

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Strengthening Evidence:

Support for RCTs 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 before submitting a Letter of Interest (LOI):

- › **Continued interest in replication and long-term impacts:** We encourage submissions that replicate prior rigorous findings in new contexts and those that extend follow-up of existing randomized controlled trials (RCTs).
- › **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.

RCTs are one of the strongest tools for generating credible causal evidence. By comparing outcomes between a treatment group and a control group, RCTs transparently and credibly isolate the impact of a program, policy, or intervention. This clarity provides actionable insight for decision-makers and stakeholders and builds confidence to support impactful solutions.

This Request for Proposals (RFP) aims to strengthen the body of proven, effective policies, programs, and interventions by funding researchers to conduct rigorous RCTs across the spectrum of social policy. If you would like to submit an application using a quasi-experimental design, please check out our Building Evidence RFP [here](#), and if you are focused on criminal justice outcomes, see a separate RFP [here](#).

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, (2) study design, and (3) implementation feasibility.** We provide details for each of these three 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 letter of interest (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: • 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. We particularly welcome applications that seek to replicate findings from prior rigorous evaluations in new contexts to strengthen the evidence base. We also welcome long-term follow-up of prior RCTs to demonstrate sustained impact. • U.S. relevance and scope: Research on a U.S.-based program, policy, or intervention addressing a pressing social issue. This RFP is open to studies across all policy areas. Alignment with Arnold Ventures’ focus areas is not required, but may be considered, particularly for higher-budget projects. A full list of AV focus areas can be explored here. (RCTs primarily focused on Criminal Justice outcomes will not be considered under this RFP; for such studies, please see this RFP.)

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 key features of the intervention and the treatment contrast relative to business-as-usual services; ii) the research question(s); iii) one to two primary outcomes and any additional secondary outcomes²; and iv) the planned duration of follow-up. 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 how recruitment will be conducted and how the study sample will be defined. Submissions should also clearly describe how randomization will be conducted and maintained, and implications for design and analysis. Submissions should explicitly discuss limitations of the design and propose strategies to mitigate potential challenges, such as attrition, missing data, etc. • 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 (randomization, recruitment, data collection, 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.

CRITERION	DETAIL
Implementation Feasibility + Funding	Why it matters: We aim to fund research that can be successfully completed in real-world settings, focusing on evaluating established programs with the capacity to be delivered at a sizeable scale. Feasible implementation ensures that the study can be completed as planned and that findings will be relevant for policymakers considering broader adoption. What we are looking for: A strong submission will provide clear evidence that the program, research team, and partners are ready for successful implementation at the proposed scale. Specifically, we look for: • Evidence of a mature, well-established program: A brief history of the program’s operation under real-world conditions, including measures such as duration, geographic reach, participation, or other indicators of maturity. Strong submissions demonstrate that the program has operated for a sufficient period and at a sufficient scale to support a credible evaluation. Proposals to evaluate pilot or untested programs with minimal real-world implementation generally will not advance unless there is a compelling justification (e.g., significant public funding is being allocated to the program). • Evaluation readiness: A clear case that the program is ready for random assignment and the infrastructure, staffing, and data sources are in place to support a credible study. Strong submissions instill confidence that implementation partners are committed and prepared to deliver services at the proposed scale. • Study partnership strength and commitments: Confirmation that study partners support participation in the study, including random assignment. Formal letters of support are not required at the LOI stage, but applicants should demonstrate strong alignment, early buy-in, and a realistic plan for securing necessary approvals. • Funding readiness for program delivery and evaluation: Clear description of how program delivery will be funded during the study period and confirmation that funding is — or will be — secured in time to support the evaluation. Note that this RFP is focused on funding research studies where other parties have agreed to pay the cost of delivering the intervention or program.³

³ 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.



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 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.⁴

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 on 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 FAQs [here](#). Please direct other questions about the selection criteria or application process to EvidenceTeam@arnoldventures.org.

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.

[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.