MEL
MOROCCO INNOVATION AND EVALUATION LAB

A collaboration between

UM6P University Mohammed VI Polytechnic

J-PAL ABDUL LATIF JAMEEL POVERTY ACTION LAB

HARVARD CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Founding partner

Community Jameel

MEL: Proposal Evaluation Criteria

The proposal review process has been designed to ensure that all funded projects are methodologically sound and will be capable of identifying or laying the ground to rigorously identify the causal impact of an intervention as isolated from other confounding factors. A two-level review process is used by MEL to assess the quality and appropriateness of early-stage randomized impact evaluation proposals. The first level of review is carried out by subject matter expert(s) from a designated roster of researchers for peer review. This/These expert(s) will be selected by the MEL Scientific Directors to decide whether the proposals are relevant to MEL's research agenda and pass the academic quality bar to fund. The second level of review is carried out by MEL's Review Board, which is composed of one representative from UM6P, the two MEL Scientific Directors, and the MEL Director. The Review Board role is to assess proposals from a portfolio perspective against MEL's research agenda, value for money, learning potential, sustainability, and policy relevance.

Reviewers will score each proposal by the criteria listed in the tables below using a ranking system from 1 (very poor) to 5 (excellent) and will provide a 1-2 sentence justification for each score. To be funded, the proposal must be practically feasible. **Low scores on the logistical viability criterion may prevent projects from being funded regardless of scores on other dimensions.**

Supplementing these main scoring criteria, reviewers will mark "Yes" or "No" for particular questions shown below. This mechanism enables reviewers to indicate any lack of confidence in a proposal's ability to achieve a critical objective, ensuring informed decision-making. **Receiving a "No" may prevent funding or may require the Board to request clarifications or confirmations on related points before making a final decision.**

During the review process, applicants may be contacted by the MEL Staff, on behalf of the Peer Reviewers and Review Board, for more detailed information on the proposal. Requests for more information can relate to any part of the proposal.

After review, all proposals will be categorized as either: (1) unconditionally approved; (2) conditionally approved, subject to minor revisions or clarifications; (3) request to revise and resubmit; or (4) rejected.

Please note:

- **Researchers who have previously received funding from J-PAL and are more than one month late on any reports to any J-PAL initiative or lab will not be eligible for consideration for funding and may be ineligible for funding across J-PAL initiatives.** In such cases, researchers are still able to submit proposals to initiatives but note that the proposal will not be submitted for review until all reporting requirements on previous awards are up to date.

- Researchers who have previously submitted a similar proposal (one that asks the same or a similar research question with the same or a similar research team) may be subject to a different review process. This may mean, but is not limited to, not being reviewed by the Board. If you have applied for funding from another J-PAL source, please disclose this in

your cover sheet.

Evaluation Criteria for the Peer Reviewers

Logistical Viability (scored out of 5)	Does the proposal convincingly address economic, logistical, political, or any other relevant obstacles and risks that might threaten the completion of the study (for example, realistic implementation capacity, active conflict or instability, government authorization, or other necessary funding)?
(Yes/No)	Are you convinced that all partners involved in the project are appropriate and the relationship is likely to endure through the entire study? **Help text**: Consider whether letters of support are compelling, and/or there is evidence of buy-in (e.g. cost-sharing) from all involved partners.

Technical Merit and Innovation (scored out of 5)	Is the research plan well-articulated and clearly structured, providing the research team with the necessary foundation to potentially run a pilot and effectively scale it into a full-scale randomized impact evaluation in the future? **Help text:** • Does the proposal clearly identify potential challenges to implementing a future randomized impact evaluation, such as feasibility constraints, ethical considerations, or threats to compliance and randomization? • Does the study aim to test key assumptions necessary for a future impact evaluation, such as take-up rates, intervention fidelity, or measurement reliability? • Will the proposed research provide actionable insights to refine the evaluation design, including informing sample size, outcome measurement strategies, and the selection of appropriate randomization methods? • Is there academic relevance? For example, does it answer new and more challenging questions, or introduce novel methods, measures, or interventions?

Appropriateness (scored out of 5)	How strongly does the proposal relate to MEL's key themes and research gaps? Does the proposal clearly discuss substantive contributions to specific Moroccan priority questions and themes?
(Yes/No)	Is there compelling evidence and discussion provided suggesting that the proposed pilot intervention(s) are appropriate for the setting and target population? And has the proposal established a plausible link between the proposed pilot intervention and the hypothesized channel for impact? Is the proposed pilot intervention likely to be cost effective when implemented at scale? **Help text:** • Is it clear that the population targeted by the intervention suffers from market-related barriers? • If testing a technology, are increases in productivity and profitability validated by scientific evidence? If so, for whom is the technology profitable? • Does the proposed pilot account for potential behavioral changes, negative externalities or unanticipated effects that may offset hypothesized welfare gains? • Is the strategy or intervention likely to be cost-effective (i.e. what is the potential impact on welfare per dollar of the intervention once at scaled, and will this be measured accurately)? Does this intervention appear promising (i.e. worth testing the impacts, and possible to conceive of scaling) when compared with other potential or existing solutions?
Implications on Equity and Social Inclusion (scored out of 5)	Does the proposal comment on whether the research addresses equity or social inclusion, in any way? Topics of social inclusion include, but are not limited to, gender, income level, location, ethnicity, race, language, citizenship status, disability, and at the intersection of those factors. **Help text:** • Does the proposal explain well whether and how the pilot design allows us to learn about baseline differences between and differential impacts on groups mentioned above? • Does the proposal explain well what reasons (if any) there are to expect that the intervention(s) studied may have disproportionate benefits for disadvantaged groups?

Policy Relevance, "Pathways to Impact" (scored out of 5)	Has the proposal convincingly argued the importance of the evidence gap for policy? And is it likely that the study will engage and provide valuable information to stakeholders to affect change at scale? **Help text:** • Does the proposal instill confidence in the researchers' commitment to the timely sharing of interim outputs and final piloting results? And does it identify explicit "end-users" including, but not limited to, their implementation partners? • Is there potential for the study to answer questions relevant for other policymakers and practitioners beyond the implementing partner? (e.g. will the results speak to commonly used approaches?). • Innovations and programs evaluated should have the potential to speak to a scalable policy.

Do you recommend for funding? (scored out of 5)	Do you recommend this proposal for funding, given your overall review, and particularly your assessment of its "value for money?"

Evaluation Criteria for the Review Board

Appropriateness (scored out of 5)	How strongly does the proposal relate to MEL's key themes and research gaps? Does the proposal clearly discuss substantive contributions to specific Moroccan priority questions and themes?
(Yes/No)	Is there compelling evidence and discussion provided suggesting that the proposed pilot intervention(s) are appropriate for the setting and target population? And has the proposal established a plausible link between the proposed pilot intervention and the hypothesized channel for impact? Is the proposed pilot intervention likely to be cost effective when implemented at scale? **Help text:** • Is it clear that the population targeted by the intervention suffers from market-related barriers? • If testing a technology, are increases in productivity and profitability validated by scientific evidence? If so, for whom is the technology profitable?

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