

J-PAL North America Proof Points

Index of proof points:

[Key Message 2: Randomized evaluations provide clear answers on what reduces poverty across a range of policy areas.](#)

Sub Key Message: Randomized evaluations can teach us more than just whether a program was effective or not. We can learn about a program or policy's mechanisms to better understand why we saw the results.

Tutoring

Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)

Sub Key Message: Randomized evaluations bring rigor to important policy debates.

Evaluating the potential of cash transferred to prevent homelessness

Moves To Opportunity

Provider race

Sub key-message: Incorporating qualitative methods

CMTO - qualitative evidence

[Key Message 3: J-PAL North America catalyzes policy-relevant randomized evaluations conducted by our network of academic researchers.](#)

Sub key-message: J-PAL North America is growing a network of more than 100 leading researchers who use randomized evaluations to answer critical questions related to poverty.

Matthew Notowidigdo

Marcella Alsan MD PhD

Alicia Sasser Modestino PhD

Sub Key Message: We spearhead initiatives that support leaders in the public, non-profit, and private sectors to explore to answer key research questions.

Initiatives

Sub Key Message: We collaborate with a broad range of implementing partners to identify policy-relevant research questions

Long-term partnership in Puerto Rico

[Key Message 4: J-PAL North America translates the results from randomized evaluations into action.](#)

Sub Key Message: We translate research from academic publications into easy-to-act-upon policy lessons and disseminate it to decision-makers.

Tutoring Meta-analysis and Evidence Review

Sectoral employment webinar with Workrise

SYEP Evidence Review

Sub Key Message: We help partners understand how to apply research insights to local contexts.

Generalizability resources introduced in trainings

Sub Key Message: We support the replication and expansion of successful evaluated programs to similar contexts.

SAGA Education

Creating Moves to Opportunity (CMTO)

[Key Message 5: J-PAL North America advances the quality and rigor of randomized evaluations across our field and builds capacity for evidence-informed decision making.](#)

Yearly Research Staff Training

Design within Reach

Evaluating Social Programs Course

Research Resources

RMS

[Key Message 6: The lives of millions of people experiencing or at risk of experiencing poverty in North America can be improved by scaling programs backed by rigorous evidence. J-PAL North America is building the evidence base and infrastructure to realize this future.](#)

J-PAL support for Office of Evaluation Sciences

Key Message 2: Randomized evaluations provide clear answers on what reduces poverty across a range of policy areas.

Sub Key Message: Randomized evaluations can teach us more than just whether a program was effective or not. We can learn about a program or policy's mechanisms to better understand why we saw the results.

Tutoring

J-PAL North America conducted an evidence review of 96 tutoring randomized evaluations, synthesizing existing evidence to inform the education sector about which programmatic elements of tutoring programs create high impact for students. J-PAL North America's meta-analysis and evidence review demonstrated not only that tutoring is consistently effective, but also that specific program designs can maximize impacts. These resources and J-PAL North America staffs' concerted efforts to disseminate this evidence have contributed to state and national policies to expand access to high-impact tutoring.

Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)

Problem and intervention: Seven million low-income Americans forgo billions of dollars in EITC and college tax credits by not filing their taxes. J-PAL affiliated researcher, Dayanand Manoli, and co-author Saurabh Bhargava partnered with the US Internal Revenue Service (IRS) to randomize individuals in two separate studies to test the effectiveness of different messages to taxpayers designed to encourage them to claim certain tax benefits.

Study results: Researchers found that repeated notifications with simple, highly relevant information improved taxpayers' likelihood of claiming benefits. However, information designed to reduce stigma and to reduce perceptions of the economic costs of filing paperwork had no effect on benefit claims. The IRS subsequently redesigned the letters that it sends to all beneficiaries who have not claimed the EITC, reaching hundreds of thousands of families per year. In the second study, researchers found that mailings highlighting tax benefits for college did not influence reenrollment, reapplication, or enrollment in college, suggesting that the timing and targeting of tax credits acted as bigger barriers than information salience in affecting enrollment decisions.

How it highlights our key message: By testing different types of messaging, researchers helped to better understand why people did not take up the EITC. Taken together, the two studies also suggest that while informational nudges can increase take-up of benefits, mere information by itself may not be enough when other constraints are present.

Sub Key Message: Randomized evaluations bring rigor to important policy debates.

Evaluating the potential of cash transferred to prevent homelessness

Homelessness in the United States is a pressing issue that requires increased research on effective strategies to address it and encourage long-term housing stability. Although initial studies of cash transfers show promising results for financial stability and health, few studies have rigorously assessed their impact on homelessness and housing stability specifically. With grant support from Google.org, J-PAL North America provided support to Bay Area service

providers to help them implement and evaluate cash transfer programs and assess their impact on homelessness and housing stability. This engagement, known as the Bay Area Evaluation (BAE) Incubator, resulted in funding for four partners that will provide important evidence on the potential of cash transfers to prevent homelessness.

Moves To Opportunity

Problem and intervention: Living in historically-disinvested neighborhoods has long been thought to negatively impact the economic mobility of residents. The US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) launched the Moving to Opportunity (MTO) demonstration in 1994 to test the impact of offering rental assistance to help families living in high-poverty neighborhoods move to low-poverty neighborhoods.

Study results: The long-term results of the evaluation by J-PAL affiliated researchers Raj Chetty, Nathaniel Hendren, and Lawrence Katz demonstrated that moving to low-poverty neighborhoods improved the health and well-being of adult household heads, increased the college going rate and future earnings of young children, and reduced the intergenerational persistence of poverty.

How it highlights our key message: Insights from these findings provided an impetus for several policy changes at the local and federal levels, which together have shifted over 28 million USD in funding and have expanded housing choice for tens of thousands of low-income families in the United States. Ongoing research inspired by the MTO results stands to impact an even greater number of families. The results continue to be used in ongoing debates about housing affordability in the US, as evidenced by this [NYT Opinion article](#) citing this research.

Provider race

Problem and intervention: Increasing representation of health professionals of color may help ameliorate medical distrust within communities of color and advance health equity by facilitating communication or reducing the racial discrimination patients may face. Many people and organizations, like the Institute of Medicine and the American Medical Association, have backed strategies to encourage this diversity.

Study results: J-PAL funded a randomized evaluation by HCDI Co-Chair Marcella Alsan and others who examined whether having a Black physician increased the take-up of preventive health services by Black men. The researchers found that when a Black man saw a Black male doctor, it boosted demand for all preventive health services, especially more invasive tests.

How it highlights our key message: J-PAL was able to support research by providing experimental evidence in favor of the policy recommendations held by many medical organizations, in light of suggestive or inconclusive evidence elsewhere. See this [STAT News op-ed](#).

Sub key-message: Incorporating qualitative methods

CMTO - qualitative evidence

While randomized evaluations enable researchers to determine the impact of a program or policy, it can often be difficult to ascertain what mechanisms are driving these impacts. Qualitative methods, such as direct observation, in-depth interviews, and focus groups, allow researchers to dive into these mechanisms by examining participants' beliefs, attitudes, experiences, and perspectives. In the Creating Moves to Opportunity (CMTO) study, qualitative research provided insights into the impacts reported by the randomized evaluation. While many believed that information and monetary resources were the main factors into why families were more likely to move to higher-opportunity neighborhoods, the narratives of the participants revealed the importance of the housing navigators who boosted confidence and provided customized assistance.

Key Message 3: J-PAL North America catalyzes policy-relevant randomized evaluations conducted by our network of academic researchers.

Sub key-message: J-PAL North America is growing a network of more than 100 leading researchers who use randomized evaluations to answer critical questions related to poverty.

Matthew Notowidigdo

Matt Notowidigdo is Co-Scientific Director of J-PAL North America and Co-Chair of the Worker Prosperity Initiative. He is a professor of economics at the University of Chicago Booth School of Business and has been a J-PAL affiliate since 2015. Matt's work spans many of the topics of focus at J-PAL North America, including labor, health, and social protection. He has extensive work in partnership with both non-profit organizations and government agencies, as well as a deep commitment to promoting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the field of economics, which was profiled by the University of Chicago. Outside of J-PAL, Matt has served as a co-Editor of the American Economic Journal: Economic Policy, a mentor for the Russell Sage Foundation's Pipeline Grants Competition, and a mentor for junior economists with the Committee on the Status of Women in the Economics Profession.

Marcella Alsan MD PhD

Marcella Alsan is a J-PAL affiliated professor and Co-Chair of the Health Care Delivery Initiative. In 2021, she was awarded a MacArthur Fellowship for her work exploring racial disparities in health outcomes and healthcare usage, including for her work on the impacts of physician race. "I really appreciate the support I've received from J-PAL's HCIDI. The intellectual feedback on research proposals is superb and improves the quality of your work. The academic leadership is willing to take risks on innovative projects and the funding stream is very flexible. And the communications team helps translate your study into something newsworthy and easily digestible, which is essential if you want to change policy." Marcella Alsan, MD, PhD (see [here](#))

Alicia Sasser Modestino PhD

Alicia Sasser Modestino is a J-PAL affiliated professor and sits on the review board for our Social Policy Research Initiative, a role in which she provides key feedback on research proposals and strengthens projects. She has conducted rigorous randomized evaluations on combating the opioid epidemic and on the impacts of summer youth employment programs (SYEP) and is seen as an expert in the evidence on SYEP ([source](#), [source](#)).

Sub Key Message: We spearhead initiatives that support leaders in the public, non-profit, and private sectors to explore to answer key research questions.

Initiatives

J-PAL North America currently runs major initiatives to support randomized evaluations and evidence-informed policymaking. These initiatives target areas where there is demand from decision-makers for more evidence and aim to fill evidence gaps concerning innovative—if untested—interventions that seek to reduce poverty. Our current initiatives are our Health Care Delivery Initiative, our State and Local Innovation Initiative, and our Social Policy Research Initiative.

Sub Key Message: We collaborate with a broad range of implementing partners to identify policy-relevant research questions

Long-term partnership in Puerto Rico

J-PAL North America is supporting the government of Puerto Rico in their process of building a culture of evidence generation and use among its institutions. Since 2017, J-PAL North America has supported the Department of Education of Puerto Rico (PRDE) to develop and evaluate promising programs in order to improve academic achievement. This collaborative work has included embedding an evaluation fellow in the Department of Education, conducting multiple randomized evaluations, and supporting the work of our affiliated researchers Gustavo Bubonis and Orlando Sotomayor. Our most recent partnership is with the Department of Economic Development and Commerce (DEDC) and seeks to improve take-up of workforce development program services, encouraging job-seeking and raising chances of employment and wage gains. EDUGESPRO is a large principal management training program. ATEMA seeks to support math teachers by incorporating Computer Assisted Learning program Khan Academy to their classroom, and the Socioemotional (SEL) project will implement a training program for social workers and teachers to enhance emotional management tools among teachers and students.

Key Message 4: J-PAL North America translates the results from randomized evaluations into action.

Sub Key Message: We translate research from academic publications into easy-to-act-upon policy lessons and disseminate it to decision-makers.

Tutoring Meta-analysis and Evidence Review

In 2020 J-PAL North America published an Evidence Review summarizing a meta-analysis of 96 randomized evaluations of tutoring programs and identified tutoring as one of the most effective tools available to educators for accelerating learning. Citing J-PAL North America research, the White House encouraged states to allocate American Rescue Plan funds for tutoring programs. Following conversations between J-PAL North America staff and the California Governor's office about the impressive potential of high-dosage tutoring, the state passed a bill in 2021 that included \$460 million for hiring paraprofessional tutors. This evidence also influenced the 2021 creation of a \$5 million high-impact tutoring program in Colorado, where advocates drew from J-PAL North America's evidence review to inform the characteristics of tutoring outlined in the legislation.

Sectoral employment webinar with Workrise

A key driver of income inequality in the United States is disparate access to high-quality jobs. Many workers, especially those without four-year college degrees, are virtually shut out of opportunities that offer not just strong wages but also opportunities for career advancement and economic mobility.

In collaboration with Workrise at the Urban Institute, J-PAL North America conducted a webinar on the research and policy implications of evidence of sectoral employment programs, which train jobseekers for employment in high-growth, high-opportunity industries. The webinar featured a J-PAL North America review, which summarized results from four studies of nine distinct sectoral employment programs finding that such programs significantly increase earnings both in the year participants completed their training and in subsequent years. These earnings gains are among the largest found in evaluations of US training programs. The gains are driven by getting people into higher-paying jobs that have higher earnings in the short term and strong upward trajectories over time.

SYEP Evidence Review

J-PAL's Summer Youth Employment Program Evidence Review summarizes 13 rigorous studies of summer youth employment programs across four major US cities: Boston, Chicago, Philadelphia, and New York. The review serves as a resource to policymakers seeking evidence-based ways to serve youth in their communities. It examines the effects of SYEPs on a wide range of outcomes, including interactions with the criminal legal system, education, and earnings.

Sub Key Message: We help partners understand how to apply research insights to local contexts.

[Generalizability resources introduced in trainings](#)

Policymakers repeatedly face what we at J-PAL call a [generalizability puzzle](#)—whether the results of a specific program generalize to other contexts. We have developed a four-step framework to systematically assess whether a given evidence-based policy will likely work in a new context, and deliver trainings on how to utilize our framework. For example, we have developed case studies and recently presented on applying our framework to tutoring interventions to address learning loss during a training with the North Carolina Office of State Budget and Management.

Sub Key Message: We support the replication and expansion of successful evaluated programs to similar contexts.

[SAGA Education](#)

Problem and intervention: In many US classrooms, particularly those in disadvantaged communities, students enter high school several years behind grade level and struggle to catch up, putting them at high risk of dropping out. During the 2013–2014 school year, J-PAL affiliates [Jon Guryan](#) (Northwestern University), and [Jens Ludwig](#) (University of Chicago) and co-authors partnered with Chicago Public Schools to study the impact of individualized math tutoring on academic outcomes for 9th and 10th grade male students in twelve public high schools in some of Chicago’s lowest-income communities.

Study results: Researchers found that SAGA Education’s intensive math tutoring program helped disadvantaged male high school students in Chicago perform better in school. The results suggest that it is possible to substantially improve academic outcomes for disadvantaged students even after they reach adolescence.

How it highlights our key message: Following the evaluation, SAGA Education has expanded its individualized tutoring program to serve 2,500 students in New York City and Chicago. SAGA Education is advising the implementation of a similar model in three cities in the Netherlands.

[Creating Moves to Opportunity \(CMTO\)](#)

Intervention: The CMTO project is an ongoing collaboration between J-PAL affiliated researchers and housing practitioners organized in response to the long-term MTO findings. The aim of CMTO is to apply research insights from the MTO studies by implementing and testing strategies for empowering low-income families with housing choice vouchers to move to high opportunity neighborhoods.

Study results: Housing mobility services offered to program participants increased the share of families who move to higher-opportunity neighborhoods by 40 percentage points. We also saw at least 30 percentage point increases in moves to high-opportunity neighborhoods across different races, family sizes, and household income levels.

How it highlights our key message: Several [ongoing randomized evaluations](#) led by J-PAL affiliated researchers in the CMTO group stand to contribute new evidence on the effectiveness of housing mobility services in helping families move to areas with greater opportunity.

Key Message 5: J-PAL North America advances the quality and rigor of randomized evaluations across our field and builds capacity for evidence-informed decision making.

Yearly Research Staff Training

J-PAL North America conducts an annual training for research staff of our affiliated researchers and partner organizations. The week-long research staff training teaches new techniques, shares best practices, and provides opportunities for research staff to network and troubleshoot with one another.

Design within Reach

J-PAL North America hosts Design Within Reach sessions where researchers present on randomized evaluations in the design stage and hear feedback from academic researchers and J-PAL staff. The research design phase can be a challenging part of conducting a randomized evaluation; it is valuable to solicit feedback while there is still an opportunity to modify research design. These sessions aim to better prepare researchers to run projects in the North America context and to open a dialogue about challenges to evaluation design and implementation.

Evaluating Social Programs Course

This annual training equips participants with resources and knowledge to design, use, and interpret evidence from impact evaluations of social programs. The course is an overview of why, when, and how researchers and policymakers might choose to conduct randomized evaluations and how randomized evaluations are designed. Lectures and case studies use real-world examples to prepare participants to apply learning at their home organizations. The course covers both the technical design and pragmatic considerations of measuring impact with a randomized evaluation.

Research Resources

We've drawn on our ten years of experience to develop a suite of research resources, in collaboration with J-PAL Global, that share best practices and key considerations for strengthening the design, implementation, and analysis of randomized evaluations—including our most recent health care evaluation toolkit, guidance and advice for social scientists conducting randomized evaluations related to health care.

RMS

J-PAL North America provides strategic and customized Research Management Support (RMS) to researchers in the J-PAL network to navigate early-stage complexities in the design and implementation of randomized evaluations. For example, J-PAL staff supported the design and launch of a randomized evaluation of the impact of different subsidies on the take-up of wildfire risk reduction activities in partnership with [Jackson County, Oregon, Fire District 3](#), including informational campaigns and financial benefits to encourage the take-up of wildfire prevention

practices on residents' homes. This project will directly inform evidence-based policy in the state of Oregon, and has the potential to inform policies among other regions battling the climate, social, and economic effects of wildfire damage.

Key Message 6: The lives of millions of people experiencing or at risk of experiencing poverty in North America can be improved by scaling programs backed by rigorous evidence. J-PAL North America is building the evidence base and infrastructure to realize this future.

J-PAL support for Office of Evaluation Sciences

J-PAL staff and affiliates contributed to the creation of the Office of Evaluation Sciences (OES) to improve the capacity of US federal agencies to build and use rigorous evidence and continue to partner with OES to aid this mission. In 2019, a senior policy associate from J-PAL North America worked as a fellow with OES and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to develop onboarding materials for new EOs with varied levels of expertise in evaluation. J-PAL North America's training team has facilitated one such onboarding session on impact evaluation methodologies, bolstering the evaluation capabilities of approximately twenty EOs in attendance. Since 2015, OES has leveraged the expertise of more than 150 multidisciplinary researchers to conduct over ninety evaluations with twenty federal agencies and impacted policymaking across a wide range of sectors.