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NORTH AMERICA
MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

June 2021

Good afternoon,

This month, Covid recovery efforts are ramping up alongside a rebounding economy. As the Associate Director of Policy here at J-PAL North America, I am reflecting on a singular opportunity, to the tune of billions in federal funding through the American Rescue Plan (ARP), for state and local governments to help their communities rebuild. Recent guidance from the Treasury Department is now also calling on governments [to devote ARP funding toward evidence-based interventions](#). This is a critical moment to examine the evidence base and enact proven approaches to aid in the nation's recovery.

In this newsletter, we feature an essay from my colleague Rohit Nainpally on how governments can prioritize programs aimed at meeting both short-term recovery needs and long-term systemic challenges in order to help disproportionately impacted communities. We also revisit J-PAL North America's Mobility from Poverty Learning agenda for state and local governments, which was recently updated to include new research priorities resulting from the Covid pandemic. Finally, fresh off the blog, staff share key insights from our May "Health Care Delivery Initiative at 8" convening, including the value of evaluation in determining impact on health care outcomes.

Vincent Quan

Associate Director of Policy, J-PAL North America





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How evidence can be prioritized during Covid-19 recovery efforts

In a new opinion piece in [Governing](#), J-PAL North America’s State and Local Innovation Initiative lead, Rohit Naimpally, discusses how state and local governments have a unique opportunity to harness billions in federal funding to help their communities recover from Covid-19. By making evidence a priority—through leveraging evidence-based approaches and evaluating promising innovations—funding proposed through the American Rescue Plan can be used to make meaningful and long-term improvements for communities across the country. Local leaders can use the flexible pool of ARP funds to address immediate priorities around pandemic recovery by spending on evidence-informed programs, including [tutoring](#), [housing stability initiatives](#), [job training and re-skilling programs](#), and [community college comprehensive support interventions](#). In addition, governments can pursue evaluations to build the evidence base in [priority areas ripe for testing new research-informed solutions](#), to build community resilience in the long run.



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State and local learning agenda features priority areas for research to promote upward mobility

The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and resulting economic crisis have not only exacerbated existing barriers to economic mobility, they have also created additional barriers. The effects of the pandemic have led to a fresh set of research questions while lending renewed urgency to a number of established questions, including ones around the impact of direct cash transfers, effective service delivery mechanisms, increasing take-up of preventive health care, and reducing disparities in educational outcomes across sociodemographic factors. J-PAL North America's updated [Mobility from Poverty Learning Agenda](#), a blueprint for core research priorities and opportunities for future research by state and local governments, highlights these priorities to aid policymakers and researchers in developing evidence to address critical policy problems. Jurisdictions, researchers, and funders can use this learning agenda to focus government-researcher partnerships on generating rigorous evidence on the most urgent questions.

Health Care Delivery Initiative at 8 Convening celebrates research collaborations to improve health care delivery

A [new post](#) on the J-PAL blog offers insights from the recent [HCDI at 8](#) virtual convening, reflecting on eight years of research collaborations to make health care delivery in the United States more efficient, effective, and equitable. During the convening, sessions featured how randomized evaluations have been used to answer questions on a range of important health policy topics—including social determinants of health, health care payment reform, and racial disparities in health outcomes—to improve the lives of Americans, particularly of those experiencing poverty. Researchers and implementing organizations, including Fresh Food Farmacy and RIP Medical Debt, shared their experiences using randomized evaluations to measure the impact of programs and policies. Common themes from the convening included the importance of strong partnerships between researchers and implementing partners when conducting a randomized evaluation and the potential for rigorous evaluations to drive policy change. Recordings of convening sessions are now available on the [J-PAL website](#).

FEATURED EVALUATION SUMMARY

FEATURED RESEARCH RESOURCE





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The impact of case management on community college persistence and graduation in the United States

Supporting community colleges, where graduation rates remain low, is a priority for state and local governments across the United States. At a community college in Fort Worth, Texas, [researchers evaluated a comprehensive case management program](#) called Stay the Course, which included mentoring and emergency financial assistance (EFA), and measured the impact of these services on students' academic outcomes, including persistence in school, degree completion, credits earned, and cumulative GPA. They found that students who received a combination of case management and EFA services were significantly more likely to stay in school and to graduate, and that these effects were particularly pronounced for women.



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Assessing viability and building relationships

Whether you're a government partner, program implementing partner, or researcher, building strong partnerships is key to conducting successful evaluations. In a randomized evaluation, early discussions with partners serve dual purposes: (1) gathering enough information to assess the practical and statistical feasibility of a randomized evaluation, and (2) establishing strong working relationships with key stakeholders. By using initial conversations to discuss research questions, outcome measures, goals, and priorities, researchers and partners can jointly assess whether a randomized evaluation is in their best interests. [This resource](#) provides guidelines for researchers to conduct these early discussions with a program implementer who has expressed interest in a randomized evaluation, and with whom a partnership seems potentially viable.

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS

[Energy Efficiency Can Deliver—Here's How](#)
Forbes



High-dosage Tutoring Stems Pandemic Learning Loss. Canada Should Get Going

C.D. Howe Institute

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