

LEAP KEY LEARNINGS REPORT

Three Years of Evidence-to-Practice
Innovation

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over three years, the Jacobs Foundation and MIT Solve partnered through the Leveraging Evidence for Action to Promote Change (LEAP) initiative to pilot and launch a new model for connecting research and practice in education. Through LEAP, teams of researchers and social entrepreneurs collaborated with education organizations in 12-week project sprints to strengthen the use of evidence in their solutions. Between 2022 and 2025, LEAP engaged more than 50 Fellows and 30 organizations worldwide, generating a rich set of lessons for the field.

THE LEAP MODEL AT A GLANCE

Each 12-week engagement paired one Project Host with a team of four Fellows—two researchers and two social entrepreneurs—who worked together to design or refine monitoring, evaluation, and learning tools. The sprints were facilitated by Solve, who managed the collaborations from selecting hosts and Fellows through team matchmaking and deliverable creation. Each project concluded with a report for the host organization that was also shared publicly as a resource for the broader education field.



KEY FINDINGS

- **Evidence capacity can be built through short, structured engagements.**

LEAP demonstrated that even brief, time-bound collaborations can produce meaningful advances in evidence use among education startups and nonprofits. The 12-week sprint format gave organizations the structure and momentum needed to strengthen their research orientation and know-how.

- **Cross-sector teams drive results but the collaboration requires intentional design.**

Combining researchers and outside social entrepreneurs brought a unique balance of academic rigor and practicality. However, success depended on clear role definition and thoughtful matchmaking between Fellows and Project Hosts.

- **Continuous improvement depends on feedback and iteration.**

LEAP evolved through consistent participant input and iteration to the model's design between sprints and program cycles. Shifting from constant oversight by Solve to milestone-based check-ins, paired with regular feedback, fostered greater ownership and accountability among teams.

- **Shared tools accelerate alignment and learning.**

Using tools and frameworks to assess readiness before each sprint enabled teams to assess their evidence culture early, clarify goals, and start each sprint with a common understanding of what success would look like.

WHY IT MATTERS

LEAP's experience demonstrates how well-designed, time-bound collaborations can make evidence generation more practical, feasible, and responsive to the needs of education innovators. By integrating research and entrepreneurial perspectives, the program showed that meaningful evidence work does not require long timelines or large budgets. Successful short-term collaborations can be achieved through attention to structure, shared understanding, and iteration. The Jacobs Foundation and Solve share these insights as a contribution to the field, inviting funders, practitioners, and researchers to build on this model and strengthen collective efforts to turn evidence into action for learners worldwide.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Leveraging Evidence for Action to Promote Change (LEAP) was an initiative by the Jacobs Foundation and Solve that brought together researchers, social entrepreneurs, and education ventures to advance evidence-based education solutions that help children thrive. Originally conceived as an engagement opportunity for Jacobs Foundation Research and Social Entrepreneur Fellows to support internal research projects at the Foundation, the program shifted externally with the idea that this form of cross-sector support could be instrumental in serving education organizations – especially those with high-potential solutions but limited resources to ground their interventions in evidence.

Launched as a global initiative with an open call in 2022, LEAP set out to bridge the gap between researchers and on-the-ground education entrepreneurs, in some cases serving to strengthen existing research practices and in others to jump start an organizational shift to focusing on evidence. At the time of LEAP’s launch, pro bono research and consulting specifically about the role of evidence were and remain rare forms of support for entrepreneurs. Prize funds and grants are often spent on the most immediate needs, and even where there is recognition that evidence is an important component of effectiveness, access to qualified experts can be an additional hurdle.

Drawing on these early insights, LEAP was structured around several core components that shaped how teams collaborated and delivered evidence-focused support. Based on learnings from pilots within Jacobs Foundation and Solve networks, LEAP was designed with the following elements:

- **12-week sprint:** Each cycle consisted of two 12-week sprints where education organizations (Project Hosts) were paired with a dedicated team of expert researchers and outside social entrepreneurs (LEAP Fellows) who worked together to generate research recommendations and implementation plans designed to strengthen the evidence base of the organization’s product or program. The 12-week format allowed enough time for focused phases – learning, drafting, and finalizing – while maintaining a timebound approach to keep the engagement feasible for Fellows and drive the project forward with urgency.
- **Cross-sector Fellows:** Traditional research-practice collaborations are bilateral, with researcher(s) providing the expertise to practitioners. LEAP incorporated the viewpoint of an external social entrepreneur or business-oriented Fellow as a third side of the partnership, with the goal that this Fellow or Fellows would serve as a “translator” between the very different contexts in which practitioners and researchers operate.
- **LEAPathon kickoff:** With up to 40 Fellows and 10 Project Hosts participating each cycle, the LEAPathon was created to introduce the winning project proposals from each organization, allow Fellows to learn more about projects of interest, and ultimately facilitate matches between Fellows and projects that would capitalize on a blend of strengths, interests, and needs. During this virtual event that initially spanned three partial days, Project Hosts would pitch their project proposal, share more about their solution, and refine their project aims and desired outcomes with feedback from Fellows. Teams kicked off their project sprint on the third day of the LEAPathon.
- **Public good:** LEAP required that Fellows work towards a tangible deliverable for the Project Host over the 12-week period, one that would be tailored to the organization’s needs while also serving as a public resource for other ventures looking to solve similar research challenges. At the conclusion of each sprint, Fellows presented their work to the LEAP community, and the deliverables were published on the LEAP site.

Across its three-year run, LEAP supported a diverse portfolio of education organizations with projects that reflected their different stages of evidence maturity. These outputs can be grouped into four broad categories:

- Evidence and learning frameworks to help organizations define, measure, and learn from their impact
- Data systems and evaluation tools to help strengthen how teams collect, track, and use information to make decisions
- Program studies and validation plans that tested, refined, or prepared interventions for scale
- Practical resources and strategies that built organizational capacity and shared learning with the wider education community

Together, these outputs represent the tangible results of LEAP's collaborative model. Drawing on feedback and evaluation data from across six sprint waves held between September 2022 and April 2025, the following section examines how participants experienced this model in practice: what worked, what was challenging, and how it evolved to strengthen its impact.

PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCE AND ENGAGEMENT REFLECTIONS

The LEAP experience offered meaningful benefits across all participant groups while revealing key insights into how collaboration works on the ground. The reflections below capture how Project Hosts, Social Entrepreneur Fellows (SEFs), and Research Fellows (RFs) each experienced the program's opportunities, challenges, and long-term impact.

These insights were drawn from surveys of Project Hosts and Fellows conducted at the completion of each of the six 12-week sprint waves from 2022-2025, formal reports written by Solve for the Jacobs Foundation reflecting on the cycle each year, and high-level takeaways from Mathematica's evaluations of LEAP in 2023 and 2024. To complement this analysis, Solve conducted longer-form interviews with four Fellows who participated in at least three cycles of LEAP, two RFs and two SEFs. Two of the Fellows also participated in LEAP pilots prior to its public launch.

PROJECT HOSTS: USE OF EVIDENCE & IMPACT

The LEAP program proved effective in boosting the evidence-based practices of Project Hosts. Across all LEAP waves, of 26 Project Host respondents, all agreed (46%) or strongly agreed (54%) that the deliverables that the Fellows produced will help them become more evidence-based and strengthen the effectiveness of their solutions. Teams helped organizations redesign their theories of change and create revised evaluation roadmaps, contributing to a stronger overall culture of monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL). Hosts valued the practical tools and resources provided, appreciating the hands-on solutions and next steps over purely theoretical advice. Overall, 96% of Project Host respondents across all LEAP waves agreed or strongly agreed that LEAP was a good use of their time.

“We are a small team based in a country that has a relatively under-developed ecosystem, it was a huge boost for us to be able to engage with some global thought leaders in our area. Through this interaction, some of our original thinking was validated, while some was challenged, and some very exciting new possibilities opened up.”

“Watching our project grow and evolve in such a short time was truly inspiring for our team. The deliverables not only met but exceeded our expectations, and it was incredibly rewarding to see how deeply the Fellows connected with our mission and goals. Their commitment and alignment made this experience both meaningful and memorable.”

Several Project Hosts successfully scaled or reshaped their programs based on the work with LEAP Fellows. For example, one organization used its refined Theory of Change to reconsider the core design of its literacy intervention, ultimately shifting toward a stronger evidence base in the Science of Reading. Another Project Host adapted an implementation and evaluation roadmap—originally developed for its program in Afghanistan—to guide expansion into a second geography, demonstrating how LEAP outputs could be applied beyond the initial project scope.

However, the long-term uptake of these MEL practices has been mixed or yet to be determined, often limited by the host organizations’ available funding and staff capacity. A strong desire for follow-on opportunities and continued peer learning was a common theme among hosts who wanted to sustain their progress.

SOCIAL ENTREPRENEUR FELLOWS: FINDING THEIR PLACE

The experience for SEFs varied depending on the project. One SEF with a background in teaching and nonprofit work found the program “pivotal” for her resume, providing a key point of reference for the doctoral program she later entered. She and others found significant value when their skills aligned with specific needs like communications, funding strategy, or stakeholder engagement. These “extras,” while not always central to the core evidence project, were practical and highly appreciated by Project Hosts.

“SEFs have organizational, startup, and wide practice experience that is more similar to that of Project Hosts, and we can serve as an intermediary between on-the-ground work and social impact research.”

As noted above, SEFs sometimes struggled in sprint meetings that were heavily focused on research, especially if their role was not clearly defined from the outset. Their success was most evident when they stepped into a Team Lead role, which leveraged their project management and leadership skills. One SEF found that serving as a team lead was a highly rewarding role for her and also helped to bolster her resume for freelance work with education and social impact organizations. Others found that the Team Lead role was the only path to success for an SEF on a project, one that could be limiting for the other SEF on a project who was not leading the sprint or for someone who did not want to lead the project.

"I feel...that the research Fellows always tend to have the most work to do (by virtue of the project aims and research questions), and the team leads the least work on the report and deliverables (although the team lead has to manage and coordinate, which is a lot of work)

It'll be good for projects to define their non-research needs at the application stage too."

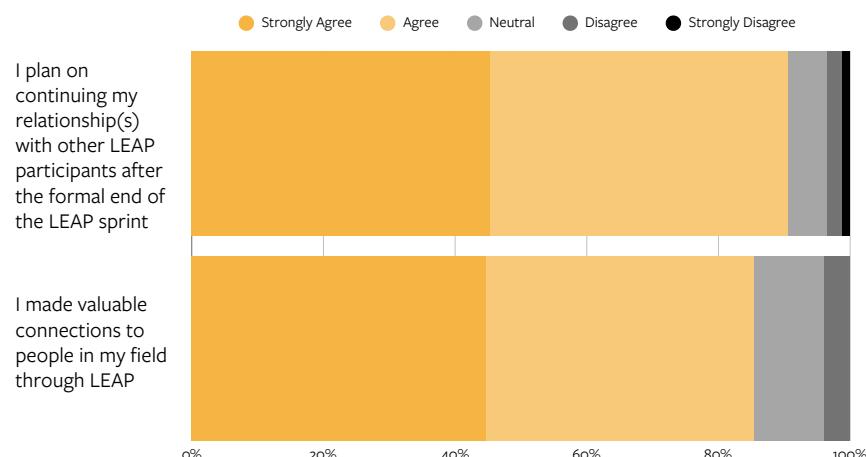
RESEARCH FELLOWS: TRANSFERABLE SKILLS & CAREER REFLECTIONS

RFs grew more comfortable applying their expertise outside their core research areas, which was a key objective of the program. One Fellow noted her appreciation for the opportunity to apply her knowledge in a hands-on way that she rarely can in her academic career. Another noted that she was drawn to the program as a way to ensure her research was "responsive to the frontline needs" in complex settings and for underserved learners. Many RFs evolved their approach from treating the LEAP Fellowship like a client project to viewing it as a collaborative learning experience with the host organization.

The role of LEAP in shaping career trajectories and connecting Fellows to a community of practice within their field was a common thread across interviews and surveys for many RFs. Across all Fellow responses to surveys across every LEAP wave, 91% of Fellows agreed or strongly agreed that they plan on continuing their relationship(s) with other LEAP participants after the formal end of the LEAP sprint (n=86). 86% of Fellows agreed or strongly agreed that they made valuable connections to people in their field through LEAP (n=76; this question was not asked in the first wave of LEAP). One RF shared in their end of program survey:

"This is my third year leading a team within a LEAP project. I continue to maintain Project Host and Fellow relationships, as well as connections to the broader community throughout the year. These relationships are now creating the beginnings of a genuine community with an incredible depth of experience in some of the most pressing educational challenges faced around the world."

FELLOW NETWORKING AND CAREER TRAJECTORY RATING STATEMENTS



CHALLENGES

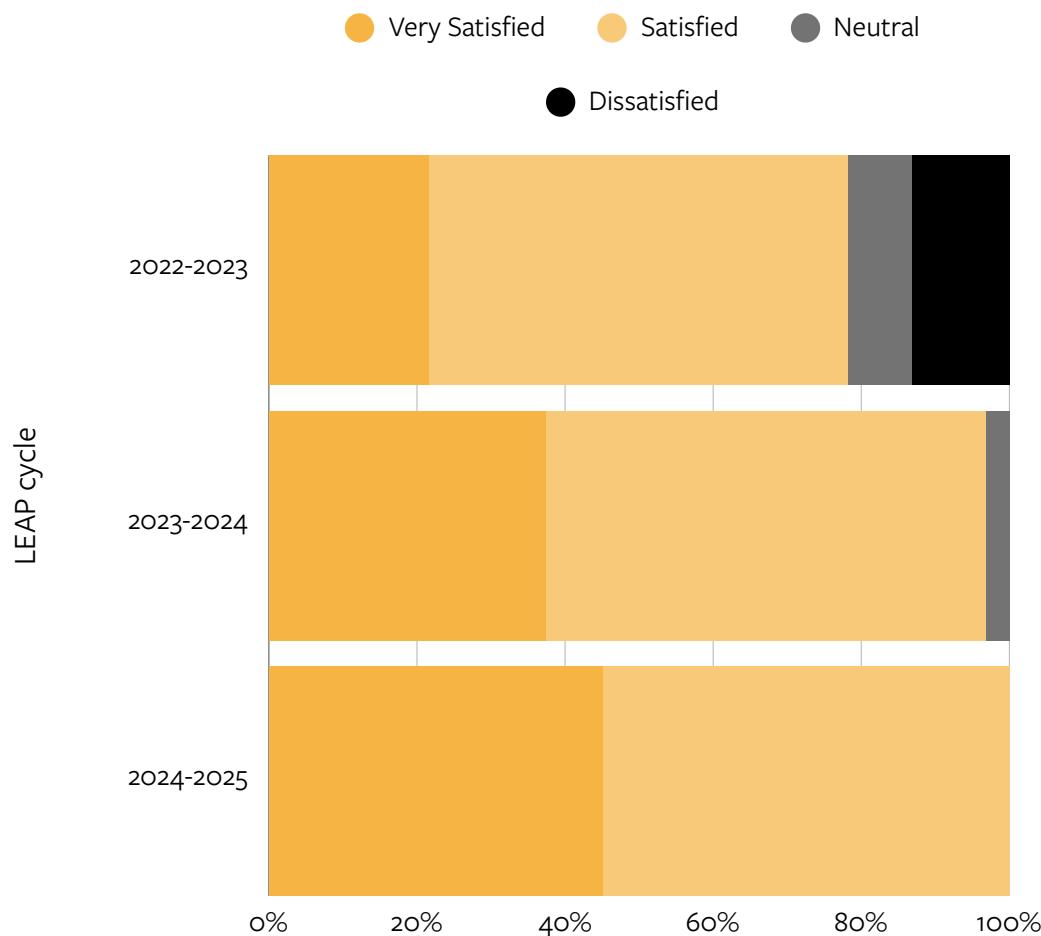
Tradeoffs and limitations in program design

While LEAP proved highly effective in fostering collaboration and building evidence capacity, its implementation surfaced important lessons about the limits and tensions inherent in its design. The reflections below explore where these tradeoffs occurred and how they shaped participant experience and program outcomes.

12-WEEK FORMAT: SPEED VS. DEPTH

The 12-week sprint format, while effective for providing a clear structure, created a tension between the need for efficiency and the desire for in-depth work. Teams often found themselves needing to balance the rapid pace of the sprint with the nuanced demands of evidence research. Fellows mentioned the value of the structure, but the timeline could limit the scope of their work. Solve and the Jacobs Foundation chose to remain with the 12-week sprint, understanding that the work undertaken by Fellows would expand or contract to fit whatever timeline they were given, while acknowledging that shifting to a timeline under 12 weeks would not be sufficient to create quality work. Fellow satisfaction with the deliverables they produced increased over the first few iterations of LEAP, with responses in the final two iterations only including Satisfied/Very Satisfied responses.

‘HOW WOULD YOU RATE YOUR SATISFACTION THE THE QUALITY OF THE DELIVERABLE(S) THAT YOUR FELLOW TEAM PRODUCED?’



THE ROLE OF THE SOCIAL ENTREPRENEUR FELLOW (SEF)

Though the SEF role was refined over time, it remained a challenge to designate a "one size fits all" formula for its success. While some SEFs thrived in roles focused on project management and communications, the value and contribution of the SEF could feel uneven across different projects, especially in more research-intensive projects. This highlighted the need for more adaptable roles and clearer expectations for SEFs, ensuring their skills are fully utilized regardless of the project's specific needs. Once Solve more actively defined the ways an SEF's skills could contribute to a project, satisfaction improved.

Direct quotes from Fellows illustrate the difficulty they found balancing the value of each Fellow type in 2023-24, with marked improvement in 2024-25:

2023-2024

"Research Fellows seem to be able to give more overall input so maybe we should define the SEF role in a more precise way."

"SEFs have organizational, startup, and wide practice experience that is more similar to that of Project Hosts, and we can serve as an intermediary between on-the-ground work and social impact research."

2024-2025

"The Fellows on my team worked so collaboratively on this project that I almost forgot we were RF vs SEF. The RFs were practice oriented, and the SEFs had sufficient experience with evidence-based methodologies so there was a good synergy."

RESEARCH FELLOW EXPERIENCE: STRETCHING BEYOND ACADEMIA

Lending their skills to an on-the-ground education venture encouraged RFs to apply their expertise in new and often uncharted contexts, which often provided rewarding experiences that they did not gain through their traditional academic careers. However, the degree of departure from researcher comfort zones could also prove challenging, requiring a high degree of flexibility and a willingness to operate outside of known and predictable environments. One RF interviewed noted that the Fellowship helped solidify her identity as an applied researcher and positively influenced her academic career. Similarly, another RF confirmed the long-term value, stating that she has applied the skills learned in LEAP to subsequent external projects in educational organizations.

BALANCING PUBLIC GOOD AND TAILORED DELIVERABLES

LEAP was built with an inherent tension, given its aim to benefit specific organizations with tailored support while offering deliverables externally as public goods. While some reports were highly effective for the Project Host, they were often so context-specific that their value as a public good was limited. This tension between a custom report for a specific host and a broadly useful resource was a consistent challenge, affecting the ability of teams to either fully support the organization or fully devote themselves to creating didactic materials for everyone else. Typically project outputs erred on the side of customized reports for the Project Hosts but at times lacked the depth that would have been possible had Project Hosts been more transparent about their needs and shortcomings.

STRENGTHENING FELLOW DIVERSITY

Finally, while the program intentionally recruited high-caliber Fellows with varied backgrounds, there remained room to broaden the range of technical expertise represented across the cohort. SEFs were selected for their strengths in business strategy and social enterprise experience rather than for formal research training, and only a small number brought experience in both domains. Likewise, RFs were chosen for their depth in fields such as neuroscience, literacy, and demography, and few had on-the-ground monitoring and evaluation (M&E) skills, factors which could make precise project matching more difficult. These patterns were a reflection not of individual limitations but of the program's early recruitment focus, which emphasized disciplinary depth over hybrid profiles. These differences did enhance collaboration by bringing complementary strengths together, yet they point to an opportunity to expand recruitment to include more hybrid skill sets and deeper geographic and technical diversity across the Fellow network.

ITERATING ON LEAP'S DESIGN

How did the model evolve over time?

The Solve and Jacobs Foundation teams engaged in a highly iterative and collaborative process to design and implement the program. Between cycles, changes were made to the delivery of programming based on input from Fellows and Project Hosts, usually in the form of surveys. Solve also spent considerable time at the beginning of the program observing the project meetings, making note of roadblocks that needed remedy.

LEAPATHON: A SHARPENED FOCUS

One of the most significant changes from the first cycle was to the LEAPathon, which started as a three-day virtual event primarily for the purpose of matchmaking between Project Hosts and Fellows. For the second cycle, LEAPathon was trimmed down to a one-day session, with a follow up meeting shortly after. The refined LEAPathon moved the matching process to one done asynchronously, based on pre-work completed by Fellows. The new focus of the live sessions was on Project Hosts 1) introducing their organization, mission, and current evidence practices and 2) beginning to collaboratively refine their project goals with input from Fellows. The follow-up meeting, set several days later, was a space to jump-start the sprint by setting team norms and discussing the refined project plan. Focusing the event proved highly effective, still allowing Fellows to "sample" different projects and indicate match preferences via the pre-work, while making the live sessions more action-oriented.

Another key improvement was the integration of a tool designed by the Jacobs Foundation (called the ENJOY Framework, at the time) that assists teams to create a clear vision for assessing and strengthening their evidence culture and practices. The framework helped Project Hosts reflect on and categorize their evidence goals, mapping their trajectory from the beginning to the end of the project sprint. This provided a crucial starting point that led to quicker team alignment and an accelerated start to each project cycle.

SPRINT STRUCTURE: TEAM SIZE AND ROLE REFINEMENT

Within the sprints themselves, changes to team structure and composition allowed for better Fellow engagement and complementarity of skillsets. From 2023-25, Fellows were asked to participate for two years in order to create continuity between cohorts and allow for Fellows to bring learnings from one cycle into the next.

“With four projects under my belt, each experience has brought its own unique value. In this case, I appreciated the opportunity to build a scalable, adaptable tool. I also enjoyed getting to deeply understand the context of the Project Host and how this would inform our deliverables.”

As Fellows became more experienced with LEAP, their feedback on their roles within the sprints became integral to defining and combining the right mix of expertise on a team. The role of the SEF was sharpened to focus on project management, keeping teams on track to deliver outputs that gave equal weight to Project Hosts’ original goals while incorporating pivots suggested by the Fellows. Solve experimented with teams of 3, 4, and 5 Fellows of different expertise combinations, ultimately settling on two social entrepreneurs and two researchers as the right balance for most projects. In most cases, a social entrepreneur Fellow acted as the project team lead, a role that recognized (and adequately compensated) their responsibility in moving projects forward to completion.

SOLVE’S FACILITATION ROLE

Solve’s facilitation approach also evolved over time to become more strategic and less hands-on. In the first LEAP cycle, Solve staff attended every meeting across all ten projects — a practice that, while well-intentioned, proved time-consuming and limited the organic team dynamics that could develop between Fellows and Project Hosts. In subsequent cycles, facilitation shifted to milestone-based check-ins, where project teams shared progress, surfaced challenges for group problem-solving, and identified areas requiring Solve’s support. Additionally, Community of Practice calls were introduced, creating a trusted space for Fellow team leads to connect, share insights, and strengthen peer relationships separate from Project Hosts, who met separately to the same end. Fellow team leads found more use in these meetings, sharing practical tips to improve project sprints and deliverables, than did the Project Hosts, who tended to be singularly focused on their own projects and Fellow interactions and less interested in getting to know their peers.

Together, these changes strengthened the model’s effectiveness and contributed to smoother, more consistent collaboration across project cycles.

STRATEGIC LEARNINGS FOR THE FIELD

High-level insights and reflections

The LEAP model offers valuable insights for education funders, practitioners, and researchers. These reflections can inform the design of future programs that aim to bridge the gap between academic research and real-world application by education ventures.

MODEL STRENGTHS

By bringing together the distinct perspectives of social entrepreneurs and researchers, the LEAP program created a dynamic environment for innovative evidence generation. The LEAPathon workshop, in particular, acted as a crucial starting point for collaboration, allowing teams to quickly find alignment and build momentum. This cross-pollination of skills and viewpoints, combining academic rigor with on-the-ground expertise, is essential for developing evidence that is not only sound but also practical and actionable for Project Hosts.

Likewise, the 12-week sprint format, coupled with focused, dedicated teams, proved to be a powerful engine for progress. This structure provided a clear timeline and a sense of urgency, which helped Fellows and Project Hosts maintain momentum and stay committed to the project's goals. The streamlined LEAPathon and milestone-based check-ins further honed this focus, ensuring that teams were aligned on their objectives and could rapidly move toward a shared deliverable.

KEY TRADEOFFS AND LEARNINGS

Despite these strengths, the tension between delivering in-depth, academically rigorous work and the accelerated timeline required to meet a Project Host's immediate needs remains a key challenge for the LEAP model. Likewise, while the final reports were often highly effective for the host organization, their value as a broader public good was sometimes limited by their context-specific nature. In this case, balancing the two is not necessarily in the interest of either goal. Future collaborations would be wise to focus on meeting the needs of the Project Host while reflecting on and summarizing key takeaways from a group of projects to share with the public.

In addition, the program's success hinges on finding the right blend of generalist and specialized talent. While RFs found great value in applying their knowledge to new sectors and topics, working outside of their particular niche specialty could prove frustrating for the Fellow or at worst, ineffective for the project. Similarly, the role of the SEF was most impactful when it was clearly defined, often as a team lead or a communications specialist. This highlights the need for a nuanced approach to team formation that recognizes and leverages diverse skill sets.

Finally, effective management for a program like LEAP requires a balance between providing a guiding hand and allowing teams the autonomy to navigate their work. The program's shift from constant oversight to milestone-based check-ins was a direct response to this need. While structure is crucial, providing teams with the freedom to collaborate and problem-solve independently proved to be more effective for fostering accountability and ownership over the project.

DESIGN RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FIELD

Solve and the Jacobs Foundation offer the reflections in this report as an invitation for funders and support organizations to learn from our experience and leverage the LEAP model to benefit pilot- to growth-stage ventures in the education field and beyond.

Below are recommendations that, in addition to our tradeoffs and lessons learned discussion above, should be considered in adopting and refining the model.

1. CUSTOMIZE SUPPORT BY ORGANIZATIONAL MATURITY

Future programs should consider a tailored approach to support based on the organizational maturity of participating Project Hosts. Assessing each organization’s “evidence-readiness” at the outset helps teams understand where they are starting and what kind of support will be most useful, whether that means redesigning a theory of change for a nascent venture or developing an evaluation roadmap for a more advanced one. Equally important is selecting Project Hosts through a clear, rigorous process with defined criteria and expectations to ensure strong alignment and maximize the value of the sprint for all participants.

2. BUILD ALUMNI NETWORKS AND POST-PROGRAM TOUCHPOINTS

The program experience should not end with the final report. Based on learnings from LEAP, there will be a strong desire among Fellows and Project Hosts for continued engagement, peer learning, and networking. Implementing alumni networks, continued community of practice calls, and structured follow-on opportunities would help to sustain the momentum and relationships built during the program. Where funding research efforts in perpetuity is certainly not feasible for any one program sponsor, providing funds to allow a Project Host to carry out the research plan proposed by Fellows provides the necessary launchpad for a sustained commitment to evidence.

3. OFFER M&E TOOLKITS AND ON-CALL RESEARCH SUPPORT

As an alternative to help Project Hosts sustain their evidence orientation without having the resources to dedicate to a full-time M&E team member, programs can develop a follow-on mechanism for on-call research support. Follow on work would provide long-term value and ensure that the learnings from the program are integrated into an organization’s daily practices, even with limited funding and staff capacity. This could take the form of Fellows serving as consultants and extending their work with the Project Host organization to the implementation phase of research.

4. SUPPORT DIVERSITY THROUGH LANGUAGE ACCESSIBILITY AND EXPANDED RECRUITMENT

To truly reflect the global nature of evidence-based work, it is important to expand the program’s diversity. This includes offering multilingual support and broadening recruitment efforts to include a wider range of technical and disciplinary backgrounds, as well as new geographic locations. This will ensure that the program’s talent pool is as diverse as the challenges it aims to solve.

5. EMBED MEASUREMENT, FEEDBACK, AND ITERATION INTO PROGRAM DELIVERY

Systematically gathering feedback from participants, monitoring key metrics, and evaluating outcomes across cycles allows program teams to refine design elements in real time. LEAP’s success was due in large part to its ability to evolve its facilitation approach, team structure, and tools over time in response to feedback from Project Hosts and Fellows. Future initiatives should plan from the outset for dedicated measurement and learning loops, treating evaluation not as an endpoint, but as an ongoing process that informs program delivery and can lead to greater impact.

IDEAL PARTICIPANT PROFILES

Recognizing that future adaptations of the LEAP model may vary in scope or focus, the profiles below outline the kinds of Project Hosts and Fellows who were most successful within the LEAP model as implemented from 2022–2025.

PROJECT HOST

Project Host organizations should ideally be at or beyond a pilot stage, with some experience in evidence generation. Solve ran a rigorous process to find and select Project Host organizations, which were evaluated based on criteria including having a promising or sound Theory of Change or logic model; having reasonable research questions; and a sound plan for implementing the sprint outputs. The most successful Project Hosts were organizations that had a sufficiently supportive infrastructure to allow space and time for team members to engage meaningfully in the sprint and the capacity to carry out the research plan post-sprint.

RESEARCH FELLOW

The ideal RF brings strong academic training alongside at least modest field experience gathering data or consulting with on-the-ground practitioners. Fellows whose expertise extends beyond a narrow domain—and who are comfortable applying their skills across varied topics, contexts, and methodological needs—tend to thrive in the LEAP model. They pair rigor with adaptability, can communicate complex ideas clearly to non-research audiences, and draw on both analytical and applied perspectives to help organizations strengthen how they generate and use evidence.

SOCIAL ENTREPRENEUR FELLOW

The ideal SEF combines practical experience in education or social enterprise with a strong grounding in monitoring and evaluation, enabling them to contribute substantively alongside RFs. Fellows who thrive in this role bring well-developed project management and communication skills, helping teams stay focused, organized, and responsive to project developments. They balance fast-paced problem-solving with a clear understanding of evidence needs, offer a realistic sense of how recommendations can be implemented on the ground, and can serve as effective team leads who bring coherence and urgency to the 12-week sprint.

POTENTIAL FUTURE ITERATIONS

As others consider adapting the LEAP model to new contexts, there is room to imagine variations that build on its core strengths while meeting different program goals, timelines, and resource realities. Some potential points of departure are outlined below.

LEAP+

The most consistent piece of feedback Solve received from Fellows was to provide additional space and opportunities for Fellows and Project Hosts to come together for continued updates and shared learning. A LEAP+ format could include features such as an alumni network, newsletter, follow-on funding, or other mechanisms for supporting the LEAP network post-sprints. These program components could have key milestone activities for 3-months, 6-months and 1-year out from the sprints for participants to reconvene and share updates/challenges faced.

LEAP MINI

The 12-week sprint format is effective for the planned outputs for LEAP, but may not be feasible for an aspiring Project Host organization that does not have the time or longer-term resources to commit to the program. A LEAP Mini model could explore shorter sprints with different objectives. For example: a 6-week sprint that focuses more on building a solid MEL foundation for organizations, via the expertise of Fellows, but also through workshops and vetted training materials.

LEAP ACADEMY

At the other end of the spectrum from LEAP Mini, a longer multi-month program could allow for Project Hosts and Fellows to go even deeper into their research to practice activities. A LEAP Academy model could include larger amounts of funding for PH organizations to allocate towards MEL work, with the dedicated support of a team of Fellows over a period of 6+ months. This model would include higher expectations around implementation of the proposed evidence practices.



CONCLUSION

LEAP has demonstrated that structured, time-bound collaboration between researchers and education practitioners can accelerate the use of evidence in meaningful, practical ways. By combining speed, credibility, and tailored support, LEAP enabled education ventures to strengthen their evidence practices while equipping Fellows with hands-on experience applying their expertise beyond academic settings.

Important questions remain for continued exploration, particularly around how to track the long-term impact on learning outcomes, and how the broader field might better coordinate efforts to make evidence generation and use more accessible, efficient, and impactful.

Solve and the Jacobs Foundation invite peer funders and entrepreneur support organizations to build on this model. By adopting and adapting evidence-to-practice mechanisms like LEAP, the field can collectively ensure that innovation in education is not only bold and creative, but also grounded in data, driven by collaboration, and focused on improving outcomes for all learners.