J-PAL’s Learning for All Initiative

African Scholars Program Information Session

[September 28, 2023]
Agenda

I. About us: J-PAL and the role of randomized evaluations
II. Introduction to the Learning for All Initiative
III. African Scholars Program overview
IV. Application best practices
V. Next steps
VI. Question & answer session
What do we do at J-PAL?
J-PAL’s mission is to **reduce poverty** by ensuring that **policy** is informed by **scientific evidence**, and **research** is translated into **action**.
We work with a global network of talented researchers
Local grounding: Seven regional offices and hundreds of local partnerships
Global knowledge: 1,640+ ongoing and completed randomized evaluations in more than 95 countries
Work across a broad range of sectors

Agriculture
Crime, Violence, & Conflict
Education
Environment, Energy, & Climate Change
Finance
Firms

Gender
Health
Labor Markets
Political Economy & Governance
Social Protection
Meet the Education/LAI Co-chairs

Karthik Muralidharan
Academic Co-Chair

Rachel Glennerster
Academic Co-Chair

Karen Macours
Academic Co-Chair (LAI)
Meet the LAI African Scholars Team

Clare Hofmeyr
Senior Education & Training Manager
J-PAL Africa

Maddie Brancel
Policy Manager - Education
J-PAL Global

Anushka Bansal
Senior Policy Associate
J-PAL Global

Raquel Caldeira
Research Associate
J-PAL Africa

Eitan Paul
Senior Research Manager
J-PAL Global

Demitria Wack
Senior Policy Associate / Initiative Manager - LAI
J-PAL Global

Primary Points of Contact

Advisors/Initiative Management
Randomized impact evaluations take a scientific approach to fighting poverty.
Randomized evaluations shed light on causal impacts.

If individuals were allowed to choose who receives the program, recipients and non-recipients may systematically differ from each other.
Randomization creates a real-life counterfactual.

The only systematic difference between the two groups is the presence of the program. Before a program starts, individuals are randomly assigned to two groups. Randomization allows a causal interpretation of the difference between treatment and control group.

Population

- Before a program starts, individuals are randomly assigned to two groups.

Intervention

- The only systematic difference between the two groups is the presence of the program.

Comparison

- Randomization allows a causal interpretation of the difference between treatment and control group.

Outcome at endline

- Program

- Individual characteristics
RCTs: Rigorous impact research

Important to identify “causality”
- Lessons for program and policy design
- Supports results-based management of programs

**RCTs** have become a widely used methodology
- Not only an academic approach
- Strong demand by development partners (Pratham, Educate!, TaRL Africa, Breakthrough, etc.) and donors

**RCTs in economics and allied social sciences** help in particular to understand the role of **behavior** and **institutions** (educational systems) on program/policy outcomes.
Introduction to the Learning for All Initiative (LAI)
Launching the Learning for All Initiative - RFP 2

**Objective:** LAI funds randomized evaluations and scale projects to improve foundational learning, especially related to literacy and numeracy and breadth of skills. Additional focus areas include girls’ education, intersections of climate and education, and the long-term economic and health impacts of education.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generation of evidence</th>
<th>Catalyse evidence to policy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bridge between implementing partners and researchers</td>
<td>Technical support on scale-ups, sharing evidence based solutions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LAI will focus on the following research areas

- **Foundational literacy and numeracy**
- **Socio-emotional learning (SEL) and measurement of holistic skills**
- **Girls’ Education**
- **Potential intersections between climate & education**
- **Long-term economic & health impacts of education interventions**
1. **Full Research Projects:** For research projects at a mature level of development. *(maximum amount of US$400,000)*

2. **Pilot Research Projects:** For studies with a clear research question and for which the design and implementation of an evaluation requires further testing and pilot data. *(maximum amount of US$75,000)*

3. **Proposal Development Grants:** For exploratory work related to preliminary research ideas. *(maximum amount of US$10,000)*
Types of research and scale projects (continued)

- **Path-to-scale projects:**
  - **Adaptations:** For projects in which the partner has identified the potential evidence-informed solution, but more work is needed before they can pilot a scalable version of it. *(maximum amount of US$75,000)*
  
  - **Policy pilots:** For projects where the partner is ready to pilot the evidence-informed solution and would like technical support. *(maximum amount of US$200,000)*
  
  - **Scale projects:** For projects that piloted a version of the evidence-informed solution in their context, and the solution has been responsibly adapted and contextualized. *(maximum amount of US$300,000)*
Evidence Synthesis and Policy Outreach

• We will produce:
  – Policy briefs synthesizing lessons from the research
  – Public summaries of funded studies
  – Document how research has influenced policy

• Present research findings to governments, NGOs, and other organizations

• Convene implementing partners, academics, donors and/or other actors in the education space
African Scholars Program overview
Funding and eligibility criteria

Resident African Scholars

- Those who have **completed a PhD** in Economics or another social science discipline (including PhD-level training in quantitative methods like statistics/econometrics); and

- Are based in an **academic institution (university) in sub-Saharan Africa**

**Note:** Only 1 person on the project needs to fulfill this definition. We encourage interdisciplinary teams to apply; there is no restriction on the number or qualifications of co-PIs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposal Development Grants</th>
<th>Pilot</th>
<th>Full randomized evaluation*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Up to US$10,000</td>
<td>Up to US$75,000</td>
<td>Upto US$400,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*African Scholars who have successfully completed a pilot study funded by J-PAL*
Mentorship for African Scholars

- African Scholars are paired with a J-PAL affiliate or invited researcher (i.e. their mentor) as scholars build out their projects and for a two-way knowledge exchange
  - Mentors are affiliates/IRs who have conducted a number of randomized evaluations and are interested in acting as an academic sounding board and guide to the scholars
- African Scholars whose proposals are successful will be matched to a mentor after the funding has been awarded.
- Scholars and mentors are required to develop and sign an agreement before funding that provides a framework for how the scholar and mentor will work together throughout the project.
Application best practices
What are we looking for?

A strong proposal should...

- Be based on a strong research idea
- Have a clear pathway to a randomised evaluation
- Follow the application guidelines
- Be simple, succinct and clearly written
What makes a strong research idea?

- Academically interesting
- Policy relevant
- Fits within the LAI research agenda
- Answers a cause and effect question
What is a clear pathway to a randomized evaluation?

- The proposal needs to include a (possible) program that will be implemented in the future.
  - There needs to be an intervention or a planned intervention described as part of the proposal

- For a pilot, there needs to be some buy in shown by the implementing partner and a description of how the pilot will lead to and assist with a larger randomised evaluation.
Proposals that are simple, succinct, and clearly written

Writing tips:

1. Build a strong structure before you start writing
2. Use a clear title for the proposal
3. Be careful when citing related literature
4. Use clear, concise language
5. Review your own proposal
6. Ask others to review your proposal
Follow the application guidelines

**Proposal development grants**  
(up to US$10,000)

1. A concise statement of topic  
2. Proposed partners, if available  
3. Clearly indicate the scope and sequencing of particular proposed activities  
4. Short budget

**Pilot grants**  
(up to US$75,000)

1. Proposal narrative  
2. Detailed budget  
3. Budget narrative  
4. Letters of support from implementation partner(s) & receiving institution

Review our website for full application guidelines: [LAI RFP](#)
Other writing resources

- J-PAL’s Research Resources
- Donald McCloskey, ‘The Writing of Economics’
- Kwan Choi, ‘How to Publish in Top Journals’
- David Evans, How to Write the Introduction of Your Development Economics Paper
- David McKenzie, Tips for writing Impact Evaluation Grant Proposals

Be inspired by other writers and learn how other randomised evaluation researchers think about their research questions on the J-PAL website
Next steps
How does the LAI application process work?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Process Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1    | **Pre-proposal submission**  
      (Letter of Interest) |
| 2    | **LAI internal review of pre-proposal**  
      (Letter of Interest)  
      - Review by LAI team to ensure idea is within scope  
      - Call with the LAI team  
      - Confirm eligibility |
| 3    | **Full proposal submission**  
      - Staff review  
      - Academic peer review  
      - LAI Board review  
      LAI Board makes the final decision |
| 4    | **Matched with mentor**  
      Call with mentor and complete mentor/mentee agreement |
| 5    | **Proposal acceptance finalized** |
Upcoming Deadlines

LAI RFP opens  
October 10, 2023

Letters of Interest due  
November 7, 2023

Full proposals due  
December 13, 2023

Interested in applying, but need more time to develop a proposal? Our next RFP will be released in Spring 2024.
Find out more about the African Scholars Program

- More information on the LAI African Scholars Opportunities page
- Frequently Asked Questions
- Sign up for the African Scholars registry
- Watch this video for an overview of what mentorship looks like for African Scholars
Question & answer session
Contact us

lai@povertyactionlab.org