J-PAL STATE AND LOCAL INNOVATION INITIATIVE Q&A

J-PAL
ABDUL LATIF JAMEEL POVERTY ACTION LAB
NORTH AMERICA

WHO CAN APPLY TO THIS COMPETITION?

The Request for Letters of Interest is open to representatives of U.S. state, county, municipal, and tribal governments. Representatives of public school systems or other state or local government organizations are also welcome to apply. In reviewing Letters of Interest, J-PAL North America looks for a demonstrated commitment from senior leaders within the government to use evidence to inform decision-making. In addition to providing the names and titles of the main contacts for the application, applicants are encouraged to provide a letter of support from the Governor, Mayor, City Manager, County Commissioner or Supervisor, or other relevant government leader.

WHAT KIND OF SUPPORT WILL SELECTED STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS RECEIVE?

Governments selected for project development awards receive up to one year of pro bono support from J-PAL North America staff, who will provide project management, connect them to other research resources and technical experts at J-PAL, and facilitate partnerships with J-PAL's network of leading academic researchers. Selected state and local governments can also access flexible project development funds to help get evaluations off the ground.

State and local governments that have partnered with a researcher from J-PAL's network to design a randomized evaluation can apply through the Request for Proposals (RFP) for additional funding to carry out pilot studies or full research projects.

Participating state and local governments will also have the opportunity to participate in custom trainings and convenings to showcase them as leaders in creating and using evidence to inform policy, facilitate lasting connections between policymakers and researchers, and help advance the spread of innovative ideas.

WHEN ARE APPLICATIONS FOR THIS ROUND OF THE COMPETITION DUE?

The deadline to submit applications for the current round is April 1, 2019. Application instructions are available here.

HOW MANY STATE OR LOCAL GOVERNMENTS WILL BE SELECTED?

J-PAL North America typically selects between three and five partners in each round of the competition. Read more about our current partners here.

CAN A SINGLE JURISDICTION SUBMIT APPLICATIONS FROM MORE THAN ONE AGENCY OR DEPARTMENT?

Multiple agencies or departments from the same jurisdiction may apply, either together or separately. Where feasible, we encourage agencies or departments from the same jurisdiction to apply together and to describe either (a) how they would coordinate on a single project or (b) how they would use the resources available through the competition to support multiple projects.

CAN A SERVICE PROVIDER APPLY?

Only state or local governments are eligible to apply. However, state or local governments may identify a service provider or other organization that would serve as a partner in delivering the program or policy they are interested in testing.

DOES MY PROPOSAL HAVE TO INVOLVE A RANDOMIZED EVALUATION?

In short, yes. We understand that there are many ways to generate evidence to inform policy and that randomized evaluations are not always feasible or optimal. However, the specific focus of this initiative is to support policymaker and researcher partnerships to design and implement randomized evaluations. Thus, applicants to the competition must be willing to consider incorporating some element of random assignment into the program or policy they are interested in testing. Selected state and local governments will receive technical support to help them determine the number of people (or schools, hospitals, neighborhoods, etc.) who could potentially participate and a plan for fairly allocating services among them.

IS THIS INITIATIVE FOCUSED ON PARTICULAR POLICY AREAS?

This initiative is open to a wide range of policy areas, including but not limited to children and families, crime, education, employment, energy and environment, health, household finance, housing and homelessness, and governance.

CAN I SUBMIT A LETTER OF INTEREST WITH MULTIPLE PROGRAMS THAT I'M INTERESTED IN EVALUATING?

Yes. J-PAL North America staff will support state and local governments in determining which programs are most suitable for a randomized evaluation.

IS IT POSSIBLE TO CONDUCT A RANDOMIZED EVALUATION OF AN ENTITLEMENT PROGRAM?

If not everyone who is eligible participates in an entitlement program, it may be possible to evaluate the impact of the program by randomly encouraging some individuals to participate. It may also be possible to use a randomized evaluation to study changes to the program's eligibility requirements (e.g. randomly offering the program to some individuals who would not be eligible under current rules) or benefits (e.g. randomly offering some individuals a more generous version of the program or the program combined with some other benefit or service).

IS IT POSSIBLE TO USE THIS INITIATIVE TO SUPPORT A RETROSPECTIVE EVALUATION OF A PROGRAM?

Probably not. Randomization needs to be incorporated from the start; participation in a program cannot be randomly assigned after the fact. Retrospective analysis may be possible for programs that already implemented random assignment (e.g., programs in which a lottery was used to determine who would participate).

IF A JURISDICTION IS SELECTED FOR A PROJECT DEVELOPMENT AWARD, DOES IT AUTOMATICALLY RECEIVE EVALUATION FUNDING?

Jurisdictions selected to receive project development awards that have partnered with a researcher from J-PAL's network to design a proposal for a high-quality and feasible randomized evaluation are eligible to apply for additional funding to carry out for pilot or full evaluations through our Request for Proposals (RFP), and we expect that the likelihood of these proposals being funded will be high. We also understand that there are many reasons why a state or local government selected for a project development award might be unable to proceed to with carrying out a randomized evaluation (e.g., resources become available to serve everyone who is eligible; randomization proves to be infeasible after a pilot period of implementation; analysis reveals that the sample size is too small to detect a meaningful effect).

WHAT IS THE TIMELINE FOR EVALUATIONS TO BEGIN AND END?

The timelines for evaluations are flexible, but we expect that most evaluations will begin within a year of the jurisdiction being selected for a project development award. End dates will depend on the specific details of the program or policy being evaluated.

DO INTERESTED JURISDICTIONS NEED TO PARTNER WITH ACADEMIC RESEARCHERS BEFORE APPLYING?

No. As part of the State and Local Innovation Initiative, J-PAL North America will connect selected jurisdictions with academic researchers from J-PAL's network.

DO THE RESEARCHERS HAVE TO BE J-PAL AFFILIATES?

In order to apply for implementation funding through our RFP, the proposed research team must include at least one J-PAL affiliate or invited researcher. As part of the assistance offered through this initiative, J-PAL North America will help connect selected jurisdictions with academic researchers in J-PAL's network.

WHO ARE THE RESEARCHERS PARTICIPATING IN THIS INITIATIVE?

J-PAL is a network of affiliated professors, who work at more than 50 universities across the world. J-PAL's affiliated professors are united by their use of randomized evaluations to test and improve the effectiveness of programs and policies aimed at reducing poverty. You can find a current list of J-PAL's affiliated professors here.

IS THE FUNDING AVAILABLE THROUGH THIS INITIATIVE SUFFICIENT TO COVER THE COSTS OF AN EVALUATION?

If an evaluation makes use of administrative data that is already being collected, we anticipate that the evaluation funding available will be sufficient to cover the full cost. Evaluations that rely on data that can only be collected through surveys will likely be more expensive and require additional sources of funding.

WHO IS FUNDING THE INITIATIVE?

The Laura and John Arnold Foundation (LJAF) is providing funding for the initiative.

WHOM SHOULD I CONTACT WITH QUESTIONS?

For questions about the State and Local Innovation Initiative, please contact Initiative Manager Rohit

Naimpally at rnaimpally@povertyactionlab.org.