IGL Seed Grants: Lowering Barriers to High-Impact Experimental Research

Background

The IGL Seed Grants programme is an initiative of the Innovation Growth Lab (IGL), IGL is a global policy lab that supports the development of productive, inclusive and sustainable economies through the application of novel policy ideas, experimentation, data and evidence. We work with policymakers, researchers, practitioners and funders to address key policy challenges in the fields of science, innovation, entrepreneurship and business policies.

Description

Funded by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, this second round of IGL Seed Grants will support researchers in developing and piloting new experimental research ideas. These grants aim to lower the barriers to conducting high-impact experimental research, enabling researchers to work on ideas that could lead to Randomised Controlled Trials (RCTs) that generate high-quality evidence on science, innovation, and productivity.

The grants are open to researchers worldwide, but the lessons and insights must be applicable to the U.S. context or other OECD countries. We seek proposals that will produce actionable insights, potentially leading to improved programmes, policies, and practices.

Proposals are evaluated based on several criteria, including:

- **Originality** of the idea
- **Potential policy impact**
- **Academic relevance**
- **Feasibility and viability** of implementation
- **Value for money**
- **Potential to generate an RCT**
- **Necessity of funding**, with priority given to researchers with limited access to other similar funding sources.

Eligibility Criteria

IGL welcomes proposals from **researchers at any university**. A maximum of 8 grants will be awarded, with a minimum of 2 specifically reserved for **junior or early-career researchers**. Priority will be given to researchers conducting studies in the **U.S. and other OECD countries** (or that would be relevant in these contexts even if conducted elsewhere).

We are particularly interested in early-stage ideas and **activities that could lead to an RCT**, with the goal of generating evidence on **effective approaches** to drive science, innovation, and productivity. The focus is on early-stage empirical research and trial designs that explore and scope potential interventions, with an emphasis on the foundational steps that lead up to conducting full RCTs or trials. While we are open to providing **feedback on trial designs**, please note that we do not accept

applications solely for feedback. If you are interested in this opportunity, please email us separately at: researchnetwork@innovationgrowthlab.org.

Examples of such activities include *(but are not limited to)*:

1. **Pilot Studies**: Small-scale experiments to test the feasibility of a future full-scale RCT. For example, testing new methods for fostering innovation in scientific teams or improving productivity in research environments.
2. **Intervention Design**: Developing and refining interventions that aim to improve science, innovation, or productivity, such as new training programs, incentives for collaboration, or changes in organisational structure.
3. **Feasibility Assessments**: Evaluating the practicality of implementing a large-scale RCT, such as assessing stakeholder willingness, logistical needs, or identifying key intervention points.
4. **Partnership Building**: Engaging with industry, government, or academic partners to develop collaboration agreements and align objectives for future trials.
5. **Data and Methodology:** Identifying potential research questions and hypotheses or identify and explore the use of datasets or specific methodologies
6. **Data Collection Methods Development**: Testing and validating new approaches for measuring productivity, innovation output, or scientific impact in preparation for an RCT.
7. **Preliminary Data Analysis**: Conducting initial data collection and analysis to identify trends, bottlenecks, or baseline conditions that will inform the design of an RCT.
8. **Formative research:** Understanding whether there is a specific need or research gap on a challenge / problem

Eligibility Requirements:

- Applicants must be **members of or must have applied to the IGL Research Network**. If you are not a member, please apply here.
- Proposals must be submitted by a **Principal Investigator (PI)** affiliated with an academic institution.

Other requirements:

- If any RCTs are conducted as a result of the grant or activities funded by IGL, they must be publicly pre-registered **on a trial registry such as the AEA RCT Registry or OSF**.
- Grant recipients are expected to publicly share their **papers, results, code, and data** once their research study has been completed, unless exceptional circumstances justify restrictions.
- All grants are awarded in GBP and are subject to and conditional upon the grantee's acceptance of IGL's standard Terms & Conditions. These terms and conditions are non-negotiable and cannot be altered or amended.

For more information, FAQ's, or to apply, please visit https://www.innovationgrowthlab.org/about/research-network/seed-grants.

If you have any other questions or require any additional information, please get in touch at researchnetwork@innovationgrowthlab.org

What we offer

Typical funding awards range up to £5000 GBP*.

In addition to funding, we may also, at our discretion, support the selected researchers by:

- Providing project management support, including trial design and advisory services
- Offering match-making and brokerage support to help identify opportunities for RCTs and/or for partnerships and collaboration
- Hosting events such as conferences, webinars, or workshops for feedback and networking
- Connecting researchers to other IGL Research Network Members
- Supporting dissemination of findings through different channels and translate them for policy and practitioner audiences.

**Note that as a grant program, no Value-Added Tax (VAT) will be applied to the funding provided. Please also note that you are responsible for payment of any costs, charges and liabilities incurred in relation to transfer of the Seed Grant Amount, and for any taxes, duties or assessments imposed in respect of the Amount.*

Expenses covered by the Grant

The grant funds may be used to support a variety of research-related activities to support the implementation of a potential future RCT, including but not limited to:

- Hiring research assistants
- Data collection and analysis
- Access to proprietary data sources or databases
- Travel directly related to activities conducted prior to the RCT, such as experiment preparation or fieldwork.
- Software or licences necessary for research

However, IGL will not fund:

- Travel unrelated to the experiment or research activities
- Unjustified or miscellaneous expenses
- Purchase of laptops, standard office supplies, or general-purpose tools
- Overhead costs not directly tied to the project

Evaluation criteria

Proposals will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

1. Fits with the aim of the call: Proposals should clearly align with the goal of advancing the evidence base in science, innovation, and productivity. This may involve testing existing ideas, generating novel hypotheses, or proposing innovative trial designs
2. Policy relevance and potential for policy impact: Proposals should demonstrate the potential to generate insights that can inform actionable policy recommendations in the fields of science,

innovation, entrepreneurship, or productivity. Even for early-stage research and scoping activities, applicants should articulate how their findings could influence policy or practice in the future, along with the broader implications and "lessons learned" that extend beyond the specific test case. Applicants may consider addressing the following questions: (1) Is there demand from policymakers for more comprehensive information to guide their decisions in this area?, (2) Is there potential for an implementing partner to scale up this intervention effectively?.

3. Academic contribution and proposal originality: The best proposals will not only be methodologically sound but will also aim to generate new insights and contribute to advancing knowledge in the field. Projects should aim to produce outputs that have the potential for academic publication in peer-reviewed journals. Proposals should stand out by offering fresh perspectives or addressing gaps in existing research. Originality can be demonstrated through novel research questions, unconventional trial designs, or by applying established methods to new contexts or populations. The most competitive proposals will push the boundaries of current thinking and explore under-researched areas that have the potential to yield groundbreaking insights.
4. Technical design: Proposals must demonstrate a high level of methodological rigour, including robust research designs that ensure reliable and valid results for potential future RCTs. Innovative or cutting-edge techniques that push methodological boundaries will be viewed positively. Research designs must appropriately answer the questions outlined in the scoping project proposal, and (if present) address threats that could compromise the validity of results.
5. Project feasibility and viability: The feasibility of the scoping project will be evaluated, considering the researcher's commitment, access to necessary resources, and potential obstacles such as ethical concerns, logistical challenges, or data access. Proposals should be realistic in scope and demonstrate a clear plan for overcoming foreseeable challenges. For example, the proposal should address their relation (if any) with an implementing partner and any other potential obstacles that might threaten the completion of the scoping study.
6. Value for Money: Proposals should demonstrate that the scoping project offers strong value for the funding requested. This includes efficiently using resources to maximise the impact of the research relative to its cost. Applicants should provide a clear budget that outlines how funds will be allocated, justifying expenses in relation to the expected outcomes.
7. Need for funding: Priority will be given to applicants who have limited access to alternative funding sources, particularly those in early career stages or from institutions with fewer funding opportunities. Proposals should explain why the requested funding is crucial for the project's success and why similar funding is not available elsewhere. Projects that demonstrate a clear need for financial support to move forward - either due to limited institutional backing, resource constraints, or the exploratory nature of the research - will be considered more favourably in the selection process.

While not required, the following items are encouraged and can strengthen your proposal:

- **Letters of Support**: Include letters of support from implementing partners that highlight their commitment and the collaborative nature of the project.
- **Registration**: Proposals from researchers registering their trial on registries such as the American Evaluation Association (AEA) registry will be viewed favourably

Application process

The application window will open on **Friday, 19 September 2025.**

To apply, researchers must submit their proposals by **October 20, 2025 at 9am CEST**, via email to researchnetwork@innovationgrowthlab.org, using the Narrative and Budget templates provided below.

If successful, applicants may be asked to adjust their budget to reflect the amount allocated. Applicants will be notified by **January 2026** regarding the status of their proposal.

Off-cycle proposals might be considered based on budget and overall alignment with programme priorities.

Contracting and Reporting Requirements

All Seed Grant contracts will be issued and signed by Nesta. Our standard contracting options include:

- The PI's home institution (university)
- The PI directly (if permitted by your institution's policies)

Applicants may choose the option that best suits them, but must ensure all necessary internal approvals are obtained prior to submission, as contracting arrangements cannot be changed after award.

Grant recipients will be required to provide updates aligned with the disbursement of funds. This will include interim progress reports (both narrative and financial) and a final project report (both narrative and financial). Seed grant recipients may also be asked to develop blog posts or other communications materials.

Detailed reporting guidelines and terms will be outlined in the final contract.

Additional information

Key Dates

Call Opens	19 September 2025
Deadline for proposals	20 October 2025, 9am CEST
Applicants notified of proposal status	15 December 2025 (tentative)
Funds disbursed	31 January 2026 (tentative)

Seed grant recipients are expected to use the funds by 31 January 2027. Funds may be utilised at any point between disbursement and the end of January 2027. The exact timeline of activities should be detailed in the application, including a completed timeline spreadsheet and budget.

All proposals made in response to this Call for Proposals will be subject to the Terms and Conditions linked above. By submitting a proposal, you agree to be bound by these Terms and Conditions.

For further information and guidance, see our website or contact us at researchnetwork@innovationgrowthlab.org.