

HOUSING STABILITY EVALUATION INCUBATOR

REQUEST FOR LETTERS OF INTEREST
Instructions



LETTERS OF INTEREST DUE: MAY 4TH, 2020 TO NA_RFP@POVERTYACTIONLAB.ORG

***Please note:** In response to the continued uncertainty and disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the deadline to submit a letter of interest for the J-PAL Housing Stability Evaluation Incubator has been extended to **Monday, May 4th**. We care deeply about our partners and the communities they serve, and believe extending the deadline will accommodate the more immediate need to respond to the urgent threats the coronavirus pandemic poses to unhoused individuals and the millions more under threat of losing their homes.*

J-PAL North America will continue to monitor the situation and will post additional updates via our [homelessness mailing list](#) and on our [webpage](#). If your organization has considered submitting a letter of interest to the Evaluation Incubator, please fill out [this form](#) (it should take less than five minutes) to receive additional urgent updates on the application process, and to communicate your interest and capacity for applying at this time.

REDUCING AND PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS

J-PAL North America's [work on homelessness](#) seeks to expand the base of rigorous evidence on strategies to reduce and prevent homelessness. A key aspect of this goal is supporting organizations working to end homelessness in using randomized evaluations to generate new and widely applicable lessons about which strategies are most effective at reducing homelessness and promoting housing stability.

Through the **Housing Stability Evaluation Incubator**, eligible organizations can apply for:

- Pro bono technical support from J-PAL North America's staff of policy and research experts;
- Flexible funding of up to \$50,000; and
- Connections with J-PAL's network of leading academic researchers

to develop one or more high-quality randomized evaluations of a policy or program.

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 funding, typically in the range of \$150,000-250,000, to carry out the evaluation.

Selected finalists will receive scholarships to attend J-PAL's weeklong Executive Education course, [Evaluating Social Programs](#), and support from J-PAL North America staff in refining their ideas for evaluation and developing a full proposal and budget for funding.

SCOPE

Organizations in the North America region interested in answering policy-relevant research questions on strategies to reduce and prevent homelessness are invited to apply. This includes nonprofit service providers, government agencies or offices, public housing authorities, Continuums of Care, and other organizations that operate programs or policies aimed at reducing homelessness, preventing eviction, and promoting housing stability. These policies or programs may be related to:

- Short-term financial assistance for individuals and families at imminent risk of experiencing homelessness;
- Legal representation in housing court for individuals and families at risk of eviction;

- Project-based transitional housing;
- Rapid re-housing;
- Permanent supportive housing;
- Broader housing subsidies, such as Housing Choice Vouchers, public housing, and low-income housing tax credits;
- Rent control;
- Evaluating whether housing first programs reduce the public costs of homelessness;
- The long-term benefits of homelessness reduction programs, on a broad range of outcomes from housing stability to well-being and health;
- Whether coordinated entry successfully matches people to the right programs;
- How existing programs can be designed, targeted, and bundled to be most effective.

This list is not exhaustive: any proposal that explores forward-looking mechanisms to prevent homelessness, or interventions and services for people experiencing homelessness is potentially in scope. For a comprehensive review of open academic research questions on reducing and preventing homelessness, please see [our Evidence Review](#), “Reducing and Preventing Homelessness: Lessons from Randomized Evaluations.”

APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS

J-PAL North America invites interested organizations to submit a brief letter of interest describing (1) the policy challenge that motivates the application, (2) a brief description of the proposed program(s) or policies in question, and (3) information to help J-PAL North America assess which programs or policies are most suitable for a randomized evaluation.

Letters of interest should be no longer than three pages (not including the cover sheet and any letters of support) and include the following information:

1. **Cover sheet.** Please complete the cover sheet, available [here](#).
2. **The challenge to housing stability.** Please describe the policy question(s) or challenge(s) that motivate the application, including any relevant statistics.
3. **The intervention.** Please provide a description of the program(s) or policies to address each challenge that you would like to evaluate, whether it is in the planning or implementation stage, and any preliminary evidence that suggests that the program or policy works or will work. Please also include a description of how program eligibility is determined.
4. **Opportunity for randomized evaluation.** Please provide the following information in order to help J-PAL North America assess the feasibility 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.
 - b. 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.
 - c. Any practical or ethical concerns about carrying out a randomized evaluation and prior experience with randomized evaluations, if any.
 - d. Please describe your office 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.

5. **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 executive leadership.

Please send the completed cover sheet, letter of interest, and letters of support to na_rfp@povertyactionlab.org by the application deadline, **Monday, May 4, 2020 at 5 pm ET**. Applicants selected to submit a full application will be notified by the end of May 2020.

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

APPLICATION SUPPORT

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 Rohit Naimpally, J-PAL North America Senior Policy and Research Manager, at rnaimpally@povertyactionlab.org to schedule a 30-minute phone consultation.

Organizations selected for funding will partner with J-PAL North America and academic researchers to identify and assess opportunities for evaluation, design one or more high-quality randomized evaluations, and engage in training and capacity building activities. Because the Housing Stability Evaluation Incubator is focused on helping organizations design and carry out randomized evaluations, 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, an oversubscribed program’s slots might be allocated by a lottery; eligible beneficiaries of an undersubscribed program might be randomly encouraged to sign up; and pilot programs or programs being expanded to new locations could provide opportunities to randomly select who receives the program first.

For more information on identifying opportunities for randomized evaluations related to housing stability, see [our Evidence Review](#), “Reducing and Preventing Homelessness: Lessons from Randomized Evaluations.”

TIMELINE

January 13, 2020	Request for letters of interest announced
February 10, 2020, 2 p.m. ET	Webinar for prospective applicants (recording available here)
May 4, 2020, 5 p.m. ET	[NEW] Deadline to submit letters of interest
End of May, 2020	Finalists selected and invited to submit full proposals for funding
August 2020, date TBD	Deadline for full proposals
Week of September 14, 2020	Selected partners announced
September 2020-September 2021	Selected partners work with J-PAL North America staff to develop one or more randomized evaluations, find an academic partner, and may apply for full funding to carry out the evaluation.

J-PAL North America may conduct phone interviews with select applicants in order to clarify our understanding of your proposal.

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.
What is the challenge to housing stability that the application hopes to address? What are the gaps in the evidence base that this application would contribute to? Is there interest from key decision-makers in learning the answers to these questions?
2. Promising approach to addressing the policy 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? Is there early-stage evidence to suggest this program might be effective in improving housing stability?
3. Feasible opportunity for a randomized evaluation.
Are the organization's/agency's executive leadership and staff supportive of conducting a randomized evaluation? Are there any practical, ethical, or political concerns about incorporating some element of randomization into the program's implementation? What is the number of people who would be eligible for the program and the number of available spots available, and over what timeframe?