



**NORTH AMERICA
MONTHLY NEWSLETTER**

April 2020

Good afternoon,

As the world responds to the COVID-19 pandemic, health care providers, teachers, government officials, community leaders, and countless others are springing into action. In the wake of unprecedented loss and disruption, I am inspired to see so many contributing where they can to help others. At J-PAL North America, we are working to share evidence relevant to the response to the COVID-19 outbreak. We hope that this research can provide useful guidance to educators, policymakers, and communities as they navigate this crisis.

J-PAL affiliated researchers have synthesized research results across policy areas to guide evidence-informed responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, including strategies to [help educators and learners adjust](#) to schooling from home, approaches to [ease access](#) to critical social services, and efforts to [boost voter turnout](#) in the time of social distancing. J-PAL North America also shared guidance on how governments can [leverage data they are already collecting](#) to more effectively deal with the economic devastation of the coronavirus.

In addition, J-PAL is providing resources to the research community on how to continue research safely and responsibly. J-PAL affiliated researcher Tavneet Suri conducted a [webinar](#) to share insights from transitioning a large-scale survey from in-person to phone interviews. For additional information, see [this J-PAL blog post](#) detailing best practices for conducting phone surveys.

J-PAL North America is also connecting interested government partners with experts in our network to address current challenges. To see the extent of J-PAL's COVID-19 response, please visit our [dedicated webpage](#). This page is regularly updated with new resources on rigorous evidence relevant to response efforts, COVID-19 funding opportunities, and updates on measures we are taking to ensure the safety of our [staff](#), students, researchers, partners, study participants, and the communities where we live and work.

As always, J-PAL North America remains grateful to our community and the work of our extraordinary partners to support those most affected by the pandemic. Thank you for your work and your partnership.

Mary Ann Bates
Executive Director, J-PAL North America



Advice for policymakers: Improving access to social benefits and leveraging data

In late March, Congress passed the \$2.2 trillion CARES Act intended to speed relief across the American economy as layoffs and business closures related to COVID-19 threaten the economic security of millions of Americans. To further support these workers, policymakers must act immediately to reduce barriers to accessing social safety net programs. In their new piece, ["Make It Easier to Access Social Benefits,"](#) Amy Finkelstein, co-scientific director of J-PAL North America, and Matthew Notowidigdo, co-chair of J-PAL North America's Work of the Future Initiative, provide recommendations for how governments can make sure that these benefits get into the hands of households that need them most. The key is to provide salient benefits information to eligible individuals and simplify the benefits application process. Governments can also leverage data that they are already collecting to strengthen their pandemic responses. Our recent [piece in Governing](#) outlines how using administrative data can help policymakers improve awareness of how the crisis is affecting demand for services, identify populations to target for assistance, and facilitate benefit enrollment and delivery.



Using evidence to guide at-home learning practices

While school closures have sent millions of children home indefinitely, education leaders should consider evidence-based approaches to support the transition to at-home learning in their communities. Education technology platforms will likely play a central role as learning moves out of the classroom, but not all programs are equally effective. Effective education technologies often share a few components: they're interactive, allow students to advance at their own pace, and provide students with real time feedback. J-PAL Education Sector Co-Chair Phil Oreopoulos outlines [recommendations for education leaders](#) in his recent piece in Education Week. For more information on at-home learning, Susanna Loeb discusses how parents can be effective home educators and [how schools can best support families during closures](#) in another Education Week article.



Leveraging social networks to get out the vote

While in-person campaigning is on hold, leveraging pre-existing social connections may be an effective way to continue efforts to boost voter turnout. As the United States responds to the COVID-19 pandemic, political campaigns are struggling to adjust to the new realities of campaigning. Senate campaigns have suspended door-to-door canvassing and are transitioning to being almost entirely online. In an article in [Scientific American](#), J-PAL affiliated researcher Donald Green discusses a recent evaluation of Turnout Nation's social network-based voter turnout strategy. While past research suggests that in-person strategies are among the most effective means of getting individuals to vote, Green's evaluation presents a promising solution to boosting voter turnout in the time of social distancing. The experiment yielded some of the largest impacts on turnout of any experimentally tested get-out-the-vote study in recent history.

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[J-PAL North America](#) is a regional office of the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL), a global research center based at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). Anchored by a network of more than 190 affiliated professors at universities around the world, J-PAL draws on results from randomized impact evaluations to rigorously study what strategies meaningfully reduce poverty and translate research into action.



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