

Amsterdam, 9 June 2026

CALL FOR PROPOSALS No. RD 6/06-2026

IEA Research and Development Funds

Due 14 September 2026

1. Aims 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. Since 2021, the R&D program aims to address a wide range of topics relevant for IEA studies with a total of 32 funded projects to date.

This 2026 Call for Proposals is thematically open. To provide examples of potential topics, some current interests 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 IEA work generally. The R&D program 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 Euros; or
- tier 2: projects between 55,000 and 110,000 Euros.

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, pragmatic, 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. Lead researchers cannot be team members on any other proposal for the same call. Team members are limited to contributing to a maximum of two proposals.

All proposals for the IEA R&D funds must:

- be based on rigorous, intellectually ambitious, and technically sound research that is relevant to important 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 and studies 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;
- 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).

IEA R&D projects should relate to the four major strands of the *Technical Standards for IEA Studies* (Martin, Fraillon, & Sibberns, 2025), noting that topics can cut across many or all of them:

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

3. Thematic Direction and Possible Topics

This 2026 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:

- questionnaire design and innovative question formats;
- improving/extending the measurement of core constructs within IEA studies;
- comparability of assessments across cycles (e.g., platform comparability, bridging of materials with different representations over time);
- improved measurement of and imputation approaches for socio-economic status;
- using technology to improve field operation procedures (e.g., data collection and quality assurance);
- 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 and *artificial intelligence* to the methods, procedures, and analysis of IEA studies;
- augmentation of collected data using external sources, e.g., administrative or EMS data;
- data visualization and communication of results; and
- tools for tracking and synthesizing secondary analysis using IEA data.

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 ten key phases: (1) defining policy goals and research questions; (2) developing assessment, conceptual, and contextual frameworks; (3) sample design, selection and weighting; (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 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>.

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.

4. Evaluation Process and Criteria

Evaluation will start with an initial screening for completeness and eligibility by the fund administrators. Proposals will be moderated at this stage, either *rejected* based on non-eligibility or a substantial defect OR *accepted* to go forward to review. Proceeding to the review stage does not guarantee or imply funding.

The review will use a single-blind approach, i.e., 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 or ISC 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

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

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. A conflict of interest is assumed if the applicant is a family member, partner, close personal relation, colleague, recent collaborator, former or current supervisor or supervisee, or where any personal, professional, or financial interest could reasonably be seen to compromise reviewers' objectivity.

Reviewers will evaluate all accepted 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 IEA funds administrators and senior management will collate review results and propose a shortlist 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) in about mid-December 2026.

5. Terms and Conditions

Awardees will conclude a research agreement² where the proposal constitutes the statement of work, with an opportunity for refinement based on reviewer feedback. The agreement will set out the framework for the funding and its terms and conditions, particularly concerning deliverables, such as progress reports and final outputs, and payments³. In addition, the research agreement will set the start and end day of the work, specify grounds for acceptance and termination related to timeliness and quality, and include terms for confidentiality and data protection. The agreement will further regulate intellectual property rights. Any new intellectual property generated as part of the work shall be vested in IEA but include a comprehensive return license to awardees.

The research agreement will specify details about the type of output(s), typically a research report, as well as the conditions for review and public sharing, noting that IEA is generally committed to the principle of open access/science and expects all publications to be open. Awardees should clearly specify the type of product(s)/output(s) expected in their proposal.

For research that will be of interest to the broader research community, awardees may elect to publish results in a peer-reviewed journal. IEA strongly encourages submissions to our open-access journal, Large-scale Assessment in Education: <https://link.springer.com/journal/40536>

In the case of a peer-reviewed journal being the main outlet for the research findings, IEA would request a separate research report to be published on the IEA website as grey literature focusing on how the research supports IEA, including or augmenting a journal article and linking to it as applicable.

For product(s)/output(s) to be published on the IEA website, IEA will commission a peer review of the draft product/output and awardees will consider any comments received in finalizing the product(s)/output(s). The peer review is non-negotiable.

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 place the research on the IEA website as a “working paper” prior to publishing in a journal.

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 publicly on IEA's website and social media.

At IEA's discretion and reviewers' recommendation, rejected proposals might be invited for resubmission or can be resubmitted by the lead researcher(s) for subsequent calls. Applicants whose

² The template agreement may be requested so applicants are aware of the terms and conditions prior to submission. Depending on the nature of the research and data used, awardees may also be required to enter into a *data processing agreement* and *standard contractual clauses* for data transfer to non-EU/EEA jurisdictions.

³ From Call 6 onwards, Euro will be the main currency for budgets and contracts. If absolutely necessary, payment in US Dollars might be negotiated using an exchange rate to be fixed on 1 June 2026.

proposals have been rejected will be provided with the primary reason for rejection and reviewers' comments to applicants if applicable.

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. IEA further reserves the right to accept proposals with non-substantial defects. IEA also reserves the right to extend the deadline for receipt of proposals, in which case the new deadline will be clearly communicated on IEA's website and the IEA Opportunities Platform as early as possible.

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 Proposal Development and 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 key information includes:

- Title
- Summary (up to 500 words)
- Theoretical background (up to 1,000 words)
- Research design (up to 1,000 words)
- Potential impact (up to 1,000 words)
- Envisaged product(s) (up to 200 words)
- Required cooperation with IEA, if applicable (up to 500 words)
- Key area(s) and words
- Short description (about 50 words)
- References (no limit)
- Timeline and milestones
- Budget, notes, and justification
- Lead researcher information, including CV
- Team member information, bios and roles, if applicable (each up to 250 words per person)
- Declaration of no conflicts of interest
- Declaration on the use of generative AI
- Declaration of agreement to research agreement terms
- Declaration of intent and name of an authorized representative of the organization

It is important that proposals discuss the type and use of project outcomes/products envisaged (e.g., a report, tool, methodology, or framework). IEA encourages the inclusion of code, datasets, and other artifacts with the output to facilitate reproducibility, to the extent possible. 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 eligibility and/or review stages.

When developing timelines, proposals should showcase a realistic timeline, with a start date no earlier than 1 February 2027. It is envisaged that most projects will be completed within six months (tier 1) or up to twelve months (tier 2). Starting later, completing earlier, 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 2027 in the case of tier 1 projects and latest by the end of March 2028 for tier 2 projects. Applicant timelines must include a period of approximately 8 weeks for the peer review of the draft output(s) followed by revisions and submitting final output(s).

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 (12th edition scheduled for 23-25 June 2027 in Bangkok, Thailand), when possible. Awardees could be invited to present their outcomes at the General Assembly at IEA's expense and are encouraged to submit to the International Research Conference.

Budgets must be prepared in Euros and include the expected number of working days needed to complete each activity and a daily rate, broken down by team member. Applicants are encouraged to include fees for publishing in open access journals in the project budget. 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).

Generative AI tools may be used for strictly limited support tasks during proposal development, such as preliminary brainstorming, researching sources, or language proofing, but may not be used to generate substantial proposal content or replace/rework the applicant's own intellectual contribution, including the theoretical background, research design, potential impact, timeline, budget, or references. Applicants remain fully responsible for the originality, accuracy, and integrity of their proposal. Any use of AI tools must be disclosed. Undisclosed or inappropriate AI use may affect the evaluation and/or result in an embargo on future funding calls.

Additional guidance on completing the electronic proposal form is provided on the IEA Opportunities platform. Applicants are encouraged to register at their earliest convenience.

**All proposals must be submitted via the
IEA Opportunities Platform (powered by Good Grants) at**

<https://iea.grantplatform.com>

by Monday, 14 September 2026, 13:00 CEST.

7. Further Information and Frequently Asked Questions

The following set of frequently asked questions may help potential applicants at an early stage.

What kinds of proposals does the IEA R&D Fund support?

The fund supports research and development that advances the methods, procedures, tools, or implementation of IEA studies and international large-scale assessments in education. Proposals should lead to a clear and tangible improvement for IEA's work.

How closely must a proposal relate to IEA's mission and work?

Closely. Proposals must show a clear connection to IEA's work in educational assessment and explain how they could improve one or more aspects of IEA studies. Proposals without a credible link to this context are unlikely to be considered.

Can methods or ideas from other fields be proposed?

Yes, provided they are clearly adapted to an identifiable need or improvement in IEA studies. Cross-disciplinary innovation is welcome, but proposals must focus on their relevance for educational large-scale assessment rather than on another field. Given misunderstandings in the past, we highlight IEA's mission in the field of education, not to be confused with the International Energy Agency with which we share the acronym.

May generative AI be used in preparing a proposal?

Yes, but only in a limited way. AI tools may be used for support tasks such as brainstorming, identifying sources, or language proofreading. Any use of AI must be disclosed. Applicants may not use AI to generate or substantially develop the core intellectual content of the proposal. Of course, the topic of the proposal can focus on LLMs, machine learning and other types of models and approaches.

Are there limits on how many proposals one person may join?

Yes. A lead researcher may submit only one proposal and may not be a team member on another proposal in the same call or hold an active award from the fund. Team members may contribute to a maximum of two proposals.

What should applicants say about outputs?

Applicants should clearly describe the expected output or product they envisage, noting IEA's interest in making the main outcomes and any accompanying materials such as datasets and code available as open access.

What should applicants say about cooperation with IEA?

Applicants should explain whether any cooperation with IEA or the study centers for its studies is needed. This includes identifying any need for non-public information, confidential materials, or data access.

What should applicants keep in mind when preparing the timeline and budget?

Timelines should be realistic, include time for peer review and revision of draft outputs, and fit the call's overall schedule. Budgets must be presented in Euros, clearly justified, and broken down in sufficient detail to show how the work will be delivered.

What makes a proposal competitive?

Strong proposals combine scientific quality with clear practical relevance for IEA. They are theoretically sound, methodologically rigorous, innovative, feasible, and explicit about the value they would add to IEA studies.

Which proposals are likely to be rejected early?

Proposals are likely to be screened out prior to formal review if they are incomplete or not fully submitted (i.e., no submission confirmation was received), out of scope by field, insufficiently related to IEA studies, duplicative of work already underway (please ask!), too broad or generic, or not realistically implementable. Policy-oriented proposals and general secondary analyses are also unlikely to be competitive given other IEA opportunities, outlets, and programs.

What are the main terms and conditions?

Successful applicants will enter into a transactional research agreement with IEA. Terms related to data protection, confidentiality, intellectual property, mandatory peer review, and termination are generally not negotiable. A template agreement can be made available on request.

What are the main changes for the 2026 Call?

The main changes for 2026 include limitations and declarations on the use of generative AI, limits on participation across proposals, budgets in Euros, and more detailed expectations for timelines, outputs, and cooperation with IEA.

I am still unsure or have a different question.

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

References

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