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**NORTH AMERICA  
MONTHLY NEWSLETTER**

June 2024

Good morning,

June marks the beginning of wildfire season for many regions in North America, bringing with it increased risk to countless communities' health and safety. One county intimately affected by wildfire season is Jackson County, Oregon, which experienced the most destructive wildfire in Oregon's recorded history in 2020, destroying nearly 2,600 homes. In the aftermath of this fire, Bob Horton, a fire chief in Jackson County, sought to explore strategies to mitigate wildfire risk using rigorous research. Bob and his team came together with J-PAL North America and J-PAL affiliated researchers to conduct [an ongoing randomized evaluation](#) of information and incentives to encourage investment in "defensible spaces"—areas around homes designed to reduce fire danger.

This research partnership is one of the first to use a randomized evaluation to study wildfire risk mitigation strategies. J-PAL North America is built on a foundation of firsts—my own origin story starts with the [Oregon Health Insurance Experiment](#), the first randomized evaluation of the impact of Medicaid. That experiment laid the groundwork for founding J-PAL North America with a core mission of encouraging and supporting randomized evaluations of important policy questions to alleviate poverty. After ten years of partnership building and catalytic funding, we're continuing to push the bounds of how and where randomized evaluations can be leveraged to improve lives, as demonstrated by the examples in this newsletter. In addition to our feature on the Jackson County study, we highlight new research results on the impact of emergency rental assistance which, similar to the Oregon Experiment, leveraged government-administered lotteries in its randomization procedure.

I—alongside the entire J-PAL North America team—am always excited to support researchers and partners aiming to address the most pressing issues facing our communities today. I encourage you to [reach out](#) with any questions or innovative ideas for leveraging rigorous research in our collective effort to alleviate poverty.

Amy Finkelstein  
Co-Scientific Director, J-PAL North America



Jackson County Fire District 3's Community Wood Chipper chipping wildland fuel off the side of the road.  
Photo credit: Jackson County Fire District 3

## Building research partnerships to address wildfire risk in Jackson County, Oregon

States and counties are increasingly discovering a need for wildfire resilience. Supported by the State and Local Evaluation Incubator, Oregon's Jackson County Fire District 3 is currently conducting a pilot evaluation of a program encouraging households to take up wildfire prevention practices. In a new blog post, Deputy Director of the Western Fire Chiefs Association and former Fire Chief Bob Horton discusses this work in partnership with Judson Boomhower (UC San Diego) and Patrick Baylis (University of British Columbia), researchers in the J-PAL network. [Read more on the blog »](#)



Photo credit: Shutterstock.com

## New research results: The effects of emergency rental assistance during the pandemic

Government-administered lotteries for public assistance, such as emergency rental assistance (ERA), can provide opportunities for rigorous evaluation. Using applications to ERA lotteries in four cities during the Covid-19 pandemic, researchers in the J-PAL network—Robert Collinson (Notre Dame), John Eric Humphries (Yale), David Phillips (Notre Dame), Patrick Turner (Notre Dame), Winnie van Dijk (Yale)—and coauthors assessed the impact of

receiving ERA on housing stability, financial security, and mental health. [Read more about the results >>](#)

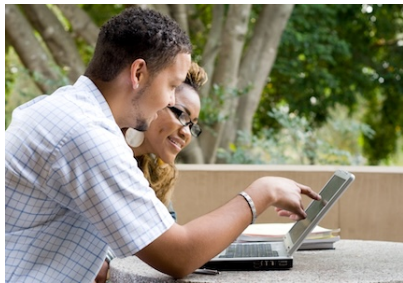
### FEATURED EVALUATION SUMMARY



## Letters of recommendation for youth employment in the United States

Can letters of recommendation from a summer job improve employment and earnings for young people? J-PAL affiliated researchers Sara Heller (University of Michigan) and Judd Kessler (University of Pennsylvania) partnered with New York’s Department of Youth and Community Development and summer youth employers to create and evaluate personalized letters of recommendation for summer youth employment program participants. Youth who received the letter of recommendation saw an increase in both employment and earnings after the program summer. [Read more about the evaluation >>](#)

### FEATURED RESEARCH RESOURCE



## Design and iterate implementation strategy

During the design phase of a randomized evaluation, researchers and implementing partners should work closely together to create a feasible implementation strategy. This [research resource](#) provides a framework for researchers making study design decisions with their partners. The steps covered in the resource include identifying stakeholders in the community, getting buy-in and feedback on study design decisions, and iterating design decisions with an implementing partner.

### MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS

## A modest intervention that helps low-income families beat the poverty trap

MIT News

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