

# **Proposal Evaluation Process**

## **Step 1: Pre-proposal form**

The pre-proposal round is to determine project eligibility and determine whether your proposed project addresses ATAI's funding priorities detailed in this RFP. Note that proposals that do not sufficiently address gender may be asked to resubmit to the regular ATAI round and will be subject to the process outlined in a separate RFP document.

We aim to respond to pre-proposal form submissions within 3 weeks to let applicants know whether they are invited to submit a proposal.

## **Step 2: Invited submission of proposal materials**

**On receiving an invitation from the pre-proposal form, please email the required materials outlined in the "Application Checklist" section of the relevant [Proposal Guidelines](#) document available at the [RFP release page](#) to [atai@povertyactionlab.org](mailto:atai@povertyactionlab.org).** We aim to respond to your proposal within 6-8 weeks after this submission.

The proposal review process has been designed to ensure that all funded studies are methodologically sound and capable of identifying the causal impact of an intervention that can be isolated from other confounding factors. A two-level review process is used by ATAI to assess the quality and appropriateness of all proposals. The first level of blinded review is carried out by a panel of peer researchers in the J-PAL, CEGA, and ATAI networks. The second level of review is carried out by the ATAI Board Members, which include a small number of non-economist subject matter experts funding and working in African agricultural development, who are ultimately responsible for funding decisions.

Referees will score each proposal by the criteria listed in the tables below using a ranking system from 1 (very poor) to 5 (excellent) and will provide a 1-2 sentence justification for each score. To be funded, the proposal must be practically feasible. **Low scores on the logistical viability criterion may prevent projects from being funded regardless of scores on other dimensions.**

Supplementing these main scoring criteria, reviewers will mark "Yes" or "No" for particular questions shown below. This allows reviewers to flag for decision makers that they lack confidence in a proposal's ability to deliver on a particular important objective. **Receiving a "No" may prevent funding, or may require the Board to request clarifications or confirmations on related points before making a final decision.**

During the review process, applicants may be contacted by the ATAI Secretariat, on behalf of referees, for more detailed information on the proposal. Requests for more information can relate to any part of the proposal. If standardized questions are requested of multiple proposals, those questions will be presented to *all* proposals.

All proposals will be categorized as either: (1) unconditionally approved; (2) conditionally approved with minor revisions or clarifications required; (3) request for revise and resubmit; or (4) not approved.

## **Please Note:**

- **ATAI will not obligate funds to projects that have not fully cleared all COVID requirements outlined in the logistical checklist included in the FAQ section of the [RFP release page](#).**

- **Researchers who have previously received funding from J-PAL and are more than one month late on any reports to any J-PAL Initiative will not be eligible for consideration for funding and may be ineligible for funding across J-PAL initiatives.** In such cases, researchers are still able to submit proposals to Initiatives, but note that the proposal will not be submitted for review until all reporting requirements on previous awards are up-to-date.
- Researchers who have previously submitted a similar proposal (one that asks the same or a similar research question with the same or a similar research team) may be subject to a different review process. This may mean, but is not limited to, not being sent out for peer review.

### **Evaluation Criteria**

<b>Logistical Viability</b> <i>(scored out of 5)</i>	Does the proposal convincingly address agronomic, logistical, or political obstacles and risks that might threaten the completion of the study <i>(for example, implementation capacity, government authorization, or other funding)</i> ?
<b>(Yes/No)</b>	Are you convinced that the implementing and/or scale-up partners are appropriate for the project and the relationship is likely to endure through the entire study? <i>Help text: Consider whether letters of support are compelling, and/or there is evidence of buy-in (e.g. cost-sharing) from the implementing partners</i>
<b>[For Gender RFP Only]</b>  <b>Gender</b> <i>(scored out of 5)</i>	Is the research designed to make a substantive contribution to our understanding of the role of gender in the agricultural transformation? <i>Help text: As outlined in the Gender and Agricultural Transformation RFP document, ATAI specifically calls for proposals that will help us understand how to accelerate the agricultural transformation process in ways that specifically reach, benefit, or empower women. This needs to be more than tacking on heterogeneity analysis by gender.</i>
<b>[Non-gender specific RFP only]*</b>  <b>(Yes/No)</b>  (*given any proposal invited to apply to the Gender RFP would inherently receive a “Yes”)	Does the project carefully consider gender roles and intra-household dynamics? <i>Help text:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Does the intervention show promise to engage women in more lucrative and/or appealing (e.g. less physically burdensome) jobs within the agriculture sector?</i></li> <li>• <i>Or does the proposal convincingly discuss how constraints may differentially bind women within the markets, institutions, or household dynamics in this context? If there could be large differences in barriers and downstream impacts for women compared to men, will the research collect data on relevant indicators and disaggregate their main findings by gender?</i></li> </ul>

<b>Technical Merit and Innovation</b> (scared out of 5)	<p>Is the research designed effectively to answer proposed questions, and is it well-articulated?</p> <p><i>Help text:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>What are potential threats to the internal validity of the study? Does the proposal sufficiently address those threats?</i></li> <li>• <i>Will outcomes be measurable within the proposed study period, both overall and for marginalized subgroups, including women?</i></li> <li>• <i>Is there academic relevance? For example, does it answer new and more difficult questions, or introduce novel methods, measures or interventions?</i></li> </ul>
<b>(Yes/No)</b> only for RCTs	<p>Are the indicators and sample size estimates appropriate, given the outcomes to be measured, and do the power calculations convincingly demonstrate the ability to detect each of the proposed impacts to be measured?</p>

<b>Appropriateness</b> (scared out of 5)	<p>Is compelling evidence and discussion provided suggesting that the proposed intervention(s) are appropriate for the setting and target population? And has the proposal established a plausible link between the proposed intervention and the hypothesized channel for impact? Is the proposed intervention likely to be cost effective when implemented at scale?</p> <p><i>Help text:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Is it clear that the population targeted by the intervention suffers from market-related or value-chain related barriers to profitability?</i></li> <li>• <i>If testing a technology, are increases in productivity and profitability validated by scientific evidence? If so, for whom is the technology profitable?</i></li> <li>• <i>Does the proposed study account for potential behavioral changes, negative externalities and/or unanticipated effects that may offset hypothesized welfare gains?</i></li> <li>• <i>Is the strategy or intervention likely to be cost-effective (i.e. what is the potential impact on welfare per dollar of the intervention, and will this be measured accurately)? Does this intervention appear promising (i.e. worth testing the impacts, and possible to conceive of scaling) when compared with other potential or existing solutions?</i></li> </ul>
<b>(Yes/No)</b>	<p>Does the proposal not only explicitly identify which agricultural transformation theme their proposed research targets, but also clearly discuss contributions to specific parts of the thematic framework laid out in ATAI's framing paper "Evidence For Transformation: Framing A Research Agenda In Agriculture For Development"?</p>

<p><b>Policy Relevance, “Pathways to Impact”</b> (scored out of 5)</p>	<p>Has the proposal convincingly argued the importance of the evidence gap for policy? And is it likely that the study will engage and provide valuable information to stakeholders to affect change at scale?</p> <p><i>Help text:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the proposal instill confidence in the researchers’ commitment to the timely sharing of interim outputs and final results? And does it identify explicit “end-users” including, but not limited to, their implementation partners?</li> <li>• Is there potential for the study to answer questions relevant for other policymakers and practitioners beyond the implementing partner? (e.g. will the results speak to commonly used approaches, and/or BMGF or DFID investments or learning agenda priorities?)</li> </ul>
<p><b>For RCTs only (Yes/No)</b></p>	<p>Does the proposal discuss the outcomes of interest relevant to agricultural transformation that will be collected? And if this is an RCT proposal, does this include the four required outcomes below, with details on how they plan to measure the underlying relevant indicators in their evaluation context?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indicators for the adoption of agricultural assets</li> <li>• Production of high value crops (crop diversification)</li> <li>• Sales as a fraction of total output</li> <li>• Yields per hectare</li> </ul>
<p><b>For RCTs only (Yes/No)</b></p>	<p>Does the proposal demonstrate real capacity development potential for local researchers and implementers, particularly in ways that increase the likelihood and/or sustainability of any policy influence?</p>
<p><b>Do you recommend for funding?</b> (scored out of 5)</p>	<p>Do you recommend this proposal for funding, given your overall review, and particularly your assessment of its “value for money?” (see FCDO’s perspectives on this principle here: <a href="https://www.ukaidirect.org/learning/value-for-money/">https://www.ukaidirect.org/learning/value-for-money/</a>)</p>