



# Humanitarian Protection Initiative

## Request for Proposals

February 2024



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Cover Photo: A woman walking home through the heavily guarded Bentiu camp for people fleeing conflict in South Sudan. | Photo by Anouk Delafortrie, © European Union, 2018 is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0 (<https://flic.kr/p/28JiMHu>)

# Overview

As conflicts flare up around the world, [protection risks are increasing in complexity and severity](#). The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs projects that [nearly 300 million people will need assistance and protection in 2024](#). These risks range from attacks on civilians, sexual- and gender-based violence, recruitment of child soldiers, psychological abuse and distress as a result of conflict, and restricted access to deliver humanitarian assistance. Yet there is [limited evidence on the comparative effectiveness of protection interventions](#) or on the mechanisms that drive effective protection programming.

In response, the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) and Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA) are actively working to fill these evidence gaps. Through the [Humanitarian Protection Initiative](#) (HPI) and with UK international development funding from the UK Government, J-PAL and IPA aim to equip humanitarian actors with a greater understanding of cost-effective, scalable, and context-sensitive solutions to prevent and mitigate physical, psychological, social, and legal harm against conflict-affected populations.

HPI is designed to generate and share new evidence on the impact on protection policy and programming, in part by funding randomized impact evaluations through regular Requests for Proposals (RFP). This document covers the scope, aims, grant types and funding criteria, eligibility. For extended eligibility criteria and support available for researchers based in or from low- and middle-income countries (LMIC) in particular, consult the [HPI Scholars Program webpage](#).

**HPI's inaugural RFP opened on February 13, 2024.** HPI accepts proposals for preparatory work leading up to randomized impact evaluations and full randomized impact evaluations that can inform policies and programs to protect conflict-affected populations from violence, coercion, and deliberate deprivation, and ensure their dignity, safety and respect for their rights. More information on scope and grant types can be found in sections II and III, below. **Letters of Interest are due April 5, 2024, following which applicants will be invited to submit full proposals by May 17, 2024.**

# I. Motivation

The humanitarian sector faces increasing challenges as conflicts globally are more entrenched, leading to severe repercussions for civilians. Data from specialized institutions such as the ACLED conflict index confirm that conflict event rates have increased by 40% from 2020 to 2023 ([2024](#)) leading to a considerable rise in conflict fatalities ([Uppsala Conflict Data Program 2022](#)). This comes after the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has been warning for years that civilians continue to be the primary victims of violations of international humanitarian law as the prolonged duration of conflicts has led to the perpetuation of dispossession, violence, and consequent suffering of affected civilian populations ([2011](#)).

In this context, humanitarian experts confirm that protection risks<sup>1</sup> are increasing in complexity and severity, which makes improving the effectiveness of efforts to mitigate protection risks for affected populations is a top priority. These risks include psychological abuse and distress, barriers to obtaining documentation, restricted access to deliver humanitarian assistance, destruction of civilian infrastructure, and the presence of mines and other explosives. By way of example, all 31 Protection Clusters, the structures aiming to provide strategic guidance and technical support on matters related to the protection of crisis-affected populations in humanitarian operations across the globe, described the risk of gender-based violence as the most concerning, with 96% of operations listing forced recruitment and association of children with armed forces as a risk in 2023 ([Global Protection Cluster 2024](#)).

These pressing issues stand in stark contrast to the limited evidence on the comparative effectiveness of protection interventions or on the mechanisms that drive effective protection programming ([J-PAL 2022](#)). While there is limited rigorous evaluation in this area, adjacent fields provide insights into features of protection programming.

Insights from **peacebuilding and conflict prevention programming**, for example, can also offer valuable perspectives on protection interventions. Such interventions include promoting restraint among armed actors, reducing the use of violence targeting civilian populations, or aim at curbing the prevalence of SGBV in crisis settings. **Media interventions**, such as 'edutainment' programs, are often used by peacebuilding and conflict resolution organizations due to their wide reach and low costs. There is an emerging body of literature that demonstrates the effectiveness of media interventions in shifting social norms, building

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<sup>1</sup> See section II. on HPI's scope for a definition of "protection" in the context of humanitarian response.



social capital ([Green, Cooper and Wilke 2020](#); [Paluck and Green 2009](#)), contributing to peace, and even encouraging defection from armed groups ([Armand, Atwell and Gomes 2020](#); [Blair 2020](#)). Nevertheless, for interventions with goals of improving protection outcomes, it is imperative to scrutinize potential negative effects, such as the potential of the media to incite violence and shape detrimental societal norms ([Paluck 2010](#); [Yanagizawa-Drott 2014](#)).

Still within the peacebuilding field, relevant learnings can be drawn from the evidence on **intergroup contact** ([Lowe 2021](#); [Mousa, 2020](#); [Scacco and Warren 2018](#)) and **perspective-taking** ([Adida, Lo and Platas 2018](#); [Alan et al. 2021](#); [Ashraf et al. 2022](#), [Simonovits et al. 2017](#)) programs that seek to reduce the salience of communal differences and build social cohesion. Yet further research is warranted to gauge their effectiveness to curb conflict and violence. There is further research on interventions to reinforce and leverage communities' own capabilities to prevent violence such as local-level **dispute resolution** ([Blattman, Hartman and Blair, 2014](#); [Blattman, Hartman and Blair, 2020](#)), and provision of economic opportunities, such as **employment** and **vocational training**, as alternatives to violence which may dissuade individuals from taking up arms and leading others to exit armed violence ([Blattman and Annan, 2016](#); [Blattman, Fiala and Martinez 2014](#); [Lyall, Zhou, and Imai, 2020](#)).

Protection interventions often focus on remedying conflict-related harm through **mental health and psychosocial support** (MHPSS) interventions. There is a large public health literature on MHPSS, however, the applicability of the results to humanitarian contexts is limited as most studies are evaluations of diverse sets of interventions, populations, and outcomes that are hardly comparable ([J-PAL 2022](#); [Elrha 2021](#); [Unicef 2021](#)). While more focused research is needed to elucidate successful mechanisms for MHPSS in cost-constrained fragile and conflict settings ([Ertl et al. 2011](#); [O'Callaghan et al. 2013](#); [Bryant 2022](#)), efforts have been made to understand how to deliver MHPSS services in resource-constrained settings. There are two emerging patterns in the literature: One focusing on training local organizations and laypersons outside of clinics to address mental health outcomes related to non-pathological forms of psychosocial distress, allowing trained professionals to focus on patients in need of more specialized care ([Bolton et al. 2014](#); [Ertl et al. 2011](#)). The other growing body of evidence is on psychotherapy models ([Bass et al. 2016](#); [Shaw et al. 2019](#); [Tay et al. 2020](#)). Moreover, emerging evidence also highlights the benefits of combining psychotherapy, in particular cognitive behavioral therapy, with cash assistance ([Blattman et al. 2022](#)).

Research by Banerjee et al. ([2019](#); [2020](#)) and Blair et al. ([2021](#)) explores methods of disseminating vital **information** to vulnerable populations and identifying effective

messengers for behavior change. However, the applicability of findings from studies on social networks to humanitarian settings where the size, composition and sources of social networks can be fluid remains uncertain ([Cachia and Ramos 2020](#)). More recent research compares generic and personalized methods for communicating legal information to populations in need of protection ([Casalis et al. 2024](#)), with further research needed to understand whether such interventions can impact outcomes like exposure to violence or the acquisition of legal documentation in acute conflict settings.

**Cash and voucher assistance** show promise in affecting multisectoral outcomes, including protection-related ones in humanitarian settings ([Bastagli et al. 2018](#); [J-PAL 2022](#); [WFP 2019](#); [World Bank, USAID and WFP 2022](#)). Cash assistance interventions can effectively reduce negative coping strategies and improve other outcomes such as food security, food expenditure, and social capital ([World Bank, USAID and WFP 2022](#)).

While cash transfers can **address sexual and gender-based violence** (SGBV) and intimate partner violence (IPV) indirectly ([Briaux et al. 2020](#)) or reduce controlling behavior ([Hidrobo, Peterman and Heise 2016](#)), evidence regarding their impact on the incidence of SGBV and IPV in humanitarian settings remains ambiguous ([Cross, Manell and Megevand 2018](#); [Hidrobo 2014](#)). Understanding the potential unintended consequences of cash interventions is essential as their use in humanitarian settings grows. Moreover, there are other approaches to addressing SGBV and IPV, such as life skills and safe spaces programs ([Bandiera et al. 2019](#); [Buehren et al. 2017](#); [Stark et al. 2018](#)) or male-focused discussion groups ([Annan et al. forthcoming](#); [Hossain 2014](#))

In conclusion, there is a large, policy- and practice-relevant gap in the evidence base that can inform effective protection programming to prevent and mitigate harm to conflict-affected populations. Building on research in adjacent fields and conducted in more stable contexts, it is of critical importance to generate rigorous evidence on protection programming in conflict settings to understand the mechanisms that lead to protection outcomes and inform effective designs of protection policies and programming.

## II. Scope

To address the gap in rigorous evidence on the effect of protection interventions in conflict-affected communities, HPI aims to support actionable and generalizable learning on program effectiveness, the mechanisms underpinning programming, and the barriers to impact that fit within the following scope:

## Conflict

While protection is a critical component of any humanitarian response, irrespective of the nature of the crisis it seeks to address, HPI will focus on generating and disseminating evidence relevant in the context of conflict. **Research evaluating protection solutions in acute conflict settings will be of particular relevance for policymakers and practitioners.** Applicants must clearly state how and to what extent the target group of their proposed evaluation has been affected by conflict as outlined in the following paragraphs.

In operationalising the 1949 Geneva Conventions, the international Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) defines **international-armed conflicts** as armed conflict between states, and **national armed conflict** as conflicts between governmental forces or non-governmental armed groups. These definitions can include conflicts where only one party uses force against another ([ICRC 2008](#)).

In practice, many conflicts do not follow the patterns of traditional insurgencies where one armed group challenges government control ([ICRC, 2011](#)). This has led to a diversity of intensity, frequency, and form of conflict including many actors such as governments, rebels, militias, or communal groups engaging in violence motivated by several factors which may include political, religious, or ethnic differences. According to ACLED analysis and data, **countries in conflict show a pattern of several overlapping conflicts that differ in objectives and targets, which exposed communities to many forms of violence** ([ACLED 2024](#)).

For strategic reasons, **HPI can only fund projects in ODA-eligible countries and places a lesser emphasis on funding projects in Latin America and the Caribbean.** Projects from that region will have to score particularly high on policy relevance and the potential to generate generalizable insights for protection in acute conflicts globally to be considered for funding, which applicants should take into account in formulating their proposals.

## Protection

In the context of humanitarian crises, **protection activities aim to prevent and mitigate physical, psychological, social, and legal harm.** They encompass all efforts pursued by humanitarian and human rights actors to ensure that the rights of affected persons and the obligations of duty bearers under international law are understood, respected, protected, and fulfilled without discrimination.<sup>2</sup> In practice, there is a priority set of protection concerns

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<sup>2</sup> The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) defines protection as 'all activities aimed at obtaining full respect for the rights of the individual in accordance with the letter and the spirit of the relevant bodies of law (i.e. International Human Rights Law, International Humanitarian Law,

in any given humanitarian context. Addressing key risks, threats, and vulnerabilities that are particular to individuals affected by humanitarian crises are necessary for the effectiveness of protection interventions.

HPI will provide funding to develop context-sensitive research on and rigorously evaluate the impact of interventions that seek to **ensure the safety, dignity and rights of people affected by armed conflict and keeping people safe from violence, coercion and deliberate deprivation.**

Competitive proposals will demonstrate an ability to produce policy- and practice-relevant evidence on **final protection outcomes**. These include but are not limited to the incidence of violence; levels of anxiety, depression or post-traumatic stress disorder in the intervention communities; the use of negative coping strategies by affected populations; the rate of child soldier recruitment; land ownership and legal status; and the incidence of abuse and exploitation linked to peacekeeping missions. Intermediary outcomes such as norms and attitudes towards the use of violence are critical to understand the causal chain underpinning effective policies and programming and extract generalizable learnings from forthcoming studies. However, there is a large gap in evidence linking intermediate outcomes to final outcomes through rigorous evaluation with clear theories of change, making proposals that include final protection outcomes most competitive.

## Research and Learning Priorities

This section provides a list of indicative research areas and questions related to the protection of conflict-affected populations that proposals may address. Rather than simply framing their work within this incomplete list of questions, applicants are encouraged to link their research to questions that they and their implementing partners believe are of fundamental importance to the understanding of protection in conflict settings.

While the questions below focus on interventions and impact, it is understood that the work proposed as part of travel/proposal development or research pilot grant applications will be at an earlier stage and can be more descriptive or methodological in nature. Given the initiative's novel scope, such early stage proposals are welcome as they represent an important investment in building solid foundations for future impact evaluations.

Researchers submitting proposals for these grant types are required to outline the pathway towards future randomized impact evaluations that fall within HPI's scope.

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International Refugee Law).<sup>1</sup> For a summary of the applicable normative frameworks, refer to the IASC's policy on protection in humanitarian action ([2016](#), pp. 16-24).



Lastly, strong proposals will also advance the academic and practitioner communities' understanding of the spillover effects of humanitarian protection interventions, and invest in rigorous measurement strategies for concepts including dignity and restraint as well as advanced measurement strategies to reduce bias in self-reporting. These are expected to contribute to strengthening the evidence base for both the prevention and mitigation of harm:

### **Prevention of Physical, Psychological, Social, and Legal Harm**

Policies and programming aimed at preventing physical, psychological, social, and legal harm encompass a range of interventions and approaches, which may work to influence perpetrators of violence against civilians in conflict settings, empower vulnerable communities or individuals to adopt protective behavior and make better protection-related decisions, or improve the way in which humanitarian assistance is delivered to further protection outcomes and reduce adverse effects. Questions may include:

- To what extent can direct dialogue with armed actors (privately or in public) reduce the use of violence? Can the influence of third parties (e.g. religious groups or influential elders) be leveraged to improve protection outcomes? And what adverse effects can be expected from such interventions?
- How can training activities for armed actors effectively promote adherence to international humanitarian law and reduce the incidence of violence?
- What components of SGBV and IPV reduction strategies are effective in conflict settings? Are socio-economic or normative interventions working with populations at risk of harm(ing) more effective in reducing the incidence of SGBV and under which conditions?
- To what extent can the opportunities to access livelihoods that do not feed conflict dynamics reduce levels of violence? What level of economic support is needed to create an effect? In which type of conflict affected contexts can this type of intervention be expected to create an effect?
- How can networks or digital communication channels to disseminate information on rights, support services, and recommended behavior be leveraged more effectively? How does the effectiveness of providing personalized information in improving protection outcomes—e.g. exposure to violence or the acquisition of legal documentation—compare to that of generic information provision in conflict affected settings? Which solution is more cost-effective?
- What interventions help communities coordinate and make effective choices around negotiating local peace deals, fleeing areas where a surge in violence is likely, or reduce conflict potential among its own members?

- How can humanitarian actors structure their work and ensure the affected communities have agency to effectively communicate how assistance can best be delivered without creating protection risks?

### **Mitigation of Physical, Psychological, Social, and Legal Harm**

Policies and programming aimed at mitigating physical, psychological, social, and legal harm are equally diverse in nature. Competitive research proposals will help identify cost-effective, scalable, and context-sensitive interventions that can effectively address priority concerns and remedy harm without unintended negative consequences. Questions may include:

- What targeting approaches best identify those most in need of assistance, accounting for local perceptions of vulnerability? In situations where social networks may have been disrupted, a larger share of society is in need, and administrative capabilities are constrained, do the advantages of community targeting observed in non-conflict settings uphold? And what targeting strategy helps best prevent elite capture and reach those most in need?
- What effect does the provision of safe spaces have on exposure to violence, mental health, and wellbeing? Are they effective at channeling support to the most vulnerable among the target population?
- When aiming to reduce the psychological effects of conflict-induced distress, what outreach, targeting, and case management strategies maximize outcomes within resource-constrained settings? Building on the concept of task shifting, what tiered MHPSS interventions are possible and effective?
- How can digital solutions to identify missing persons support family reunification while respecting the privacy of those missing and their families? How does combining psychological support with economic empowerment interventions for family members of the missing affect mental health outcomes in the long term?
- How can humanitarian organizations improve their processes and procedures such as client feedback channels to ensure they are alerted to abuse and exploitation in their operations?

Applicants are encouraged to consult the protection-focused chapters of J-PAL's Learning Agenda for Randomised Evaluation in Humanitarian Action ([2022](#)) for a more complete summary of policy- and practice-relevant questions on how to better prevent and mitigate harm to conflict-affected populations and which require rigorous evaluation.

### III. Grant Types and Purpose

HPI considers proposals for three different grant types. Applicants are invited to carefully select the grant type that best fits the current stage of their research project.

Notably, the initiative's scope and focus on humanitarian settings necessitate a heightened investment in ethical research design and implementation. Research teams are encouraged to make use of travel/proposal development and pilot grants to ensure that forthcoming full studies are built on strong foundations, including equitably partnerships and reliable safety and security protocols (see section IV. *Funding Criteria* for more detail).

#### Travel/Proposal Development Grants

Travel/proposal development grants are to explore preliminary research ideas, contributing to the development of pilot or full study grant proposals in future rounds. Activities may include partnership development, descriptive or observational analysis, context and risk analysis, the design of context-sensitive measurement tools, and data development or collection, including through travel to potential project sites. Activities to help ensure that future research fully adheres to the "do no harm" principle are specifically encouraged.

Travel/proposal development grants may request up to US\$10,000.

#### Pilot Grants

Pilot grants are for piloting research, not the intervention. They typically fund activities to 1) get a sense of the take up rate of an intervention or what drives take up to ensure that uptake is high enough before starting a full study and 2) practice the logistics of the intervention with the partner(s) to make sure the intervention can be delivered as planned and to the highest ethical standards, which critically important in humanitarian contexts and for new interventions. Applicants can expect the HPI Board to give careful consideration to the extent to which a pilot grant proposal is suited to answer such questions and/or whether the information provided in a full study grant proposal credibly substantiates that researchers have completed this necessary preparatory work.

As such, pilot grants are meant for projects for which applicants and implementing partners have identified a clear research question and intervention, but for which the design and implementation requires further testing and pilot data. In addition to activities listed in the previous paragraph, pilot grant funding may also cover more foundational work to inform a forthcoming full study, including the development and adaptation of measurement strategies and instruments, piloting survey questions and logistics to test feasibility, validity,

reliability, and effectiveness safeguarding mechanisms for study participants and staff, and setting up technical access mechanisms to use administrative data for the full study. Projects should be designed and implemented in a way that demonstrates how future research adheres to the "do no harm" principle.

Pilot grants may request up to US\$75,000. PhD candidates supervised by an eligible J-PAL affiliate or invited researcher can apply for funding of up to US\$50,000.

## Full Study Grants

Full study grants are for projects with a clear research question, strong relations with implementing partner(s), well-defined evaluation design, measurement instruments, and outcomes of interest, and statistical power estimates. Proposals can also be submitted for complementary funding to continue relevant, pre-existing randomized impact evaluations or to collect additional data on protection outcomes. The expectation is that these projects will result in a publicly available paper that is eventually submitted to a top journal.

As for all other grant types, applicants can expect the HPI Board to give careful consideration to the extent to which a full study grant proposal fits HPI's scope and credibly substantiates that researchers have completed the necessary preparatory work. In addition to the aspects mentioned in the previous paragraph, this includes applicants' ability to demonstrate the policy- and practice-relevance of forthcoming results and an advanced understanding of the research project's context and political economy through corresponding risk assessments and safety and security protocols.

Full study grants may request up to US\$350,000 (expected award average of US\$200,000). PhD candidates supervised by an eligible J-PAL affiliate or invited researcher can apply for funding of up to US\$50,000.

# IV. Funding Criteria

## Designing Influential Research Projects

Competitive proposals will be characterized by their focus on producing results that can inform high leverage decision making for improved protection outcomes in conflict settings in addition to their academic relevance. Examples of impactful studies include those that generate evidence on scalable and cost-effective solutions or challenge the conventional wisdom on a protection issue, especially the theoretical and ideological priors that academics, policymakers, and practitioners typically bring to the subject. The evaluation of

standard protection interventions that are built on weak or no evidence is equally relevant in as far as learnings can be expected to help prioritize resource allocation and improve the effectiveness of protection programming.

Beyond publishing an academic journal article and presenting in academic forums, HPI grantees are expected to meaningfully collaborate with their implementing partners in using research outputs, including baseline, midline, and endline results; publish non-technical research summaries and briefs on the J-PAL and IPA websites; participate in broader dissemination events convened by J-PAL and IPA; and engage in dialogues with policymakers and practitioners supporting or designing similar programs. HPI staff can support grantees with many of these activities.

In addition, it will be mandatory for HPI grantees to collect cost data that can be used for cost-effectiveness analysis following J-PAL's costing guidelines and provided templates. Projects demonstrating positive impacts on the outcomes of interest will be required to make cost-effectiveness data publicly available, and all evaluations will be required to make the per unit cost of programs public.

Applicants can draw on [J-PAL's pathways to influence policy and practice](#) and IPA's [Best Bets: Emerging Opportunities for Impact at Scale](#) report to substantiate their project's potential to influence policy and practice in the narrative proposal. Concrete milestones to demonstrate how research teams will support their implementing partner(s) and the wider community of protection practitioners and policymakers in using forthcoming results must be listed as policy- and practice milestones in the timeline. The letter of support by implementing partners is an opportunity for implementing partners to detail what actions they expect to take under a positive, negative, or null result scenario.

## **Designing Responsible Research Projects**

While adherence to the “do no harm” principle is essential in all contexts, it becomes critically important in humanitarian settings, necessitating equitable relationships between researchers, implementing partners, and participants. It requires prioritizing the safety and security of all involved, and employing ethical research designs and measurement strategies informed by a deep understanding of conflict drivers. If selected for funding, researchers or their staff can include related questions in their regular research quality support discussions with J-PAL staff.



## **Ensuring Equitable Relationships: Researchers, Implementing Partners and Participants**

HPI encourages building strong, transparent, and equitable partnerships among researchers, implementing partners, and participants, valuing diverse perspectives and addressing power differentials. HPI travel/proposal development and pilot grants can be requested to facilitate these collaborative efforts. Recognizing that communities affected by violence are actively developing protection solutions, HPI encourages projects focused on advancing and quantifying the impact of their work.

Applicants are required to demonstrate their commitment to maintaining rigorous standards for safeguarding and inclusivity of study participants throughout project implementation as part of their proposal. Beyond the IRB's mandate to ensure the safety of research participants, we encourage researchers to involve affected communities in intervention design and share findings with participants.

## **Ensuring Safety and Security of Research Participants and Research Teams**

Competitive applications will substantiate how the safety and security of research participants and research teams will be prioritized throughout project planning and implementation. Applicants are required to detail the systems in place to ensure the highest research ethics and care for respondents and research teams.

A comprehensive risk management matrix that details the risks for research teams, enumerators, and participants forms an integral part of the proposal based on the template that will be provided to applicants who pass the LOI stage. This must be complemented with effective and clear safety and security plans that define how security incidents and potential harm to research participants and research teams, including enumerators, during data collection or research procedures, will be managed and treated. These can include the protection of vulnerable populations involved in the research, strategies to protect participants engaging with sensitive research questions, and anticipate any potential adverse effects of participation. In addition, addressing potential exposure to violence, communicable disease, and emotional wellbeing from surveying difficult matters should also be covered. Protocols should incorporate appropriate feedback and complaint mechanisms to safeguard research assistants, enumerators, and participants alike.

In the context of humanitarian crises, it is critically important that applicant teams include members experienced in working in fragile settings and closely collaborate with their implementing partners to jointly assess and manage risks and incidents. Where applicable, the safety and security plan of the implementing partner may be attached in lieu of a

separately developed protocol, along with an explanation on the extent to which research participants and staff are covered.

### **Ensuring Ethical Research Designs and Measurement Strategies**

Randomisation in humanitarian settings can pose challenges, particularly when it may seem to be at odds with humanitarian principles such as impartiality, which prioritize need-based treatment allocation (see text box for more detail on the humanitarian principles).

Contextually appropriate options for responsible randomization may include A/B testing to compare approaches without a pure control group, and testing cross-cutting treatments to assess bundled interventions' trade-offs. 'In the bubble' randomization accommodates eligibility-based program administration, and randomization would include those on the eligibility threshold. Moreover, encouragement and phase-in designs are common for understanding program impacts in humanitarian settings (see Annex 1).

**Humanitarian action is guided by four widely accepted principles**, with similarities to the Belmont principles guiding human subject research:

- **Humanity:** Human suffering must be addressed wherever it is found. The purpose of humanitarian action is to protect life and health and ensure respect for human beings.
- **Impartiality:** Humanitarian action must be carried out based on need alone, giving priority to the most urgent cases of distress and making no adverse distinction on the basis of nationality, race, gender, religious belief, class or political opinion.
- **Independence:** Humanitarian action must be autonomous from political, economic, military or other objectives that any actor may hold with regard to areas where humanitarian action is being implemented.
- **Neutrality:** Humanitarian actors must not take sides in hostilities or engage in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

The application of the humanitarian principles is essential to distinguish humanitarian action from other forms of activities that may pursue similar goals or operate in the same environments. For researchers, it is important to keep in mind that, in practice, this may place important normative or operational constraints on the kind of variation that experimental evaluations can seek to introduce and will require careful consideration in addition to the established standards for ethical research.

— Adapted from CHS Alliance, Groupe URD and Sphere Project ([2014](#))

We strongly encourage the inclusion of team members experienced in humanitarian contexts and the involvement of local researchers to gain essential insight into the risks of operating in specific conflict settings. This ensures that research designs are adjusted appropriately based on contextual knowledge and a thorough understanding of associated challenges.

## Proposal Evaluation Criteria

### Primary Evaluation Criteria

Proposals are reviewed by a rotating group of academic researchers and policy reviewers. Projects are assessed against five equally weighted evaluation criteria:

**Academic contribution**

Does the study make a significant contribution toward advancing knowledge in the field? How does the study compare with the existing body of research? Is the research designed to probe mechanisms (i.e. how an intervention has impact)? Does it answer new questions or introduce novel methods, measures, or interventions? Is there academic relevance? Does the research strategy provide a bridge between a practical experiment and underlying economic theories?

**Policy relevance**

Does the study address HPI's priority research areas? Is there demand from policymakers or practitioners for more/better information to influence their decisions in this area? Will results from the intervention have generalizable implications? How will the "lessons learned" have relevance beyond this case? What is the estimated cost-effectiveness of the intervention? Does the intervention scale and does the proposal outline credible pathways to evidence use?

**Technical design**

Does the research design appropriately answer the questions outlined in the proposal and is it appropriate for working in a humanitarian setting? Are there threats that could compromise the validity of results? If so, does the proposal sufficiently address those threats? For full study proposals, are designs powered to detect results?

**Project viability**

Is the relationship with the implementing partner equitable, strong and likely to endure through the entire study? What is the credibility and policy influence of the implementing partner? Does the implementing partner have committed or prospective sources of funding for the project? What is the implementing partner's prior experience implementing this type of program? Are there any other logistical or political obstacles that might threaten the completion of the study, such as government authorization, Human Subjects review, or a weak safety and security management system? For pilots, do researchers describe how piloting activities would inform a full-scale impact evaluation? Does the research team have a track record of implementing successful projects similar to the one being proposed, and in similar settings?

**Value for money**

Is the cost of the study commensurate with the value of expected contributions to science and policy? Does the study leverage funding from other sources?

**Additional Considerations**

When reviewing proposals, review board members and staff will also consider:

**Ethics:** Reviewers will consider whether there is any risk of harm to research participants and staff, what the proposed risk mitigation strategies are, and how the possible benefits of the research compare to the possible harms. Projects are required to have secured all necessary research approvals from all relevant local, national, and international ethics committees prior to beginning fieldwork. Given the particular vulnerability of HPI's target population and the risks stemming from working in fragile contexts, we ask applicants to elaborate on the ethical considerations underpinning their work, with a particular focus on the safety and security of research participants and staff, in addition to fulfilling J-PAL and IPA's regular IRB review requirements. We ask that researchers keep the best interest of the target population in mind throughout all stages of their research activities.

**Team Diversity:** HPI welcomes proposals from diverse research teams. We highly encourage proposals from teams with researchers or other research team members (research associates, managers, enumerators, etc.) with lived experiences related to the topic and with researchers from the countries where the project will take place. We also encourage prospective applicants to consider working across disciplines.

## V. Eligibility

### Geographic Eligibility

In principle, HPI can fund projects in any [ODA-eligible country](#). In line with the initiative's scope, HPI expects research projects to focus on fragile contexts, with a focus on acute conflict settings (see section II. Scope for more detail on the definition of conflict). While in principle ODA-eligible, the initiative's strategic focus does not lie on Latin America and the Caribbean and projects from that region will have to score particularly high on policy relevance and the potential to generate generalizable insights.

### General Research Team Eligibility

One researcher per project must be a [J-PAL affiliate](#), an [invited researcher to HPI or the J-PAL Europe office](#), or a J-PAL postdoc. PhD candidates supervised by J-PAL affiliates or eligible invited researchers are also eligible. PhD candidate applications have to comply with a funding cap of US\$50,000 for pilot and full study grants.

All applicants, including affiliates and invited researchers, are limited to submitting three proposals, inclusive of all proposal types, per 12-month period per initiative either as main PIs



or co-PIs. If an applicant is submitting a fourth proposal in a 12-month period, the proposal is ineligible for funding.

Research teams that do not fit the J-PAL-specific eligibility criteria are encouraged to fill in this [researcher interest form](#) and send it to [hpi@povertyactionlab.org](mailto:hpi@povertyactionlab.org) in order to discuss possible options, including the possibility of being connected to eligible researchers.

## Extended Eligibility for Researchers from or Based in an LMIC

HPI is invested in creating more opportunities for academics from traditionally underrepresented groups and offers additional funding and mentoring opportunities for researchers based in or from low- or middle- income countries ([LMIC](#)). Through the HPI Scholars Program, researchers who hold a PhD, whose primary affiliation is with a university, who are based in or from an LMIC and who are not yet part of J-PAL's network can apply for travel/proposal development (up to \$10,000) and pilot grants (up to \$75,000) as part of HPI's regular RFP.

Please refer to the website on the [HPI Scholars Program](#) for more information about eligibility and resources to support proposal development if your research interests fall within HPI's scope, are based in or from an LMIC, and don't yet meet the conditions outlined under *General Research Team Eligibility* above.

## Implementing Organizations

HPI is a research fund and only funds impact evaluations and related research activities. Implementing organizations that wish to study the impact of their programs should partner with research teams that are eligible to apply for research funding. J-PAL and IPA are available to support matchmaking with researchers. Please reach out to [hpi@povertyactionlab.org](mailto:hpi@povertyactionlab.org) (J-PAL) and [humanitarian@poverty-action.org](mailto:humanitarian@poverty-action.org) (IPA) to learn more.

# VI. Timeline and Application Process

## Dates for Round 1

HPI's inaugural RFP will follow the following timeline, which applies to both regular funding and HPI Scholars Program applications:

- Tuesday, February 13, 2024: RFP announced and applications open
- Friday, April 5, 2024: Letters of Interest (LOI) submission deadline

- Friday, May 17, 2024: Full proposals submission deadline

LOIs are mandatory and serve to determine research team eligibility, alignment with HPI's scope, and grant type and methodological fit, following which successful research teams are invited to submit a full proposal. For information on how to access J-PAL's application portal, follow the instructions on the [RFP webpage](#).

## Off-cycle Proposals

HPI welcomes off-cycle proposals to better align with the fast-paced nature of humanitarian programming. Off-cycle proposals must be submitted through the same application portal as regular proposals and motivate how receiving a funding decision before the end of a regular funding round will allow them to make use of an unanticipated opportunity. Research teams interested in submitting an off-cycle proposal should reach out to [hpi@povertyactionlab.org](mailto:hpi@povertyactionlab.org) to discuss their constraints and a suitable timeline before starting their application.

# VII. J-PAL and IPA Proposal Development Support

## General Proposal Development Support

J-PAL and IPA staff continuously conduct outreach to stakeholders and researchers who may be interested in rigorously evaluating interventions to answer questions that align with HPI's scope. Interested research teams and implementing organizations should not hesitate to reach out to request support in identifying a suitable research or implementing partner, respectively. J-PAL and IPA staff can furthermore answer questions on a proposal's alignment with HPI's scope and research methodology while advising on relevant resources to strengthen proposals.

Research teams or implementing organizations with general questions about HPI should contact [hpi@povertyactionlab.org](mailto:hpi@povertyactionlab.org) (J-PAL) and [humanitarian@poverty-action.org](mailto:humanitarian@poverty-action.org) (IPA). For tailored support specific to your region or country, please refer to our list of contacts from J-PAL Regional Offices and IPA Country Offices in Annex 3.

## Scholar Program Proposal Development Support

Applicants are highly encouraged to consult J-PAL's library of practical [research resources](#) on designing and running randomized while developing their proposal. They should not hesitate to

contact [hpi@povertyactionlab.org](mailto:hpi@povertyactionlab.org) at any stage of the application process.

Scholar applicants who are successful at the letter of interest stage will be invited to discuss their proposal with J-PAL staff members to strengthen their application. For more information and additional supporting resources, please visit the [HPI Scholars Program webpage](#).

# Annex 1: Resources for Responsible Research in Humanitarian Contexts

Article	Content
The ethical contours of research in crisis settings: five practical considerations for academic institutional review boards and researchers ( <a href="#">Falb et al 2019</a> )	This paper describes five issues particular to humanitarian settings that IRBs should consider and on which they should provide recommendations to overcome associated challenges.
Contributions of experimental approaches to development and poverty alleviation: Field experiments and humanitarian assistance ( <a href="#">Quattrochi et al. 2020</a> )	This paper shares reflections on the opportunities and risks of running experiments in humanitarian settings, and provides insights from field experiments of large-scale humanitarian aid programs in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

  

Resource	Content
<a href="#">Humanitarian Research Toolkit</a> (IRC)	A toolkit for conducting research in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, comprising guidance, training documents, and other practical tools.
<a href="#">Ethical conduct of randomized evaluations</a> (J-PAL)	This resource is intended as a practical guide for researchers to use when considering the ethics of a given research project.
<a href="#">Randomised Evaluations in Humanitarian Action</a> (J-PAL)	Building on conversations with researchers and practitioners, chapter III. of this learning agenda provides guidance on ethical randomization design in humanitarian settings
<a href="#">Data Responsibility in Humanitarian Action</a> (Inter-Agency Standing Committee)	This operational guidance provides concrete steps to ensure that data is safe, ethical, and effectively managed in humanitarian action, laying out a set of principles and actions for data responsibility.

[Gender-Based Violence Research Methodologies in Humanitarian Settings](#) (ELRHA)

This document provides an evidence review and recommendations on research methodology and ethics to support researchers conducting research on GBV in humanitarian settings.

[Ethics for Humanitarian Innovation Toolkit](#) (ELRHA)

This is a toolkit to guide brainstorming on the development, evaluation and implementation of ethical humanitarian innovations.

## Annex 2: About J-PAL and IPA

**The Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab** (J-PAL) is a global research center working to reduce poverty by ensuring that policy is informed by scientific evidence. Anchored by a network of over 900 researchers at universities around the world, J-PAL conducts randomized impact evaluations to answer critical questions in the fight against poverty. J-PAL researchers have led more than 2,200 randomized evaluations across a diverse range of topics, from clean water to microfinance to crime prevention. The network is committed to supporting the application of research insights and the scaling of programs that have been evaluated and found to be effective: more than 600 million people have been reached by programs that were scaled up after being evaluated by J-PAL affiliates and invited researchers. <https://www.povertyactionlab.org/>

**Innovations for Poverty Action** (IPA) is a research and policy nonprofit that creates and shares evidence, while equipping decision-makers to use evidence to reduce poverty. With a long-term presence in 20 countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, and evaluations in 30+ more countries, IPA leads the field of development in cutting-edge research quality, innovation, and impact. In recent decades, trillions of dollars have been spent on programs designed to reduce global poverty, but clear evidence on which programs succeed is rare, and when evidence does exist, decision-makers often do not know about it. IPA exists to bring together leading researchers and these decision-makers to ensure that the evidence we create leads to tangible impact on the world. Since our founding in 2002, IPA has worked with over 600 leading academics to conduct over 900 evaluations in over 50 countries. This research has informed hundreds of successful programs that now impact millions of individuals worldwide. <https://poverty-action.org/>



## Annex 3: J-PAL and IPA Contacts

Research teams with general questions about HPI should contact [hpi@povertyactionlab.org](mailto:hpi@povertyactionlab.org) (J-PAL) and [humanitarian@poverty-action.org](mailto:humanitarian@poverty-action.org) (IPA). If working in a country where J-PAL has a strong presence, reach out to [hpi@povertyactionlab.org](mailto:hpi@povertyactionlab.org) to be connected to the respective regional office. When developing a proposal in an area where IPA has a country office, please directly reach out to the following contacts:

IPA Country Office	Contact Name	Contact Email
Burkina Faso	Thierno Faye	tfaye@poverty-action.org
Colombia	Juan Felipe García	jfgarcia@poverty-action.org
Côte d' Ivoire	Thierno Faye	tfaye@poverty-action.org
Ghana	Salifu Amadu	samadu@poverty-action.org
Kenya	Ginger Golub	ggolub@poverty-action.org
Liberia	Walker Higgins	whiggins@poverty-action.org
Malawi	Tamara Billima-Mulenga	tbillima@poverty-action.org
Mali	Thierno Faye	tfaye@poverty-action.org
Myanmar	Mun Pan Aung	mpaung@poverty-action.org
Nigeria	Funmi Ayeni	fayeni@poverty-action.org
Peru	Bárbara Sparrow	bsparrow@poverty-action.org
Philippines	Aftap Opel	aopel@poverty-action.org
Rwanda	Cassien Havugimana	chavugimana@poverty-action.org
Uganda	Patrick Nalere	pnalere@poverty-action.org
Sierra Leone	Walker Higgins	whiggins@poverty-action.org