

MEASURING IMPACT

TRANSFORMING
PHILANTHROPY
THROUGH
EVIDENCE



Session overview



Demystifying impact evaluation concepts

Led by: Aparna Krishnan

Senior Advisor, J-PAL South Asia



Case study: Learning from impact evaluation

Led by: Lina Marliani

Executive Director, J-PAL Southeast Asia



Turning evidence into stakeholder action

Moderated by: Brian San

Co-Secretary-General, Institute of Philanthropy

Learning goals

- Gain a clear understanding of causal impact and how we can estimate it to learn whether a program really works.
- Learn from a real-world case study to consider how to design an evaluation and apply evidence to organizational decision-making.
- Balancing real-world constraints, discuss opportunities and challenges for impact evaluations to meaningfully inform philanthropic decisions.

Learning from each other's experiences

- We hope to also learn from you and encourage your participation!
- Please use the **chat feature** throughout to share your thoughts and experiences related to the topics being discussed.
- During the discussion portion, please use the **Q&A feature** to share your questions for presenters and upvote questions from others.

Please introduce yourself in the chat!

How can rigorous scientific evidence help you choose where to deploy your resources for maximum impact?



Choose and design programs based on **local context** and **global knowledge** of what works



Use rigorous **impact evaluations** to test if programs have the intended effects

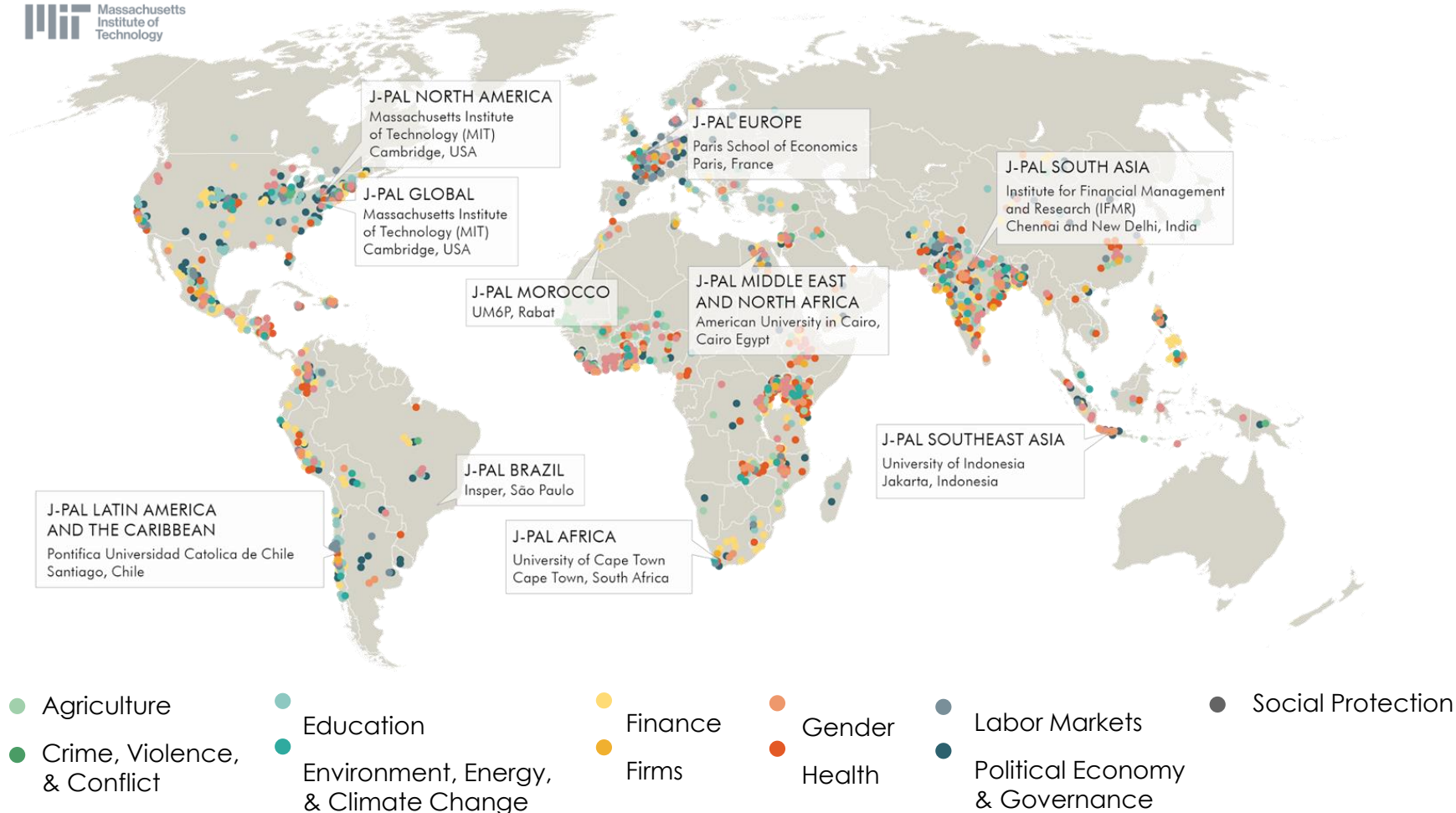


Compare solutions in terms of their **cost** and the magnitude of **impact**



Scale successful solutions with **fidelity**

J-PAL's offices around the world build partnerships for **globally informed and locally grounded** evidence



Founded by MIT professors in 2003



Abhijit Banerjee



Esther Duflo



Sendhil Mullainathan

Demystifying impact evaluation concepts

Aparna Krishnan

Senior Advisor, J-PAL South Asia



Impact evaluations help to understand whether program investments are achieving their ultimate objectives

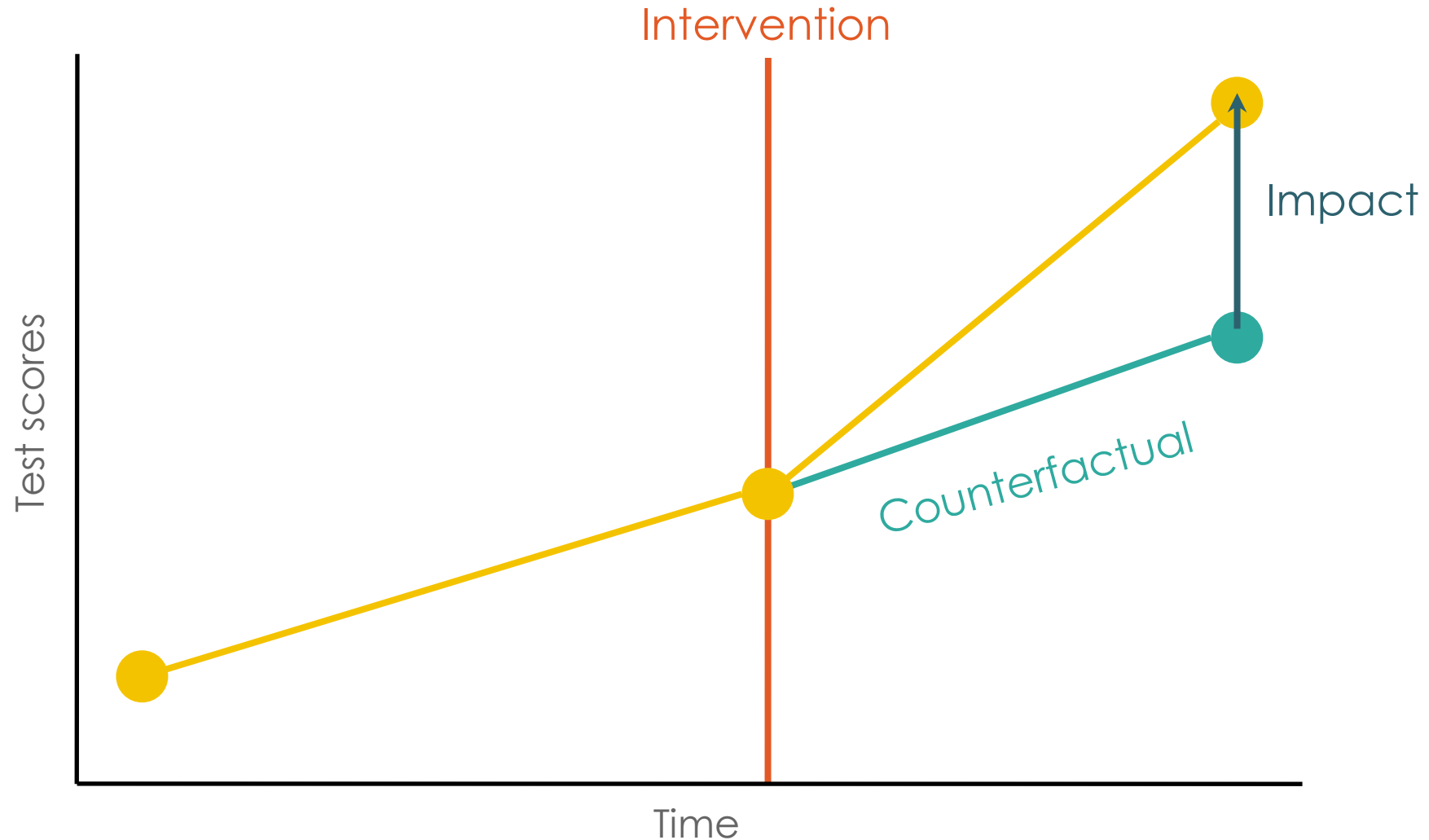


A tutoring platform delivering personalized, adaptive learning aligned with students' curriculum

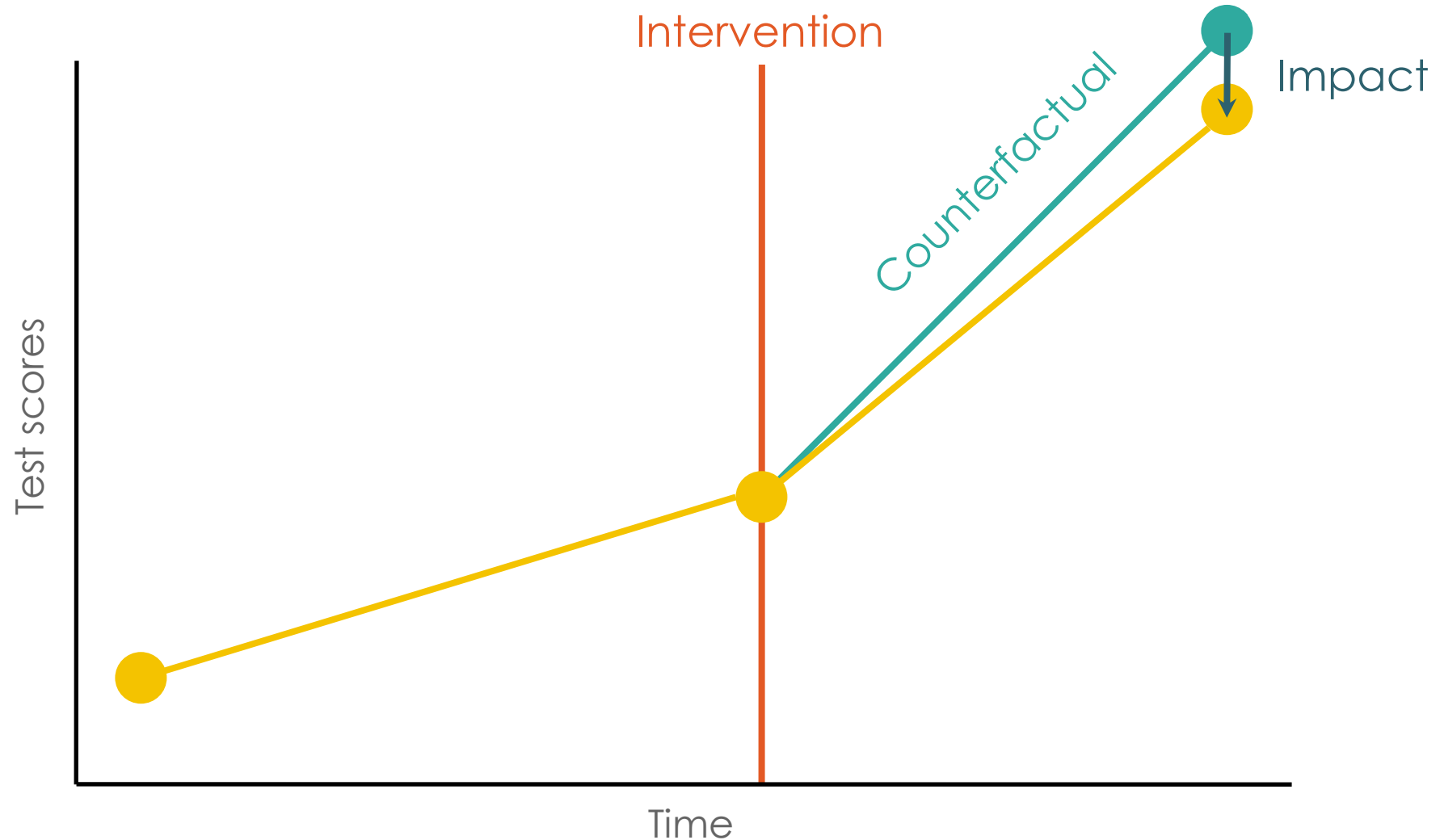
- **Data collected on outputs:** # of student users, questions submitted
- **Unknown impacts:** Did students' learning outcomes improve?

Without rigorous impact evaluation, we make a leap of faith that program investments are achieving their intended impact

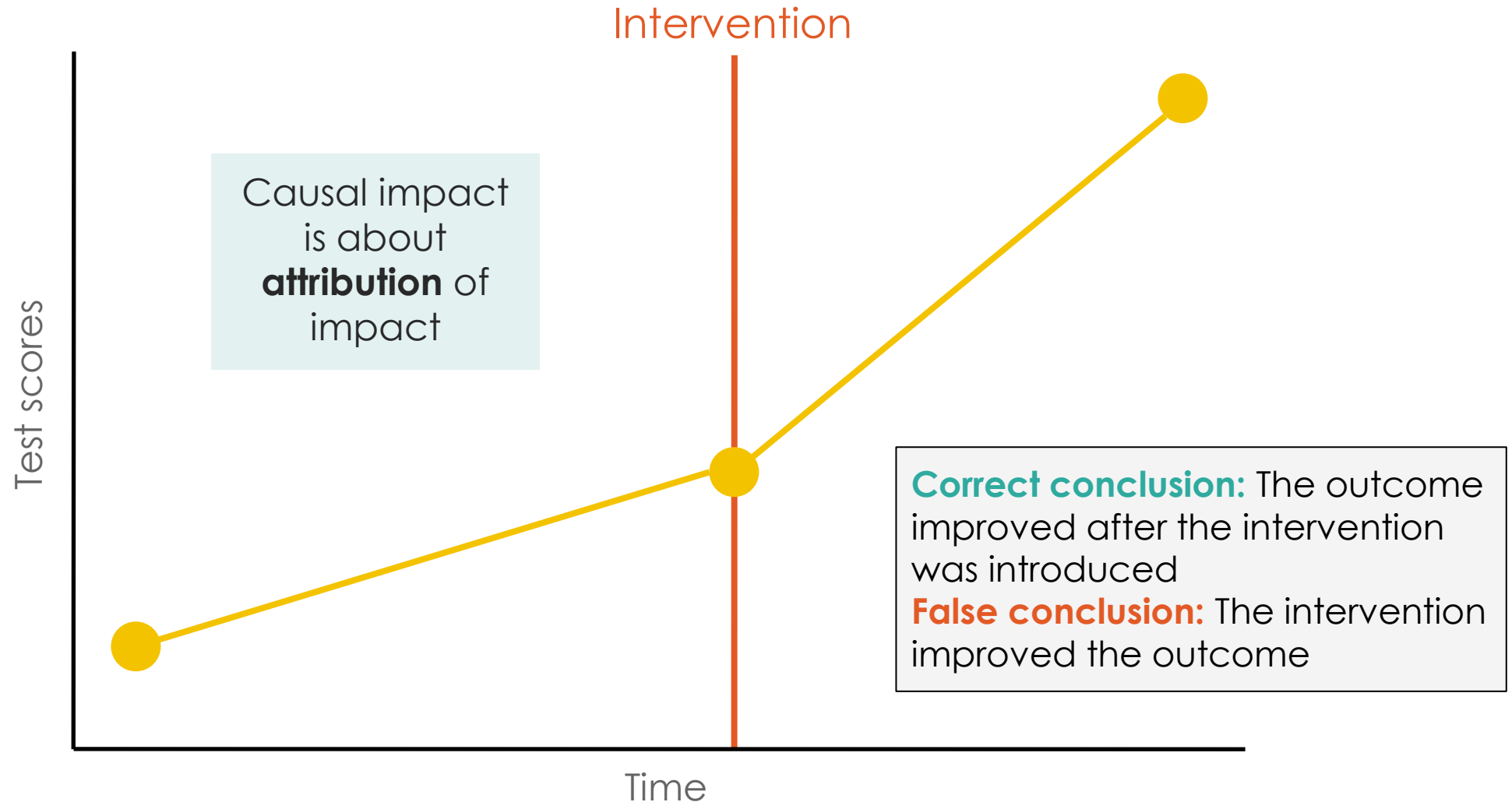
What is the impact of this tutoring program?



What is the impact of this tutoring program?



Which of these conclusions is correct?



What is causal impact and how can we estimate it?

The causal impact of a program is defined as a comparison between:

- **What actually happens** after the program has been introduced
- **What would have happened** had the program not been introduced (i.e., the “**counterfactual**”)

In order to estimate impact, we have to understand the **counterfactual**:

- **Problem:** The counterfactual never happened so it cannot be observed
- **Solution:** We need to “mimic” or construct the counterfactual

Impact evaluation methods

- Impact evaluation methods answer **cause-and-effect** questions: *What is the effect of [program] on [outcomes]?*
- Different methods use different **comparison groups** to estimate the counterfactual
- Each method relies on **different assumptions** to create a credible estimate, and whether these hold will depend on the evaluation at hand

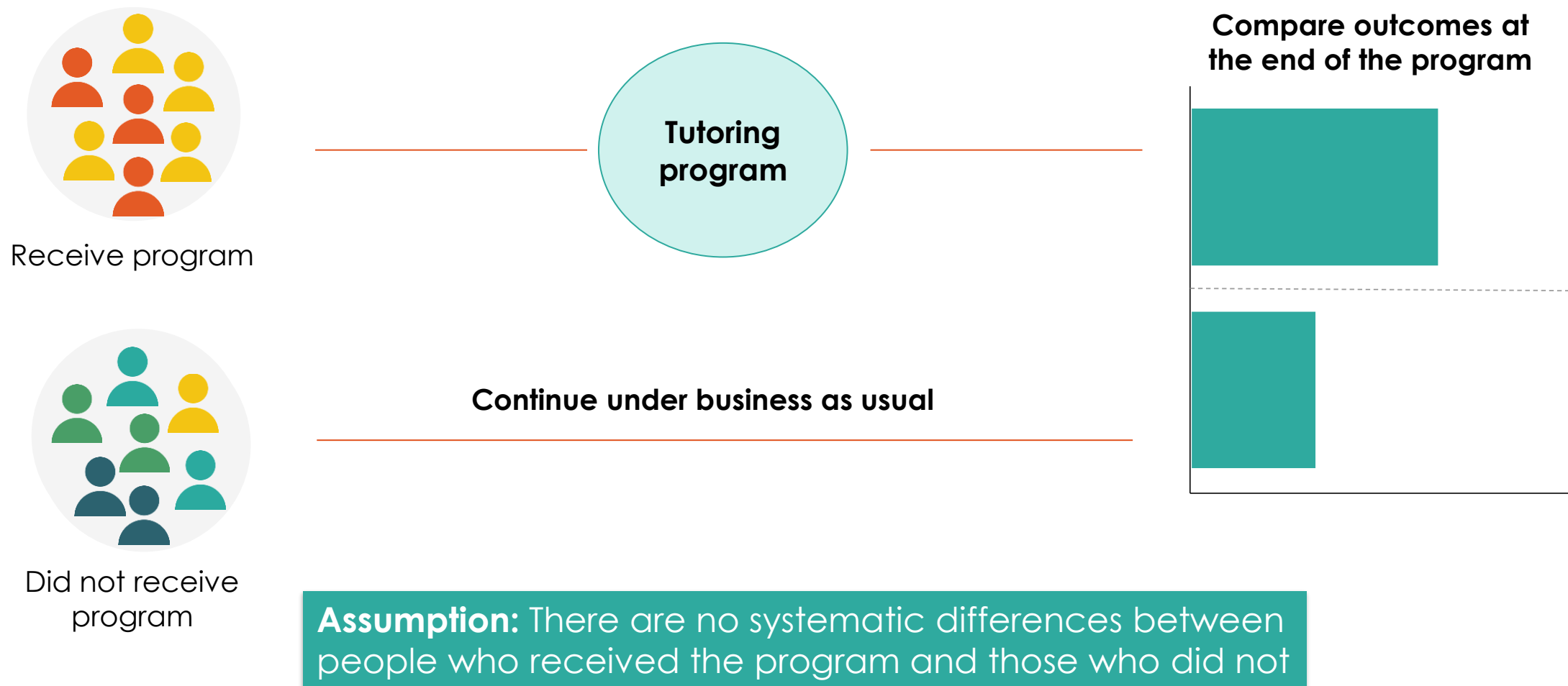
Non-experimental methods

- Pre-post comparison
- Simple difference
- Statistical matching
- Difference-in-differences
- ...and others

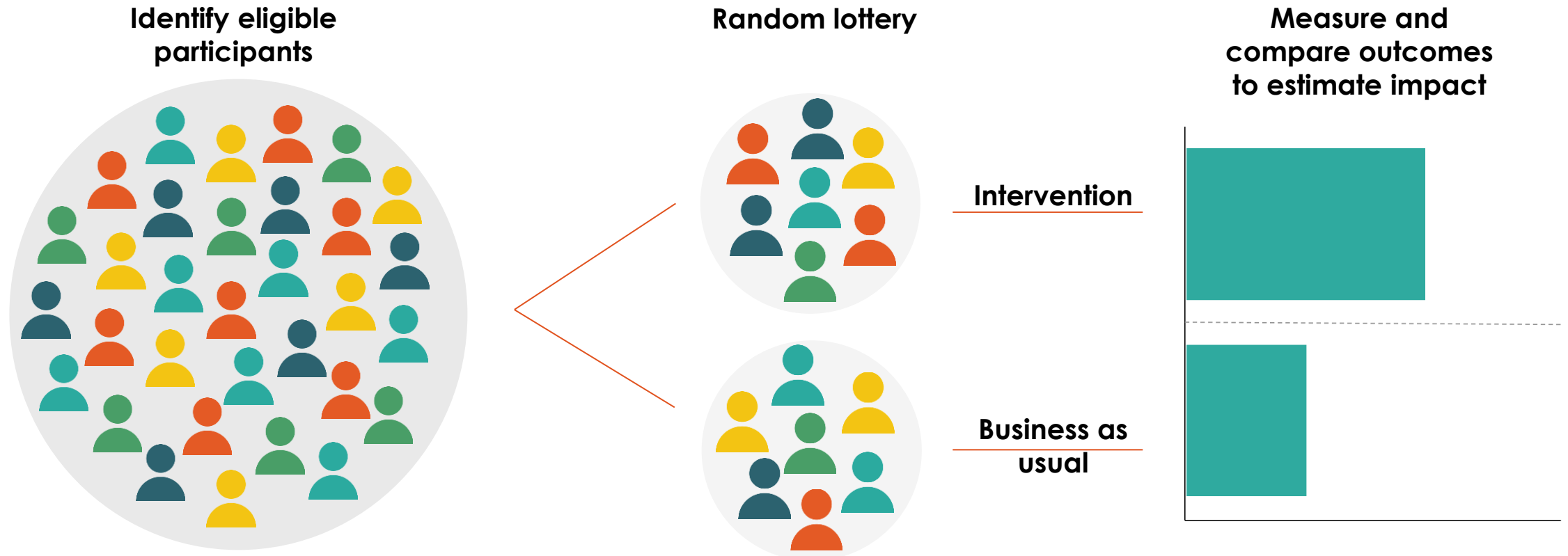
Experimental method

- Randomized evaluations

Is comparing the outcomes of participants with those of non-participants a good estimate of causal impact?



Randomized evaluations use random assignment to mimic the counterfactual and estimate an intervention's impact



Benefit of a randomized controlled trial (RCT): Randomization ensures that the treatment and comparison groups are comparable at the outset, thus creating a good approximation of the counterfactual.

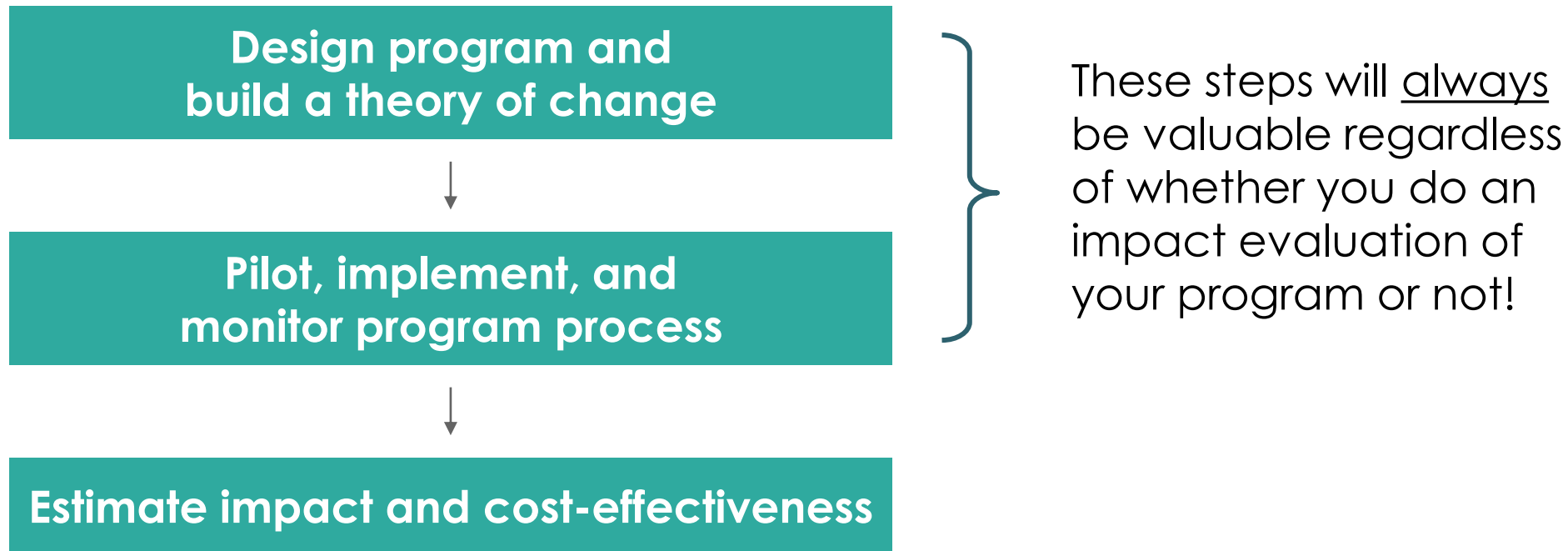
What are some areas where evidence from impact evaluations could affect your decision making?

Opportunities: Using impact evaluation in philanthropy

1. **Deciding what to invest in:** Use existing evidence to determine areas with the most potential for social impact to guide investments.
2. **Guiding grantee activities:** Use existing evidence to support grantees on their strategy for program design and implementation.
3. **Estimating causal impact and cost effectiveness:** Generate evidence on how a funded program affects outcomes of interest.

What are some possible challenges you anticipate for using impact evaluation in your work?

Impact evaluation is just one component of a good evaluation and learning strategy



A good impact evaluation builds on good program design and implementation

**Design program and
build a theory of change**



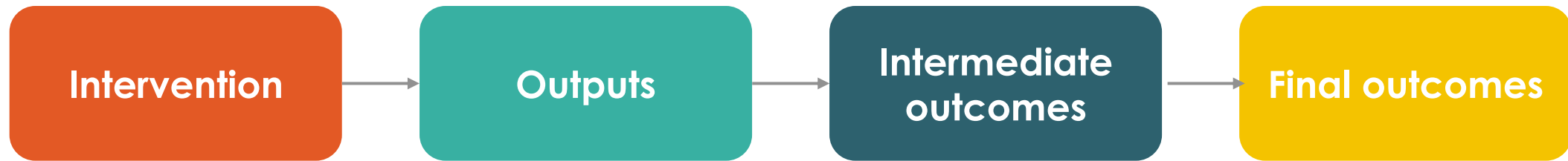
PROGRAM DESIGN AND THEORY OF CHANGE

- Understand the extent of the problem and who is affected
- Identify a promising solution informed by existing evidence
- What steps are needed to achieve the desired change in outcomes?



Theory of change

A theory of change describes the **causal pathway** from the intervention (input) to the final outcomes (impact).



This helps to think critically about the **assumptions** that need to hold for your intervention to have the intended effect and to consider what **data** to collect at each step to test these assumptions.

A good impact evaluation builds on good program design and implementation

Design program and
build a theory of change



Pilot, implement, and
monitor program process



PILOTING, IMPLEMENTATION, AND MONITORING

- Pilot the program and adjust design as needed
- Is the program able to be implemented with fidelity?
- Does the program reach the target population?

A good impact evaluation builds on good program design and implementation

Design program and
build a theory of change



Pilot, implement, and
monitor program process



Estimate impact and cost-effectiveness



IMPACT EVALUATION AND COST-EFFECTIVENESS

- Did the program have the intended effects?
- Given magnitude of impact and cost, how does it compare to alternatives?

Case study: Learning from impact evaluation

Lina Marliani

Executive Director, J-PAL Southeast Asia



Considerations for exploring an impact evaluation

- Is the program **ready** for evaluation?
 - If it requires further tinkering, first focus on piloting, implementation, and monitoring.
- What is your **informed prior** about whether the program will be effective?
 - Is there genuine uncertainty about effectiveness and cost-effectiveness?
- What would you like to **learn** about the program?
 - How will the findings inform concrete policy and programmatic decisions?
- What is the **resource tradeoff** for evaluation?
 - What time or resource constraints do you face? What is the cost of not evaluating?

Case study: Investing in health and education to empower children and families in Indonesia

- **Challenge:** Despite economic growth, Indonesia faces challenges in health and education indicators, such as the prevalence of stunting.
- **Solution:** By requiring certain investments, conditional cash transfers seek to improve child welfare. However, most research only examines short-term impacts.



Photo: Shutterstock.com

Program design &
theory of change



Implementation &
monitoring



Impact evaluation &
cost-effectiveness

Designing a conditional cash transfer in Indonesia



- **Intervention:** In 2007, the government introduced *Program Keluarga Harapan* (PKH), a quarterly cash transfer for low-income households of about 15-20% of annual income.
- **Eligibility:** Transfers were conditional on families completing various health and education requirements.

Program design &
theory of change



Implementation &
monitoring



Impact evaluation &
cost-effectiveness

What would you want to know to understand whether the program was implemented as intended?

Monitoring program implementation

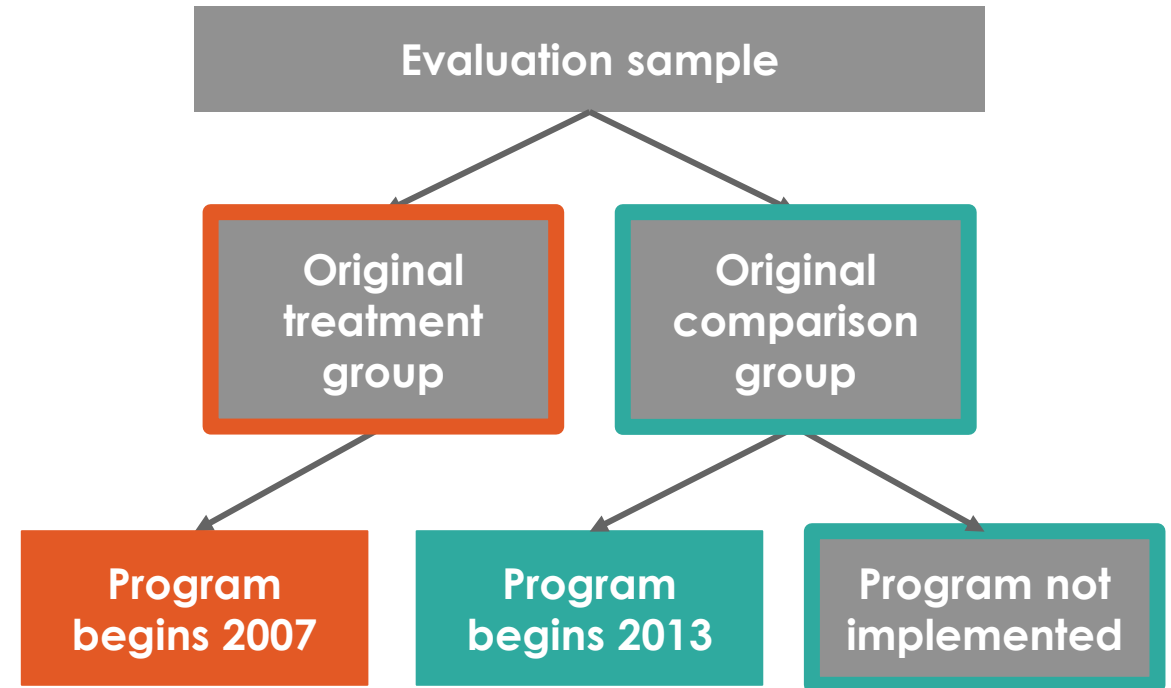
- Were eligible households correctly identified?
 - Conducted door-to-door survey and proxy means test
- Do households comply with the necessary requirements for the program?
 - Verification system was not implemented until several years into the program
- For households who comply, are transfers received?
 - Data from administrative records and household surveys

[“Cumulative Impacts of Conditional Cash Transfer Programs: Experimental Evidence from Indonesia.”](#) Cahyadi et al., 2017.



Designing a randomized evaluation

- Estimated program impacts on health, education, and economic outcomes.
- Compared results two years following the program's initial roll out to the effects after six years to understand longer-term trends.



Program design &
theory of change



Implementation &
monitoring



Impact evaluation &
cost-effectiveness

Evaluation findings

- Conditional cash transfers helped households **make significant investments in their children's health and education** six years later
 - Likelihood of stunting for children under age 3 decreased
 - School enrollment for children age 7-15 increased
- Conditional cash transfers had **no longer-term impacts on employment or consumption**

Program design &
theory of change



Implementation &
monitoring



Impact evaluation &
cost-effectiveness

What can we learn from this evaluation?

- With specific goals like improving school attendance or child health, conditional cash transfers can be an effective approach.
- However, with less monitoring capacity or broader goals, labeled or unconditional cash transfers may be a better fit.



Photo: Talitha Chairunissa

Program design &
theory of change



Implementation &
monitoring



Impact evaluation &
cost-effectiveness

How did the findings influence decision-making?

Informing scaling decisions

Informed in part by this study and related research, **the government expanded the PKH program**, increasing the number of beneficiary families from 6 million to 10 million from 2016 to 2020.

The role of philanthropy

More recently, aid agencies and philanthropy played a catalytic role in supporting piloting and evaluating the impacts of cash without condition, **helping to build a strong evidence base** to get a once novel approach into the mainstream.

Program design &
theory of change



Implementation &
monitoring



Impact evaluation &
cost-effectiveness

This is just one of the pathways to policy change



Shifting global thinking



Institutionalizing evidence use



Applying research insights



Adapting and scaling a program



Scaling up evaluated pilots



Scaling back an evaluated program

The use of RCTs is expanding to tackle key policy-research challenges in new areas



Equitable social programs

Identify effective and inclusive approaches for people living with disabilities.



Climate change

Advance evidence-based policies to mitigate and adapt to climate risks.



Urbanization

Adapt approaches to support well-being and resilience in urban settings.



AI for social good

Test strategies for effective adoption of AI for program targeting, access, and delivery.



The future of work

Test strategies for sustainable employment and help workers adapt to changing economies.



Big data

Increase the use of big data for evidence-informed decision-making.

Reflections: Turning evidence into stakeholder action

Moderated by Brian San

Co-Secretary-General, Institute of Philanthropy



FIRESIDE CHAT

Turning evidence into stakeholder action



Aparna Krishnan

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Brian San

Co-Secretary-General,
Institute of Philanthropy



Questions?

Please share your questions using the Q&A feature.

Stay tuned: Upcoming impact measurement workshop

Join us for an **in-person workshop** this September to dive deeper into the **impact measurement** topics discussed today to strengthen evidence-based philanthropic decision-making.

When: 11-12 September, 2025

Where: Hong Kong

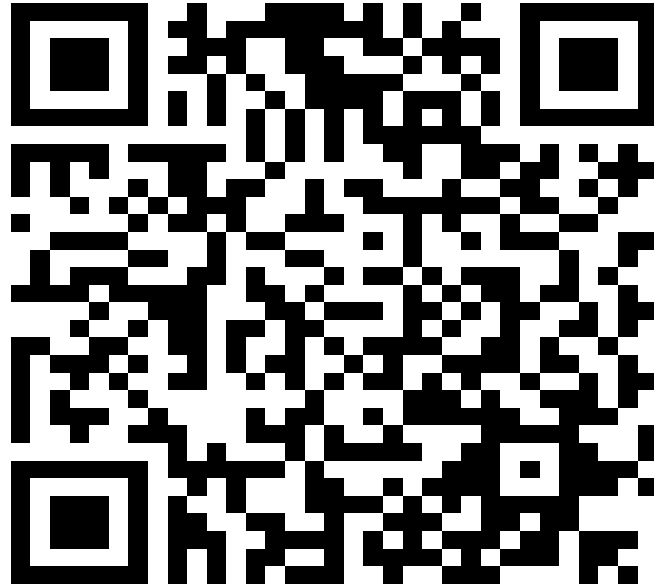


Photo: J-PAL Southeast Asia

Look out for our email with more information soon!

Please share your feedback with us

Thank you for your participation in the webinar! We would appreciate if you could take just two minutes to share your anonymous feedback:



Closing reflection: In light of important challenges, evidence-informed philanthropy can help funds go further

1



**Directing money
to solutions that
actually work**

2



**Increasing the impact
of existing solutions
by improving design**

3



**Creating knowledge
that can be scaled
far beyond one
implementer**



Thank you!



References and further reading

J-PAL resources on impact evaluation and evidence to policy

- Research Resources: [Introduction to randomized evaluations](#) and [The elements of a randomized evaluation](#)
- [Pathways to Policy Change](#) (with accompanying case studies)
- [The Evidence Effect](#)
- Blog: [Growth is not enough](#)

Conditional cash transfers case study

- Evaluation Summary: [The Medium-Term Impact of Conditional Cash Transfers on Health and Education in Indonesia](#)
- Research paper: [Cumulative Impacts of Conditional Cash Transfer Programs: Experimental Evidence from Indonesia](#)
- Evidence review: [Research Directions on Social Protection in Low- and Middle-Income Countries](#)
- The Evidence Effect: [Giving cash with conditions](#)

Key vocabulary

TERM	DEFINITION
Counterfactual	What would have happened to the participants of an intervention had they not received the intervention. The counterfactual can never be observed; it can only be inferred from a comparison group.
Estimate	In statistics, a “best guess” about an unknown value in a population (such as the effect of a program on an outcome) according to a rule (known as the “estimator”) and the values observed in a sample drawn from that population.
Impact	The causal impact of an intervention is the effect of the treatment. It is estimated by measuring the differences in outcomes between the treatment and comparison groups.
Theory of change	A structured approach used in the design and evaluation of social programs to specify the pathway through which the intervention could lead to an impact. It maps the logical chain of how program activities and outputs achieve changes in outcomes.
Assumption	A precondition that underpins a theory of change or model. An assumption cannot always be directly observed or verified. E.g., <i>When students read textbooks, they learn from them.</i>

Reuse and citation

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J-PAL, 2025

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