

Spring 2022

To our colleagues:

Since our founding in 2014, JFI has focused on bringing global research and policy from theory to practice, with an emphasis on implementation. As we have grown, we have cultivated a dynamic form of policy intervention, one that straddles the public and private sectors as well as design and application. Rather than concentrate solely on input for policymakers, as many think tanks do, we work at all levels to realize solutions to social problems; our public sector research and design attempts to improve legislation and government action, while our private sector efforts — incubating new entities, designing software, structuring investment — model and scale promising alternatives.

The past year — in which partisanship continued to rise and the pandemic brought further disruptions to our economy and civil society — has demanded precisely this form of policy innovation. Our projects have grown, and our areas of focus have widened. Our team has expanded to nearly 40, half of whom work with us full-time in New York and the other half serve as fellows. In addition, we have been encouraged, and honored, to work with ambitious leaders to found and incubate like-minded organizations.

Our core areas of focus remain higher education finance, guaranteed income, digital ethics, and cross-disciplinary research dissemination through our publication, Phenomenal World. This year we codified a new project in social wealth to develop better methods for management of public assets and funding of large-scale social programs. We continue to define success in the thousands of students benefiting from new financing, and in the tens of thousands receiving income from cash pilots we support, but also in the longer term shifts in policy thinking and market viability. The second part of this letter will cover 2021's developments in these long-term projects, which continued to grow in mainstream recognition.

In the course of this work, we have developed a range of capacities that undergird our high-impact and flexible approach. Across all of our initiatives, we run evaluations, conduct policy analysis, and generate and run responsive models. In essence, we have, through the exigencies of our implementation work, built a policy shop, with the power to turn around high-quality research to serve project areas old and new, for JFI and for external partners. We increasingly use these capacities beyond our walls, in new consulting and modeling engagements as well as in our incubation activities.

With these new capacities maturing, we are opening up to the world and actively seeking new ideas. If you have in mind a high-impact policy intervention that is underinvested, please contact us.

There are many forms our work with you can take, from light touch to deeply involved. Our collaboration can take the form of a conversation: your suggestions for new JFI initiatives, or consultative dialogues about your own work. It might involve financial or partnering support for our existing core initiatives. We can also provide operational and staff support in standing up your own kindred organization, as we are currently doing with a founder of a new organization on monetary policy. For a new organization on climate investment, our involvement has been yet deeper: we have provided both operational support as well as initial research and advice on its initial scope of work. At the most substantial end of the spectrum, we've worked with founder Nika Soon-Shiong and the Fund for Guaranteed Income on design and research for its first program, the 800-recipient Compton Pledge guaranteed income pilot.

In the long term, we hope to foster an ecosystem of like-minded organizations to amplify and stabilize effective social interventions. We would welcome proposals for any level of engagement from readers of this letter. You can reply directly to this email, or contact Michael at [michael.b.stynes@jainfamilyinstitute.org](mailto:michael.b.stynes@jainfamilyinstitute.org).

In closing, we thank the staff for their passion and for continuing to enlarge our vision of what JFI can be, and we thank you for being a part of our community. We are grateful to you, our partners, collaborators, and friends, for your meaningful support in so many ways as we work together to make a difference.



Michael Stynes  
Executive Director



Bob Jain  
Founder, Chair

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# Our work in 2021

## Higher Education Finance

Our applied work in this area focuses on income share agreements (ISAs). Since 2015, we've been working on ISA program design and analytics, structuring the nation's first ISA program at scale, Purdue's Back a Boiler program, which launched in 2016. Our fifteen-year mission is to make this safer and more flexible form of financing widely available to students, and collect data on education outcomes to support students, schools, and investors. This year marked the initial distribution of funds to students at two of the nation's largest income-contingent finance projects. The Student Freedom Initiative (SFI) launched at nine HBCUs, and in November SFI announced the 29 HBCUs and MSIs that will make up its second-year cohort. We are honored to work with SFI on design and analytics. With flexible income-contingent financing and student supports, this program alleviates student loan burdens, which disproportionately affect Black and minority populations. Many thanks to executive director Mark A. Brown and COO Keith B. Shoates, as well as our longtime collaborator and director of program design Barry Cynamon, for their visionary work that will transform the lives of many students.

We have also been working with Western Governors University (WGU) on an ISA program. A nonprofit online university with more than 115,000 students, WGU collaborated with JFI to build its ISA program this year, and launched a pilot in December 2021. In 2022, the University will scale up the program to several states, colleges, and majors. JFI Director of Research Sidhya Balakrishnan is part of the independent research team together with Doug Webber, Dubravka Ritter, Eric Bettinger, Michael Kofoed, and Jon Hartley.

Our flagship research project in higher education finance is our Millennial Student Debt series, which uses a massive set of credit bureau, Census, and IPEDS data to scrutinize changes in higher education policy across the US, from the nation as a whole to individual ZIP codes. Our inaugural annual report, Student Debt and Young America, was amplified by Marshall Steinbaum's co-authored position piece published at Brookings and Andre Perry's post at the Hechinger Report. Taking a holistic view on the impacts of student debt on a generation of Americans, Millennial Student Debt reports this year include Hysteresis and Student Debt by senior fellow Marshall Steinbaum and fellow Sérgio Pinto, How Schools Lie: The Financial Aid System at America's Colleges by lead researcher Laura Beamer, and Homeownership and the Student Debt Crisis by research associate Eddie Nilaj. This research and JFI's experts were featured in Vox, Open Campus, Newsweek, NPR, Bloomberg, Politico, and other venues, and formed the basis of Capitol Hill fact sheets for Higher Ed, Not Debt's briefings on college affordability.

## Guaranteed Income

In the years since we advised on the research plans for Stockton, California's SEED pilot in 2016, we have watched the concept of cash assistance move firmly into the mainstream. We are proud to have contributed to this sea change in public attitudes through our involvements in dozens of pilots, task forces, and policy proposals in the intervening years. While pilot and policy design has always been at the center of [this initiative](#), 2021 marked the beginning of a new research offering from our guaranteed income team—microsimulations that explicate the consequences of tax code changes as rapidly as members of Congress, or other advocates, suggest them. Led by research associate Jack Landry under the direction of lead researcher Stephen Nuñez, our prompt analyses of changes to the Child Tax Credit formed were fundamental to public understanding of the Build Back Better bill debates this fall. The work was featured in [Huffpost](#), [CNBC](#), [Slate](#), [Matthew Yglesias's Slow Boring](#), [The Hill](#), and others, and informed [Congressional testimony and FAQs from the Congressional Research Service](#).

For our 2021 pilot work, as thousands of people receive cash in JFI-designed pilots in the US and abroad, our studies have entered intensive phases of field research and initial analysis. We've completed recruitment for our study of the [Compton Pledge](#), one of the largest city-led guaranteed income pilots. JFI developed the pilot and study in partnership with former Mayor Aja Brown and the Fund for Guaranteed Income. The study, led by Sidhya Balakrishnan, Sewin Chan, Sara Constantino, Johannes Haushofer, and Jonathan Morduch, is a [randomized controlled trial](#) with 2100 participants, including 698 cash recipients. Uniquely among US UBI studies, it includes a variation in frequency of payments, with half of the recipients receiving cash transfers every two weeks, and the other half receiving transfers once every quarter. This study will provide information on how people spend their money differently depending on the frequency of cash transfers. We extend our thanks to our Compton Pledge academic advisory board, with a special nod to Greg Duncan and Katherine M. O'Regan. We are also grateful to our [advisory council](#) and especially Maritza Agundez, Managing Attorney for the Coalition for Humane and Immigrant Rights in Los Angeles, for her leadership. This project would not be possible without support from the [Robert Wood Johnson Foundation](#), [J-PAL](#), and Debra Fine.

In Maricá, Brazil, the [largest basic income program in Latin America](#) is taking place: 42,000 people are receiving monthly unconditional cash. This year, the New York Times published [an editorial](#) by our collaborator and GI leader in Brazil, Eduardo Suplicy, and US Representative Rashida Tlaib, outlining Maricá's program and its lessons for shared prosperity. In our qualitative research, we've concluded our series of semi-structured interviews with some two dozen leaders from government and civil society involved in the design and implementation of Maricá's digital complementary currency, the mumbuca. To analyze how the currency, and the basic income benefit paid in it, are understood and used by residents of the city, we will conduct 120 structured interviews with beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries in the first half of 2022. On the quantitative side, the PI team (Sidhya Balakrishnan, Johannes Haushofer and Fabio Waltenberg) along with a collaborative research team from JFI (Paul Katz, Marcella Cartledge, Sara Restrepo) and UFF (Roberta Costa, Fernando Freitas, Andrea Gama) successfully secured ethics approval and conducted several pilots and evaluator trainings before launching the survey for the

quantitative evaluation of the program in September. The evaluation of the policy will use a matched comparison design, with 5500 study participants. The team completed 50 percent of the in-person surveys in 2021, and will complete the remainder of the surveys in the first two months of 2022. JFI also collaborated with UFF to host and present a virtual [Basic Income conference](#) in the summer of 2021. The seminar included presentations from basic income pilots and programs across the world, including JFI's Compton and Maricá projects, as well as speakers from Kenya, Korea, Finland, Mexico, and more.

Last but not least in pilot news, the HudsonUP Basic Income Pilot, a five-year program in Hudson, NY whose qualitative evaluation is being led by JFI senior fellow Leah Hamilton, released its [Year 1 Report](#), which was covered in [Fast Company](#) by Talib Visram. In October, HudsonUP added a second cohort of 50 low-income individuals. Thank you to pilot director Joan Hunt and assistant pilot director Nicole Fallon for their leadership of the program.

Beyond microsimulation and pilots, our publishing also increased this year, through our white paper series that shares our team's expertise on the most important questions in the field. Following [two briefs](#) on the \$1400 stimulus checks, senior fellow Claudia Sahm published [Model Behavior: A Critical Review of Macroeconomic Models for the Child Tax Credit](#), and spoke about macroeconomic and Fed trends in [Vox](#), [Bloomberg](#), [the Washington Post](#), and the [New York Fed](#). We published our first institutional statement on the GI landscape, [JFI Position on Guaranteed Income](#), including our thoughts on how GI fits in with existing benefits, options for effective administration, and companion programs. Lessons from the pandemic's cash transfers formed the foundation of three Capitol Hill panels hosted by policy communications VP Halah Ahmad in collaboration with the Aspen Institute's Financial Security Program and the Urban Institute; the third is [available to the public](#). Thank you to Rachel Black and Sheida Elmi at Aspen and Mary Bogle and Elaine Maag at Urban.

We've also increased our consulting for pilots. We published a [toolkit on guaranteed income](#) for individuals interested in building pilots in their communities, and a [messaging brief](#) with a review of framing and public perception of GI. We are delighted to be advising, formally and informally, dozens of organizations interested in GI, and encouraged to see the continued groundswell of interest in cash relief and changing norms around the social safety net and the benefits of unrestricted cash.

## **Social Wealth**

Launched publicly in November 2021, JFI's [Social Wealth](#) initiative seeks to develop financial infrastructure to transform public assets into long-term portfolios that can facilitate the wider distribution of returns to capital, endow critical social programs, and catalyze inclusive economic development.

As JFI's newest focus area, Social Wealth has had a busy year. This past September, we announced a [partnership](#) with the newly created sovereign wealth fund of Niterói, Brazil, the Fundo de Equalização da

Receita (FER, or Revenue Equalization Fund). Emerging from more than a year of planning, the collaboration centers on the joint development, together with the Niterói Treasury, of tools and analysis to aid the management of this innovative fund. At its heart stands a piece of modeling software, the development of which is being spearheaded by Lead Independent Researcher [Francis Tseng](#) and fellows [Paulo Mann](#) and [Thaís Donega](#), and advised by fellows [Jonathan Calenzani](#) and [Jason Windawi](#).

At the same time, we are working with Niterói Treasury Secretary Marília Ortíz to support exchange and collaboration among the subnational sovereign wealth funds of Brazil. On June 14, together with our partners at the Federal Fluminense University, the Treasury of Niterói, and the Inter-American Development Bank, JFI co-sponsored a [half-day convening](#) attended by the governor of the state of Espírito Santo and the mayors of the cities of Niterói, Maricá, and Ilhabela, the four Brazilian jurisdictions with active social wealth funds (SWFs), together with the technical teams responsible for the management of each fund. Subsequent meetings have helped lay the groundwork for a more permanent forum to share best practices, develop common management strategies, and establish a coherent regulatory framework for subnational SWFs.

As the new year unfolds, we look forward to expanding our work with Brazilian sovereign wealth funds while developing lines of research into public and community banking, complementary currencies, and public asset pools in the US and Brazil.

We have many people to thank for this initial year: our close collaborators at the Universidade Federal Fluminense, especially Rector Antonio Claudio Lucas de Nóbrega and Fundação Euclides da Cunha President Alberto di Sabbato; Niterói Mayor Axel Grael, Treasury Secretary Marília Ortíz, and the team responsible for the management of Niterói's SWF, led by Heitor Moreira; and Maricá Mayor Fabiano Horta, Vice-Mayor Diego Zeidán, and the leadership and staff at the municipal Secretariats of Solidarity Economy and Social Assistance and the Banco Mumbuca, without whose support our research in Maricá would not be possible.

### **Digital Ethics and Governance**

This year marked a greater expansion into international work for our [digital ethics and governance initiative](#), and a shift towards applied work on data markets, data networks, and AI governance principles for developing nations.

Fellow Friederike Schuur has spent the past year embedded in [UN Global Pulse](#), the UN's primary initiative on big data and AI, working on fairness and equity in the use of AI as well as in access and ownership of data. In the fall, she also convened a group to discuss governance gaps in light of the current and likely future state of neurotechnology. Friederike's piece on [data networks](#) can be found on the UN site. In January, JFI co-hosted a vibrant peer exchange on data commodification. The event is among the first interdisciplinary conversations about the nature of data in the context of growing

initiatives and efforts to increase data sharing and reuse. Speakers included Alex 'Sandy' Pentland, Sylvie Delacroix, Viktor Mayer-Schönberger, and Rachel Adams, as well as representatives from the [European Commission](#), [GAIA-X](#), [Ocean Protocol](#), and [DEPA](#). We anticipate deepening this work in the year ahead through a collaboration with the UN's nascent Global Data Access Initiative (GDAI).

Our partnership with the World Bank formally launched in April 2021. As part of the project, Project Lead [Arden Ali](#), with the help of Fellow Liza Paudel, is writing a background paper on national AI strategies in low- and middle-income countries, which is being integrated into the World Bank's Impacts of Artificial Intelligence on Developing Countries project. JFI participated in the review meeting for the concept note of the project on December 16. In December, JFI co-hosted the Third Athens Roundtable on Artificial Intelligence and the Rule of Law with The Future Society, European Law Observatory on New Technologies, IEEE, and the European Council, among others. JFI has also proudly become an advisor to the ID2020 Alliance, focused on the responsible development of digital ID.

Thank you to Robert Kirkpatrick (UN Global Pulse), Sriganesh Lokanathan (UN Global Pulse Jakarta), Edward Hsu (World Bank), Valeria Dessolis (World Bank), Cornelius Saunders (ID2020), and Nicolas Mialhe (The Future Society).

## Phenomenal World

[Phenomenal World](#), JFI's publication of international political economy and finance, started the year off by publishing its first book-length volume, [Market Economy, Market Society](#), a collection of essays and interviews on the decline of European social democracy. Edited by fellow Maya Adereth, the volume included contributions with preeminent scholars of those governments, including Adam Przeworski and Stephanie Mudge, as well as interviews with key historical figures, including former Prime Minister of Spain Felipe González. Editor Jack Gross hosted several events on pressing political-economic issues, including on [social policy in Brazil](#), [investment and decarbonization](#), and [race and the municipal bond market](#).

And we continued to publish in a wide range of compelling areas that grew our audience across the worlds of finance, academia, labor research, policymakers, and beyond. Some particularly widely-read highlights: Yakov Feygin on the [politics of inflation](#); Kate Mackenzie on [COP26 and international finance](#); Ernest Leung on the [intellectual history of East Asian developmentalism](#); Ho-fung Hung on [Evergrande and China's growth model](#); and Andrew Elrod on the political economy of the construction industry's [persistent labor shortages](#).

It was also a year of growth internally. In spring of last year, we brought on historian Tim Barker, an expert on mid-century US economic policy, as our first contributing editor to the site. We also launched a revamped website, including a new 'shortform' section for briefer contributions and book reviews. And,

finally, we began exciting preliminary work on a book series with an academic press. We are excited to tell you more in the future.

### **The “Why” Behind our Work**

This list is long, and for those forbearing readers who have made it to the end of the letter, we want to get back to the motivation behind it. A question we get is why do we pick these projects, why do we go about it the way we do, and why do we need so many people to do it. When we select new initiatives, we subject each potential project to an analysis of beneficial impact, urgency, tractability, and potential for foundational change. And we’ve found that the way to tackle those problems is with teams that are not only interdisciplinary but extend beyond just research into consulting, design, modeling, and implementation.

In brief, to make change, there is a lot that needs to be done. What we have found, over and over, is that to attack deep problems, we have to work with a variety of constituencies: researchers and academics, policymakers, media, advocacy, and industry, and bring to bear a variety of resources: personnel, skills, money, and time. The projects that we select, urgent yet tractable, feel likely to take hold in a certain domain, but not necessarily bound by a certain discipline. We’re comfortable with the idea that these projects may take ten or fifteen years—patience here is of itself a virtue. We are grateful that our work has laid track for our new capacities on which we can now expand and grow, with your input and support.