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NORTH AMERICA
MONTHLY NEWSLETTER
December 2024

Good afternoon,

This month, we are honored to present our second annual Evidence Champion award to two individuals who have made significant contributions to the field of evidence-based policymaking throughout their remarkable careers: [Alicia Sasser Modestino](#) (Northeastern University), our researcher recipient, and [AJ Gutierrez](#) (Saga Education), our partner recipient.

Both awardees have demonstrated a deep dedication to building evidence and supporting the scale-up of evidence-based programs to help young people. Alicia—in collaboration with the City of Boston—has studied summer youth employment programs and found they improve the well-being of young people across a range of outcomes. Building on this research, Boston has scaled up these programs to help improve opportunities for young people in the city. AJ—who himself benefited from an intensive tutoring model—has spent his career catalyzing randomized evaluations of Saga’s tutoring program, which has been found to consistently improve math outcomes for high school students. He now advocates for policy change to support the national scale-up of evidence-based tutoring.

Today, both [summer youth employment programs](#) and [high-impact tutoring](#) are two especially promising evidence-based strategies for helping young people thrive in the United States. At J-PAL North America, we aim to support researchers and our partners in continuous research to understand how and why a program works, for which populations, and how to increase program equity and cost-effectiveness. We applaud AJ and Alicia for their dedication to identifying and scaling strategies to improve the lives of students from low-income families, demonstrating how evidence-based insights can transform social programs.

We are so grateful for our partners who join us on our mission to alleviate poverty.

Happy holidays and best wishes in the new year,

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

2024 EVIDENCE CHAMPIONS



Alicia Sasser Modestino



AJ Gutierrez

Photo credit: J-PAL

Recognizing J-PAL North America's 2024 Evidence Champions

Our second annual Evidence Champion award recognizes individuals in our network who have made extraordinary contributions to the field of evidence-based policymaking. This year, we are honoring two Evidence Champions, Alicia Sasser Modestino as our researcher recipient, and AJ Gutierrez as our partner recipient. Read more on the J-PAL blog about [Alicia's work with the City of Boston](#) to guarantee summer jobs to all Boston Public School students and [AJ's efforts to scale high-impact tutoring](#) programs across the United States and abroad.



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New J-PAL webpage features opportunities and resources on researching racial equity

J-PAL North America seeks to support the generation of credible evidence on racial equity, which has been underfunded and under-prioritized in the field of economics. As a new resource for those seeking to advance racial equity research, we launched a webpage to highlight racial equity funding opportunities, racial equity focused research projects, and tools and resources for researching racial equity. [Visit the webpage »](#)



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New memo: Policy experiment stations to accelerate state and local government innovation

To equip incoming presidential administrations, the Federation of American Scientists calls upon fellow researchers from the science, technology and innovation community to compile [Day One Memos](#) sharing implementation-ready policy proposals. J-PAL North America's Co-Executive Director Laura Feeney—alongside the Social Science Research Council, University of Chicago Urban Labs, California Policy Lab, and The People Lab—authored a Day One Memo calling for the expansion of state and local government capacity to rigorously evaluate their programs. As a key component of this strategy, the authors propose to create and fund a network of state-based “Policy Experiment Stations,” to accelerate innovation in state and local social policy. [Read the memo »](#)



Photo credit: Lucy Nguyen, J-PAL Global

Open enrollment for the DEDP MicroMasters Program

The [MicroMasters Program in Data, Economics, and Design of Policy \(DEDP\)](#) offers online courses for policymakers, researchers, and students looking to generate and use evidence to inform policy. The program's Public Policy Track covers a range of key topics with examples drawn from the US and other high-income economies. These topics include local issues such as minimum wage, food assistance programs, and consumer welfare regulations, as well as global issues such as trade, climate change, and immigration. Courses are free to audit, with the option to pay to upgrade for the proctored exam in pursuit of a course certificate. Students who complete the DEDP credential are eligible to apply for the on-campus [master's in DEDP](#) at MIT or pursue accelerated studies at one of the [pathway universities](#). Spring courses start on January 21. [Enroll today »](#)

FEATURED EVALUATION SUMMARY

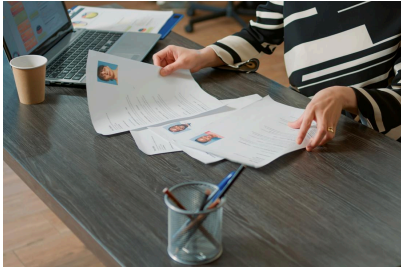


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Increasing the demand for workers with a criminal record in the United States

Workers with criminal records face substantially lower chances of securing employment compared to similar workers without such records. However, policy interventions like Ban the Box have yielded mixed results in improving hiring outcomes for these workers. Researchers in the J-PAL network—[Will Dobbie](#) (Harvard), [Mitchell Hoffman](#) (University of Toronto), and [Zoe Cullen](#) (Harvard)—evaluated the effectiveness of several interventions aimed at addressing hiring managers' underlying productivity and risk concerns. They found that policies which directly addressed these concerns effectively increased demand for workers with criminal records. [Read more about the evaluation](#) »

FEATURED RESEARCH RESOURCE



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Evaluating technology-based interventions

Technology-based interventions can offer many benefits, in particular the ability to standardize treatment across participants and site, making it easier to replicate the interventions with fidelity across contexts. Examples of technology-based interventions might include automated alerts embedded into an Electronic Medical Record, a text messaging platform facilitating communication between teachers and parents, or computer-assisted learning tools. This [research resource](#) provides guidance for researchers conducting evaluations that use technology as a key part of the intervention, discusses challenges that J-PAL North America staff have encountered across several studies, and describes steps that mitigate these challenges.

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