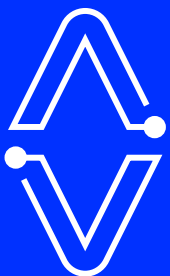


**REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS**

# Causal Research on the Impacts of K-12 School Policies





# Arnold Ventures Overview

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.

## The Opportunity

The next several years present an important opportunity to shape the future of state K-12 education policy. States are making consequential decisions about curriculum, assessment, and accountability systems; school choice and governance policies; and teacher and leader workforce policies. High-quality research in these areas will help policymakers distinguish between reforms that are merely appealing and those that meaningfully improve student outcomes over the long term.

Through this request for proposals (RFP), Arnold Ventures seeks to support research studies that **estimate the causal effects of actionable, politically viable U.S. K-12 education policies that can be influenced at the state level and have the potential to improve outcomes at scale.** Competitive proposals should employ rigorous causal research methods and, where feasible, examine not only short-term educational outcomes but also longer-term impacts on postsecondary and/or labor market outcomes using administrative data. Given the pace of state policymaking, we place a high value on research that can inform decisions quickly and will give preference to studies that can be completed within 18 months of project kickoff and/or produce actionable findings by the end of 2028.

We seek proposals that address one or more of the following three areas within U.S. K-12 policy. While we are open to a range of possible research questions within these three areas, the language below highlights questions of particular interest:

### CURRICULUM, ASSESSMENTS, AND ACCOUNTABILITY

- What are the effects of state-led curriculum reforms on student achievement and longer-term outcomes, and which reform components are most important?
- How do statewide assessment reforms and school and district accountability systems affect student achievement, educational attainment, and longer-term outcomes, and which design features drive observed impacts?
- How do grading policies, graduation requirements, promotion and retention policies, end-of-course assessments, and advanced coursework policies affect educational attainment, workforce readiness, and longer-term outcomes?

### SCHOOL CHOICE AND GOVERNANCE

- What are the effects of charter school expansions, private school choice programs, education savings accounts (ESAs), open enrollment policies, and other school choice initiatives on both the participating students and the students who remain in traditional public schools?
- How do changes in school governance — including state takeovers, charter authorization policies, district consolidation, school closures, and school funding reforms — affect student outcomes and system performance?

### TEACHER AND LEADER POLICIES

- How do teacher- and school leader-focused reforms — including preparation (pre- and in-service), licensure, and compensation — affect the quality of the educator workforce and short- and long-term student outcomes?



# RFP Timeline

| STAGE OF APPLICATION PROCESS                              | DATE                     |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Deadline to receive letters of interest (LOI)             | <b>November 13, 2026</b> |
| Notification of invitation to submit a full proposal      | <b>December 18, 2026</b> |
| Deadline for invited applicants to submit a full proposal | <b>January 31, 2027</b>  |
| Notification if selected for award                        | <b>March 31, 2027*</b>   |

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

## Selection Criteria

AV seeks to support rigorous research that generates actionable evidence to inform policy decisions and improve the lives of individuals, families, and communities in America. To that end, applications should demonstrate strength in the areas that we view as essential to producing research that will strengthen the evidence base in key fields. Specifically, we ask that applicants address the following criteria in their proposals, which serve as the basis for our funding decisions: **(1) policy relevance and (2) causal study design.**

While these criteria reflect our priorities and guide our funding decisions, we recognize that strong projects can vary, and we may make 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.

### POLICY RELEVANCE

We believe research should speak directly to the priorities and pressing needs of decision-makers and the communities they serve. Projects with strong policy relevance demonstrate a clear pathway from evidence to action and address questions that matter for real-world practice and systems change.

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 three K-12 policy areas listed on Page 2. Submissions should briefly describe how the study addresses questions of strategic importance within the relevant policy area.
- **Pathway to policy impact:** Description of the policy challenge the study addresses, why it is timely, and how the research could inform policy or practice at scale. Strong submissions will identify the policymakers, agencies, or other decision-makers who stand to benefit from the research and describe how study findings could inform policy or practice, including potential mechanisms for scaling or institutionalizing effective interventions. Strong submissions will also discuss the generalizability of study findings.
- **Contribution to the field:** 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.

## CAUSAL STUDY DESIGN

We aim to support 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.

A strong submission will present a well-specified, adequately powered, and methodologically sound design that demonstrates rigor and feasibility.<sup>1</sup> 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<sup>2</sup>; ii) the research question(s); iii) one to two primary outcomes and any additional secondary outcomes<sup>3</sup>; and iv) the planned duration of follow-up or measurement timing. The strongest submissions measure medium- to long-term impacts to ensure that immediate impacts do not fade.
- **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).

While studies must be designed to produce valid causal inferences, we welcome proposals that also include careful measurement and analysis of implementation where appropriate and feasible. Any proposed implementation analyses should be closely linked to the primary research questions and represent a relatively small share of the overall project scope and budget.

## 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](#)** (this file may download directly to your computer depending on which browser you're using).

This RFP will remain open through November 13, 2026, 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.<sup>4</sup>

1 Studies funded under this RFP must follow our [open science guidelines for research grants](#), which includes a public posting of a pre-analysis plan prior to study launch.

2 This RFP is focused on evaluating the effects of state-level policy decisions, rather than the impacts of individual curricula or instructional programs. We are therefore not seeking proposals that evaluate the effectiveness of a specific curriculum in isolation. However, proposals may examine state policies that involve broad or system-level changes to curriculum requirements, adoption, or use across schools or districts.

3 If the study has more than two primary outcomes, describe the method for multiple comparisons adjustment.

4 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.



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 RFP. Applicants can find responses to frequently asked questions [here](#). Please direct other questions about the selection criteria or application process to [EvidenceTeam@arnoldventures.org](mailto:EvidenceTeam@arnoldventures.org).

[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.