Abstract:
When inventors move to new locations, they carry knowledge and expertise, which may be a loss to their previous collaborators. But they might also become a bridge between otherwise disconnected innovation hubs, facilitating information flows and idea diffusion. In this paper, I study the effect of an inventor’s relocation on their previous collaborators’ productivity. A simple patent production model addresses the dual role of relocators as former collaborators and as intermediaries providing access to information. The model helps to guide the empirical analysis and to interpret the results. Empirically, I build a novel dataset combining information about inventors from the USPTO patent data with online professional profiles. Using a matching design, I find sizeable positive effects on the productivity of inventors whose collaborators have relocated. These effects pertain not only to quantity, as gauged by the number of patents, but also to quality, as measured by the number of citations. I show that the core mechanism driving both effects is greater access to novel information networks and information.