



EDUCATION, TECHNOLOGY, AND OPPORTUNITY - INNOVATION COMPETITION

REQUEST FOR LETTERS OF INTEREST

The J-PAL Education, Technology, and Opportunity Initiative is led by J-PAL North America, a research center at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). The Education, Technology, and Opportunity Initiative supports decision-makers in the United States in designing randomized evaluations to generate rigorous evidence on the impact of education technologies and/or innovative instructional models that utilize education technology.

Through this initiative, education leaders can apply for:

1. Pro bono technical support from J-PAL North America's staff of policy and research experts;
2. Flexible pilot funding of up to \$50,000 (based on demonstrated need); and
3. Connections with J-PAL's network of leading academic researchers.

J-PAL's network of researchers includes affiliated professors at more than 50 universities around the world who use randomized evaluations to design, test, and improve programs and policies aimed at alleviating poverty. Applicants who successfully partner with a researcher from J-PAL's network to design a high-quality randomized evaluation can jointly apply for full evaluation funding through the [J-PAL North America Education Technology Request for Proposals](#), typically in the range of \$50,000 to \$150,000 to carry out the evaluation.

ELIGIBILITY TO APPLY

J-PAL North America invites letters of interest from education organizations who work in the K-12 sector in the United States such as *school districts, school networks, charter management organizations, education agencies at any level of government, and education nonprofits*. We encourage letters of interest from education leaders who answer "yes" to the following questions:

- Are you currently piloting or planning to pilot a new educational technology program or educational model? Alternatively, are you planning to implement an existing education technology program or education model in a new location?
- Are you interested in partnering with academic researchers on a randomized evaluation to generate rigorous evidence on your program(s) and/or educational model(s)? Do you have the capacity to partner with academic researchers on a research project?
- Are you committed to using evidence from research to inform your decision-making?

APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS

Applicants should submit a 3-5 page letter of interest describing (1) an education technology and/or innovative educational program that you hope to test through a randomized evaluation, (2) how rigorous evidence would inform how your organization makes decisions, and (3) how a partnership with J-PAL North America would increase your organizational capacity for conducting a rigorous evaluation and using evidence to inform policy.

Applicants to this competition must be open to working with J-PAL North America to look for ways to include random assignment in the implementation of the program or policy they are interested in testing. For example, slots for a program with a waitlist might be allocated by a lottery; multiple versions of a program may be randomly assigned to students to test them against one another; and pilot programs or programs being expanded to new locations could provide opportunities to randomly select which schools, grades, or classrooms receive the program first. For other examples of randomized evaluations in education, please see the following examples of studies by J-PAL affiliated researchers: [\(1\) Intensive tutoring in Chicago](#); [\(2\) Technology-enabled behavioral tools to improve parental engagement](#); and [\(3\) laptop provision in California](#).

Letters of interest should not be more than five pages (not including any letters of support) and include the following information:

1. *The applicant.* Please briefly describe your organization or agency and your major activities, including the key programs that you oversee or administer.
2. *The problem.* The educational challenge that motivates the application. Please provide some evidence of the challenge, including any relevant statistics.
3. *The intervention.* A brief description of the technology and/or program the applicant would like to examine. Please include the current status of your program (i.e. undergoing development or ready to implement) in your description. Please include a description of any preliminary evidence that suggests the program will work. Note: for this round, we are particularly interested in receiving letters of interest that propose to evaluate innovative instructional practices that utilize technology.
4. *Opportunity for randomized evaluation.* Please provide the following information in order to help J-PAL North America assess which programs or policies are most suitable for a randomized evaluation:
 - 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. If you have a question about the number of people or units you would need for an evaluation, please contact Kim Dadisman at kdadisman@povertyactionlab.org for a phone consultation.

- 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. 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.
 - d. Any practical or ethical concerns about carrying out a randomized evaluation and prior experience with randomized evaluations, if any.
5. 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.
6. Commitment to using evidence to inform decision-making. Please describe your organization or 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 organization or 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.
7. Level of support from outside stakeholders: A description of 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.
8. Contact information. The names and titles of the main contact(s) for this application. As general guidance, a Director of Research (or a related position) typically submits the application. Applicants who have reached the finalist stage will be asked to participate in phone interviews and (if they are requesting funding) to submit a proposed budget.

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 reach out to Kim Dadisman, J-PAL North America Policy and Research Manager, at kdadisman@povertyactionlab.org to schedule a 30-minute phone consultation.

NEXT STEPS

Letters of interest should be submitted to edtech@povertyactionlab.org by **April 1st, 2019 at 5 pm ET**. Selected applicants will be notified by June 2019.

Letters must be submitted by an authorized representative of the organization. A letter of support from the applicant's executive leadership is encouraged.

TIMELINE

January 14, 2019	Request for letters of interest announced
February 8, 2019	Innovation competition webinar (1 – 2 pm ET)
April 1, 2019	Deadline to submit letters of interest
April – May 2019	Finalists are invited for interviews
June 2019	Selected applicants are notified
Summer 2019	Kick-off project meeting with selected applicants and J-PAL

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 education question or challenge**

Does the proposal address questions crucial to understanding pressing education issues in the United States? Do these questions deal with strategies for improving learning outcomes? Does the proposal align with J-PAL North America's objective of supporting studies of interventions that address issues with implications for low-income, marginalized, or vulnerable populations in the United States?

2. **Promising approach to addressing the question or challenge utilizing technology and/or innovation in education**

Is there an opportunity to test a promising new program? Is there early-stage evidence to suggest this program might be effective in improving student learning?

3. **Feasible opportunity for a randomized evaluation**

Are there any practical or political concerns about implementing a randomized evaluation? Are the organization's/agency's executive leadership and staff supportive of conducting an evaluation?

4. **Commitment to using evidence to inform decision-making**

Will the results of the proposed study affect the organization's policy or practice?

5. Potential contribution to the evidence base

Will the proposed study meaningfully contribute to evidence on the impacts of educational technology? What questions does this potential evaluation answer that we don't yet have an answer to? Is there interest from education decision-makers in learning the answers to these questions? Will testing this program advance our understanding of broad, generalizable lessons for how students learn?

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