

PROJECT “STRENGTHENING LEARNING AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT IN BRAZILIAN PRESCHOOLS”: RFP OVERVIEW

Second Semester, 2024 Request for Proposals (RFP)

J-PAL’s project [Strengthening Learning and Child Development in Brazilian Preschools](#) calls for proposals from J-PAL affiliated researchers, invited researchers, post-docs, and PhD students who have a J-PAL affiliate or invited researcher on their thesis committee to conduct a randomized research project to evaluate the impact of programs focused on improving the quality of preschool education on learning and development of children in Brazil. Additionally, applicants of this RFP can also request funds for implementing partners of “promising preschool programs” (see the “award types” section for more information).

Letters of interest are due by Monday, October 7th, 2024 at 7:00 PM UTC-3. Proposals are due by Monday, November, 04, 2024 at 7:00 PM UTC-3. Please submit your application to preschool.rfp@povertyactionlab.org

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RFP TIMELINE

Release Date: Monday, September 02, 2024
Required Letter of Interest (LOI) Deadline: Monday, October 07, 2024 at 7:00 PM UTC-3 <i>*All applicants will receive an invitation to proceed with full proposal development</i>
Full Proposal Deadline: Monday, November 04, 2024 at 7:00 PM UTC-3 <i>*By invitation</i>
Results Announced to the Applicants: Week of December 19, 2024 (tentative)

OVERVIEW

BACKGROUND (OR MOTIVATION)

Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Brazil has seen significant advances over recent years, with playing and interactions as structuring elements of the [Brazilian National Common Curricular Base for Early Childhood Education \(BNCC\)](#). However, despite strong legal frameworks and the establishment of a national curriculum, ECE faces challenges related to equitable access and the quality of education considering socioeconomic, racial/ethnic, and geographic disparities ([Raikes et al, 2023](#)).

In light of this, [Bracell Foundation](#) and J-PAL Latin America and the Caribbean are partners at the project “Strengthening Learning and Child Development in Brazilian Preschools” to identify promising preschool programs, evaluate their effectiveness, and support the scale-up of those that could truly enhance the development of 4-to-5-year-old children in Brazil. In this project we will also build partnerships with states and municipal departments of education of São Paulo, Bahia, and Mato Grosso do Sul, implementing partners, and the J-PAL research network.

Please visit our [webpage](#) and [blog post](#) where we outline the focus that this project aims to target.

GEOGRAPHIC PRIORITIES

The project’s “Strengthening Learning and Child Development in Brazilian Preschools” geographic focus is in the states of São Paulo, Mato Grosso do Sul and Bahia in Brazil. J-PAL’s network of researchers are required to submit proposals for research conducted in municipalities of one of these three states, in partnership with implementing organizations that have developed programs focused on improving the quality of preschool education.

AWARD TYPES

This RFP invites proposals under Randomized Research Projects.

Randomized Research Projects (up to BRL 400,000¹)

This grant is for research projects at a mature level of development. Not only must the research question be clear, but applicants must also demonstrate a commitment from implementing partners, a method of randomization, well-defined instruments, and sample size estimates from power calculations. Proposals can also be submitted for funding the continuation of research projects that have already started with other funding (including those for which field data collection has been completed). The expectation is that these projects will result in a publicly available paper that is eventually submitted to a top economics journal and content to knowledge dissemination focused on academia, decision-makers

¹Under exceptional circumstances, J-PAL Board may choose to award a higher amount of funding for Randomized Research Projects.

and third sector. De-identified data should be made publicly available within three years of the end of data collection (sooner if required by donors), or within 60 days of a paper's acceptance in a journal. The total amount awarded to a single randomized research project will be up to 400,000 BRL.

Implementing Partner (up to BRL 300,000²)

Applicants of this RFP can also request up to BRL 300,000 for implementing partners of promising preschool programs. This partner will be responsible for implementing the preschool program in municipalities of one of these three states: São Paulo, Mato Grosso do Sul or Bahia.

Characteristics of promising programs include:

- Being evidence-based
- Being aligned with the Brazilian National Common Curricular Base for Early Childhood Education ([BNCC](#)) and the National Curricular Guidelines for early childhood education ([DCNEI](#))
- Having previous experiences of implementation at public preschools in Brazil
- Being open to share the materials for replications
- Feasible to be implemented in 2 years or less
- Having a previous evaluation of the implementing process that enabled researchers to learn what worked or not in terms of program content, delivery strategy, duration, instruments, and other components.
- Having potential for being scaled-up in other Brazilian municipalities.

We invite J-PAL's research network to learn more about 9 [preschool programs](#) that want to evaluate their impact.

ELIGIBILITY

J-PAL affiliated researchers, invited researchers, post-docs, and PhD³ students who have a J-PAL affiliate or invited researcher on their thesis committee are eligible to apply for this project's RFP. All proposals may include other collaborators outside those mentioned, as long as the principal investigator is eligible.

Additional consideration will be given to proposals that involve locally-based researchers and partners, as well as those with interdisciplinary co-authors from other fields such as Education and Psychology, for example.

²Under exceptional circumstances, J-PAL Board may choose to award a higher amount of funding for implementing partners.

³PhD students may be eligible to apply up to BRL 135,000 in pilot studies or full research project funding. To be eligible, PhD students must have a J-PAL affiliate or J-PAL invited researchers on their thesis committee. This adviser must provide a letter of support and indicate willingness to remain involved in a supervisory role throughout the lifetime of the project. If the student is pre-thesis, the letter should state "I am actively responsible for supervising this project/research and anticipate being on the student's thesis committee." In addition, in order to apply for up to BRL 135,000 for full-RCT funding, PhD students must provide documented evidence of successful pilot activities, funded either through a JOI Brazil development grant or other sources. Please also note that PhD students are eligible to submit a maximum of two development grant applications and two pilot/full study proposals during their time as PhD students. All else equal, priority will be given to PhD students who have not applied before. Applicants who received development funding as PhD students but have since moved to another institution may only apply for funding to continue that same project, and may not apply for funding for unrelated projects unless they have since become a J-PAL affiliate or invited researchers.

Notes for All Award Types

- To prevent concentration of awards to any specific researchers, and to reduce the burden on initiative review boards, applicants are limited to submitting three proposals, including of all proposal types, per 12-month period per initiative (either as PI or co-PI).
- In order to be considered for new grants, applicants must be current on reporting for all their other grants, across all J-PAL initiatives. **Researchers whose projects are more than 2 months late on any reports to any J-PAL Initiative despite reminders from J-PAL and who have not received an approved extension will not be eligible to have new projects funded by J-PAL.** You may submit applications to this RFP, but your application will not be considered for funding until your deliverables become current.

SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS

To respond to this RFP, please follow the directions listed below.

1. Please visit our website and download the template file that contains the [Letter of Interest \(LOI\)](#). Fill out the document and send it to preschool.rfp@povertyactionlab.org by **Monday, October 7, 2024, at 7:00 PM UTC-3**.
 - The LOI is an expression of interest categorized by filling in some initial information. This step serves for the project team to analyze thematic pertinence and eligibility and is a key input for defining who can send a proposal (step 2). The project team will notify you once we have reviewed your LOI and if you are clear to begin filling out your proposal.
2. If you receive an invitation to apply, please submit your research funding proposal, including all required documents, via email to preschool.rfp@povertyactionlab.org by **Monday, November 4, 2024, at 7:00 PM UTC-3**. Please find below the list of required documents for submission:
 - a. RFP Application
 - b. Budget for Research (RCT)
 - c. Budget for Implementation Costs (if necessary)
 - d. Letters of support
 - e. Project execution schedule and description of the activities
 - f. Term of approval and consent
 - g. Statement of adherence to policies and standards
 - h. Declaration of awareness and agreement with the general terms and conditions of the financial aid contract

Please be sure to submit your budget in BRL (Brazilian Real). This project is funded by donations in Brazilian Real (BRL) and the project will make all awards in BRL.

We emphasize that the materials must be in English. For any inquiries, please contact us at

preschool.rfp@povertyactionlab.org Assistance is available in both English and Portuguese.

Researchers should submit a letter of interest by Monday, October 7, 2024 at 7:00 PM UTC-3. Proposal applications are due by Monday, November 4, 2024 at 7:00 PM UTC-3. Please submit your application via e-mail preschool.rfp@povertyactionlab.org

RESEARCH AGENDA

RESEARCH GAPS

The project “Strengthening Learning and Child Development in Brazilian Preschools” will provide targeted funding to test promising preschool programs and scale-up the effective ones. It will generate rigorous and innovative research that addresses the impact of preschool programs on learning and child development during preschool years. Randomized evaluations can provide valuable insights on effective strategies and interventions that can be used to enhance the quality of preschool education and positively impact learning and child development. Considering gender, race, socioeconomic and regional disparities to access a qualified preschool education, this project encourages applications that consider these social inequalities in their scope.

This section presents a summary of the research agenda and a list of questions the project would like to answer using rigorous evidence.

In Brazil, early childhood education (ECE) is the first stage of basic education and a constitutional right for all children ([Brazil, 1996](#)). It is divided into: daycare, for children from zero to three years of age, and preschool, for children aged four and five. The goal of ECE is to promote the integral development of children, considering physical, psychological, intellectual, and social aspects, complementing the actions of the family and the community ([Brazil, 1996](#)). Also, it must be provided free of charge and primarily by municipalities, in collaboration with the states and the federal government ([Brazil, 1996](#)). Enrollment in daycare is optional for families, while preschool has been mandatory in Brazil since 2009.

Studies conducted in the United States and Denmark showed that children who attended preschool achieved higher levels of education, employability, salaries, adoption of healthy eating habits, and health in adulthood compared to those who did not attend preschool ([Conti et al., 2016](#); [Heckman and Karapakula, 2019](#); [Rossin-Slater and Wüst, 2020](#)). While these studies highlight the benefits of attending preschool, it is important to note that the quality of education plays a crucial role in achieving these positive outcomes.

Brazil faces some challenges in promoting the quality of preschool education. Among basic education teachers, 48.6 percent recognize the need for training on the use of play-based elements in pedagogical practices, and 54.5 percent disagree or strongly disagree that their profession is valued by society ([INEP, 2021](#)). Finally, about 1 in 4 school principals disagree or strongly disagree that students with disabilities, autism spectrum disorders, or high abilities/giftedness receive specialized educational support ([INEP, 2021](#)). In this sense, ECE professionals training is fundamental for the quality of pedagogical practices, with direct effects on preschool children's learning and development. Evidence reveals that ECE professional training focused on topics related to promoting child development and learning

opportunities have a significant impact on the children's cognitive development, executive functions, socioemotional, motor and math skills ([Andrew et al., 2019](#), [Gallego et al., 2021](#); [Dillon et al., 2017](#); [Amadu et al., 2020](#)).

Evidence from studies about Brazilian programs that strengthen the quality of preschool education and positively impact children's learning and development in preschools is scarce. Therefore, this project aims to test preschool programs in Brazil and evaluate how they promote learning and development of preschool-aged children.

KEY OPEN RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This project funds randomized evaluations of preschool programs aimed to impact learning and child development during preschool years in Brazil. While this list is not exhaustive, key open questions this project seeks to address are presented below.

1. How does the program influence the learning opportunities of children in preschools? How does the program influence behaviors, skills, knowledge and experiences that promote children's learning and development at preschool?
2. What are the effects of the program on socioemotional development of children? How does the program influence skills related to empathy for others, recognition of feelings, needs and ways of thinking and acting or the child's interpersonal relationships?
3. How does the program impact the children's ability to express ideas, desires, feelings about their experiences, through oral or written language (spontaneous writing)?
4. How does the program impact children's mathematical skills? How does it influence learning related to the classification of objects and figures according to their similarities and differences or the relationship between numbers and their respective quantities?
5. What is the impact of the program on children's motor development? How does it influence learning related to demonstrating control and appropriate use of the body during playful activities, listening and storytelling, artistic activities, among other possibilities? How does the program influence the development of skills related to self-care (hygiene, nutrition, comfort and appearance)?
6. How does the program impact children's behaviors?
7. What is the impact of the program on executive functions of preschool children?
8. What is the impact of the program on children's cognitive development?
9. What is the impact of the program according to gender, race, socioeconomic and/or geographic location of children?
10. What are the most effective strategies/mechanisms of the program?
11. What are the conditions that influence the impact of the program (ECE professionals background, learning conditions, relationship with the Education Department of the municipality, other factors)?
12. How implementation strategies impact the effectiveness and costs of the program?
13. How does the program's implementation (dose, fidelity, quality, barriers, adherence, etc.) influence the results of the program?

This project will prioritize evaluations that measure effectiveness on learning opportunities and child

development, cost-effectiveness, and scalability.

If a researcher is uncertain about whether a research project is eligible for this RFP, please email preschool.rfp@povertyactionlab.org

ADMINISTRATIVE NOTES

Research funding

This project can accommodate two research funding management models (**Model Executed by J-PAL LAC | Insper** and **Model Executed by Another Host Institution**). These models are meant to work within institutional constraints to best accommodate the needs of projects from different types of organizations involved in the research, researcher host institutions, funding amounts, among other concerns.

In compliance with the prevailing legislation and the internal rules of each host institution, applicants should familiarize themselves with the available financial management models as described below, and indicate their preferred option in the proposal. Please note that PIs with affiliation to non-Brazilian universities must adhere to the Model Executed by J-PAL LAC | Insper.

- **Model Executed by J-PAL LAC | Insper:** According to Insper's policies and instructions for disbursement and accountability, J-PAL LAC, in partnership with Insper, manages the financial resources and research activities of the project.
- **Model Executed by Another Host Institution:** The host institution of the research, directly or through an accredited or authorized Research Support Foundation, will receive the award funds from Insper and will execute the project.

When following the **Model Executed by J-PAL LAC | Insper**, you must coordinate the budget details with the J-PAL LAC office for review and approval by emailing the Research Senior Manager Edivaldo Constantino at econstantino@povertyactionlab.org. The budget must be sent for J-PAL LAC's review no later than one week before the application submission deadline. In the current cycle, budgets submitted after **7 PM on Monday, October 28** may not be reviewed for approval by J-PAL LAC. Eventually, the model indicated by PIs in the "*Declaration of Awareness and Agreement with the General Terms and Conditions of the Financial Aid Contract*" may not be the most adequate, which may only be discovered after the submission of the project for evaluation. In this case, we reserve the right to change the financial management model of the project, which must be accepted by the researcher for the project to proceed. In case of non-acceptance, the financing will not move forward.

We will work with you to make sure your award is made in a way that suits you, your project, your affiliated institution(s), and your needs for administrative support.

For more information on budget, requirements, and process, please contact

preschool.rfp@povertyactionlab.org Further information can be provided to researchers after the grant has been awarded. Please be mindful that J-PAL requires that the reviewing IRB have IRB Organization (IORG) status with the US Office of Human Protections. [You can look up the IORG status of an IRB here.](#)

Code of Conduct

Since J-PAL is part of MIT, everyone who is associated with J-PAL, including all researchers worldwide affiliated with J-PAL (affiliates and invited researchers), as well as all co-authors on J-PAL funded or implemented studies are considered part of the broader MIT community. It is therefore our hope and expectation that they will adhere to the [MIT code of conduct](#), as well as the [J-PAL code of conduct](#). MIT's section titled "Relations and Responsibilities Within the MIT Community" contains specific provisions regarding personal conduct, harassment, discrimination and retaliation, violence against community members, and substance use. Please take some time to review these.

Because almost all researchers we work with are also part of other university communities, they may also be subject to their host universities' policies and procedures. Many of these policies may be very similar to the MIT policies above. In parallel, all proposals governed under this Call of Proposals must comply with [Insper's Code of Ethics in Research](#). Finally, many researchers are separately affiliated with other academic associations and organizations, including the American Economic Association, and they should continue to abide by the codes of conduct established by the associations and organizations to which they belong. The AEA's code of conduct is available [here](#).

We continue to encourage all staff and researchers to have a direct and open dialogue with each other if they have concerns about interactions between researchers, staff, or partners on any of the above issues, or about any aspect of a research project (e.g., adherence to minimum must dos, IRB protocols, or finance/operation rules). But if staff do not feel comfortable holding such discussions, or if the concern cannot be resolved at this level, they can reach out to the individuals and offices identified in the relevant policies linked above.

Violations of MIT community guidelines or of J-PAL research/operations rules can also be directly reported to any of the J-PAL contacts for further action: (i) Global Executive Director; (ii) any of the regional Executive Directors; (iii) [Cindy Smith](#) (Global Director of Finance and Operations); or (iv) [Anna Omura](#) (Global Senior Manager of Finance and Operations).

LINKS TO ALL RFP MATERIALS

The overall research agenda, as well as all submission templates and reference documents that make up the overall RFP package, are all available at <https://www.povertyactionlab.org/page/strengthening-learning-and-child-development-brazilian-preschools-request-proposals>

OTHER FAQs

For questions on RFP priorities, application and review processes, eligibility, and general inquiries, please reach out to preschool.rfp@povertyactionlab.org, or visit the [project website](#).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project is a partnership between J-PAL LAC, Fundação Bracell, and Insper.

The team would like to thank its partners for their participation in strengthening and fostering rigorous research of preschool education in Brazil.