitations - Are there any contractual limitations on the ability of the researchers to report the results of the study? If so, what are those restrictions, and who are they from? [150 words max]

Institutional Review Board and Institute to Receive Award

According to US federal regulations, a human subject is a living individual about whom an investigator conducting research obtains 1) data through intervention or interaction with the individual (e.g., through an interview, focus group, or survey), or 2) identifiable private information (e.g., individual-level health or education data).

22. Human Subject Research* - Do you plan to conduct human subjects research during your travel/proposal development? If your project scope of work includes collecting the types of data above, please select Yes. [Yes;No]

[Logic Based - if answer to Human Subject Research is Yes] Please be mindful that MIT requires that the IRB determination must be held by the institution that enters into the subaward agreement with MIT. 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. Information about this MIT policy can be found [here](#) and [here](#). 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.](#)

[Logic Based - if answer to Human Subject Research is Yes] Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Record - If the project has not received an IRB exemption and IRB review is required (i.e., you plan to conduct human subject research), please enter the IRB of record. IRB Requirements - If this proposal receives initiative funding, we will ask that you submit:

All IRB approval(s) or exemption(s)

All IRB-approved protocols

Any IRB-approved consent forms

23. [Logic Based - if answer to Human Subject Research is Yes] IRB of Record - Provide the name of the IRB of Record below.
24. [Logic Based - if answer to Human Subject Research is Yes] Is this IRB of Record IORG certified? [Yes;No]

Institute to Receive Award (ITRA) Information

PLEASE NOTE: MIT now requires that at least one project PI be employed by the organization receiving the subaward and funds. Please see this [memo](#) and [FAQs](#) document for more information.

25. Institute to Receive Award (ITRA) - If you are using an implementing organization as part of your travel/proposal development project, please indicate the institution that will receive the grant funds.
26. Contact at Institute to Receive Award (ITRA) - If you are using an implementing organization as part of your travel/proposal development project, please provide contact information for the person who will be in charge of the contract at the ITRA.
27. Local Legal Requirements Certification* - All PIs and co-PIs certify that they understand they must adhere to all local legal requirements, including obtaining local IRB approval and government research permits, where applicable. Do you agree? [Yes;No]

Budget

Depending on the source of your J-PAL funding and should your proposal be successful, you may be required to remove any assets (i.e., laptops, tablets, etc.) from your budget. Please create your budget with this in mind. Rentals of such items are allowed and the preferred way to address needs for assets like laptops.

From the [RFP website](#), download and complete the Travel/Proposal Development Budget Template. There are two tabs: one for the initiative-specific budget and one for the project budget (i.e., the initiative-specific budget plus any other sources of funding you may have). When done, please upload your completed budget in the field below. Please note that the budget template is formatted specifically for this application. Do not remove the formatting, change any of the formatting, or create new columns.

28. Budget Upload*
29. Budget Narrative Upload* - Please justify the expenses outlined in your budget in a Word document with the title [PI Last Name, First Name][Budget Narrative].doc(x), and

upload it here. This document is required in addition to the Proposal Budget. Notes included in the Excel sheet do not suffice.

Letters of Support & Additional Attachments

30. Are you applying as a PhD Student?* [Yes;No]

[Logic based if answer above is Yes] [File] J-PAL Affiliate or Invited Researcher Letter of Support* - PhD student applicants are required to submit a letter of support from a J-PAL affiliate or invited researcher who serves as an adviser on the applicant's dissertation committee. This letter should indicate the adviser's willingness to advise the student throughout the project's lifetime. Please note that in some cases, the adviser may be asked to add their name to the financial award and IRB documents. Please upload the letter here.

31. [File] Letter of Transmission - For travel/proposal development projects that will be setup as subawards, a letter or document stating approval of the proposal materials and budget from each proposed institute to receive award (ITRA) is required. Please note that MIT policy states that the project PI needs to be employed at the ITRA and that the ITRA should provide the IRB (either using the Institute's IRB or a third party IRB). The Project PI must be the PI on the IRB.

32. [File] Additional attachments - Please attach any relevant materials discussed in your answers to the previous questions, as well as letters of support from partners.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Please review GI's RFP Overview (provided at the [RFP release page](#)) for the evaluation criteria. Please ensure that your answers address the evaluation criteria.