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**NORTH AMERICA**  
**MONTHLY NEWSLETTER**  
August 2021

Good morning,

Applied economists are best known for focusing on quantitative research: collecting numerical data, quantifying differences in outcome, and using statistical techniques to make adjustments and estimates. While these methods can be highly rigorous, they cannot answer all questions related to a program's impact. Economists also use interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observation—methods that are more frequently associated with qualitative research. By approaching problems differently, asking different questions, and incorporating a wide variety of experiences and perspectives, qualitative research tools can shed light on why and how a program may be working, or aid the design of an intervention or research study. Some economists use these tools in the process of designing an evaluation, or interpreting peculiarities in the data; others pair with researchers who specialize in qualitative research for a more comprehensive view on the mechanisms that drive a program's impacts.

In our new qualitative research blog series, we feature stories from researchers who conducted qualitative research methods as part of J-PAL-supported randomized evaluations and their reflections on how this integration of qualitative approaches added critical context to data and created stronger studies. I hope this new blog series sparks new questions and research designs. If you have already incorporated qualitative research into your work, I welcome you to [share your experiences](#).

In this newsletter, we also share recent research results from a randomized evaluation of a nationwide Facebook messaging campaign featuring physician-recorded video messages that reduced 2020 holiday travel and decreased subsequent cases of Covid-19. Finally, we share key guidance on how state and local governments can apply the funds from the American Rescue Plan Act to evaluations and evidence-based interventions.

Laura Feeney  
Acting Executive Director  
Director of Research & Training, J-PAL North America





## **New blog series features the role qualitative research can play in strengthening randomized evaluations**

Often, researchers in quantitative fields receive data that is complicated and unexpected. In our new blog series, we look at the ways qualitative research methods can often help build context around that data and shed light on the reasoning behind decision-making. To launch the series, J-PAL North America Co-Scientific Directors Amy Finkelstein and Lawrence Katz *offer insights* into how fellow economic researchers can use qualitative methods in their work. And through three case-studies—featuring research on *racial concordance in health*, *creating moves to opportunity*, and *Oregon health insurance experiment*—we further explore how randomized evaluations were bolstered by the inclusion of qualitative approaches.

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**Research finds messages from healthcare workers, delivered over Facebook,**



**Promoting evidence and evaluation in the American Rescue Plan Act**



## reduced 2020 holiday travel and Covid-19 spread

A [randomized evaluation](#) of a nationwide information campaign on Facebook found that short messages from physicians and nurses had a significant impact on reducing holiday travel and decreasing subsequent Covid-19 infection rates. Researchers found that the campaign, which reached almost 30 million Facebook users, was an impactful and cost-effective way to slow the spread of Covid-19 and enact behavior change. These results add to the growing body of evidence that [physicians are effective and trusted public health messengers](#), and demonstrates the potential for social media to be used as an impactful public health tool for disseminating accurate public health messages to a vast audience. This work has important implications for preventing the spread of future pandemics as well as more salient applications amid growing concerns over Covid-19 variants and persistent resistance to vaccinations.

This August, J-PAL North America’s Senior Policy and Research Manager, Rohit Nairpally, presented on a US Department of Treasury technical assistance panel for governments receiving state and local recovery funds through the American Rescue Plan Act. In a [reflection piece](#) on the J-PAL blog, he shares key lessons on evaluation and evidence-based interventions discussed on the panel. Chief among them: the American Rescue Plan encourages evidence use and enables evaluation in an exciting way; evidence can play a crucial role in economic recovery by both identifying when a program is on track and when it’s time to change course; and evaluation is a team sport that governments don’t have to pursue by themselves. For more on how governments can leverage evidence-based approaches and evaluation of promising innovations as tools to make meaningful improvements in their communities using American Rescue Plan funding, see [Rohit’s op-ed in Governing](#) we previously featured in June.

### FEATURED EVALUATION SUMMARY



### Matching provider race to increase take-up of

### FEATURED RESEARCH RESOURCE



### Grant and budget management research



## preventive health services among Black men

In [this study](#), researchers examined the impact of increasing representation in the healthcare workforce, through seeing the effect of race concordance (when the race of a patient matches that of their physician) and incentives on the take-up of preventive health services by Black men. Findings demonstrate that Black men who were randomly assigned to see a Black doctor were much more likely to select every preventive service, particularly invasive services, including blood pressure measurements, diabetes screenings, and flu vaccines. Given the severity of racial disparities in health outcomes, with Black men experiencing earlier morbidity and mortality from preventable or manageable conditions than white men, this study demonstrates the importance of building a diverse healthcare workforce.

## resource

This [research resource](#) covers practical advice on managing grants for principal investigators (PIs) and research staff. We include overarching tips to help ensure smooth grant management throughout the project; define and explain common terms and conditions; discuss final deadlines and no-cost extensions; and include guidance on managing multiple grants. This resource assumes that the grant has already been awarded; for guidance on writing a grant, see [Grant proposals](#).

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### MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS

[Who Discriminates in Hiring? A New Study Can Tell](#)  
New York Times

[Schools Will Spend Millions on Tutoring This Year — Here's How to Do It Right](#)  
Education Post

[COVID messages from doctors change behaviors across racial lines](#)  
Harvard News

[Building research partnerships to address the opioid crisis in Minnesota](#)  
J-PAL North America Blog

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