**WORK OF THE FUTURE INITIATIVE – INNOVATION COMPETITION REQUEST FOR LETTERS OF INTEREST**

The J-PAL Work of the Future Initiative is led by J-PAL North America, a research center at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). The Work of the Future Initiative supports decision-makers in North America who wish to evaluate interventions related to the future of work in North America. In particular, this competition supports the design and implementation of randomized evaluations of labor market interventions that can serve as models. For any questions, please contact Initiative Manager Toby Chaiken at [tchaiken@mit.edu](mailto:tchaiken@mit.edu).

Through this competition, eligible applicants 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 to explore a randomized evaluation.

J-PAL’s network of researchers includes affiliated professors at more than 55 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 pilot funding (up to $50,000) or full evaluation funding through the J-PAL North America Work of the Future Request for Proposals, typically in the range of $50,000 to $250,000 to carry out the evaluation.

Selected finalists will also have access to trainings on evaluation such as J-PAL’s weeklong Executive Education course, [Evaluating Social Programs](https://www.povertyactionlab.org/training/evaluating-social-programs), and support from J-PAL North America staff in refining their ideas for evaluation.

ELIGIBILITY TO APPLY

J-PAL North America invites letters of interest from partners looking to experiment with potential solutions to issues associated with the changing workforce. Some examples of these partners could be state workforce agencies; nonprofits & other entities contracting with workforce agencies to provide services; government offices devoted to labor force issues; community colleges trying to improve connections to workforce & better job placements for graduates; educational organizations trying to increase the pipeline into in-demand jobs; and employers interested in expanding diversity in hiring. This list is not exhaustive: any proposal that explores forward-looking mechanisms for facilitating skills acquisition, job finding, employment stability, earnings and productivity growth, or work-life balance is potentially in scope. If you have questions about eligibility, please reach out to Initiative Manager Toby Chaiken ([tchaiken@mit.edu](mailto:tchaiken@mit.edu)).

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; 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 the following examples of studies by J-PAL affiliated researchers:

* [Researchers implemented a large-scale workplace wellness program at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign](https://www.povertyactionlab.org/evaluation/are-workplace-wellness-programs-effective) to evaluate the effects of the wellness program on employee health and productivity. The researchers found that financial incentives increased participation in the program, although only to a point. The workplace wellness program itself, however, did not affect any measured health or cost outcome. Among those offered the program, healthier employees enrolled in the program at higher rates, suggesting that workplace wellness programs could result in net savings for employers if these programs are able to attract or retain healthier employees.
* To test how employers value and compare credential from for-profit and online universities, [researchers randomly submitted resumes](https://www.povertyactionlab.org/evaluation/value-postsecondary-credentials-labor-market) with different characteristics and post-secondary credentials to measure the impact of education type on prospective employer interest. They found that, for jobs that did not require a degree, there was no advantage to having a postsecondary credential from a for-profit institution. However, resumes with for-profit postsecondary credentials were over 20 percent less likely to receive callbacks for jobs that did require a degree.
* **Across multiple studies,** [researchers have found that summer youth employment programs that provided minimum wage summer jobs to mainly disadvantaged youth](https://www.povertyactionlab.org/sites/default/files/publications/stopping-bullet-summer-job.pdf) in New York City and Chicago reduced arrests for violent crimes, incarceration, and premature deaths.

APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS

Applicants should submit a 3-5 page letter of interest describing (1) the policy question that motivates your application or the innovative program that you hope to test through a randomized evaluation (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 their efforts to use evidence to inform decision-making.

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 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.
3. *The intervention*. A brief description of 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.
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:
   1. 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.
   2. 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).
   3. 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.
   4. 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.
   1. 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.
   2. Please describe any experience with research and evaluation to date, including any partnerships with external researchers.
   3. 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. *Letters 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. For representatives of government agencies, you are also encouraged to provide a letter of support for your application from senior leadership, for example your Governor, Mayor, City Manager, County Commissioner or Supervisor, or agency leader.
8. *Contact information*. The names and titles of the main contact(s) for this application. As general guidance, a Director of Research or whoever will be responsible for overseeing the evaluation 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 Initiative Manager Toby Chaiken at [tchaiken@mit.edu](mailto:tchaiken@mit.edu) to schedule a 30-minute phone consultation.

NEXT STEPS

Please submit the completed cover sheet (available [here](https://www.povertyactionlab.org/work-of-the-future/competition/coversheet)) letter of interest, and letters of support to [wotf@povertyactionlab.org](mailto:wotf@povertyactionlab.org). Applications are not currently open.

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

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 questions crucial to understanding pressing labor market issues in the United States? 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**

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**  
Would a randomized evaluation of an intervention addressing this policy issue make a significant contribution toward advancing the state of knowledge? What questions does this potential evaluation answer that we don’t yet have an answer to? Is there interest from decision-makers in learning the answers to these questions?

*The J-PAL North America Work of the Future Initiative is funded through generous support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Laura & John Arnold Foundation.*