

EMPath

Economic Mobility Pathways

OUTCOMES WORKGROUP

meeting notes

September 15, 2016

THIS SESSION

Evaluating Social Programs

Jason Bauman—

Policy Manager at J-PAL North America

Todd Hall—

Policy Associate at J-PAL North America

SAVE THE DATES

March 9, 2017

June 1, 2017

In the September 2016 Outcomes Workgroup session, members of the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab North America (J-PAL) joined us for a thorough overview of the many different evaluation methods organizations have at their disposal to evaluate the performance and impact of the social programs they administer. Attendees had the opportunity to test their newly-gained evaluation knowledge through a fun group activity.

Evaluating Social Programs

The **Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab North America (J-PAL)**, housed at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), “seeks to reduce poverty by ensuring that policy is informed by scientific evidence” by conducting randomized evaluations, sharing policy findings, supporting evaluation initiatives and developing evaluation capacity.

In the spirit of the last objective, Jason and Todd led the session with a thorough overview of program evaluation and how to design impact evaluations. They started their presentation by explaining to participants why evaluation is done and why this is important, using Chicago youth employment programs as an example of the impact that evaluation results can have in increasing funding.



J-PAL

ABDUL LATIF JAMEEL POVERTY ACTION LAB

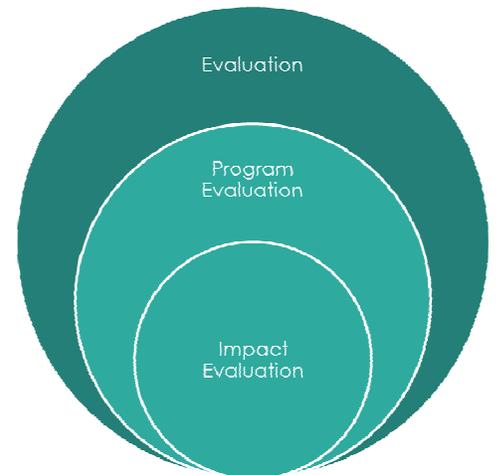
NORTH AMERICA



Jason Bauman



Todd Hall



When introducing program evaluation, Todd and Jason explained that it is the process through which we attempt to answer the questions: does the program work as planned? and were its goals achieved at the expected magnitude?

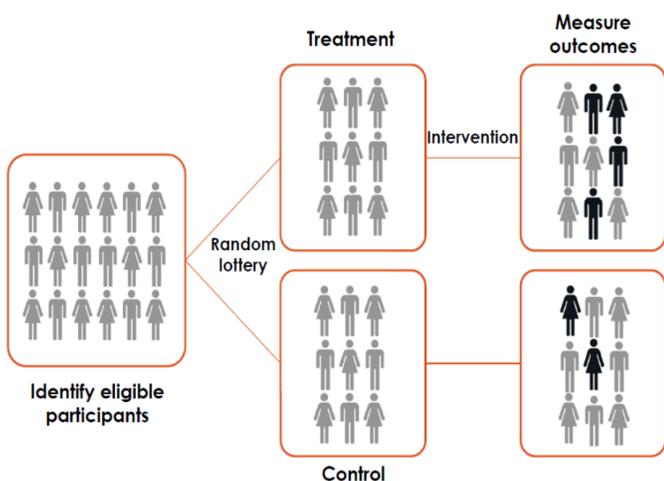
The presenters also shared that program evaluations can help organizations identify if there was an

implementation or theory failure in a program. They also clarified that there are differences in impact and process evaluations: while the former looks at the impact of a program on the outcome of interest, the latter looks at whether or not there was fidelity to the model.

Measuring Impact

Evaluation methods presented to the group included pre-post, simple difference, differences-in-differences, regressions, and randomized evaluation. Regarding pre-post studies, attendees reported experiencing reliability concerns with self-reported information, and many found this evaluation method to be ineffective.

As Todd and Jason continued with their presentation, they explained that simple difference evaluation studies look at control and treatment group comparisons. They also touched on difference-in-difference evaluations, and explained that this is a good evaluation method to use when the treatment and control groups are different, since it accounts for differences within groups and between groups.



Randomized evaluation

At the time of selecting a comparison group, Jason and Todd recommended selecting a group that most closely resembles the treatment group. However, some session attendees reported experiencing difficulties keeping the control group engaged, and the majority claimed they are not able to include a comparison group in their evaluations, which is a common issue many non-profit organizations face when conducting evaluations. As a way to address these issues, the presenters mentioned providing treatment through phasing as a way to provide a treatment to participants while still maintaining a comparison group. Attendees in turn shared that they have addressed this issue by asking government and non-profit agencies for the data they were looking to obtain from the control group.

Finally, Todd and Jason strongly recommended the use of randomized evaluation to organizations with programs that are over-subscribed, expanding, or are just being rolled out (also called Smart-piloting), as the process of randomization helps organizations get the most accurate evaluation results, allowing organizations to be more confident about the validity of their findings. Some of the randomization styles organizations can implement include randomizing access to the program, randomizing the units (individual vs. group), randomizing timing (when people get access to the program) and even randomizing the level of encouragement to participate in a program a per-

You may reach **Todd Hall** at thall@povertyactionlab.org or at (617) 715-5163.

You may reach **Jason Bauman** at jbauman@povertyactionlab.org or at (617) 324-6917.

FEATURED RESOURCES

- ◇ [EMPath September 2016 Outcomes Workgroup presentation slides](#)
- ◇ [Poverty Action Lab website](#)

SAVE THE DATE

Our Next Outcomes Workgroup Meeting is scheduled for:
March 9, 2017 from 9:30AM to 11:30AM