Science for Progress Initiative (SfPI)

Rolling Request for Proposals (RFP)

SfPI calls for proposals from J-PAL affiliates, J-PAL postdocs, J-PAL invited researchers (from any initiative or region), and eligible PhD students to catalyze scientific research on the scientific process.

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RFP Timeline

This RFP is rolling, meaning we accept proposals at any time. Letters of Interest (LOIs) will be reviewed on a rolling basis, and SfPI staff will aim to respond to applicants within two business days.
Proposals will be considered in the order they are received, with decisions communicated within 2 weeks of the date of receipt.

Overview

Background

To learn more about metascience and the potential open questions and areas of focus that SfPI will aim to target, please read our blog, our website, and the working paper Innovation: Market Failures and Public Policies.

Geographic Focus

SfPI welcomes proposals from various countries and regions. There are no geographic restrictions for proposals.

Award Types

For this RFP, SfPI invites proposals under three award types:

- Full randomized controlled trials (RCT) evaluation grants, with a funding cap of $500,000
- Pilot study grants, with a cap of $75,000
- Travel/proposal development grants, with a cap of $10,000

As part of the above proposal types, SfPI will offer in-kind support for applicants in the form of assistance from Research Management Support (RMS). RMS provides temporary technical assistance to applicants and their research teams in the form of short-term, customized, and expert support to help design and launch a randomized evaluation. RMS staff can:

- Provide immediate and strategic technical assistance, typically during the study launch phase
- Tailor support to the unique needs of each research team, such as survey and consent form design, overall study design, and assistance with trial pre-registration
- Help identify pitfalls that can be difficult to foresee and streamline processes that may be unfamiliar when designing and implementing a randomized evaluation

RMS technical support is available to researchers at any stage of the research process. For more information about RMS, please see SfPI's Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) document (provided at the RFP release page) and the RMS website. Applicants may also look at the SfPI RMS Preliminary Questionnaire to learn about the types of services RMS offers. To request RMS or learn more, reach out to sfpi@povertyactionlab.org.

Full RCT evaluation grants are intended to facilitate the means to conduct a full RCT, whose research question aligns with SfPI's theme(s). Proposals should demonstrate:

- A robust research design
- Well-defined research instruments
- Detailed and well-justified power calculations, e.g., based on pilot data, for any impacts that the research team plans to measure
- A feasible implementation plan
- A strong partnership commitment from implementing organizations, including indications of the potential for significant scale-up of research findings by partners or scaling organizations

Pilot study grants are offered for projects whose work lays the groundwork for a future randomized evaluation. Proposals for these grants should do at least one of the following or a combination of the following:

- Test the efficacy of an intervention or an evaluation design, and acquire data that is qualitative or quantitative in nature, e.g., measuring take up
- Serve as a diagnostic to reveal the behavior of stakeholders, barriers to innovation, technology adoption, or market spillover, or the potential for takeup of an intervention under "real world" conditions
- Facilitate access to administrative data for designing or conducting an RCT. Examples of these activities include, but are not limited to, negotiating data use agreements, conducting exploratory data analysis and cleaning, or setting up technical access mechanisms

Pilot studies should also:

- Have a clear research question that lays the groundwork and assesses the feasibility of using a randomized evaluation to answer the overarching question
- Clearly articulate the conceptual and methodological distinction between the pilot study and any future follow-on studies
- Articulate 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 could contribute to the Science for Progress Initiative's themes or concerns

Travel/proposal development grants facilitate preliminary, exploratory research. Funding typically supports costs related to researcher travel and/or facilitating access to administrative data for designing or conducting a future RCT. Examples of these activities include, but are not limited to, conducting background research, developing partnerships, visiting sites such as (but not limited to) scientific labs, collecting preliminary data, negotiating data use agreements, conducting exploratory data analysis and cleaning, or setting up technical access mechanisms. The expectation is that these funds will be used to support costs related to PI travel to develop a proposal for a pilot or a 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.

Eligibility

J-PAL affiliates, J-PAL postdocs,, and invited researchers (from any initiative or region) are eligible to apply for all categories of SfPI funding. Please see the SOPs for more information on eligibility, especially for interested PhD students.

Notes on Funding Limits and Deliverable Delinquency

- To prevent concentration of awards to any specific researchers, and to reduce the burden on initiative review boards, affiliates/invited researchers are limited to submitting three proposals, inclusive of all proposal types, per 12-month period

per initiative (either as PI or co-PI).
- Applicants who are delinquent in their deliverables to SfPI or other J-PAL initiatives may submit proposals, but will not be eligible to receive additional funding from any J-PAL initiative until your deliverables become current.

Submission Instructions

To respond to this RFP, you must submit your application on J-PAL's online portal.

SfPI, along with most initiatives at J-PAL, is now using a new online portal called WizeHive. Here is the link to the online portal. Please review these instructions for applicants. As of March 25th, 2025, we ask that all applicants use WizeHive to submit their applications.

Please read both the relevant Proposal Guidelines and the SOPs documents on the RFP release page in detail *before answering the proposal questions within the portal.* Each of the following documents includes a checklist and guidance on what to address within each narrative prompt – guiding your completion of all required submission materials based on the appropriate proposal type.

- Proposal Guidelines: RCTs
- Proposal Guidelines: Pilot studies
- Proposal Guidelines: Travel/Proposal development grants

Research Agenda

The Science for Progress Initiative (SfPI) is designed to catalyze scientific research on the scientific process. Its purpose is to produce rigorous, quantitative evidence from randomized evaluations on the most effective approaches to funding and supporting scientific research—evidence that can inform both policy and practice.

SfPI is open to receiving proposals related to metascience, which is described in our blog, our website, and this working paper. So far, there are three potential questions that have emerged from the literature:

- What contracts, incentives, management structures, and institutions work best when funding scientific research? What are the best ways to allocate research grants?
- How can we encourage the diffusion of socially valuable scientific discoveries out of scientific labs and academic papers, so as to encourage innovation and economic growth?
- How can we ensure that the most talented individuals—including younger researchers, those entering science from non-traditional life and career paths, and more broadly members of traditionally under-represented groups—are not discouraged from pursuing science?

SfPI invites proposals related to these topics as well as other metascience subjects more broadly. The science of science is a nascent, burgeoning field. Receiving an array of diverse proposals will guide SfPI's thematic direction in future funding rounds.