

DigiFI Africa Request for Proposals: Proposal Development Grant Application Guide The Digital Identification and Finance Initiative in Africa (DigiFI Africa)

OVERVIEW

All J-PAL research affiliates, DigiFI invited researchers, J-PAL postdocs, African scholars, and PhD students with a J-PAL affiliate or invited researcher adviser are eligible to apply for a proposal development grant¹.

African Scholars: Resident African Scholars (Researchers who have completed their PhD (in economics or a related field) and who are based at an academic institution based in sub-Saharan Africa) AND non-resident African Scholars (researchers who (a) have completed high school in Africa, (b) have completed their PhD in economics or a related field, and (c) are based in an academic institution outside of Africa) are eligible to apply for the pilot grants. Targeted mentorship will be provided to African Scholars who receive funds from DigiFI. Mentors can include any J-PAL affiliate or Invited Researcher. African Scholars who do not currently have a mentor can apply to be matched with one after their projects are selected by DigiFI Africa.

Please note: Researchers who have previously received funding from J-PAL and are more than two months late on any reports to any J-PAL Initiative will not be eligible for funding, and may be ineligible for funding across J-PAL initiatives. In such cases, researchers are still able to submit proposals to DigiFI Africa, but note that the proposal will not be submitted for review until all reporting requirements on previous J-PAL Initiative awards are up-to-date.

Proposal Development Grant: Proposal Guidelines

Proposal Development grants are intended to facilitate preliminary exploratory research, and funding typically supports costs related to researcher travel, meetings with implementing partners, other activities to develop/strengthen relationships with governments/implementers, and activities to help understand the policy goals and constraints. Please note, Proposal Development grants may also be used for activities intended to 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.

The expectation is that Proposal Development funds will be used to support costs related to developing a proposal for a pilot or full-scale randomized evaluation during a subsequent call for proposals. These projects usually last for less than 6 months.

Funding per Proposal Development Grant award: a maximum of \$15,000. The typical grant is \$5,000 for one researcher. PIs should use the specific budget template in their submission (see details

¹ J-PAL affiliates, J-PAL postdocs, invited researchers, African scholars and eligible PhD students are limited to being named on a maximum of three proposals to DigiFI Africa per 12-month period (either as PI or co-PI)



in the Budget Guidelines section, below).

Timeline: Grantees must complete their proposal development work and submit final reports within one year of receiving the award.

APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS

Many J-PAL initiatives, including DigiFI Africa, use an online portal for all proposal submissions, proposal reviews, invoice submissions, and grantee reporting. All proposal applications to DigiFI Africa are **reviewed on a rolling basis**.

Please note the following before beginning your application:

- Our portal works best in the latest version Google Chrome.
- If you already have an account but do not remember the password, please contact fc_help@povertyactionlab.org for help retrieving or resetting your password.
- If you do not have a J-PAL portal account and need one created, please complete [this form](#) and specify that you want an applicant account. Account creation normally takes no more than two business days; you will be asked to verify your email address and set a password. For further information and troubleshooting, please get in touch with fc_help@povertyactionlab.org. Your J-PAL portal account credentials will allow you to apply to or review for any J-PAL initiative. Please verify your eligibility by thoroughly reading the RFP overview. Ineligible applicants will be notified during LOI reviews and will not be invited to submit proposals.
- As this portal is new, you might experience some glitches. We apologize for any inconvenience. Please reach out to digifiafrica@povertyactionlab.org and fc_help@povertyactionlab.org if you face any issues.

To apply to DigiFI Africa's rolling RFP, you will first need to log in via our [online portal](#). Please navigate to the portal and follow the instructions to complete your login. Once you are logged into the portal, please [click here](#) to access DigiFI's letter of interest (LOI) form.

The DigiFI Africa team will notify you via the portal once we have reviewed your LOI and you are clear to begin your proposal. In the interim, to facilitate your proposal development, please refer to this document. It outlines all the information you will be asked to provide when submitting a full proposal. **However, please do not complete or submit this to DigiFI Africa for consideration until your LOI has been accepted.** All submissions will be made through the online platform.

The deadline for submissions is rolling until further notice.

NARRATIVE

In the narrative section of the online application you will be asked to provide:

1. A statement of the topic. This should clearly outline what you hope to learn in the proposal

development grant and how this could assist with informing a future pilot study or full randomized evaluation. If there is any survey component, please include the number of individuals surveyed.

2. A brief description of the implementing partner (or partners) you plan to work with for both program implementation and evaluation, including the history of the partnership, and any in-kind or financial support they have committed or provided to the project.
3. A discussion of the project's connection to the research topics outlined in [DigiFI Africa's framing paper](#).
4. A description of the potential risks (technical, logistical, political or COVID-related) and mitigation strategies.
5. A discussion of the other evaluation criteria (provided in the grant form on the portal), if not already addressed in the narrative.

BUDGET

Please submit a detailed project budget using the Excel templates available on our [Request for Proposals webpage](#). To reduce the processing time, please keep the following in mind when developing your budget:

1. Travel costs are generally paid as cost reimbursements. Proposal development grants are for a maximum of \$15,000. The typical grant is \$5,000 for one researcher.
2. Please include detailed budget notes in the column provided in the template.
3. International travel: We will not be able to reimburse you until your flights have been completed.
4. Per diem: A per diem stipend of \$20/day in-country can be claimed to cover food and miscellaneous expenses.
5. Survey and other in-country expenses: Proposal development grants can be used to cover expenses for in-country costs such as hiring enumerators, procuring translation or transcription services, developing instruments, and others.
6. Other expenses: Other expenses will be reimbursed upon submission of an expense report. Expenses should be supported by receipts whenever possible, and all expenses over \$50 must be supported by receipts. All expenses must be claimed within 30 days of completion of the project. Examples of these expenses are listed below:
 - a. Materials and Supplies,
 - b. PPE (Facemask, Sanitizer, Hand gloves) expense,
 - c. Local travel: In-country and getting to/from airports, and
 - d. Expenses related to the successful execution of the project with a strong motivation in notes
7. Medical insurance: All grantees are required to provide proof of emergency medical insurance coverage before travel. As many universities provide this to their students, faculty, and staff at no cost, this is not a reimbursable cost under this award.
8. Expenses not allowed: J-PAL is not able to cover travel or trip protection insurance, lost luggage insurance, incidental expenses, or grantees' time. In most cases, J-PAL is not able to

directly reimburse any individuals or organizations other than the grantees awarded the proposal development grant.

9. African Scholar's salaries: African Scholars, who apply for proposal development funding may include a salary to cover their own time in their budget. Any costs toward the salary of an African Scholar should be explained in the budget notes.
10. If required, please refer to our [budget guide](#).

LETTERS OF SUPPORT

Please provide the following letters of support along with your online application.

1. Government letters of support are encouraged but are not required for Proposal Development Grants. It is expected that researchers have started a conversation with Government Ministries and are interested in developing a relationship with these partners.
2. A letter from the receiving institution of the award is required to show that they have reviewed your proposal and accept your budget. If the organization allows you to submit your proposal without such a letter (due to time constraints or some other reason), please note this on the Proposal Cover Sheet (under the box for Receiving Institution).
3. To be eligible, PhD students must have a J-PAL affiliate or DigiFI Africa invited researcher on their thesis committee. This adviser must provide a letter of support and indicate willingness to remain involved in a supervisory role throughout the lifetime of the project.
4. African scholars are required to submit a mentor agreement from their mentor prior to the disbursement of funds. Agreements are not required for the application but will need to be submitted prior to the disbursement of funds. As mentioned, DigiFI will help match African scholars with mentors where required.

Applicants are encouraged to engage with the Initiative staff prior to the application deadline to discuss the general direction and feasibility of the proposed idea. DigiFI Africa is also committed to building partnerships and researchers are strongly encouraged to speak with Initiative staff.