

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Building Evidence:

Support for QEDs to Evaluate Social Programs
and Policies



**EVIDENCE
& EVALUATION**

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 at all levels of government and help build durable, bipartisan coalitions for lasting change.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Earlier this year, we made key updates to the application materials. Please review the highlights below before submitting a Letter of Interest (LOI):

- › **Updated priority policy areas and research priorities:** This Request for Proposals (RFP) now welcomes submissions in two new policy areas: (1) Online Gambling and (2) Health Care. Additionally, each policy area has an updated description of current priorities and key research questions. We will prioritize submissions that clearly address these interests.
- › **Required LOI template to standardize submissions:** All applicants must submit an LOI using an editable Word template with two sections: Key Study Details and Study Narrative. Download the template [here](#) (this file may download directly to your computer depending on which browser you're using).
- › **Updated FAQs:** The [Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQs\)](#) have been expanded to address common questions and provide additional guidance on the application process.
- › **Updated Indirect Cost Policy (as of March 1, 2026):** Before submitting your LOI, please review AV's updated [policy](#) to ensure that your submission reflects the current policy.

Research Funding Opportunity

The Evidence & Evaluation team leads AV's efforts to strengthen causal evidence in social policy. We believe that understanding which programs and policies work — and which do not — enables policymakers to direct limited resources toward the most effective strategies that improve outcomes at scale.

Causal research employing strong, quasi-experimental methods is a critical component of the evidence-building process and important for increasing the knowledge base for decision-makers and stakeholders. Examples of quasi-experimental methods include natural experiments, regression discontinuity, difference-in-differences, and instrumental variable designs. If you would like to submit a letter of interest (LOI) for a study employing random assignment, please check out our Strengthening Evidence RFP [here](#). If you are focused on criminal justice outcomes, see a separate RFP [here](#).

This RFP seeks to advance the knowledge base about potentially effective policies, programs, and interventions by funding rigorous, causal research using quasi-experimental methods in the following AV policy areas: Higher Education, Career Pathways, Health Care, Medicaid, Online Gambling, Infrastructure, and Public Finance.

More details on the research priorities of each policy area are included on the next page.

HIGHER EDUCATION

The [Higher Education initiative](#) seeks to identify and scale policies, programs, and practices that improve student success and the value of a degree. Projects responding to this RFP should 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. A question of particular interest is:

- What are the impacts of tuition guarantees and freeze policies on student enrollment, completion, or financial decision-making?

CAREER PATHWAYS

The [Career Pathways initiative](#) seeks to identify and expand programs and policies that improve access to good jobs, meaningful careers, and economic mobility, with a focus on high school career and technical education, apprenticeships and on-the-job training, workforce system reform, and postsecondary pathways other than a traditional college degree. Projects responding to this RFP should build 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). Questions of particular interest include:

- What are the impacts of changing funding models for secondary and postsecondary CTE and workforce training?
- What are the impacts of work-based learning on high school students' postsecondary and labor market outcomes? How do impacts vary by model, dosage, student characteristics, or other factors?
- How do changes in apprenticeship policies (e.g., funding, regulatory standards) affect apprenticeship growth, composition, outcomes, and return on investment (ROI) of public investment in apprenticeships?

HEALTH CARE

The [Health Care initiative](#) broadly seeks to improve efficiency across health care markets. Projects responding to this RFP should build evidence on the effects of (1) administrative costs and burden or (2) coverage churn. Projects may focus on one or more market segments (e.g., Medicaid, Medicare, and/or commercial) and are encouraged to consider cross-market dynamics or how findings in one market may inform policy in others. Primary outcomes should include government expenditures or consumer affordability, with additional analysis of costs borne by other payers where relevant. Projects under this initiative should address one of the following questions:

- What drives health care administrative costs, and what roles do different stakeholders (e.g., insurers, providers) play? What policies have been effective in reducing administrative costs and easing administrative burdens, and who realizes the savings?
- What is the full cost of churn across coverage systems, and how is this cost distributed among consumers, taxpayers, and private entities? Which policies are most effective at reducing churn and its associated costs?

MEDICAID

The [Medicaid initiative](#) seeks to improve efficiency in Medicaid and address perverse incentives without impacting coverage levels. Projects responding to this RFP should build evidence on programs addressing (1) uncompensated care or (2) health-related social needs (HRSN) and should evaluate Medicaid program spending as a primary outcome. Projects may also examine total government expenditures (e.g., Medicaid, Medicare, Marketplace, SNAP, and other public programs) to assess broader fiscal effects. Analyses of Medicaid spending should distinguish between state and federal expenditures with an emphasis on identifying opportunities to reduce total government costs. Projects that address major components of Medicaid spending will be prioritized over highly population- or service-specific analyses. Eligible projects under this initiative should address one of the following questions:

- What are the most effective and efficient approaches to financing uncompensated care? Areas of interest include redundancy among uncompensated care programs, challenges associated with defining uncompensated care, or comparisons between uncompensated care payments and expanding insurance coverage.
- Under what circumstances is covering HRSN through Medicaid cost-effective? Studies should examine relevant populations, covered services, and overall policy design features that influence costs and outcomes.

ONLINE GAMBLING

We aim to build rigorous evidence on the financial, social, and behavioral impacts of state policies governing online casino-style gambling, such as digital slot machines, table games, and related wagering platforms (“iGaming”). As states increasingly consider whether and how to authorize iGaming, there is a need for credible evidence on the consequences of legalization and the effectiveness of alternative regulatory approaches. Projects responding to this RFP should evaluate the effects of iGaming policies on individuals, households, communities, and public finances. While we are open to a wide range of causal research questions, we are particularly interested in the following:

- What are the financial, social, and behavioral impacts of iGaming legalization on individuals and households?
- What are the broader public-sector impacts of iGaming legalization, including effects on tax revenue and public expenditures?
- How do specific regulatory approaches (e.g., licensing structures, taxation, advertising restrictions, responsible gambling requirements, and consumer safeguards) influence gambling behavior and related outcomes?
- How do platform features and product design characteristics influence gambling participation, spending patterns, and indicators of gambling-related harm?
- What are the effects of iGaming advertising and marketing on gambling participation, spending, and related outcomes?

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 state capacity, housing, transportation, 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. Questions of particular interest include:

State Capacity

- What organizational structures, compensation systems, employment regimes and personnel management structures foster employee productivity?
- What is the impact of procedural and policy reforms on service quality and cost, resident satisfaction, administrative burdens, and trust in government?
- What is the impact of investments in technology on productivity or service delivery?

Housing

- What is the impact of housing reforms on tax revenue, and demand for public goods and services?
- What is the impact of tax and financing reforms on housing construction and renovation?
- What is the impact of rental assistance, tenant protections, and housing-first policies on new housing construction and on the supply and demand of rental housing?

Transportation

- What is the impact of Buy American and domestic content requirements on cost, speed, innovation and effectiveness of transportation projects?
- What is the impact of policy and process reforms, including permitting and procurement, on project costs and delivery?
- What are the impacts of outcomes-focused project selection on the type and mix of projects built in a state?

Energy and Permitting

- How do different permitting governance models (e.g., state siting boards, consolidated permitting offices, lead-agency models, local control, or hybrid approaches) impact project costs and delivery, litigation rates, administrative costs, and project outcomes?
- What has been the impact of states and local policies to streamline permitting energy infrastructure on project timelines and outcomes?
- How do different regulations impact project costs and delivery, litigation rates, administrative costs, and project outcomes?

PUBLIC FINANCE

The [Public Finance initiative](#) seeks to advance tax and budget policies that promote fiscal stability in government and advance Americans' economic opportunity, mobility, and security. Projects responding to this RFP should build evidence on whether state reforms efficiently achieve their intended effects, with a focus on three areas: state responses to benefit cliffs, state pension reform, and the public administration that determines how benefits and tax systems operate in practice. In the third area, the initiative prioritizes work on the shared, cross-program systems states use to run benefits and tax administration, with attention to vendor procurement and market structure, hiring and workforce capacity, data sharing and interoperability across programs and agencies, and the design of the administrative systems themselves. Questions of particular interest include:

- What are the impacts of states' responses to benefit cliffs, such as transitional benefit programs, on labor force participation, employment, earnings, and economic mobility?
- How do specific state pension reform choices affect plan solvency, government and taxpayer costs, public-sector recruitment and retention, and workers' retirement readiness?

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

STAGE OF APPLICATION PROCESS	DATE
Deadline to receive letters of interest	September 11, 2026
Notification if invited to submit a full proposal	November 6, 2026
Deadline for invited applicants to submit full proposal	January 15, 2027
Notification if selected for award	March 31, 2027*

**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) study design. We provide details for each of these two areas below.

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.

CRITERION	DETAIL
Policy Relevance	Why it matters: 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. What we are looking for: 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 a U.S.-based program, policy, or intervention addressing a pressing social issue. Quasi-experimental designs (QEDs) must be relevant to at least one of the key AV policy areas listed above (Higher Education, Career Pathways, Health Care, Medicaid, Online Gambling, Infrastructure, and Public Finance) and should align with the priorities of that policy area. Submissions should briefly describe how the study addresses questions of strategic importance within the relevant domain. • Pathway to policy impact: Description of the underlying social policy challenge the study addresses, why it is timely, and how it aligns with the priorities of specific policymakers or agencies at the local, state, and/or federal level. Strong submissions explicitly identify the decision-makers who stand to benefit from the research and describe how study findings could inform policy or practice at scale, including the concrete policy, administrative, or operational mechanisms through which effective interventions could be scaled or institutionalized (e.g., program expansion, funding allocation, operational improvements, or regulatory changes). 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.

CRITERION	DETAIL
Study Design	Why it matters: 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. What we are looking for: A strong submission will present a well-specified, adequately powered, and methodologically sound design that demonstrates rigor and feasibility.¹ 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 outcomes²; 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).

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



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 September 11, 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.³

Supporting Documents

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 direct other questions about the selection criteria or application process to EvidenceTeam@arnoldventures.org.

³ 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.