**J-PAL Governance Initiative: Overview and Instructions**

*Round 18 - Fall 2020*

*J-PAL’s Governance Initiative (GI) funds randomized evaluations of strategies to improve governance in low- and middle-income countries. GI is now calling for proposals from J-PAL affiliates, J-PAL postdocs, and GI invited researchers for full research projects, pilot studies, travel/proposal development grants, and policy outreach support grants. Proposals are now due by* ***11:59 p.m. ET on Friday, November 20, 2020.***

**Background**

Governments around the world spend billions of dollars annually to provide basic services and development programs aimed at improving the lives of those living in poverty. At the same time, a large number of foundations and international aid organizations channel their development dollars through government-run programs. The effectiveness of such public spending is often compromised by a number of connected factors: policies that do not reflect the needs or preferences of the people, leakages due to corruption, lack of community participation, or poor oversight of public spending. Despite the crucial importance of good governance for development, many questions about how to improve governance remain unanswered. As a response to this need, GI funds randomized impact evaluations of programs designed to improve participation in the political and policy process, reduce leakages in public programs, and strengthen state capacity.

**Focus**

GI funds randomized evaluations of programs and policies aimed at improving governance in low- and middle-income countries, building a better bridge between field experiments and underlying economic theories. GI’s research priorities are identified in the Governance Initiative Review Paper (full paper [here](https://www.povertyactionlab.org/review-paper/governance-initiative-review-paper); executive summary [here](https://www.povertyactionlab.org/review-paper/governance-initiative-review-paper-executive-summary)) which summarizes existing evidence in governance from primarily economics and political science, with an emphasis on field evaluations. The Governance Review Paper is organized around the following themes:

1. The impact of political participation on policy outcomes, growth, and citizen satisfaction.
2. The determinants of political participation: institutions, demographics, information, participation in government programs, and technology.[[1]](#footnote-1)
3. Reliable measures of corruption and leakages.
4. The impact of corruption and leakages on individuals, firms, the provision of goods and services, and the correction of externalities.
5. The determinants of leakages and corruption: the incentives and structure of bureaucracy, technology, transparency, the judiciary system, demographics, and anticorruption in the long run.
6. The selection and recruitment of public officials: the effects of wages and compensation, and government screening
7. Using incentives to improve the performance of public officials: compensation, financial incentives, and nonfinancial incentives
8. Monitoring public service delivery: information flows, government monitoring, and citizen monitoring
9. E-governance and demographics as cross-cutting factors

As long as proposals fall within at least one of these themes, GI does not prioritize proposals from one of these research areas over another. If a researcher is uncertain about whether a research project is eligible for GI, please email GI@povertyactionlab.org.

**Funds**

Three types of proposals will be considered in this round:

*(1) Full Research Projects*: These grants are for research projects at a mature level of development. Not only must the research question be clear, but applicants must also demonstrate a commitment from implementing partners, a method of randomization, well-defined instruments, and sample size estimates. Proposals can also be submitted for funding the continuation of research projects that have already started without GI funding (including those for which field data collection has been completed). The expectation is that these projects will result in a paper publishable in a top economics or political science journal. The total amount awarded to a single project, including any GI funding for proposal development or piloting, will not exceed $400,000.[[2]](#footnote-2) Please note that, in general, full research project proposals with budgets exceeding $250,000 are rarely funded given the high quality and volume of all proposals received and GI’s limited resources.

*(2) Pilot Studies*: These grants are for studies with a clear research question, but for which the design and implementation requires further testing and pilot data.[[3]](#footnote-3) The expectation is that these projects will ultimately develop into full-scale randomized evaluations. The maximum amount awarded for pilot studies is $75,000.

*(3) Travel/Proposal Development Grants:* These grants cover exploratory work related to preliminary research ideas, such as conducting background research, developing partnerships, visiting field sites, and collecting preliminary data. The expectation is that these funds will be used to support costs related to PI travel to develop a proposal for a pilot or full scale randomized evaluation during a subsequent call for proposals. The maximum amount awarded for travel/proposal development grants is $10,000.

Please note that GI was established to fund randomized impact evaluations of programs and policies being implemented in the field. As a general rule, GI does not fund pure lab experiments. A proposal may be considered if there is a randomized field evaluation of an underlying program or policy which supplements a lab experiment.

*Cost-extension requests by active grants:* In addition to the three proposal types above, cost-extension requests from current GI awardees for their ongoing GI-funded studies will also be considered alongside new proposals during this round. Cost-extension requests must also be submitted by email to GI@povertyactionlab.org by ***11:59 p.m. ET on Friday, November 20, 2020.*** Cost-extension requests must include:

1. A PDF with: (a) your original application to GI for the project seeking a cost-extension request; (b) a cover letter (1-2 pages) outlining the reasons for requesting a cost-extension, any updates or changes to your original proposed activities to date, and describing your new budget narrative
2. Your latest project budget (using GI’s budget spreadsheet templates) with two new columns: one indicating your request for additional funds in each category, and another indicating the new total budget.

**Off-Cycle Proposals**

GI offers two types of funding outside of the regular RFP cycles. Eligibility for these proposals is the same as for the regular funding cycles:

*(1) Off-Cycle Projects*: These grants are intended for research projects that face a significant time constraint and need to receive funding before the end of a regular funding round to make use of an unanticipated opportunity (e.g. a newly announced policy change that will go into effect soon, creating an opportunity for an evaluation). Proposals must clearly justify the need to receive a decision on an expedited schedule. The maximum amount awarded to an off-cycle proposal is $50,000.

*(2) Policy Outreach Support*: These funds are intended to support conferences, workshops, events, or other policy outreach activities to disseminate evidence from GI-funded evaluations, or other randomized evaluations conducted by J-PAL affiliates, J-PAL postdocs, or GI invited researchers that address GI’s research priorities. These funds can be used to cover travel, accommodations, meals, venues, and related costs. Applications are accepted on a rolling basis and the suggested budget range for these requests is $10,000 – $20,000.

**Eligibility**

J-PAL affiliates, J-PAL postdocs, and GI invited researchers are eligible to apply for any type of GI funding. Please note that GI invited researchers are nominated and reviewed on a yearly basis, with the review based on a nominee’s previous research with a particular emphasis on randomized evaluations related to governance. All proposals may include collaborators outside of this network.

For policy outreach support funds, J-PAL regional offices are also eligible to apply, with support from an eligible researcher as collaborator.

In addition, PhD students may be eligible to apply for travel/proposal development grants or up to $50,000 in pilot or full-scale funding. To be eligible, PhD students must have a J-PAL affiliate or GI invited researcher on their thesis committee at their host university. 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]](#footnote-4) In addition, in order to apply for up to $50,000 for pilot or full-scale funding, graduate students must provide documented evidence of successful pilot activities, funded either through a GI travel/proposal development grant or other sources. Please note that PhD students are not eligible to apply for off-cycle funding.

Please note that beginning in January 2019, any J-PAL affiliate, J-PAL postdoc, GI invited researcher, or eligible PhD student can submit **a maximum of three pilot or full-scale proposals within a 12 month period to GI**, either as a main PI or co-PI in the proposal. For example, if a researcher submitted two pilot or full-scale proposals in our Spring 2019 round, they were only eligible to submit a maximum of 1 pilot or full-scale proposal in our Fall 2019 round. *Applications from our postponed Spring 2020 round will not count towards this number.*

**Applications**

Proposal applications are due by ***11:59 p.m. ET on Friday, November 20, 2020.*** To apply, please follow the instructions in the **Full/Pilot Proposal Application Form**, the **Travel/Proposal Development Grant Application Form**, or the **Policy Outreach Support Application Form** on the GI RFP webpage and submit your proposal by email to GI@povertyactionlab.org.

**Review Process**

Proposals are reviewed along five broad criteria: academic contribution, policy relevance, technical design, project viability, and value of research.

*Full and Pilot Proposals:* Selection of awards follows a two-stage process. First, proposals are distributed for peer review to referees selected from a roster of researchers and policy experts on governance issues assembled by the GI co-chairs. Each application is reviewed by three referees: one member of the GI Review Board, one J-PAL affiliate not on the board, and one policy expert in governance. Second, application proposals are reviewed and scored by the five members of the Review Board, consisting of the GI co-chairs and three other J-PAL affiliates chosen by the J-PAL Directors. All board members submitting a proposal in the current round of funding are required to recuse themselves from this review. [[5]](#footnote-5) Based on the scores and the comments of the referees, the review board votes on the status of the application. The status of an application can fall into four categories: (1) approved, (2) conditional approval (with minor revisions or clarifications), (3) revise and resubmit during this or a subsequent round, and (4) not approved.

*Travel/Proposal Development Proposals:* The GI co-chairs review the proposals and make final funding decisions.

*Cost-extension requests by active grants:* The GI co-chairs review the requests and make final funding decisions.

*Off-Cycle Proposals:* The GI co-chairs review the proposals and can decide to award funding, reject the proposal for funding, or include the proposal in the regular review process for the next RFP round.

*Policy Outreach Support Proposals*: Proposals are reviewed by the GI co-chairs on a rolling basis, with decisions generally made within 2-4 weeks. The GI co-chairs may decide to award funding, request a revise and resubmit, or reject the proposal for funding.

If you would like to appeal a decision of the GI Review Board, please email Initiative Manager David Alzate (dalzate@povertyactionlab.org) within one week of the announcement, detailing the reasons for the request for reconsideration (maximum two pages in length). This request will then be communicated to the reviewers.

**Timeline**

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| Friday, October 2 (2020) | RFP is issued |
| Friday, November 20 (2020) | Proposal submission deadline |
| Friday, December 18 (2020) | Peer review deadline |
| Week of January 11 (2021) | GI Review Board meeting |
| Week of January 18 (2021) | Results announced |

**Grant Conditions**

*Full and Pilot Grants*: If your proposal is selected for funding, the terms of the award will be as follows:

1. **Research conduct:** Grantees will be required by MIT to establish an Institutional Authorization Agreement so that MIT can cede IRB authority to the IRB of Record. Specific instructions will be given in the Notice of Award. In addition, they are expected to adhere to MIT’s community-wide policies that are available [here](https://policies.mit.edu/policies-procedures/90-relations-and-responsibilities-within-mit-community), as well as policies put in place by the [UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/foreign-commonwealth-development-office).
2. **Peer-review proposals:** Grantees may be requested to peer-review proposals in future GI rounds.
3. **Project registration:** Within three months of the start date indicated on the proposal, grantees 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. There is also the opportunity to include more information, including power calculations and an optional pre-analysis plan. *(Full studies only)*
4. **Reporting:** Grantees will be requested to provide a brief start-up report, semi-annual financial updates; annual progress reports; a final financial report within 60 days of completion of the award period; and *(Full studies only)* a final substantive report with preliminary results within 12 months of completion of the award period, which will be made public on the J-PAL website.
5. **Collecting and reporting program cost data:** Policymakers are interested in program costs, as it is one of the key factors in their decision to support a program. Cost data also allows for [cost effectiveness analysis (CEA)](https://www.povertyactionlab.org/conducting-cost-effectiveness-analysis-cea), which J-PAL may conduct (with permission from the researchers), even if such analysis is not part of an academic paper. In order to facilitate cost collection, GI awards include $1,000 to defray expenses associated with collecting cost data. GI will provide a costing worksheet for grantees to update annually. If grantees are unable to collect detailed cost data, grantees are still required to provide estimates of total program cost, average cost per beneficiary, and marginal cost to add another beneficiary. *(Full studies only)*
6. **Collecting and reporting Gender-disaggregated data:** J-PAL, through its Gender sector, is making an effort to study heterogeneity in program impacts by beneficiary/participant gender more systematically. Please note that the following request only applies to J-PAL internal reports and does not extend to the academic paper or online J-PAL summary.

Many studies funded by J-PAL initiatives already collect study participants’ gender. In such cases, and when outcome data are individual-specific, we request that grantees conduct heterogeneity analyses by beneficiary gender for the study’s main results for internal reporting to J-PAL (to be shared in the final grant report). A single study might be underpowered to detect heterogeneous treatment effects, or null results might not seem interesting in one study, but these findings may be meaningful when included in an analysis across studies. J-PAL will use the reported results for (a) determining potential pooled statistical analyses to conduct across studies and (b) generating gender-related policy lessons in Governance. Our reporting template will include a question on this, which researchers are encouraged to fill in when applicable. We recognize that there will be cases where this reporting is not applicable, for various reasons. In these cases, the PIs can just provide a brief explanation to be shared with the Gender sector.
7. **Data publication:** Grantees may be requested to share data collection instruments and methodologies with other grantees. Furthermore, researchers funded through this grant will be required to publish de-identified data in accordance with J-PAL’s [Data and Code Availability Policy](https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B97AuBEZpZ9zZE5ncHEzTWZnNjg/view). J-PAL's research team can work with you to clean, label, de-identify, document and replicate datasets collected as part of a randomized trial before publishing them in the J[-PAL Dataverse](https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataverse/jpal) or another data repository of your choice. (Full studies only)
8. **Participate in GI activities:** Grantees may be requested to participate in one of the GI’s activities at a mutually agreed time and place. Activities may include evidence workshops, matchmaking conference, or presentations to one of the GI’s donors.
9. **Credit GI**: Any presentations and publications, including academic papers, policy briefs, press releases, blogs, and organizational newsletters that emerge from this project should credit the J-PAL Governance Initiative. The exact wording on crediting GI and donor support will be provided in the terms of your award.

*Travel/Proposal development grants:* If your proposal is selected for funding, the terms of the award will be as follows:

1. **Research Conduct:** Grantees are responsible for following appropriate IRB protocol and providing GI copies of any IRB approvals or exemptions, if any are necessary. In addition, they are expected to adhere to MIT’s community-wide policies that are available [here](https://policies.mit.edu/policies-procedures/90-relations-and-responsibilities-within-mit-community), as well as policies put in place by the [UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/foreign-commonwealth-development-office).
2. **Submit report:** Grantees are required to submit a brief report within 30 days of completing travel. If the travel/proposal development work results in non-initiative-funded follow-on projects, grantees should inform GI as part of their final report or upon receipt of additional funding.
3. **Participate in GI activity:** Grantees agree to participate in one GI activity or event. GI will cover associated costs.
4. **Credit GI**: Any presentations and publications, including academic papers, policy briefs, press releases, blogs, and organizational newsletters that emerge from this project should credit the J-PAL Governance Initiative. The exact wording on crediting GI and donor support will be provided in the terms of your award.

*Policy Outreach Support Grants*: Recipients will be expected to report on the use of these funds in regular GI project reports. In the case that the policy outreach activities are not linked to a specific GI-funded project, recipients will be asked to submit project and expense reports within 30 days of completion of the work plan specified in the proposal. All outreach activities must be completed within six months of receiving the award.

**Administrative Notes**

Full and pilot grants are provided under an award from MIT to the grantee’s host institution. Travel/proposal development grants and policy outreach support grants are paid as travel reimbursements. For more information on budget, requirements, and process, please see instructions in the **Full/Pilot Proposal Application Form**, the **Travel/Proposal Development Grant Application Form**, or the **Policy Outreach Support Application form** on the [GI webpage.](https://www.povertyactionlab.org/initiative/governance-initiative-request-proposals) All materials needed to apply for full research, pilot, travel/proposal development, or policy outreach support grants are also available at <http://www.povertyactionlab.org/GI>.

**Related Initiatives**

**Please do not submit the same proposal to more than one J-PAL or IPA initiative at the same time.** Before applying to GI, consider whether your proposal may be better suited for the J-PAL Crime and Violence Initiative (CVI), J-PAL Digital Identification and Finance Initiative in Africa (DigiFI), Innovations for Poverty Action's Peace & Recovery (P&R) program. These initiatives share similar themes and geographic focus and support rigorous research that will lead to policy relevant findings. If you are uncertain about which initiative to apply to, please contact [GI@povertyactionlab.org](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5Cafahey%5CDownloads%5CGI%40povertyactionlab.org).

[J-PAL Crime and Violence Initiative (CVI)](https://www.povertyactionlab.org/cvi): CVI fosters experimental research on crime and social and political violence. Crime and violence can hinder economic development and urban growth and exacerbate governance challenges by fostering corruption and draining public sector resources. The initiative funds evaluations that focus on preventing, mitigating, and responding to the effects of crime and violence.

[J-PAL Digital Identification and Finance Initiative in Africa (DigiFI):](https://www.povertyactionlab.org/africa/digital-identification-finance-initiative) DigiFI Africa aims to grow the evidence base around innovations in identification and payments by supporting governments in Africa in their efforts to monitor and evaluate relevant reforms.

[IPA Peace & Recovery (P&R) program](http://www.poverty-action.org/program-area/peace-and-recovery): The P&R program is designed to support field experiments and related research in several broad areas: reducing violence and promoting peace; reducing “fragility” (i.e. fostering state capability and institutions of decision making); and preventing, coping with, and recovering from crises (including conflict and non-conflict humanitarian crises).

**Funding**

Support for the Governance Initiative is provided by the [UK Foreign, Commonwealth, & Development Office](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/foreign-commonwealth-development-office).

1. For proposals related to political participation in elections, please note that U.S. federal tax law prohibits GI from using funds for any political campaign that is not candidate or position neutral. GI will screen all elections-related proposals to ensure that they are in compliance with this regulation. More information on this regulation can be found on the [IRS website](https://www.irs.gov/charities-non-profits/charitable-organizations/the-restriction-of-political-campaign-intervention-by-section-501-c-3-tax-exempt-organizations). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. In rare circumstances, proposals with a compelling reason for requesting more than $400,000 may be considered on a case-by-case basis. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Please note that full evaluations requesting less than $75,000 are considered full research projects and evaluated accordingly. The criteria for pilot funding apply only to proposals requesting funds to conduct piloting, or pre-randomization, activities. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. 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 or GI invited researcher through the GI special invitee nomination and review process. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. In addition, no spouse, partner, or immediate family member (parent, child, or sibling) of any individual named on a proposal application may serve as a peer or board referee in the round in which the applicant’s proposal is being reviewed. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)