J-PAL INNOVATION IN GOVERNMENT INITIATIVE: SCALE-UP INNOVATION COMPETITION OVERVIEW

J-PAL's **Innovation in Government Initiative (IGI)** is calling for proposals to fund technical assistance to governments to adapt, pilot, and scale evidence-informed innovations that have been previously evaluated with a randomized evaluation(s) and found effective in improving the lives of people living in poverty. J-PAL affiliated and IGI invited researchers can submit applications in collaboration with government partners, J-PAL regional offices, and other collaborators. Please send proposals to IGI@povertyactionlab.org by 5:00 p.m. US ET on Friday March 27, 2020.
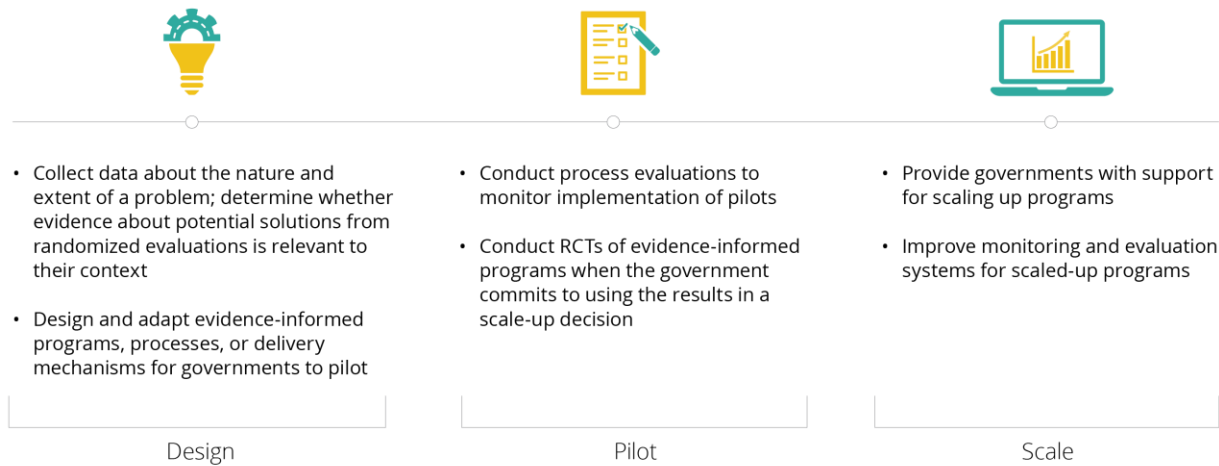
BACKGROUND

Many governments around the world are eager to use evidence to improve the effectiveness of their social programs and policies, especially when it comes to essential services like education, health, and social assistance. Meanwhile, universities and research organizations are producing and synthesizing evidence from rigorous impact evaluations that can be used to design and improve these programs. However, demand from governments and good research are not enough to change lives. Using evidence to inform change at scale also requires a deep understanding of context and systems, coupled with political will, a policy window, and implementation capacity. Identifying these opportunities and building strong partnerships to apply evidence takes time and resources.

For more than a decade, the J-PAL network and our partners have built long-term partnerships with governments around the world to increase the use of evidence in policy, and adapt and scale programs informed by evidence. Together we work with government partners on their policy priorities, helping to determine whether and how evidence is relevant to their context, supporting them in piloting programs leveraging this evidence, and building systems for data-enabled program delivery and monitoring. We believe supporting governments during this middle phase is critical to bridge the gap between the generation of promising evidence and the effective delivery of evidence-informed programs at scale.

IGI'S MISSION & ACTIVITIES WE SUPPORT

Mission: IGI works with governments to adapt, pilot, and scale evidence-informed innovations that have the potential to improve the lives of millions of people living in poverty in low- and middle-income countries.

J-PAL affiliated and IGI invited researchers can submit applications to IGI's Scale-Up Innovation Competitions in collaboration with government partners in low- and middle-income countries, J-PAL regional offices, and other collaborators. Proposals should focus on priority issues that government partner has identified. Funding can be used to support technical assistance to the government to adapt, pilot, and scale evidence-informed innovations that have been previously evaluated with a randomized evaluation(s) and that have the potential to improve the lives of people living in poverty. Innovations can be new programs or changes to existing programs, processes, or delivery systems. Funding can be used to support technical assistance to governments at various stages in the scaling process, including support to:

- Collect data about the nature and extent of a problem; determine whether evidence about potential solutions from randomized evaluations is relevant to their context

- Design and adapt evidence-informed programs, processes, or delivery mechanisms for governments to pilot

- Conduct process evaluations to monitor implementation of pilots

- Conduct RCTs of evidence-informed programs when the government commits to using the results in a scale-up decision

- Provide governments with support for scaling up programs

- Improve monitoring and evaluation systems for scaled-up programs

Design

Pilot

Scale

IGI prioritizes projects that are demand-driven and have high potential to contribute to evidence being used in policy decisions to scale up programs that have clear benefits people living in poverty. In particular, we welcome applications from the government implementing partners on completed or ongoing randomized evaluations to scale up their innovations that are found to be effective. We also welcome applications to adapt, pilot, and scale evidence-informed innovations in new contexts, when appropriate.

ELIGIBILITY

All J-PAL affiliated researchers, IGI invited researchers, and J-PAL offices are eligible to apply in collaboration with their government partners. All applicants are required to have a J-PAL affiliated or IGI invited researcher involved in the project to apply. All proposals may include collaborators outside of this network including other researchers and NGO partners. IGI invited researchers are eligible to apply for projects to adapt, pilot, and/or scale findings from evaluations in the J-PAL network, which includes any randomized evaluation funded by a J-PAL initiative, implemented by a J-PAL office, and/or that had a J-PAL affiliated researcher as a co-PI.

Only projects with a specific government partner(s) in low- and middle-income countries will be considered. For all IGI projects, the implementing partner has to be a government body or a non-governmental partner delivering services through government infrastructure (e.g. government schools, clinics, etc.) with the government actively involved in the partnership. Government partners can be national, state, regional, provincial, city, etc., including individual ministries or agencies. Governments must be the main recipients of technical assistance, but governments cannot be the receiving institutions of funds. Receiving institutions can include J-PAL offices, IPA offices, and other non-governmental partners working with J-PAL affiliated and IGI invited researchers.

**If you are uncertain about whether your team is eligible, please email
IGI@povertyactionlab.org.**

IGI PRIORITY SECTORS

IGI will initially prioritize proposals in three priority sectors where there are large bodies of evidence about designing effective programs and high government demand for collaboration: education, health, and social

assistance. We also accept proposals from other sectors beyond these three for innovations that have been previously evaluated with a randomized evaluation(s) and have clear benefits for people living in poverty.

IGI Education: Improving learning and quality of education

IGI Health: Improving health and quality of health services

IGI Social Assistance: Improving design and delivery of social safety net programs like cash transfers

Based on the evidence from randomized evaluations in these three sectors to date, **Appendix 1** lists some examples of the types of interventions that have been found effective in multiple contexts, promising interventions for which more evidence is needed and/or important considerations remain, and some broad policy areas for which there is a large body of evidence to inform policy design. We encourage applications in these areas. We also welcome and encourage applications related to other programs or policy issues, recognizing that new promising innovations are always emerging.

Applying evidence responsibly: Drawing on evidence from randomized evaluations is not enough to determine whether a program is relevant and appropriate for a particular context and feasible for a government to implement well. This also requires a deep understanding of theory, the local context and systems, and analysis of descriptive data. Such an understanding is often gained through the process of adapting the program model to local institutions and systems and then piloting one or more versions of it to see if high-quality implementation is feasible. Applications seeking to apply evidence in a new context should include a formal scoping process to work with the government partner to diagnose the problem and determine whether evidence is relevant, as well as a process for adapting and piloting the program model in the new context before scaling.

CROSSCUTTING THEMES

IGI will also prioritize partnerships that explore one or more crosscutting themes that we believe are important for effectively implementing programs at scale and drawing general lessons for others working to scale up evidence-informed social programs with governments. Applicants should include a short summary of how their projects will explore one or more of the themes below in their proposals.

1. **Technology- and data-enabled program delivery and monitoring**: Phones, tablets, digital transfers, and other technologies have the potential to improve and reduce the costs of program delivery and monitoring.

2. **Implementation science**: Piloting and pressure-testing different implementation models before selecting one for scale-up can help identify models that are both feasible to implement well and lead to sufficient take-up and use among program participants.

3. **Cost analysis:** The costs of various program options are critical inputs for policy decisions, so collecting cost data early and systematically is critical.

FUNDS

IGI expects to award several grants per round ranging from US$75,000-$200,000 each. Projects can receive up to a cap of US$300,000 per round, but the typical grant will be between US$75,000-$200,000. The total awarded to a single project in its entire life cycle will not exceed US$500,000 except in special circumstances. Proposals can include a wide range of activities, including but not limited to:

- **Embedding staff**: Hiring or seconding a part- or full-time staff member to work directly with the government partner during the scaling process, either embedded in the government body itself or just working closely with them.

- **Scoping research:** Proposals can include scale-up scoping activities, including research and data collection to determine whether a scale-up is feasible and likely to be relevant and appropriate in the specific context.

- **Innovation design support:** Staff and/or NGO technical support to the government in designing and adapting the evidence-informed program, process, or delivery mechanism to pilot.

- **Pilot innovation costs:** Proposals can include some pilot implementation costs. IGI does not fund implementation costs for a scale-up beyond the pilot phase, as this funding should be secured by the government or from another third-party source.

- **Monitoring and process evaluations:** Data collection for process evaluations to monitor the implementation of government pilots.

- **Scaling support:** Providing governments with technical support for scaling successful pilots and improving monitoring and evaluation systems for scaled-up programs.

- **Capacity building:** As long as they directly contribute to the scale-up of an effective innovation, proposals can include capacity-building activities to help the government design monitoring and data systems to track their performance. Proposals must demonstrate why these activities are essential for achieving the end goal.

- **Randomized evaluations:** Unlike other J-PAL funding initiatives, funding randomized evaluations is not IGI's main goal. However, we recognize that in some cases rigorous evidence of effectiveness at scale is a critical input for a government's scale-up decision. In these cases, IGI allows proposals that include partial funding for randomized evaluations. Proposals that include randomized evaluations must include additional information in their proposals; please follow the application instructions carefully.

IGI funding cannot be used to:
- Support any political activities or lobbying. Please refer to MIT's lobbying policy here.
- Support staff working to build relationships with several government partners who have not yet agreed to collaborate with the applicant team.
- Fund evidence reviews for governments that are not interested in a longer engagement to adapt, pilot, and scale innovations informed by evidence.

GRANT CONDITIONS

All applicants selected for awards will be asked to:

1. Provide a brief start up report 3 months after receiving funds, annual progress and semiannual financial reports, and a final project and financial report within 60 days of completion of the award period. To contribute to J-PAL's learning agenda about how to work with governments most effectively, grantees will also be requested to provide a brief narrative, timeline, and any relevant government testimony or documents showing whether evidence from randomized evaluations or IGI-funded technical assistance contributed to any government decisions.

2. If the award recipient is not a J-PAL office, the Executive Director from the relevant J-PAL regional office is also required to submit 1-page annual and final progress reports or schedule 1-hour annual calls with the relevant IGI staff to discuss J-PAL's involvement in the project and how this grant helped build or strengthen the institutional partnership between J-PAL and specific government partners.

3. Participate in at least one of IGI's activities on a mutually agreed time and place. This activity could be an evidence workshop, a conference, a training event, or a presentation to donors.

4. In addition to these requirements, projects will be required to collect and report (i) program cost data sufficient to conduct a cost-effectiveness analysis, and (ii) implementation and scale-up processes sufficient to inform how a program is implemented so it could be scaled-up in a new context. IGI will provide a cost-collection template, and applicants are encouraged to budget for these activities at the outset.

5. Finally, full RCTs are also required to register in the AEA registry and publish data in an open-access, online database at the end of the research period. Grantees should register their trial with the AEA RCT Registry before starting fieldwork. J-PAL will contact grantees at the start of fieldwork to request the assigned registration number. For questions and support with the registry, please contact Keesler Welch (keesler@mit.edu).

REVIEW PROCESS

Selection of awards follows the process below:

Proposals submitted during an RFP: Proposals will be reviewed and scored by a sub-committee of members of the IGI Advisory Board consisting of at least three of the following: at least one of the two IGI co-chairs, one board member representing the region nominating the project, and/or one board member with sector/domain knowledge on the proposal. Details of the current IGI co-chairs and Advisory Board members are here.

All board members submitting a proposal in the current round of funding are required to recuse themselves from this review. No spouse, partner, or immediate family member (parent, child, 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. Proposals will be scored using the evaluation criteria described in the IGI application form. The sub-committee will then vote on the status of the application based on their scores and comments. The status of an application can fall into four categories: (1) approved (unconditionally), (2) conditional approval (i.e. subject to project agreeing to make minor revisions or clarifications requested by

the sub-committee), (3) revise and resubmit on this or a subsequent round, or (4) not approved. Only applicants who receive a "revise and resubmit" are welcome to resubmit their proposal in a future round.

Off-Cycle Projects: These grants are intended for projects that face a significant time constraint and need to receive funding before the end of the process for this round to make use of an unanticipated opportunity (e.g. a newly announced policy change that will go into effect soon creating a great opportunity for a potential scale-up). The amount allocated will not exceed US$75,000, and proposals must clearly justify the need to receive a decision on an expedited schedule. Based on the off-cycle proposal, the IGI co-chairs will decide whether to review it off-cycle or instead recommend including the proposal in the regular review process for the next round. The procedure and requirements for submitting an off-cycle application are the same as that for applications submitted during an RFP round.

If you would like to appeal a decision of the IGI Advisory Board, you may contact IGI staff at IGI@povertyactionlab.org within one week of the announcement detailing the reasons for the request for reconsideration (maximum two pages in length and clearly addressing ALL the reasons given by the sub-committee for turning down the proposal). This will then be communicated to the sub-committee for review, whose decision will be final.

APPENDIX 1

	Education	Health	Social Assistance	Example IGI activities
Examples of types of interventions with robust evidence of effectiveness from multiple contexts	• Tailored instruction programs • Providing information on education benefits, costs, and quality	• Subsidizing preventive health products and removing cost-sharing when possible • Providing nudges and incentives for take-up of preventive care • Delivering health products through schools	• Cash transfers (conditional, unconditional, labeled) • Ultra-Poor Graduation approach	• Embedding staff • Scoping research • Innovation design support • Pilot innovation costs • Process evaluations • Scaling support • Capacity building
Examples of types of interventions that are promising, but for which important considerations remain	• Merit-based scholarships • Education technology • School-based management and community monitoring • Teacher accountability reforms • Teacher professional development	• Early childhood psychosocial stimulation • Home visits by health workers, community health worker programs • Increasing girls' education and economic opportunities to reduce adolescent pregnancy • Cash transfers for health outcomes	• Digitizing social transfers • Variations on the Graduation approach (lower-cost versions, with CBT, government-implemented) • Reducing barriers to accessing government transfers • Reducing leakages in government transfer systems • ID cards and targeted information to increase access to transfers	• Embedding staff • Scoping research • Innovation design support • Pilot innovation costs • Process evaluations • Randomized evaluations • Scaling support • Capacity building
Examples of broad policy areas with large bodies of evidence to inform policy	• Reducing costs of schooling to increase participation • Increasing participation by making education benefits salient • Tailoring instruction to students' learning levels • Augmenting school-based inputs with pedagogical innovations	• Increasing take-up and use of health services • Nudges and behavioral economics • Incentives for health care providers	• Cash transfer design and delivery mechanisms • Nudges and behavioral economics • Social assistance targeting and self-targeting • Targeted information to increase access to transfers	• Embedding staff • Scoping research • Innovation design support • Pilot innovation costs • Process evaluations • Randomized evaluations • Capacity building