

## Call for expressions of interest

### Experimental Impact Evaluations for development policy analysis in developing countries

Submission deadline: 23h59 East Standard Time, 06 June 2016.

The Partnership for Economic Policy (PEP) invites research teams in developing countries to submit an expression of interest (EOI) for undertaking a randomized control trial (RCT) from late 2016 to 2018. The evaluation should target new programmes or policy interventions, extensions and modifications of existing programmes, or existing programmes allowing random allocation of new beneficiaries. PEP is interested in evaluations related to the following themes: youth employment, women's economic empowerment, entrepreneurship and financial inclusion, and productivity in rural sectors. Interested applicants should demonstrate their interest and aptitude for conducting a rigorous and policy-relevant evaluation.

The selected teams will be assisted in the elaboration of a full RCT proposal to be submitted for a second selection phase in July 2016. Please note that an invitation to submit a full proposal is not a guarantee of a research grant. Full proposals will participate in a competitive process of several rounds of evaluation, which requires successful completion of training on impact evaluation and presentation of the proposal to an audience of peers and PEP-affiliated international experts. At the end of the selection process, 4 teams will benefit from a "PEP support grant" which includes scientific support from a PEP-mentor, financial support up to \$100,000, as well as various subsidies for participation in a PEP meeting, a working paper, dissemination activities, and more.

#### a. Introduction

A randomized control trial is an evaluation method borrowed from medical science. This methodology consists in testing a new treatment by giving it only to some randomly chosen patients, with the rest (the "controls") receiving standard care. What works in improving medical treatments can also work for policy interventions. Today, organizations and governments make use of RCTs to look for evidence of the policies and programmes that work best. To learn more about experimental evaluation visit [web.PEP-PlaylistRCTs](http://web.PEP-PlaylistRCTs) and consult the references at the end of this document.

## **b. Elements of Successful Expression of Interest**

We seek research teams that clearly demonstrate their capacity to evaluate a policy intervention or programme with the following attributes:

### **a) Interest in evaluating a relevant programme or intervention**

Randomized control trials are at the heart of evidence-based policy making. They provide evidence for stakeholders, government officials and the civil society on whether a particular programme can achieve its desired outcome. A successful EOI must demonstrate that the evaluated programme is relevant and warrants an impact evaluation.

To justify mobilizing the resources needed to carry out an RCT, the programme to be evaluated should be:

- Strategically relevant. The programme covers, or could be expanded to cover, a large number of people; or could generate substantial changes in outcomes.
- Untested. Little should be known about the effectiveness of the programme, globally or in a particular context.
- Influential. The results can be used to inform key policy decisions.
- Replicable. The programme can be scaled up or can be applied in a different setting.
- Innovative. The testing of new and promising approaches is noted favorably.

You can learn more about what to evaluate and why by consulting the references at the end of this document.

### **b) It is possible to randomize access to the intervention**

Most stakeholders, government officials, programme managers and policymakers regard RCTs as the gold standard of evidence. However, it is not uncommon to find out that they are reluctant to randomize. The research team should ensure that programme managers and programme administrators on the field agree to randomize access to the evaluated intervention.

Applications should provide a formal letter from the managers and/or government officials in charge of the programme or intervention confirming that they are interested in an evaluation and willing to randomize access. A common

approach to this matter consists in using existing programme constraints to implement randomization. For instance, programs may be unable to reach the entire population of interest due to budgetary or capacity constraints. Researchers may use random assignment mechanisms to select programme participants instead of using first-come-first-served or other potentially endogenous selection methods.

PEP is engaged to promote ethical practices in all aspects of research. EOI must confirm that the intervention is intended to be beneficial and its evaluation ethical. Selected proposals will need institutional review board's (IRB) approval from their own institutions. If no IRB procedure is available, then PEP will submit the proposal through its own ethics committee.

### **c) The research team has technical capacity to collect quality data**

RCTs provide information on the overall impact of a program, as opposed to specific case studies or anecdotes, which can give only partial information and may not be representative of overall programme impacts. Surveys and data collection are an essential part of RCTs.

Researchers must demonstrate their capacity to collect data for the treatment and control group before and after the implementation of the program. This usually requires basic experience in survey design, data collection and knowledge of the local environment. The implementation of an RCT will require the recruitment and training of local enumerators to collect relevant data of good quality.

### **d) There is potential for data analysis and capacity building**

One of PEP's core missions is to promote local research capacity. Selected teams will benefit from a full-support training and mentoring programme to guide them through the implementation of a successful RCT. Nonetheless, technical knowledge of statistical software, academic knowledge of basic econometric methods and previous experience on impact evaluation, data analysis, and managing data collection will be highly valued.

Note that PEP requires teams to be composed of at least 50% female researchers who are all contributing substantively to the project. PEP also seeks gender balance in team leaders and thus positively encourages female-led research teams. PEP also favours the inclusion of young researchers (under 30), under the leadership of a senior researcher.

Although EOI are welcome from all developing countries, priority is given to teams from and based in low-income countries (LIC), fragile and/or conflict states (visit [web.pep-net.org](http://web.pep-net.org) to see the list of LIC). In our previous PAGE initiative, 45% of the supported projects were led by teams of researchers from these countries.

### **c. Eligibility criteria and institutional requirements**

In accordance with the PAGE II initiative, the evaluated programme or intervention should correspond to one or more of the five priority themes of research: youth employment, women's economic empowerment, entrepreneurship and financial inclusion, and productivity in rural sectors.

All team members must be developing country nationals and reside in a developing country during the full course of the project. In addition, the lead researcher should have an institutional affiliation which is willing to serve as the host for the proposed research and receive funds for field activities.

University-level training in economics or equivalent experience is required.

Researchers are expected to have at least one peer-reviewed working paper at the end of the project cycle. This paper should comply with technical and ethical standards used in peer-reviewed journals (e.g. *JDE* and *AEJ*) and shall be considered for submission to a journal with minor formatting and fine-tuning. The final working paper and journal article will be coauthored with PEP mentors if the team requires significant help on research design, survey elaboration, and writing up the report.

All information sources used for the project must be documented. PEP treats cases of plagiarism very seriously; transparency and fairness are considered fundamental research values.

### **d. Application Process**

The deadline to submit applications is June 6, 2016. The EOI has to be submitted electronically using the PEP "intranet system". Here are the steps to follow:

- All members of the applicant team must first register on the PEP website. To register, click on "Register" and follow the instructions.

- Registered members will receive a username and password by email, normally within minutes, which will allow you to access your PEP intranet file, by clicking on the log in button.
- All members of the applicant team must post their personal CV in their PEP intranet file. To do this, each member should "Log in" to the PEP website and then select "Profile" and "Upload CV". We also strongly encourage applicants to fill out their profile with as much detail as possible (including photo, short bio, etc.).
- To submit the expression of interest, the team leader must log in, click on "Submit New Proposal" and fill out the required information. Read the submission guide ([link here](#)), upload the expression of interest template provided by PEP ([link here](#)), and the evaluation consent letter from the program managers or the institution in charge of the intervention.
- When all is done, to make sure that the expression of interest has been successfully submitted to PEP, return to your PEP intranet file and click on "My Projects".

PEP encourages teams to submit proposals in English, but will accept proposals submitted in French or Spanish in cases of (justified) language barrier. If you have difficulty completing the steps above, please consult our FAQ page.

### **e. References**

You will find below some resources that can help you plan an RCT.

Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab. Introduction to Evaluations. Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Web. 3 Feb. 2016.

<https://www.povertyactionlab.org/research-resources/introduction-evaluations>

Djebbari and Lopera. 2011. Impact Evaluation Using Stata. PEP training material.

Duflo, Esther, Rachel Glennerster, and Michael Kremer. 2008. "Using Randomization in Development Economics Research: A Toolkit". T. Schultz and John Strauss, eds., Handbook of Development Economics. Vol. 4. Amsterdam and New York: North Holland, 4.

Gertler, Paul J.; Martinez, Sebastian; Premand, Patrick; Rawlings, Laura B.; Vermeersch, Christel M. J.. 2011. Impact Evaluation in Practice. World Bank. License: CC BY 3.0 IGO.

Khandker, Shahidur R.; Koolwal, Gayatri B.; Samad, Hussain A.. 2010. Handbook on Impact Evaluation: Quantitative Methods and Practices. World Bank. License: CC BY 3.0 IGO.

## Requests for Clarification

If you have questions about the submission process, how to use the intranet or the PEP grant, visit our FAQ webpage by clicking [here](#). If you do not find your answer, contact us at [info@pep-net.org](mailto:info@pep-net.org) for assistance on the submission process and technical questions. Questions concerning this call for expressions of interest can be addressed to [maria.lopera.1@ulaval.ca](mailto:maria.lopera.1@ulaval.ca). You can expect a one-week answer delay.

