

J-PAL's Learning for All Initiative

African Scholars Program Information Session

[September 28, 2023]



Agenda

- I. About us: J-PAL and the role of randomized evaluations
- II. Introduction to the Learning for All Initiative
- III. African Scholars Program overview
- IV. Application best practices
- V. Next steps
- VI. Question & answer session

A man with dark, curly hair and a mustache, wearing a grey short-sleeved polo shirt, is focused on his work. He is standing outdoors, surrounded by lush green trees and foliage. In front of him is a large wooden frame covered with numerous bundles of red and white yarn. He is using his hands to sort or arrange the yarn. A thick, curved orange line is superimposed over the lower left portion of the image, partially obscuring the text.

What do we do at J-PAL?

J-PAL's mission is to **reduce poverty** by ensuring that **policy** is informed by **scientific evidence**, and **research** is translated into **action**.

We work with a global network of talented researchers



Local grounding: Seven regional offices and hundreds of local partnerships



J-PAL North America

Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)
Cambridge, USA

J-PAL Global

Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)
Cambridge, USA



J-PAL Latin America and the Caribbean

Pontificia Universidad Catolica de Chile
Santiago, Chile



J-PAL Middle East and North Africa

American University in Cairo
Cairo, Egypt



J-PAL Europe

Paris School of Economics
Paris, France



J-PAL South Asia

Institute for Financial Management & Research
Chennai & New Delhi, India



J-PAL Africa

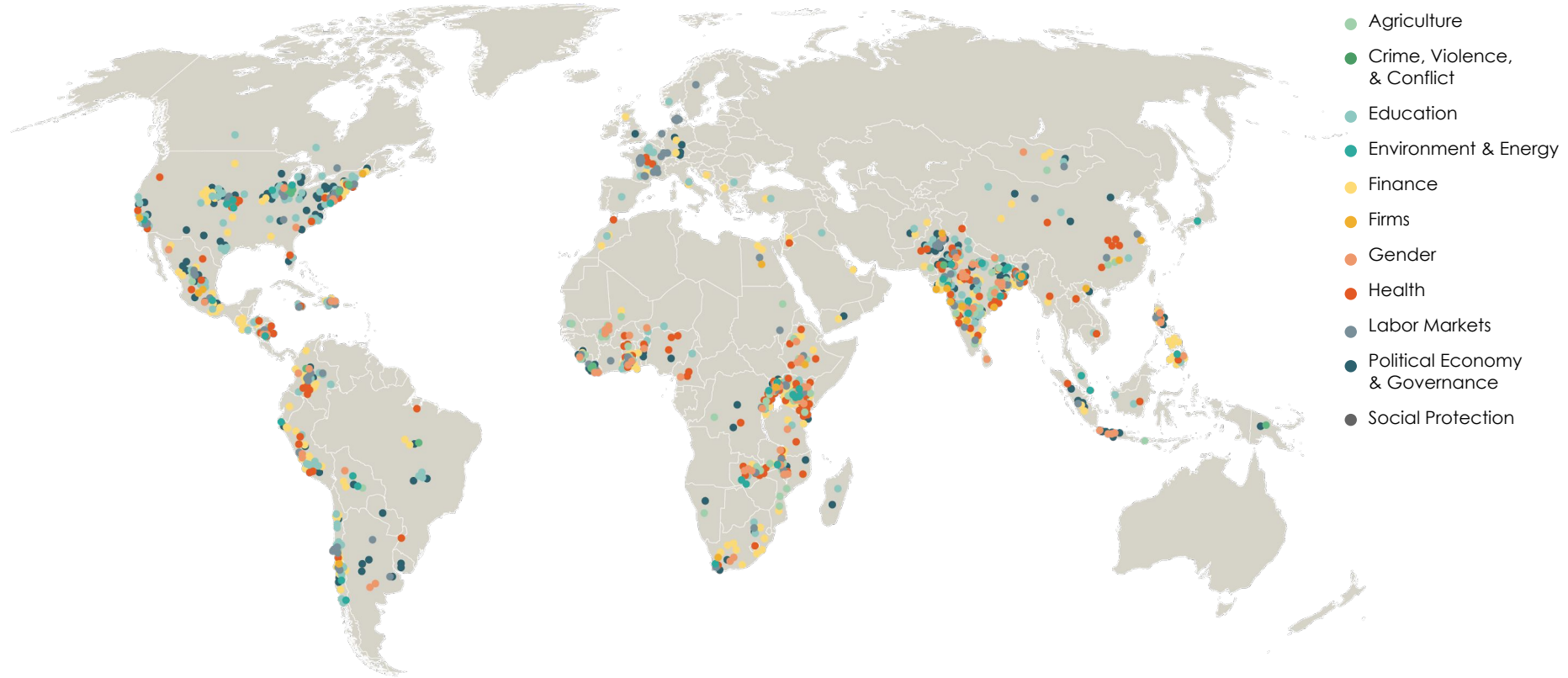
University of Cape Town
Cape Town, South Africa



J-PAL Southeast Asia

University of Indonesia
Jakarta, Indonesia

Global knowledge: 1,640+ ongoing and completed randomized evaluations in more than 95 countries



Work across a broad range of sectors



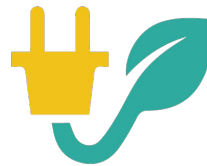
Agriculture



Crime, Violence,
& Conflict



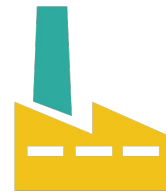
Education



Environment,
Energy, &
Climate Change



Finance



Firms



Gender



Health



Labor
Markets



Political Economy
& Governance



Social
Protection

Meet the Education/LAI Co-chairs



**Karthik
Muralidharan**
Academic
Co-Chair



**Rachel
Glennerster**
Academic
Co-Chair



**Karen
Macours**
Academic
Co-Chair (LAI)

Meet the LAI African Scholars Team



Clare Hofmeyr
Senior Education &
Training Manager
J-PAL Africa



Maddie Brancel
Policy Manager -
Education
J-PAL Global



Eitan Paul
Senior Research Manager
J-PAL Global



Demitria Wack
Senior Policy Associate /
Initiative Manager - LAI
J-PAL Global

Advisors / Initiative Management



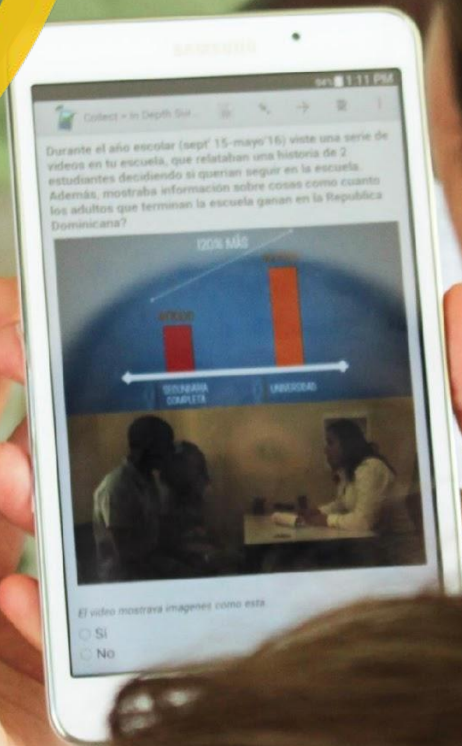
Anushka Bansal
Senior Policy Associate
J-PAL Global



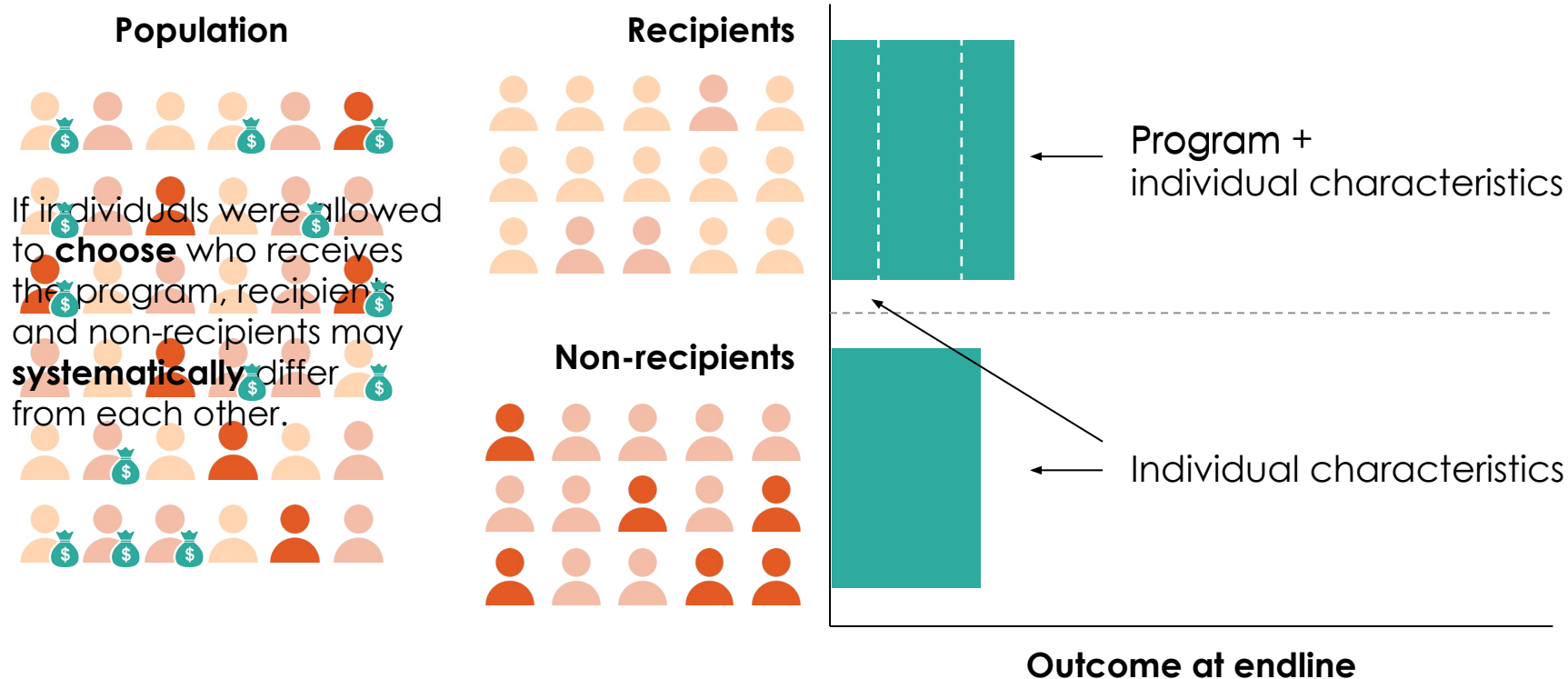
Raquel Caldeira
Research Associate
J-PAL Africa

Primary Points of Contact

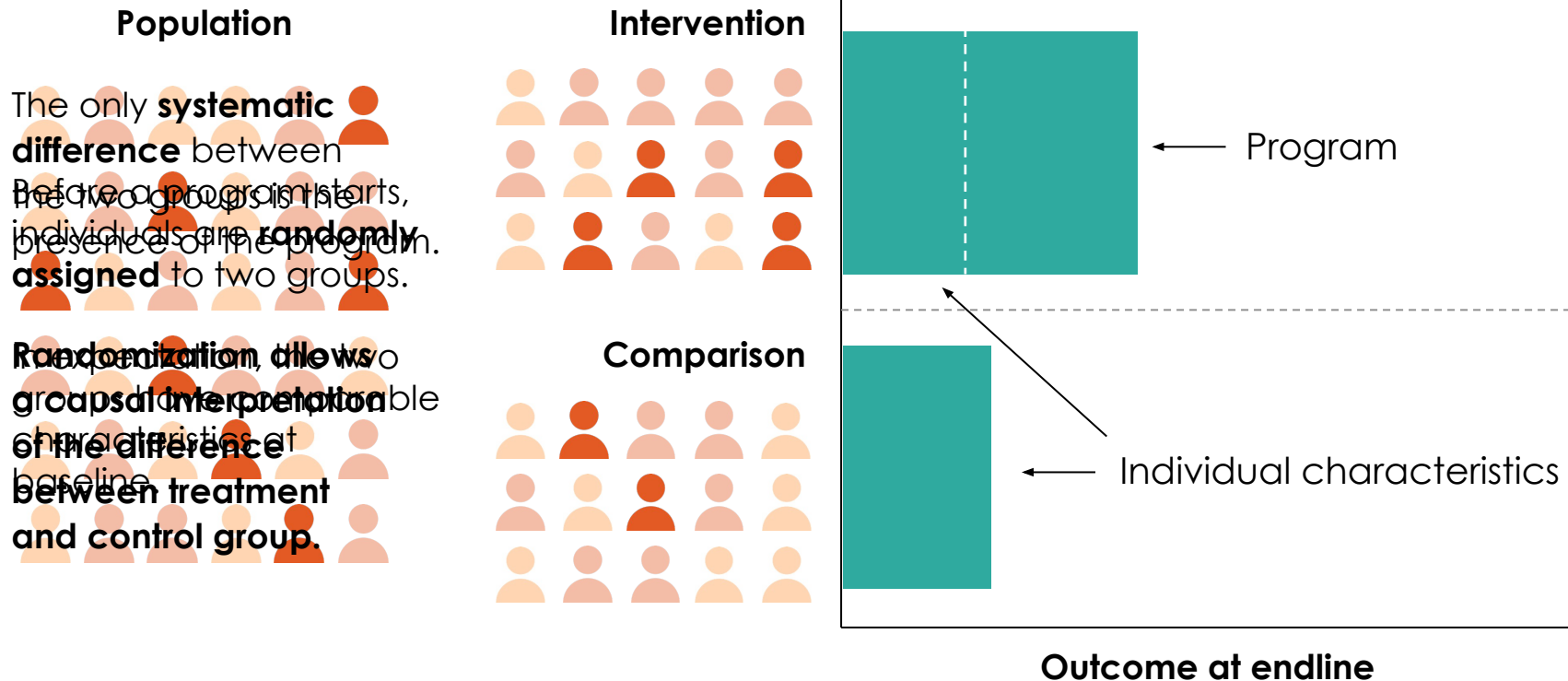
Randomized impact
evaluations take a
scientific approach
to fighting poverty.



Randomized evaluations shed light on causal impacts.



Randomization creates a real-life counterfactual.



RCTs: Rigorous impact research

Important to identify “**causality**”

- Lessons for program and policy design
- Supports results-based management of programs

RCTs have become a widely used methodology

- Not only an academic approach
- Strong demand by development partners (Pratham, Educate!, TaRL Africa, Breakthrough, etc.) and donors

RCTs in economics and allied social sciences help in particular to understand the role of **behavior** and **institutions** (educational systems) on program/policy outcomes.

Introduction to the Learning for All Initiative (LAI)



Launching the Learning for All Initiative - RFP 2

Objective: LAI funds randomized evaluations and scale projects to improve foundational learning, especially related to literacy and numeracy and breadth of skills. Additional focus areas include girls' education, intersections of climate and education, and the long-term economic and health impacts of education.



Generation of evidence

Bridge between implementing partners and researchers



Catalyse evidence to policy

Technical support on scale-ups, sharing evidence based solutions

BILL & MELINDA
GATES *foundation*



**Douglas B.
Marshall Jr.**
Family Foundation



Foreign, Commonwealth
& Development Office



**Founders
Pledge**



The **LEGO** Foundation

LAI will focus on the following research areas



Foundational literacy and numeracy



Socio-emotional learning (SEL) and measurement of holistic skills



Girls' Education



Potential intersections between climate & education



Long-term economic & health impacts of education interventions

Types of research and scale projects

1. **Full Research Projects:** For research projects at a mature level of development. *(maximum amount of US\$400,000)*
2. **Pilot Research Projects:** For studies with a clear research question and for which the design and implementation of an evaluation requires further testing and pilot data. *(maximum amount of US\$75,000)*
3. **Proposal Development Grants:** For exploratory work related to preliminary research ideas. *(maximum amount of US\$10,000)*

Types of research and scale projects (continued)

- **Path-to-scale projects:**

- **Adaptations:** For projects in which the partner has identified the potential evidence-informed solution, but more work is needed before they can pilot a scalable version of it. *(maximum amount of US\$75,000)*
- **Policy pilots:** For projects where the partner is ready to pilot the evidence-informed solution and would like technical support. *(maximum amount of US\$200,000)*
- **Scale projects:** For projects that piloted a version of the evidence-informed solution in their context, and the solution has been responsibly adapted and contextualized. *(maximum amount of US\$300,000)*

Evidence Synthesis and Policy Outreach

- We will produce:
 - Policy briefs synthesizing lessons from the research
 - Public summaries of funded studies
 - Document how research has influenced policy
- Present research findings to governments, NGOs, and other organizations
- Convene implementing partners, academics, donors and/or other actors in the education space



African Scholars Program overview



Funding and eligibility criteria

Resident African Scholars

- Those who have **completed a PhD** in Economics or another social science discipline (including PhD-level training in quantitative methods like statistics/econometrics); and
- Are based in an **academic institution (university) in sub-Saharan Africa**

Note: Only 1 person on the project needs to fulfill this definition. We encourage interdisciplinary teams to apply; there is no restriction on the number or qualifications of co-PIs.

Proposal Development Grants

Up to US\$10,000

Pilot

Up to US\$75,000

Full randomized evaluation*

Up to US\$400,000

*African Scholars who have successfully completed a pilot study funded by J-PAL

Mentorship for African Scholars

- African Scholars are paired with a J-PAL affiliate or invited researcher (i.e. their mentor) as scholars build out their projects and for a two-way knowledge exchange
 - Mentors are affiliates/IRs who have conducted a number of randomized evaluations and are interested in acting as an academic sounding board and guide to the scholars
- African Scholars whose proposals are successful will be matched to a mentor after the funding has been awarded.
- Scholars and mentors are required to develop and sign an agreement before funding that provides a framework for how the scholar and mentor will work together throughout the project.

Application best practices



What are we looking for?

A strong proposal should...



Be based on a strong research idea



Have a clear pathway to a randomised evaluation



Follow the application guidelines



Be simple, succinct and clearly written

What makes a strong research idea?



- Academically interesting
- Policy relevant
- Fits within the LAI research agenda
- Answers a cause and effect question

What is a clear pathway to a randomized evaluation?



- The proposal needs to include a (possible) program that will be implemented in the future.
 - There needs to be an **intervention** or a **planned intervention** described as part of the proposal
- For a pilot, there needs to be some buy in shown by the implementing partner and a description of how the pilot will lead to and assist with a larger randomised evaluation.

Proposals that are simple, succinct, and clearly written



Writing tips:

1. Build a strong structure before you start writing
2. Use a clear title for the proposal
3. Be careful when citing related literature
4. Use clear, concise language
5. Review your own proposal
6. Ask others to review your proposal

Follow the application guidelines



Proposal development grants (up to US\$10,000)

1. A concise statement of topic
2. Proposed partners, if available
3. Clearly indicate the scope and sequencing of particular proposed activities
4. Short budget

Pilot grants (up to US\$75,000)

1. Proposal narrative
2. Detailed budget
3. Budget narrative
4. Letters of support from implementation partner(s) & receiving institution

Review our website for full application guidelines: [LAI RFP](#)

Other writing resources



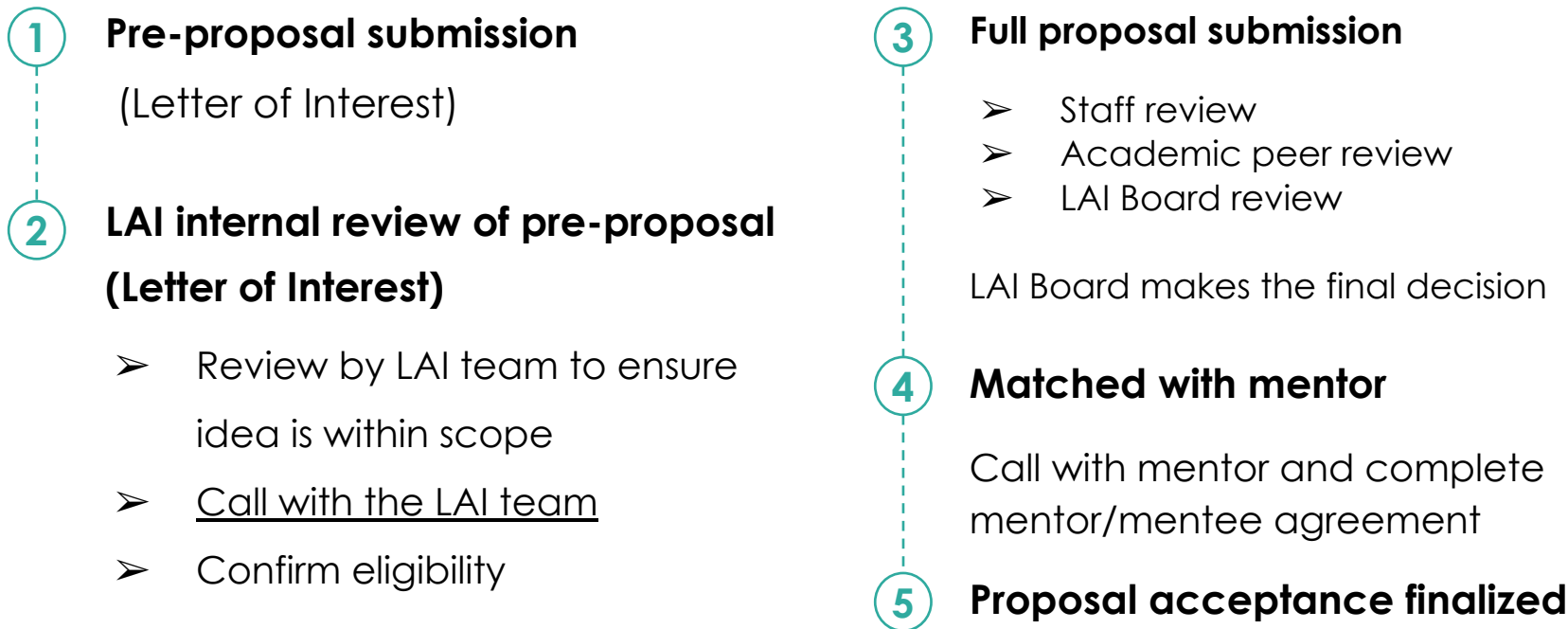
- J-PAL's [Research Resources](#)
- Donald McCloskey, '[The Writing of Economics](#)'
- Kwan Choi, '[How to Publish in Top Journals](#)'
- David Evans, [How to Write the Introduction of Your Development Economics Paper](#)
- David McKenzie, [Tips for writing Impact Evaluation Grant Proposals](#)

Be **inspired by other writers** and learn how other randomised evaluation researchers think about their research questions on the [J-PAL website](#)

Next steps



How does the LAI application process work?



Upcoming Deadlines

LAI RFP opens

October 10, 2023



Letters of Interest due

November 7, 2023



Full proposals due

December 13, 2023



Interested in applying, but need more time to develop a proposal? Our next RFP will be released in Spring 2024.

Find out more about the African Scholars Program

- More information on the [LAI African Scholars Opportunities page](#)
- [Frequently Asked Questions](#)
- Sign up for the [African Scholars registry](#)
- Watch this [video](#) for an overview of what mentorship looks like for African Scholars

Question & answer session





Contact us

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