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**NORTH AMERICA
MONTHLY NEWSLETTER**

April 2026

Good morning,

Poverty is a multifaceted and pressing challenge facing 35 million people in the United States. Its scope and complexity require that policy solutions be comprehensive and evidence-based. That's why J-PAL North America supports evidence generation and use across a wide range of sectors and dimensions, from labor and education to health and crime.

Some interventions—like [cash transfers](#), for example—are cross-cutting, with the potential to impact various dimensions of poverty at once. While existing research on cash transfers in the United States have shown that they likely aren't a poverty panacea, they can still make a meaningful difference. For instance, Chelsea Eats—a publicly run, Covid-19-era cash transfer program in Massachusetts—showed that modest payments of up to \$400 per month helped improve food security and some health outcomes. What's more, the success of this program extended beyond its ability to reduce calorie gaps and emergency department visits; Chelsea Eats is a prime example of how governments can partner with academic researchers to rigorously test innovative solutions to support their communities.

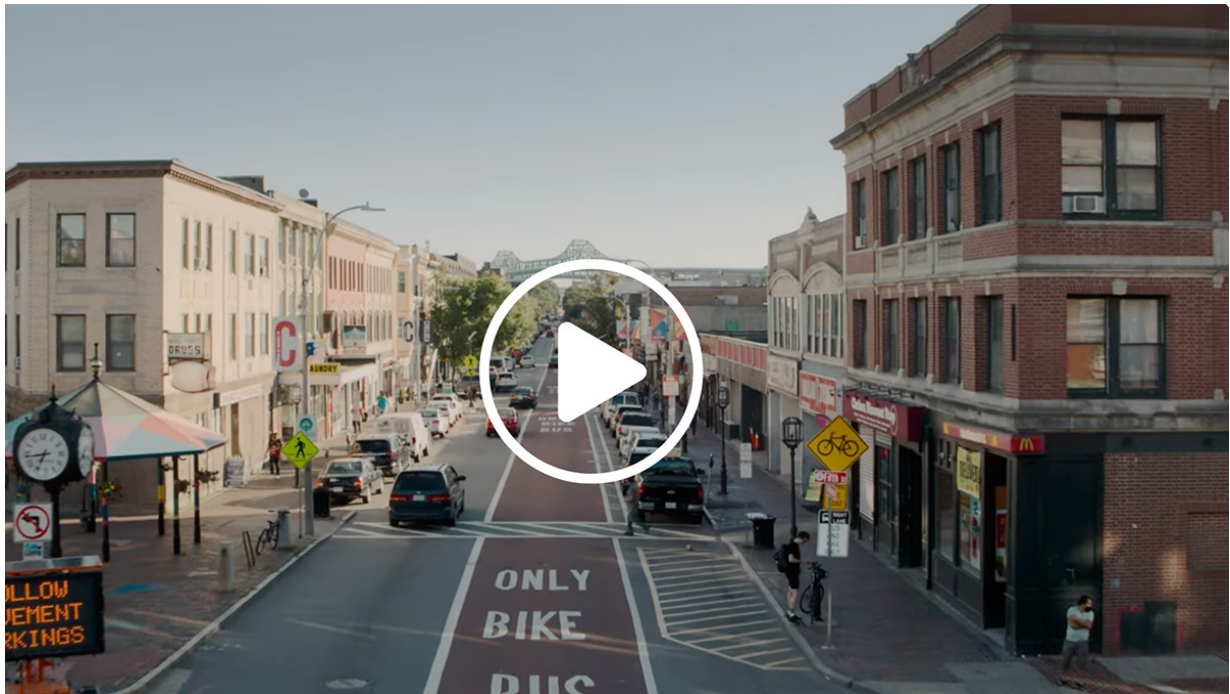
While key to both generating and using evidence, government-researcher partnerships can be difficult to form and even more difficult to maintain. That's why J-PAL North America, the Wilson Sheehan Lab for Economic Opportunities, and Carrie S. Cihak host regular Evidence Matters webinars on how public sector leaders can collaborate with academic researchers to reduce poverty and improve opportunities for constituents.

Keep reading to learn more about Chelsea Eats, Evidence Matters, and other ways J-PAL North America is supporting evidence generation and use across sectors.

Sincerely,

Laina Sonterblum

Policy and Communications Manager, J-PAL North America



Behind the scenes of the Chelsea Eats unconditional cash transfer program

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic and its economic effects on unemployment and food insecurity, the government of Chelsea, MA distributed monthly cash transfers of up to US\$400 to eligible households through the Chelsea Eats program. In a [new post on the J-PAL blog](#), J-PAL affiliated researcher Jeffrey Liebman and former City Manager of Chelsea, MA, Tom Ambrosino share how the city partnered with researchers to understand the impact of the Chelsea Eats program on people’s lives. A new video shares the results from the study, highlighting the impact of cash transfers on health, spending, and other key outcomes. [Watch the video »](#)



Photo credit: Wilson Sheehan Lab for Economic Opportunities

Evidence Matters: Tools for building effective government-researcher partnerships

Hosted by the Wilson Sheehan Lab for Economic Opportunities, J-PAL North America, and Carrie S. Cihak, Evidence Matters is a collaborative learning series bringing together government, researcher, and community perspectives to advance equitable, evidence-based economic

mobility. A [new post on the J-PAL blog](#) highlights key insights from March's webinar, "10 Lessons for Building Government & Research Partnerships That Matter," illustrating how successful partnerships depend on the expertise of all stakeholders. Join us for our June 2 webinar, "From Line Items to Impact: Incorporating Evidence into Local Budgeting," for a deep dive into the practical "how-to" of institutionalizing evidence-based spending. [Register now »](#)



Photo credit: J-PAL North America

Applications open: J-PAL North America Research Staff Training

Join J-PAL North America for our annual [Research Staff Training](#) (RST) from August 3–6 in Beverly, Massachusetts. Designed for early-career research staff working on randomized evaluations, this three-day training brings together participants from around the world to build practical and technical skills through a mix of lectures, hands-on exercises, and peer learning. Sessions will cover topics such as research ethics, power calculations, coding best practices, project management, survey design, equitable research practices, and effective communication with partners. Applications are due June 12, with decisions released on a rolling basis by June 17. An early application discount is available for submissions received by May 15. [Learn more and apply »](#)

FEATURED EVALUATION SUMMARY



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The impact of unconditional cash transfers on health outcomes in Chelsea, Massachusetts

There is limited evidence on the impact of cash transfers on health outcomes. A randomized evaluation conducted by Sumit Agarwal (University of Michigan), Benjamin Lê Cook (Harvard), and J-PAL affiliated professor Jeffrey Liebman (Harvard) found that monthly US\$400 payments to qualifying households for nine months reduced the number of emergency department visits, especially visits related to substance use. There were no significant differences in visits to primary care, Covid-19 vaccination, or biomarker measures of health.

[Read the evaluation summary »](#)

FEATURED RESEARCH RESOURCE



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So, you got a null result. Now what?

On the J-PAL blog, Michala Riis-Vestergaard (Research and Training Lead, J-PAL Global) outlines a series of steps for researchers who find that the program or policy they evaluated had no discernable impact on the outcomes measured. These steps aim to get researchers closer to understanding what drives a null result, distinguishing between three possible explanations: imprecise estimates, implementation failure, and a true lack of impact.

[Read the blog post »](#)

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