

Request for Proposals for Education Research - Cover Sheet

Please use this sheet as a summary of LAI eligibility and types of grants. More information can be found in the subsequent pages of the research agenda.

Heading	Description	Details
Thematic focus areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Foundational Literacy & Numeracy (pre-primary¹ through upper primary) ● Socioemotional Learning (SEL) and Measurement of Holistic Skills/ Breadth of Skills (pre-primary through lower secondary) ● Girls' Education (pre-primary through upper secondary) ● Intersections of Climate and Education (pre-primary through upper secondary) ● Long-term Economic and Health Impacts of Education Interventions 	Thematic Focus
Eligibility	<p>All J-PAL affiliates, invited researchers from any J-PAL initiative or regional office, and J-PAL postdoctoral fellows are eligible to apply to any research or scaling proposal type.</p> <p>Scholars based in sub-Saharan Africa can apply for pilot or travel/proposal development funding under the African Scholars program (<i>details below</i>).</p> <p>PhD students who have a J-PAL affiliate or invited researcher on their thesis committee are eligible to apply for up to US\$75,000 in pilot, research, or scale funding, or US\$10,000 in travel/proposal development funding.</p>	Application Eligibility, Process, and Review
Eligibility for African Scholars	<p>African Scholars include individuals who have completed a PhD in economics or another empirical social science discipline with sufficient quantitative training to conduct an RCT and are based at an academic institution (university) in sub-Saharan Africa. These scholars are eligible to apply for travel/proposal development grants (up to US\$10,000) and pilot grants (up to US\$75,000) with descriptive pilots capped at US\$25,000.</p>	Application Eligibility, Process, and Review
Types of Grants	<p>LAI provides funding for research (full randomized evaluations, pilots, and travel/proposal development grants) and scale projects. The funding types and limits for research are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Full Randomized Evaluations: Up to US\$400,000 ● Pilots: Up to US\$75,000 (or US\$25,000 for descriptive work) ● Travel/Proposal Development Grants: Up to US\$10,000. <p>The funding types and limits for scaling projects are:</p>	Funds

¹ To be eligible for LAI funding, pre-primary interventions should take place in preschools or early learning centers. LAI will consider community, home-based, or other out-of-school interventions insofar as there are plans to measure how these relate to school-related outcomes.

Heading	Description	Details
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Adaptations: Up to US\$75,000 ● Policy Pilots: Up to US\$200,000 ● Scale Projects: Up to US\$300,000 <p>LAI scaling funds support technical assistance and/or research with government, NGOs, and/or the private sector focused on adopting evidence-informed solutions. J-PAL eligible researchers can apply for scale funding in collaboration with governments, NGOs, and/or private sector actors. In addition, J-PAL and IPA offices can apply for the scaling funding provided at least one J-PAL eligible researcher is fully involved as an active, engaged, and responsive PI or adviser.</p>	

Request for Proposals for Education Research (RFP Overview)

J-PAL's Learning for All Initiative (LAI) will fund randomized evaluations (full and pilot evaluations and travel/proposal development grants) and scale projects to improve children's foundational learning, especially related to literacy, numeracy, and breadth of skills. Additional focus areas include girls' education, the intersection of climate and education, and the long-term economic and health impacts of education interventions.

Background

Literacy and numeracy are building blocks of all future academic learning. Without foundational skills in reading, writing, and math, children cannot access higher-order skills to succeed in other parts of the curriculum. Literacy and numeracy skills are also associated with later life outcomes like income, productivity, and improved health outcomes for future generations. However, pre-pandemic, [57 percent](#) of children in low- and middle-income countries were in learning poverty, meaning they were unable to read and understand a simple story by age 10. School closures, which affected over one billion children during the pandemic, exacerbated low learning and inequity in education systems. In 2022, experts estimated that the number of children who could not read for meaning in low- and middle-income countries had increased to 70 percent, [erasing](#) all global progress that these countries had made to combat learning poverty since 2000.

School closures and the economic strain of the pandemic had wider implications for children's mental health and wellbeing (for example children suffered from [greater violence](#) during the pandemic). According to limited [data](#), up to 20% of children in low- and middle-income countries experience mental health challenges, which the pandemic may have exacerbated.

Socioemotional learning also has a [variety of benefits](#). [Research](#) shows that these skills are [inextricably linked](#) with academic achievement, can help children overcome adversity and contribute positively to society, and are [positively associated](#) with adult outcomes like productivity, health, and civic participation. However, limited evidence exists on socioemotional learning among school-aged children in low- and middle-income countries and the tools and methods from research in high-income countries may not always transfer between countries and contexts. Additionally, there are [open questions](#) about the validity and reliability of frequently used measures of socioemotional learning and other holistic skills.

In addition to pandemic-related stressors, across the world, we are witnessing an [increased occurrence](#) of extreme weather brought about by climate change. As events like fires, droughts, and floods propagate and intensify, access to quality education will become more difficult for many. In many contexts, this is especially true for girls and marginalized groups who already face obstacles to attending school due to other responsibilities such as unpaid household work, economic pressures, and early marriage. These threats shed light on the [importance](#) of developing a broad set of skills in all children to help them adapt, learn, and thrive in an increasingly volatile world. Yet, there is limited rigorous evidence on the ways that education systems can adapt to changing environments.

Despite global progress in recent decades, [data](#) show that especially in South Asia and many parts of Africa, reduced financial resources, and other effects of instability can disproportionately impact women and girls. Girls often face additional constraints and have to combat restrictive gender norms and gender-based discrimination. Particularly during times of crisis, girls can face an [increased risk](#) of early marriage and pregnancy due to negative coping mechanisms employed by families and individuals to survive. Finally, research has shown that schools can be both an [institution](#) that reinforces gender norms, or a place that effectively combats gender norms in society.

In the face of these crises, global demand for evidence in education has rapidly increased in recent years. In 2020, UNICEF, along with J-PAL and other partners, launched the [Foundations of Literacy and Numeracy \(FLN\) Hub](#) to make the evidence more accessible to policymakers. In addition, the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), the World Bank, the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF), and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) convened an international panel of experts to synthesize the evidence of “[smart buys](#)” in education through the Global Education Evidence Advisory Panel (GEEAP), which were updated in 2023. Post-pandemic school openings, paired with uncertainty brought about by climate change, offer an ideal window for research and evidence-based action as governments ensure high-quality and equitable education for all children.

Launching the Learning for All Initiative

In response to the current crisis in education and the increasing demand for actionable evidence, and with the generous support of the [Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation](#), the [Douglas B. Marshall Jr. Family Foundation](#), [Echidna Giving](#), the [Foreign, Commonwealth, & Development Office](#) (FCDO), [Founders Pledge](#), and the [LEGO Foundation](#), the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) Education sector is launching LAI. LAI will generate research in key open areas related to improving children’s learning. LAI seeks to improve global learning outcomes by uncovering the next generation of promising evidence-based approaches that can be tested, replicated, and adapted by policymakers to their local contexts. In addition to evaluating innovations, the Initiative will evaluate evidence-based interventions at a larger scale and in new contexts, to better understand their generalizability, mechanisms of change, and pathways to scale. The Initiative will achieve this through two core activities:

1. Generate high-quality, rigorous studies across pre-primary, primary, and secondary ages, with a focus on improving learning in low- and middle-income countries, especially for marginalized children.
2. Bridge the gap between research and policy by summarizing research insights and supporting policymakers to use evidence when designing and scaling innovative education reforms to meet SDG 4 by 2030.

Cross-cutting themes

Interdisciplinary engagement: Important insights can be gained when disciplines like economics, cognitive psychology, and education are brought together to develop, adapt, test, and scale innovations. In particular, research by economists, who conduct many of the education RCTs around the world, can benefit from insights from psychologists who study children’s developing capacities for exploring, reasoning, and learning. And although cognitive psychologists have tools for evaluating what children know at different ages

and how they learn, oftentimes these tools are honed primarily in labs and must be reworked to create and test innovations in real-world settings. Despite the promising potential of these collaborations, they are limited in part due to misaligned academic incentives: researchers are incentivized to publish in journals specific to their field; combining different research approaches across disciplines can require significant time and resources; and few formal mechanisms exist to support and push this work forward.

To address this gap, LAI serves as a vehicle to award funding from the [Foundations of Learning \(FOL\) Initiative](#), which invites **teams of economists and cognitive psychologists** to apply for funds to develop and test innovative solutions to improve learning. To be eligible for FOL funds, teams must include at least one economist and at least one cognitive psychologist with the ultimate aim of improving children’s learning. At least one of the team’s PIs must be a J-PAL affiliate or invited researcher and eligible for J-PAL funding. FOL funds can be used for research conducted in an LMIC or for small-scale lab work, often done by psychologists in a controlled setting, in an HIC as long as there are tangible plans to expand this work elsewhere to “in-the-field” randomized evaluations in an LMIC.

Interdisciplinary teams are not a requirement for non-FOL funding administered under LAI, however, in all cases, the Review Board will look favorably on teams that can demonstrate strong expertise in education measurement and understanding of cognitive development.

Locally-led research: Research led by local team members can be [better grounded](#) in the appropriate social, political, economic, and cultural contexts, and find closer alignment with local policies and priorities. LAI will look favorably upon project teams with researchers from and/or based in low- and middle-income countries, particularly when these intersect with the countries or regions in which proposed projects will take place. In addition to encouraging local researcher leadership on teams, LAI is launching an African Scholars program, described in greater detail below.

Gender and social inclusion: Education inequality and marginalization appear across a range of demographic factors, including but not limited to gender, income level, rurality, ethnicity, race, language, citizenship status, disability, and the intersection of those factors. Projects are encouraged to consider these risk factors, as well as how insights generated can combat discrimination and promote the safeguarding of all individuals, especially the most marginalized.

Geography: LAI will fund projects across low-, and middle-income countries (LMICs). Some sub-topics contain additional geographic restrictions, which are outlined within each respective focus area below.

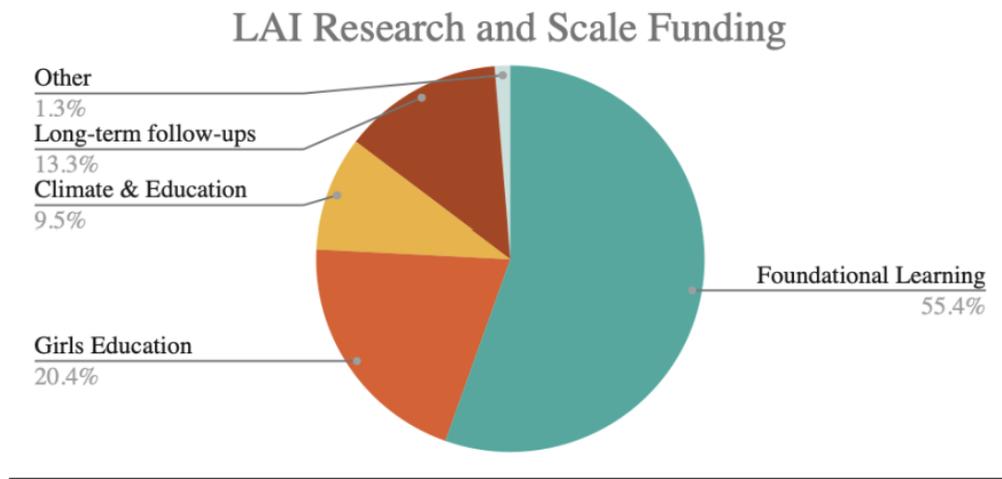
Age range: LAI will consider a range of evaluations across pre-primary, primary, and secondary education that aim to improve student attendance or learning in one or more of the focus areas. Some sub-topics contain additional age/grade level restrictions, which are outlined within each respective focus area below.

Pathways to Scale: LAI is focused on supporting projects that have carefully considered the potential implementation of a proposed intervention at scale. This includes cultivating active partnerships with governments, developing connections with local researchers and practitioners, and using these partnerships to

gauge the compatibility of interventions with pre-existing in-country structures to bring ideas to scale. J-PAL will favor demonstrably scale-relevant projects for our standard randomized evaluation funding, but will also be funding scale projects, described in more detail below, which directly support the implementation of successful interventions at scale. Scale projects are encouraged to intersect with the core areas of research outlined below, though there is a small pot of funding available for scale projects in education more broadly.

Thematic focus

Applicants are invited to apply for funding from any of the below core areas of research:



1. Foundational Learning

LAI will fund research across a wide range of interventions designed to improve foundational learning for school-age children. These can be broken into two discrete but complementary areas: academic measures of learning – in particular, foundational literacy and numeracy – and more holistic measures of learning encompassing categories such as cognitive, social, and emotional skills. In addition to addressing these topics separately, researchers are encouraged to consider projects that explore the relationship between holistic skills and academic achievement.

Foundational Literacy and Numeracy: Though children’s enrollment and attendance in school has improved in recent decades, there is an urgent need to deepen research on how to best develop children’s foundational literacy and numeracy skills. LAI will be open to funding various types of research within this theme. This may include research on bringing to greater scale pedagogical interventions like structured pedagogy and Teaching at the Right Level, which, as of 2023, are both listed as “great buys” in the [Cost-effective Approaches to Improve Global Learning](#) by the Global Education Evidence Advisory Panel. Similarly, research may seek to fill evidence gaps in areas listed as “good buys” or “promising but limited evidence” in the report.

Research related to pedagogy may include instructional approaches such as remediation, differentiated instruction, play-based learning, and/or distance learning, among others. Additionally, LAI recognizes that innovative and creativity-based pedagogies focused on increasing foundational literacy and numeracy skills may

simultaneously support a broader set of development and learning outcomes. Therefore, J-PAL encourages applicants with proposals related to pedagogy to indicate if and how they will consider measuring outcomes related to breadth of skills (see section below), alongside measures of literacy and numeracy, as primary or secondary outcomes. Where relevant, applicants should also detail how they will measure these broader sets of skills, including ensuring the reliability and validity of measurement (see “Breadth of Skills” section below).

Additional topics for research on foundational literacy and numeracy may include programs or policies around the [language](#) of instruction; teacher preparation and support; teacher selection, posting, and transfers; curriculum and materials; education technology such as personalized learning software; school governance; school financing models; and/or family and community engagement in education, to name a few examples. Research may also seek to understand the most effective approaches at various levels of delivery, including but not limited to classroom practices, teacher professional development and support, and/or education systems.

At-scale Instructional Improvement for Literacy and Numeracy: Within the umbrella of Foundational Literacy and Numeracy, there is funding for projects specifically seeking to understand which instructional practices, or pedagogies, are most effective at improving students’ literacy and numeracy outcomes and how to do this at scale. Researchers may consider requesting funding for randomized evaluations that could inform scaling such as a pilot RCT to test an adapted model of a previously proven program in a new context; a full RCT with multiple intervention arms to evaluate alternative models of program delivery; a large-scale RCT (i.e. randomized at the district level) that incorporates needs of programs at scale; or a randomized evaluation of government delivery of a previously proven program to ensure government ability to implement before bringing a program to scale. See additional strategies [here](#). **This funding is specific to Sub-Saharan Africa and India and is restricted to the primary grades 1-3.**

Breadth of Skills: Numerous frameworks exist to categorize the broad set of skills that are important for students’ learning and development. These frameworks are not always consistent with one another, which can impede the sector’s ability to advocate for the importance of these skills to stakeholders from policymakers to teachers and parents. While the LAI RFP materials use the terms *holistic skills* and *breadth of skills*, which are used by the [LEGO Foundation](#) and other actors such as the [Brookings Institution](#), there are many other widely used [terms](#) including whole child development, social and emotional learning/socioemotional learning, 21st-century skills, life skills, soft skills, global competencies, and noncognitive skills, among others. Within these broad terms, there are also a variety of frameworks describing the domains housing various skills. To organize and compare them, Harvard’s EASEL Lab developed a [Taxonomy Project](#) mapping the major [social and emotional learning frameworks](#) across disciplines.

To conceptualize the broad set of skills of interest to this RFP, we follow one of the possible frameworks distinguishing five skill domains: social, emotional, cognitive, physical, and creative skills (even if it is not the only or necessarily the best way to categorize them). The table in [Annex 1](#) from LEGO Foundation’s [Learning through Play at School](#) outlines non-exhaustive examples of outcomes and pedagogies within each of those domains.

Key gaps remain within the body of evidence from randomized evaluations on holistic skills, including but not limited to:

- **Geography:** The majority of research on holistic skills has taken place in [high-income countries](#), with research in low- and middle-income countries historically focusing more on access and attendance or academic outcomes like literacy and numeracy. This leaves many open questions about the impacts of educational interventions on other skill outcomes (including those targeted and not directly targeted by specific interventions) in low- and middle-income country contexts.
- **Measurement:** The tools and methods from research in high-income countries may not always transfer between countries and contexts. Additionally, different cultures may value certain skills above others, which may also require adapted tools for measurement between contexts. To accurately assess whether an intervention can improve a certain skill, that evaluation must be able to measure the skill validly and reliably. There are, for instance, open questions about the validity and reliability of many frequently used measures of socioemotional learning. The same holds for other holistic skills.
- **Age ranges:** The existing research on holistic skills tends to focus on certain age ranges, especially the early childhood and elementary school years. These are important and responsive years for brain development (for example, they are the [years](#) in which children develop executive functioning skills like impulse control, which are important building blocks for later in life), but there is also a need for more research in later years such as in early adolescence when many other critical cognitive, social, emotional, and other changes occur.
- **Breadth of skills:** Even for interventions for which impact evidence on some skill dimensions has started to emerge, evidence of impacts on other domains is often lacking: e.g. a [review](#) of the link between learning-through-play interventions and holistic outcomes showed that evidence is most concentrated in the cognitive skill domain, followed by social skills, with less evidence on the connection between play and emotional, physical, and creative skills.
- **Conditions and mechanisms:** Within the global evidence base, a [meta-analysis](#) found that research is not clear on which “individual, contextual, methodological, and programmatic” variables contribute to the development of different socioemotional learning skills and recommended that future research seek to uncover the conditions and mechanisms of effective programs.
- **Cost-effectiveness:** A key gap in the literature on holistic skills is evidence on cost-effectiveness. For example, the [2023 GEEAP “Smart Buys” report](#), which summarizes evidence on cost-effective approaches to learning at scale, included “teaching socioemotional and life skills” as an area with promising but limited evidence, demonstrating that empirical evidence is mounting to show the causal impact of socioemotional and life skills instruction on academic learning outcomes. However, for more evidence to credibly be integrated into synthesis products like the GEEAP, researchers should make progress toward establishing common measures of effectiveness (see *Measurement of Holistic Skills in RCTs: Review and Guidelines*) and [collect high-quality cost data](#).

LAI will seek to fill these evidence gaps by funding RCTs measuring impacts on holistic skills for pre-primary to lower secondary grade children in low- and middle-income countries, across all listed skill domains. LAI will consider early childhood development and out-of-school interventions insofar as there are plans to measure how

these may relate to school-related outcomes. As part of the LAI review of proposals' research design, we will put special weight on the quality of the measurement proposed, and encourage researchers to include plans and budgets for the development, testing, and validation of appropriate measurement approaches. Guidelines to do so can be found in J-PAL's *Measurement of Holistic Skills in RCTs: Review and Guidelines*. Applicants seeking funding explicitly for the design and validation of new tools can apply under the "Pilot Research Projects" category of funding, as long as a direct and credible link with an application of those tools in future RCT work is established.

2. Girls' Education:

Despite gains in educational access for girls at the primary level, completion rates remain low across many contexts, especially at the secondary level in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. Even in locations that have achieved gender parity in educational attainment and learning, [research](#) suggests that girls must often achieve higher education than boys to attain equal labor outcomes. The Center for Global Development's [Advancing the Agenda in Girls' Education Research](#) highlights that, while there has been an increase in girls' education research, the evidence is mostly from a few middle-income countries rather than low-income countries, and evidence is scarce at scale. Additionally, boys and girls may face other intersecting disadvantages such as extreme poverty or disability, which can [compound in barriers](#) that manifest differently across genders in different contexts, but more often disadvantage girls over boys.

The available [evidence](#) suggests that interventions to increase school enrollment and attendance tend to help the most disadvantaged gender (often girls) most, with some exceptions. In terms of [learning](#), a J-PAL synthesis of programs to improve learning in low- and middle-income countries found that in a small number of cases, aspects of program implementation, such as preferential treatment afforded to boys by tutors or gender stereotypes, prevented girls from benefiting from programs to the same extent as boys. In other instances, girls benefited more from design features within programs that supported their needs, such as the presence of female role models or the ability to learn in groups with friends. More research is needed to understand how the effects of programs to improve learning and participation vary by gender.

We encourage proposals to reduce gender gaps in school participation and learning. Proposals may aim to generate more evidence on the gendered impacts of gender-neutral interventions, as well as fill research gaps in understanding gender-targeted interventions such as those highlighted in The Population Council's [Girls' Education Roadmap](#). For example, researchers may seek to better understand the impacts of gender-sensitive teaching and school environments, reducing gender-based violence, and/or engaging parents and communities on girls' school participation and learning. Researchers may also seek to understand the effects of teaching life skills like negotiation, conflict resolution, or leadership on girls' academic and later-life outcomes, as outlined as a key evidence gap in the GEEAP "Smart Buys" report. Finally, more evidence is needed regarding the effectiveness of different components in these programs and the mechanisms driving positive change, particularly in settings where girls' education needs are greatest.

Understanding that there is also limited evidence across other factors of marginalization, LAI encourages proposals that aim to address how exclusion and inequality manifest locally, such as effective interventions for children with different abilities or those living in remote areas, as well as the compounded intersections of these areas.

3. Climate and Education:

LAI will encourage proposals that have a primary or secondary focus on the mitigation of the impact of [negative climate and environmental factors](#) on students' learning, educational attainment, well-being, and school participation, as well as the role of education in building resilience to climate change. Researchers may seek to ask questions related to the illustrative areas outlined below:

- a. **What can education systems and communities do to keep climate change from disrupting learning?**
 - i. Hurricanes, floods, and droughts often [close schools](#) and [lead families to migrate](#) which disrupts children's education. How can education systems, and learning in particular, be made more resilient and adaptable to climate shocks to encompass broad temperature changes, extreme weather events, increased migration, changes in livelihoods/household income/family dynamics/infrastructure, etc.?
 - ii. There is evidence that [children learn less in hot classrooms](#). How do counteractive cooling technologies or air filtration systems affect access to schools and learning outcomes?
 - iii. How can existing adaptation and resilience mechanisms (e.g. social protection systems and/or analytics serviced for government planning for adaptation or resilience) be used in multifunctional ways to leverage better education outcomes in the context of climate shocks?
 - iv. By reducing pollution (which can be [bad for learning](#)) or by creating more distributed energy, can equitable access to green energy and/or infrastructure have positive spill-overs for educational outcomes?
- b. **Which interventions or combinations of interventions are most successful at preparing students and their families for climate resilience and adaptation?**

Researchers are encouraged to propose creative solutions at the intersections of these issues. For example, education-focused interventions may consider combining remote sensing measures of temperature or exposure to weather shocks with primary survey data to explore these intersections. Or, researchers may consider conducting follow-up studies of education interventions in places with enough variation in extreme weather over a longer time horizon, asking whether the intervention affected how the beneficiaries fared in the wake of climate change.

4. Long-term Impacts of Education Interventions

In recent years, researchers have increasingly examined the long-term impact of interventions, gauging whether a range of interventions in sectors including education, health, and labor induce long-term benefits for program participants. However, in the education space in particular, much remains unknown about long-term effects, including whether improved skills in childhood translate to improved livelihoods, incomes, and productivity in adulthood, and potentially what the intergenerational health impacts are on beneficiaries' children. Most interventions have not been studied through long-term follow-ups in both treatment and comparison arms, while follow-ups that have been conducted often [fade out](#) over time. Some interventions have seen more [enduring](#)

[effects](#), including studies in which effects have diminished in the medium term but resurfaced in the long term. The resurfacing of effects raises questions around the mechanisms through which education interventions may improve long-term outcomes: Do these interventions improve outcomes including wages by inducing additional years of education, by directly improving skills that become useful in adulthood, or via another mechanism? With the expansion of big data, the growth of government administrative data, and the proliferation of cell phones, previously undertaken research projects are now better equipped to reconnect with previous participants, and new research has enhanced opportunities for long-term tracking. Furthermore, data sources like satellite information enable improved monitoring even in cases where administrative data is scarce. In addition, the total number of RCTs has ballooned since the 2000s, leading to a larger body of work for which follow-up may be appropriate.

LAI will fund long-term follow-up studies of education interventions originally evaluated with randomized evaluations. These can span across a range of intervention types. As a primary focus, researchers are encouraged to submit proposals on studies in which enough time has passed for long-term follow-up (ideally greater than ten years). LAI will also consider shorter-term follow-ups that assess the viability of interventions in the “medium term.” In both cases, researchers are encouraged to use resources such as [Using Randomized Controlled Trials to Estimate Long-Run Impacts in Development Economics](#) to assess the viability of conducting additional endlines.

Proposals should indicate where previous evidence in the literature indicates the plausibility of long-term effectiveness and clearly explain the cost-effectiveness of the original intervention. LAI will look favorably upon proposals for projects that relate to the [GEEAP “smart” and “good” buys](#). Researchers proposing long-term follow-ups should establish that they have either maintained data to recontact subjects or have other means to reestablish contact if the study was not originally designed for long-term follow-up. Studies should also have the means to test outcomes like income, measures of adult productivity outside of income, and/or the health of the children of those receiving the intervention.

Additionally, researchers designing new studies may keep follow-ups in mind should this be an option worth exploring in the future, including taking [steps](#) like including follow-up in consent scripts, choosing sample sizes with necessary statistical power for long-term follow-up (taking into account attrition over time), considering phase-in designs that allow for follow-up, and the use of mobile phones for tracking or survey administration.

Application Eligibility, Process, and Review

Eligibility: All J-PAL affiliates, invited researchers from any J-PAL initiative or regional office, and J-PAL postdoctoral fellows are eligible to apply to any research or scaling proposal type. In addition, scholars based in sub-Saharan Africa can apply for pilot or travel/proposal development funding under the **African Scholars** program (*eligibility details are provided below*). **PhD students** who have a J-PAL affiliate or invited researcher on their thesis committee are eligible to apply for up to US\$75,000 in pilot, research, or scale funding, or US\$10,000 in travel/proposal development funding. The affiliate or invited researcher can be based at the same institution as the student, or at a different institution. Alternatively, PhD students may also be co-PIs on grant applications submitted by a J-PAL affiliate or invited researcher, in which case the expectation is for co-PIs to be full and

equal collaborators.

J-PAL eligible researchers can apply for scale funding in collaboration with governments, NGOs, and/or private sector actors. In addition, **J-PAL and IPA offices can apply for the scaling funding** provided at least one J-PAL eligible researcher is fully involved as an active, engaged, and responsive PI or adviser. To gauge the involvement of a J-PAL eligible researcher, we require them to complete a PI certification confirming their active engagement. All proposals may include other collaborators outside of those mentioned as long as the principal investigator is eligible. Additional consideration will be given to proposals that involve locally-based researchers and partners, as well as those with interdisciplinary co-authors.

Additional eligibility for African Scholars: LAI is invested in creating more opportunities for African scholars to develop and drive the research agenda on the African continent. African Scholars who have an interest in LAI's research agenda, and who are keen to run projects with a pathway to a randomized evaluation, are strongly encouraged to apply. Research teams including at least one African Scholar are eligible to apply. African Scholars include individuals who have **completed a PhD in economics or another empirical social science discipline** (including PhD-level training in quantitative methods such as statistics/econometrics) **equipping them to conduct an RCT** and are **based at an academic institution (university) in sub-Saharan Africa**. These scholars are eligible to apply for travel/proposal development grants (up to US\$10,000) and pilot grants (up to US\$75,000), with more descriptive pilots capped at US\$25,000. Targeted mentorship will be provided to African Scholars who receive funds from the initiative, have conditional/partial funding decisions, or are asked to revise and resubmit their proposals.

LAI encourages interdisciplinary study teams including both economists and researchers from other social science disciplines as co-PIs to apply.

Additional eligibility requirements: **Any researcher can submit a maximum of three proposals, inclusive of all proposal types, within a 12-month period to LAI, either as a main PI or co-PI in the proposal.** For example, if a researcher submitted two proposals in our Fall 2023 round, they can then only submit a maximum of one proposal in our Spring 2024 round.

Applicants who are delinquent in their deliverables to any J-PAL initiative may submit proposals, but will not be eligible to receive additional funding from any J-PAL initiative. You may submit applications to LAI, but your application will not be considered for funding until your deliverables become current.

Projects can apply to receive different types of funding over their lifecycle and receive multiple grants over time. However, applicants who are submitting a proposal for a project that has already received LAI funding must be up to date on the project's deliverables and should be able to provide outcomes for the previously funded stage of the project, including a summary of all findings to date.

Funds: J-PAL's LAI expects to award funding across three types of research funds:

1. **Full Randomized Evaluation Research Projects:** These grants will generally be for a **maximum amount of US\$400,000** for research projects at a mature level of development. Not only must the research question be clear, but the applicants must also demonstrate a commitment from implementing partners, a

method of randomization, well-defined instruments, and power calculations. The expectation is that these projects will result in a publicly available paper that is eventually submitted to a top economics or education journal.

- Pilot Research Projects:** These grants will be for a **maximum amount of US\$75,000**. Pilot funding is available to studies with a clear research question, but for which the design and implementation require further testing and pilot data. These grants may be used for activities intended to 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. Pilots can also be used to test and strengthen tools, translate the tools to different contexts, etc. Pilots should not be mini-RCTs because of issues with statistical power. These grants may also be for **descriptive work** that aims to inform future randomized evaluation development. However, in these cases, the budget should be **closer to US\$25,000** rather than US\$75,000. Applications in this category should be for exploratory work and not simply inexpensive randomized evaluations. If a researcher applies for pilot funding from more than one J-PAL initiative, the proposal should justify (i) why the project spans both initiatives and (ii) why more than US\$75,000 in funding is needed for the pilot. The expectation is that these projects will ultimately develop into full-scale randomized evaluations. For projects that do not result in a full-scale evaluation, the expectation is that these projects will produce a publicly available paper documenting insights from the pilot.
- Travel/Proposal Development Grants:** These grants will be for **up to US\$10,000**, and have a suggested **period of performance of approximately 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 for a pilot or full randomized evaluation during a subsequent call for proposals.

In addition, LAI will award funding across three categories of activities as part of scale-focused projects, which support technical assistance and/or research with government, NGOs, and/or the private sector focused on adopting evidence-informed solutions:

- Adaptations:** These grants will be for a **maximum of US\$75,000** and have a **suggested period of performance of up to one year**. This type of support is for projects in which the government partner has identified the potential evidence-informed solutions from randomized evaluations, but more work needs to be done before they can pilot a scalable version of it. These grants can be used to support the government partner in designing and adapting evidence from randomized evaluations to inform programs, policies, or delivery mechanisms to their context and systems so that they are ready to begin piloting it. This can include collecting data about the nature and extent of a problem to determine whether potential solutions are relevant to the context (i.e., conducting a needs assessment or scoping feasibility study).
- Policy pilots:** These grants will be for a **maximum of US\$200,000** and have a **suggested period of performance of up to two years**. This type of support is for projects where the partner is ready to pilot

the evidence-informed solution from randomized evaluations but would like technical support in either setting up a pilot, making sure it maintains fidelity to the evidence in terms of the program features that drove positive impacts, and/or monitoring pilot implementation quality. These grants can be used to support the government partner in piloting a scalable version of an evidence-based solution from randomized evaluations, including preparing for the pilot training, program manuals, etc., conducting process evaluations to monitor implementation quality, analyzing pilot results, and if successful, helping the partner to make a case for further scale.

3. **Scale projects:** These projects will be for a **maximum of US\$300,000** and have a **suggested period of performance of up to three years**. This type of support is for projects where the partner has already piloted a version of the evidence-informed solution in their context, either in a randomized evaluation or policy pilot or elsewhere, with sufficient justification that the solution has been responsibly adapted and contextualized. This type of support is for projects where, based on previous results, the government partner would like to move forward with a scale-up and would like technical support in expanding the program more widely. This grant can support a range of activities that can include but are not limited to analyzing result to help the partner secure key approvals for the scale-up, ensuring implementation and rollout protocols maintain fidelity to the evidence from randomized evaluations in terms of the key program features that drove positive impacts, and/or setting up low-cost partner-owned monitoring systems for programs at scale to report periodic progress to key decision-makers.

Please note that all proposal teams that are working in a country with a regional J-PAL office (see list [here](#)) or IPA country office (see list [here](#)) are encouraged to reach out to that office at least three weeks in advance of the round deadline to help prepare their application and provide a letter of office support.

Review Process: Selection of awardees for all applications will follow a **two-stage process**:

1. Proposals will be distributed for peer review to referees selected from a roster of researchers and donors focused on education research and policy. Each application will be reviewed by at least two referees. Reviewers will remain anonymous to applicants and should disclose, individually and proactively, any actual or potential conflict of interest to lai@povertyactionlab.org before participation in any review process. When in doubt as to whether a conflict of interest could exist, the reviewer should err on the side of disclosure.
2. Proposals will be scored using the review criteria and then ranked by members of the Review Board. Funding decisions will be made in a meeting of the Review Board.

If a permanent Review Board member is conflicted out from a round, initiative co-chairs may invite a stand-in member for that round. If you would like to appeal a decision of the LAI Review Board, you may contact LAI staff at lai@povertyactionlab.org within one week of receiving the funding decision detailing the reasons for the request for reconsideration (maximum of two pages in length and addressing all reasons given by the review sub-committee for rejecting the proposal). LAI staff will then communicate the reconsideration request to the LAI Review Board, upon whose review the decision will be final.

Review criteria: As part of the proposal selection process, projects are evaluated on several criteria, including:

- **All proposals should consider:**
 - Are the questions and proposed interventions consistent with at least one of LAI's thematic research priorities?
 - Is the cost of the study commensurate with the value of expected lessons learned? Is there convincing evidence that the solution can be cost-effective?
 - Are there any technical, logistical, or political obstacles and risks that might threaten the completion of the project (for example, implementation capacity, government authorization, or other funding)? Does this potential project or scale-up present any unintended opportunities for harm, corruption, or misuse of funds? How do you plan to monitor and prevent/address both of these types of risks throughout the project?
 - Are there any potential unintended consequences or risks of this project or potential scale-up for staff or program participants and if so, what are they? What proactive measures has your team taken to assess, monitor, and mitigate/prevent any such potential risks? What measures will you take to mitigate/prevent them in the future?
 - Does the project sufficiently identify and discuss the likely effects of the proposed program for disadvantaged populations, and does the proposal consider the special vulnerabilities of disadvantaged populations?
- **Research proposals (full, pilots, and travel/proposal development grants) should consider:**
 - Does the study make a significant contribution toward understanding pressing issues in learning and 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?
 - Does the research design appropriately answer the questions outlined in the proposal? Are there threats that could compromise the validity of the results? If so, does the proposal sufficiently address those threats? Are the validity and the reliability of the measurement of primary and secondary outcomes sufficiently considered? Can expected outcomes and impacts be observed within the proposed study period and/or sample?
 - **For Full RCTs**, do the power calculations convincingly demonstrate the ability to detect each of the proposed impacts to be measured? Is the proposed project sufficiently powered to pick up differential effects by gender?
 - Will results from the intervention have broader implications? How, if at all, will the “lessons learned” have relevance beyond this test case? Is there a demonstrated demand from policymakers for more/better information to influence their decisions in this area? Has the research team outlined in their proposal a plan to catalyze the use of the results, and does the proposal identify potential pathways to scale?

- **Scale proposals should consider:**

- What is the strength of the existing evidence? How big or small was the impact and was it large enough to justify program expansion given its costs?
- Does the project address problems or opportunities that are important to the partner, and, if addressed, could generate meaningful benefits to program participants? Did the proposal make a clear case for why the solution may be relevant or appropriate for the proposed context based on descriptive data, knowledge of local systems and institutions, and existing evidence?
- Is there potential for the partner to widely scale up the innovation in the future? What commitment has the partner expressed to move forward with implementing the scale-up if the pilot is successful? How many people will the scaled-up program reach and over what timeframe?
- Are there any logistical or political obstacles that might threaten the completion of the proposed activities, for example, government authorization or potential transfer of key decision-makers?

In addition, when submitting a proposal to LAI, applicants should:

- Attach a letter of support from their partner (intervention-implementing organization). Letters of support from all implementing partners should indicate willingness to work with the research team and willingness to share program cost data with J-PAL (through the PI) to conduct the program's cost analysis.
- Attach a letter of support from their J-PAL regional office or IPA country office, when applicable, indicating willingness to work with the research team to provide support on their project.
- Concurrently apply for approval from their respective Institutional Review Boards (Human Subjects Committees). Appropriate Institutional Review Board (IRB) approvals or exemptions are required to be in place before a subaward is issued and research commences. The IRB approval must be held by the institution that enters into the subaward agreement with MIT. If the institution does not have its own IRB, it must engage the services of a commercial IRB to review and provide oversight for its research activities. Consult with J-PAL regarding including the cost of this commercial entity in the project budget. Please note that J-PAL requires that the reviewing IRB have [IORG](#) status with the US Office of Human Protections. An IRB's status can be found by consulting the database of IORGs [here](#).
- Submit the application to their office of sponsored programs or contracts department, as MIT will need official acceptance of the proposal and budget by the applicant's institution to process the sub-award. Applicants can do this after submitting to the Review Board, but doing so before the award decision will lessen delays.

Grants Conditions: If your research proposal is selected for funding, the **terms of the award** will be:

- **Peer-review proposals:** Grantees may be requested to peer-review proposals in future LAI rounds.
- **Project registration (RCTs):** 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 an option to include more information, including power calculations and an optional pre-analysis plan. AEA project registration is required for

all projects involving randomization.

- **Collect and report outcome metrics:** All grantees will be asked to track and report on one or more of the Initiative's key outcome metrics for the intervention they are evaluating and/or scaling, in addition to the number of people reached and their average income level, where available. Collecting data on at least one will be required, as LAI reports on these metrics to our donors.
- **Participate in activities:** Grantees may be requested to participate in one of LAI's activities at a mutually agreed time and place. Activities may include evidence workshops, a matchmaking or policy conference, or presentations to LAI's donor or their partners. LAI will cover any associated costs.
- **Credit:** Any presentations and publications, including academic papers, policy briefs, press releases, blogs, and organizational newsletters that emerge from this project should credit LAI at J-PAL with the following text: "This research is funded by the Learning for All Initiative (LAI) at J-PAL."
- **Collect and report 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. Thus, gender-disaggregated data for all project types is a requirement. 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, though projects are encouraged to report gender data in papers as well, where relevant. 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. 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 education. 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.
- **Progress report and final report:** All pilot, full RCT, and scaling grantees will be requested to provide a brief startup report three months after the start of the award period, annual financial updates, annual progress reports, a final financial report within 60 days of completion of the award period, a final narrative report either 2 months (pilots) or 4 months (RCTs and scaling awards) after the end of the award period, and (RCTs only) a final preliminary results report within 12 months of completion of the award period.
- **Collect and report program cost data (RCTs and scaling awards only):** 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. To facilitate cost collection, LAI awards include US\$1,000 to defray expenses associated with collecting cost data. LAI will provide a costing worksheet for grantees to update. 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.

- **Survey instruments (all grant types):** Four months after the project ends, grantees will be requested to share survey and data collection instruments and methodologies with J-PAL as part of the final narrative report. LAI and J-PAL may share these instruments with other grantees.
- **Data publication (all grant types):** Researchers funded through this grant will be required to publish de-identified data per [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. Requests for data publication services can be made by sending an email to data@povertyactionlab.org. De-identified data should be made publicly available within three years of the end of data collection or 60 days of a paper's acceptance in a journal.

Code of Conduct: Since J-PAL is part of MIT, everyone who is associated with J-PAL, including researchers worldwide receiving grants from J-PAL initiatives, is considered part of the broader MIT community. Therefore, it is our hope and expectation that they will adhere to MIT's community-wide policies that are available [here](#). As part of MIT's broader policies, this 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](#).

J-PAL takes safeguarding against workplace abuses and the appropriate use of funds, including any adverse effects of aid expenditure that have an undesired or unexpected result upon recipients, seriously. All Learning for All Initiative (LAI) grantees and partners must comply with the guidelines of [J-PAL's Code of Conduct](#). If your project requires your team to interact directly with children, you will be required to adhere to the [LEGO Child Safeguarding Policies](#) (regardless of funding source). If you receive funding from the LEGO Foundation, you will also be asked to follow the [LEGO Code of Conduct](#). All LAI grantees and partners must comply with the following guidelines if they receive funding:

- You will be asked to share information about child safeguarding guidelines with staff working directly with children related to your work with J-PAL. Share the LEGO and J-PAL Code of Conduct with project staff.
- You will be asked to confirm that your organization has recruitment processes in place for screening relevant candidates to prevent unsuitable individuals from working with children within activities related to your work with J-PAL.
- Any staff with direct contact with children must complete a child safeguarding training annually. If you already have a robust training in place, then this will suffice. However, if you do not have one in place, we suggest this [UNICEF Online Child Safeguarding Training](#) (approx 90 minutes long). For multi-year

subawards, keep accurate records of who is working on the project and the dates they completed their annual trainings. You will submit this information each year in your report.

- All staff should be aware of how to report incidents of abuse.
- Should you receive funding, we will follow up with more detailed information.
- If your research falls within the scope of [General Data Protection Regulation](#) (GDPR) requirements, comply with GDPR and let the Learning for All Initiative team know right away (lai@povertyactionlab.org).

If anyone wishes to report that a researcher has violated MIT community policies, they should consult the individuals and offices identified in the relevant policies linked above. In addition, all violations can be directly reported to any of the following J-PAL contacts for further action: (i) [Iqbal Dhaliwal](#) (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).

Administrative details:

Payments and Subawards

RCT, pilot, and scaling grants are provided under an award from MIT to the grantee's host institution. **Please note: PIs must have a formal affiliation with the institute to receive an award from MIT to set up a subaward.** Please see the [J-PAL Human Subjects Memo 2023](#) for full details. Travel/proposal development grants are paid as travel reimbursements. 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 [LAI RFP page](#).

Budgets, Requirements, and Process

Full, pilot, and scaling research grants are provided under an award from MIT to the grantee's host institution. Travel/proposal development grants are directly reimbursed to the PIs (receipts are required). For more information on LAI materials, please visit [here](#).

Annexures

Annex 1: Examples of holistic skills domains, outcomes, and pedagogies

Skill domain	Examples of outcomes	Examples of pedagogy
Cognitive skills	conflict resolution, decision-making, higher-order thinking, mathematics concepts and skills, metacognition, reading comprehension, etc.	active learning, collaborative inquiry-based learning, peer tutoring, problem-based learning, project-based learning, scaffolding, etc.
Creative skills	creativity, divergent thinking, inventiveness	collaborative learning, Montessori education, etc.
Emotional skills	confidence, engagement, enjoyment of learning, executive function, learner well-being, listening skills, motivation, positive classroom behavior, self-efficacy, self-regulation, etc.	active learning, collaborative active learning, cooperative learning, experiential learning, guided discovery learning, inquiry-based learning, Montessori education, problem-based learning, etc.
Physical skills	fine motor, gross motor	active learning, guided discovery learning, etc.
Social skills	collaboration, communication, interpersonal skills, negotiating skills, positive peer play, social connections, social regulation, etc.	active learning, cooperative learning, experiential learning, guided discovery learning, inquiry-based learning, etc.