

# J-PAL North America Proposal Evaluation Criteria

A strong proposal will clearly address the following criteria, which are provided to all proposal reviewers. For information on eligibility criteria and the application process, please see J-PAL Application Instructions.

## Table of Contents

Relevance to Public Policy and Issues of Poverty	1
Academic Contribution	2
Technical Design	2
Viability & Value of the Project	3
Research Transparency	3
Advancing Racial and Ethnic Equity [Optional: Applicable to proposals focused on racial equity]	3
Potential Ethical Risks [Optional]	4
Previous J-PAL Award Compliance	4

## Relevance to Public Policy and Issues of Poverty

- Does the proposal make the case for how answering the proposed research question and/or evaluating the proposed intervention has the potential to generate benefits for the following economically marginalized 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/ethnic groups who are at greater risk of living in or falling into poverty due to economic marginalization produced through structural racism in North America, such as Black, Indigenous, and Latinx populations.
- Is the proposal addressing a pressing public policy issue in North America? How is this policy issue relevant to one or more of the populations described above?
  - Does the policy issue have a significant or disproportionate impact on low-income and/or economically marginalized populations?

- Is the intervention designed to improve or increase access to resources and choices for low-income and/or economically marginalized populations?
- Is the policy issue one that, if unaddressed, could cause people to fall into poverty?
- Does the policy intervention relate to issues of structural racism that are specific to economically marginalized racial/ethnic groups in the North America context?
- Will lessons learned from this study have broader relevance or applications for policy or decision-making beyond this test case?

## Academic Contribution

- Does the study contribute to advancing knowledge? For example, does it answer new questions, or introduce novel methods, measures, or interventions?
- Does the study have academic relevance? How does the proposed study compare with the existing body of research? Has the research question(s) been evaluated within or outside of economics?
  - Does the proposal appropriately cite papers from outside economics if/as applicable?
- Is the experiment clearly linked to underlying social science theories?

## Technical Design

- Does the proposal effectively explain how its study design will enable it to answer its research question[s]?
- Are there threats that could compromise the validity of results? How do you plan to address these?
- Does the proposal provide a clear rationale for the study's sample size and power to detect relevant impacts? This explanation should be appropriate to the design stage of the study (please see the document J-PAL Proposal Instructions for more details on how J-PAL defines full vs. pilot stage studies), and include descriptions of the following:
  - For full studies:
    - Parameters of 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
  - For pilot studies:

- A “back-of-the-envelope” sense of the potential sample size and power to detect relevant impacts if a full randomized evaluation were launched.
- For additional guidance on [power calculations](#), [randomization design](#), [intake and consent processes](#), and other aspects of designing an RCT, please see J-PAL’s [research resources](#).
- [If applicable] ‘Addendum on Team Experience and Expertise’
  - Is the addendum relevant to the study?
  - Does the researcher address advantages and limitations of their position with respect to the research?
  - [Optional] Have the researchers taken any mitigating steps?

### **Viability & Value of the Project**

- If applicable, is the role of the implementing partner(s) clear and is the relationship strong and likely to endure through the entire study?
- Is a realistic timeline for completing the study and analysis provided?
- Are there any logistical or political obstacles that might threaten the completion of the study, for example, government authorization or completion of multiple data use agreements?
- Is the cost of the study commensurate with the value of expected lessons learned?

### **Research Transparency**

- Does the project advance best practices in research transparency?
- Does the researcher demonstrate commitment to registering the research project and publishing data and replication code online when not precluded by privacy restrictions?

### **Advancing Racial and Ethnic Equity [Optional: Applicable to proposals focused on racial equity]**

- Does the study seek to [understand underlying mechanisms behind racial and ethnic disparities](#), inform the development of new policy or intervention proposals, and test the effectiveness of such interventions?

- Are key outcomes or estimates related to racial equity<sup>1</sup>?
- Is the study sample powered to measure effects within specific subgroups or to compare outcomes across different subgroups.
- Does the proposal address how findings would advance racial and ethnic equity?
- Does the proposal define race and ethnicity in the context of the study?
- Does the proposal demonstrate a thorough knowledge of the literature around racial and ethnic equity, including literature outside of economics?
- Does the proposal build upon theories and questions regarding race identified within a broad set of fields including [sociology](#), [stratification economics](#), and other existing work on race?
- Studies in which the only relationship to equity is to examine heterogeneity by race or ethnicity ex-post do not meet this criteria
- For additional guidance, please reference the following: [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?”](#).
- Please see [“Researching Racial Equity”](#) for additional information and example projects.

### Potential Ethical Risks [Optional]

Please discuss, if applicable, 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 or entirely blank; please detail only 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.

### Previous J-PAL Award Compliance

- J-PAL will consider compliance on past J-PAL North America funded projects in making future funding decisions. This includes completion of project reports and other grant deliverables.
  - *Note:* J-PAL will only consider administrative aspects of the award and **will not** evaluate the success of the project itself.

---

<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).