

# J-PAL's European Social Inclusion Initiative (ESII) RFP Round IV: Instructions for Pilot Study Applications

A complete application for pilots consists of (i) an application form - which includes a cover sheet and a project narrative; (ii) a timeline; (iii) a budget narrative; (iv) an itemised budget; (v) letters of support from implementing partners; and (vi) a budget letter of support or document from the Institute to Receive Award (ITRA).

Proposals are due on the **1st of November, 2024 at 6:00 PM Central European Time (CET)**. Please send your application documents to [esii@povertyactionlab.org](mailto:esii@povertyactionlab.org) following the instructions below.

## I. Pilot Overview

These grants are for studies with a clear research question, but which require substantial upfront investments in design, measurement, and/or implementation before a full impact evaluation proposal can be submitted.

Activities could include A/B testing, developing new measurement strategies or instruments, analysis of existing data, piloting survey questions, or new data development or collection. Random assignment does not necessarily need to occur during a pilot study, but applications should explain how the pilot will lead to a randomised evaluation in the future. Pilot proposals are not expected to have full power calculations.

In addition, pilot proposals should:

- Have a very clear research question that lays the groundwork and assesses the feasibility of using a randomised evaluation to answer this question.
- Clearly articulate the conceptual and methodological distinction between the pilot study and any future follow-on studies, and what exactly the pilot will enable researchers to learn. The narrative should include a solid justification for why a pilot is needed, what will be learned, and what a future RCT informed by this exploratory research fits in ESII's scope.

Projects that receive pilot funding are welcome to apply for additional funding in future RFPs.

**Funding per pilot study:** The award limit is currently set at €50,000. We expect projects of various sizes, and will carefully check whether the budget size accurately reflects the scope of work proposed.

**Timeline:** Funding requests should not extend beyond the **31st of December, 2026**.

## II. Pilot Study Application Checklist and Guidelines

The following documents will be required for your application to be considered. For each of these items, you will find guidelines in the sections below.

Proposal Narrative	Required	Use the Pilot Proposal Narrative Template and save as a pdf document with the title: [PI Last Name, First Name][Narrative].pdf
Proposal Budget	Required	Use the Budget Template and save as a single Excel file with the title: [PI Last Name, First Name][Budget].xls(x)
Budget Narrative	Required	Save as a pdf document with the title: [PI Last Name, First Name][BudgetNarrative].pdf
Timeline	Required	Use the Timeline Template and save as a pdf document with the title: [PI Last Name, First Name][Timeline].pdf
Letter(s) of support		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Letter of support from each implementing partner</li> </ul>	Required	[PI Last Name, First Name] [Name of Organisation Letter of Support].pdf
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A budget letter of support or document from the ITRA</li> </ul>	Required	[PI Last Name, First Name] [Name of ITRA/Organisation Letter of Support].pdf
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>[PhD candidates applying for funding] Letter of support from affiliate/invited researcher supervisor</li> </ul>	Required	[PI Last Name, First Name] [Name of Supervisor Letter of Support].pdf

Please submit your application to [esii@povertyactionlab.org](mailto:esii@povertyactionlab.org) by the full proposal deadline on the **1st of November, 2024 at 6:00 PM Central European Time (CET)**. You must attach all documents for your proposal to be considered as complete. Incomplete proposals will not be reviewed. All templates for these documents are provided at the [RFP webpage](#) and instructions for each one are included below.

## Proposal Narrative Guidelines

Please use the Pilot Proposal Narrative Template that can be found [here](#). Apart from compiling the cover sheet you will be asked to answer the following questions. Please ensure that your submission is in 11-point font and does not exceed the word limit.

- **Abstract:** A 100-150 word abstract of the study, which will be added to the ESII webpage if the project receives funding. The abstract should include (i) a basic problem statement; (ii) the intervention or approach being evaluated; and (iii) what questions the research will answer.  
*(Suggested word count: up to 150 words)*
- **Problem Statement and Motivation:** To motivate the research, clearly state the social inclusion problem your project aims to tackle and how your proposed research project can help address this challenge. This should be policy-oriented and clearly state how the policy problem you are addressing falls within the scope of ESII activities.  
*(Suggested word count: up to 200 words)*
- **Unique contribution to the literature:** Please clearly articulate how this research fits within the existing literature and how it will advance the field. Explain the project's potential to provide a unique scientific contribution if fully developed and, in particular, the value of conducting this scoping work prior to a full-scale randomised evaluation. Note that the full reference list (to be provided at the end of the Narrative document) does not count towards word counts.  
*(Suggested word count: up to 200 words)*
- **Future intervention description:** Please succinctly describe the future intervention you would like to evaluate if the project was to be fully developed. If possible, please include details of potential implementing partners and your relationship with them. It is acceptable if, at this stage, you do not have all the details of the future intervention, you can describe the different possible scenarios you are exploring and include details of how this pilot can help inform some of the existing gaps.  
*(Suggested word count: up to 200 words)*

- Overview of pilot activities: Please clearly articulate what you aim to understand and/or achieve with this pilot grant and
  - What activities will this grant fund?
  - What data, tools, and methods do you expect to use to address your pilot objectives? Will it pilot an intervention? Will it provide qualitative data to inform intervention design? Will it test survey instruments and/or field logistics?
  - Please indicate who will be the implementing partner.

*(Suggested word count: up to 500 words)*
  
- Informing a future RCT: Please clearly articulate how the results from this pilot will help inform a future RCT or others' research. Describe, specifically, what researchers and practitioners can be expected to learn from this pilot study.
  - How will the activities described help inform a future RCT?
  - In what specific ways will the pilot prepare researchers for a full research project?

*(Suggested word count: up to 500 words)*
  
- Target pilot population: Please describe the target population(s) to be reached during the pilot and describe how the targeting and engagement will take place.
  - Describe how the project plans to target individuals at risk of social exclusion.
  - Describe if and how the project plans to engage with hard to reach at-risk populations.
  - Discuss if you foresee the pilot population being significantly different than the population targeted if the study was to be fully implemented.

*(Suggested word count: up to 300 words)*
  
- In-country partner(s): Describe the current relationship between your research team and any local implementing partner(s), as well as the role and level of engagement of each for this project. Your letter(s) of support should support this description. Please describe the history of the partnership, the partner's involvement in project activities, and any in-kind or financial support they have committed or provided to the project. Please include any potential risks to the partnership.
  - Applicants should identify both implementing partners (those involved in the pilot itself) and full-RCT partners (those potentially involved in the full-RCT), which may be the same or two separate sets of organisations.

*(Suggested word count: up to 300 words)*
  
- Potential ethical risks: All J-PAL initiatives rely on IRB approvals secured by the PIs for many of the ethical issues surrounding conduct of primary data collection and experimentation. For this reason, PIs on successful applications are required to secure an IRB approval before an award agreement can be signed with J-PAL.

The domain of an IRB review, however, does not include all ethical considerations. For this reason, we are providing an opportunity for the PIs to discuss any issues that they feel warrant discussion but that are not covered in their existing or planned IRB review. Specifically, please describe any ethical and/or safety-related risks, and detail how you will manage these risks, if your study could be considered more than minimal-risk (e.g. research participants are a vulnerable population, surveys will include questions on sensitive topics, the partner operates in a risky environment, etc.).

*(Suggested word count: 300 words)*

## Budget Guidelines

It is your responsibility that your budget follows your host institution's policies for costs. As part of your proposal, you must submit a letter from the institution to receive the award that states that they have reviewed your proposal and accepted your budget. You should contact them in advance to make sure you are aware of their policies for proposal review and give them enough time to meet the proposal deadline.

It is usual for the ITRA to be the university of primary affiliation of (one) of the eligible researcher(s) or one of the universities with which one of the other researchers is primarily affiliated. The Paris School of Economics (PSE), which is the institute that will process the awards, requires that there is a subawardee PI at the ITRA who will be responsible for overseeing the work on the ground.

## Proposal Budget Guidelines

Carefully review the guidelines below, then use the Budget Template, which must be completed in its entirety and saved as a single Excel file with the title: [PI Last Name, First Name][Budget].xls(x) to attach to your application. To reduce processing time, please keep the following in mind when developing your budget:

- Please submit the budget in euros.
- Applicants should review J-PAL best practices on questionnaire design and data collection/management in the [J-PAL Research Protocol Checklist](#), to ensure they have budgeted for expenses associated with piloting and surveyor training, survey translation, field spot checks, and back checking.
- Projects which have secured or will require co-funding for their project should complete both Excel sheets in the Budget Template, i.e. both "Total Project Budget" (overview over all costs required to complete your project) AND "Initiative Budget" (what you are requesting from ESII) templates. If the project has other funders, the proposal should clearly explain the marginal contribution of the requested funds from ESII and the feasibility of your project, should another part of the activities remain unfunded. Applications must include a brief budget narrative document detailing the major costs within the budget. In addition:

- We strongly encourage applicants to include budget notes in the column provided in the budget template, specifying input costs for line items within the budget.
- Travel costs should include a breakdown of how many trips are planned, the estimated cost per trip, number of people on a given trip, etc.
- Any computer/equipment purchases should include a breakdown of what is being purchased (e.g. how many laptops), as well as the project staff that will be assigned to the equipment.
- The Paris School of Economics sets a maximum of 230 euros for daily accommodation and meals. Budgets should be made depending on prices in the research location.
- Awards are normally paid on a cost-reimbursable basis. However, PSE can advance payments to ITRAs if requested by the research team. Depending on the award amount, upon signature of the contract, 30 to 50 percent can be provided in advance with subsequent tranches provided based on agreements between the research team and PSE, or the rest being on a cost-reimbursable basis. Please note that preparing an advance payment model requires additional time and additional coordination between PSE and the ITRA.

#### Allowable Direct and Indirect Costs

- Please note that ESII does not cover PI salaries.
- Project implementation costs: For full research projects, implementation costs are expected to be borne by the project partners. However, under some circumstances, ESII can fund implementation costs where it is a marginal addition to an existing programme to offset costs from an experiment (e.g. adding an additional treatment arm or the costs of an encouragement design). These types of costs might include travel, small participant incentives, and/or SMS fees.
- Proposals requesting funds for implementation are required to explain why the implementer cannot bear the costs in the budget narrative and must also justify the input costs.
- Universities in high-income countries (generally defined as [OECD member countries](#)) can charge up to 10% in indirect costs, applied to total direct costs. Non-university non-profits from any location and universities from mid- or low-income countries may charge up to 15% in indirect costs, applied to total direct costs.
- We understand that the cap on overhead or indirect costs under this initiative is low and that grantees may have reasonable project support costs included in budgets as direct costs. Such costs should be reasonable and explained in the budget narrative.
- Unallowable costs include those labelled as “incidental”, “miscellaneous”, or “contingency”. Any costs for rent should be explained in the budget narrative.

## Budget Narrative Guidelines

Detail the major costs within the budget, referring to the Budget Guidelines, and compile this in a pdf document with the title [PI Last Name, First Name][Budget Narrative].pdf to include in your proposal. This document is required in addition to the Proposal Budget -- i.e. notes included in the Excel sheet do not suffice.

## Timeline Guidelines

Please fill out the template provided outlining in detail i) key project milestones and ii) key policy and practice milestones. Save the timeline as a pdf document with the title [PI Last Name, First Name][Timeline].pdf.

## Letter(s) of Support Guidelines

Please obtain a letter of support from the following, each saved as a single pdf file with the title [PI Last Name, First Name] [Name of Organisation Letter of Support].pdf for upload to the portal:

1. Letter from each implementing partner, indicating the details of their commitment to partner on the research, their willingness to share progress on results and use of evidence, and their willingness to share relevant programme cost information. These letters of support should not be templates provided by the research team, but the implementing partners' perspective and real understanding of the partnership.
2. Budget letter of support from ITRA: A budget letter of support or document stating that the proposed grant host institution, the Institute to Receive Award (ITRA), approves the proposal materials.
  - A letter or document stating approval of the proposal materials and budget is required from each ITRA. Please allow for an adequate amount of time to acquire this letter.
  - Given the funds will be provided by the Paris School of Economics, this letter should indicate an understanding that the agreement is governed by French law and French will be the official language of the contract. Translation costs should be accounted for in the budget, if necessary. If it is not possible to receive the letter, please justify this in the budget narrative.

Institute to Receive Award (ITRA) Requirements: It is usual for the ITRA to be the university of primary affiliation of (one) of the eligible researcher(s) or one of the universities with which one of the other researchers is primarily affiliated. The Paris School of Economics (PSE), which is the institute that will process the awards, requires that there is a subawardee PI at the ITRA who will be responsible for overseeing the work on the ground.

3. Letter of support from affiliate/invited researcher supervisor: Graduate students applying as the primary PI are required to include a letter of support from a researcher adviser eligible for this call. The letter should comment on the merit of the project and indicate the adviser's willingness to remain involved in a supervisory role throughout the lifetime of the project, committing to supervise the project closely.

### **A note on the Institution/IRB approval requirements if the proposal is accepted for award**

Should your proposal be accepted for an award, the allocated funds will be disbursed through a grant from PSE to your host institution. In addition to your proposal, this process will require:

- IRB: We will further ask that you submit information on IRB approval(s) or exemption(s). If your project is awarded ESII funding, you will need to submit the IRB approval before receiving funding. It is mandatory for grantees to ensure that the project they implement has been reviewed by an IRB with status as an IRB Organisation (IORG). An IRB's status can be found by consulting the database of IORGs. If you do not have access to an IRB or ethics review committee at your institution(s) that has IORG status, requests can be sent to PSE's IRB after projects are chosen for funding. Funding is contingent on approval or exemption from an IRB with IORG status. PSE will require proof of this prior to executing the award with your institution.
- Formal submission approval of the proposal from your institution to the initiative: If your proposal is accepted for award, the allocated funds will be disbursed through a grant from PSE to your host institution. In addition to your proposal, this process will also require your institution to formally approve and submit the proposal to the initiative, unless this has already been included in your proposal. Prior to finalising the award with your institution, PSE will need verification of this approval.
- We aim to complete the subaward 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 your award and we may in some cases be able to cover those costs (post-award, but pre-IRB) under the award.
- J-PAL minimum must do for initiative funded projects: Please note that all projects funded through J-PAL initiatives are expected to comply with the "minimum must do's" detailed in [J-PAL's research protocols](#).



### III. Terms and Conditions

#### General Terms and Conditions

1. This Call for Proposals is not and shall not be construed to be a contract, offer, or request for an offer. Those responding to this call receive no rights whatsoever as a result of their submissions. J-PAL will not have any express or implied obligations or responsibilities to those who respond and will not otherwise be bound by any terms or conditions, except to the extent set forth in a definitive, final, written grant agreement duly executed by the recipient(s) and J-PAL. There is no commitment by J-PAL that such a final grant agreement will be executed, even if J-PAL enters into negotiations with the applicants, proposed recipient(s), or his or her institution.
2. J-PAL in its sole and exclusive discretion may reject any or all proposals with or without notice or reasons, withdraw this call at any time before or after delivery of proposals, or if no proposal is accepted, abandon the call.
3. J-PAL further reserves the right in its sole and exclusive discretion to waive irregularities or defects in any proposal, but in no event will J-PAL have any obligation to do so. Moreover, J-PAL will not be responsible for errors or omissions by anyone submitting a proposal, and J-PAL shall be the sole judge of the responsiveness, appropriateness and completeness of any and all proposals.
4. J-PAL reserves the sole and exclusive right in its discretion to modify the timeline for decision-making or otherwise modify or amend this call as it deems appropriate.
5. All responses to this call become the property of J-PAL. Regardless of any markings identifying the proposal or its content as proprietary or confidential, J-PAL reserves the right to disclose or use any information contained in the proposals and other presentations responsive to this call. The review board making funding decisions includes external academics and policymakers, who will receive a copy of the proposals.
6. J-PAL is not responsible for and will not reimburse any costs incurred in submitting materials or information pursuant to this call or in otherwise responding to this call, including but not limited to evaluating, responding, providing follow-up, negotiating, and otherwise complying with it.
7. Applicants agree to be bound by the terms of their proposal for at least sixty days from the date such proposals are due, and otherwise agree to negotiate in good faith any other terms for a definitive arrangement if selected by J-PAL to do so.
8. Applicants certify that the work product they propose to create or use if they are a grant recipient will not infringe on or violate the intellectual property rights (including but not limited to trademarks, copyrights, patents, trade secrets, moral rights) or privacy rights of any person or entity. Applicants submitting proposals, materials, or information further certify that they have or will have such ownership or use rights in such work product sufficient to allow IPA to achieve its purposes as generally provided for in this call.
9. Grant recipients agree that, if requested by J-PAL, they will provide additional information about any subcontractors, graduate students, research assistants, and other

third parties engaged by the grant recipient to provide services. J-PAL reserves the right in good faith to approve any such persons in order to ensure consistency with IPA's expectations of quality and character.

10. Applicants are required to disclose to J-PAL all funders of their project. Depending on the co-funders, an applicant may be ineligible for funding from J-PAL under this call. Further information may be requested from the ESII staff at J-PAL.