

Humanitarian Protection Initiative

RFP I: Pilot Study Application Instructions

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Overview

The first Request for Proposals (RFP) of [Humanitarian Protection Initiative](#) (HPI), managed by J-PAL in collaboration with Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA) and supported by the United Kingdom (UK) international development funding from the UK Government, is now open. Letters of Interest (LOI) are due by Friday April 5, 2024, and full proposals are due by Friday, May 17, 2024.

Those interested in applying are asked to first read the initiative's [RFP document](#) and consult the information available on the [RFP webpage](#). Applicants must carefully consider whether their team composition and project comply with the following requirements outlined in the aforementioned document:

- HPI scope (see RFP section II. *Scope*)
- Research team eligibility (see RFP section V. *Eligibility*)
- Choice of grant type (see RFP section III. *Grant Types and Purpose*)
- HPI funding criteria (see RFP section IV. *Funding Criteria*)

Please reach out to hpi@povertyactionlab.org with any questions

I. Letter of Interest (LOI) Instructions

All applicants must first access J-PAL's [application portal](#) by following the [instructions on the RFP webpage](#) and submit the required LOI by **Friday April 5, 2024** through the application portal.

The information provided as part of the LOI will help determine research team eligibility, whether the proposed project fits HPI's scope and addresses its research priorities, and whether it fits the selected grant type. Successful applicants will receive an invitation to proceed with their full proposal materials within three weeks.

II. Full Proposal Instructions for Pilot Study Grants

After submitting the LOI and receiving an invitation to submit the full proposal for a Pilot Study grant, complete the online application and submit the materials found in the Pilot Study Application checklist below by **Friday, May 17, 2024** through J-PAL's application portal.

See information below to prepare for a Pilot Study submission: Pilot Study Overview, Application Checklist, Narrative Proposal Guidelines, Pilot Study Budget Guidelines for randomized evaluations or randomized controlled trials (RCTs).

III. Pilot Study Overview

These grants are for studies with a clear research question, but which require substantial upfront investments in design, measurement, and/or implementation before a full impact evaluation proposal can be submitted. Activities could include A/B testing, developing new measurement strategies or instruments, analysis of existing data, piloting survey questions, or new data development or collection.

Strong applicants will demonstrate:

- A. The research should account for ethical research preparation, design and measurement considerations as outlined under "[Designing Responsible Research Projects](#)" in the RFP section IV. *Funding Criteria*.
- B. A feasible implementation plan which ensures the safety and security of research participants and the research team in line with the requirements outlined under "[Designing Responsible Research Projects](#)" in the RFP section IV. *Funding Criteria*. To substantiate that adequate risk assessment and management systems are in place, applicants are required to:
 - a. Complete a risk management matrix by using the template available on the RFP webpage.
 - b. Attach your project's safety and security plan. This document should define how security incidents and potential harm to research participants and research teams, including enumerators, during data collection or research procedures, will be managed and treated. Where applicable, the safety and security plan of the implementing partner may be attached in lieu of a

separately developed protocol, along with an explanation on the extent to which research participants and staff are covered.

- c. Submit the materials that have been or will be submitted to IRB.

Please refer to section IV. *Funding Criteria* in the [RFP document](#) for a full overview of the proposal evaluation criteria and additional considerations.

Funding per full pilot study: The award limit for randomized impact evaluations is up to US\$75,000. PhD candidates supervised by an eligible J-PAL affiliate or invited researcher can apply for funding of up to \$50,000. We expect projects of various sizes, and will carefully check whether the budget size accurately reflects the scope of work proposed. Note the guidelines on allowable and unallowable costs in the Budget Guidelines section.

Timeline: Funding requests cannot extend beyond January 31, 2026.

IV. Pilot Study Application Checklist

Please complete all sections in the online portal by the full proposal deadline, Friday, May 17, 2024. You must upload several documents to complete your full proposal. The most updated templates for these documents are provided at the [RFP webpage](#).

1. **Proposal Narrative:** Guidance pertaining to the narrative prompts is included in the Narrative section below. Please note that this section requires detailed power calculations.
2. **Initiative Budget:** Carefully review the Budget Guidelines in this document, then use the Initiative Budget template available on the [RFP webpage](#) to outline the budget requested from HPI, 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) for upload to the portal.
3. **Total Project Budget:** For projects that will secure or will require co-funding for their project, the Total Project Budget template available on the [RFP webpage](#) is required to provide an overview over all costs required to complete the project, including those outside of the initiative requested budget, where applicable.
4. **Budget Narrative:** Detail the major costs within the budget, referring to the Budget Guidelines, in a Word document with the title [PI Last Name, First Name][Budget Narrative].doc(x) for upload to the portal. This document is required in addition to the Proposal Budget -- i.e. notes included in the Excel sheet do not suffice.

5. **Timeline:** Please use the relevant template available on the [RFP webpage](#) to complete a milestone reporting document that outlines in detail 1) key project milestones (8-15 milestones), and 2) key policy and practice milestones (4-7 milestones) and upload it to the portal.
6. **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 for upload to the portal:
 - A. A letter from each implementing partner, indicating the details of their commitment to partner on the research, their willingness to share progress on results and use of evidence, and their willingness to share relevant program cost information and indications of the potential for scale-up of research findings by partners or scaling organizations. In addition, the partner should discuss and explain what actions they expect to take under a positive, negative, or null result scenario. These letters of support should not be templates provided by the research team, but the implementing partners perspective and real understanding of the partnership.
 - B. A budget letter of support or document stating that the proposed grant host institution, the Institute to Receive Award (ITRA), approves the proposal materials. Please consult the [Budget Guidelines](#) below for more detail on the requirements regarding the nature of the ITRA and the content of the ITRA's letter of support).
7. **Safe and responsible research conduct:** To substantiate that adequate risk assessment and management systems are in place, applicants are required to:
 - A. Complete a risk management matrix by using the template available on the RFP webpage;
 - B. Attach your project's safety and security plan. This document should define how security incidents and potential harm to research participants and research teams, including enumerators, during data collection or research procedures, will be managed and treated. Where applicable, the safety and security plan of the implementing partner may be attached in lieu of a separately developed protocol, along with an explanation on the extent to which research participants and staff are covered;
 - C. Submit the materials that have been or will be submitted to IRB.

Note: In the case that this proposal is awarded initiative funding, we will further ask that you submit information on IRB approval(s) or exemption(s). It is mandatory for grantees to ensure that the project they implement has been reviewed by an IRB with status as an IRB Organization (IORG). An IRB's status can be found by consulting the [database of IORGs](#). If

you do not have access to an IRB or ethics review committee at your institution(s) that has IORG status, requests can be sent to PSE's IRB after projects are chosen for funding. Funding is contingent on approval or exemption from an IRB with IORG status.

V. Pilot Study Narrative Proposal Guidelines

The online portal will require you to address the below prompts. The text provided below each bolded subsection helps provide guidance on what the HPI Board is looking for to effectively evaluate your proposal.

Abstract

In 3-5 sentences, describe your research question and the context of your evaluation. The abstract should include (i) a basic problem statement, (ii) the intervention or approach being evaluated, and (iii) what questions the research will answer.

Problem Statement & Motivation

To motivate the research, clearly state the protection issue, including available evidence of the problem in this particular context. This should be policy-oriented and distinct from the project's contribution to the academic literature.

- Describe the magnitude(s) and type(s) of inefficiencies and/or protection challenges this research seeks to address. Provide rationale and any available evidence.
- Discuss how the problem is important in relation to understanding the overall effectiveness of programs promoting protection outcomes for conflict-affected populations in relation to the policy and research priorities laid out in the HPI [RFP document](#).
- Discuss how this research will lead to generalizable insights, and why this project goes beyond a specific place based policy or program evaluation.

Suggested word count: Up to 200 words

Unique Contribution to the Literature

What knowledge gap are you addressing, and how will it advance the field?

Succinctly list and bold the specific research question(s) you seek to address. Explain the project's potential to provide a unique scientific contribution. Provide a brief literature review. Note that a full reference list can be attached in a later section not subject to word counts.

Suggested word count: Up to 200 words

Overview of Pilot Research

What activities will this grant fund? What data, tools, and methods do you expect to use to address your pilot research question(s)?

- Describe the intervention that you plan to test or the strategy you will use to identify barriers to economic inclusion in displacement contexts.
- Establish a plausible link between the proposed approach under consideration and the hypothesized channel for impact on livelihoods-related outcomes.
- Describe the theory of change that motivates your investigation and whether you expect impacts to vary across geographic region, gender, age, population, type of displacement, host community status or context.

Suggested word count: Up to 750 words

Target Population

Please describe the target population(s) to be reached. For more information on HPI's target group, please refer to the section on the initiative's scope in the RFP document.

Suggested word count: up to 200 words

HPI Focus Areas

Please indicate using the dropdown which HPI focus areas your proposal relates to; these are described in detail in section II. Scope of the HPI RFP document.

Gender Dynamics

How will this project address physical, psychological, social, and legal harm—or risks thereof—faced specifically by women and girls? In what specific ways does this project investigate related outcomes for women and girls? How will you further evidence base on this dimension? Discuss whether your research design involves an intervention that is sensitive to women's vulnerabilities and strengths in the context of conflict and/or whether the design will allow you to report on gender differentiated impacts. If you assert this is outside the scope of your research, please provide a compelling justification.

Suggested word count: up to 200 words

Anticipated Research Outcome

How would results from this pilot inform a future RCT, or others' research or practice? Describe, specifically, what researchers and practitioners can be expected to learn from this pilot study.

- Will it pilot an intervention? Will it provide qualitative data to inform intervention design?
- How could the findings meet the needs of policymakers or practitioners? Outline a specific plan for how you will share your findings and outputs (e.g. data). How will the implementing partners and other stakeholders become aware of the findings and

benefit from the data and other such outputs (e.g. descriptive statistics) generated from this pilot study?

- In what specific ways will the pilot prepare researchers for a full RCT project?

Suggested word count: up to 500 words

Potential Ethical Risks

All J-PAL initiatives rely on IRB approvals secured by the PIs for many of the ethical issues surrounding conduct of primary data collection and experimentation. For this reason, PIs on successful applications are required to secure an IRB approval before an award agreement can be signed with J-PAL.

The domain of an IRB review, however, does not include all ethical considerations. For this reason, we are providing an opportunity for the PIs to discuss any issues that they feel warrant discussion but that are not covered in their existing or planned IRB review. Specifically, please describe any ethical and/or safety-related risks, and detail how you will manage these risk, if your study could be considered more than minimal-risk (e.g. research participants are a vulnerable population, surveys will include questions on sensitive topics, the partner operates in a risky environment, etc.).

- Discuss any relevant ethical considerations around the intervention, taking into account the benefits to society of doing this research vs. the risks to subjects.
- Discuss whether there are potential harms to research participants and staff in the process of data collection and/or research procedures (for example, discomfort to being asked certain questions or breach of confidentiality) or potential harms to research staff from conducting the data collection (for example, exposure to political violence, unusual levels of a communicable disease, emotional wellbeing from surveying about difficult matters) that are not part of an existing or planned IRB approval. If so, what are they, and what proactive measures will be taken to assess, monitor, and mitigate/prevent any such potential risks?

Suggested word count: 300 words

Potential Risks and Mitigation Strategies

Are there any technical, logistical, or political obstacles and risks that might threaten the completion of the study (for example, implementation capacity, government authorization, or other funding) and how does your team plan to address/overcome them?

Suggested word count: 150 words

Team composition: Lived Experience

Do you have any Principal Investigators or other research team members (research associates, managers, enumerators, etc.) who either currently or in the past have been affected by conflict? If yes, what is the scope of their involvement? Otherwise, what other efforts have been made to engage individuals who have been displaced?

Suggested word count: Up to 200 words

Team composition: Local Knowledge

Is at least one of the Principal Investigators in your team based in the country where the research will be implemented? Alternatively, has at least one of the Principle Investigators completed high school or undergrad in the country where the research will be implemented? If yes, what is the scope of their involvement? Otherwise, what other efforts have been made to engage local decision-makers or stakeholders in the research?

In addition, have any of the Principle Investigators completed high school or undergrad in a [low- or middle-income country](#), as defined by the World Bank? If yes, what is the scope of their involvement?

Suggested word count: Up to 200 words

VI. Pilot Study Project Details Guidelines

Partnership Details

Please describe the implementing partner (or partners), the history of the partnership, the partner's involvement in project activities, and any in-kind or financial support they have committed or provided to the project. Please include any potential risks to the partnership.

Suggested word count: up to 250 words

Timeline

Please complete and upload the milestone reporting document available on the [RFP webpage](#) that outlines in detail 1) key project milestones (8-15 milestones), and 2) key policy and practice milestones (4-7 milestones).

Additional Information

Please review the HPI [RFP document](#)'s section IV. *Funding Criteria* and provide additional information as relevant to the other evaluation criteria if not already addressed in the fields above.

VII. Pilot Study Budget Guidelines

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 accepted your budget. In addition, the proposed budget must follow the below guidelines to be eligible for funding.

Guidelines for Completing an Pilot Study Proposal Budget

Please submit a detailed project budget using the Budget Template provided at the [RFP website](#) and a budget narrative. To reduce processing time, please keep the following in mind:

- Institute to Receive Award (ITRA) Requirements: It is usual for the ITRA to be the university of primary affiliation of (one) of the eligible researcher(s) or one of the universities with which one of the other researchers is primarily affiliated. Under certain conditions, a non-university non-profit organization can act as the ITRA of an award. Please reach out to hpi@povertyactionlab.org, should your team consider this set up for the proposed project.
- Projects which have secured or will require co-funding for their project should complete both Excel templates, i.e. both "Total Project Budget" (overview over all costs required to complete your project) AND "Initiative Budget" (what you're requesting from HPI) templates. If the project has other funders, the proposal should clearly explain the marginal contribution of the requested funds from HPI and the feasibility of your project, should another part of the activities remain unfunded.
- Applications must include a brief budget narrative document detailing the major costs within the budget. In addition:
 - We strongly encourage applicants to include budget notes in the column provided in the budget template, specifying input costs for line items within the budget.
 - Travel costs should include a breakdown of how many trips are planned, the estimated cost per trip, number of people on a given trip, etc. Any computer/equipment purchases should include a breakdown of what is being purchased (e.g. how many laptops), as well as the project staff that will be assigned to the equipment.

Allowable Direct and Indirect Costs

- Please note that HPI does not cover PI salaries with the exception of researchers based in a mid- or low-income country (LMIC). Full RCTs may cover up to \$20,000 per

year with a limit of \$8,000 per PI per year. Pilots may cover up to \$8,000 per LMIC researcher PI/co-PI, but the total budgeted amount for LMIC researcher PI time should not exceed 25% of the total budget. For Travel / Proposal Development grants, 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.

- Project Implementation Costs: For full research projects, implementation costs are expected to be borne by the project partners. However, under some circumstances, HPI can fund implementation costs where it is a marginal addition to an existing program to offset costs from an experiment (e.g. adding an additional treatment arm or the costs of an encouragement design). These types of costs might include travel, small participant incentives, and/or SMS fees.
- Proposals requesting funds for implementation are required to explain why the implementer cannot bear the costs in the budget narrative and must also justify the input costs.
- Costs related to ensuring increased security for participants and research teams are allowed. Please detail how these relate to your safety and security plan.
- Universities in high-income countries, generally defined as OECD member countries, can charge up to 10% in indirect costs, applied to total direct costs. 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.
- 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.
- Unallowable costs include those labeled as “incidental,” “miscellaneous,” or “contingency.” Any costs for rent should be explained in the budget narrative.

Note: A letter or document stating approval of the proposal materials and budget is required from each ITRA. Please allow for an adequate amount of time to acquire this letter. If it is not possible to receive the letter, please justify this in the budget narrative.

VIII. Terms and Conditions

General Terms and Conditions

1. This Request for Proposals (RFP) is not and shall not be construed to be a contract, offer, or request for an offer. Those responding to this RFP receive no rights whatsoever as a result of their submissions. J-PAL will not have any express or implied obligations or responsibilities to those who

respond and will not otherwise be bound by any terms or conditions, except to the extent set forth in a definitive, final, written grant agreement duly executed by the recipient(s) and J-PAL. There is no commitment by J-PAL that such a final grant agreement will be executed, even if J-PAL enters into negotiations with the applicants, proposed recipient(s), or his or her institution.

2. J-PAL in its sole and exclusive discretion may reject any or all proposals with or without notice or reasons, withdraw this RFP at any time before or after delivery of proposals, or if no proposal is accepted, abandon the RFP.
3. J-PAL further reserves the right in its sole and exclusive discretion to waive irregularities or defects in any proposal, but in no event will J-PAL have any obligation to do so. Moreover, J-PAL will not be responsible for errors or omissions by anyone submitting a proposal, and J-PAL shall be the sole judge of the responsiveness, appropriateness and completeness of any and all proposals.
4. J-PAL reserves the sole and exclusive right in its discretion to modify the timeline for decision-making or otherwise modify or amend this RFP as it deems appropriate.
5. All responses to this RFP become the property of J-PAL. Regardless of any markings identifying the proposal or its content as proprietary or confidential, J-PAL reserves the right to disclose or use any information contained in the proposals and other presentations responsive to this RFP. The review board making funding decisions includes external academics and policymakers, who will receive a copy of the proposals.
6. J-PAL is not responsible for and will not reimburse any costs incurred in submitting materials or information pursuant to this RFP or in otherwise responding to this RFP, including but not limited to evaluating, responding, providing follow-up, negotiating, and otherwise complying with it.
7. Applicants agree to be bound by the terms of their proposal for at least sixty days from the date such proposals are due, and otherwise agree to negotiate in good faith any other terms for a definitive arrangement if selected by J-PAL to do so.
8. Applicants certify that the work product they propose to create or use if they are a grant recipient will not infringe on or violate the intellectual property rights (including but not limited to trademarks, copyrights, patents, trade secrets, moral rights) or privacy rights of any person or entity. Applicants submitting proposals, materials, or information further certify that they have or will have such ownership or use rights in such work product sufficient to allow J-PAL to achieve its purposes as generally provided for in this RFP.
9. Grant recipients agree that, if requested by J-PAL, they will provide additional information about any subcontractors, graduate students, research assistants, and other third parties engaged by the grant recipient to provide services. J-PAL reserves the right in good faith to approve any such persons in order to ensure consistency with J-PAL's expectations of quality and character.
10. Applicants are required to disclose to J-PAL all funders of their project. Depending on the co-funders, an applicant may be ineligible for funding from J-PAL under this RFP. Further information may be requested from the HPI staff at J-PAL.

Grant Terms and Conditions

If an applicant is awarded funding by J-PAL, the grant agreement may include clauses similar to the following:

1. The Grant Recipient shall at all times comply with, and ensure that its employees, officers, contractors, subcontractors and other persons or entities involved with Partner or with the Project at all times comply with all requirements and obligations that apply pursuant to national and international laws and regulations. This shall specifically include, but not be limited to: (i) applicable data privacy law(s); (ii) any anti-bribery and anti-corruption laws and regulations that may apply; (iii) any applicable laws and regulations that prevent fraud, money laundering and financing of terrorism; and (iv) any Trade Sanctions imposed by the UN, EU or US, or any similar sanctions or restrictions.
2. Specific stipulations related to the Fair Credit Reporting Act (FCRA) in the United States:
 - a. The Grant Recipient shall comply with, and ensure that its implementing partners involved in the Project (if any) comply with, FCRA and its relevant requirements.
 - b. The Grant Recipient shall keep J-PAL informed of the validity, as well as any changes in the status, of its FCRA registration and that of any key implementing partners. No payments shall be made by the Grant Recipient to any India-based entity that is subject to the FCRA, in relation to any period in which the entity's FCRA registration is not valid or not active.
 - c. The Grant Recipient shall be fully responsible for (non-)compliance with FCRA and other applicable laws, and is liable for any damages, losses, expenses and claims arising out of non-compliance by Partner or its implementing partner(s).
3. The Grant Recipient shall respect human rights and shall abide by applicable local laws, environmental legislation including multilateral environmental agreements, as well as internationally agreed core labor standards.