

## J-PAL North America launches two partnership opportunities to research social programs

Evaluation Incubators to provide technical assistance, training, funding to help partners design randomized evaluations of housing stability strategies and state and local programs.

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King County, Washington's Youth and Family Homelessness Prevention Initiative provides flexible funding and case management to families with youth under 18 and unaccompanied youth under age 25 who are at risk of homelessness. After receiving support from J-PAL North America staff during the 2017 State and Local Innovation Competition (now Evaluation Incubator), they partnered with a researcher to run a randomized evaluation of their programs.

J-PAL North America, a research center in the MIT Department of Economics, has opened two Evaluation Incubators: the [Housing Stability Evaluation Incubator](#) and [State and Local Evaluation Incubator](#). J-PAL North America's Evaluation Incubators equip partners to use randomized evaluations — the most [scientifically rigorous method](#) used to study program impact — in order to generate evidence about programs and policies that alleviate poverty.

Evaluation Incubators offer organizations and government agencies the opportunity to expand the base of evidence on solutions to pressing policy questions. Both incubators provide selected partners with technical assistance, training, flexible funding, and connections to academic researchers to build their capacity to generate evidence and utilize data to drive decision-making. Partners may also have the opportunity to leverage these resources to carry out a randomized evaluation in collaboration with J-PAL-affiliated researchers.

### **Growing housing instability necessitates innovation and evidence**

In the United States, nearly 600,000 people experience homelessness on a given night, and over 1.4 million people access shelter in a given year. Homelessness disproportionately affects Black people, LGBTQ individuals, people with severe mental illness, veterans, survivors of domestic violence, and members of several other marginalized communities. Rigorous evidence on strategies to reduce homelessness and foster housing stability is critical to ensure that people have a safe and stable place to live.

[Randomized evaluations](#) have already demonstrated their capacity to transform the field. For example, rigorous evidence on Housing First programs — which provide housing with no preconditions — shifted narratives and norms of service provision when results showed marked reductions in chronic homelessness.

As the scope and complexity of housing instability grow in the United States, so too does the need for rigorous research to identify the most effective strategies to end homelessness.

[Current partners](#) are focusing their research specifically on [cash transfers](#).

Nicole Moler, impact analyst at [Compass Family Services](#), notes the organization's excitement about the potential to implement and rigorously evaluate a cash transfer program with support from J-PAL North America: "We've had the opportunity to give small amounts of

funds to some clients before and have seen the difference it can make, but haven't had the data to back up our observations. We are excited to explore randomized evaluation because we want to really know if it will work at a larger scale. At the same time, Compass has a desire to make sure the evaluation is done carefully, ethically, and rigorously. This is where J-PAL's expertise comes in."

While cash transfers are a promising solution, unanswered policy questions range widely, from how to address the shortage of housing supply to what bundle of services are most effective and for whom. As such, J-PAL North America's Housing Stability Evaluation Incubator invites letters of interest from service providers seeking to evaluate any programs aiming to reduce homelessness or foster long-term housing stability.

Continuums of care, community-based organizations, and other service providers that wish to learn more about this opportunity can contact the [Homelessness and Housing Stability](#) team directly or see below for more information. Interested government agencies seeking to address homelessness can direct their inquiries and letters of interest to the State and Local Evaluation Incubator.

### **State and local governments are uniquely positioned to create and use evidence that addresses social challenges**

State and local governments play a central role in building rigorous evidence to inform poverty alleviation and promote well-being. They make decisions about funding public schools and community colleges, consider how prescription monitoring practices can be adjusted to prevent opioid overprescription, and take on new practices to address disparities in the criminal justice system, to name just a few examples. Researchers and state and local leaders have [shared key areas](#) where new or additional research at the state and local level is best positioned to address barriers to mobility from poverty. This kind of evidence is critical to informing how state and local governments fund and develop these programs.

State agencies, county authorities, and city offices can also act as catalysts of innovation by testing new policy approaches to foster upward mobility and community well-being. In turn, decision-makers can use this evidence to improve and scale effective policies and programs to reach more people. For example, California's [Shasta County Superior Court](#) partnered with J-PAL North America to better understand how to reduce failure to appear (FTA) — when a

defendant does not attend a scheduled court hearing — in their district. FTA can be costly for those summoned to court. Even for minor offenses, an FTA can lead to additional fines, and in some cases, an arrest warrant, which can have serious long-term effects on an individual's record.

Shawn Watts of the Shasta County Superior Court speaks to how critical their partnership with J-PAL North America was in building evidence to address this challenge: “Prior to this project, the court had no experience with randomized evaluations. The education we received on this research tool was instrumental to our understanding of how we should approach solutions to our issues. This study showed us that texting could reduce FTAs in our general population, especially if we had more reliable cell phone numbers for our defendants.”

This year, to maximize the impacts of the American Rescue Plan, investing in effective evidence-based programming is needed more than ever as communities rebuild from the pandemic. Any state or local government agency interested in testing a promising social program, including those focused on housing stability and homelessness prevention, is encouraged to apply to the State and Local Evaluation Incubator.

### **Information for prospective applicants**

Interested organizations are encouraged to submit a letter of interest by Oct. 17 to either the Housing Stability Evaluation Incubator or State and Local Evaluation Incubator. If you believe you may be eligible for both opportunities, please apply for the State and Local Evaluation Incubator. Detailed instructions on how to apply to the incubators can be found on their respective webpages.

J-PAL North America will host a webinar on Aug. 25 at 1:30 p.m. ET to provide more information on both Evaluation Incubators, review the application process, and answer questions. Please contact Laina Sonterblum with any questions about the Housing Stability Evaluation Incubator and Mera Cronbaugh with any questions regarding the State and Local Evaluation Incubator.