SOCIAL PROTECTION INITIATIVE APPLICATION FORM AND INSTRUCTIONS

*Pilot Proposals: Round 3 (2024)*

## **INSTRUCTIONS**

Proposals for pilot funding consist of (i) an application form; (ii) a budget form (and related attachments); and (iii) letters of support. The required templates are available on the [SPI webpage](https://www.povertyactionlab.org/initiative/social-protection-initiative-spi) and should be submitted via our [online portal](https://jpal.force.com/portal/FGM_Portal__CommunitySignin?startURL=%2Fportal%2Fapex%2FFGM_Portal__CommunityApplication%3Fid%3D7013m000001dX22) by **5:00 PM ET on April 4, 2024**.

In past RFPs, SPI requested that applicants submit Expressions of Interest (EOIs) ahead of submitting full proposals. Starting in 2024, we are no longer requiring EOIs–our portal will be open only for full proposal submissions between February 5, 2024 and April 4, 2024.

In the interim, to facilitate your proposal development, we have posted this reference application document that outlines all required information that applicants will be asked to provide when submitting a proposal to SPI. You are welcome to begin drafting your proposal materials using this template, as the fields and content included in this reference document will be required in the [online portal system](https://jpal.force.com/portal/FGM_Portal__CommunitySignin?startURL=%2Fportal%2Fapex%2FFGM_Portal__CommunityApplication%3Fid%3D7013m000001dX22). Please do not complete or submit these reference documents to SPI for consideration.

Questions? Please reach out to [spi@povertyactionlab.org](mailto:spi@povertyactionlab.org).

## BASIC INFORMATION

On the **Basic Information** tab, you will be asked to complete the following information.

* Researcher eligible for SPI funding
* Funding eligibility category (options: J-PAL affiliate, EPoD faculty affiliate, invited researcher, Graduate student, J-PAL postdoc)
* Advisor of the graduate student applicant
  + If you are a graduate student, please indicate the J-PAL affiliate, EPoD faculty affiliate, or SPI invited researcher who serves as an advisor on your dissertation committee at your host university.
* Team members
  + Please identify project team members and their roles. We require at a minimum that the Primary PI and any co-PIs are listed.
* PI certification
  + You will be asked to make the following certification: I certify that any listed J-PAL or EPoD affiliates, J-PAL postdocs, and SPI invited researchers who are co-PIs on this project have agreed to be active, engaged, and responsive PIs dedicated to guaranteeing quality control on all aspects of this research; and that their participation in this project is not merely to provide access to resources and funding to other project team members who would be otherwise ineligible.
* Country/countries where research will take place
* Proposed project start and end dates
* Proposed subaward period of performance start and end dates
  + The period of performance is the time during which the institute that receives the award is able to submit invoices against awarded funds and may differ from your total anticipated project length.
* Funding requested ($)
* Previous Application(s) to J-PAL Initiatives
  + Have you submitted this or a related proposal to any J-PAL research initiative? If yes, please specify the initiative(s), year of RFP, and name of the proposal submitted.
  + If you have previously submitted this or a similar proposal to SPI: Are the PI team, context, and research question the same as in the previously submitted proposal?
* Expected subaward
  + Do you expect that you will need to set up any subawards for this project? Subawards are agreements with other organizations to perform a part of a research project, and may be established with a partner organization or any organization doing the field work. If you anticipate needing to set up subawards, please provide the name of the partner organization and the nature of the work.
* Institute holding IRB of record
  + If the project has not received an IRB exemption and IRB review is required, please indicate the current or expected IRB of record.
  + Please note: For all rounds of J-PAL funding starting October 1, 2022, and for all projects where data collection is supposed to start after January 1, 2023, all J-PAL initiatives and offices are requested to ensure that the project they fund or implement has been reviewed by an [IRB with status as an IRB Organization (IORG)](https://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/register-irbs-and-obtain-fwas/irb-registration/irb-organizations/index.html%22). An IRB’s status can be found by consulting the [database of IORGs.](https://ohrp.cit.nih.gov/search/search.aspx?styp=bsc)
  + If this proposal receives initiative funding, we will further ask that you submit:
    - All IRB approval(s) or exemption(s);
    - All IRB-approved protocols; and
    - Any IRB-approved consent forms.
  + The IRB approval must be held by the institution that enters into the subaward agreement with MIT. If the institution does not have their own IRB, they must engage the services of a commercial IRB to review and provide oversight for their research activities. J-PAL recommends these third party IRBs: [Brany](https://www.brany.com/) and [Heartland](https://heartlandirb.org/how.html). If the project is exempt from IRB approval, we will need the exemption status but no other action is required.
  + If your IRB of Record is not the same as your Institute to Receive Award (ITRA), we ask that you include the ITRA and the administrative PI at the ITRA on the IRB as a site and role. If you already have the approved IRB, please modify it to include the ITRA/PI as a site and role.
* IORG Certification
  + Is this IRB of Record IORG certified? Researchers must adhere to all local legal requirements, including obtaining local IRB approval and government research permits, where applicable. [Check if your IRB is IORG certified here](https://jpal.my.site.com/portal/apex/fgm_portal__communityapplication?Id=7013m000001dX22AAE&appId=006TV000003HxuoYAC&mode=edit&from=dashboard).

## MANAGE TEAM MEMBERS

On the **Manage Team Members** tab, you will be able to manage any project team member added through the **Basic Information** section.

## PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

On the **Partner Organizations** tab, you will be asked to add any implementation partners (including partners in charge of delivering the intervention and partners in charge of evaluating/conducting research on the intervention), scale-up partners, or co-funders. The form will ask you for contact information of the partner organizations and to share the amount received from co-funders.

## INSTITUTE TO RECEIVE AWARD

On the **Institute to Receive Award** tab, you will be asked to indicate the institute that will receive the award should the proposal be accepted. You will be requested to specify the amount of funding that this institute should receive, the PI associated with the institute, and the contact information of your primary contact at the institute. **Please note that MIT now requires that at least one project PI be based at or affiliated with the institutes any award funds are allocated to.**

## PROJECT DETAILS

On the **Project Details** tab, any section marked with an asterisk (\*) is required, and all required fields must be addressed in order to submit a proposal. Some fields are only required in certain circumstances; please follow the instructions, thoroughly read the cues, and access linked documentation as necessary.

Include a single-spaced response to prompts where applicable.

Any field that requests the upload of documentation supports multiple attachments; however, the file size limit for any single file is 2GB.

### Social Protection Initiative Focus Areas (\*)

Please indicate which SPI focus areas your proposal relates to; these are described in the [SPI Evidence Review](https://www.povertyactionlab.org/review-paper/research-directions-social-protection-low-and-middle-income-countries).

* **Options**:
  + Social Assistance: Designing programs aimed at addressing poverty and/or life-cycle challenges in low- and middle-income countries
  + Social Insurance: Insuring beneficiaries against shocks (e.g., economic, health, climatic) in low- and middle-income countries
  + Cross-Cutting Design and Implementation Issues: Identifying beneficiaries, addressing take-up challenges, and delivering benefits in low- and middle-income countries
  + Political Considerations: Examining how politics affects how social protection programs operate in low- and middle-income countries

### Abstract (\*)

Please write a 100-150-word abstract of the study. The abstract will be added to SPI’s webpage if the project receives funding.

### Policy Motivation (\*)

Please describe the policy problem that motivates this research and how it fits with the research priorities identified in the [SPI Evidence Review](https://www.povertyactionlab.org/review-paper/research-directions-social-protection-low-and-middle-income-countries). *(Recommended word count: 600 words)*

### Potential Policy Impact (\*)

Please provide a comment on whether and how the project has the potential to inform policy or program design, whether in this context or more broadly. *(Recommended word count: 200 words)*

### Target Population (\*)

Please describe the target population to be reached. *(Recommended word count: 100 words)*

### Intervention Details and Evaluation Design (\*)

Please describe the intervention or treatment to be evaluated and the evaluation design used in the study. *(Recommended word count: 1,000 words)*

### Outcomes and Measurement (\*)

Please describe the outcome variables and how you plan to measure them. *(Recommended word count: 200 words)*

### Potential Risks and Mitigation Strategies (\*)

Are there any technical, logistical, or political obstacles and risks that might threaten the completion of the study (for example, implementation capacity, government authorization, or other funding) and how does your team plan to address/overcome them? *(Recommended word count: 150 words)*

### Power Calculations (\*)

Please describe your power calculations for this study. *(Recommended word count: 300 words)*

### **Gender**[[1]](#footnote-0) **(\*)**

Please comment on whether the research proposal addresses gender issues in any way, including analysis disaggregated by gender. Please note that funded projects will be required to collect and report on gender-disaggregated data. *(Recommended word count: 75 words)*

### Marginalized Groups (\*)

Please comment on whether the research proposal addresses the concerns and needs of marginalized groups, including people with disabilities, indigenous communities, diverse SOGIESC[[2]](#footnote-1) communities, and children. Please note that funded projects targeting these groups will be required to report on data disaggregated by disability status, minority status, and child status. *(Recommended word count: 75 words)*

### Partnership Details (\*)

Please describe the implementing partner (or partners), the history of the partnership, the partner’s involvement in project activities, and any in-kind or financial support they have committed or provided to the project. Please include any potential risks to the partnership. *(Recommended word count: 125 words)*

## **POTENTIAL ETHICAL RISKS** (Optional)

All J-PAL initiatives rely on IRB approvals secured by the PIs for many of the ethical issues surrounding conduct of primary data collection and experimentation. For this reason, PIs on successful applications are required to secure an IRB approval before an award agreement can be signed with J-PAL.

The domain of an IRB review, however, does not include all ethical considerations. For this reason, we are providing an opportunity for the PIs to discuss–if applicable–any issues that they feel warrant discussion but that are not covered by their existing or planned IRB review. Specifically, please consider whether you have any relevant information to provide for any or all of the following questions. It is fine to leave this section partly or entirely blank; please detail only issues that are not or will not be covered by your IRB that you feel are potentially important enough for the review committee to be aware of.

### Broader Ethical Considerations

If the underlying intervention you are studying will not be reviewed by the IRB approval that you have secured or will secure (because, for example, the intervention is being implemented by outside entities not for research purposes), then please discuss any relevant ethical considerations around the intervention, taking into account the benefits to society of doing this research vs. the risks to subjects.

### Potential Harms to Research Participants

Are there potential harms to research participants in the process of data collection and/or research procedures (for example, discomfort to being asked certain questions or breach of confidentiality), that are not part of an existing or planned IRB approval? If so, what are they, and what proactive measures will be taken to assess, monitor, and mitigate/prevent any such potential risks?

### Potential Harms to Research Staff

Are there potential harms to research staff from conducting the data collection (such as, for example, exposure to political violence, unusual levels of a communicable disease, emotional wellbeing from surveying about difficult matters)? If so, what are they? Has the team taken proactive measures to assess, monitor, and mitigate/prevent any such potential risks?

### Contractual Limitations on Results Reporting

Are there any contractual limitations on the ability of the researchers to report the results of the study? If so, what were those restrictions, and who were they from?

### Additional Considerations

Beyond anything discussed and/or disclosed in existing or planned IRB submissions, are there any other ethical considerations that you feel are important for the Board to be aware that you have already thought of these, and incorporated in your work?

## BUDGET

### Budget Templates (\*)

Please submit a detailed project budget using the Excel templates available [online](https://www.povertyactionlab.org/initiative/social-protection-initiative-request-proposals). To reduce the processing time, please keep the following in mind when developing your budget:

1. If there is co-funding for the project, you must complete both the “Total Project Budget” and the “SPI Budget” templates. Please note that these templates are formatted specifically for the SPI application in our portal; we kindly ask that you do not remove the formatting or create new columns.
2. Awards are paid on a cost-reimbursable basis. Project invoices can be submitted right after the contract with MIT has been finalized.
3. Applications must include budget notes in the column provided in the budget template, detailing the major costs within the budget. For example, “Travel Costs” should include a breakdown of how many trips are planned, the estimated cost per trip, etc. “Field Costs” should include a breakdown of the number of respondents, cost per respondent, etc.
4. Universities in high-income countries, generally defined as [OECD member countries](http://www.oecd.org/about/membersandpartners/list-oecd-member-countries.htm), can charge up to 10% in indirect costs, applied to total direct costs. Independent 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.
5. We understand that the cap on overhead or indirect costs under SPI 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 notes.
6. Assets, such as computers or any other equipment purchases should include notes with 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. However, please note that depending on the funding your grant gets, asset purchase might not be allowed. You will be notified to submit adjustments later in the process if your grant is selected.
7. Unallowable costs include those labeled as “incidental,” “miscellaneous,” or “contingency.” Any costs for rent should be explained in the budget notes.
8. SPI research funds are unable to fund any program implementation costs.
9. Please note that SPI generally does not cover salaries for PIs based in high-income countries. For PIs based in low- or middle-income countries (LMICs), up to $8,000 per year may be requested for each LMIC PI in the pilot proposal, but the total budgeted amount for LMIC researcher time should not exceed an amount equivalent to 25% of the total budget per year. However, in exceptional cases, such as where there is no primary data collection, one can motivate a deviation from these thresholds. Expenses with PI salaries are subject to RB approval.
10. It is your responsibility that your budget follows your host institution’s policies for costs. As part of your proposal, you must submit a Letter of Transmission from the Institute to Receive Award (ITRA) that states that they have reviewed your proposal and accepted your budget. Please see detailed instructions below. Please note that this applies to all projects, including those going through J-PAL and IPA offices. You should contact J-PAL and IPA offices in advance to make sure you are aware of their policies for proposal review.

### Budget Narrative (\*)

Please justify the expenses outlined in your budget in a Word document with the title [PI Last Name, First Name][Budget Narrative].doc(x). You will be asked to submit this document in our portal. Please note that the document is required in addition to the Proposal Budget–i.e., notes included in the Excel sheet do not suffice.

### Allocation of External Funding (\*)

If you have other pending awards for this project, please tell us how you plan to allocate the funds in case you receive all of these requested awards. Is J-PAL funding sufficient to run the project, or is the project contingent on whether or not additional funding is secured?

### Letter of Transmission (\*)

Applicants must provide a letter from the receiving institution of the award to show that they have reviewed your proposal and accept your budget. Please follow the MIT approved language for the Letter of Transmission below:

**(On ITRA letterhead)**

<ITRA> is pleased to support <NAME OF 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, they are responsible for the implementation of this project in accordance with this proposal and with appropriate research and data protection practices. Please contact them with any concerns which may arise related to project implementation.

## LETTERS OF SUPPORT

Please provide the following letters of support:

### Letter(s) of Support from Implementing Partner(s)

While only full projects are required to provide a letter of support from their implementing partner, applicants for pilot funding are encouraged to submit such letters if available.

### Letter of Support from J-PAL or EPoD Faculty Affiliate or Invited Researcher (Graduate Students Only)

PhD students are required to include a letter of support from a J-PAL affiliate, EPoD faculty affiliate, or SPI invited researcher who is an advisor on their dissertation committee at their host university. [[3]](#footnote-2) The letter should indicate the advisor’s willingness to remain involved over the project’s lifetime. If the student is pre-thesis, the letter should state “I am actively responsible for supervising this project/research and anticipate being on the student’s thesis committee.” Graduate students who are applying for pilot or full funding must also include documented evidence of successful preparatory activities. Please note that in some cases, due to restrictions at the institution that will receive the funding awarded, the advisor may be asked to add his or her name to the subaward and IRB documents.

## SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS

Please submit your application via J-PAL’s [online portal](https://jpal.force.com/portal/FGM_Portal__CommunitySignin?startURL=%2Fportal%2Fapex%2FFGM_Portal__CommunityApplication%3Fid%3D7013m000001dX22). The deadline for submissions is **5:00 PM ET on April 4, 2024**.

## REQUIREMENTS

If your proposal is accepted for award, the actual funds will be provided under a subaward from MIT to the Institute to Receive Award indicated on the **Institute to Receive Award** tab. This will require, in addition to your proposal:

1. A 1-2-page summary of the research being conducted, written for a general audience;
2. The IRB approvals or exemptions as needed for your project along with the IRB approved protocol and copies of any IRB approved consent forms and survey instruments.
   1. Please note that J-PAL 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. Therefore, for all rounds of J-PAL funding starting October 1, 2022, and for all projects where data collection started after January 1, 2023, all initiatives and offices are requested to ensure that the project they fund or implement has been reviewed by an IRB with status as an IRB Organization (IORG). An IRB’s status can be found by consulting the database of IORGs [here](https://ohrp.cit.nih.gov/search/search.aspx?styp=bsc). If you do not have access to an IRB or ethics review committee at your institution(s) that has IORG status, there are external, commercial IRBs, such as [Brany](https://www.brany.com/) or [Heartland IRB](https://heartlandirb.org/), that you can use.
3. If your selected Institute to Receive Award has not had contracts with MIT previously, they will need to complete a number of additional steps before any contract can be negotiated between MIT and your Institute to Receive Award. Steps include obtaining a [Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) number](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1oWurD5gX2sdK7YVWN0eU6zVEFcvoUJXG/view?usp=share_link) from [SAM.gov](https://sam.gov/), filling in MIT’s Subrecipient questionnaire ([domestic](https://ras.mit.edu/document/subrecipient-profile-questionnaire-form) or [foreign](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1zhNMS7DSsG7rM72TGjaJj77qxalZ2bM0/edit?usp=share_link&ouid=114630952722754683954&rtpof=true&sd=true)), and completing registration in MIT’s supplier portal. Additionally, MIT might require additional documents including the Institute to Receive Award’s financial audits. **These steps can take some time to complete so please start this process early**.

## PROCESS

We aim to set up the subaward within 60-75 days of receiving all your forms. Assuming IRB approval is in place, we set the period of the award to start from the start date indicated on the submitted proposal. The process MIT follows for these awards is:

1. The SPI Review Board sends an official award notification letter.
2. If not already submitted, J-PAL requests your institution’s approval of the proposal, your institutional IRB approval, a research summary, and, if your Institute to Receive Award is not a subaward partner with MIT, the additional forms needed to establish them as a subaward partner.
3. MIT establishes a subaward to the Institute to Receive Award.
4. MIT establishes communication directly with subawardee regarding contract execution and completion.
5. Institute to Receive Award can begin to send invoices to MIT for expenses incurred during the award period of performance. These will be paid on a cost reimbursable basis.

## EVALUATION CRITERIA

| Academic Contribution | Does the study make a significant contribution toward advancing knowledge in the field? Does it answer new questions or introduce novel methods, measures, or interventions? Is there academic relevance? How does the study compare with the existing body of research? Does the research strategy provide a bridge between a practical experiment and underlying economic theories? |
| --- | --- |
| Policy Relevance | Does the study address questions crucial to understanding pressing issues on social protection in low- and middle-income countries? Does it address the priority questions outlined in the [SPI Evidence Review](https://www.povertyactionlab.org/review-paper/research-directions-social-protection-low-and-middle-income-countries)? Will results from the intervention have broader implications? How, if at all, will the “lessons learned” have relevance beyond this test case? Is there demand from policymakers for more/better information to influence their decisions in this area? Is there potential for the implementing partner to scale up this intervention? |
| Technical Design | Does the research design appropriately answer the questions outlined in the proposal? Are there threats that could compromise the validity of results? If so, does the proposal sufficiently address those threats? What changes could the researchers make to improve the design? |
| Project Viability | Is the relationship with the implementing partner strong and likely to endure through the entire study? What is the credibility and policy influence of the implementing partner? Are there any other logistical or political obstacles that might threaten the completion of the study, for example, government authorization or Human Subjects review? For pilots, do researchers describe how piloting activities would inform a full-scale randomized evaluation? |
| Value of Research | Is the cost of the study commensurate with the value of expected lessons learned? Does the study leverage funding from other sources? |

1. The requirements in this and the following question are outlined in the [SPI RFP Overview](https://www.povertyactionlab.org/initiative/social-protection-initiative-request-proposal) document under the “Grant Conditions” section. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. SOGIESC stands for sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. 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. Applicants who received travel/proposal development funding as graduate students but have since moved to another institution may only apply for funding to continue that same project, and may not apply for funding for unrelated projects unless they have since become a J-PAL affiliate, EPoD faculty affiliate, or SPI invited researcher. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)