MEL Proposal Guidelines

This document contains an [Overview](#_heading=h.30j0zll), [Budget Guidelines](#_heading=h.1fob9te), and an [Application Checklist](#_heading=h.3znysh7) for early-stage randomized impact evaluations. In the subsequent sections, we will refer to all types of early-stage randomized impact evaluations as “Pilot studies”. Please read this document carefully before submitting your proposal.

## Overview

**Submission instructions:**All applicants must submit their proposals through our [submission form](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfv270nYyC2vhTrORlLNKl3dPMK-CRhNuX_TYoKc7F9mPi-VQ/viewform). Materials for a complete application can be found in the [Application Checklist](#_heading=h.3znysh7) section of this document. Applications are open on a rolling basis and will be reviewed every few weeks. If a quicker response is required, please write to us at mel\_morocco@povertyactionlab.org, and we will get back to you as soon as possible.

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 a 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.

**You should apply as a pilot if the funded work lays the groundwork for a future randomized evaluation to:**

* test the efficacy of an intervention or an evaluation design, and acquire data that is qualitative or quantitative in nature, e.g. measuring take up, and/or
* serve as a diagnostic to reveal the behavior of specific stakeholders, barriers to technology adoption or market access, or the potential for profitability of an intervention under “real world” conditions, and/or
* facilitate 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:

* clearly define a research question and explain how the pilot will assess 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 by the MEL.

**Funding per Pilot award:** limited to US$75,000 or less. Please be aware that if you need to transfer MEL funds to your host institution outside of Morocco, instead of disbursing them directly through UM6P and MEL within Morocco, a 10% withholding tax will be applied prior to disbursement, in accordance with Moroccan tax regulations. For example, proposals requesting US$75,000 will incur a 10% tax, resulting in a total of US$67,500 after tax. Please account for this in your budget submission.

**Timeline*:*** Funding requests should not extend beyond **June 30, 2027**.

## Budget Guidelines

It is your responsibility to ensure 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[[1]](#footnote-0)**.

**Guidelines for completing a Pilot proposal budget:**Please provide a comprehensive project budget using the [Budget Template](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1glktTQ_JQaXUuKSxQXiW1VyKk_nm_H0o/edit?gid=267464933#gid=267464933), and detailing unit costs for both staff and non-staff expenses. If you require further information on typical costs in Morocco, please feel free to contact us. To reduce processing time, please keep the following in mind:

* **Institute to Receive Award (ITRA) Requirements**: Pilot grants are either disbursed directly through MEL or provided under an award from UM6P to the grantee’s host institution.
* **IRB Requirements:**
  + The protection of human subjects is of prime concern when implementing research projects. As such, appropriate protocol Institutional Review Board approvals or exemptions are required to be in place prior to a subaward being issued and research commencing. MEL requires that the reviewing IRB have [IORG status](https://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/register-irbs-and-obtain-fwas/irb-registration/irb-organizations/index.html) with the US Office of Human Protections. An IRB’s status can be found by consulting the database of IORGs [here](https://ohrp.cit.nih.gov/search/search.aspx?styp=bsc).
  + For commercial IRBs, MEL recommends [Heartland](https://heartlandirb.org/) and [Solutions](https://www.solutionsirb.com/), which provide review of international research and satisfy MEL's IRB requirements; fees can be found on their respective websites. If the project is exempt from IRB approval, we will need the exemption status but no other action is required.
* Please refer to the [Award Requirements and Setup Process](https://docs.google.com/document/d/11mziwsFFbsxJuOAktQogrq5pq5iWIhCS/edit#heading=h.gjdgxs) document to review all of MEL’s award requirements in detail as part of preparing your submission.
* MEL prefers that research teams request follow-up funding from us directly. If your matchmade project is progressing to a full-scale RCT and requires further financial support, please contact us before approaching external funders. If you have received research co-funding from external sources, please reach out to mel\_morocco@povertyactionlab.org for steps on completing the proposal and budget applications.
* Applications must include a brief budget narrative document detailing the major costs within the budget in addition to an Excel sheet detailing the staff and non staff expected costs.
  + We also strongly encourage applicants to include budget notes in their budget Excel sheet, specifying input costs for line items within the budget. For personnel costs, please provide a detailed breakdown of salary rates per hour, week, or month, along with information about the institute’s policy on employment benefits. 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.
* Applicants should review J-PAL best practices on questionnaire design and data collection/management in the [J-PAL Research Protocol Checklist](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1_EKbboOdCyjIFNzm6SP_F9sst1YKR8Me/view?usp=drive_link), to ensure they have budgeted for expenses associated with piloting and surveyor training, survey translation, field spot checks, and back checking.
* **PLEASE NOTE:** In case this award is funded to the institute to receive the award through a subaward from UM6P, it will be performed on a cost-reimbursable basis. If your ITRA is unable to accept a cost-reimbursable model due to low liquidity/financial concerns, UM6P might consider switching to a milestone payment model. However, please note that UM6P reserves the right to employ the milestone payment model on a case-by-case basis when absolutely necessary and whether the ITRA meets UM6P’s criteria for this model. It is important that you let MEL staff know as soon as possible the financial status of your ITRA so that we can effectively guide you through the process.

Allowable Direct and Indirect Costs:

* **Please note that MEL does not cover PI salaries. However, to better support independent non-profit organizations or universities based in low- or middle-income countries, we have applied in the** [**Budget Template**](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1glktTQ_JQaXUuKSxQXiW1VyKk_nm_H0o/edit?gid=267464933#gid=267464933) **an increased indirect cost rate of 15%, as opposed to the standard 10%.**
* 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** (e.g., if texting fees are requested as an implementation cost, the budget narrative should include a breakdown of how many texts are planned, the estimated cost per texts, number of people on a given campaign, etc).
* Universities in high-income countries (according to the World Bank classification) can charge up to 10% in indirect costs, applied to total direct costs, as explained above.
* 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 Request for Proposals 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.

## Application Checklist

Complete all required application materials and submit them through our [submission form](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfv270nYyC2vhTrORlLNKl3dPMK-CRhNuX_TYoKc7F9mPi-VQ/viewform). **Please limit your upload to two documents: a compiled PDF (that includes your proposal and supporting materials) and an Excel sheet for your requested budget.** All templates for these documents are listed below.

1. **Proposal Narrative:** The proposal narrative and guidance pertaining to it can be found in the [application form](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1BiPxHlkCgROMuJlt2pcBydmXdBk6otdP/edit). As part of the proposal narrative, you will be required to include a research timeline.
2. **Proposal Budget**: Carefully review the Budget Guidelines in this document, then fill the [Budget template](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1glktTQ_JQaXUuKSxQXiW1VyKk_nm_H0o/edit?gid=2141956802#gid=2141956802), which must be saved as a single Excel file with the title: [PI Last Name, First Name][Budget].xls(x).
3. **Budget Narrative:** Detail the major costs within the budget, referring to the Budget Guidelines above. This document is required in addition to the Proposal Budget; notes included in the Excel sheet do not suffice.
4. **UM6P “**[**Know Your Client**](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1SIGkhb-VAmH8C_jylXe-ee2u8xK5_4PT/edit#heading=h.gjdgxs)**” Document:** UM6P requires this document as part of their background check to assess whether the ITRA is eligible to receive MEL's research funds.
5. **Letter(s) of Support**: Please obtain a letter of support from the following:
6. a letter/document stating the proposed grant host institution’s approval of the proposal materials.
7. letters from each implementing and research partner, indicating the details of their commitment to partner on the pilot.

1. If the organization allows you to submit your proposal without such a letter (due to time constraints or some other reason), please describe this in the notes section. Please note that this applies to all projects, including those going through J-PAL and IPA offices. You should contact them in advance to make sure you are aware of their policies for proposal review and give them enough time to meet the proposal deadline. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)