

# J-PAL North America Proposal Evaluation Criteria

A strong proposal will address the following criteria, which are provided to proposal reviewers.

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## Relevance to Public Policy and Issues of Poverty

J-PAL North America aims to reduce poverty by ensuring policy is informed by scientific evidence across a wide range of focus areas. A strong proposal will clearly describe how the project relates to J-PAL's mission, why the study matters, who stands to benefit, and how findings could shape public policy or practice.

- Describe the underlying public policy issue the study seeks to address.
  - Is the policy issue timely?
  - Are there potential risks or harms if the challenge is left unaddressed?
  - Why and how are the policy issue and research question(s) important to the field and to stakeholders? Do they serve the needs of policymakers, practitioners, and communities?
  - To what extent have impacted communities been involved in identifying the policy issue or research question(s)?
- Describe how the proposed research question(s) have the potential to benefit (access to resources or choices) for the following populations: people who are low-income or living in poverty; people who have risk factors associated with falling into poverty; people who identify as members of racial or ethnic groups at greater risk of living or falling into poverty due to economic marginalization produced through systemic racism in North America, such as Black, Indigenous, and Latinx populations.

- Explain how lessons learned could have broader relevance for policy or decision making beyond this study.
  - Could findings inform policy or practice at scale?

## Academic Contribution

Studies should have academic relevance, contribute to the advancement of knowledge, and have a clear link to underlying social sciences theories.

- Situate the study within the existing literature (including from outside of economics, as applicable) and describe how the study builds on, extends, or fills a gap within the existing body of research.
- Make a case for why new evidence is needed, and how it will advance learning. For example, does the study answer new research questions, introduce novel methods, measures, or interventions?

## Technical Design

Studies should have a strong design to produce credible results that the field, policymakers, and practitioners can trust.

- Describe how the study design will answer the research question(s). Discuss any threats to the validity of results, and plans to address them.
- Provide a detailed rationale for the study's sample size and power to detect relevant impacts, appropriate to the design stage of the study. For additional guidance on [power calculations](#), [randomization design](#), [intake and consent processes](#), and other aspects of designing a randomized evaluation, please see J-PAL's [research resources](#).
  - **Full studies** must describe: parameters of the chosen average effect size (e.g., ITT, LATE, etc.); outcome(s) on which power calculations are based; units used in power calculations; a realistic and decision-relevant minimum detectable effect (MDE) size; underlying assumptions about sample size and take-up rates.
  - **Pilot studies** should provide a “back-of-the-envelope” sense of the potential sample size and power to detect relevant impacts if a full randomized evaluation were launched in the future.

## Viability & Value of the Project

Proposals should describe steps taken to maximize the value and viability of the study.

- Provide a realistic timeline for completing the study and analysis, and discuss any obstacles that could threaten the completion of the study (for example, completion of multiple data use agreements, political obstacles, etc.), and any steps taken to mitigate potential obstacles.
- [If applicable] describe the role of the implementing partner(s). How have partner(s) been involved in developing the research question(s), intervention, and design? Is there a

strong relationship that is likely to endure through the implementation, interpretation of findings, and/or uptake of results?

- We encourage applicants to complete the optional addendum on team experience and expertise to provide additional context for how team members are well positioned to carry out the study and work with identified partners and impacted communities
  - [If included] The optional “Addendum on Team Experience and Expertise” should be relevant to the study, and the team should address advantages and limitations of their position with respect to the research. If any limitations are identified, the team may describe any mitigating steps they have taken, though this is not required.
- The cost of the study should be commensurate with the value of expected lessons learned.

## Research Transparency

Proposals should demonstrate commitment to best practices in research transparency, including pre-registering the project, and publishing data and replication code when not precluded by privacy restrictions.

## Previous J-PAL Award Compliance

J-PAL considers compliance on past J-PAL North America awards made to all proposal PIs, including completion of project reports and deliverables.

- Only the administrative aspects of awards will be considered; **we will** not evaluate the success of the evaluation itself.

## Potential Risks

Please discuss any ethical considerations that you feel warrant discussion but are not covered by your existing or planned IRB review. It is fine to leave this section partly blank; please detail issues that are not or will not be covered by your IRB that you feel are potentially important enough for the review committee to be aware of. See [this J-PAL resource for more details](#).

## Advancing Racial and Ethnic Equity [As applicable to proposals focused on racial equity]

Proposals focused on racial and ethnic equity should address the following points.

- Proposals should define race and ethnicity in the context of the study.
- Describe how the study seeks to [understand underlying mechanisms behind racial and ethnic disparities](#), inform the development of new policy or intervention proposals, test the effectiveness of such interventions, and how findings could advance racial and ethnic equity.

- Explain how key outcomes or estimates are related to racial equity,<sup>1</sup> and, if relevant, how the study sample is powered to measure effects within specific subgroups or to compare outcomes across different subgroups.
- Describe how the proposal builds upon theories and questions regarding race identified within a broad set of fields including [sociology](#), [stratification economics](#), [history](#), and other existing work on race, and demonstrates a thorough knowledge of the literature around racial and ethnic equity, including literature outside of economics?
- Teams are encouraged, but not required, to intentionally involve impacted communities throughout the research process:
  - Does the proposal describe how impacted communities are involved throughout the research process (e.g., the co-creation of research questions, outcomes of interest, study design, analysis and interpretation and communication of results)? Does the proposal describe approaches the research team is planning to take to intentionally engage with impacted communities?
- Please see the following resources: “[Researching Racial Equity](#)” (additional information and example projects), [J-PAL blog post on stratification economics](#), journal articles on [stratification economics](#) and [sociological perspectives on racial discrimination](#), and Bill Spriggs’ “[Is now a teachable moment for economists?](#)”.

## Artificial Intelligence [As applicable]

Proposals evaluating an AI tool should address the following questions.

- Describe the AI tool you plan to evaluate.
- Has the tool been evaluated in the past? Has it been used in a real world setting?
- What specific problem or bottleneck is the AI tool intended to address, and why is AI well-suited to this need compared to existing processes or technologies? Who stands to benefit, and how?
- Describe any risks associated with the tool (for example, ethical, biases, consent, privacy, etc).
  - Do any of the risks require additional consideration related to how AI or a LLM tool may interact with the specific study population?
  - You may also describe any steps you have taken to reduce harm, though this is not required outside of the discussion in the potential risks addendum.

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<sup>1</sup> We define racial and ethnic equity as the process of ensuring that race is no longer used to reinforce social hierarchies. Racial equity does not imply the absence of racial group identities, communities, or cultural traditions, but that such aspects are not used against individuals or groups in social, political, and legal domains. This process involves acknowledging and addressing historic harms and racial injustices, making amends, working to create racially just systems, policies, practices, attitudes, and cultural messages, and eliminating structures that reinforce differential outcomes by race (AISP Toolkit).