HORIZON NETWORKS

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

Education and Learning Variability Between Ages 2-12

CIFAR

THE NEXT LEAP STARTS **HERE**

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The Jacobs Foundation and CIFAR invite the Jacobs Fellowship alumni community to submit proposals under the broad theme of Education and Learning Variability for a Horizon Network. This call for Horizon Networks - a joint initiative of CIFAR and the Jacobs Foundation - replaces the former Creating Impact Science Program (CRISP) for Jacobs Research Fellowship alumni.

This call seeks bold, forward-looking research proposals that explore ways to create a global, multidisciplinary research community and catalyze debate and action among researchers, policymakers, and educators to improve children's learning and development.

Learning and development are shaped by a wide range of interacting sources of variability, many of which remain poorly understood. This call for proposals invites international and interdisciplinary research networks to uncover new areas of inquiry that advance foundational understanding of learning variability across childhood ages 2-12, while laying the groundwork for broader educational and societal impact. By convening researchers across disciplines, contexts, and methodological traditions, we seek to catalyze collaborative research that opens new conceptual and empirical pathways, strengthens the evidence base, and advances understanding of how evidence can more effectively inform decision-making in learning systems worldwide.

Despite significant advances in fundamental research, intrinsic limitations continue to constrain the generation of scalable evidence capable of capturing highly variable and individualized learning trajectories – particularly without relinquishing the benchmarks and accountability structures required for policy and public investment. The central challenge is no longer to demonstrate that children learn differently; rather, it is to bridge the widening gap between increasingly sophisticated, data-driven insights into learning variability and the education systems, policies, and institutional structures that shape children's learning and development.

We invite proposals that move beyond documenting heterogeneity to actively translating foundational discoveries into transformative applications. We are particularly interested in network proposals that connect cutting-edge research with the redesign, implementation, or scaling of practices, tools, and policies capable of reshaping learning systems worldwide. Successful proposals will articulate a clear pathway from fundamental insight to systemic impact – demonstrating how advances in science can inform decision-making, influence practice, and enable more adaptive, equitable, and evidence-responsive learning environments at scale.

Networks may explore the following questions:

- How do individual differences and contextual conditions jointly influence learning processes, developmental pathways, and educational outcomes across childhood and adolescence?
- How can we design interventions that reduce growing inequalities in children's learning?
- Which school-level learning approaches, environments, and experiences are effective in improving learning outcomes in heterogeneous student groups?
- How can education systems respond to learner variability at scale to improve learning and development?
- How can research outcomes better inform policy and practice, along with improved generation, communication, and uptake of evidence?
- What kind of institutional conditions and evidence ecosystems need to be in place so that research outcomes can be efficiently translated into direct application in classrooms, programs, and broader education systems?

We are looking for interdisciplinary, innovative proposals that:

- Focuses on children within the age range 2-12 (i.e., compulsory primary school years)
- Designs interventions that can be deployed at scale across multiple settings.
- Values participatory and co-designed approaches with educators, policymakers, civil society groups, or other non-academic partners where appropriate.
- Explores mechanisms that link research insights to practice and policy, where relevant to the proposed theme.

Horizon Network Structure

Horizon Networks will bring together alumni of the Jacobs Research Fellowship and current fellows with other early to mid-career researchers to co-lead an ambitious, interdisciplinary research network along with a small team of trainees. Together, they will explore frontier research questions around learning variability that have the potential to open new fields of inquiry, challenge disciplinary boundaries, and generate insights with global relevance.

Each Network will be co-led by **two Jacobs Research Fellowship alumni (mandatory co-leads)** and will include **two additional Jacobs Research Fellowship alumni or current fellows as core members (for a total of four Jacobs Research Fellowship alumni or current fellows per Network)**, along with additional early- to mid-career faculty members from across a diverse set of institutions and geographies.

The Network will meet twice a year for three years to explore frontier research questions around learning

variability that have the potential to open new fields of inquiry, challenge disciplinary boundaries, and generate insights with global relevance.
Networks will be encouraged to bring in thought leaders from outside academia to participate in exploratory discussions as strategic advisors.

Selection Criteria and Eligibility

Proposals should:

- Be co-led by two Jacobs Research Fellowship Alumni or Fellows nearing the end of their active fellowship term, both from different disciplines with the ability to build and lead an interdisciplinary network that outlines a roadmap for the future of research in a new area of inquiry
- Include an additional two JRF alumni or current fellows as members of the core team
- Be oriented around interdisciplinary ideas around learning variability
- Have no more than 30% of their proposed team from a single country and no more than 2 members from a single institution

The following criteria are considered in the selection process:

Transformative Research Potential

Proposals should clearly demonstrate their relevance to the call, including their connection to the theme of learning variability. They must articulate the unique or novel aspects of the proposed research and highlight its potential for translation and application. **Where relevant, proposals should also consider how their research will contribute to improving the generation, communication, or uptake of evidence in learning systems.** We especially encourage proposals that involve high-risk, high-reward ideas, and can benefit significantly from an international, collaborative, and interdisciplinary approach.

Interdisciplinary Research Team

Proposals should elaborate on the need for an international and interdisciplinary approach to tackle the identified question or theme. Applications require four researchers across a variety of related disciplines to form the core team. Two of these members will be mid-career researchers and alumni or fellows of the Jacobs Research Fellowship who will also act as co-leads of the network. We strongly encourage teams that reflect a high degree of diversity across career stages, disciplines, and personal or professional backgrounds.
Excellence of Research Team

The proposal should emphasize the overall excellence of the core research team and provide a thoughtful rationale for how this group will be expanded to best address the proposed theme or question. Proposed members should reflect the necessary interdisciplinarity required to address the research challenges. Applicants are encouraged to detail what additional perspectives are required, and a plan for including diverse voices in the workshop.

Timeline

- Application: **March 2026**
- Selection: **April** to **June 2026**
- Launch: **July 2026**
- End of term: **June 2029**