

## 2026 Lab Start-Up Funding Evaluation Criteria

### Problem Scale, Depth, and Urgency

1. The problem has a significant impact on society through the number of people affected, how deeply people's lives are affected, and/or having a disproportionate impact on a particularly vulnerable community. The proposal provides an estimate of the number of people affected.
2. The proposal shows an understanding of the structural factors that give rise to and impede progress on the problem.
3. There is a compelling reason why our funding is needed, e.g., the problem is becoming more urgent, is neglected compared to its costs to society, or there is a lack of solutions-focused research.

### Scientific Contribution

4. The proposal shows an understanding of the frontiers of knowledge and explains why the proposed research question(s) are novel.
5. The proposal details a well-thought-out research design that shows promise for identifying or testing a scalable solution (e.g., clear hypothesis to test, strategy for data collection and making inferences, methodology aligns with research goals, careful consideration of any ethical questions).
6. The proposal clearly articulates the role of a strong partnership in making scientific progress, including the partner(s) and/or community impacted by the social problem having a role in co-creating the potential solution.

### Potential for Impact at Scale

7. The proposal presents a compelling path toward developing and testing a solution in a real-world setting.
8. The proposal demonstrates evidence of demand for research insights. It is clear who will need to act on the knowledge generated and there is sufficient reason to believe they will act on it.
9. The proposal presents a solution(s) that will plausibly improve people's lives and provides a quantitative estimate of the solution's potential reach and impact. If there is not yet strong evidence that it will improve lives, there is a plan to generate that knowledge.
10. The proposal makes clear why the proposed solution(s) is likely better than alternative approaches.
11. The proposal lays out a viable pathway to impact at scale and/or contains a plan to explore opportunities to scale during the award period.

### Strength of Partnership

12. The partner(s) represent or have buy-in from practitioners within the field and/or the communities most impacted by the problem.
13. The partner(s) have a strong reputation in this field and are positioned to help scale proven interventions.
14. The partner(s) have the resources, capacity, and positioning to co-create and implement the proposed work. If not, grant funds or resources will be used to support or grow capacity to engage in this work.
15. The proposal demonstrates aligned goals, complementary capabilities across the research and partner teams, and that the partner organization will benefit from the collaboration.

### Leadership and Team

16. This is a sustained program of research to address the problem over multiple years, not just a research study.
17. The team and partner(s) have the expertise and staffing (proposed or already in place) needed to achieve the proposal's objectives.
18. The PI has successfully implemented major grants and/or demonstrates the skills to manage this project and budget.
19. The proposal details the role of Harvard students. We particularly encourage labs to engage undergraduates in their work.