

**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.

## WHAT'S NEW IN THIS RFP?

Since our prior Building Evidence RFP, we have made four noteworthy updates:

- › **Medicaid added as a new policy area:** This RFP now welcomes submissions focused on Medicaid, particularly those examining approaches to reduce Medicaid spending and/or efficiently pay for uncompensated care.
- › **Updated research priorities:** All policy areas now feature updated descriptions of current priorities and key research questions. We will prioritize submissions that clearly address these interests.
- › **New required LOI template to standardize submissions:** All applicants must submit a Letter of Interest (LOI) using an editable Word template with two sections: Key Study Details and Study Narrative. Download the template [here](#).
- › **Expanded and more transparent selection criteria:** The Selection Criteria section has been expanded to clearly outline how LOIs will be evaluated.

## 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](#), and if you are focused on criminal justice outcomes see a separate RFP [here](#).

**This Request for Proposals (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: Career Pathways, Contraceptive Choice and Access, Higher Education, Infrastructure, Medicaid, and Public Finance. More details on the research priorities of each policy area are included below.**

- **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, career-connected learning, 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 obtaining industry-recognized credentials in high school—and associated accountability and funding incentives—on students' postsecondary and labor market outcomes?
- › 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, or return on investment (ROI) of public investment in apprenticeships?

- **Contraceptive Choice and Access:** The [Contraceptive Choice and Access initiative](#) aims to close gaps in contraceptive affordability and access. Projects responding to this RFP should build evidence on which federal or state policies increase the availability and affordability of birth control, particularly for populations facing the most significant barriers. Relevant policies targeting affordability include public and private insurance coverage standards and federal/state family planning funding streams. In particular, this initiative is interested in addressing the following research questions related to practical access issues:
  - › What are the impacts of state over-the-counter coverage policies (e.g., Medicaid or other plans without a prescription or cost sharing, innovative technology and solutions to enable point of sale access, pharmacist scope of practice expansions to assign pharmacy prescriber numbers to enable Medicaid coverage) on coverage, uptake, method mix or switch, or affordability? How do impacts vary by geography?
  - › What is the impact of federal policy changes (e.g., Title X funding freeze, HR1, Medicaid work requirements or other changes) on contraceptive access?
  - › What are the impacts of state Medicaid policy design elements (e.g., consent requirements, prior authorization, coverage in SPA or waiver vs traditional Medicaid population) on vasectomy uptake among Medicaid recipients? How do impacts vary by geography?
- **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?
- **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 housing, transportation, climate, 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.
- **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 what works to (1) reduce Medicaid spending and (2) efficiently pay for uncompensated care. Questions of particular interest include:
  - › What are the impacts of policy-relevant interventions that address Medicaid spending (e.g., restricting overuse of high-cost interventions, preventing avoidable last-resort care, reducing sources of significant state cost variance) on Medicaid spending and utilization?
  - › What are the most effective and efficient ways to pay for uncompensated care? Areas of interest include

redundancy among uncompensated care programs, challenges associated with defining uncompensated care, or comparisons of payments to coverage.

- **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 tax and benefit programs efficiently achieve their intended effects, with a focus on program integrity (reducing waste, fraud, and abuse and improving tax administration), the effectiveness of federal and state retirement security initiatives, and the impacts of policies that enhance economic opportunity by supporting households, expanding employment, or improving place-based outcomes. Questions of particular interest include:

- › What is the government's return on investment (ROI) for interventions that prevent waste, fraud, and abuse in tax and benefit programs?
- › Are federal and state initiatives designed to improve retirement security (e.g., state-facilitated retirement programs, tax-preferred savings mechanisms) achieving their objectives? Specifically, how effective are tax incentives—such as saver's credits, matching contributions, or reduced administrative fees—in improving retirement readiness for low- and moderate-income households?

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

STAGE OF APPLICATION PROCESS	DATE
Deadline to receive letters of interest	<b>March 6, 2026</b>
Notification if invited to submit a full proposal	<b>May 1, 2026</b>
Deadline for invited applicants to submit full proposal	<b>June 26, 2026</b>
Notification if selected for award	<b>September 16, 2026*</b>

*\*Proposals over \$500,000 may require additional time for approval.*

## 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 rigorous, policy relevant evidence. 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
<b>Policy Relevance</b>	<p><b>Why it matters:</b> 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.</p> <p><b>What we are looking for:</b> 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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Alignment with AV priorities:</b> 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 (Career Pathways, Contraceptive Choice and Access, Higher Education, Infrastructure, Medicaid, and Public Finance) and should align with the priorities and learning agenda of that policy area. Submissions should briefly describe how the study addresses questions of strategic importance within the relevant domain.</li> <li>• <b>Pathway to policy impact:</b> 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).</li> <li>• <b>Contribution to the field:</b> 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.</li> </ul>

CRITERION	DETAIL
<b>Study Design</b>	<p><b>Why it matters:</b> 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.</p> <p><b>What we are looking for:</b> A strong submission will present a well-specified, adequately powered, and methodologically sound design that demonstrates rigor and feasibility. Specifically, we look for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Clear articulation of the intervention, research questions, and outcomes:</b> A precise description of i) the program, policy, or intervention being evaluated, including its scope and how long it has been implemented; ii) the research question(s); iii) one to two primary outcomes and any additional secondary outcomes<sup>1</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.</li> <li>• <b>Compelling study design:</b> 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.</li> <li>• <b>Adequate power for meaningful, policy relevant effects:</b> Detailed sample size assumptions and a power analysis for the primary outcome(s). Submissions should provide clear justification 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.</li> <li>• <b>Use of high-quality data sources:</b> Clear description of all data sources and plans to secure data sharing agreements. The strongest submissions use high-quality administrative data wherever feasible.</li> <li>• <b>Study timeline and feasibility:</b> A realistic timeline outlining key activities (randomization, recruitment, data collection, analysis, and dissemination).</li> <li>• <b>Adherence to research transparency and integrity:</b> A commitment to practices that promote credible, transparent research, such as pre-registration of the study and public posting of a pre-analysis plan prior to study launch. For more details, see our <a href="#">open science guidelines for research grants</a>.</li> </ul>

1. 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 RFP will remain open until March 6, 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>2</sup> In addition to the LOI, please also share the following under the *Optional Upload for Supporting Documents* section on the portal (this will not count towards the LOI page limit):

- **Study team overview:** Applicants should outline the project team in 1-2 pages, including an overview of roles and responsibilities for key project members. Applicants will be asked to upload brief (1-3 pages) CVs of key members of the study team 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 that is consistent with AV's [cost policy](#). While a formal budget is not required at the LOI stage, applicants should discuss the anticipated drivers of project costs (e.g., personnel time, data acquisition, travel, and administrative costs).<sup>3</sup>

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](mailto:EvidenceTeam@arnoldventures.org).

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2. 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.
3. In general, this RFP is focused on funding research projects where other parties have agreed to pay the cost of delivering the intervention or practice. However, 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.

[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.