Title: Will it work here? A framework for easing the tension between generalizing results and locally-based studies (Abstract submission ID: 2885)

Panelists: Vincent Quan (Moderator), Mary Ann Bates (Panel 1), Cathryn Cook (Panel 2), Sophie Shank (Panel 3)

Moderator: Vincent Quan, J-PAL North America

Panel Justification:

There is a growing body of evidence on how to improve educational outcomes, particularly for low-income students. How can educators draw on the available evidence, both from their local context and from studies conducted in other districts, states or countries, to make the most informed, evidence-based decisions? The proposed panel session will introduce the generalizability framework, a systematic approach to assess whether evidence applies or does not apply to a specific context.

The key to the generalizability framework is that it breaks down the question "Will it work here?" into a series of steps based on the theory behind a program. The development of the framework was motivated by:

- The goal of using evidence to make decisions;
- A growing evidence base from which decision-makers can draw; and
- Questions on how to leverage this growing evidence base to support local decision-making.

Through the interactive session we will offer a structured approach to (1) assess the generalizability of evidence, (2) walk through a case study on how evidence from India has generalized to Chicago, and (3) provide participants with a chance to apply the framework.

- Part 1 - The first panelist will introduce the generalizability framework and describe why and how it was developed. Panelist 1 will share how this framework helped the Rwandan government determine whether to replicate an effective school-based sex education program tested in Kenya.
- Part 2 - The second panelist will share evidence from SAGA Innovations, an effective high school tutoring program in Chicago and New York City, and discuss how the program's underlying mechanisms mirror those of an effective tutoring program in India and Kenya.
- Part 3 of the panel will divide the audience into small groups. Participants will practice applying the generalizability framework to improve college access.

Abstracts:

Part 1: Introducing the Generalizability Framework
Panelist: Mary Ann Bates, J-PAL North America

The first panelist will introduce the generalizability framework and illustrate its application using a case study. The discussion will first address why and how the generalizability framework was developed and the questions to ask at each step:

- Step 1: What is the disaggregated theory behind the program?
- Step 2: Do the local conditions hold for that theory to apply?
- Step 3: How strong is the evidence for the required general behavioral change?
- Step 4: What is the evidence that the implementation process can be carried out well?

The discussion will then illustrate through a case study how the framework helped decision-makers in Rwanda determine whether the results of a specific study in Kenya would generalize to their local context. The Rwandan government had asked J-PAL whether a school-based HIV awareness program that was found to be effective in Kenya would work in Rwanda. In applying the framework, the first step was to review the theory of change behind the HIV awareness program. The assumptions behind the theory relied on local conditions specific to the local Kenyan context. The next step was to determine whether the local conditions (in Kenya) also held in Rwanda. After gathering descriptive and observational data on the local context in Rwanda, it was determined that conditions did not hold. Accordingly, researchers did not recommend implementing the campaign in Rwanda.

Part 2: Applying the Generalizability Framework: From India to Chicago
Panelist: Cathryn Cook, SAGA Innovations

This panel will highlight SAGA Innovations' tutoring program in Chicago and New York City, and discuss the parallels between SAGA's theory, approach, and results and those of Pratham's Teaching at the Right Level program in India and Kenya. In particular, the panel will discuss how two programs in completely different parts of the world shared a common theory for how to improve learning. In Chicago, New York City, India, and Kenya, programs that re-oriented instruction based on a students' level of preparedness rather than by age or grade were found to significantly improve student outcomes.

The panel will shed light on the local conditions that affect Chicago Public Schools and New York City Public Schools, including wide-ranging levels of academic preparedness within classrooms and pressure to teach to the curriculum, local conditions that are also shared by classrooms in India and Kenya. The panel will also highlight similarities in program implementation: Tutors are trained to teach to the level of the student, without having to manage a whole classroom or focus only on the grade-level curriculum.

Building on the evidence from India and Kenya, University of Chicago researchers recognized the potential of the SAGA model and designed a randomized control trial to evaluate the tutoring program in Chicago, followed by a quasi-experimental study of the program in New York City.

The evaluations aimed to assess the effectiveness of individualized instruction as a means of better supporting disadvantaged students.

Similar to findings from India and Kenya, results suggest that it is possible to substantially and cost-effectively boost academic achievement for disadvantaged students, through intensive remediation.

Audience Workshop: Generalizability Framework in Action
Facilitators: Sophie Shank, J-PAL North America

Workshop Learning Goals:

Participants will assess whether a program that was effective in another school district or state is likely to work in their local context. To do so, participants will learn to apply the four steps of the generalizability framework.

We will start by reviewing the evidence from text message campaigns to reduce summer melt. During the summer between high school and college, students encounter multiple roadblocks to successful matriculation. Relatively low-cost programs to help students navigate the complex college application process and support students through this transition have been shown to increase college enrollment and persistence in the United States and Canada.

Participants will then work in small groups to practice and apply the evidence on summer melt programs using the generalizability framework. The session will focus on identifying the behaviors addressed by the programs and determining if (hypothetical) local conditions are similar enough to apply the theory to a new context. Groups will also discuss the relative strength of the evidence and how well the programs were implemented. Participants are also welcome to think through how to apply the framework to a program in their own context.