J-PAL STATE AND LOCAL INNOVATION INITIATIVE

J-PAL
ABDUL LATIF JAMEEL POVERTY ACTION LAB

WHAT WE PROVIDE

Matchmaking with researchers

Technical assistance

Project funding

State and local leaders are actively innovating and experimenting with approaches to address complex policy challenges. Yet too often, they must act without the benefit of rigorous evidence about what has been tried and proven elsewhere, or of learning after the fact which of their own policies and programs were most effective.

The J-PAL State and Local Innovation Initiative is led by J-PAL North America, a research center at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). The goal of the J-PAL State and Local Innovation Initiative is to assist state and local governments in using randomized evaluations to generate new and widely applicable lessons about which programs and policies work, which work best, and why.

Through the J-PAL State and Local Innovation Initiative, J-PAL North America will:

- Build the capacity of state and local governments to create and use rigorous evidence;

- Share this evidence with other jurisdictions that may be facing similar challenges; and

- Document and disseminate best practices for feasibly implementing randomized evaluations at the state and local level.

The state and local leaders selected to participate in this initiative will serve as a model for others across the United States, demonstrating that state and local governments can create and use rigorous evidence to address challenging social problems.

THE COMPETITION

The J-PAL State and Local Innovation Initiative features a two-phase competition for state and local leaders who are interested in designing and implementing randomized evaluations and using the evidence generated to inform their decision-making.

In Phase I of the competition, state and local leaders identify the policy questions they would like to answer using randomized evaluations. Selected state and local leaders receive ongoing technical support from J-PAL staff for a period of up to one year, flexible pilot funding of up to $100,000, and connections with J-PAL's network of researchers.

In Phase II of the competition, state and local governments that have partnered with a researcher from J-PAL's network to design a high-quality randomized evaluation can apply for additional funding, typically in the range of $250,000–500,000, to carry out the evaluation.

The deadline to submit letters of interest for the second round of the J-PAL State and Local Innovation Initiative was February 17, 2017. J-PAL North America anticipates announcing the next application round in Fall 2017. There will be multiple rounds of both Phase I and Phase II of the competition over five years.

To learn more about this initiative, please visit our website at povertyactionlab.org/stateandlocal. If you have further questions or would like to discuss a potential proposal, please email initiative manager Julia Chabrier at jchabrier@povertyactionlab.org.

Our affiliates
have conducted
150 ongoing
or completed
evaluations
in the region.

WHY RANDOMIZE?

In a randomized evaluation, participants and non-participants are randomly selected from a sample of eligible program participants. Random assignment ensures that, with a large enough sample, the two groups are similar on average before the start of the program. When properly designed and implemented, randomized evaluations produce impact estimates that offer us confidence that any differences in outcomes between the two groups are a result of the program. The ability to isolate the impact of the program from other confounding factors is why randomized evaluations are widely recognized as a particularly credible method for estimating program impact. Additionally, because randomized evaluations do not require a lot of assumptions, they produce results that are transparent and easy to explain to different audiences.

OUR PARTNERSHIPS

The J-PAL State and Local Innovation Initiative encourages new research projects across a wide range of social issues, including:

- Children and families
- Crime and violence prevention
- Education
- Employment
- Energy and environment
- Governance
- Health
- Household finance
- Housing and homelessness

WHEN DOES A RANDOMIZED EVALUATION MAKE SENSE?

Because this initiative is focused on helping state and local leaders design and implement randomized evaluations, applicants must be must be open to working with J-PAL North America to look for ways to include random assignment (for example, a random lottery) in the implementation of the program or policy they are interested in testing. If you have a program that is oversubscribed, a lottery can be a fair method for determining who gets access. Alternatively, if you have a program with low take-up rates, it may be possible to randomly encourage some of those who are eligible to sign up for the program. Pilot programs, or programs that are being expanded to new locations, can provide opportunities to randomly select who receives the program first. Randomized evaluations do not require that you withhold services from the people who would benefit most: those who are neediest or most deserving can be guaranteed access to your program, with randomization limited to those people on either side of your eligibility criteria, for whom the potential benefit may be less clear.

The first cohort of governments selected through the State and Local Innovation Initiative—Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico, South Carolina, Philadelphia, and Rochester—are developing evaluations to test innovative approaches to increasing employment, helping people move out of poverty, expanding opportunity for young people, and finding more effective treatments for substance use disorders.

Through this initiative, selected state and local governments have the opportunity to showcase how they are using evidence to inform policy in their jurisdictions. Over the course of the five-year initiative, selected state and local governments will participate in initiative convenings and other events in order to share best practices and lessons learned across sites. J-PAL North America will support state and local leaders in sharing the evidence generated by this initiative so that it reaches a wide audience of policymakers across the United States.

ABOUT J-PAL NORTH AMERICA

J-PAL North America is a regional office of the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL), a global network of researchers who use randomized evaluations to answer critical policy questions in the fight against poverty. J-PAL North America was established with support from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation and the Laura and John Arnold Foundation and works to improve the effectiveness of social programs in the region through three core activities: research, policy outreach, and capacity building.

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