Jobs and Opportunity Initiative (JOI) and Social Protection Initiative (SPI): LETTER OF INTEREST (LOI) GUIDELINES

This document contains an Overview and Narrative Template for Letters of Interests (LOIs). for Full RCTs, pilots, and travel/proposal development grants. Please read this document carefully before submitting your LOI.

Submission instructions: To respond to this RFP, all applicants must first **submit the required LOI on WizeHive, using the relevant application link from the [JOI](#) and/or [SPI](#) RFP webpages, and following the [Applicant Instructions here](#).** Successful applicants will receive an invitation to proceed with their full proposal materials.

Contents

OVERVIEW - FULL RCT

Strong RCT proposal applicants will demonstrate:
- a research question that is clearly discussed in relation to one or more Initiative themes (as outlined in the RFP's research agenda)
- **a robust research design, well-defined research instruments, and sample size estimates justified by pilot data presented in the proposal and how specific available data informs detailed power calculations for any impacts you plan to measure.** Where studies are designed to detect differential impacts for men and women, there should be available evidence that large differences in outcomes are anticipated, informing statistical power calculations and justifying related increased data collection costs to allow for gender-disaggregated comparison of impacts.
- a feasible implementation plan, and
- a strong partnership commitment from implementing organizations (e.g., agreement to

research design, sharing of costing information), including indications of the potential for significant scale-up of research findings by partners or scaling organizations.

Please note: if J-PAL has already funded part of, or precursors to, this project in a past competition round for any initiative, **the project will not be eligible to receive additional funding unless some preliminary data (e.g. take-up rates from a pilot, etc.) from the previously funded work is available and shared in the proposal. You may submit this additional material as an addendum to your submission via the online application.**

Funding per Full RCT award: The funding limit for this RFP is US$350,000, but please note that proposals under US$200,000 will be most competitive. Eligible PhD students can apply for up to US$50,000.

Project Timeline: Both the JOI soft skills window and the JOI/SPI joint window cannot fund projects beyond October 31, 2027.

Project Costing Exercise: J-PAL RCT grantees are requested to collect and share detailed program cost data following the [J-PAL Costing Guidelines](#). **The Narrative Template (please see the [JOI](#) or [SPI](#) RFP webpages to download) includes details on what to include in your proposal narrative.**

OVERVIEW - PILOT

Pilot grants are for studies with a clear research question, but for which the design and implementation requires further testing and pilot data. Pilots are not required to include randomized methodology as long as they test for the logistics or first stage results of a treatment/policy intervention using administrative data or surveys or build a monitoring system. The expectation is that these projects will ultimately develop into full-scale randomized evaluations. The maximum amount awarded for a pilot study is US$75,000. **You should apply as a pilot if the funded work lays the groundwork for a <u>future randomized evaluation</u> because it:**
   ● tests the efficacy of an intervention or an evaluation design, and acquires data that is qualitative or quantitative in nature, e.g. measuring take up, and/or
   ● serves as a diagnostic to reveal the behavior of value chain actors, barriers to technology adoption or market access, or the potential for profitability of an intervention under "real world" conditions, and/or
   ● facilitates access to administrative data for designing or conducting an RCT. Examples of these activities include, but are not limited to, negotiating data use agreements, conducting exploratory data analysis and cleaning, or setting up technical access mechanisms.

In addition, pilot proposals should:
   ● have a very clear research question that assesses the feasibility of using a randomized

evaluation to answer this question.

- **clearly articulate the conceptual and methodological distinction between the pilot study and any future follow-on studies, and what exactly the pilot will enable researchers to learn.** The narrative should include a **solid justification for why a pilot is needed, what will be learned, and what a future RCT informed by this exploratory research could contribute to specific topics addressed in the RFP's research agenda.**

If your research design includes randomization to assess the impact of an intervention, please apply for full RCT funding.

Funding per Pilot award: Limited to US$75,000 or less; eligible PhD students can apply for up to US$50,000.

Project Timeline: Both the JOI soft skills window and the JOI/SPI joint window cannot fund projects beyond October 31, 2027.

OVERVIEW - TRAVEL/PROPOSAL DEVELOPMENT

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

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

Project Timeline: Please note that both the JOI soft skills window and the JOI/SPI joint window cannot fund projects beyond October 31, 2027. Grantees must complete their project development work and submit final reports within one year of receiving the award.

LETTER OF INTEREST TEMPLATE

The online application will require you to address the below prompts. In the text provided below, each bolded subsection helps provide guidance on what the JOI and SPI Board is looking for to effectively evaluate your proposal.

Please note that on WizeHive, applicants can move back and forth between sections to edit answers before submitting. Applicants can also save their applications, then come back later to make changes before submitting. For more details about how to navigate WizeHive, please see these instructions.

Important Information

Primary Eligible Researcher

Please identify one researcher who is eligible for J-PAL Initiative funding. This may be the principal PI and/or any eligible co-PI. Details for only one primary eligible researcher are required in cases where there's more than one eligible researcher. Other PIs who are eligible can be added as co-PIs. *[First Name; Last Name; Email Address]*

PI Eligibility Category

Indicate how the researcher is eligible for J-PAL Initiative funding. Please only select one. If applying through the JOI African Scholars program, please select "Regional Scholar."
[J-PAL Affiliate; Invited Researcher; PhD Student; J-PAL Postdoc; Regional Scholar]

PhD Student Applicants

If you are a PhD student, please indicate the J-PAL-affiliated researcher who serves or will serve as an advisor on your dissertation committee.

For PhD Students: Graduation Date

Please enter your expected graduation date/year. *[70 characters max]*

Organization Name of Eligible Researcher

Please tell us the name of the organization the eligible researcher (i.e., the professor or PhD student) is affiliated with. *[15 words max/70 characters]*

Organization Type of Eligible Researcher

Indicate the eligible researcher's organization type: "University" or "Other." If you choose "Other" instead of "University," please briefly explain your organization type. For funding eligibility requirements, see the RFP materials on the RFP website.
[University; Other]

Organization Website of Eligible Researcher

[70 characters max]

Country Where Organization of Eligible Researcher is Based or Headquartered

[Dropdown]

Team Members & Roles

Please add all your project team members and indicate their role(s) on the project/application.

Please copy and paste the role exactly as it is written below so that it matches our internal database.

Role options are: Applicant; Primary PI; Co-PI; Reporting Contact; Secondary Reporting Contact; IRB Contact; Finance Contact; Collaborator; Contact for Contracting (e.g., grant manager or research administrator); Other (please specify role or title).

If you are the applicant and a PI (or another role), indicate so by adding yourself as an applicant and then again as a PI. Complete and accurate assignment of collaborator roles will help the initiative to communicate with members of the research team more efficiently. [First Name; Last Name; Role or Title; Email Address].
You can enter up to 10 contacts.

PI Certification

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

[Yes; No]

Demographic Information

J-PAL is collecting information about all project teams, including demographic information, to better understand and support our research network. As the applicant, we kindly ask that you send the language and link included below to all PIs/Co-PIs on your proposal research team. Provide your proposal name and each member's role (as you listed them on the application) when you send out the blurb. Please complete the "Team Member and Roles" section first before sending out the email(s) so that your team members are already in the system. Completion of this step is required for all PIs on your research team. Please note that each PI/co-PI only needs to complete this survey once. If they have already submitted the survey for a previous application and it has not changed, they do not need to fill it out again.

If you have any technical problems with completing this step please email help@povertyactionlab.org or the JOI and SPI teams directly.

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

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

Demographic Information Confirmation

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

Project Details

Full Title of Proposal *[30 words max/200 characters]*

Funding Amount

Amount of requested funding in USD.

National Location

In which country or countries will your research or travel take place? *[Dropdown]*

Past and Future Submission to J-PAL

Have you submitted or do you plan to submit this LOI and proposal to any other J-PAL Initiative RFP, including in any previous JOI or SPI rounds of funding? [Yes, I have submitted or plan to submit this proposal to another initiative/Yes, I have submitted this proposal previously to this initiative/No, I have not submitted or do not plan to submit this proposal to another initiative] *[Yes; No]*

Details about Past and Future Submissions

If you answered "Yes" to the above, please include the following:
1. Initiative(s), year/season of RFP, and the name of the LOI/proposal you submitted or plan to submit. (e.g., GI Spring 2019 Using Mobile Phones to Improve Service Delivery).
2. Are the PI team, context, and research question the same as in the previously submitted or soon to be submitted proposal?

3. If this proposal is for a similar project, but would be using funds for something different, please explain the difference in terms of what research you're going to be conducting and how you're using the budget.

[350 words max]

Abstract

Write a study abstract, including the project description, research question, and intervention or treatment to be evaluated. Discuss the project's technical design, what is going to happen during the project, the practical value of your project, the conceptual value of your research, and the distributional implications of your work. Provide context about proposed partners and a timeline. Please note that this abstract will be added to the JOI and/or SPI's webpages if the project receives funding. *[200 words max]*

Research Focus Areas and/or Cross-Cutting Themes

Please indicate which JOI and/or SPI focus areas or themes your proposal relates to; these are described in detail in the RFP materials.
Options:
- Job Creation
- Training and Matching
- Social Protection
- Identifying which soft skills matter, for whom, and under what conditions
- Leveraging soft skills to increase the effectiveness of broader labor markets and private sector development policies and programs
- Do soft skills interventions require tackling other constraints to be effective?
- Improving implementation quality and scalability of soft skills intervention.

Initiative Alignment

Please briefly describe how the project aligns with JOI and/or SPI's research focus areas and/or cross-cutting themes, as described in the RFP materials, initiative research agenda, or initiative review paper. *[250 words max]*

Intervention Description

What is the intervention that you are evaluating (for example evaluating a training program, a government roll-out, etc.)? What are the key components of the program, and what outcomes are you hoping to measure? *[200 words max]*

Contribution to Knowledge and Policy

In what way will this project expand the evidence base on soft skills for workforce and business development and/or livelihoods interventions? Please describe what is novel about your research and how your findings will contribute to existing literature. *[200 words max]*

AI Technology

Please describe the AI technology that will be used in your intervention. In your response, explain the type of model or system involved, how it fits into the broader intervention (if applicable), and the extent to which humans will be included in any decision process. Please also describe any technology-specific risks you have identified and the safeguards you will put in place to manage them. If not applicable, please write "N/A." *[200 words max]*