

OSTROM WORKSHOP RESEARCH SERIES

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American History; Ostrom Fellow, IU

“The Policy Laboratory: The Income Maintenance Experiments and Trial-and-Error in American Public Policy”



Wednesday, APRIL 10, 2019

12:00–1:00 PM • Ostrom Workshop, 513 N. Park

The Income Maintenance Experiments (IMEs) of the late 1960s and 1970s were the first large-scale social experiments in American policy history. Using federal funds, two research institutes tested the effect of a guaranteed annual income on several neighborhoods—urban and rural—across the United States, measuring divorce rates, happiness rates, birth rate, and workforce participations. Following the IMEs, policy experimentation expanded significantly among American policy circles. This paper explores the logistics and results of those experiments and poses two questions: (1) what effect did those experiments have on actual policy programs? and (2) how did these first experiments both limit and initiate a new movement in policy experimentation during the final 25 years of the twentieth century? While the IMEs informed the content of Richard Nixon’s Family Assistance Plan, their shortcomings and design flaws undermined policy scientists’ interests in testing radically new policy alternatives.



[Connor Stangler](#) is a third-year PhD student in American history at Indiana University. His research focuses on the relationship between the social sciences and public policy in the mid-twentieth century. He is an adjunct professor of history and political science at the University of Indianapolis. He is originally from Columbia, Missouri.

Presentations are open to the public (see our website for papers). You are welcome to bring your lunch. For questions, contact Allison Sturgeon (sturgeon@iu.edu; 812/855–3151).