

SOCIAL POLICY RESEARCH INITIATIVE (SPRI) REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS (RFP)

PROPOSAL INSTRUCTIONS

This document outlines the steps to submit a proposal. Please also review the “Evaluation Criteria” document for how we make funding decisions, and the “Grant Requirements” document for what’s required if the proposal is funded.

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RFP OVERVIEW

FOCUS OF THE RFP

The J-PAL North America Social Policy Research Initiative (SPRI), is calling for randomized evaluations that contribute to J-PAL's mission to reduce poverty by ensuring policy is informed by rigorous evidence. This could include randomized evaluations across a broad range of sectors including but not limited to consumer finance, children and families, crime, education, employment, energy and environment, household finance, housing and homelessness, labor, employment and training, etc. with the exception of proposals related to health.

We particularly welcome proposals that incorporate research questions involving racial equity. For proposals focusing on racial equity please refer to the "Advancing Racial and Ethnic Equity" section in the "Evaluation Criteria Document"

RFP TIMELINE

SPRI Initiative RFP Opens	September 27, 2023
Initiative RFP Full Proposals Due	January 17, 2024
Funding Decisions Announced	Week of March 18, 2024

Send all proposal materials to NA_RFP@povertyactionlab.org by 5pm ET on January 17, 2024. Questions? Email initiative staff, NA_RFP@povertyactionlab.org.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

PROPOSAL ELIGIBILITY

J-PAL North America funds randomized evaluations, or randomized controlled trials (RCTs), in the United States. These include:

- Randomized evaluations of policies or programs
- Randomized correspondence or audit studies (ex: "[Systemic Discrimination Among Large U.S. Employers](#)")
- Re-analyses of past instances of randomization (ex: "[When Scale and Replication Work: Learning from Summer Youth Employment Experiments](#)")
- Lab experiments, only when part of a larger evaluation involving a real-world intervention (see above criteria). Pure lab experiments are not eligible for J-PAL North America funding.

J-PAL North America will fund non-randomized work under pilot and travel/development funding (see [grant criteria](#) below) if there is a clear link to how it will lead to an RCT

The same proposal (or different versions of the same proposal) may not be submitted to multiple J-PAL North America RFPs simultaneously unless given explicit permission to do so.

RESEARCHER ELIGIBILITY

J-PAL affiliates, J-PAL post-doctoral fellows, and researchers invited by J-PAL North America to participate in the initiative (invited researchers) are eligible to apply for funding of any type. Applicants may submit a maximum of three proposals per 12-month period to a single initiative. PI and co-PI status are counted towards this limit.

GRADUATE STUDENTS

To apply, graduate students must meet the following criteria:

- They have a **J-PAL affiliate** or **invited researcher** on their thesis committee. The researcher does not need to be based at the same university as the student..
 - Pre-thesis PhD students may apply if they anticipate an affiliate or invited researcher will be on their thesis committee and the affiliate will supervise the proposed project.
- To apply for full funding, graduate students must have previously received a grant from J-PAL for the same evaluation or have documented evidence of successful piloting activities. Note, for graduate students the total amount of funding they may receive across time is capped at \$50,000 per initiative, regardless of the number of projects funded.

PROPOSAL TYPES

FULL RESEARCH PROJECTS

Full research projects are typically awarded \$150,000 to \$250,000, with a **maximum budget of \$400,000. The award period may be up to three years.** A full project proposal is one where applicants:

- Can propose a clear and well-developed research question, with references to previous literature
- Can provide detailed randomization design, power calculations, and can indicate outcomes of interest

Full project proposals may be submitted for an ongoing study that has already begun without J-PAL North America funding.

Please see [“Required Documents”](#) for more information.

PILOT STUDIES

Pilot studies may be awarded a **maximum of \$50,000. The award period may be up to three years.** A pilot proposal is one where applicants:

- Seek to answer a particular research question but the design and implementation require further testing and development before a full project launches
- Can clearly explain how the pilot will lead to a randomized evaluation in the future, although random assignment does not necessarily need to occur during the pilot
- Pilot funds may also be used for activities intended to facilitate access to administrative data for designing or conducting an RCT.

Please see “[Required Documents](#)” for more information.

ADD-ON-FUNDING

Add-on-funding may be awarded to projects previously funded by any J-PAL North America initiative. Funding requests are capped at **\$400,000 minus the amount of all funding previously awarded to the evaluation (i.e. if a proposal previously received \$150,000 from J-PAL North America, add-on-funding is capped at \$250,000)**. The award period may be up to **three years**. Add-on-funding proposals may seek to:

- Add additional sites or treatment arms to an implemented evaluation
- Support additional activities on ongoing or past RCTs, such as follow-ups to measure long-term effects.
- Extend the project timeline or cover additional costs due to implementation challenges

RESEARCH MANAGEMENT SUPPORT (RMS)

Researchers are strongly encouraged to apply for Research Management Support (RMS) when submitting their proposals. RMS provides short-term, customized, and expert support to help design and launch a randomized evaluation for researchers in the J-PAL network. Support may include activities such as project management, stakeholder management, technical support, and staff recruitment. More information can be found on the [website](#), or by contacting NA_RMS@povertyactionlab.org.

TRAVEL/PROPOSAL DEVELOPMENT GRANTS

Researchers may be awarded a **maximum of \$5,000 for one year**. Grants are to be used for early-stage research activities which may include travel, exploring access to administrative data, or other costs incurred while conducting field work. Travel/proposal development grants are **paid by direct reimbursement to the PI and cannot cover any activity that requires review by an IRB**.

To apply, please submit the [J-PAL North America Travel/Project Development Grant Application](#).

HOW TO APPLY FOR PILOT OR FULL FUNDING

REQUIRED DOCUMENTS

1. Cover sheet

2. 5-page narrative

- Please save the narrative as a Word document, titled [PI Name]_[Topic Name].doc(x).
- The narrative may not exceed five pages in length.

- The narrative should address each of the points listed in the “Proposal Evaluation Criteria” document. If necessary to fully address the guiding questions on Ethics and Risks, please include an addendum (details under 2A).
- The narrative should begin with an abstract of 150-200 words. The abstract should include information on the research question, hypotheses, intervention, (potential) sample size, and outcomes.
 - For full studies, power calculations must be included in order to be considered for funding. For pilot studies, “back-of-the-envelope” power calculations are required.
- References to previous literature are required to provide context for your research question. Chicago Author-Date style is suggested. References are not included in page count.

2A. Optional: Potential ethical risks

- If included, please respond to the following questions found [here](#).
- Please save the addendum in the same document as the full narrative, using the same formatting conventions. Label the relevant section, “Addendum on Ethics and Risks.”
- The addendum may not exceed 1 page in length, for a total combined document of no more than six pages.

2B. Advancing Racial and Ethnic Equity [Optional: Applicable to proposals focused on racial equity]

- If included, please respond to the following questions found [here](#).
- Please save the addendum in the same document as the full narrative, using the same formatting conventions. Label the relevant section “Addendum on Advancing Racial and Ethnic Equity.”
- The addendum may not exceed 1 page in length, for a total combined document of no more than six pages (seven if also including addendum 2A).

3. Budget

- Please upload as an Excel workbook, titled *[PI Name]_[Topic Name].xls(x)*
- Please carefully review the “instructions” tab of the budget template for guidance on what to include in the proposal budget.
 - In particular, please note that J-PAL North America will not cover the PI, co-PI, or co-Investigator effort or activities related to the day-to-day operations of the implementing partnership.

4. Budget narrative

- Please save the budget narrative as a Word document, titled **[PI Name]_Budget Narrative_[Topic Name].doc(x)**.
- Please provide justification for the expenses requested in your budget.

5. Letter(s) of support

- Full projects are required to provide a letter of support from implementation partners. Applicants for pilot funding are encouraged, but not required, to submit letters of support.
- Letters of support should indicate willingness to share cost data, when appropriate.

6. Optional: Questionnaire for Research Management Support (RMS)

- Fill out the questionnaire [here](#) if you are interested in applying for Research Management Support.

8. Graduate students only: Letter of support from the J-PAL affiliate or invited researcher on your thesis committee

- Pre-thesis students are required to submit a formal letter of confirmation from an affiliate or invited researcher that explicitly states: “I am actively responsible for supervising this project/research and anticipate being on the student’s thesis committee.”
- Students with a thesis committee in place should submit a letter in which the J-PAL affiliate or invited researcher attests to being on the committee.
- Pilot or full proposals submitted by graduate students must also reference the student’s prior travel/proposal development grant and/or document successful piloting activities.

ADDITIONAL STEPS FOR OFF-CYCLE PROPOSALS

In rare cases, proposals facing time constraints may apply for funding off-cycle. Off-cycle proposals will face the same scrutiny as proposals submitted during the RFP round and **must include a justification for off-cycle submission**. Examples of acceptable justifications may include a pressing policy or program implementation timeline (ex. implementation must align with the academic year) or other constraints outside of the research team’s control. Acceptable justifications do not include timeline changes under the research team’s control or other internal factors.

REVIEW PROCESS

Proposals are reviewed by two peer reviewers from J-PAL’s academic network. After peer review, the Social Policy Research Initiative (SPRI) Review Board consisting of Lawrence Katz, Alicia Sasser Modestino and Judd Kessler, reviews each proposal and makes all funding decisions. All applicants will receive redacted comments from the referees and the Review Board.

IMPORTANT NOTES

- Applicants **must have IRB approval or exemption** before MIT can establish a subaward agreement to set up funding.
- MIT requires an **official acceptance of the proposal and budget by your institution to set up the subaward**. Applicants are encouraged to submit the proposal to their office of

sponsored programs or contracts department prior to the award decision to avoid delays and ensure that your institute will accept your proposal and proposal budget.

- Please see the [Grant Requirements](#) document for more detailed information about post-award requirements.