Learner Variability in Products Designed to Support Adult Learners: Request for Grant Proposal

Overview

Formally launched in 2016, Digital Promise Global's (DPG) Learner Variability Project (LVP) initiative aims to lead the way in translating the latest research on learner variability to support the development of edtech products deeply rooted in learning sciences and designed to serve each learner. This RFP is for products designed for adult learners.

The goals for adult learning include being able to use literacy, numeracy, problem solving, communication, and digital skills effectively across contexts. Understanding the factors and strategies that impact adult literacies, and how they connect to each other, can help build tools and learning experiences that support all adult learners. Adults must see the benefit of learning tasks to fully engage. Engaging in lifelong learning activities is interconnected with general well-being.

The idea of personalizing learning has captured headlines, but one critical aspect is rarely discussed: the explicit acknowledgement of the importance of learning sciences research in determining how to best understand and reach each learner and how to incorporate these research findings into the products being designed for today's classroom.

Developers of technology-based products can make much better use of existing and emerging research to truly support each adult learner. DPG works with top researchers across the field of learning sciences to provide open-source learner models on the LV Navigator that seek to present in clear, practical ways the research that underpins who each individual is as a learner and how to support how they learn best.

The purpose of this RFP is to incentivize edtech products designed to support adult learners to develop research-based supports for the variability of all learners so that more users, especially those who typically struggle, will achieve greater success and learning within the product. DPG seeks to award funds to edtech companies and organizations (including not-for-profit and for-profit) who share the goal of accelerating inclusion of research-based features and supports for learner variability. By collaborating with edtech products to develop research-based supports for learner variability, DPG can help grow the market of research-based products that the workforce, organizations, educational institutions, and the learners themselves can select from to best support individual learning strengths and needs.

DPG will work together with each grantee's design team (to be called "Collaborator") to assess their product using the LVP Adult Learner Model. DPG will then provide recommendations to improve supports for learner variability aligned to the product's mission and vision.

Following this assessment, the Collaborator may receive funds up to $50,000 to support the development and/or redesign of features as determined in the final assessment report. There will be a required match up to 2:1 that will be determined on a case-by-case basis. DPG's team will provide research expertise and feature design support to the Collaborator's team during this design process. DPG and the Collaborator will also partner to measure the effectiveness of LVP-based features that are redesigned and/or built into the Collaborator's platform.

Finally, as a result of this partnership, DPG and the Collaborator will share information, learn from one another, and work together to identify and develop opportunities for national attention resulting from the dissemination of communications, case studies, and other deliverables associated with this collaboration.

We invite proposals from edtech companies who want to further their use of research in developing product features to support more learner variability. DPG aims to lead the way in translating the latest research on learner variability to inform, develop, and bring to market new models for supporting learning.

Rules and Guidelines

Funding Criteria

For this RFP, we are targeting not-for-profit or for-profit organizations and companies who wish to work collaboratively to use research to design features for increasing supports for learner variability in their edtech products. Specifically, we are targeting companies/organizations with edtech products that support the learning of nontraditional adult learners (i.e. workforce, reskilling, upskilling, alternative pathways to learning).

We will consider proposals from companies and organizations who:
- Prioritize equity by intentional design;
- Sign the Student Data Privacy Pledge;
- Provide evidence of financial stability (e.g., sustained level of growth in funding or revenue, commitment from a major funder);
- Have a significant market reach;
- Identify a staff member who can devote 30% time to the partnership, which will be a minimum 6-month engagement with the final timeline established on a case-by-case basis; and
- Have staff capacity to, on mutually agreed timelines, participate in continuous research-based design sessions and incorporate the recommendations of this partnership into product development timelines.

Preference will be given to companies and organizations who meet at least some of the following criteria:
- Intentionally design **with** the range of adult learners their product is meant to serve;
- Have staff and/or leadership with experience in adult learning and development;
- Identify clear data privacy practices (i.e.data collection, storage, and use);
- Publicly facing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion statement;
- Publicly facing accessibility statement;
- Products identify clear efforts toward mitigating racial bias (i.e. products using AI);
- Evidence of incorporating academic research into iterative product development for continuous improvement;
- At least 1 study of product's impact completed internally and/or with an outside research partner;
- Examples of public sharing of research results; and
- Support within the product for data interoperability.

We will not consider incomplete proposals or proposals that do not address equity.

Intellectual Property

Grant awards will be subject to the following intellectual property terms:
- The awardee will retain ownership of its edtech product and the materials it provides to DPG.
- DPG will retain ownership of its pre-existing materials and the materials it produces in the course of its research. DPG will grant the awardee a non-exclusive, worldwide, royalty-free license to use the materials to implement recommendations made by DPG in the awardee's edtech products.
- DPG will not be prohibited from developing similar materials for or making similar recommendations to any other awardees or third parties.
- DPG may freely use and share data, information, and results derived from the research and collaboration that is the subject of the Proposal, so long as the awardee is not identified (i.e., the data, information, and results are aggregated or anonymized).
- DPG will share data and information derived from the research where the awardee is identified only with the awardee's consent.

Evaluation Criteria

Complete proposals received by the deadline will be evaluated on the following rubric:

Category	Range			
	No Response Provided	Does Not Meet Expectations	Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
Qualification & Organization History ● Meets Funding Criteria ● Response to #1				
Understanding of the LVP Framework ● Responses to #2, 3, & 4				
Technical Aspects of Proposal ● Fully addresses the vision raised herein				
Significance and Potential for Scale ● Responses to #1, 5, & 6				
Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion ● Response to #7				

Timeline and Support

This is an open RFP for 2021. Applications will be accepted on a rolling basis, and we will try to provide a decision within 5-6 weeks of receiving a completed application. We hope to grant 2 or 3 awards for the Adult Learner Model. We will close this RFP when we have reached the limit of our grant funds, even if this is before the end of 2021.

If you have questions about the application process, please email tcallella@digitalpromise.org. You will receive a response within 3 days.

Applicants may also request a 30-minute video call to talk through a series of questions by emailing tcallella@digitalpromise.org with a request.

How to Apply

Response Requirements

To apply, please submit a proposal using the Proposal Narrative Template that includes the following:

1. Overview and Product Mission (approximately 1.5 pages)
Tell us about your organization/yourself, including:
- Your mission
- If and how you have used scientific research on how people learn to inform product design
- If and how you have tried to address learner variability in your product
- How long you have been in operation and how long your product has been on the market
- Significant milestones in your history

- Financial stability markers
- Metrics on product reach and impact, including if and how you have completed research on product impact and if and how you have disseminated results
- The team member who would be the lead contact for and devote 30% time to this partnership
- Other team members who would be involved including, for each, their role in the organization/your work

2. Learner Factors Identified within Mission (1-2 explanatory paragraphs/bullet)
DPG presents in each of its Learner Models (see the LV Navigator) the critical variables that affect how we learn best--that is, the ways learners vary. We call these our learner factors or just factors.

Using the LVP Adult Learner Model on the Navigator, identify 1-2 factors from our list of factors that are a focus of your mission. These factors might be directly stated in your mission, or your mission might focus on these factors without stating them directly. For each factor, provide 1-2 paragraphs explaining why this factor is important to the learning goals of your product and why this factor is important for supporting the variability of all learners. Your answers to these questions may overlap as you consider your mission.

3. Learner Factors Expanded from Factors in Your Mission (1-2 explanatory paragraphs/bullet)
Using the factor connections that show on the factor chart when you hover over any one factor on the LVP Adult Learner Model, identify 1-2 factors that connect with a critical factor from your response in the prior section. For each connecting factor, provide 1-2 paragraphs discussing why this factor is important to consider to support and/or expand your mission and why this factor is important for supporting the variability of all learners. Your explanations of each connecting factor may overlap as you consider the expansion of your mission to more fully support each learner.

4. Strategies for Supporting the Variability of All Learners (1 explanatory paragraph/bullet)
Identify 2-3 strategies using the suggested strategies on the LVP Adult Learner Model that can support 1 or more of the factors identified in the prior sections. These can be strategies your product already employs or strategies you would like to consider using in your product. You may choose to examine multiple strategies for the same factor (i.e., you do not need to reference 2-3 factors). For each strategy, please provide:
- The strategy name
- The factor the strategy supports
- The way your product uses this strategy or a way you could conceive using this strategy

5. Goals for Partnership (1-2 paragraphs)
Based on the initial review you have done of your product in the prior sections, what are 2-3 high-level goals you hope to achieve through this collaboration?

6. Funding Request and Matching Funds (1 page or less)
The funding section of the Proposal Narrative Template asks for:
- The amount of funding requested
- How you plan to apply the matching funds (e.g., in-kind labor, existing funding)
- A high-level breakdown of how these combined funds will be used (e.g., personnel, project design and management, UX and visual design, teacher/student guidance/resources, marketing, etc.)

Your responses should be based on the initial review you have done of your product in the prior sections as well as the initial high-level goals you hope to achieve through this collaboration. You do not need to identify specific design goals or development plans, as those will be jointly developed with the DPG team should you earn this funding.

7. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (1 page or less)
- Describe how your product is prioritizing equity by intentional design.
- Sign the Student Data Privacy Pledge and submit a screenshot or link.

If your product has any evidence of items listed below, please submit screenshots or links.
- Intentionally design **with** the range of adult learners the product is meant to serve;
- Have staff and/or leadership with experience in adult learning and development;
- Identify clear data privacy practices (i.e.data collection, storage, and use);

- Publicly facing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion statement;
- Publicly facing Accessibility Statement; and/or
- Products identify clear efforts toward mitigating racial bias (i.e. products using AI)

Submission Instructions
- Make a copy of the [Proposal Narrative Template](#), naming it "ProductName.SubmissionDate" (e.g., LVPApp.12.15.20).
- Complete all steps of the application within the template.
- Email your completed application (saved as a PDF or Word document) to tcallella@digitalpromise.org. You will receive a confirmation email within two days of your application being received.

Selection and Award Process

Application Review and Scoring
All applications will be reviewed using the evaluation rubric.

Final Application Review and Collaborator Selection
We reserve the right to ask organizations selected for investment to answer an additional set of questions that enable us to perform a more detailed due diligence review. DPG is not obligated to make any awards. Selection is tentative and contingent upon negotiation of a successful agreement.

All program requirements shall be set forth in writing in an Award Letter and/or a Memorandum of Understanding or other agreement entered into by the Collaborator and DPG (collectively, the "Award Documents"). All funding will be contingent on execution of these Award Documents. The policies and procedures have been developed specifically for this RFP and are not negotiable. You are advised to ensure your organization/you can accept all policies and procedures at the time of proposal submission. The Policy Handbook can be found [here](#).

About Digital Promise Global

To learn more about the Learner Variability Project, please read [Learner Variability is the Rule Not the Exception](#).

Our vision is that folks at every stage of their lives have access to learning experiences that help them acquire the knowledge and skills they need to thrive and continuously learn in an ever-changing world.

To learn more, please visit [DPG's website](#).