

Amsterdam, 10 June 2025

CALL FOR PROPOSALS No. RD 5/06-2024

IEA Research and Development Funds

Open Call for Research Proposals due 15 September 2025

1. Introduction and objectives

Starting in 2021, the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) invited proposals for research and development to advance and improve the science and methodology of IEA studies, ensuring that they remain at the forefront of international large-scale assessments (ILSAs) in education. The aim of the IEA Research and Development (R&D) Funds relates to IEA's mission to advance research and innovation. Funding is drawn primarily from an overhead on participation fees across IEA studies.

The R&D program aims to address a wide range of topics relevant for IEA studies since 2021. This 2025 Call for Proposals is thematically open. To provide examples of potential topics, some topics and themes of current interest for IEA studies are highlighted for consideration in section 3. Proposals should be clear about the ways in which they aim to contribute to and improve IEA studies and the work of IEA.

The funding is not intended to fund substantial, policy-related, or general secondary studies and analyses. Please refer to <https://www.iea.nl/about/opportunities/rdfund> for details about the R&D funds, past calls, topics, and awardees, and <https://www.iea.nl/> for other opportunities.

2. Eligibility and funding tiers

IEA R&D Calls for Proposals are open to i) researchers external to IEA (e.g., individuals or those associated with a university or survey organization) regardless of their current involvement in IEA studies, ii) staff and experts from study centers for IEA studies, and iii) IEA staff. The program welcomes proposals from all groups, and award selection will be based on proposal merit only.

The level of funding is generally based on the proposed project's needs and will fall into either:

- tier 1: projects up to 55,000 EUR/USD; or
- tier 2: projects between 55,000 and 110,000 EUR/USD.

Proposals are accepted for both funding tiers, and the tier must be indicated in the application. While proposals at tier 2 are likely to provide more depth, proposals at tier 1 are more likely to translate into more varied and timely insights for IEA. Tier 1 proposals can also benefit a larger number of applicants and are hence encouraged.

Proposals must identify a lead researcher. A lead researcher may not submit more than one application for a given funding call and may only hold one active project from the fund as the lead researcher. This restriction does not apply to any administering organizations, which may submit multiple proposals if they are for different projects and have different lead researchers.

All projects covered by the IEA R&D funds must:

- be based on rigorous, intellectually ambitious, and technically sound research that is relevant to the most pressing questions and opportunities in IEA's work on ILSAs;
- be clearly related to methods and approaches that IEA uses in one or more of its studies, or related to those methods and approaches that would, in a forward-looking way, have the potential to significantly improve IEA's work in the future;
- propose specific approaches, innovations, and methods with a tangible outcome or recommendation that adds value to IEA studies and can be used within the work of IEA immediately or in the future; and
- ensure the proposed approaches can be realistically implemented and are clearly tied to the actual needs identified within the proposal; and
- must not be duplicative of work already ongoing at IEA (if unsure, applicants can reach out to the fund managers).

Please note that proposals that fail to meet these criteria will not be considered.

IEA R&D projects should relate to the four major strands of the *IEA Technical Standards for International Large-Scale Assessment* (Martin et al., 1999; Martin et al., forthcoming), noting that topics can cut across many or all of them:

- designing, managing, and implementing IEA studies;
- developing data collection instruments;
- data collection and processing; and
- analyzing data and reporting results.

3. Thematic direction and possible topics

This fifth Call for Proposals is open, i.e., proposals are field-initiated and not related to a predefined topic, theme, design, or method, and the choice is up to the proposing researcher(s). This provides an incentive to the research community to recommend changes, innovations, and improvements to IEA, based on the applicant's observation of IEA studies' designs and methodologies.

Current debates and interests for IEA include, but are certainly not limited to, the following areas, to be read as inspiration:

- accommodating diversity by making assessments and questionnaires more accessible (e.g., for students with special educational needs) or better targeting them to the contexts of low- and middle-income countries;
- comparability of assessments across cycles (e.g., assessment platform comparability, bridging of materials with different representations over time);
- systematic conceptualization of log and process data use from computer-based assessments and surveys that adds value for policy and practice;
- dealing with bias and non-response (e.g., sources of sampling bias, attrition in longitudinal studies, use of replacement units, weighting methodologies);
- application of machine learning, large language models, and artificial intelligence to the methods, procedures, and analysis of IEA studies;
- questionnaire design and innovative question formats; and
- data visualization and communication of results (e.g., clear communication of results and reducing a simplistic focus on league tables).

Topics may relate to a specific area or study phase or cut across several of them. IEA typically understands the lifecycle of its studies to include 10 key phases: (1) defining policy goals and research questions; (2) developing assessment, conceptual, and contextual frameworks; (3) sample design and selection; (4) developing and piloting assessments and questionnaires; (5) translation and verification; (6) field operations and data collection; (7) quality observations; (8) data management and cleaning; (9) scaling and analyses; and (10) reporting and dissemination/communication.

A non-comprehensive set of sources on these advances and possible topics for this call include:

- Rutkowski, von Davier, and Rutkowski (2013), who brought together recognized scholars in the field of large-scale assessment to describe technological and statistical advances;
- Bennet (2018), who describes the possible future of educational assessment, including what is likely to change and what is unlikely to do so;
- Johnson, Pennell, Stoop, and Dorer (2018), who collate and illustrate advances across various areas of social science research in cross-cultural settings;
- Harju-Luukkainen, McElvany, and Stang (2020), who provide a cross-national perspective of challenges in international and national student assessments as well as strategies and recommendations for further development.
- Nilsen, Stancel-Piątak, and Gustafsson (2022), who have collated overviews and current developments in education across a range of ILSAs;
- Yaneva and von Davier (2023), who take a look at automated scoring, item development, and validity and fairness using natural language processing in assessment;
- And, specific to the IEA context, Wagemaker (2020) provides an overview of key validity, reliability, and comparability considerations and advances for contemporary IEA studies.

Applicants are also strongly recommended to consult international and technical reports for IEA studies, related materials, and publications, as well as substantial and methodological contributions to the field in the *Large-scale Assessments in Education* journal¹.

Proposals that use data and/or insights from multiple countries and those that have relevance for a larger range of countries and/or across multiple IEA studies are preferred.

Proposals can also be related to other quality frameworks, including the *total survey error* paradigm (Biemer et al., 2017) or the *Cross-cultural Survey Guidelines* (CCSG; Survey Research Center, 2016), i.e., those covering major aspects across the full lifecycle of international surveys and assessments. Information on funded projects from the three previous calls can be found on the IEA website at <https://www.iea.nl/about/opportunities/rdfund>.

4. Evaluation process and criteria

The review process will consist of a single-blind review approach. The identity of the applicant(s) will be known to the reviewer(s), but not vice versa. A minimum of two reviewers, typically one from IEA's staff and one from the wider network of experts, will be assigned to each proposal based on their methodological and/or subject matter expertise. Internally authored IEA proposals will only be sent to external reviewers. In cases of conflicting/pronounced differences in scoring, a third reviewer may be involved at IEA's discretion.

At all stages, those with conflicts of interest regarding a particular proposal will be excused from both the review process as well as subsequent award decisions.

¹ See <https://largescaleassessmentsineducation.springeropen.com/>.

Following an initial screening for eligibility (see Section 2 above), reviewers will evaluate all in-scope proposals for scientific quality and originality using the following set of criteria.

- **Theoretical background:** accurate and comprehensive understanding of (existing) theories, concepts, definitions, and existing scholarly literature with clear reference to their relevance, appropriateness, and explanatory power.
- **Research design:** systematic and well-articulated strategy for implementing the proposal's aims and answering research questions through rigorous and ambitious methods, analytical approaches, interpretation, and outputs.
- **Innovation and creativity:** extent to which the proposal or its approaches, methodologies, or technologies are either entirely novel, adopted from another discipline, or adapted from an existing approach in a new way, along with a clear rationale on how a new approach might overcome existing limitations.
- **Potential impact:** extent to which a proposed approach, methodology, or technology can benefit IEA studies (and additionally the field at large) and lead to a real change or improvement, e.g., an added value, efficiency gain, or a reduction in total survey error.
- **Significance/relevance for IEA:** extent to which the outcomes and outputs can feasibly be implemented and (readily) result in tangible changes, innovations, and improvements for specific, multiple, or all IEA studies.
- **Adequacy of budget:** sufficiency of the overall budget and its components for the proposal aims relative to the proposal's scope (neither abundance nor underfunding) as well as a clear balance of staff costs, direct costs, and any overheads.
- **Appropriateness of timeline:** extent to which the timeline is realistic and clearly specifies how the proposal's aims and specific phases fit into an overall timeline, highlighting in particular the reliability of activities that are more open in terms of outcomes or entail a higher risk of delay (e.g., given external cooperation).
- **Team qualification:** (scholarly) expertise and experience of the lead researcher and team members as well as clear task sharing, communication, and leadership to assure transparency, reliability, and flexibility as appropriate for the proposal.

Each criterion will be rated on the following score scale:

- **0 – Insufficient:** the proposal fails to address the criterion or cannot be assessed due to missing or incomplete information.
- **1 – Poor:** the criterion is inadequately addressed or there are serious inherent weaknesses.
- **2 – Fair:** the proposal broadly addresses the criterion, but there are significant weaknesses.
- **3 – Good:** the proposal addresses the criterion well, but a number of shortcomings are present.
- **4 – Very good:** the proposal addresses the criterion very well, but a small number of shortcomings are present.
- **5 – Outstanding:** the proposal successfully and comprehensively addresses the criterion. Shortcomings, if any, are minor.

Proposals will be reviewed, and any requests for clarification made, within about a two-month period following the submission deadline.

The R&D Funds administrators will formulate recommendations based on the merit and transactional value of the reviewed proposals for IEA and submit those to the IEA Standing Committee, which will decide on the projects to fund, followed by award notification (or rejection).

5. Terms and Conditions

Successful applicants will conclude a research agreement with IEA where the proposal constitutes the statement of work, with an opportunity for refinement based on reviewer feedback.

The research agreement will set out the framework for the funding and its terms and conditions, particularly concerning deliverables, such as progress reports, and payments. In addition, the research agreement will set the start and end day of the agreement, as well as specify grounds for termination of the agreement. The contractor will be asked to commit to confidentiality and data protection. The research agreement will also regulate intellectual property rights.

Please note that if any new intellectual property is generated as part of the work, this shall be vested in IEA but include an appropriate return license. Please note that this condition is non-negotiable.

The final research agreement must specify details about the type of product(s)/output(s) as well as the conditions for review and public sharing in the statement of work, noting that IEA is generally committed to the principle of open access/science and expects all publications to be open. As such, applicants are encouraged to include fees for publishing in open access journals in the project budget.

In addition, awardees should clearly specify the type of product(s)/output(s) expected in their proposal, considering the following as a guideline. For research that will be of interest to the broader research community, awardees may elect to publish results in a peer-reviewed journal. In addition to this, IEA would request a separate report to be published on the IEA website as grey literature focusing on how the research supports IEA, so including or augmenting a journal article and linking to it as applicable. This different structure and conception allow for alignment of interests while respecting the varying guidelines and processes of external publishers. While the timeline for the execution of the project itself and its deliverables will be fixed in the agreement, there will be some latitude on how outputs will be made available to the general public, e.g., to allow for sufficient time to publish the research in a journal prior to being placed on the IEA website.

In some cases, the awardees and IEA may choose to produce an internal research report that remains confidential to IEA and authors. For example, this might be applicable for IEA study centers that develop new procedures that should remain protected.

Successful proposals, provided that a research agreement is in place by that time, will be announced to IEA members, followed by public announcements on IEA's website and social media.

At IEA's discretion, rejected proposals might be invited for resubmission or can be resubmitted by the lead researcher(s) for subsequent calls, provided that substantial concerns and feedback are addressed in the revised proposal. On request, the reviewers' comments on the proposal will be provided.

IEA reserves the right to accept or reject any or all proposals. In particular, IEA reserves the right to reject proposals from an applicant who, in the opinion of IEA, has previously failed to perform properly, failed to complete work on time, or is not in a position to perform the work.

No applicant shall have any claim for any compensation of any kind whatsoever as a result of participating in this Call, and by submitting a proposal, each applicant agrees that they have no claim.

6. Guidelines for submission

There is no requirement to submit a letter of intent. There is no requirement to separate technical and financial proposals. The process starts with a full proposal, which must be submitted in English

and electronically via the third-party management system used by IEA (see link below). This requires the applicant to register on the platform and accept the respective data privacy policies.

Required proposal information includes:

- Summary (up to 500 words)
- Theoretical background, research design, and possible impact (each up to 1,000 words)
- References (no limit)
- Timeline and milestones (concise)
- Budget, notes, and justification (concise)
- Lead researcher information (including CV) and team member bios and roles (each up to 250 words per person)
- Declaration of no conflicts of interest with respect to commercial/financial interests
- Declaration of intent and name of an authorized representative of the organization

Biographical notes on team members should highlight the relevance of the person's expertise and experience to the proposed activities.

It is important that proposals discuss the type and use of project outcomes or products envisaged (e.g., a tool, methodology, or framework). Further, proposals must clearly describe the extent to which collaboration with IEA is desired or necessary for completing the work. For example, the type and detail of non-public/confidential information/data that is required should be clearly specified so that data availability and feasibility can be evaluated during the proposal review stage.

When developing timelines, proposals should showcase a realistic timeline, with a start date no earlier than 01 February 2026. It is envisaged that most projects will be completed within three to six months (tier 1) or six to twelve months (tier 2). Starting later or extending the duration is possible but requires clear justification. Timelines should be designed to be completed prior to the end of the calendar year in the case of tier 1 projects and before the end of Q2 for tier 2 projects. Applicant timelines must include a period of approximately 8 weeks for the peer review of the final output(s) followed by revisions.

It is IEA's interest to provide reports at General Assembly meetings (typically in early October of each year) and/or IEA's biannual International Research Conference (typically in June of every other year, next occasion in 2027), when possible. Awardees could be invited to present their outcomes at the General Assembly and are encouraged to submit to the International Research Conference.

Budgets must include the expected number of working days needed to complete each activity related to the project, a daily rate, and a total budget in Euros or US dollars. Funding will be provided as a lump sum and can be used for staff (including one's own position) and direct project costs (e.g., travel, software). Indirect cost charges and institutional overheads need to be clearly described and justified and should be kept to a minimum. Applicants should also describe if and to what extent the project has previously received or will receive co-funding from other sources, including the applying organization's own funds (monetary or staff time).

Additional guidance on completing the electronic proposal form is provided on the Good Grants platform, and applicants are encouraged to register at their earliest convenience.

**All proposals must be submitted via Good Grants at
<https://ieard.grantplatform.com>
before or on Monday, 15 September 2025, 13:00 CEST.**

7. Further information

Questions may be submitted at any time to Lauren Musu and Ralph Carstens via rd@iea.nl.

An informational webinar will be hosted by IEA to present the R&D Call for Proposals and address the questions of interested researchers on Wednesday, 2 July 2025, at 15:00 CEST. Please [register your place](#).

References

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