EVALUATION INCUBATOR TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE OVERVIEW

J-PAL North America's evaluation incubators support the design and implementation of randomized evaluations to inform important policy questions. The Evaluation Incubators create partnerships between J-PAL North America, researchers, and service providers or government agencies through two teams: the State and Local Innovation Initiative, and the Homelessness and Housing Stability team.

Selected partners receive technical assistance from J-PAL North America staff, introductions to academic researchers within J-PAL's network, and, in some cases, funding to help design a feasible randomized evaluation. If a partner is successfully matched with a researcher from J-PAL's network and a randomized evaluation is feasible, the researcher may apply for additional funding from J-PAL North America to carry out the evaluation via a subsequent request for proposals.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE (TA)

The overall goals for TA engagements are to help partners identify feasible and policy relevant opportunities for randomized evaluations, connect partners with interested researchers from J-PAL's network, and build partners' capacity for generating and using evidence. That is, technical assistance focuses on developing a project, not implementing one.

J-PAL North America's highly qualified policy and research staff provide technical assistance across a range of technical and management areas including:

PROJECT MANAGEMENT:

- Maintaining ongoing communication with partner and any other relevant stakeholders
- Leading team calls (scheduling, developing agendas, recording and sharing meeting notes)
- Scheduling and developing agendas for site visits
- Working with the partner to identify key stakeholders and secure buy-in for the evaluation
- Developing overall project timeline and tracking progress against timeline
- Documenting key decision points

RESEARCH SUPPORT:

- Developing/refining the Theory of Change
- Assessing feasibility of randomized evaluation
- Identifying priority research questions
- Developing brief reviews of relevant literature

- Identifying potential data sources
- Consulting on data use agreements and Institutional Review Board (IRB) applications
- Preparing "back of the envelope" power calculations

TRAINING:

- Connecting partners to research resources, Evaluating Social Programs, and other targeted training opportunities
- Providing training about evaluation methods and the use of data and evidence in decision-making (online and in-person opportunities)
- Training service providers to build support for a randomized evaluation
- Organizing knowledge sharing activities with other stakeholders (e.g., state and local governments)

MATCHMAKING:

- Facilitating relationships between implementing partners and J-PAL affiliates and invited researchers who could serve as Principal Investigators (PIs) on the evaluation. While J-PAL staff can make introductions and facilitate early conversations, we cannot guarantee a long-term working relationship.

THE RESEARCHER'S ROLE

Researchers in J-PAL's network have the opportunity to review Evaluation Incubator applications. Researchers can also be "matched" with a selected partner. "Matched" researchers can expect to engage in the following activities:

- Designing the randomized evaluation
- Participating in regular calls and being responsive to partner's questions and concerns
- Joining site visits
- Participating in calls and meetings with relevant external stakeholders in the potential study (as needed)
- Assessing data quality and analyzing historical data
- Drafting data sharing requests and agreements, and obtaining IRB approval

If a randomized evaluation is feasible, researchers can apply for evaluation funding through one of J-PAL North America's researcher-facing Requests for Proposals (RFPs).

- Funded researchers will be active, engaged, and responsive PIs, dedicated to guaranteeing the quality control of all aspects of the research

FAQs: WORKING WITH EVALUATION INCUBATOR PARTNERS

WHO ARE THE J-PAL NORTH AMERICA STAFF PROVIDING TA?

J-PAL North America pairs a manager with an associate to provide technical assistance and support to partners selected through our Evaluation Incubators. Managers bring strong experience in project management and in building new research partnerships with non-profits and government agencies.

WHO ARE THE RESEARCHERS FROM J-PAL'S NETWORK THAT MAY BE MATCHED?

J-PAL's network of researchers consists of university professors who conduct randomized evaluations to design, evaluate, and improve programs and policies aimed at reducing poverty, and publish the results of these evaluations in high-quality economics journals. They set their own research agendas, raise funds to support their evaluations, and work with J-PAL staff on research, policy outreach, and training. J-PAL staff reach out to researchers who we believe may be interested in the research proposals submitted by organizations participating in an Evaluation Incubator.

HOW LONG DOES J-PAL NORTH AMERICA SUPPORT LAST?

Technical assistance and support are generally provided for up to one year, depending on the initiative and the project. A project may end earlier than a full year for a variety of reasons: it may become clear that developing a randomized evaluation is not feasible, J-PAL NA may be unable to find researchers with interest in the proposed evaluation, or capacity or time constraints from a partnering organization may prevent work from continuing. In these cases, the J-PAL NA staff on the project will work with the partner organization to update the planned scope of work and timeline for the project.

WHAT KINDS OF SUPPORT ARE PROVIDED THROUGH J-PAL NORTH AMERICA?

J-PAL North America TA staff provide:

- Project management support (facilitating calls, leading site visits, developing project timeline)

- Research support (assessing feasibility of a randomized evaluation)

- Training (connecting partners to resources, targeting training to build capacity around evaluation)

- Matchmaking (facilitating connections between partners and J-PAL's affiliates and invited researchers)

WHAT KINDS OF SUPPORT ARE NOT PROVIDED THROUGH J-PAL NORTH AMERICA TA?

J-PAL North America staff provide project management and some research support to partners and researchers through the evaluation incubators. TA staff do not provide the kinds of support typically

provided by research staff, such as independently drafting pre-analysis plans, IRB applications, DUA applications, or research proposals.

DO EVALUATION INCUBATOR PROJECTS RECEIVE FINANCIAL SUPPORT FROM J-PAL NORTH AMERICA? WHAT CAN THE FUNDS BE USED FOR?

In some cases, partners receive flexible project development funds (up to $50,000) to help get evaluations off the ground. Examples of costs that may be covered by these funds include:

- Personnel costs for staff or consultants hired

- Travel costs to visit implementation sites or meet with stakeholders

If you're not sure whether a partner is receiving financial support, please reach out to the relevant initiative manager.

CAN THE PROJECT TEAM WORK WITH CO-AUTHORS, COLLABORATORS, OR RESEARCHERS OUTSIDE OF J-PAL'S NETWORK?

Yes, however at least one affiliate or invited researcher from J-PAL's network must be a PI on the project to apply for future evaluation funding through a J-PAL RFP.

CAN A RESEARCHER OR PARTNER ORGANIZATION BRING IN THEIR OWN RESEARCH STAFF?

Yes, although our expectation is that as a potential PI, the affiliated researcher would play an active role in developing the project.

WHAT KIND OF TIME COMMITMENT MIGHT A RESEARCHER ANTICIPATE IF PARTNERED WITH AN EVALUATION INCUBATOR PROJECT?

The time commitment can vary depending on the project. It is likely that the researcher(s) will participate in regular calls with the partner and J-PAL North America staff once or twice per month during the technical assistance (up to a year) period. Should a randomized evaluation be feasible, the researcher(s) will be expected to play a lead role in preparing a proposal for funding from J-PAL North America (and other funding sources, if applicable) to carry out the evaluation via a subsequent RFP.

IF THE PROJECT DOES NOT SEEM LIKE A GOOD FIT, CAN THE RESEARCHER OR PARTNER END THE ENGAGEMENT?

Yes, either party (researchers or the partner) has the option of ending the engagement if a randomized evaluation does not seem feasible or the project is not a good fit. Please contact your J-PAL North America staff members if you are interested in ending the engagement, and J-PAL will assist in communicating with the rest of the team.

If an RCT is not feasible and the researcher would like to continue the engagement using a different evaluation method, please note that J-PAL North America only funds randomized evaluations.

WHO CAN I CONTACT IF I HAVE ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS?

State and Local Innovation Initiative (SLII): Kim Dadisman, slii@povertyactionlab.org

Homelessness and Housing Stability: Bridget Mercier, housing@povertyactionlab.org