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NORTH AMERICA

NORTH AMERICA
MONTHLY NEWSLETTER
November 2023

Good afternoon,

Earlier this month, I had the pleasure of attending the Association of Public Policy Analysis and Management's annual conference (APPAM). The theme of the conference—"Policy that matters: Making public services work for all"—seemed an apt fit with our work to ensure social policy is informed by rigorous evidence. As part of that mission, we advocate for furthering the use of inclusive language and asset-based framing in research. We believe this work can strengthen research and the policy it informs in a few significant ways. It can bolster the credibility of researchers when speaking to the communities with whom we do research—signaling respect for their humanity and understanding of the broader cultural contexts. It can also enhance the accuracy of our research results, preventing us from falling into generalizations or overly simplistic interpretations of results. And it increases a study's policy relevance by encouraging human-centered, context-relevant research questions.

To that end, J-PAL staff and I led a workshop at APPAM titled Using Inclusive Communication to Improve the Accuracy and Accessibility of Public Policy Research. The workshop builds on J-PAL North America's internal inclusive language practices, which are among the most helpful I have seen. Markedly, they aim to be flexible, rather than prescriptive; they center people and complex lived experiences while recognizing that language is always changing and evolving. I frequently apply these guidelines to my research, and I encourage my colleagues to do the same.

If you are interested in learning more about what we shared during this presentation, I invite you to visit the blog post recapping our key takeaways from the workshop. It expands on the existing J-PAL inclusive language guide with additional considerations for incorporating this work throughout the research cycle. At J-PAL North America, we are continuously learning and growing in this work, so I invite you to reach out with feedback, suggestions, or interest in discussing inclusive language practices in your own work.

Matt Notowidigdo
Co-Scientific Director, J-PAL North America

Photo credit: J-PAL North America

Integrating inclusive and asset-based communication throughout the research cycle

In the latest part of J-PAL North America's blog series on researching racial equity, we share highlights from our workshop on inclusive and asset-based communication in research, recently delivered at the 2023 Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management annual conference. We share why inclusive and asset-based communication is important for improving the accessibility and accuracy of research. We outline several considerations for embedding these principles throughout the research cycle such as collaborating with community organizations to develop theories of change, research questions, and hypotheses and navigating differences in power dynamics between researchers, program administrators, and program recipients. Visit the blog to read more >>

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Rigorously evaluating cash transfer programs in the United States

Cash transfer interventions are gaining more attention worldwide, including in the United States where dozens of pilots with varying frequency, payment method, and eligibility are underway. In September, J-PAL affiliated professor Lisa Gennetian (Duke) brought together researchers conducting randomized evaluations of cash transfer programs in the United States to discuss the growing evidence base. On the J-

PAL blog, we highlight key takeaways from the conversation, including common challenges regarding measuring outcomes, implementing and designing cash transfer programs, and communicating about results to the public.

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Join us at our upcoming webinar: Evaluating effectiveness and equity in climate mitigation programs

On December 5, J-PAL North America is hosting a conversation with Results for America and government climate leaders on the role and promise of rigorous evaluation in informing effective, equitable climate mitigation strategies. We will hear from two teams in King County about how they use rigorous evaluation to guide planning and action on climate and transportation priorities, discuss the existing evidence base and research agenda, and share free resources and capacity-building programming from Results for America and J-PAL North America. Join us at the webinar >>
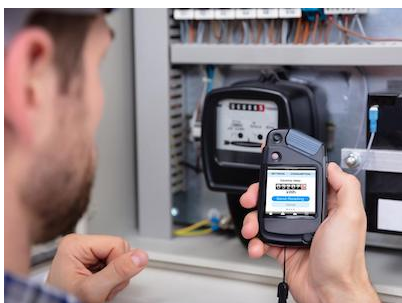

FEATURED EVALUATION SUMMARY

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Default enrollments to reduce electricity consumption: Evidence from an electricity pricing program

Paying the same price for electricity regardless of season and time of the day can lead to inefficiencies in responding to electricity demand such as stressed electricity grids during peak times and an oversupply of electricity during the night, when demand is lower. J-PAL affiliated researchers Patrick Baylis (University of British Columbia), Meredith Fowlie (University of California Berkeley), and Catherine Wolfram (University of California Berkeley) investigated the effect of automatically enrolling households in time-variant pricing structures on opt-out rates and electricity consumption. They found that default

enrollment into more efficient pricing plans offers a powerful means to reduce electricity consumption through the tendency to remain in default enrollments.

FEATURED RESEARCH RESOURCE

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So, you got a null result. Now what?

A new post on the J-PAL blog 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 explanations: imprecise estimates, implementation failure, and a true lack of impact. Learn more>>

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Have an idea of content you would like to see in this newsletter? We want to hear from you! Please send your feedback to J-PAL North America Communications Lead, Erin Graeber.

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