

Social Policy Impact Pathfinder

Which aspects of a policy or program contribute most to its effectiveness? The Social Policy Impact Pathfinder (SPI-Path) is a suite of tools that offers clients—policymakers in the government and philanthropic sectors—the opportunity to learn more from the experimental impact evaluations in which they invest, to address not just overall effectiveness but key question of “what works?”

Abt Associates’ methodologists have spearheaded recent advances in analytic techniques for this purpose, techniques that capitalize on the basic strengths of a randomized trial but stretch to new analytic strategies and reap the improved program design guidance that follows from “what works?” answers. These techniques are expressly designed to identify the pathways through which impacts accrue across the component parts of social programs.

A Suite of Tools

Two analysis approaches, with User Guides, currently exist as parts of the suite, and a third is in development.

SPI-Path | Individual exposes more clearly “what works” about the specific program experiences of individual participants. To the extent that program experiences can be predicted by available baseline data, including both individual- and site-measured variables, the impact of those experiences can be estimated in a way that uses the experimental design to minimize the influence of selection and other biases.

SPI-Path | Site capitalizes on cross-site variation in program features to investigate the role of program design and local context in determining impact magnitude. It extends the standard multi-level model in a multi-site experimental framework to strengthen options for causal attribution when random variation in program features occurs within sites in addition to natural variation across sites.

SPI-Path | Factor relies on a factorial matrix in both experimental and observational data to explore which elements of an intervention drive impacts, individually and collectively. This analysis is currently in development.



What works?

These tools will help evaluators address many important public policy issues. Examples of questions they could answer—from a much wider range of potential applications—include:

- How much difference does the “dosage level” of a program matter to impact?
- Does a particular feature within an overall intervention “package,” like job-finding help at the end of a training program or a Neighborhood Watch initiative as part of a public housing project, add appreciably to the intervention’s overall impact?
- Are non-custodial fathers who would have struggled most to pay child-support assistance absent special assistance given a bigger boost from a government-provided employment opportunity than non-custodial fathers generally?
- Does adding sanctions for nonparticipation strengthen the impact of welfare-to-work programs on self-sufficiency in a community?



SPI-Path makes answering these types of questions easy (through examples of statistical software that performs the calculations), defensible (through grounding in the peer-reviewed evaluation literature), and well-documented (through adherence to the new industry-standard techniques Abt has developed).

To use these tools to support your policy research agenda, visit [AbtAssociates.com](https://www.abtassociates.com) to learn more and download the User Guides for the SPI-Path|Individual and SPI-Path|Site tools.

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