



Introduction

Arnold Ventures' Career Pathways portfolio promotes policies that ensure that students across the country have multiple pathways to career success and economic mobility, including pathways that do not always require a 4-year degree. We invest in research, policy development, and advocacy to help build a system in which learners are measurably better off for having participated in career education and training, and to ensure public investment emphasizes pathways that deliver strong economic outcomes. Our Career Pathways team's 3 primary policy areas of interest include:

1. Strengthening secondary and postsecondary **career and technical education (CTE)**
2. Building the research base on **apprenticeships and other work-based learning models**
3. Modernizing the **public workforce system** so that it functions effectively across agencies and funding streams

These systems collectively represent significant public investment, and improving their efficacy is essential to ensuring career opportunities for students and workers as well as a strong return on investment (ROI) for taxpayers.

1. CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION (CTE)

- › What are the effects of changing **secondary CTE funding formulas**?
- › What are the impacts of **performance-based secondary or postsecondary CTE funding models**? Are there benefits, unintended consequences, or gaming?
- › What are the effects of changing **non-funding levers for K-12 CTE or career readiness** policy (e.g., **program criteria or accountability structures**)?
- › What are the effects of incentivizing **industry-recognized credentials** in CTE policy? Are the benefits and risks similar in secondary and postsecondary CTE?
- › What is the **relative ROI** on public investment in varied secondary CTE structures in terms of student outcomes?
- › What are the impacts on CTE participation and outcomes of varied **eligibility or admissions** policies?

2. APPRENTICESHIPS AND WORK-BASED LEARNING

- › What are the causal impacts of **work-based learning** on student outcomes? How does impact vary across different types or dosages of work-based learning, or different student types? How should it be defined or encouraged in policy?
- › What are the impacts of **apprenticeship participation** and completion? How does it vary by industry, occupation, or context? (*Note: we are interested in various configurations: registered apprenticeships, youth apprenticeships, pre-apprenticeships, apprenticeship degrees, etc.*)
- › How do changes in **apprenticeship funding structures** or **regulatory standards** affect growth, student outcomes, and ROI of apprenticeships?
- › What are the design elements of **employer-driven, "customized job training" programs** and related funding policies that maximize worker outcomes and taxpayer ROI?

3. WORKFORCE SYSTEM REFORM

- › What policies, program models, and components deliver strong, durable labor market outcomes for **workers with barriers** to opportunity?
- › What are the impacts of changing **program eligibility standards** for workforce policies?
- › What are the impacts of moving to **performance- or milestone-based funding models** for workforce training on worker outcomes and ROI of public investments?



- › What **components of sectoral training models** most drive impact, replicability, cost-effectiveness, and scalability?
- › What are the impacts of various policies and models to **blend funding and integrate services**?

Have a Research Idea?

Reach out to [Jules Sproul](#). While the above are our main areas of interest, we are also open to adjacent, policy-relevant topics. Please note that, due to the volume of inquiries, we are not always able to respond.

Frequently Asked Questions

- **What does the process look like to get a research project funded by Arnold Ventures (AV)?**
 - › The most direct approach is to apply via the [RFPs](#) run by AV's Evidence & Evaluation team, if one is open.
 - › The other approach is via conversation with the Career Pathways team. We tend to start with a short discussion to learn about your idea and determine if it is aligned with our strategy and can plausibly meet the methods criteria (see below). If so, we will ask your team to submit a short concept note (typically 1 page long) and would then ask you to complete a full proposal, budget request, and methods and analysis plan.
- **What is the timeline?**
 - › We source projects on an ongoing basis and submit proposals to our Board quarterly.
- **What is the average project size and award amount?**
 - › The award amount will depend on the project and what is needed to conduct high-quality research. However, most project budgets are \$150,000-325,000. Likewise, most projects are 18-36 months and focus largely or entirely on the core, causal analysis and write-up. We only rarely fund modest programmatic costs, for especially high-priority questions and if strictly necessary for causal evaluation (e.g., getting to evaluable scale).
- **What are the criteria for funding?**
 - › Funding is limited, and we prioritize projects on an ongoing basis. The key criteria are:
 1. Policy relevance: Findings should be directly actionable in state or federal policy. For that reason, we are more interested in jurisdiction-level policy changes or, less commonly, network-level or multi-site program evaluations, rather than individual program sites. The most compelling proposals identify plausible policy windows for acting on the research findings.
 2. Rigorous causal methods: Generally, funded studies use randomized trial, lottery, regression discontinuity, difference-in-differences (DiD), or instrumental variable designs, with a strong case in the latter 2 for exogeneity. We do not fund studies that rely solely on matching designs, non-DiD fixed effects, or other observational methods.
 3. Longitudinal outcomes: We prefer that studies look beyond proximate outcomes like high school graduation to postsecondary and, ideally, labor market outcomes.
 - › See the [Evidence & Evaluation RFPs](#) for other criteria that may apply. Note that we do not have a specific industry or target population focus, although we tend to focus on high school through early career. We are also interested in understanding variations in effects across sectors and individuals.

[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.