

J-PAL Co-Founders Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo Awarded Nobel Memorial Prize in Economics

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Photo: J-PAL co-founders Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo with J-PAL senior leadership at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in July 2019. (Left to right: David Sears, Paula Pedro, Benjamin Olken, Lina Marliani, Anna Schrimpf, Esther Duflo, Iqbal Dhaliwal, Mary Ann Bates, Anja Sautmann, Abhijit Banerjee, Shobhini Mukerji, Laura Poswell, John Floretta.)

Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) co-founders Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo, with longtime J-PAL affiliate Michael Kremer, were jointly [awarded](#) the 2019 Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel. The prize was awarded “for their experimental approach to alleviating global poverty.”

Banerjee and Duflo co-founded J-PAL with Sendhil Mullainathan at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 2003 with a mission of reducing poverty by ensuring that policy is informed by scientific evidence. J-PAL conducts randomized evaluations of innovative policy ideas and programs to identify what works, what doesn’t, and why in the fight against poverty; and works with partners to bring the most effective programs to scale.



J-PAL began with just six staff members in 2003 and has since expanded to become a global research center with 181 affiliated researchers and 400 staff at leading research universities around the world. Its work is focused on research, policy engagement, and training:

- **Research:** J-PAL’s researchers and staff design and support innovative, large-scale randomized evaluations to identify the most effective approaches to reducing poverty. To date more than 950 randomized evaluations have been conducted by J-PAL affiliated researchers.
- **Policy engagement:** J-PAL policy experts work with high-level decision-makers in government and other organizations to help them understand and apply results from randomized evaluations, and to scale up programs found to be most effective. [More than 400 million people have been reached](#) by scale-ups of programs found to be effective by J-PAL affiliates.
- **Training:** J-PAL’s researchers and staff lead trainings for government officials and practitioners seeking to adopt evidence-based approaches to social policy and development. More than 7,000 people have participated in J-PAL training programs around the world.

When Banerjee and Duflo founded J-PAL in 2003, randomized evaluation was a relatively new methodology in development. Today, 2,900 randomized evaluations have been registered with the American Economic Association, and training in this methodology is standard practice in many university development economics programs.

In 2013, J-PAL opened a North America office to rigorously study what programs and policies meaningfully reduce poverty in the region. Over the past six years, the office has catalyzed more than eighty evaluations on important and understudied areas related to poverty in North America and has worked to translate research into action. J-PAL North America’s work spans a wide range of sectors including health care delivery, homelessness and housing security, criminal justice, education, and labor force development. Through its State and Local Innovation Initiative, J-PAL North America also partners with state and local governments to use randomized evaluations to generate new and widely applicable lessons about which programs and policies work, which work best, and why.

Abhijit Banerjee noted, **“J-PAL has and always will represent a shared bond between our affiliated researchers, more than 400 dedicated staff worldwide, and hundreds of funding and implementation partners. Without their incredible commitment, creativity, and hard work, this journey would not have been possible. I am so grateful to all of them.”**



Iqbal Dhaliwal, Executive Director of J-PAL, said, **“Abhijit and Esther are the rare founders who hit the incredible balance of providing a challenging and creative vision for the organization’s growth, while giving huge freedom to staff to innovate. A lot of us joined J-PAL because we were inspired by them, and it is an honor to work alongside them every day to seek out the most promising approaches to ending global poverty.”**

Esther Duflo—the youngest person and second woman to win the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economics—said, **“This recognition signifies the critical importance and urgency of our work. We have seen the great potential of experimental research and policy engagement to make change on a global scale. I look forward to taking this work forward with J-PAL’s incredible affiliated researchers, staff, funders, and implementers to reach hundreds of millions more around the world.”**

Mary Ann Bates, Executive Director of J-PAL North America, stated, **“The J-PAL North America office grew from Abhijit and Esther’s vision to alleviate global poverty by also focusing on poverty in developed countries like the United States. This prize recognizes the innovation, importance, and urgency of the field of experimental economics. I’ve been inspired by our many state and local government partners and innovative service providers who are courageously running randomized evaluations. We’re hopeful that the evidence generated will continue to improve many lives.”**

J-PAL’s work is supported by visionary foundations, governments, and individuals. Major donors include Co-Impact, Community Jameel, Echidna Giving, Google.org, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, The Douglas B. Marshall Jr. Family Foundation, the Omidyar Network, the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and the UK Department for International Development. Donors to J-PAL’s work in North America include The Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, Arnold Ventures, The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, The Layton-Lazo Family Fund, The Gerri and Rich Wong Family, The Overdeck Family Foundation, The Spencer Foundation, and The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

For more information, visit povertyactionlab.org/na.

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The Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) is a global research center working to reduce poverty by ensuring that policy is informed by scientific evidence. Anchored by a network of 181 affiliated professors at universities around the world, J-PAL draws on results from randomized impact evaluations to answer critical questions in the fight against poverty. We build partnerships with governments, NGOs, donors, and others to share this knowledge, scale up effective programs, and advance evidence-informed decision-making. J-PAL was launched at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 2003 and has regional offices in Africa, Europe, Latin America & the Caribbean, North America, South Asia, and Southeast Asia.