

Governance Initiative: Request for Proposals Overview

Round 23 - Spring 2024

RFP Overview

J-PAL's Governance Initiative (GI) funds randomized evaluations of strategies to improve governance in low- and middle-income countries. GI is now calling for proposals from **only graduate students** of J-PAL affiliates or invited researchers from *any* J-PAL initiative or regional office. Such graduate students may apply for full research projects, pilot studies, or travel/proposal development grants. **For this round, all proposals must relate to political participation.**

All proposals for full, pilot, and travel/proposal development grants are due *via email* to GI@povertyactionlab.org by **11:59 p.m. ET on Wednesday, May 29, 2024.**

Background

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

Focus

GI funds randomized evaluations of programs and policies aimed at improving governance in low- and middle-income countries, building a better bridge between field experiments and

underlying governance theories. GI's research priorities are identified in the Governance Initiative Review Paper (full paper [here](#); executive summary [here](#)) which summarizes existing evidence in governance from primarily economics and political science, with an emphasis on field evaluations. The Governance Review Paper is organized around the following themes:

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

For this round, all proposals must be related to the topic of political participation to be considered (items 1 and 2 in the above list). GI also welcomes proposals from multidisciplinary research teams. If a researcher is uncertain about whether a research project is eligible for GI, please email GI@povertyactionlab.org.

Funds

Three types of proposals will be considered in this round:

- **Full Research Projects:** These grants are for research projects at a mature level of development. Not only must the research question be clear, but applicants must also demonstrate a commitment from implementing partners, a method of randomization, well-defined instruments, and sample size estimates. Proposals can also be submitted for funding the continuation of research projects that have already started without GI funding (including those for which field data collection has been completed). The expectation is that these projects will result in a paper publishable in a top economics or

¹ For proposals related to political participation in elections, please note that U.S. federal tax law prohibits GI from using funds for any political campaign that is not candidate or position neutral. GI will screen all elections-related proposals to ensure that they are in compliance with this regulation. More information on this regulation can be found on the [IRS website](#).

political science journal. The total amount awarded to a single graduate student project, including any GI funding for proposal development or piloting, will not exceed **\$50,000**.

- **Pilot Studies:** These grants are for studies with a clear research question, but for which the design and implementation requires further testing and pilot data. The expectation is that these projects will ultimately develop into full-scale randomized evaluations. The maximum amount awarded for pilot studies by graduate students is **\$50,000**.
- **Travel/Proposal Development Grants:** These grants cover exploratory work related to preliminary research ideas, such as conducting background research, developing partnerships, visiting field sites, and collecting preliminary data. The expectation is that these funds will be used to support costs related to PI travel to develop a proposal for a pilot or full-scale randomized evaluation during a subsequent call for proposals. The maximum amount awarded for travel/proposal development grants is **\$10,000**.

Please note that GI was established to fund randomized impact evaluations of programs and policies being implemented in the field. As a general rule, GI does not fund pure lab experiments. A proposal may be considered if there is a randomized field evaluation of an underlying program or policy which supplements a lab experiment.

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

Off-cycle and Policy Outreach Proposals

Off-Cycle Projects: GI is not accepting off-cycle proposals at this time. We will reach out when we have scheduled our Fall 2024 RFP, which will be open to J-PAL affiliates, invited researchers from any J-PAL initiative or regional office, and graduate students of J-PAL affiliates/invited researchers.

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

Eligibility

For this round, PhD students are eligible to apply for travel/proposal development grants or up to \$50,000 in pilot or full-scale funding. To be eligible, PhD students must have a J-PAL affiliate or invited researcher (from *any* J-PAL initiative) on their thesis committee at their host university. This adviser must provide a letter of support and indicate willingness to remain involved in a

supervisory role throughout the lifetime of the project.² In addition, in order to apply for up to \$50,000 for pilot or full-scale funding, graduate students must provide documented evidence of successful pilot activities, funded either through a GI travel/proposal development grant or other sources. Please note that PhD students are not eligible to apply for off-cycle funding.

Please note that any J-PAL affiliate, J-PAL postdoc, J-PAL invited researcher, or eligible PhD student can submit a **maximum of three pilot or full-scale proposals within a 12-month period to GI**, either as a main PI or co-PI in the proposal. For example, if a researcher submitted two pilot or full-scale proposals in our Fall 2023 round, they would only be eligible to submit a maximum of 1 pilot or full-scale proposal in our Spring 2024 round.

Applications

All proposals for full, pilot, and travel/proposal development grants are due **via email** to GI@povertyactionlab.org by **11:59 p.m. ET on Wednesday, May 29, 2024**. Application instructions and forms for each grant type are available on our [website](#). Letter of intent/expressions of interest are *not* required this round.

Review Process

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

Full, Pilot, and Travel/Proposal Development Proposals: For the Spring 2024 RFP, the GI co-chairs will review the proposals and decide to award funding or reject the proposal for funding. In our Fall 2024 RFP, GI will return to our regular review process, in which each proposal is reviewed by three referees and the full GI Review Board.

If you would like to appeal a decision, please email gi@povertyactionlab.org within one week of the announcement, detailing the reasons for the request for reconsideration (maximum two pages in length). This request will then be communicated to the reviewers.

² Please note that PhD students are eligible to submit a maximum of two travel/proposal development grant applications and two pilot/full study proposals during their time as graduate students. All else equal, priority will be given to graduate students who have not applied before. Please note that applicants who received travel/proposal development funding as graduate students but have since moved to another institution may not apply for funding unless they have since become a J-PAL affiliate or J-PAL invited researcher (from any initiative), or unless the proposal includes a J-PAL affiliate or invited researcher as a co-author.

RFP Timeline

Friday, April 19	RFP is issued
Wednesday, May 29	Proposal submission deadline
(Tentative) June 19-21	Results announced

Grant Conditions

Full and Pilot Grants: If your proposal is selected for funding, the terms of the award will be as follows:

- Research conduct:** Grantees will be required to have IRB approval or exemption from the IRB of Record. **The IRB approval must be held by the institution that enters into the subaward agreement with MIT** (the ITRA). Similarly, **the Principal Investigator (PI) of a subaward issued by MIT's Research Services Administration must have an official affiliation with the organization receiving the subaward and funds** ([see here for further details](#)). Specific instructions will be given in the Notice of Award. In addition, grantees are expected to adhere to MIT's community-wide policies that are available [here](#), as well as policies put in place by the [UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office](#).
- Peer-review proposals:** Grantees may be requested to peer-review proposals in future GI rounds.
- Project registration:** Within three months of the start date indicated on the proposal, grantees must register their trial with the [AEA RCT Registry](#). Registration includes 18 required fields, such as your name and a small subset of your IRB requirements. There is also the opportunity to include more information, including power calculations and an optional pre-analysis plan. (Full studies only)
- Reporting:** Grantees will be requested to provide a brief start-up report, annual financial updates; annual progress reports; a final financial report within 60 days of completion of the award period; and (Full studies only) a final substantive report with preliminary results within 12 months of completion of the award period, which will be made public on the J-PAL website.
- Collecting and reporting program cost data:** Policymakers are interested in program costs, as it is one of the key factors in their decision to support a program. Cost data also allows for [cost effectiveness analysis \(CEA\)](#), which J-PAL may conduct (with permission from the researchers), even if such analysis is not part of an academic paper. In order to facilitate cost collection, GI awards include \$1,000 to defray expenses associated with collecting cost data. GI will provide a costing worksheet for grantees to update annually. If grantees are unable to collect detailed cost data, grantees are still required to provide

estimates of total program cost, average cost per beneficiary, and marginal cost to add another beneficiary. (Full studies only)

6. **Collecting and reporting gender-disaggregated data:** J-PAL, through its Gender sector, is making an effort to study heterogeneity in program impacts by beneficiary/participant gender more systematically. Please note that the following request only applies to J-PAL internal reports and does not extend to the academic paper or online J-PAL summary.

Many studies funded by J-PAL initiatives already collect study participants' gender. In such cases, and when outcome data are individual-specific, we request that grantees conduct heterogeneity analyses by beneficiary gender for the study's main results for internal reporting to J-PAL (to be shared in the final grant report). A single study might be underpowered to detect heterogeneous treatment effects, or null results might not seem interesting in one study, but these findings may be meaningful when included in an analysis across studies. J-PAL will use the reported results for (a) determining potential pooled statistical analyses to conduct across studies and (b) generating gender-related policy lessons in Governance. Our reporting template will include a question on this, which researchers are encouraged to fill in when applicable. We recognize that there will be cases where this reporting is not applicable, for various reasons. In these cases, the PIs can just provide a brief explanation to be shared with the Gender sector.

7. **Data publication:** Grantees may be requested to share data collection instruments and methodologies with other grantees. Furthermore, researchers funded through this grant will be required to publish de-identified data in accordance with J-PAL's [Data and Code Availability Policy](#). J-PAL's research team can work with you to clean, label, de-identify, document and replicate datasets collected as part of a randomized trial before publishing them in the [J-PAL Dataverse](#) or another data repository of your choice. (Full studies only)
8. **Participate in GI activities:** Grantees may be requested to participate in one of the GI's activities at a mutually agreed time and place. Activities may include evidence workshops, matchmaking conference, or presentations to one of the GI's donors.
9. **Credit GI:** Any presentations and publications, including academic papers, policy briefs, press releases, blogs, and organizational newsletters that emerge from this project should credit the J-PAL Governance Initiative. The exact wording on crediting GI and donor support will be provided in the terms of your award.

Travel/Proposal development grants: If your proposal is selected for funding, the terms of the award will be as follows:

1. **Research Conduct:** Grantees are responsible for following appropriate IRB protocol and providing GI copies of any IRB approvals or exemptions, if any are necessary. If IRB is required, **the IRB approval must be held by the institution that enters into the subaward agreement with MIT** (the ITRA, [see here for further details](#)). In

addition, they are expected to adhere to MIT's community-wide policies that are available [here](#), as well as policies put in place by the [UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office](#).

2. **Submit report:** Grantees are required to submit a brief report within 30 days of completing travel. If the travel/proposal development work results in non-initiative-funded follow-on projects, grantees should inform GI as part of their final report or upon receipt of additional funding.
3. **Participate in GI activity:** Grantees agree to participate in one GI activity or event. GI will cover associated costs.
4. **Credit GI:** Any presentations and publications, including academic papers, policy briefs, press releases, blogs, and organizational newsletters that emerge from this project should credit the J-PAL Governance Initiative. The exact wording on crediting GI and donor support will be provided in the terms of your award.
5. **Applicants requesting proposal development funds for costs at their institution** (*versus direct reimbursement to the PI after travel*, where this is not required) must provide a letter from the receiving institution of the award to show that they have reviewed your proposal and accept your budget.

- a. **The Principal Investigator (PI) of a subaward issued by MIT's Research Services Administration must have an official affiliation with the organization receiving the subaward and funds** ([see here for further details](#)).
- b. Please follow the MIT approved language for the Letter of Transmission as follows:

Example language for Letter of Transmission when there is a PI at the ITRA:
(*On ITRA letterhead*)

<ITRA> is pleased to support the <Name of research> proposal and will plan on carrying out the work in accordance with the submitted budget. <NAME OF PI at ITRA> will serve as <ITRA's> Principal Investigator for this work. In this role, he/she is responsible for the implementation of this project in accordance with this proposal and with appropriate research and data protection practices. Please contact him/her with any concerns which may arise related to project implementation.

Administrative Notes

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

Travel/proposal development grants and policy outreach support grants are paid as travel reimbursements. For more information on budget, requirements, and process, please see instructions on the [GI webpage](#).

Related Initiatives

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

[J-PAL Crime and Violence Initiative \(CVI\)](#): CVI fosters experimental research on crime and social and political violence. Crime and violence can hinder economic development and urban growth and exacerbate governance challenges by fostering corruption and draining public sector resources. The initiative funds evaluations that focus on preventing, mitigating, and responding to the effects of crime and violence.

[J-PAL Digital Identification and Finance Initiative in Africa \(DigiFI\)](#): DigiFI Africa aims to grow the evidence base around innovations in identification and payments by supporting governments in Africa in their efforts to monitor and evaluate relevant reforms.

[J-PAL Social Protection Initiative \(SPI\)](#): In collaboration with [Evidence for Policy Design \(EPoD\)](#) at the Harvard Kennedy School, SPI funds randomized evaluations of social protection programs in low- and middle-income countries and supports policy engagement to share insights from completed research.

[IPA Peace & Recovery \(P&R\) program](#): The P&R program is designed to support field experiments and related research in several broad areas: reducing violence and promoting peace; reducing “fragility” (i.e. fostering state capability and institutions of decision making); and preventing, coping with, and recovering from crises (including conflict and non-conflict humanitarian crises).

Self-Nominating to Become a J-PAL Invited Researcher to Apply to GI

The annual self-nomination period to become an invited researcher is open until August 1st, 2024.³ Both existing invited researchers who would like to be eligible for an additional initiative,

³ Please keep in mind that this process does not replace the nominations from J-PAL regional offices and initiatives, and self nominations will only be considered once a year. We will continue to receive nominations from J-PAL regional offices and initiatives three times per year as a complementary process.

as well as researchers who are not currently invited to any J-PAL initiatives or regional offices, can self-nominate.

Invited researchers should be currently affiliated with a university or its equivalent, where academic freedom to publish results is protected, either as a professor or as a principal investigator. Researchers working at funding and implementing organizations (e.g. the World Bank, ADB or IDB) are not eligible to become invited researchers because of potential conflicts. Invited researchers should also have a PhD in economics or a related quantitative discipline.

The Invited Researcher Selection Committee will review nominations in the fall of 2024. Note that this timeline does not align with the application timeline for the current RFP, but could confer eligibility for future RFPs. For more information on eligibility and the self-nomination process, please click [here](#).