J-PAL North America Education Technology
Request for Proposals (RFP)
Proposal Instructions

Focus of the RFP

J-PAL North America's Education Technology RFP supports randomized evaluations in North America that aim to generate valuable insights into which uses of education technology improve learning. This could include randomized evaluations across a broad range of education technologies, including but not limited to online learning, technology-enabled behavioral nudges, educational software/computer-assisted learning, and provision of hardware for learning.

Contents

RFP Timeline

Winter 2019 Education Technology RFP Opens	December 10, 2018
Winter 2019 Education Technology RFP Closes	April 1, 2019
Award Letters Released	Week of May 31, 2019

Proposal Types

Full Research Projects

Full research projects are typically awarded between $50,000 and $150,000, with a maximum award size of $400,000. **Grant periods may be for durations of up to three years.** These projects should meet the following criteria:

- Researchers propose a clear and well-developed research question including detailed randomization design and sample size estimates.
- Researchers must include power calculations based on a minimum detectable effect (MDE) size with a clear explanation of why the minimum detectable effect size is realistic and decision-relevant. Please include enough detail for reviewers to understand how you arrived at the MDE and cite the relevant literature.
- Proposals should also indicate the outcomes of interest.
- A strong proposal will demonstrate academic rigor, policy relevance, and alignment with J-PAL's mission to reduce poverty by ensuring that policy is informed by scientific evidence.
- Proposals must include proof of commitment from partner organizations (in the form of letters of support).
- Note: Proposals can be submitted for funding an ongoing study that has already begun without J-PAL North America funding.

Pilot Studies

Pilot studies may be awarded up to $50,000. Pilots should meet the following criteria:

- Researchers seek to answer a particular research question; however, the design and implementation require further testing and piloting.
- Pilot studies should help researchers develop projects that are not yet ready for launch.
- Random assignment does not necessarily need to occur during a pilot study, but applications should explain how the pilot *will lead to a randomized evaluation in the future.*
- Pilot proposals are not expected to have full power calculations. However, applicants should provide a clear discussion of what minimum detectable effect size (MDE) they consider to be relevant for the study including a rough estimate of the necessary sample size for a full study.

- Applicants should share back-of-the-envelope sense of the potential sample size and power to detect relevant impacts if a randomized evaluation were launched.
- Projects that receive pilot funding are welcome to apply for additional funding in future RFPs.

Short-Term Research Management (STReaM)

In this RFP cycle we are offering the opportunity to receive short-term research management (STReaM). This is a program that provides 3-6 months of research management support from J-PAL North America staff. This support can be used for either full studies or for pilots, and may include but is not limited to: coordinating communication across stakeholders; refining randomization implementation design and consent procedures; pilot design and implementation; and study process monitoring. For more information about STReaM and to express interest, please see the website or contact stream@povertyactionlab.org.

Travel/proposal development grants

Travel/proposal development grants are to be used for early stage activities with the goal of launching a randomized evaluation in North America. Researchers may be awarded up to $5,000. Please see application instructions here. You may submit applications for travel/proposal development grants at any time of the year.

Off-cycle proposals

In rare instances, proposals facing time constraints due to factors outside of their control may apply to the RFP off-cycle. Off-cycle proposals will face the same scrutiny as proposals submitted during the RFP round, and should include a justification for off-cycle submission. Please email your off-cycle submission materials to **edtech@povertyactionlab.org** with "Off-cycle Proposal" in the subject line.

Eligibility Criteria

J-PAL affiliates, J-PAL post-doctoral fellows, and researchers invited to the Education Technology RFP by J-PAL North America (special invitees) are eligible to apply for funding.

Graduate Student Eligibility

Graduate students may apply for full research projects or pilot studies up to $50,000 if they meet the following criteria:

- They have a J-PAL Affiliate on their thesis committee. **Please note that having an invited researcher who is not a J-PAL affiliate on a student's thesis committee does not satisfy this criterion.**

- They received a travel/proposal development grant from J-PAL for the specific project proposed or have documented evidence of successful piloting activities.

Graduate student proposals must reference the student's prior travel/proposal development grant and/or document successful piloting activities. The proposal must also include a letter of support from the J-PAL Affiliate on this student's committee, in which the adviser attests to being on the student's thesis committee.

Students may be awarded a maximum of two travel/proposal development grants and two grants for pilot/full study funding during their time as graduate students.

Review Process

Proposals are reviewed by two peer reviewers from J-PAL's academic network. After peer review, the Review Board, currently consisting of Phil Oreopoulos, Larry Katz, and a third J-PAL Affiliate, reviews each proposal and makes all funding decisions. The Review Board may grant an unconditional approval, a conditional approval (pending minor revisions), a request to revise and resubmit, or a rejection. Regardless of funding status, all applicants to the RFP will receive redacted comments from the referees.

In the event that a Review Board member submits a proposal to the RFP, s/he is required to recuse her/himself from the Review Board. No spouse, partner, or immediate family member of any individual named on a proposal may serve as a peer or Review Board referee in the round in which the applicant's proposal is under review.

If you would like to appeal a decision of the Education Technology RFP Review Board, please contact RFP manager, Vincent Quan (vquan@povertyactionlab.org) within one week of the decision. Please send a detailed write-up of the reasons for this appeal (maximum two pages in length).

Evaluation Criteria

Relevance to public policy and issues of poverty	• Does the study address questions crucial to understanding pressing education policy issues in North America? • Do these questions relate to the use of education technology to improve learning? • Does the study align with our objective of supporting studies of interventions that address issues with implications for low-income, marginalized, or vulnerable populations in the United States? o We take a broad view of how policies may impact these populations. This may include policies that address broad system-wide issues affecting many people, including vulnerable populations, as well as issues that if

	unaddressed could lead people to fall into poverty. For additional examples, please see the *Appendix 1*. • To what extent does the study address issues that impact low-income, marginalized, and vulnerable populations? • Will results from the intervention have broader implications? • How will the lessons learned from this study have relevance beyond this test case? • Is there demonstrated demand from policy makers for more/better information to influence their decisions in this area?
Contribution	• Does the study contribute to advancing knowledge in the field? • Does it answer new questions, introduce novel methods, measures, or interventions? • Is there academic relevance? • How does the study compare with the existing body of research? • Is the experiment clearly linked to underlying economic theories?
Value of research	• Is the cost of the study commensurate with the value of expected lessons learned?
Technical design	• Does the research design appropriately answer the questions outlined in the proposal? • Are there threats that could compromise the validity of results? • If so, does the proposal sufficiently address those threats?
Viability of the project	• Is the relationship with the implementing partner strong and likely to endure through the entire study? • Are there any other logistical or political obstacles that might threaten the completion of the study, for example, government authorization or Human Subjects review?
Publishing data	• Does the project advance best practices in transparency? • Is the researcher committed to registering the research project and publishing data and replication code online when not precluded by privacy restrictions?

How to Apply

Required documents:

1. **The proposal application cover sheet (available here).**
    *   Please save the coversheet as *[PI Name]_[Topic Name]_[Ed Tech].pdf*

2. **A 5-page narrative**
    *   The narrative must include a 150-200 word abstract of the study, which J-PAL North America will post online if the project receives funding. The abstract should include information on the research question, the hypotheses, the intervention, the (potential) sample size, and the outcomes.
    *   The narrative should clearly describe the underlying project and the evaluation, including descriptions of:
        *   The policy problem that motivates this research;
        *   The extent to which this issue impacts low-income and vulnerable populations (see page 1 for guiding questions);
        *   The treatment/intervention, evaluation design, the study population (including demographics), and implementing partners;
        *   Power calculations based on a minimum detectable effect (MDE) size with a clear explanation of why the minimum detectable effect size is realistic and decision-relevant. Please include enough detail for reviewers to understand how you arrived at the MDE and cite the relevant literature; and
        *   The expected timeline to complete the study and analysis.
    *   The narrative should address each of the topics listed in the Evaluation Criteria.
    *   The narrative may not exceed five pages in length. The minimum font size is 11 points, and margins may not be smaller than 1 inch. J-PAL NA will send back any proposals violating these formatting rules.
    *   Please save as a Word document, titled *[PI Name]_[Topic Name].doc(x)*

3. **A complete budget (Please use the template available here).**
    *   Project budgets should reflect the actual needs of the project.
    *   All J-PAL North America RFPs cap overhead charges at 9% of total direct costs.
    *   J-PAL North America does not cover PI effort (academic or summer months). We will support salary and fringe benefits for other project personnel.
    *   Enter the requested amounts for each item in the column provided in the budget template.
        *   Institution/University costs include all expenses incurred directly by the university/institution receiving the award. For example, a research assistant working at the PI's university.

- o Partner costs include all costs not directly incurred by the university/institution. An example of this could include a subaward to cover operational costs incurred by the implementing partner.
  - o Travel costs should include a breakdown of how many trips are planned, the estimated cost per trip, and the purpose of the trip.
  - o Any computer/equipment purchases should include an itemized list of purchases. For example, it should include how many laptops will be purchased and the purpose of the purchase.
- Budgeting for J-PAL's courses (optional):
  - o Staff training: J-PAL's staff training is designed for research staff working on randomized evaluations conducted by our network of faculty affiliates, invited researchers, or our partner organizations. This five-day course provides technical guidance for designing, implementing, and analyzing data in randomized evaluations, with an optional focus on US-based studies that use administrative data. The course fee is $2,000 and includes tuition, accommodation, meals, course materials, and transportation to and from the training venue (in New Hampshire) from MIT. The training fee does not include travel to and from Boston. More details, including a sample course agenda, are available [here](#).
  - o Executive Education: J-PAL's flagship executive education course, Evaluating Social Programs, is designed for managers and researchers from NGOs, governments, and foundations. This five-day course provides participants with a thorough understanding of randomized evaluations and a pragmatic step-by-step guidance on conducting an evaluation. The course fee is $5,000 for representatives from for-profits, foundations, and academic-research institutions in the United States or other developed countries and $3,000 for representatives from NGOs and graduate students. This cost includes tuition, course materials, and breakfast and lunch. Travel, accommodations, and other meals are not included. More details, including a sample course agenda, are available [here](#).
- J-PAL will not approve costs labeled miscellaneous, contingency, or rent.
- J-PAL does not allow variance greater than 10% (by major line item) without prior approval. If modifications are needed, project staff are required to inform J-PAL and request approval in advance.
- If there is co-funding for the project, please complete the Total Project Budget and the J-PAL NA Budget tabs in the budget template.
- Expenses associated with the provision of detailed information on program costs are allowable.
- Please save the budget form as a single Excel file, titled *[PI Name]_Budget.xls(x)*

4. **A brief budget narrative.**
- Please provide justification for the expenses requested in your budget. Please save the budget narrative as *[PI Name]_BudgetNarrative.doc(x)*

5. **Letter(s) of support from the partner organizations**
- Full projects are required to provide a letter of support from implementation partners. Applicants for pilot funding are encouraged to submit letters of support.
- Letters of support should indicate willingness to share cost data.

6. **Optional: Questionnaire for short-term research management (STReaM)**
- Fill out the questionnaire here if you are interested in working with a research manager through STReaM.

Additional Notes:
- Applicants are encouraged to concurrently apply for approval from their respective Institutional Review Boards (Human Subjects Committees). The award of any J-PAL North America grant is contingent on approval from the host institution's IRB as well as the IRB at MIT, known as the Committee On the Use of Humans as Experimental Subjects (COUHES).
- Applicants are encouraged to submit the application to their office of sponsored programs or contracts department as MIT will need official acceptance of the proposal and budget by your institution to process the subaward. You can do this after submitting a proposal, but doing so before the award decision will help avoid delays.
- It is your responsibility to ensure the budget you submit is correct and follows your host institution's policies for costs. If you wait until an award has been made by the RFP Review Board before getting approval from your planned host institution, you risk having an award that your institution cannot accept. We recommend that as soon as you submit your proposal to J-PAL North America (if not before), you send it through your host institution for their review and acceptance.

Send proposal to NA_RFP@povertyactionlab.org with subject "Ed-Tech"
Due: 5 pm ET on April 1, 2019.
Questions?
Contact Vincent Quan (vquan@povertyactionlab.org)

Appendix 1: Connection to J-PAL Mission

One consideration in the RFP is the extent to which a study aligns with J-PAL's mission to reduce poverty by ensuring that policy is informed by scientific evidence. We think of poverty along several dimensions and define it quite broadly:

Overall, does the study address a policy issue that has a significant impact for low-income, marginalized, or vulnerable people?

More specifically,
1. Does the policy issue have a disproportionate impact on low-income or vulnerable populations? Does the intervention target better/ more appropriate care for people in poverty?
2. Is the policy issue a broad, system-wide issue that affects many people, including low-income and vulnerable populations?
3. Is the policy issue an issue that, if unaddressed, could lead people to fall into poverty?

Examples:

Connection to Mission	*Examples of Tested Interventions*
1. Issue with disproportionate impact on low-income populations; better/ more appropriate services for low-income people	Intensive tutoring or educational software to provide disadvantaged students with remedial support
2. Broad, system-wide issue that affects many people, including low-income and vulnerable populations	Automated and personalized text messages to remind students of pre-matriculation tasks before college
3. Issues that, if unaddressed, could lead people to fall into poverty	Wrap-around services to help low-income students complete community college

A full list of funded evaluations is available here.

Appendix 2: Grant Requirements

If funded, researchers agree to the following:

The terms of the award are as follows and as specified in any subaward established with MIT in connection with the administration of the grant. Acceptance of funding from J-PAL North America signals your consent to all these requirements. **Non-compliance with these requirements could affect your eligibility for future funding from any J-PAL initiative.**

AEA and OSF Trial Registration and Pre-Analysis Plans

1. Researchers must register their trial with the [AEA RCT Registry](#) as soon as IRB approval or exemption is granted. For questions and support with the registry, please contact J-PAL staff member Keesler Welch ([support@socialscienceregistry.org](#)). Please send the assigned registration number to Keesler as soon as it is available, and copy Alex Marlowe ([amarlowe@povertyactionlab.org](#)). **Please note: Pilot projects that do not include any randomization (e.g. those that do NOT include an actual experiment) do NOT need to register.**
   a. Registration is required before the subaward can be established.
2. Researchers must also create an account for their project on the [Open Science Framework (OSF)](#) as soon as IRB approval or exemption is granted. Researchers must 1) create an account, 2) create a **public** page for the project, and 3) add both "Keesler Welch" and [edtech@povertyactionlab.org](#) as Administrators (do not check the "Bibliographic Contributor" box) and 4) link to your AEA RCT registration page. Please contact Keesler Welch ([support@socialscienceregistry.org](#)) with any questions.
   a. Note: OSF registration and creation of a public page is required by J-PAL North America's funder. J-PAL staff may add representatives from the funder as non-bibliographic contributors to the project page so that they can be added as an affiliated institution.
   b. Upon study completion, the AEA Registry and OSF pages must be updated with the results of the study and information on paper publication (as available).
3. All J-PAL North America funded studies must include a pre-analysis plan uploaded to either the AEA RCT Registry OR OSF. The pre-analysis plan must be uploaded **prior to launch of the experiment** (i.e. randomization activities). It may be made public or kept private if preferred. Note: It is only possible to keep a pre-analysis plan private on the AEA RCT Registry. The pre-analysis plan must include the hypothesis or hypotheses to be examined in the empirical research study, the primary and secondary outcomes, and the statistical model(s) and methodologies to be used. Additional guidelines can be found [here](#).
   i. You will be asked to explain the status of your pre-analysis plan as part of the three-month start-up and annual report templates.

      ii. Failure to upload a pre-analysis plan prior to the experiment launching may jeopardize your eligibility for future funding.

Accessing Funds

To access the grant, you will need to submit the following document(s):

1. A formal letter of transmission from the subaward institution agreeing to the proposal and budget. The letter must be on the subaward institution's letterhead, and should state that they support the proposal and plan to carry out the work in accordance with approved budget. They should also include contact information for the person who will receive and sign the subaward on behalf of their institution.

2. IRB Approval or Exemption: We expect that MIT's IRB will not require a full review of your project but will instead cede authority to your university. If your institution uses the SMART IRB system ([list of participating institutions](#)), please submit your reliance request through this platform. Once the agreement is fully executed, please send the confirmation to Alex Marlowe. If your institution has not opted into this program, please send the following documents to Alex Marlowe (amarlowe@povertyactionlab.org):

      i. A copy of your university's IRB approval or exemption and accompanying documents.

      ii. A 1-2 page summary of the research being conducted, written for a general audience;

      iii. Copies of any consent forms being used, with the hosting IRB's approval stamp

      iv. The name and title of the hosting IRB's signatory official, FWA #, and IRB # (the university's IRB #, not the specific project's IRB #)

3. Confirmation of AEA and OSF registration (as outlined above) should also be included in your email to Alex Marlowe.

Once all materials have been received, it typically takes up to **60 days** to establish the subaward, though usually subawards can be backdated to allow costs from the date when all IRB approvals are in place. The subaward will be paid on a **cost-reimbursable basis**.

Reporting

1. Grantees must provide the reports below:

    a. a three-month start-up report to update J-PAL North America on your timeline and provide information about pre-registration and pre-analysis plans (template to be shared);

    b. a brief annual progress report highlighting key elements of RCT development such as recruitment and enrollment **due March 1** each year until the completion of the project (template to be shared);

    c. a final financial report within 60 days of completion of the award period (template to be shared);

    d. a final project report with preliminary results within 4 months of completion of the award period;

        i. We request that you submit a copy of any survey instruments used for the project with your final report. Pilot studies are encouraged, but not required to share survey instruments.

    e. The completed costing template (to be shared) with detailed information on program costs within 4 months of completion of the award period.

        i. J-PAL has found that policymakers are very interested in how much a program costs, as it is one of the key factors in decision-making. Detailed cost data allows for cost effectiveness analysis (CEA), which J-PAL may conduct (with permission from the researchers).

        ii. If researchers are unable to collect detailed cost data, we require initiative-funded projects to provide estimates of total program cost, average cost per beneficiary, and marginal cost to add another beneficiary.

        iii. For questions about the scope of this requirement or assistance with the costing worksheet, or if you have a compelling reason for being unable to share any cost data, please email Vincent Quan at vquan@povertyactionlab.org.

2. If you are not be able to meet the reporting deadline you may request an extension. This request should be submitted before the due date.

3. If projects are unable to complete the project by the end of the award period and need to extend the award end date for the project, please fill out and submit a no cost extension request form. For questions about this please email Alex Marlowe at amarlowe@povertyactionlab.org.

4. Researchers whose reports are more than two months late and who have not received an approved extension will not be eligible for additional J-PAL funding until the reports are submitted.

Data & Code Publication

1. Except to the extent limited by law, IRB requirement, and/or any applicable binding agreement, we require researchers to submit data to J-PAL within eighteen months of completing data collection. Submitted data will be held by J-PAL under an embargo agreement, which may, in appropriate circumstances, restrict data access to protect confidential or proprietary information. J-PAL will follow up on a yearly basis following the submission of data as to whether the data has been made public. J-PAL may share submitted data beginning on the fifth year following completion of data collection. If the researcher does not wish the data to be shared by this time, the researcher may petition the initiative co-chairs, who, in their discretion, will determine whether to share the data. If legal or other restrictions prohibit the submission of data to J-PAL, researchers must (1) inform J-PAL as early as possible, and (2) exercise reasonable efforts to procure permission to publish de-identified or slightly aggregated data. Please see J-PAL's Guidelines for Data Publication for additional details. Pilot studies are not required to publish data.

2. In addition to publication of the underlying data, we also encourage researchers to publish the code needed to replicate data analysis within six months of the publication date of a final evaluation report or scholarly article.

Paper Publication

1. After the completion of the RCT, the grantees will complete an academic paper and submit the academic paper to least one peer-reviewed academic journal for publication. Grantees must send a PDF of the published paper to the Initiative Manager as soon as it is available, and report on intentions to publish in the final report.
   a. If grantees are not able to do so, please inform the Initiative Manager and write a brief explanation to J-PAL detailing any challenges or issues that arose, which prevent grantees from writing a paper.
2. PIs are highly encouraged to share the public working papers from funded projects with Initiative staff as soon as they are available. J-PAL staff will then work with grantees to develop a strategy for communicating the results via traditional or social media and J-PAL publications like evaluation summaries.

J-PAL Involvement

1. All J-PAL affiliates and initiative special invitees who are co-PIs on this project certify that they will be active, engaged and responsive PIs on this project dedicated to guaranteeing the quality control on all aspects of this research; and that their participation in this project is not merely to provide access to J-PAL resources and

funding to anyone else working on this project who is neither a J-PAL affiliate, nor an initiative special invited researcher.

2. J-PAL funded researchers are required to participate in one of J-PAL North America's activities on a mutually agreed date and place. This activity could be a presentation of research, a matchmaking conference (bringing together researchers and implementing partners), a training (e.g. a lecture at J-PAL's Executive Education course), or a presentation to one of J-PAL North America's donors.

3. Applicants who are selected for funding will be requested to peer review proposals in future J-PAL North America RFP rounds.

4. The J-PAL academic network is asked to consider sharing data collection instruments and methodologies with other J-PAL affiliated researchers.

5. In an effort to gather and share lessons learned from funded RCTs, PIs are required to have a debrief call with J-PAL North America staff at the conclusion of the project. The purpose of this call is to learn from both the successes and challenges of implementing the project.

Administrative Notes:

1. Invoices must be provided that show current expenses and cumulative spending by major line item (Salaries & Benefits, Travel, Field Costs, Equipment, Other Direct Costs), and cumulative totals should be compared to budget. The MIT subaward documents will provide an example, but please make sure your organization's invoicing procedures follow this policy.

2. Please note that these invoices are subject to audit and MIT may request backup receipts. These cases are rare but they do happen on occasion.

3. Financial and technical reports must be sent in a timely manner, as described in section 3.

4. Please note that J-PAL does not allow variance greater than 10% (by major line item) without prior approval. We understand that budgets often change or need revisions during the lifecycle of a project and as such, we are happy to accommodate these modifications and they will typically be approved if the substance of the project is not changed. However, project staff are required to inform J-PAL and request approval *in advance* as we may need to modify the subaward agreement to be able to process invoices.