Global Innovation Fund J-PAL SA Indian Scholars Program

Health and Climate Change

Proposal Guidelines

August 2023

Funded by the Global Innovation Fund (GIF), J-PAL South Asia has launched a new RFP for India-based researchers who are interested in leveraging government administrative data to develop randomized evaluations in collaboration with the state or the central governments, to address health or climate challenges.

The objective of this funding is to support India-based researchers with domain expertise to address critical policy challenges in the health or climate change space through:

- Collaborations with government leadership to identify program inefficiencies, 'use-case' questions, data readiness and create a scope of work for the use-case based on state needs, capacity and culture.
- unlocking administrative data combined with relevant primary data for randomized evaluations
- supporting government partners to make data usable and generate relevant and actionable information insights
- building state capacity to institutionalize effective data use for problem identification, solutioning and decision making.
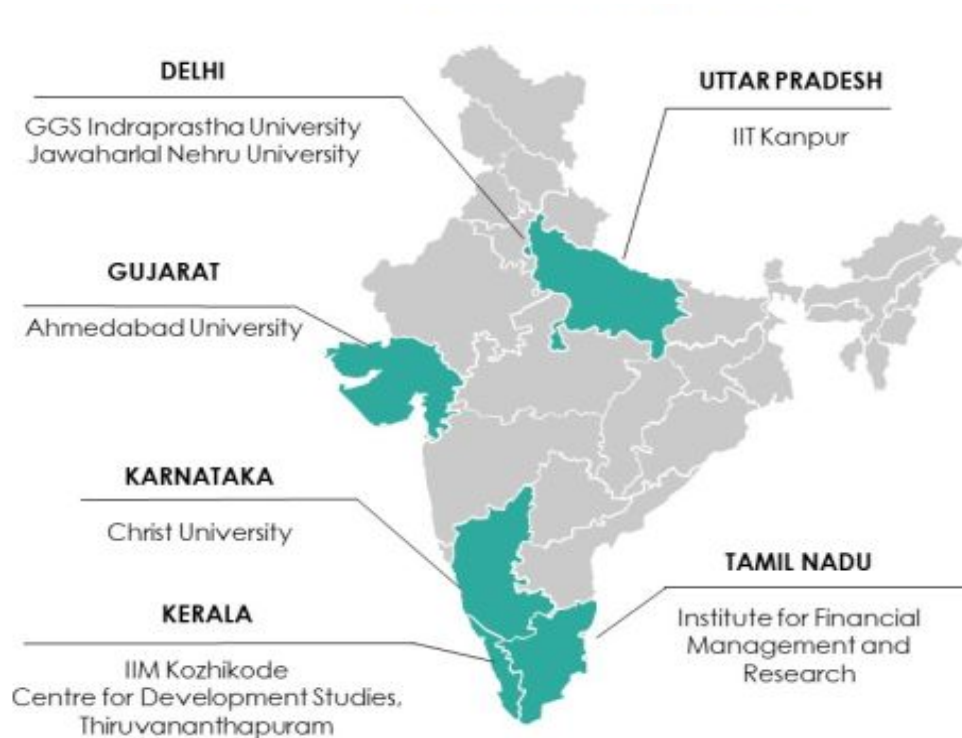
Registration and Submissions

- Register your interest for proposal development support for the applications, **as early as possible** by emailing us with a brief description (100 words) of your research idea.
- Applications for this round of funding are due by 15 September 2023.
- Please submit your support requests and applications over email following instructions available in the proposal guidelines here, to isp@povertyactionlab.org.

I. Background

J-PAL South Asia is committed to diversifying the development research agenda of the country, by identifying and supporting Indian researchers with the requisite domain expertise and research interests in health, climate change or its intersection. We are launching a request for proposal, for Indian researchers based in Indian Universities who are or may be interested in working with government administrative data in some capacity to develop randomized evaluations with the state or the central government, within the health or the climate change sector.

The first round of ISP extended support to 14 promising India-based researchers in 2021 across 8 universities for formative studies and randomised evaluations on maternal and child health, and women's economic empowerment. We were able to unlock USD 240,000 towards research funding, capacity building opportunities, project implementation experience, and mentorship to India-based researchers.

The current round of applications is funded by the Global Innovation Fund (GIF). The objective of this funding is to identify opportunities and/or gaps in program delivery across key Health/Climate interventions (for e.g. health insurance or climate adaptation measures), and demonstrate value proposition for data use of administrative and survey data, and build state capacity to institutionalize effective data use for problem identification, solutioning and decision making.

All funded projects need to complete activities that are covered by this grant by 31 March 2024

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

II.   Proposal Types

Under this funding window we will fund studies that leverage government administrative data (combined with survey data as needed) to explore, diagnose, design and test scalable, cost-effective

interventions addressing health and climate themes described in the previous sections. Three types of proposals will be considered:

1. *Data Exploration Grants* Up to $25,000
   These funds are designed to support interested researchers conduct the following activities:
   - visit government partners in order to secure support for potential projects
   - build and strengthen government relationships
   - get access to administrative data
   - run usability tests for research purposes, scope research questions
   - conducting diagnostic analysis for the usability of the data for research and decision making

   Data exploration grants should ideally aim towards supporting a future pilot study proposal or a full research project proposal.

2. *Pilot and scoping studies*: Up to $40,000
   These grants will support exploratory, pre-RCT scoping and pilot studies. These studies will have clear research questions for which the researcher intends to utilize government administrative data and primary survey data (where relevant) to pilot one or more of the following. These questions may be jointly identified with a government partner based on request from them, or have been discussed by researchers with government partners:
   a. Exploratory analysis of existing data, including field-based data validation exercises, data linking across admin datasets or with survey datasets, field visits and qualitative methods to identify, diagnose and develop a problem statement for further study
   b. The design and implementation of an evaluation requires further testing of the proposed intervention, pilot data, and/or partnership development, before an RCT can be executed;
   c. The feasibility of some aspects of intervention design has not yet been demonstrated under "real world" conditions.
   Other requirements:
   - The researcher team should have a pre-existing government partnership and clearly defined scope of work with the government partner.
   - The proposal should also include a description of how the research may be used to inform data systems, and/or institutionalize data use in the field of health and climate change.

3. *Full Randomised Evaluations: Up to $75000*
   These grants are for rapid full evaluations that utilize government administrative data in the health and climate change space. The grant can be used for
   a. Implementing full evaluations
   b. Funding part of an ongoing randomized evaluation

c. Measure additional outcomes post a randomized evaluation of the nature mentioned above

Other Requirements:

- The researcher team should have a pre-existing government partnership and clearly defined scope of work with the government partner.
- The proposal should include a clear research question, a robust randomization design and description of the treatment, a theory of change, well-defined research instruments, and sample size estimates.
- The proposal should also include a description of how the research may be used to inform data systems, and institutionalize data use in the field of health and climate change.

III. Researcher Eligibility

The funding opportunity is available for Indian researchers and academics currently based out of an Indian university, who have completed their PhD (in Economics, Public Policy, Public Health or related empirical discipline).

IV. Government Engagement Commitment

Data Exploration Grant	Pilot Grants	Full Evaluation Grants
None, grant to be leveraged to facilitate the partnership	Proposals with a letter of support or commitment documentation of the government partner will be viewed favorably, however *is not mandatory at this stage.* If you do have a document along these lines available, please do submit it along with your proposal materials as well as a government communication and engagement plan outlining how you plan to inform government processes or decisions through the course of the study and on its completion.	Any of the following to display government partner commitment - ● Letter of support from the government partner ● Any existing signed valid document, such as - MoU, NDA, Signed project approval etc. A government communication and engagement plan outlining how you plan to inform government processes or decisions through the course of the study and on its completion.

All types of proposals leveraging existing administrative data must submit a data use protocol outlining measures for secure access and protection of personal and sensitive data if any, through the course of the project.

V.   Proposal Evaluation Criteria

Referees will score each pilot and full evaluation proposal on the five criteria listed in the table below and will provide a 1-2 sentence justification for each score. Submissions for data exploration grants will be evaluated based on their relevance to the theme, alignment with grant objectives and prior publication record of the researcher:

Relevance to Program Theme	Does the study address questions crucial to understanding which programs and policies may be effective in the health or climate change space and how it plans to leverage existing and/or new data? Does the proposal mention how their study will be useful to strengthen existing data systems or practices? Is any signed documentation of government partnership submitted along with the proposal?
Academic Contribution	Does the study make potentially significant contributions toward advancing knowledge in the field? Does it answer new questions, or introduce novel methods, measures, or interventions? How does the study compare with the existing body of research? Does the research strategy provide a bridge between a practical experiment and underlying economic theories?
Technical Design and Data Management	Does the research design appropriately answer the policy questions outlined in the proposal? Is the data collection/use plan appropriate? Are there sufficient protocols for secure access, handling, use and publishing of data in line with standard ethics review requirements? Are there threats that could compromise the validity of results? If so, does the proposal sufficiently address those threats?
Government Commitment and Partnership (For Pilots and RCT grants)	Do the researchers have pre-existing government commitments or partnerships for the proposed study? Do they have prior experience in engaging with similar government partners in the health or climate space?
Institutionalizing data use	Does the intervention/study have broader implications for institutionalizing administrative data generation/ quality or use for the government partnering or other governments? Does the intervention inform administrative data quality, usage or gaps?

VI.   Proposal Application Guidelines

Please use the templates provided on the ISP website to submit your proposal documents. Your proposal narrative (not to exceed six pages in length for data exploration grants and pilot proposals) should include the following

- A summary of the policy problem that motivates this research and how it fits the themes covered by the program
- Mention the government department that will be approached and the kind of administrative data that will be accessed
- Describe the motivation behind accessing the respective administrative dataset and what are the program inefficiencies and gaps that you anticipate
- Data access, use/collection plan
    - For administrative dataset, how you plan to seek access to the same and how this dataset will be managed and used in the context of the intervention or evaluation or diagnostic analysis or outcome measurement as per the design of the study.
    - For primary data collection, the purpose, scope and plan-timelines for the same have to be clearly defined. A clear description of the target population, and implementing partners should also be mentioned.
- Describe if you have any plans to build government capacity to institutionalize effective data use practices
- The project's potential contribution to academic literature;
- Description of the potentially proposed treatment;
- A description of research goals;
- A description of the target population;
- A description of implementing partner in India, if applicable;
- If the project has other funders, the proposal should clearly explain the marginal contribution of these requested funds.
- A letter of support from the implementing partner, indicating their commitment for the project, if applicable (for pilots only)
- **Potential ethical risks**: Please discuss, if applicable, any ethical considerations that you feel warrant discussion but are not covered by your existing or planned IRB review. It is fine to leave this section partly or entirely blank; please detail only issues that are not or will not be covered by your IRB that you feel are
potentially important enough for the review committee to be aware. For more details, see here.

The narrative should also address each of the topics in the Proposal Evaluation Criteria listed above. Proposal narratives should also include a 100-150 word abstract of the study, which will be

uploaded to our web page if the project receives funding. Further, the proposal should also mention the expertise of the researcher in the respective subject

Additional guidance on proposal narrative:

1. **Data Exploration**

   The funds can be used towards within-country travel in India. In order to apply, interested researchers should complete the proposal cover sheet and budget template (available on the website), along with the proposal narrative template.

2. **Pilots**

   Pilot studies can be qualitative or quantitative in nature, and can serve as a diagnostic for data systems in the the health and climate change sector. Pilots may entail exploratory, diagnostic, pre-RCT scoping using administrative and primary data, where the research question has been clearly defined but there is a need to test the feasibility of some aspects of program design that has not yet been demonstrated under "real world" conditions. Proposals can also be designed to test the efficacy of an intervention or an evaluation design, to acquire pilot data, and/or to pilot a project in the same form in which it would be scaled-up if successful. The research question as well as the utilization of government administrative data should be very clear. Pilot proposals are not expected to fully elaborate on their project design but should explain how they are a necessary step in the development of a full evaluation. In particular, they should explain the conceptual and methodological distinction between the pilot study and any future follow-on studies as well as what exactly the pilot will enable researchers to learn. These funds may be used towards the partial costs of pilot implementation as well as any scoping, evaluation, or data collection. Please use the proposal narrative, cover, and budget templates, available on the website, for your submission.

3. **Full evaluations**

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

   - A clear explanation of the evaluation design and program intervention;
   - A theory of change demonstrating impact on outcomes related to climate and health;
   - Power calculations

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

VII. Proposal Evaluation Process

Grant making will follow a two-stage process -
- Grants will be evaluated on the basis of the parameters mentioned in the previous sections. Depending on the kind of application, it will be reviewed by the members of a review committee set up for the purpose of this grant.
- Once proposals are selected to be funded by the committee, the same will be shared with the donor for approval

Each application will be reviewed and scored by three referees consisting of academics and/or policy experts. Proposals will be scored using the evaluation criteria described earlier in this document at this stage.

All proposals will be categorized as either: (1) unconditionally approved; (2) conditionally approved with minor revisions or clarifications required; (3) request for revise and resubmit; (4) reject and resubmit; or (5) not approved.

If you would like to appeal a decision of the Review Board, you may contact isp@povertyactionlab.org within one week of the results' announcement with a document detailing the reasons for appeal (maximum two pages in length), which will then be communicated to the Review Board[1].

VIII. Timelines

RFP Guidelines issued	16 August 2023
Proposal Development Support	17 August - 31 August 2023
Proposal Submission	15 September 2023
Decision Letters Sent to Applicants	13 October 2023

IX. Grant Conditions

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

- **Project Execution:** Due to requirements of the Global Innovation Fund, our donor, all research projects will need to be executed by J-PAL South Asia. This means that we will not be able to sub-grant to the researcher's host institution or any other third-party.
- **Start-up report**: Grantees must submit a brief start-up report before 31 December 2023. This will allow J-PAL to monitor the initial stage(s) of the funded projects and whether there

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[1] The members of the Review Board are

are any delays in the implementation of the project activities. The reporting should include progress made on milestones and KPIs as required by GIF

- **Trial Registration**: For full evaluations, grantees must register their trial with the AEA RCT Registry (http://www.socialscienceregistry.org) before starting field work. Registration includes 18 required fields (such as your name and a small subset of your IRB requirements) and the entire process should take less than 20 minutes. There is also the opportunity to include more information, including power calculations and an optional pre-analysis plan. J-PAL will reach out to grantees during the process of establishing the award and ask for confirmation of registration. Further information about the trial registration process is available on our website here.
- **Progress Reporting**: Grantees should provide detailed progress narrative and financial reports using templates provided to them by J-PAL. This is required to be submitted by **31 March 2024**. The progress report must adhere to the prescribed template
- **Data publishing and availability**: All grantees have to comply with [J-PAL](J-PAL) and [GIF](GIF)'s data publication and access guidelines. In case of difference in timelines, GIF's timelines take precedence.
- **Gender-disaggregated results**: All grantees will be required to develop program efficiency metrics for their respective engagements with the government partner. Where possible, such efficiency metrics or data analyses frames should also report gender-disaggregated findings, in addition to the larger objective of the study
- **Data Methodology and Instruments**: Share data collection instruments and methodologies with other grantees, as needed.
- **Credit to GIF**: Any presentations and publications that emerge from this research project should credit the J-PAL SA and the Global Innovation Fund (GIF) with the following text: "Funding provided at the discretion of IFMR through J-PAL South Asia at IFMR on advice of the Indian Scholar Program Review Committee and approval from the donor – Global Innovation Fund (GIF)." Please also include acknowledgements to partnering government departments/ministries as appropriate.
- **Health and Climate Change Activities**: Participate in at least one of Health or Climate Change related organizational activities on a mutually agreed date and place. This activity could be an evidence workshop, a matchmaking conference, or a presentation to the donors, or at a conference that is attended by sector experts and/or practitioners.

X.   Leveraging the J-PAL Ecosystem

Scholars shortlisted under this grant will be able to leverage J-PAL's ecosystem to design and implement rigorous randomised evaluations (and pilot and scoping studies) that inform key policy areas in the health and climate space. The organisation offers the following support for developing and implementing research projects

- **Proposal Development Support**: All researchers who seek to submit proposals will be provided proposal development support for the final application submission. This includes preparatory meetings with applicants to provide feedback on the feasibility of research

ideas from an implementation perspective, general guidance on proposal development for J-PAL SA at IFMR, and discuss practical tips to consider while planning a randomized evaluation or pilot study. Proposal development is followed by budget development through the Finance Team at J-PAL South Asia

- **Research Implementation Support**: Applicants who are awarded a grant will need to run all research activities for their project through J-PAL South Asia. J-PAL South Asia's in-house research team provides a suite of services to eligible researchers who want to run travel/proposal development projects, pilot projects or full evaluations, which includes:
  - Trial registration
  - Customized guidance on evaluation design, management and administration
  - Recruitment and training of research staff
  - Local IRB support
  - Access to internal catalogue of administrative datasets, templates and protocols for secure access to and handling of administrative data
  - End to end management of data collection, including hiring and training of field teams
  - Ensuring compliance around research and ethical integrity and data quality and security
  - Financial and grant management
- **Training, Mentorship and networking opportunities:** Through trainings and interaction with respective mentors, the selected scholars will get networking opportunities with seasoned researchers in their respective fields
  - **Research Resources and training:** Researchers will be required to go through offline and online training related to implementation and design of evaluations and government engagements.
  - **Research Mentorship**: Every proposal will be tagged to a "mentor" who will be able to give project specific technical and academic rigorous guidance on how to proceed with the overall design of the project. Mentors are chosen on the basis of their expertise in implementing randomized evaluations on ground and experience with handling complex government stakeholders.

XI.   Budget Details

All applicants are required to work with J-PAL South Asia's Admin and Finance team to develop budgets based on their proposed activities, as research activities will need to be executed through J-PAL South Asia. Please reach out to isp@povertyactionlab.org at least 2 weeks in advance of the proposal submission deadline to allow for enough time to iterate on the budget. It is the applicant's responsibility to submit a complete, accurate budget. Due to limitations arising from host country regulations, J-PAL South Asia cannot award the entire grant to a host institution outside of or within India. Additionally, this limitation means that Salaries for Principal Investigators outside of or within India cannot be a part of the budget. Researchers may budget travel and accommodation as necessary in order for them to visit the project.

XII.   Award Requirements and Process

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

XIII.   Application Instructions

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

- **Cover Sheet**: This document must be completed in its entirety;
- **Proposal Narrative**: This document must not exceed six pages in length and an additional one page technical appendix for full evaluations and must address all of the items discussed in the relevant Proposal Application Guidelines table above. Please save the cover letter and proposal narrative as a single Word file with the title: [PI Last Name, First Name] [Topic Name].doc(x).
- **Proposal Budget**: This Excel spreadsheet must be completed in its entirety using the enclosed table and saved as a single file with the title: [PI Last Name, First Name][Budget].xls(x);
- **Letter(s) of Support (if available)**: In case you are submitting any letters of support from your implementing partner, save each as a single PDF file with the title [PI Last Name, First Name] [Name of Organization Letter of Support].pdf. Letters of support from the implementing partner may include the following:

    a.   The implementing partner's support for the activities proposed

    b.   How the results of the research or other activities may strengthen its policymaking

    c.   How it sees a partnership with J-PAL South Asia to be valuable

    d.   What costs will be shared by the implementing partner and an initial total budget amount (if exact costs are not available, then a broad commitment to pay for implementation or other costs is sufficient)

    e.   Willingness to share program implementation cost data with project for the purpose of conducting program cost analysis

Note: We understand that in some cases it may not be feasible or appropriate to have the partner include all of the items above in their letter. In such cases, you can submit a more general letter of support and address the remaining points in your proposal narrative. If you are unable to submit any of the required documents before the RFP deadline, please write to the initiative manager at isp@povertyactionlab.org to request an extension.

- **Submit an email** with all of the above attachments to isp@povertyactionlab.org.   In the subject line, please write: Indian Scholars Program 2023 Proposal: [PI Last Name, First Name]

Please ensure that all materials are shared before the proposal deadline as mentioned in the Timeline section