GOVERNANCE INITIATIVE: RFP OVERVIEW

Round 25 - Spring 2025 | Request for Proposals (RFP)

J-PAL's Governance Initiative (GI) funds randomized evaluations of strategies to improve governance in low- and middle-income countries. GI calls for proposals from J-PAL affiliates, J-PAL invited researchers,[1] J-PAL postdocs, J-PAL staff with PhDs, and PhD students of J-PAL's affiliates and invited researchers. The GI Review Paper identifies research priorities (full paper; executive summary). All letters of interest (LOIs) for full, pilot, multidisciplinary, and travel/proposal development grants are due via WizeHive **by 11:59 p.m. ET on Tuesday, April 22, 2025.** All proposals are due via WizeHive **by 11:59 p.m. ET on Tuesday, June 3, 2025.** WizeHive, J-PAL's new platform for RFPs, requires a new login if you have not used it before. Please follow the prompts in the links above to create a new login. If you experience any errors or technical issues with WizeHive, you can first check the J-PAL guide to WizeHive as well as the platform's FAQ section. For additional support during business hours, please reach out to application_help@povertyactionlab.org and CC gi@povertyactionlab.org. For all other questions, please email gi@povertyactionlab.org.

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TIMELINE FOR SPRING 2025 RFP

Announce RFP to J-PAL research network	Friday, March 28, 2025 at 5 p.m. ET
Required Letter of Interest (LOI) Deadline *Applicants will receive an invitation to submit proposals*	Tuesday, April 22, 2025 at 11:59 p.m. ET
Proposal Deadline *By invitation*	Tuesday, June 3, 2025 at 11:59 p.m. ET
Anticipated Notification Date	Late August 2025

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[1]Select non-affiliate faculty who have been nominated, approved, and notified of their eligibility to submit proposals. Note: This request for proposals has been sent directly to researchers eligible to apply for GI research grants. **Please do not circulate externally, given this restriction**. If you have questions regarding your eligibility to participate, we welcome you to inquire by emailing us at GI@povertyactionlab.org. **Among those eligible to apply, note that all applicants are limited to being named (as PI or Co-PI) on a maximum of three proposals to GI per 12-month period.**

OVERVIEW

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 governance theories. GI's research priorities are identified in the Governance Initiative Review Paper (full 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.[2]
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

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2 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.

9. E-governance and demographics as cross-cutting factors

If a researcher is uncertain about whether a research project is eligible for GI, please email GI@povertyactionlab.org.

AWARD TYPES

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. For the Spring 2025 RFP, GI invites proposals under four (4) award types.

Full Randomized Evaluation Research Projects (up to $400,000, suggested period of performance: 24 - 30 months)

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 from power calculations. 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. De-identified data should be made publicly available within three years of the end of data collection (sooner if required by donors), or within 60 days of a paper's acceptance in a journal.

The total amount awarded to a single project, including any GI funding for proposal development or piloting, will not exceed $400,000.[3] 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.

Pilot Studies (up to $75,000, suggested period of performance: one year)

These grants are for studies with a clear research question, but for which the design and implementation requires further testing and pilot data.[4] The expectation is that these projects will ultimately develop into full-scale randomized evaluations.

Travel or Proposal Development (up to $10,000, suggested period of performance: six months)

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

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[3] In rare circumstances, proposals with a compelling reason for requesting more than $400,000 maybe considered on a case-by-case basis.
[4] 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.

for a pilot or a full randomized evaluation during a subsequent call for proposals. 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. **Please note these grants are provided on a cost-reimbursable basis; for more details, see the travel/proposal development narrative** linked on the [GI RFP release page](#).

Multidisciplinary Grants – Type I and Type II (up to $30,000, suggested period of performance type I: six months; type II: 24 months)

GI is continuing its multidisciplinary funding window to facilitate and sponsor multidisciplinary experimental research activities. GI seeks research proposals that combine insights from applied economics and political science with those from other disciplines (including social sciences, humanities and, potentially, natural sciences) to answer pressing governance questions, with a preference for proposals incorporating theory, methods, and/or analytical frameworks drawn from psychology and behavioral science. Multidisciplinary grants must relate to political participation. We strongly recommend that approaches from other disciplines inform how research questions are formulated and answered, not just how inputs and outcomes are measured.

These grants will fund the following activities:

- Type I: Exploratory research, which may also include travel activities, to (a) address a general topic of interest within the field of governance and (b) propose ideas for how the topic might be explored through a future randomized evaluation that incorporates theory, methods, or analytical frameworks from disciplines outside economics and political science. Proposals do not need to include a detailed program or evaluation design.
- Type II: Additional research activities on top of an ongoing or recently completed randomized impact evaluation–including (but not limited to) the addition of a new survey module, treatment arm, or qualitative fieldwork–that draw from disciplines outside economics and political science.

Both Type I and Type II activities can include other costs associated with promoting interactions and collaborations between researchers from different disciplines centered around the development of a research project in the governance space (including travel, but excluding high-income countries PI salary costs).

Priority will be given to proposals authored by teams that include a researcher outside the applied economics space (this space includes PhD holders in economics as well as public policy, political science, or similar programs if their focus is on applied microeconomic methods). We also encourage proposals by eligible PhD students (see Eligibility section below). Successful grant proposals will be eligible to apply for larger pilot and full-scale grants during the Governance Initiative's future RFPs (see [GI RFP Launch Page](#)).

ELIGIBILITY

J-PAL affiliates, J-PAL postdocs, all J-PAL invited researchers, and PhD students of J-PAL affiliates and

invited researchers are eligible to apply for GI funding. Please note that GI invited researchers are nominated and reviewed on a trimester basis, with the review based on a nominee's previous research with a particular emphasis on the ability to perform randomized evaluations. All proposals may include collaborators outside of this network; we welcome proposals from multidisciplinary research teams under all grant types.

In some cases, PhD students are 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. This adviser must provide a letter of support and indicate willingness to remain involved in a supervisory role throughout the lifetime of the project. 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.

Notes for All Award Types

- To prevent concentration of awards to any specific researchers, and to reduce the burden on initiative review boards, applicants are limited to submitting three proposals, inclusive of all proposal types, per 12-month period per initiative (either as PI or co-PI). **For example, if a researcher submitted two pilot or full-scale proposals in our Fall 2024 round, they can then only submit a maximum of 1 pilot or full-scale proposal in our Spring 2025 round.**
- In order to be considered for new initiative grants, applicants must be current on reporting for all their other grants, across all J-PAL initiatives. **Researchers whose projects are more than 2 months late on any reports to any J-PAL Initiative despite reminders from J-PAL and who have not received an approved extension will not be eligible to have new projects funded by J-PAL.** You may submit applications to GI, but your application will not be considered for funding until your deliverables become current.
- In order to be considered for new initiative grants, applicants must have submitted all necessary materials for award setup for all their other grants, across all J-PAL initiatives. **Awarded applicants are required to submit all necessary materials for award setup within six months from the date of notice of award**. Barring any extenuating circumstances, failure to submit required materials within this timeframe may result in the forfeiture of the award.

Process for receiving award if funded

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

The process MIT follows is thus:
1. The GI Review Board sends an official award notification letter.

2. If not already submitted, J-PAL requests your institution's approval of the proposal (letter of transmission) and your institutional IRB approval.[5]
3. MIT establishes a subaward to the institution to receive the award.
4. Institute to receive award invoices MIT for expenses incurred for the project on a cost reimbursable basis.

PROJECT TIMELINE

Funding requests should not extend beyond 12/31/2027, as grantee spending must be completed by that date.

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 initiatives below. These initiatives share similar themes 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.

[Crime and Violence Initiative (CVI)](): CVI funds evaluations that focus on preventing, mitigating, and responding to the effects of crime, violence, and conflict. Key themes include understanding the motivations behind crime and violence, preventing violence before it occurs, improving law enforcement and justice systems, understanding and combating criminal and extremist groups, promoting social integration in fragile settings, strengthening state and institutional capacity in fragile and conflict-affected states, preventing the rollback of fundamental rights, and exploring the links between climate change and conflict. **Contact:** [cvi@povertyactionlab.org]()

[Humanitarian Protection Initiative (HPI)](): HPI supports research to generate evidence to inform policies and programs that prevent and mitigate physical, psychological, social, and legal harm to conflict-affected populations. 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 protection of civilians during conflicts; the rights of detainees; the respect of humanitarian laws; 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. **Contact:** [hpi@povertyactionlab.org]()

[J-PAL Digital Identification and Finance Initiative in Africa (DigiFI):]() DigiFI Africa aims to grow the evidence base around innovations in identification and payments by supporting governments in

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[5] In the case that IRB approval is not already in place when funding decisions are made, proposed start dates should reflect time needed to get IRB approval by the IRB of record, as well as time required to establish a reliance agreement and move forward in the subaward granting process.

Africa in their efforts to monitor and evaluate relevant reforms. **Contact:** digifiafrica@povertyactionlab.org

J-PAL Social Protection Initiative (SPI): In collaboration with Evidence for Policy Design (EPoD) at the Harvard Kennedy School, SPI funds randomized evaluations of social protection programs in low- and middle-income countries and supports policy engagement to share insights from completed research. **Contact:** spi@povertyactionlab.org

For information on related initiatives coordinated between J-PAL and Innovation for Poverty Action, please visit the webpages for the Peace and Recovery Initiative and the Displaced Livelihoods Initiative.

J-PAL REGIONAL OFFICES

If your proposal involves a country with a J-PAL office, **contact the relevant office 3-4 weeks before submission**. These offices have strong connections with policymakers, understand regional policy priorities, and offer infrastructure to support research and scaling activities.

If this project takes place in a country that has a J-PAL office but it is **not** the host institution, please detail the reasoning in the Partnership section of the application. Your answer will help us understand how J-PAL offices can be more competitive and better respond to the needs of PIs. Annex II lists the point persons at each J-PAL regional office.

SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS

To respond to this RFP, please follow the directions listed below.

1) Please click on the link of the application you want to apply for: full, pilot, multidisciplinary, and travel/proposal development grants. Please follow the instructions in J-PAL's portal, WizeHive, to complete your registration[6].

2) Submit **a required Letter of Interest (LOI) by the deadline above.**

3) **If you receive an invitation to apply,** please follow the next steps outlined in the relevant proposal guidelines documents below.

Please read the relevant Proposal Guidelines document on the GI RFP release page in detail *before answering the proposal questions within WizeHive.* **Each of the following documents includes a checklist and guidance on what to address within each narrative prompt. Use these guidelines to guide your completion of all required submission materials based on the appropriate proposal type. All guidelines are on the GI RFP release page.**

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[6] If you experience technical difficulties, please contact help@povertyactionlab.org and GI@povertyactionlab.org

- **Proposal Guidelines: RCTs**
- **Proposal Guidelines: Pilot studies**
- **Proposal Guidelines: Travel/Proposal development grant**
- **Proposal Guidelines: Multidisciplinary grants**

4) Upon completing your proposal and uploading proposal attachments (budget, letters, etc.), submit the proposal by the deadline above.

REVIEW PROCESS

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

Full, Pilot, and Multidisciplinary Proposals: For the Spring 2025 RFP, each proposal will be reviewed by one to three peer reviewers and the full GI Review Board. Multidisciplinary proposals will be evaluated by the GI co-chairs and a panel of reviewers that reflects the breadth of disciplines represented in the 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 two to three referees: one member of the GI Review Board, one J-PAL affiliate not on the board, and (in some cases) one to two policy experts 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. 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.

If you would like to appeal a decision, please email gi@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 co-chairs.

Evaluation Criteria

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

ADMINISTRATIVE NOTES

PAYMENTS AND SUBAWARDS

RCT, pilot, and multidisciplinary grants are provided under an award from MIT to the grantee's host institution. PLEASE NOTE: MIT now requires that at least one project PI be employed by the

organization receiving the subaward and funds. Travel/proposal development grants are paid as travel reimbursements. Receipts are required for reimbursement.

Please be mindful that MIT requires that the IRB determination must be held by the institution that enters into the subaward agreement with MIT. The PI at the ITRA must be listed as the main PI on the IRB. If the institution does not have its own IRB, the institution must engage the services of a commercial IRB to review and provide oversight for the research activities. [Heartland](#) and [Solutions](#) provide review of international research and satisfy J-PAL's IRB requirements; fees can be found on their respective websites. Furthermore, MIT requires that the PI named on the IRB must be employed by the institute receiving the award. Information about this MIT policy can be found [here](#) and [here](#). Please consult with J-PAL regarding including the cost of this commercial entity in the project budget. J-PAL also requires that the reviewing IRB have IRB Organization (IORG) status with the US Office of Human Protections. [You can look up the IORG status of an IRB here](#).

Subaward Setup: For grants with human subject research, once all materials including IRB approvals/exemptions have been received, MIT typically takes 90 days to establish the subaward. Please provide conservative rather than optimistic estimates for start and end dates to reduce the likelihood of needing to submit no-cost extension requests.

Note that if travel/proposal development grants have human subject research (HSR), then IRB approval or exemption will be required before MIT reimburses expenses. According to US federal regulations, a human subject is a living individual about whom an investigator conducting research obtains 1) data through intervention or interaction with the individual (e.g., through an interview, focus group, or survey), or 2) identifiable private information (e.g., individual-level health or education data). For more information on budget, requirements, and process, please see instructions in the relevant application forms, for which reference documents exist on the [RFP page.](#)

GRANT CONDITIONS

Funding awarded by GI is conditional on continued support from our own core donors. If GI's scheduled funding is reduced, GI may need to reduce or cancel your award.

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

1. **Research conduct**: Grantees will be required to have IRB approval or exemption from the IRB of Record. **The IRB approval must be held by the institution that enters into the subaward agreement with MIT** (the ITRA). Similarly, **the Principal Investigator (PI) of a subaward issued by MIT must be employed by the organization receiving the subaward and funds** and **must be listed as the main PI on the IRB** ([see here for further details and FAQ](#)). Specific instructions will be given in the Notice of Award. In addition, grantees are

expected to adhere to MIT's community-wide policies that are available here, as well as policies put in place by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office.

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

   a. **Example language for Letter of Transmission:** (On ITRA letterhead)
      The <name of ITRA> is pleased to support the <Name of research> proposal and will plan on carrying out the work in accordance with the submitted budget. <NAME OF PI at ITRA> will serve as <ITRA's> Principal Investigator for this work. The <ITRA> takes full responsibility for the actions and well-being of <PI's name> in the course of the activities related to the scope of work for this research project. For any concerns about the technical aspects of the project, please contact <PI's name and email>. For administrative or contractual issues, please contact <ITRA's grant manager name and email>.

3. **Peer-review proposals:** Grantees may be requested to peer-review proposals in future GI rounds.

4. **Project registration:** Within three months of the start date indicated on the proposal, grantees must register their trial with the AEA RCT Registry. 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)

5. **Reporting:** Grantees will be requested to provide a brief start-up report, 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.

6. **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), 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. GI requires grantees to collect and report the cost of the program they are evaluating separately from all research costs in their final narrative report. We recommend research teams regularly track costs as they are incurred to maximize accuracy. While not required, many teams also find it easier to submit cost data reports on an annual basis.

7. **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.

8. **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. 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 or another data repository of your choice. (Full studies only)

9. **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 conferences, or presentations to one of the GI's donors.

10. **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 GIcopies of any IRB approvals or exemptions, if any are necessary. If IRB is required, **the IRB approval must be held by the institution that enters into the subaward agreement with MIT** (the ITRA, see here for further details). In addition, they are expected to adhere to MIT's community-wide policies that are available here, as well as policies put in place by the UK 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 your award letter.

5. **Applicants requesting proposal development funds for costs at their institution** (*versus direct reimbursement to the PI after travel*, where this is not required) must provide a letter from the receiving institution of the award to show that they have reviewed your proposal and accepted your budget.

   a. **The Principal Investigator (PI) of a subaward issued by MIT must be employed by the organization receiving the subaward and funds** (see here for further details).

   b. Please follow the MIT approved language for the Letter of Transmission as follows:
   Example language for Letter of Transmission: *(On ITRA letterhead)*
   The <name of ITRA> is pleased to support the <Name of research> proposal and will plan on carrying out the work in accordance with the submitted budget. <NAME OF PI at ITRA> will serve as <ITRA's> Principal Investigator for this work. The <ITRA> takes full responsibility for the actions and well-being of <PI's name> in the course of the activities related to the scope of work for this research project. For any concerns about the technical aspects of the project, please contact <PI's name and email>. For administrative or contractual issues, please contact <ITRA's grant manager name and email>.

IMPORTANT BUDGET NOTES

- **Purchase of Assets**: Depending on the source of your J-PAL funding and should your proposal be successful, you may be required to remove any assets (i.e., laptops, tablets, etc.) from your budget. Please create your budget with this in mind. Rentals of such items are allowed and the preferred way to address needs for assets like laptops.

- **Flight reimbursement:** J-PAL will only reimburse the lowest available economy/cabin/coach flights. Please review J-PAL's travel reimbursement policies before completing your budget.

CODE OF CONDUCT

Since J-PAL is part of MIT, everyone who is associated with J-PAL, including all researchers worldwide affiliated with J-PAL (affiliates and invited researchers), as well as all co-authors on J-PAL funded or implemented studies are considered part of the broader MIT community. It is therefore our hope and expectation that they will adhere to the MIT code of conduct, as well as the J-PAL code of conduct. MIT's section titled "Relations and Responsibilities Within the MIT Community" contains

specific provisions regarding personal conduct, harassment, discrimination and retaliation, violence against community members, and substance use. Please take some time to review these.

Because almost all researchers we work with are also part of other university communities, they may also be subject to their host universities' policies and procedures. Many of these policies may be very similar to the MIT policies above. Finally, many researchers are separately affiliated with other academic associations and organizations, including the American Economic Association, and they should continue to abide by the codes of conduct established by the associations and organizations to which they belong. The AEA's code of conduct is available here.

We continue to encourage all staff and researchers to have a direct and open dialogue with each other if they have concerns about interactions between researchers, staff, or partners on any of the above issues, or about any aspect of a research project (e.g., adherence to minimum must dos, IRB protocols, or finance/operation rules). But if staff do not feel comfortable holding such discussions, or if the concern cannot be resolved at this level, they can reach out to the individuals and offices identified in the relevant policies linked above.

Violations of MIT community guidelines or of J-PAL research/operations rules can also be directly reported to any of the J-PAL contacts for further action: (i) Global Executive Director; (ii) any of the regional Executive Directors; (iii) Cindy Smith (Global Director of Finance and Operations); or (iv) Anna Omura (Global Senior Manager of Finance and Operations).

LINKS TO ALL RFP MATERIALS

All submission templates and reference documents that make up the overall RFP package, are all available on the GI RFP website

OTHER FAQS

For questions on RFP priorities, application and review processes, eligibility, and general inquiries, please reach out to: GI@povertyactionlab.org, or visit the GI website.

For questions on award set-up and administration, please reach out to gi_grant_admin@povertyactionlab.org.

Annex I: GI Updated Research Agenda

Introduction

The Governance Initiative research agenda is summarized by the [Review Paper](#) ([Executive Summary](#)), which outlines open questions in political economy and governance across three thematic areas: political participation, corruption and leakages, and state capacity. Applicants to GI's Requests for Proposals are asked to demonstrate how their research will respond to open questions in the Review Paper–which GI periodically updates to include new studies and to reflect how the field is evolving.[7]

GI currently sees two major trends reshaping governance and hence the direction of frontier research. First, digital technologies and social media are changing both how governments deliver services and how citizens access information, form political preferences (sometimes polarized ones), and organize collective action. GI's 2020 revision of the Review Paper incorporated initial insights on this issue. Second, and relatedly, the rise of electoral autocracies brings new relevance to the study of political rights and democratic institutions, including the media and the judiciary. Together, these trends suggest a need for research on institutional and informational interventions that can support civil society, civic freedoms, political empowerment of women and marginalized groups, open government, democratic governance, digital democracy, and media freedom.

The core research questions that animate the Governance Initiative can also shed light on other pressing policy concerns, from mitigating and adapting to climate change to ensuring that women are able to make their voices heard politically. What defines the quality of policy implementation is an important cross-cutting theme. Within GI's framework, GI will give particular consideration to high-quality research proposals that respond to these and other international development policy priorities.

Below is a snapshot of the open questions in the Governance Initiative Review Paper, highlighting how they can shed light on these priority policy issues.

Increasing citizen participation, political empowerment, & accountability

Over the last 13 years, GI has funded research on an evolving set of questions on political participation, furnishing evidence on the impact of providing voters with better information about politicians on electoral accountability, ways of strengthening the representation of women and underrepresented groups in politics, and the impact of civil society monitoring on government service provision. In recent years, this research has also touched on providing politicians with better information on voter preferences, encouraging high-quality politicians to run for office, and understanding the incentives of media institutions to supply political information. Increasingly, research supported by GI has explored the spread of information through networks, both online and offline, including the role of social media in quickly spreading information and misinformation and organizing political participation.

These lines of inquiry–on the institutions that inform citizens, aggregate their preferences, and translate these preferences into policy outcomes–are relevant to pressing challenges today: many countries around the world are experiencing democratic backsliding: the erosion of political rights and civil liberties, even as countries may continue to hold elections. Research on these questions, as well as on the media and the judiciary, can offer key insights to ensure that citizens' voices are heard. Equally relevant is research on

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[7] In 2020, the Review Paper was updated to include new content on social networks, decentralization, and state capacity, reflecting research gaps in these areas.

identifying and removing barriers to women's political participation, including by expanding women's social networks outside their households and challenging norms that constrain women's political participation. Finally, research on political economy and governance is key to unlocking progress on climate change, by shedding light on the incentives faced by politicians, bureaucrats, and citizens.

Applicants are invited to refer to the full set of research questions included in the Review Paper; illustrative research questions include:

Institutional design

- What is the impact of different institutional arrangements in influencing the political voice afforded to different citizen groups, and what are their implications for policy outcomes?

- What interventions are effective in countering vote-buying and voter intimidation, and what are the strategic responses of political actors to these initiatives?

Voter information & preference formation

- What are the best ways to inform voters to elicit a change in their behavior or attitudes toward corruption, gender, ethnicity, or politician under-performance?

- What is the influence of technology and social media on citizens' political participation, electoral outcomes, and ability to monitor the government?

- What are the most effective strategies to minimize the spread and impacts of misinformation in low- and middle-income countries?

- What factors drive ideological and affective polarization? How does polarization shape how citizens form political beliefs, evaluate the performance of politicians, and hold government officials accountable? What interventions are effective in countering it? Does polarization of citizens' political preferences lead to affective polarization on climate change?

Politician selection & incentives

- How can more committed or qualified candidates be encouraged to stand for elections?

- How can the incentives of politicians and civil servants be aligned in favor of climate change policies?

Political participation of marginalized groups

- Through what channels do beliefs, institutions, or policies drive gender exclusion in the political and policy process? How do norms, as informal institutions, shape and constrain women's political participation?

- If the right to vote is necessary but not sufficient to ensure that marginalized groups' preferences are translated into policy, what policies and institutional arrangements can bring marginalized groups into the political process?

- How does improving the political women's representation of women and marginalized groups in politics affect service provision, citizen outcomes, and beliefs and aspirations regarding women's participation?

Tackling corruption & reducing leakages

Corruption, leakages, and inefficient program delivery can compromise the effectiveness of governments' development efforts. GI-funded researchers have made progress in identifying effective strategies to tackle corruption and to mitigate its impacts, including by modifying the incentive structures faced by bureaucrats, using technology to ensure that certain procedures are followed, and making government actions more transparent. However, there is a need for additional research, particularly given the cross-cutting nature of corruption, which spans politicians' malfeasance in office or during elections, frontline workers' shirking or absenteeism, and bureaucrats' acceptance of bribes. In addition, there remains scope for dedicated research to improve the measurement of corruption directly, rather than relying on biased perceptions, and assessing the welfare impacts of corruption empirically. Studies in all of the thematic areas outlined in this document—from those on reducing vote-buying to studies on increasing revenues raised by tax collectors—may also measure corruption outcomes. The full set of questions is included in the Review Paper; examples of open research questions include:

- How widespread is corruption and its impacts, and what interventions can donors pursue to tackle it?

- What interventions can limit vote-buying and strengthen the integrity of elections, and how do candidates and voters respond to these over the long-term?

- How do financial and non-financial incentives affect bureaucrats' performance and likelihood of engaging in corruption?

- How do e-governance technologies affect corruption?

- How can governments reduce corruption without also reducing program efficiency and beneficiary welfare? Is there a fundamental trade-off, and if so, can corruption crackdowns be optimized?

- How do program administrators weigh these tradeoffs– do they see reducing corruption or getting money out to beneficiaries as their primary imperative?

- How does corruption influence decision-making on environmental policies, and which reforms may make policymakers more accountable to domestic and international citizens who favor conservation?

- What is the extent of judicial corruption and how does it affect judicial legitimacy and economic performance?

Strengthening state capacity to raise revenue & deliver services

Research on state capacity has yielded valuable insights on how to strengthen the ability of the state to raise resources through taxation and to deploy those resources to effectively deliver policies and programs. This area spans research on collecting and spending tax revenue–where experimental research is increasingly able to offer insights not just on increasing tax compliance, but on setting tax policy– and on recruiting,

incentivizing, and monitoring civil servants to ensure that they perform their jobs well, with minimal corruption.

These questions are particularly relevant as the debt burden faced by low-income countries is two-and-a-half times higher than it was ten years ago. Debt servicing leaves countries with fewer resources to provide public services and adapt to climate change, and efforts to increase tax revenues, including through increasing the tax base and improving the efficiency of tax administration, are lagging behind.[8] At the same time, the emergence of artificial intelligence and other new technologies also offer opportunities to streamline government processes and reduce leakages–but research is needed to better understand their impacts. The full set of research questions is included in the Review Paper; illustrative research questions in this area include:

State capacity & institutional design

- Can e-governance limit corruption and leakages by automating processes previously conducted by individuals with discretion?

- Can e-procurement improve the efficiency of government investment?

- How can technology and machine learning be leveraged to improve the capacity of the state to deliver goods and services and to be more responsive to citizens?

- How do perceptions of state effectiveness shape citizens' trust in and engagement with the state? How can mistrust in the state be redressed?

- How do we design new institutions—market, regulatory, governance—to act to mitigate climate change? How can governments design and enforce regulations to limit pollution and curb overuse of natural resources?

Performance of civil servants

- What are the possible selection and promotion criteria to improve the performance of civil servants and reduce their propensity to engage in corruption, shirking, and absenteeism?

- Can outcome-based incentives improve quality of service delivery? Does a narrow focus on incentivized outcomes reduce performance on other dimensions?

- Under what conditions does top-down monitoring improve bureaucratic performance and reduce corruption? Does providing the government with real-time data on its intermediaries' (civil servants) performance via audits or time-stamp technology improve outcomes?

- How can community monitoring programs be designed to make them more effective in monitoring civil servants?

Judiciary

- Can improvements in the efficiency of courts reduce crime and fraud and encourage investment?

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[8] https://www.imf.org/en/Blogs/Articles/2024/01/24/how-to-ease-rising-external-debt-service-pressures-in-low-income-countries

- What are the effects on conflict resolution of legal assistance in weakly institutionalized polities? How do these effects interact with traditional norms and customs?

Taxation

- What factors shape how governments choose when, how, and how much to tax?

- How can governments best reform existing tax systems and strategies to collect revenue?

- How can tax administrations obtain reliable information about the amount of taxes that are due? What is the optimal balance of "soft" information that tax collectors may have about taxpayers' ability to pay and "hard" data, such as third-party reports?

- How can new technologies be leveraged to improve the state's ability to assess and collect taxes? How do information technology and tax officials complement each other in determining tax capacity?

Annex II: J-PAL Leads by Region

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