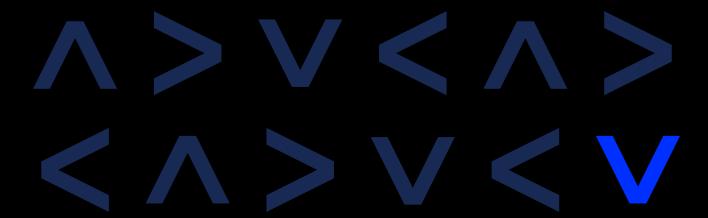# Building Evidence: Support for QEDs to Evaluate Social Programs and Policies

Arnold Ventures

Evidence and Evaluation

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Arnold
Ventures

Arnold Ventures (AV) is a philanthropy dedicated to improving the lives of all Americans through evidence-based policy solutions that maximize opportunity and minimize injustice. AV focuses on improving systems where outcomes are falling short, incentives are misaligned, and the time is right for change. By funding rigorous research, we strive to better understand the root causes of problems and build the evidence about what works to solve them. Using this research, we advocate for policy reforms at all levels of government and build durable, bipartisan coalitions to drive lasting change and impact.

The Evidence and Evaluation team has been at the forefront of AV's mission to inform policy solutions through an evidence-based lens. We are driven by the core belief that by increasing the body of evidence about 'what works' – while also identifying programs and policies that do not demonstrate impact – we create opportunities for government to better target limited resources and drive improved outcomes.

The Opportunity

The Evidence and Evaluation team aims to identify, evaluate, and scale evidence-based solutions targeting the nation's most pressing social problems. This funding targets the first two phases of that goal – identifying and evaluating potential solutions – and is geared toward studies examining the causal effects of a policy, program, or intervention that aligns with key AV policy areas. Causal research employing strong, quasi-experimental methods are a critical component of the evidence-building process and are important for increasing the knowledge base for decision-makers and stakeholders. Examples of causal research methods include natural experiments, regression discontinuity, difference-in-differences, and instrumental variable designs. If you are thinking about a study employing random assignment, you should check out our other RFP focused on randomized controlled trials here and if you are focused on criminal justice outcomes see a separate RFP here.

This Request for Proposals (RFP) aims to bolster the knowledge base about potentially effective policies, programs, and interventions by funding researchers to conduct rigorous, causal research using quasi-experimental methods that aligns with key AV policy areas. We seek studies that will advance the knowledge base within key AV policy areas, including higher education, career education and training, infrastructure, contraceptive choice and access, and public finance:

- **Higher Education:** The Higher Education initiative seeks to identify and scale policies, programs, and practices that improve student success and address equity gaps. Projects funded under this RFP will help build credible evidence about 'what works' in higher education to improve outcomes, including but not limited to retention, persistence, successful transfer, degree or certificate completion, job placement, post-college earnings, and loan repayment. More details on this initiative are provided here.

- **Career Education and Training**: The Career Education and Training initiative seeks to identify and expand programs and policies that improve access to good jobs, meaningful careers, and economic mobility, with a focus on pathways other than a traditional college degree. Projects responding to this RFP should build policy-relevant evidence for promising, replicable program models and policies, with an emphasis on assessing impacts on learners' labor market outcomes (e.g., earnings/wages, employment/job quality, career advancement). Example topics of interest include, but are not limited to, studies that provide causal evidence on apprenticeships and related models, models that seek to integrate career and academic education, the effects of policies that introduce or revise career education-related funding structures and institutional incentives, and the impacts of state-level systems reorganization or governance changes.

- **Contraceptive Choice and Access:** The Contraceptive Choice and Access initiative aims to close the gaps in contraceptive affordability and access. Projects responding to this RFP should estimate the impact of existing federal or state policies on availability and affordability of birth control, particularly for populations facing the

most significant barriers. Relevant policies targeting affordability include public and private insurance coverage standards and federal/state family planning funding streams. Policies targeting practical access issues may explore alternative delivery channels (e.g. over the counter, pharmacist prescribed, mobile units, vending machines), healthcare workforce/staffing issues, and integration of family planning services in primary care settings. More details on this initiative are provided [here](#).

- **Infrastructure:** The Infrastructure initiative seeks to bolster U.S. capacity to build infrastructure faster, better, and at a lower cost. Projects responding to this RFP should expand the knowledge base of 'what works' when building infrastructure in the United States at any level of government, such as improving the permitting process, reducing regulatory barriers, and increasing state capacity. Specific areas of interest include housing, transportation, climate, and energy. Within these areas, the initiative is particularly interested in supporting evaluations of recent state and local policy reforms, including studies of early-stage outcomes. More details on this initiative are provided [here](#).

- **Public Finance:** The Public Finance initiative seeks to advance tax and budget policies that both promote fiscal stability in government and advance Americans' economic opportunity, mobility, and security. Specific areas of interest for this RFP include program integrity (reducing waste, fraud, and abuse, and improving tax administration) and federal tax policy (especially with regard to the Child Tax Credit, place-based policies, taxation of high-net-worth individuals, and international taxation). Broadly, projects under this RFP will help us answer the question: "Are tax and benefit programs efficiently achieving their intended effects?"
  Two questions of particular interest to the Public Finance team are:
  - What is the return on investment to the government for interventions aimed at preventing waste, fraud, and abuse in tax and benefit programs?
  - What is the impact of state-level Child Tax Credit expansion(s) on the labor force?

  More details on this initiative are provided [here](#).

The submission and decision timeline for this RFP is as follows:

STAGE OF APPLICATION PROCESS	DATE
Deadline to receive letters of interest	June 13, 2025
Notification if invited to submit a full proposal	August 8, 2025
Deadline for invited applicants to submit full proposal	September 26, 2025
Notification if selected for award	December 1, 2025*

Proposals over $500,000 may require additional time for approval.

Selection Criteria

AV is not interested in funding research for research's sake; we are interested in supporting relevant, rigorous work that can ultimately inform decisions and improve the lives of kids and families in American communities. To that end, we have a few criteria that outline the research most likely to hit our sweet spot.

When working on a letter of interest (LOI), we ask interested partners to address the following: policy relevance, study design, and implementation feasibility.

CRITERION	DETAIL
Policy Relevance	**Why it matters:** We believe research should inform actionable strategies and resource allocation, aligning with the priorities and pressing needs of decision-makers and communities. **What we are looking for:** • Research on a program, policy, or intervention being tested in the United States and relevant to at least one of the key AV policy areas above • Clear description of how the program, policy, or intervention is relevant to at least one of the key AV policy areas above • Demonstration of how the research project has the potential to inform or influence policy/practice at the local, state, and/or federal level • Local, state, and/or federal policy levers available to support scaling of this intervention if it is found to be effective (e.g. funding streams or regulatory changes)
Study Design	**Why it matters:** We support research that aims to accurately measure impact and ensure that conclusions drawn are valid and reliable. **What we are looking for:** • Clear articulation of the program, policy, or intervention being evaluated, the research question(s) for the evaluation, the primary outcome(s) of interest, and duration of follow-up • Clear articulation of the quasi-experimental method used (e.g., regression discontinuity, difference-in-differences, instrumental variable, etc.) • Study design overview, including the proposed estimation strategy, plans to address threats to validity, necessary robustness checks, and if this is a prospective or retrospective study • Articulation of why the study design was selected and how it will protect against selection bias • Sample sizes for the primary outcome(s) • Data sources and plans to secure data sharing agreements (preferably using administrative data, wherever feasible) • Study timeline that outlines key steps in the project

CRITERION	DETAIL
Implementation Feasibility + Funding *(for prospective studies)*	**Why it matters:** We support research that can be successfully completed by evaluating established programs with the capacity to be delivered at a sizeable scale. **What we are looking for:** • Brief description of history of program implementation in real-world conditions (Implementation can be demonstrated by providing measures of program participation, geographic reach, and other measures of a program's history within a community) • Discussion of how funding or policy changes for program delivery has been secured • Confirmation of support from programmatic and other study partner(s) as applicable (Note: formal agreements are not necessary for the LOI but will be required for full proposals)

Other Considerations

In addition to the selection criteria above, we encourage LOIs for causal studies that also demonstrate:

- If appropriate, there is a clear pathway to more rigorous testing of the program (such as an RCT or additional quasi-experimental study) following this study. This can be demonstrated by including letters of support for further evaluation from policy or program leadership (these are not necessary for the LOI stage).

- The primary outcomes have significant policy importance to the AV policy areas listed above.

- The study assesses key outcomes in both the short- and longer-term, as appropriate for the type of program and study.

- Researchers that have not previously received funding from AV, including those who have been impacted by the systems we are seeking to change.

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.

How to Apply:

We ask interested researchers to submit a letter of interest for AV consideration (maximum of three pages) via our applicant portal. This RFP will remain open until June 13, 2025, and all letters of interest must be submitted by that date. Applicants may use their own format, with single or double spacing, an 11-point font or larger, and one-inch margins. In addition to the letter of interest, please also share the following under the *Optional Upload for Supporting Documents* section on the portal (this will not count towards the LOI page limit):

- **Study team overview:** Outline the project team in 1-2 pages, including an overview of roles and responsibilities for key project members, and include brief biographies for all key project team members. You will be asked to upload brief (1-3 pages) CVs of key members of the study team 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 that is consistent with AV's cost policy. While a formal budget is not required at this stage, applicants should provide detail on the anticipated drivers of project costs (e.g., personnel time, data acquisition, travel, and administrative costs).[1]

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1   *In general, this RFP is focused on funding research projects where other parties have agreed to pay the cost of delivering the intervention or practice. However, we may consider supporting the costs of intervention delivery in a limited number of awards if such support would be needed to enable a rigorous impact evaluation (e.g., increase study power). Applicants seeking such funding should indicate so in their submission and provide the compelling reason for the funding request.*

The Evidence and Evaluation team at AV oversees this Request for Proposals. You can find responses to frequently asked questions here. Please direct other questions about the selection criteria or application process to EvidenceTeam@arnoldventures.org.

Statement on Commitment to Assessing Impact on All Communities

AV's mission includes maximizing opportunity and minimizing injustice. We encourage research projects that use inclusive research methods and frameworks, including assessments of whether policy and practice have a disproportionate impact on particular communities, whenever appropriate and possible.

Statement on Commitment to Transparency and Research Integrity

AV is committed to the principles of research transparency and integrity, as explained in our Guidelines for Investment in Research. As a condition of any grant award, we will ask awardees to pre-register the study on the Open Science Framework website. Prior to the commencement of the study, we will ask grantees to make public a copy of the research and analysis plan described in the proposal. In addition, we will ask grantees to make their datasets and related materials (e.g., de-identified data, programming/code, and output) publicly available if permitted through data sharing agreements.

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