Arnold Ventures

EVIDENCE & EVALUATION AND STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

NOVEMBER 2026

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Research on the Impacts of Online Gambling



Arnold Ventures (AV) is a philanthropy dedicated to improving the lives of Americans through evidence-based policy solutions that maximize opportunity and minimize injustice. We focus on improving systems where outcomes are falling short, incentives are misaligned, and the time is right for change.

To advance this mission, we invest in rigorous research to better understand the root causes of problems and strengthen the evidence base on what works to solve them. Using this evidence, we advocate for policy reforms and help build durable, bipartisan coalitions for lasting change.

Background

Decisions made over the next several years will shape the future of online gambling policy in the United States. In July 2025, Arnold Ventures launched an initial sports betting request for proposals (RFP) to better understand the consequences of state-level sports betting legalization in the years following *Murphy v. NCAA*, the 2018 Supreme Court decision that cleared the way for states to authorize sports betting. The 12 studies funded through that RFP are starting to generate evidence that will help policymakers weigh the trade-offs of legalization.

Since then, the policy landscape has continued to evolve. States and regulators are increasingly grappling with questions about the design, regulation, and oversight of online gambling markets, including sports betting and online casino gaming. At the same time, sports-related prediction markets have emerged as a rapidly growing form of wagering operating under a different regulatory framework. As these markets develop, policymakers are being asked to make consequential decisions on a new set of issues that extend beyond the questions addressed by earlier research. We believe that high-quality research can help inform these decisions and support more effective policymaking.

Opportunity

This RFP will fund causal research in five areas: product and platform design; marketing and consumer protection; treatment and recovery; sports betting on prediction markets; and illegal or offshore gambling. We will support both Randomized Controlled Trials (RCTs) and rigorous Quasi-Experimental Designs (QEDs), and we will place a high value on research that can be completed within 12–18 months of project kickoff. Across all five areas, we are especially interested in how effects vary across populations, including young adults, college students, financially vulnerable households, and high-frequency bettors.

NEW: This RFP will also fund a smaller set of descriptive studies to inform policy areas where rigorous causal evaluation is not yet feasible. In this fast-moving space, policymakers often lack basic facts: how common a product or practice is, who is most exposed, and where risk concentrates. We seek studies that produce insights that decision-makers can use, such as prevalence estimates, profiles of the most-affected bettors, or thresholds regulators could adopt. Strong projects typically use administrative or transaction-level data, though representative surveys or audits of operator practices may also be appropriate where these administrative data sources are unavailable. Descriptive studies may stand alone or be added to a causal proposal; stand-alone studies should be completed within 6–12 months.

The questions that follow highlight areas of particular interest for both causal and descriptive research, though we remain open to other relevant questions in these areas.

Causal Research Questions

PRODUCT AND PLATFORM DESIGN

- How do specific bet types, such as microbets, in-play betting, parlays, and same-game parlays, affect betting behavior and gambling-related harm? What happens when states restrict them?

- How do platform features, including promotions, push notifications, personalized recommendations, and frictionless payment options, affect betting behavior and gambling-related harm? What are the effects of state rules that limit these features?

MARKETING AND CONSUMER PROTECTION

- How do restrictions on advertising and promotions affect who starts betting, how much people bet, and gambling-related harm?
- What are the effects of deposit limits, affordability checks, credit card bans, and other consumer protections on betting behavior and gambling-related harm?

TREATMENT AND RECOVERY

- What are the effects of treatment and other interventions for online gambling-related harm? Do the programs states currently fund deliver measurable benefits, and for whom?
- What increases the share of people who seek treatment and stay engaged in care?
- Which treatment approaches deliver the most benefit per dollar?

SPORTS BETTING ON PREDICTION MARKETS

- How does access to sports-related prediction markets affect betting behavior and financial, social, and behavioral harm? How do these effects compare with those of state-regulated sportsbooks?
- Do prediction markets draw bettors away from state-regulated sportsbooks, attract people who did not previously bet, or increase total wagering?

ILLEGAL OR OFFSHORE GAMBLING

- Do restrictions on state-regulated sports betting products or platforms push bettors toward other products, platforms, or markets, including prediction markets and illegal or offshore operators?
- Do cease-and-desist orders, payment restrictions, advertising or affiliate restrictions, domain blocking, or related enforcement actions reduce use of targeted offshore operators or overall online illegal gambling activity?

Descriptive Research Questions

PRODUCTS AND PLATFORMS

- How common are different forms of online wagering, including microbetting and other pre-match and in-play products? How do betting patterns and indicators of risky play differ across products?
- How do operators use notifications, promotions, personalized recommendations, frictionless payments, and other engagement tools?

MARKETING AND CONSUMER PROTECTION

- How are bettors selected for VIP programs? What incentives, benefits, and outreach do they receive?
- What patterns of depositing and redepositing distinguish different types of bettors, including those exhibiting indicators of gambling-related harm?

ILLEGAL OR OFFSHORE GAMBLING

- How do consumers find, access, and fund illegal or offshore gambling? Which intermediaries (payment providers, affiliates, search engines, social-media platforms, etc.) play the largest role in facilitating access?
- How do the characteristics and gambling behaviors differ across people who use legal markets, illegal or offshore markets, or both?

RFP Timeline

STAGE OF APPLICATION PROCESS	DATE
Deadline to receive letters of interest (LOIs)	**January 13, 2027**
Notification if invited to submit a full proposal	**March 1, 2027**
Deadline for invited applicants to submit full proposal	**April 15, 2027**
Notification if selected for award	**June 30, 2027***

**The timeline for final notification is an estimate and may be subject to change depending on the proposal scope and budget.*

Causal Research Selection Criteria

The causal research funded through this RFP should generate actionable evidence for policy decisions. To that end, we will evaluate causal research questions on two criteria: **(1) policy relevance, and (2) study design.**[1]

1. **Policy Relevance.** We believe research should speak directly to the priorities and pressing needs of decision-makers and the communities they serve. A strong submission will clearly articulate why the study matters, who stands to benefit, and how its findings could shape policy or practice. Specifically, we look for:
   - **Alignment with AV priorities:** Research on one of the areas listed above. Submissions should briefly describe how the study addresses questions of strategic importance within the relevant area.
   - **Pathway to policy impact:** A description of the policy challenge the study addresses, why it is timely, and which policymakers, agencies, or other decision-makers stand to benefit. Strong submissions describe how findings could inform policy or practice at scale, including how effective interventions could be scaled or institutionalized, and discuss how well findings are likely to generalize.
   - **Contribution to the field:** An explanation of how the study builds on, extends, or fills gaps in existing evidence. Strong submissions situate the project within the broader evidence base, make a persuasive case for why new evidence is needed, and articulate how it will advance learning or inform decision-making.
2. **Study Design.** We aim to support causal research that accurately measures impact and produces valid, reliable evidence that can inform real-world decisions. Strong study design is essential to generating credible causal estimates that policymakers can trust. **Causal studies supported under this RFP may use either RCTs or rigorous QEDs.**[2]

   Strong causal submissions will present a well-specified, adequately powered, and methodologically sound design that demonstrates rigor and feasibility.[3] Specifically, we look for:
   - **Clear articulation of the intervention, research questions, and outcomes:** A precise description of i) the program, policy, or intervention being evaluated, including the key program components, target population or geography, and years of implementation; ii) the research question(s); iii) one to two primary outcomes and any additional secondary outcomes[4]; and iv) the planned duration of follow-up or measurement timing.

---

1 While these criteria reflect our priorities and guide our funding decisions, we recognize that strong projects can vary and there may be exceptions based on the specifics of a proposal. We also understand that not all details can be provided at the LOI stage; applicants should address each criterion to the extent feasible in an LOI, with full proposals expected to address all criteria comprehensively.

2 For QEDs, we prioritize designs based on natural experiments (e.g., regression discontinuity, difference-in-differences, instrumental variables). We do not fund QED studies that only rely on matching or selection on observables as their primary identification strategy.

3 Causal research funded under this RFP must follow our open science guidelines for research grants, which include a public posting of a pre-analysis plan prior to study launch.

4 If a causal research study has more than two primary outcomes, describe the method for multiple comparisons adjustment.

- **Compelling study design:** An overview of the proposed design, including i) a rationale for why the selected empirical strategy is well-suited to address the research question; ii) a clear explanation of the identification strategy and source of variation used to generate causal impacts; and iii) a precise articulation of how treatment and comparison groups will be constructed, if applicable. Submissions should explicitly discuss potential threats to validity and outline robustness checks to address these threats.
- **Adequate power for meaningful, policy-relevant effects:** Detailed sample size assumptions and a power analysis for the primary outcome(s). Submissions should provide clear justification, based on theory and empirical evidence, for why the minimum detectable effect size (MDE) is realistic for the intervention and of a magnitude that is policy-relevant. Note that detailed power calculations are only required at the full proposal stage, not for the LOI. Applicants may consult our guidance on power analysis for additional detail on expectations.
- **Use of high-quality data sources:** Clear description of all data sources and plans to secure data-sharing agreements. The strongest submissions use high-quality administrative data wherever feasible. Note that formal letters of support are only required at the full proposal stage, but applicants should demonstrate a feasible plan for securing access to data.
- **Study timeline and feasibility:** A realistic timeline outlining key activities (data access, analysis, and dissemination). We will prioritize studies that can be completed within 12–18 months of project kickoff.

Descriptive Research Selection Criteria

Descriptive studies may stand alone or be added to a causal proposal. Descriptive research will also be evaluated on **(1) policy relevance and (2) study design.** The policy relevance of descriptive research will be assessed using the same standards described above for causal research. In addition, strong descriptive proposals will discuss the specific decision the findings could inform, such as setting a deposit limit, defining a risk indicator, or targeting enforcement, and the decision-makers who are in a position to act on them.

The study design criteria for descriptive research differ from those for causal research. Strong descriptive proposals will clearly define the key measures (e.g., prevalence rates, patterns of betting activity, or profiles of specific groups of bettors) and key concepts (e.g., risky play, gambling-related harm), and discuss their validity and reliability. Strong descriptive proposals will clearly outline their data source(s), explain who is and is not represented in the data, and what the findings can tell us about the broader market, especially when data come from a single operator, platform, or state. Estimates should be sufficiently reliable to inform decisions, including for key subgroups. The strongest submissions use large-scale administrative or transaction-level data, though representative surveys or audits of operator practices may also be appropriate where these administrative data sources are unavailable. Proposals should present a feasible plan for securing data access and completing the work within 6–12 months. We anticipate budgets for descriptive projects to be smaller than those for causal studies.

How to Apply

We ask interested applicants to submit an LOI for AV consideration via our applicant portal. **Applicants must use the LOI template provided here** (depending on your browser settings, this file may download directly to your computer). For stand-alone descriptive studies, applicants only need to complete the following three questions in Section 1 of the LOI template: Project Name, Program/Policy/Intervention Summary, and Primary Research Question(s). The other questions in Section 1 apply only to proposals that include a causal research component.

This RFP will remain open through January 13, 2027, and all LOIs must be submitted by that date. Applicants whose letters are reviewed favorably, based on the eligibility and selection criteria above, will be invited to submit a full proposal.[5]

In addition to the completed LOI template, applicants should upload the following materials under the *Supporting Documents* section of the portal (these materials will not count toward the LOI page limit):

- **Study team overview:** Applicants should provide a 1–2 page overview of the core study team, focusing on key project members and their roles and responsibilities. This overview should highlight the experience and expertise most relevant to the proposed study and clarify how the team is structured to carry out the work. Applicants will also be asked to upload brief (1–3 pages) CVs of key study team members to the portal.
- **Budget request summary:** Applicants should specify the amount of funding requested from AV, reflecting the project timeline and the study scope, and include an approximate project budget consistent with AV's cost policy. While a detailed budget is not required at the LOI stage, applicants should provide a brief (up to 1 page) budget narrative that outlines the key cost drivers and provides a high-level overview of how funds would be allocated (e.g., personnel time, data acquisition, travel, and administrative costs). This narrative is intended to provide a clear, high-level understanding of the project's scope and cost structure and does not need to include line-item justification. A full, itemized budget will be required for invited full proposals.

The Evidence & Evaluation team at AV oversees this Request for Proposals. Applicants can find responses to frequently asked questions here. Please note that these FAQs were developed primarily for causal studies and may not fully apply to stand-alone descriptive studies, which have historically not been funded through the Evidence & Evaluation team's RFP process.

Please direct any additional questions about the research priorities, selection criteria, or application process to EvidenceTeam@arnoldventures.org.

5 All qualified applicants will be considered without regard to race, color, religion, national origin, age, sex, gender identity or expression, marital status, sexual orientation, disability, military/veteran status, or any other characteristic protected by applicable law.

Arnold Ventures is a philanthropy that supports research to understand the root causes of America's most persistent and pressing problems, as well as evidence-based solutions to address them. By focusing on systemic change and bipartisan policy reforms, AV works to improve the lives of American families, strengthen communities, and promote economic opportunity.