

Protocol for selecting Early Childhood Development Innovations in Latin America and the Caribbean

This document describes the protocol used to identify and select innovative Early Childhood Development (ECD) projects in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC).

Projects are evaluated on the basis of three components: The first component refers to the project's relevance to the region's ECD challenges; the second component, to innovative approaches to tackle the ECD challenge (e.g., use of new methods, including but not limited to technological advances); the third component looks into the potential to scale and evaluate the project (implementation practices, monitoring and evaluation) in accordance with its degree of progress. For a project to be considered innovative, it should include at least one relevant component, one innovation component, and one scalability and evaluation component.

Protocol Structure

The protocol has been organized in the following manner: the first part describes the identification of the main sources used to define the set of projects to be evaluated. The second part contains the criteria used to evaluate and chose the projects included in this selection.

Sources tapped to build the set of interventions

A set of interventions is a database containing ECD projects in LAC that helps identify innovations. The following sources were tapped to build this database:

1. Organizations and projects singled out by institutions that implement, finance, monitor and evaluate innovations in LAC¹.
2. Associated organizations as well as projects implemented by academic institutions such as: Center on the Developing Child – Harvard University; Center for Health Policy and Inequality Research – Duke University; Child Development and Learning – University of Oxford; University of the West Indies – Jamaica; National Institute for Early Education Research, among others.
3. Organizations and outstanding projects in LAC's ECD networks such as: ECDAN – Early Childhood Development Action Network; Early Childhood Peace Consortium; Early Years – The International Networking Group on Peace Building with Young Children; Early Childhood Workforce Initiative, among others.
4. Multilateral organizations.
5. IDB resources. Interaction and work with countries and their governments, publications about innovations in the region, projects and Centers who have won the ALAS BID Award for excellence on child development.

¹ SUMMA, Center on the Developing Child, OpenIDEO, The Early Learning Lab, Children's Investment Fund Foundation, Center for Education Innovations of R4D, Brookings, among others.

Selection Criteria

Innovations were evaluated on the basis of three components: (i) the project's relevance to the region's ECD challenges; (ii) its innovative approach to tackle the ECD challenge; and (iii) its potential to scale and assess the project in accordance with its degree of progress. For a project to be considered innovative, it should include at least one relevant component, one innovation component, and one scalability and evaluation component.

Relevance Component

A project tackles a relevant ECD problem in LAC if it meets any of the following criteria:

1. It serves a population segment that was traditionally neglected (e.g., migrants, abandoned or institutionalized children, children exposed to violence, the elderly, among others).
2. It improves centers service quality. This may refer to structural quality (for example, improvements in infrastructure, number of students per caregiver, educational level of the caregiver), or process quality (for example, quality and relevance of teaching material, training, and remuneration of caretakers).
3. It increases household service quality or frequency.
4. It fosters caregiver's development and strengthens caregiver-child ties.
5. It boosts ECD workforce quality and conditions.
6. It promotes, enables, or contemplates integration of existing services or platforms.
7. It promotes, enables, or evaluates existing programs at-scale.
8. It improves the quality of an existing intervention at scale.
9. It measures or evaluates the mid- and long-term effects of programs that were successful in the short-term.
10. It strengthens knowledge generation and diffusion for an efficient management of ECD public policies.

Innovating Component:

Innovating programs in the region must meet the following lines of action: (i) improve centers' service quality; (ii) be integrated with existing health, education, nutrition, and social protection interventions; (iii) knowledge generation and dissemination; (iv) strengthening of regional ECD networks; (v) at-scale services; (vi) better working quality and conditions for the workforce.

A project is considered innovative when it tackles problems following some of these premises:

1. It adapts solutions, tools, or successful practices to a new context (a new context might be a new community, or the evaluation of a given phenomenon's long-term effects).
2. It offers an improved version of an existing program (for example, to service a segment of the population not traditionally served by these programs, or to scale up the program).
3. It presents improved measurement practices and protocols.
4. It presents new measurement, monitoring, implementation, or data generation tools, for example involving the community or potential users in the project design/implementation.
5. Provides new services.

Scalability and Evaluation Component

Literature on ECD innovations has stressed the importance of promoting projects that have the ability to scale up and be evaluated. However, a large proportion of the projects to be classified do not have enough information available about costs or about monitoring and evaluation practices and protocols. Given these limitations, this component seeks to gauge a project's scalability and evaluation *potential*.

In order to define these criteria, a review was conducted of academic articles such as The Lancet's Series on Early Childhood Development (2016);² the Special 2018 Series of the Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences;³ Milner, et al. (2019a);⁴ and Milner, et al. (2019b)⁵. The latter examine the project's teachings and provide lessons to determine the innovative potential of other projects implemented in the region⁶.

A project meets the scalability and evaluation criteria depending on the phase it is in:

Projects in the initial phase need to:

1. Have the potential to be integrated to existing services or platforms
2. Have the potential to be evaluated (they describe the sample, monitoring practices, data collection and measurement, and evaluation protocols)
3. Be able to be implemented with public resources

Projects in the intermediate phase need to:

1. Be sustainable over time
2. Have the capacity to be integrated to existing services/platforms
3. Present promising preliminary results (they describe the sample, monitoring practices, data collection and measurement, and evaluation protocols)

Projects in the advance phase need to:

1. Have evaluation results that can be extrapolated to other contexts
2. Have evaluation results that can be observed through time

² Richter, Linda M. et al. 2017. (2017). Advancing Early Childhood Development: from Science to Scale 3 Investing in the foundation of sustainable development: pathways to scale up for early childhood development. *The Lancet*, 389(10064), 103-118.

³ Yousafzai A, Aboud F, Nores M, et al. 2018. Special Issue: Implementation Research and Practice for Early Childhood Development. In: *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*.

⁴ Milner, Kate M. et al. 2019a. "Contextual Design Choices and Partnerships for Scaling Early Childhood Development Programmes." *Archives of Disease in Childhood* 104(Suppl 1): S3-12.

⁵ Milner, Kate M. et al. 2019b. "Counting Outcomes, Coverage and Quality for Early Childhood Development Programmes." *Archives of Disease in Childhood* 104(Suppl 1): S13-21.

⁶ Special emphasis is being placed in the early measurement of primary (e.g., cognitive development) and secondary (e.g., caregiver-child bond) objectives that can help monitor project progress and adapt it swiftly, as well as in the importance of monitoring systems and the use of technologies (such as cellphones) to connect beneficiaries with suppliers and supervisors. Also, of relevance is the role of existing education, health, and nutrition services to scale ECD interventions at low cost.