

# Application Form and Instructions: J-PAL North America RFP

Round VII – Winter 2017

*J-PAL North America (J-PAL NA) funds randomized evaluations of social policies in the region. J-PAL NA is now calling for proposals from J-PAL affiliates, J-PAL post-docs, and a list of pre-selected researchers, for both pilot studies and full research projects. For this round of funding, proposals are due by **5:00pm EST on Friday, January 13, 2017.***

**Background:** The creation and dissemination of rigorous empirical evidence is an essential ingredient for high-quality academic research and effective public policy. Policymakers at all levels of government, as well as in the private sector, are constantly proposing or considering new policies. Yet they are often hampered by a lack of evidence on the efficacy of existing programs or the potential for alternatives. Numerous policy solutions may be proposed that appear to be based on sound theory, but few are based on credible empirical research.

J-PAL NA will fund randomized impact evaluations that can provide valuable insights for learning which policies work best, and which are most cost-effective in achieving their goals.

**Focus:** This RFP welcomes proposals in any sector that, broadly defined, relates to J-PAL's mission: reducing poverty by ensuring that policy is based on scientific evidence. This could include RCTs across a wide range of sectors, including consumer finance, crime, education, environment, government efficiency, labor, employment and training, etc.<sup>1</sup> However, as we have a separate U.S. Health Care Delivery Initiative, we are asking applicants who are interested in submitting proposals related to health policy to apply to the U.S. Health Care Delivery RFP available at [www.povertyactionlab.org/HCDI](http://www.povertyactionlab.org/HCDI).

The geographic scope for this RFP is Canada and the United States. (Please see J-PAL LAC for J-PAL affiliates' work in Latin America and the Caribbean, including Mexico: [www.povertyactionlab.org/LAC](http://www.povertyactionlab.org/LAC))

**Funds:** J-PAL North America anticipates conducting two General RFPs per year (in addition to taking off-cycle requests).

**Proposal types:** Three types of proposals will be considered:

- 1) **Full Research Projects** (typically \$150,000-\$400,000): These grants are for research projects at a mature level of development. Not only must the research question be clear, but the applicants must also demonstrate a commitment from implementing partners, a method of randomization, well-defined instruments, and sample size estimates from power calculations. Proposals must have a clear discussion of what minimum detectable effect size they consider to be relevant and an explanation for why. Proposals should also include a formal description of the outcomes and effect size that the study is powered to detect. Proposals can also be submitted for funding the continuation or completion of

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<sup>1</sup> For proposals related to political participation in elections, please note that U.S. federal tax law prohibits J-PAL NA from using funds "to carry on propaganda, lobby to influence legislation, fund any political campaign, influence the outcome of any election, carry on any voter registration drives, or violate any applicable local, state, federal or foreign law." J-PAL NA will screen all elections-related proposals to ensure that they are in compliance with this regulation.

research projects that have already started without J-PAL NA funding (including those for which field data collection has been completed).

- 2) **Pilot Studies** (eligible for funding of \$50,000 or less): These grants are for studies with a clear research question, but for which the design and implementation require further testing and pilot data. Pilot studies are intended to help researchers develop research projects that are not yet ready for launch. Projects that receive funding as pilot studies are welcome to reapply as full proposals in later RFPs. Random assignment does not necessarily need to occur during a pilot study, but applications should explain how a project will directly lead to a randomized evaluation in the future. Pilot proposals are not expected to have full power calculations. However, proposals must have a clear discussion of what minimum detectable effect size (MDE) they consider to be relevant for the study and an explanation for why. Applicants should also share some back-of-the-envelope sense of the potential sample size and power to detect impacts of the eventual randomized evaluation to which this pilot study could lead.
- 3) **Travel/Project Development Grants** (up to \$5,000): Please see separate application available at [povertyactionlab.org/NA-RFP](http://povertyactionlab.org/NA-RFP).

**Off-Cycle Proposals:**

- a) We encourage pilot projects and travel/project development grants facing time constraints to apply before the deadline. Decisions on these applications are typically made in about two weeks.
- b) The bar for approving full proposals off-cycle will be higher to ensure only the most time-sensitive ones are submitted.

These grants are intended for research projects that face a significant time constraint and need funding before the end of the process for this round to make use of an unanticipated opportunity (e.g. a newly announced policy change that will go into effect soon creating a great opportunity for an innovative evaluation).

Please note, since J-PAL NA was created to fund randomized impact evaluations of programs and policies being implemented in the field, as a general rule J-PAL NA does not fund pure lab experiments. However, a proposal may be considered if there is a randomized field evaluation of an underlying program or policy, which supplements the lab experiment.

**Eligible applicants:** The pool of eligible applicants is comprised of J-PAL affiliates, J-PAL post-docs, and a list of pre-selected researchers. All proposals may include collaborators outside of this network, but the principal investigator (PI) must be an eligible applicant. All eligible applicants must certify that they will be active, engaged and responsive PIs on the project, dedicated to guaranteeing quality control on all aspects of the research.

If a researcher is uncertain about whether a research project is eligible for J-PAL NA funding, please contact Vincent Quan at [quanv@mit.edu](mailto:quanv@mit.edu).

**Applications:** Proposal applications are due by **5:00pm EST on Friday, January 13, 2017**. To apply, please submit: (i) the Proposal Application Form (see below) and a 5-page narrative, (ii) a separate Budget Form, and (iii) a letter of support from the partner organization implementing the

program you plan to evaluate. (The letter of support is optional for pilot proposals.) Please submit completed documents to [NA\\_RFP@povertyactionlab.org](mailto:NA_RFP@povertyactionlab.org).

In addition, when submitting a proposal for a full research project to J-PAL NA, applicants:

- Are encouraged to concurrently apply for approval from their respective Institutional Review Boards (Human Subjects Committees). The award of any J-PAL NA grant is contingent on approval from the host institution's IRB (unless that IRB defers to the judgment of MIT's IRB, as is often the case) as well as the IRB at MIT, the Committee On the Use of Humans as Experimental Subjects (COUHES).
- Are encouraged to submit the application to their office of sponsored programs or contracts department as MIT will need official acceptance of the proposal and budget by your institution to process the subaward. You can do this after submitting a proposal, but doing so before the award decision will lessen delays.

**Grant Conditions:** In case of being selected for funding, applicants will be asked to meet the following requirements. Non-compliance with initiative requirements could affect eligibility for future funding.

1. Volunteer to peer-review proposals in future RFP rounds.
2. Participate in one of J-PAL NA's activities on a mutually agreed date and place. This activity could be an evidence workshop (presentation of research), a matchmaking conference (events that bring together researchers and implementing partners to form connections that lead to research projects), or a presentation to one of J-PAL NA's donors.
3. Provide documentation on program implementation, data collection, and data analysis, including:
  - a. Collecting and reporting program cost data: J-PAL has found that, in addition to impact, policymakers are very interested in how much a program costs, as it is one of the key factors in their decision to adopt or fund a program. Furthermore, detailed cost data allows for cost effectiveness analysis (CEA), which J-PAL may conduct (with permission from the researchers) even if such analysis is not part of the final academic paper. In order to facilitate cost collection, your award includes \$1,000 to defray expenses associated with collecting these data. J-PAL NA will provide an example costing worksheet along with the first annual report and request that grantees update this document annually. This document is meant to give you a somewhat comprehensive idea of the elements of cost data needed to conduct CEA.

However, even if researchers are unable to collect detailed cost data, we require initiative-funded projects to provide estimates of total program cost, average cost per beneficiary, and marginal cost to add another beneficiary, as even this limited information can be very valuable to policymakers. (For instance, did the program cost approximately \$100 per beneficiary or closer to \$500?) For questions about the scope of this requirement or assistance with the costing worksheet, or if you have a compelling reason for being unable to share any cost data, please email Vincent Quan at [quanv@mit.edu](mailto:quanv@mit.edu).

- b. Sharing data collection instruments and methodologies with other J-PAL affiliates. Pilot studies are encouraged but not required to share data collection instruments.
4. Data Publication: Except to the extent limited by law, institutional review board requirement, and/or any applicable binding agreement, we require researchers to submit data to J-PAL within eighteen months of completing data collection. Submitted data will be held by J-PAL under an embargo agreement, which may, in appropriate circumstances, restrict data access to protect confidential or proprietary information. J-PAL will follow up on a yearly basis following the submission of data as to whether the data set has been made public. J-PAL may share submitted data beginning on the fifth year following completion of data collection. If the researcher does not wish the data to be shared by this time, the researcher may petition the initiative co-chairs, who, in their discretion, will determine whether to share the data. If legal or other restrictions prohibit the submission of data to J-PAL, researchers must (1) inform J-PAL as soon as practicable – preferably, at the beginning of the project, and (2) exercise reasonable efforts to procure permission to publish de-identified or slightly aggregated data. Further details outlining where a data set should be published and what data should be published are available in [J-PAL's Guidelines for Data Publication](#), adopted June 2015. Pilot studies are not required to publish data.

In addition to publication of the underlying data, we also encourage researchers to publish the code needed to replicate data analysis within six months of the publication date of a final evaluation report or scholarly article.

5. Grantees should provide a brief annual progress report on your project and finances due 30 days following each year of your project; a final financial report within 60 days of completion of the award period; and a final project report with preliminary results within a maximum of 6 months of completion of the award period. Proposals funded as a pilot are requested to submit annual progress reports beyond the completion of the J-PAL NA award period if they are subsequently funded as full projects. **Timely submission of reports is very important.** We will send reminders to you at least one month in advance of reporting due dates. If you will not be able to meet the deadline you may request an extension, this request should be submitted before the due date. If no report has been received by the due date, you will receive monthly reminders and, eventually, requests from Initiative co-chairs for your reports. **Please note that in very rare cases (we expect) and as a last resort for non-submission of reports, researchers whose projects are more than 2 months late on any reports to any J-PAL Initiative, and who have not received an approved extension, will not be eligible to have new projects funded by J-PAL.** In such cases researchers can submit proposals to Initiatives, but the proposals will not be submitted for review until all reporting is up to date.
6. We request that you submit a copy of any survey instruments used for the project with your final report. Pilot studies are encouraged, but not required to share survey instruments.
7. Trial Registration: Before starting fieldwork on a full research project, researchers must register their trial with the AEA RCT Registry (<http://www.socialscienceregistry.org>). Registration includes 18 required fields (such as your name and a small subset of your IRB requirements,) and the entire process should take less than 20 minutes. There is also the opportunity to include more information, including power calculations and an optional pre-analysis plan. J-PAL NA will contact grantees at the start of fieldwork to request the assigned registration number. For questions and support with the registry, please contact J-PAL staff member Keesler Welch ([keesler@mit.edu](mailto:keesler@mit.edu)).

8. In addition, researchers must create a login on the Open Science Framework (OSF) (<http://www.openscienceframework.org/>) and create a page for their project. This should take about two minutes. OSF can optionally be used to manage research projects and make some files public. At a minimum, J-PAL NA staff will help you put a link to your project's AEA registration on the OSF site, and can help you navigate any other OSF services you may want to use. E-mail Vincent Quan (quanv@mit.edu) for details.

When you release your working paper or published paper, staff can also help you link this to either the AEA Registry or the OSF webpage for the project. In the case where results are embargoed by a journal (e.g. medical journals), researchers may wait until article publication.

An amount equivalent to ten percent of the budget will be disbursed only after all the requests listed above have been completed and the final reports have been submitted.

**Review Process:** Selection of awards will follow a two-stage process:

First, proposals will be distributed for peer review to referees selected from a roster of researchers. The roster will be assembled by the Scientific Directors of J-PAL NA. Each application will be reviewed by 3 referees: one member of the J-PAL NA RFP Review Board and two researchers and/or policy experts not on the Review Board.

Second, application proposals will be reviewed and scored by the three members of the RFP Review Board consisting of the two Scientific Directors of J-PAL North America and one other J-PAL affiliate chosen by the J-PAL Directors. All RFP Review Board members submitting a proposal in the current round of funding are required to recuse themselves from this review. No spouse, partner, or immediate family member (parent, child, sibling) of any individual named on a proposal application may serve as a peer or Review Board referee in the round in which the applicant's proposal is being reviewed. Proposals will be scored using the evaluation criteria described below. Based on the scores and the comments of the referees the RFP Review Board will vote on the status of the application. The status of an application can fall into four categories: (1) approved (unconditionally), (2) conditional approval (with minor revisions or clarifications), (3) revise and resubmit on this or a subsequent round, and (4) not approved.

If you would like to appeal a decision of the RFP Review Board, you may contact Vincent Quan (quanv@mit.edu) within one week of the results announcement detailing the reasons for the request for reconsideration (maximum two pages in length). This will then be communicated to the RFP Review Board.

Detailed criteria on which the projects will be evaluated and scored are listed on the last page of this document.

Proposals for off-cycle studies will be reviewed by the three-person RFP Review Board, which might decide to accept or reject the project for funding, or include the proposal in the regular review process for this round.

## **Timeline**

Week of November 14, 2016	RFP is Issued
Friday, January 13, 2017	Proposal Submission Deadline
Week of February 19, 2017	Results Announced

If your proposal is accepted for award, the funding will be provided under an award from MIT to your host institution. Before this can happen, you will need to show IRB approval for the project if Human Subjects are involved.

**Process:**

The process MIT follows for these awards is:

- The Initiative Board sends an official award notification letter.
- If not already submitted, you will need to provide formal institutional approval of the proposal and your institutional IRB approval. In most cases, approval from MIT's IRB will also be required. If that is the case, we will notify you on the award notification letter of what information is required to complete that process. J-PAL informs the MIT contracts office of the award.
- MIT establishes a subaward with your institution.

We aim to complete this process within 60 days of receiving all your forms and IRB approvals. We can backdate the award to cover expenses from the Award Date or the date of IRB approval, whichever is later. If a project includes non-Human Subjects work prior to the IRB approval, please let us know following award and we may in some cases be able to cover those costs (post-award, but pre-IRB) under the award.

# Proposal Application Form

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**Instructions:** The proposal is comprised of: (i) The Application Form, which includes a cover sheet and the narrative, (ii) a Budget Form, and (iii) Letters of Support from implementation partners. Note: Pilot projects are encouraged, but not required to submit letters of support.

**Narrative:** Your narrative (not to exceed 5 pages in length, with a minimum 11 point font size) should clearly describe the underlying project and the evaluation, including (i) a summary of the policy problem that motivates this research, and (ii) a description of the treatment, evaluation design, target population, and implementing partners. The narrative should also address each of the topics listed in the Evaluation Criteria listed at the end of this RFP. Please also mention if the project has scale-up potential and/or the program costs and impacts can be used to generate cost-effectiveness analysis. *The narrative must also include a 150-200 word abstract of the study*, which will be posted on J-PAL NA's website if the project receives funding. The abstract should include information on the hypotheses to be examined, what is being randomized, and the outcomes that will be measured.

**Budget:** Please submit a detailed project budget using the attached template. To reduce the processing time, please keep the following in mind when designing and submitting your budget.

- Awards are normally paid on a cost-reimbursable basis.
- If there is co-funding for the project, you must complete both the “Total Project Budget” and the “Initiative Budget” in the budget template.
- Overhead charges under all J-PAL Initiatives are capped at 9% of total direct costs.
- J-PAL NA typically does not cover PI time or summer months.
- All applications must include budget notes in the column provided in the budget template, specifying the 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 that are detailed clearly in the budget (e.g., # of respondents times \$/respondent = total \$) do not require additional justification in the budget notes section.
- Any computer/equipment purchases should include a breakdown of what is being purchased, e.g. how many laptops, and the project staff that will be assigned to the equipment.
- If a project expects to utilize J-PAL research or project management support, the project budget must allocate funds for projected staff time and applicable overhead, including management and administrative support. Please reach out to initiative manager Vincent Quan at [quanv@mit.edu](mailto:quanv@mit.edu) for guidance and further information.
- We encourage grantees to seek outside funding to supplement financial support from J-PAL. If you are seeking funding from other organizations and plan to include a line item for J-PAL staff, please contact initiative manager Vincent Quan at [quanv@mit.edu](mailto:quanv@mit.edu) for guidance on how to budget for J-PAL staff time in proposals submitted to external funders.
- We understand that the cap on overhead or indirect costs under this Initiative is low and that awardees 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: Costs labeled as “incidental”, “miscellaneous”, or “contingency” and rent.
- It is your responsibility that the budget you submit is correct and follows your host institution’s policies for costs. If you wait until an award has been made by the RFP Review Board before getting approval from your planned host institution, you risk having an award that your institution cannot accept. We recommend that as soon as you submit your proposal to J-PAL NA (if not before), you send it through your host institution for their review and acceptance.
- Please note that this applies to all projects, including those going through regional J-PAL offices and IPA. Please contact them in advance to make sure you are aware of their policies for proposal review and that you give them enough time to meet the proposal deadline.
- Please note that J-PAL does not allow variance greater than 10% (by major line item) without prior approval. We understand that budgets often change or need revisions during the lifecycle of a project. We are happy to accommodate these modifications, and they will typically be approved if the substance of the project is not changed. However, project staff are required to inform J-PAL and request approval in advance, as we may need to modify the subaward agreement to be able to process invoices.

**Letters of Support:** Please provide the following letters 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.

**Off-cycle Studies:** In addition to the previous instructions, please explain the time restriction your project is facing that does not allow you to wait for the next RFP round to apply for funding.

**Submitting Your Application:** Please follow the steps below to submit your application:

Step 1: Save the coversheet and your 5-page narrative as a single word file, titled  
*[PI Name]\_[Topic Name].doc(x)*

Step 2: Fill in the separate Budget Form and save as a single excel file, titled  
*[PI Name]\_Budget.xls(x)*

Step 3: Submit PDF of letter(s) of support from partner (implementing) organizations.

Step 4: Submit an email with all of the above attachments to [NA\\_RFP@povertyactionlab.org](mailto:NA_RFP@povertyactionlab.org)

The deadline for submissions is **5:00pm EST on Friday, January 13, 2017.**



# J-PAL NA RFP Coversheet

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<b>PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR AND INSTITUTIONAL AFFILIATION</b>			
<b>CO-INVESTIGATOR(S) AND INSTITUTIONAL AFFILIATION</b>			
<b>TITLE OF PROPOSAL</b>			<b>COUNTRY</b>
<b>PARTNER(S)</b>		<b>CONTACT (Name, Email, Phone)</b>	
<b>CO-FUNDER(S)</b>		<b>FUNDED AWARD (PI, Project Title, Amount)</b>	
<b>Have you submitted this or a related proposal in any previous J-PAL NA round of funding?</b>			
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		If yes, when?	
<b>Have you submitted this or a related proposal to any other J-PAL research initiative?</b>			
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		If yes, which initiative and when?	
<b>J-PAL NA FUNDING REQUEST</b> <i>(Check applicable box(es))</i>			
<i>Full research project</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Pilot study</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Off-cycle request</i> <input type="checkbox"/>			
<b>REQUESTED</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>TOTAL CO-FUNDED</b>	<b>\$</b>
<b>GRANT PERIOD</b>			
<b>START DATE:</b> (yyyy-mm-dd)		<b>END DATE:</b> (yyyy-mm-dd)	
<b>INSTITUTION TO RECEIVE AWARD*</b>		<b>CONTACT FOR CONTRACTING ISSUES (NAME AND EMAIL)</b>	

By checking this box, all J-PAL affiliates and initiative special invitees who are co-PIs on this project certify that they will be active, engaged and responsive PIs on this project dedicated to guaranteeing the quality control on all aspects of this research; and that their participation in this project is not merely to provide access to J-PAL resources and funding to anyone else working on this project who is neither a J-PAL affiliate, nor an initiative special invitee.

\* Please indicate the institution that will actually receive the grant funds

## Evaluation Criteria

Relevance	Does the study address questions crucial to understanding pressing social policy issues in North America?
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?
Value of research	Is the cost of the study commensurate with the value of expected lessons learned?
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?
Viability of the project	Is the relationship with the implementing partner strong and likely to endure through the entire study? Are there any other logistical or political obstacles that might threaten the completion of the study, for example, government authorization or Human Subjects review?
Policy Relevance	Will results from the intervention have broader implications? How, if at all, will the “lessons learned” have relevance beyond this test case? Is there demonstrated demand from policy makers for more/better information to influence their decisions in this area?
Publishing data	Does the project advance best practices in transparency? Is the researcher committed to registering the research project and publishing data and replication code online when not precluded by privacy restrictions?