



Causal Research on Community Safety and the Criminal Justice System: Priority Questions

[Arnold Ventures](#) supports rigorous causal research on scalable policies, practices, and interventions that can improve community safety and make the criminal justice system fairer and more effective. Though we welcome proposals to conduct causal research across the full range of topics eligible under our [Causal Research on Community Safety and the Criminal Justice System RFP](#), we would be especially excited to see proposals that address the priority questions detailed below. These questions reflect areas where policymakers are confronting consequential decisions about public safety, where credible evidence could inform a clear policy or practice lever, and where important gaps remain in what is known. Across these areas, we are interested in research that directly measures the public safety impacts of an intervention and assesses the intervention’s net social returns by weighing those impacts against its other benefits and costs, including any costs or savings to government. Please note the priorities and related details listed here may evolve as the field develops and policy debates change.

PRIORITY	KEY QUESTIONS / FOCUS	EXAMPLE TOPICS <i>(illustrative, not exhaustive)</i>	EXAMPLE OUTCOMES <i>(illustrative, not exhaustive)</i>
Improving investigations and clearance rates	Which interventions — including investments in investigative personnel, practices, and technology — improve clearance rates?	Detective training and supervision; civilian staff and analysts; specialized investigative units; victim and witness participation; clearance-rate reporting; dedicated funding for investigative capacity; automated license plate readers; real-time crime centers; AI tools	Clearance rates; arrests or prosecutions; time to case resolution; community-level crime; resource (re-)allocation
Improving the collection and use of DNA evidence	How can agencies use DNA evidence more effectively to solve crimes and deter future offending?	Forensic workflow and caseload management; coordination among law enforcement, forensic laboratories, and prosecutors; Rapid DNA technology; forensic genetic genealogy	Clearance rates; evidence processing time and backlogs; arrests or prosecutions; deterrence and reoffending; forensic costs
Police staffing, deployment, and alternative response	Which policies and practices help agencies use and deploy personnel and resources more effectively to improve public safety?	Recruitment, retention, and performance (including technologies); hot spots policing; place-network investigations; implementation at scale; alternative/ civilian response models	Community-level crime and victimization; response time; clearance rates; staffing levels, retention, and vacancies; personnel costs
Violence prevention	Which interventions prevent serious violence and later justice system involvement enough to warrant broader adoption?	Cognitive behavioral therapy (replication across settings, active components, lower-cost delivery); focused deterrence; community violence intervention; place-based and built-environment approaches; law enforcement and community-led responses to domestic violence	Rates of violence and other crime; arrests; reoffending and revictimization; program costs
Prison populations, operations, staffing	Which policy and operational levers safely reduce prison populations and relieve staffing pressures without compromising public safety?	Population-reduction levers; facility operations; correctional staffing, recruitment, and retention	Prison population and admissions; staffing vacancies and overtime; institutional safety; correctional costs; recidivism and public safety

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Prison rehabilitation	Which in-prison programs, institutional models, and incentives reduce misconduct and recidivism, and do effects persist after release and replicate across settings?	In-prison programming; institutional models; behavioral incentives; replication across facilities, populations, and correctional systems	Institutional misconduct; recidivism; post-release employment and stability; program costs
Sentencing and release	Which approaches to reducing long or unnecessary sentences can lower incarceration and correctional costs while maintaining public safety?	Sentencing guideline reforms; earned and good time credits; second-look mechanisms; compassionate or geriatric release; parole eligibility; other reforms to laws governing sentence length and time served	Incarceration and time served; recidivism and public safety; correctional costs; post-release employment and other outcomes
Community supervision	Which changes to probation and parole lower costs and unnecessary system involvement without harming public safety?	Less restrictive conditions; shorter terms; early-discharge incentives; reduced incarceration for technical violations; electronic monitoring (safe substitution for incarceration vs. net-widening)	Supervision population and term length; revocations and technical violations; new criminal activity; incarceration days; supervision costs
Continuity of care and support through release	Do services initiated before release improve outcomes after people return to the community, and how should states structure and deliver them?	Health coverage; treatment; credentials; identification documents; other pre-release supports and hand-offs to community providers	Treatment engagement and continuity; health outcomes and overdose; recidivism; employment and housing stability; health care and correctional costs
Bail and pretrial	Which pretrial models and release conditions can reduce unnecessary detention without harming public safety or court appearance?	Financial conditions of release; risk assessments in individualized release decisions; citation or summons in lieu of arrest; reconsideration of conditions after an initial hearing; pretrial services; court reminders; monitoring; responses to violations	Pretrial detention and days incarcerated; failure to appear; new criminal activity; case disposition; jail costs
Reentry	Which specific interventions at the point of reentry improve stability and reduce recidivism for people leaving incarceration?	Expanded health care access; employment supports; housing supports	Recidivism and reincarceration, including days reincarcerated; employment and earnings; housing stability; health care use; program costs
Behavioral health and justice involvement	Do strategies that connect people with behavioral health needs to effective treatment — particularly for people who are often disconnected from conventional systems of care — reduce justice system involvement and recidivism?	Referral models; treatment models; service-delivery models; technologies	Treatment initiation and retention; arrests; days incarcerated; overdose and crisis events; health and justice system costs



[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.