

LEVER Evaluation Incubator Proposal Application

This document outlines the steps to submit a proposal application. Please also review the appendices for how we make funding decisions, and for requirements and details related to awards.

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Instructions

The application consists of two main sections: a proposal narrative (see sections 2.1 through 2.4) and a set of supporting documents (see sections 3.1 through 3.8). Please submit each of the following as a separate document (save as either Word, PDF, or Excel document):

- Proposal Narrative
- Cover Sheet
- Project Budget
- Budget Narrative
- Signed Letter of Transmission
- Letter(s) of Support
- Subrecipient Profile Questionnaire

Please submit all components of the application **via email to slii@povertyactionlab.org by 8pm ET on August 4, 2023**. You will be informed of your proposal approval by the first week of September.

If you have any questions regarding this application, please contact slii@povertyactionlab.org.

Introduction

1.1 What is LEVER?

Leveraging Evaluation and Evidence for Equitable Recovery (LEVER): Through the LEVER project, Results for America and J-PAL North America are training state and local jurisdictions to use data, evaluation, and evidence to advance effective and equitable government programming for generations to come.

State and local governments are working to build resilience in their communities in the face of the economic and public health effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. Federal funds—such as the \$350 billion available from the American Rescue Plan State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF) and the \$1.2 trillion available from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL)—are catalyzing a once-in-a-generation opportunity for state and local governments. From local rental assistance, state-wide tutoring programs, to sector-based job training, governments have a historic opportunity to fund evidence-based approaches to advance economic mobility and racial equity.

This opportunity also sparks a chance to meaningfully understand the impacts of promising new programs and policies to bring the most effective solutions to scale. J-PAL North America and Results for America are committed to equipping state and local governments with the resources needed to create a culture of evidence and data use in decision-making, ensuring programs are best-positioned to improve lives.

1.2 LEVER Evaluation Incubator

LEVER prepares state and local jurisdictions to rigorously evaluate their own programs and to use existing evidence in developing programs and policies. LEVER's Evaluation Incubator is one part of this work. This opportunity is for government agencies who are interested in evaluating a particular program using randomized evaluation. While governments are not required to have participated in LEVER's previous offerings, such as the May workshop, these offerings can equip your team to think through questions that may inform the evaluation goals that you bring to the Evaluation Incubator.

LEVER Evaluation Incubators provide in-depth support for government agencies as they turn ideas into well-designed randomized evaluations of social programs. Through an Evaluation Incubator, governments receive training, one-on-one technical assistance with J-PAL North America and Results for America staff, flexible funding, and connections to academic researchers to develop their evaluations.

1.3 Timeline

- June 5: Applications open
- June 28: Information Session on the LEVER Evaluation Incubator
- August 4: Applications due
- Second week of August: Applicants may be invited for 30-minute interviews
- End of August/Beginning of September: Finalists are selected and notified
- September to December: Technical Assistance from J-PAL North America and Results for America staff
- 2nd week of September: Training on Why Randomize + How to Randomize
- 2nd week of October: Matchmaking Convening

Proposal Narrative

A strong proposal will clearly address the following criteria, which are provided to all proposal reviewers. If necessary, applicants may provide additional information that does not respond directly to the prompts below. The proposal narrative should not exceed five pages.

2.1 Opportunities for Randomized Evaluation

Please discuss each of the following points for the randomized evaluation you are interested in exploring with J-PAL North America:

- A short description of the program or policy that you would like to evaluate via a randomized evaluation, including its key components, the policy question or challenge it is intended to address, and any existing evidence around program efficacy.
 - Please also describe the current status of the intervention, including whether it is in the planning or implementation stage and whether you anticipate making any changes to the intervention in the near future.
- An explanation of how individuals are selected to receive the program, including any eligibility criteria (e.g., are participants selected on a first-come, first-served basis? Using a ranked waitlist? By lottery?).
 - Include initial thoughts on how you might use random assignment to determine who receives the program, including any practical or ethical concerns about implementing a randomized evaluation. J-PAL staff are available to support this activity.
- The number of people or other units (e.g., households, schools, clinics) that the program currently reaches and over what timeframe; and how many people or other units the program could potentially reach over that same timeframe, if resources were not a constraint.
 - If your organization is still determining key inputs related to sample size (e.g., confirming data sources, number of treatment arms), please explain your plans to get the necessary inputs and how different approaches affect power.
 - (Optional) You may include preliminary power calculations in this section if you have them. J-PAL staff are available to support the power analysis.

2.2 Access to Data

- For the program or policy you are interested in evaluating, please describe:
 - The primary outcomes you expect to change as a result of the program.
 - Any existing sources of data that could be used for measuring outcomes (e.g., shelter entry, hospital records, consumer reference data). For a randomized evaluation, you will need to be able to access data to measure outcomes for both individuals who receive the program and those who do not.

- Any other existing data collection efforts related to the program.
- Describe any previous experience collecting data for research, and working with other agencies or offices to access data that could be used to measure outcomes.
- Describe any existing processes that researchers may need to use to access relevant data.

2.3 Opportunities for Racially Equitable Research

- Please provide a description of how this proposal advances racial equity for Black, Latinx, and Indigenous communities at risk of living in or falling into poverty due to economic marginalization produced through structural racism in North America. Below are a few guiding questions:
 - How will stakeholders from different racial/ethnic groups be included in the study?
 - Which racial/ethnic groups might be negatively impacted by this proposal? What steps will be taken to minimize negative impacts?
 - How will racial disparities be addressed in the research design and/or the data you will access?
 - Which racial/ethnic groups could benefit from the proposal?

2.4 Organizational Commitment and Capacity Building

- Please briefly describe your organization's commitment to pursuing new opportunities for rigorous evaluation and using evidence to inform decision-making, and how a partnership with J-PAL North America and academic researchers would advance those efforts.
- Who in your office or agency would play the lead role in developing a randomized evaluation in collaboration with J-PAL North America staff and researchers and coordinating technical support and capacity building activities? What other staff would be available to support the collaboration with J-PAL North America?
- Conducting a randomized evaluation can be difficult for many reasons (e.g., staffing constraints, buy-in for randomization, challenges in accessing or collecting data, implementing the program or policy, political opposition). What do you see as the two most difficult challenges for your team in conducting this evaluation?

Supporting Documents

Follow the instructions to complete each document below. Please append all supporting documents to your proposal narrative in PDF or Word (.docx) format, or Excel for the budget template.

3.1 Cover Sheet

Please communicate general project information in a cover sheet. Use the “Cover Sheet” document in the application folder as a template.

3.2 Project Budget

Please submit a detailed project budget for up to \$50,000. Use the “Project Budget” document in the application folder as a template. If you have any questions, please contact slii@povertyactionlab.org.

- Please carefully review the “instructions” for allowable costs.
- The budget should cover expenses for the duration of the TA engagement with J-PAL (9/08/2023 – 12/31/2023). You will be able to revise the budget should the dates of the engagement change.

Note: It is your responsibility to submit a budget that is correct and follows your organization’s financial policies (*please check with your finance team if there are any restrictions on what can be paid for with private funding / external grants*).

3.3 Budget Narrative

Please provide a detailed description of each line of your budget and explain how the expense relates to your planned project. For example:

- If costs cover personnel or fringe benefits, please describe the staff member(s) role in the project.
- If your budget includes travel, include the specific travel costs (per diem, transport, etc.) and how the travel will contribute to the project.

A complete budget narrative is typically 1-2 pages.

3.4 Signed Letter of Transmission

Please submit a letter of transmission (support) signed by an authorized, signatory official within your organization expressing their support for the project. This letter should contain the following information:

1. Expression of support for the TA engagement, work described in the proposal narrative, and proposed budget.
2. Amount requested in funding
3. Project dates of 9/08/2023 – 12/31/2023.

4. Name of the project director and name and contact information for the person who will sign the funding agreement if an award is made (note: this cannot be the same person as the project director).

Use the “Signed Letter of Transmission” document in the application folder as a template.

3.5 Letters of Support

Please attach letters of support from any other implementing, funding, or research partners involved in the project (e.g., the agency or provider delivering the intervention, the agency housing the administrative data). Please also indicate the number of letters of support you are attaching on the cover sheet (enter 0 if none).

3.6 Subrecipient Profile Questionnaire

Organizations selected to receive funds will need to be set up within MIT’s financial systems and sign a subaward agreement (contract) to formally establish the award. To expedite the process, all applicants must submit the Subrecipient Profile Questionnaire that MIT uses to conduct an organizational risk assessment for all organizations that have not previously received funding from MIT through a Subaward Agreement. Please review the instructions attached to the form and contact smargolis@povertyactionlab.org with any questions. Both instructions and the form can be found in the application folder as “Subrecipient Questionnaire.”

Appendices

Appendix A: Evaluation Criteria

1. Promising approach to addressing the policy area	Is there an opportunity to test a promising program or policy central to addressing the policy area/question?
2. Feasible and ethical opportunity for incorporating random assignment	Is there a clear description of a plan to incorporate random assignment into program delivery or implementation? Are there any practical or ethical concerns about implementing a randomized evaluation?
3. Ability to measure meaningful outcomes and discern impact	Would the study have sufficient statistical power to detect an effect between the treatment and control groups? Is it possible to access data on the proposed study outcomes?
4. Commitment to using evidence to inform decision-making	Is there demonstrated commitment from senior leaders within the organization to use evidence to inform decision-making?
5. Potential contribution to the evidence base	Would a randomized evaluation of the intervention make a significant contribution toward advancing the state of knowledge? How do the proposed interventions compare to approaches that have previously been studied?

Applications will be reviewed by J-PAL North America's State and Local Review Board, which is composed of State and Local Innovation Initiative co-chairs Bruce Sacerdote and Dayanand Manoli, as well as J-PAL North America Co-executive Director Vincent Quan.

Appendix B: Award Conditions and Expectations

Selected partners agree to:

- Designate one staff member to serve as Project Director who will be the point person for the collaboration and secure buy-in from key stakeholders. The Project Director should:
 - Coordinate with program staff and/or service providers and senior leadership in support of the evaluation.
 - Schedule internally with key stakeholders to accommodate site visits or, if in-person visits are not possible, remote meetings, with J-PAL North America staff and researchers, if needed.
 - Communicate that this evaluation is a priority.
 - Facilitating relationships between J-PAL North America staff and affiliated researchers and the relevant entities that hold data or are necessary to implement the evaluation.
 - Ensure that project development progresses along the planned timeline.
- Submit the required final report associated with the award. Organizations who receive funding will also be required to submit a final financial report.
- Present on the work conducted during this evaluation at J-PAL North America hosted events, where possible and on a mutually agreeable date.
- All staff members who work on this project agree to follow MIT's [code of conduct](#).

Appendix C: Funding Conditions and Expectations

- If your agency will receive funding through this award, you will need to sign a subaward agreement (contract). If you have not received funding from MIT before, you will be asked to upload two additional documents electronically into MIT's system (W9 + new supplier registration form). Once we have received all required documents, MIT will review your award and send a draft agreement to the contact listed in your letter of transmission.
 - Note: It can take up to 60 days to receive the draft agreement from MIT, though in many cases this happens more quickly. It is therefore essential that you submit all documents to J-PAL by the requested deadlines to ensure you receive funds in a timely manner.
 - Note: J-PAL subawards are cost-reimbursable.
- If your project will involve human subjects research, you need to provide documentation of institutional review board (IRB) approval before we can establish a subaward agreement and issue funding.
- **A special note for government agencies:**
 - If your team has not received external grants before, please discuss the process with your agency upon notice of the funding decision. In some cases, the draft agreement may need to be reviewed by multiple parties. County governments may be required to seek a Commissioner's signature which can require advanced planning.

Application due	8pm ET on August 4, 2023
Notification of proposal approval	End of August
Initial kickoff call with J-PAL staff	Early September
Deadline to submit IRB approval (if required)	September 30 2023
Deadline to upload W9 and new supplier registration form to MIT site (if required)	September 22, 2023
MIT reviews and drafts agreement	November 2023
Deadline to submit changes to MIT	Within 3 weeks of receiving agreement
Deadline to sign executable agreement	Within 3 weeks of receiving executable agreement

Organizations who have successfully partnered with a researcher in J-PAL’s network to design a feasible, high-quality evaluation can apply for additional funding to carry out the evaluation. Any additional funding is contingent upon both the organization’s choice to proceed and a review of the funding proposal.