

STATE AND LOCAL INNOVATION INITIATIVE EVALUATION INCUBATOR – REQUEST FOR LETTERS OF INTEREST

J-PAL North America's Evaluation Incubators support the design of randomized evaluations to inform important policy questions by creating partnerships between J-PAL North America, researchers, and service providers or government agencies. Selected partners receive technical assistance from J-PAL North America staff, funding (in most cases), and introductions to researchers to help design a feasible randomized evaluation. Letters of Interest for this Evaluation Incubator are due **Monday, October 17, 2022, 5:00 p.m. ET.**

OVERVIEW

The J-PAL State and Local Innovation Initiative is led by J-PAL North America, a research center at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). The J-PAL State and Local Innovation Initiative (SLII) supports US state and local leaders in using randomized evaluations to generate new and widely applicable lessons about which programs work, which work best, and why. J-PAL North America is now calling for proposals from state and local governments to design a randomized evaluation of an existing or planned program or policy.

For this Evaluation Incubator, J-PAL North America's State and Local Innovation Initiative welcomes proposals from state and local governments in any area that relates to J-PAL's mission of reducing poverty by ensuring that policy is based on scientific evidence. **We are especially interested in proposals that focus on projects funded through the American Rescue Plan Act.** This could include proposals across a wide range of sectors, including but not limited to racial equity, children and families, crime, education, employment, energy and environment, health, household finance, housing and homelessness, and governance.

APPLICATION PROCESS

This Evaluation Incubator involves a two-stage application process,

In the first stage, applicants submit a Letter of Interest by **October 17, 2022.** J-PAL will review all submitted letters and select **finalists** in mid-November.

Finalists will receive:

- **J-PAL staff support over three months** (November 2022–February 2023) to assist in preparing a full proposal.
- **Introductions to researchers** within J-PAL’s network, as capacity allows, who can provide feedback on initial design ideas.

In the second stage, finalists are invited to submit a full proposal in mid-February 2023. **Selected partners** will be announced in March 2023.

Selected partners will receive:

- **Up to one year of technical support from J-PAL North America’s staff** of policy and research experts to design a randomized evaluation. J-PAL North America’s policy and research staff will provide technical assistance including project management, research support, and training as needed to help partners develop feasible and policy-relevant opportunities for randomized evaluations.
- **Flexible project development funding of up to \$50,000** to help design an evaluation. Examples of costs that may be covered include personnel costs and travel costs to visit implementation sites or meet with stakeholders. Funds may not be spent on the implementation of the program or policy itself. Funding decisions will be based on demonstrated need; some partners may not receive funding.
- **Training on program evaluation, evidence use, and data**, including a scholarship to attend J-PAL’s [Evaluating Social Programs](#) course in the month of June.
- **Ongoing connections with J-PAL’s network of leading academic researchers.** J-PAL staff will make an ongoing effort to provide introductions to researchers; however, they cannot guarantee a successful, long-term working relationship. Partners who successfully match with a researcher from J-PAL’s network to design a high-quality randomized evaluation through the Evaluation Incubator can jointly apply for funding through one of J-PAL North America’s Requests for Proposals to carry out the evaluation. Funding awarded may be pilot funding (up to \$50,000) or full evaluation funding (typically in the range of \$150,000-\$250,000).
- **Relationship building** with other leading organizations that are committed to using data and evidence.

ELIGIBILITY TO APPLY

The State and Local Innovation Initiative welcomes applications from state and local government agencies based in the United States who are interested in evaluating a program or policy through random assignment. Random assignment may be appropriate when, for example, slots for a program with a waitlist might be allocated by a lottery; eligible beneficiaries of an undersubscribed program may be randomly encouraged to sign up; multiple versions of a program may be randomly assigned to individuals to test them against one another; and pilot programs or programs being expanded to new locations could provide opportunities to randomly select who receives the program first.

For examples of relevant randomized evaluations, please see a [list of current government partnerships](#) and [randomized evaluations funded by the State and Local Innovation Initiative](#). Please see the Evaluation Incubator overview document, linked on the [website](#), for a more general description of Evaluation Incubators and frequently asked questions.

APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS

Applicants should submit a 3–5-page Letter of Interest describing (1) the policy/research question that motivates your application, and the program or policy you wish to evaluate (2) how rigorous evidence would inform how your organization or agency makes decisions, and (3) how a partnership with J-PAL North America would advance your efforts to use evidence to inform decision-making.

J-PAL North America is committed to supporting the use of randomized evaluations to generate evidence on how interventions impact racial equity. We invite you to share any information about how your policy question or program seeks to address racial disparities or may have a disproportionately large impact on communities of color.

The Letter of Interest must be submitted by someone on your leadership team, such as a director or program manager. Applicants who reach the finalist stage will be asked to submit a proposed budget and additional administrative documents. A more detailed description of what J-PAL is looking for when reviewing Letters of Interest is provided at the end of this [document](#).

Letters of Interest should not exceed five pages (not including letters of support) and should include the following information:

1. **Cover sheet**. Please fill out the included cover sheet with contact information and availability for a short phone interview. Please provide the names and titles of the main contact(s) for this application.
During the interview, J-PAL staff will ask additional questions based on your Letter of Interest to better understand the scope and viability of your proposed evaluation.
2. **The applicant**. Please briefly describe your agency and your major activities, including the key programs that you oversee or administer. Please also include a brief description about your organization's commitment to diversity and equity as it relates to the programs you support and implement.
3. **The question**. Please briefly describe one or more policy challenges or questions that motivate your application. Please provide some evidence of the challenge, including any relevant statistics.
4. **The intervention**. Describe the proposed policy or program you would like to examine. Please include the current status of the policy or program (e.g., undergoing development or ready to implement) in your description, as well as any preliminary evidence that suggests the program works or will work. Please also describe the primary outcome(s) you are interested in measuring.

5. Opportunity for randomized evaluation. Please include:
 - a. An estimate of how many people or other units are currently reached by the program or policy and over what timeframe (e.g., 400 students tutored each semester). If different, please also provide an estimate of how many people or other units you estimate could potentially be reached, if resources were not a constraint.
 - b. The primary outcomes you expect to change as a result of the program or policy and any existing sources of data that could be used for measuring outcomes (e.g., hospital admissions, student test scores, arrest records).
 - c. What racial/ethnic groups are currently most advantaged and disadvantaged by this intervention? How are they affected differently?
 - d. An explanation of how individuals are selected to receive the program or policy, and any initial thoughts on how a fair lottery or other form of random assignment could be used to determine who gets access to the program or policy.
 - e. The two to three primary challenges in carrying out a randomized evaluation. They may be ethical (e.g., constituent or political concern over a control group), logistical (e.g., staff or organizational capacity to run an evaluation or collect data), or other challenges.
6. Access to data. A description of existing data collection efforts related to the program, including data collected by the applicant and others on outcomes the program is thought to affect, and whether any of these data would also be available for individuals assigned not to receive the program. A successful applicant will have a way to access data to measure the outcomes of interest. Is any available data broken down by race/ethnicity?
7. Commitment to using evidence to inform decision-making. Please describe your agency'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 these efforts.
 - a. Please describe who in your agency would play the lead role in developing a partnership with J-PAL North America and what other staff would be available to support the partnership.
 - b. Please describe any experience with research and evaluation to date, including any partnerships with external researchers.
 - c. Please provide any additional information on the potential scope of your organization or agency's partnership with J-PAL North America and how this partnership would support your organization or agency's priorities.
8. Description and letters of support from outside stakeholders. A description of any relevant relationships or partnerships with local stakeholders and the community. Please indicate whether the applicant has discussed the evaluation idea with partners who would need to be on board in order for the evaluation to happen (e.g., a school district leader).

A letter of support from any external partner(s) necessary to conduct the evaluation is preferred. For representatives of government agencies, you are also encouraged to provide a letter of support for your application from executive leadership.

J-PAL North America staff, who are not members of the initiative’s Review Board, are available to provide support to help prospective applicants prepare stronger applications. Prospective applicants are encouraged to attend or view a recording of our informational webinar, which goes through the application process in detail. Please direct any remaining questions to Mera Cronbaugh, at mcronbaugh@povertyactionlab.org, or sign up to attend office hours [here](#).

NEXT STEPS

Please submit the completed cover sheet, Letter of Interest, and letters of support to slii@povertyactionlab.org. Letters must be submitted by an authorized representative of a U.S. state or local government (including states, counties, cities and other municipalities).

TIMELINE

The table below indicates the dates for each of the major steps in the process.

DATE	ACTIVITY
August 1, 2022	Request for Letters of Interest announced
August 25, 2022	Webinar for prospective applicants (registration and recording available here)
October 17, 2022, 5:00 p.m. ET	Deadline to submit Letters of Interest
Mid-November 2022	Finalists selected and invited to submit full proposals to the Evaluation Incubator
November 2022–February 2023	Finalists receive support from J-PAL staff to help develop full proposals
Mid-February 2023 (date TBD)	Deadline for full proposals
Week of March 13, 2023	Selected partners announced
March 2023–March 2024	Selected partners work with J-PAL NA staff to design a randomized evaluation, find an academic partner, and may apply for future evaluation funding to carry out the evaluation
June 2023	Selected partners attend J-PAL's Evaluating Social Programs course

WHAT IS J-PAL NORTH AMERICA LOOKING FOR?

J-PAL North America will consider the following general criteria in reviewing Letters of Interest:

1. Clear description of an important policy question or challenge

Does the proposal address crucial questions for state and local governments' understanding of pressing social policy issues in the United States? Does the proposal align with J-PAL North America's objective of supporting studies of interventions that impact low-income populations or populations living in poverty/populations that have risk factors associated with falling into poverty?

2. Clear description of how the proposed evaluation will address racial equity

How will the proposal address racial disparities 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? How will this proposal benefit communities of color?

3. Promising approach to addressing the question or challenge

What is the current status of the policy or program (e.g., undergoing development or ready to implement)? Which entities fund, oversee, and/or administer the program, and which stakeholders would need to demonstrate buy-in for an evaluation?

4. Feasible opportunity for a randomized evaluation

Are there any practical or political concerns about implementing a randomized evaluation? Are the government's executive leadership and staff supportive of conducting an evaluation? What is the number of people who would be eligible for the program and the number of available spots, and over what timeframe?

5. Commitment to using evidence to inform decision-making

Is there demonstrated commitment from senior leaders within the government to use the evidence to inform decision-making?

6. Potential contribution to the evidence base

Would a randomized evaluation of an intervention addressing this policy issue make a significant contribution toward advancing the state of knowledge? How does the proposed intervention compare to approaches that have previously been studied?