

**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.

## WHAT'S NEW IN THIS RFP?

Since our prior Strengthening Evidence RFP, we have made two noteworthy updates:

- › **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.

Randomized controlled trials (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 helps inform 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	<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, (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
<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>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. <b>We particularly welcome applications that seek to replicate findings from prior rigorous evaluations to strengthen the evidence base in additional contexts. We also welcome long-term follow-up of prior RCTs to demonstrate sustained impact.</b></li> <li>• <b>U.S. relevance and scope:</b> 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 <a href="#">here</a>. (RCTs primarily focused on Criminal Justice outcomes will not be considered under this RFP; for such studies, please see this <a href="#">RFP</a>.)</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; 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. 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 how recruitment and randomization will be conducted. Submissions should explicitly discuss limitations of the design and propose strategies to mitigate potential challenges, such as attrition, missing data, etc.</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.

CRITERION	DETAIL
<b>Implementation Feasibility + Funding</b>	<p><b>Why it matters:</b> We aim to fund research that can be successfully completed in real-world settings by 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.</p> <p><b>What we are looking for:</b> 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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Evidence of a mature, well-established program:</b> 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).</li> <li>• <b>Evaluation readiness:</b> 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.</li> <li>• <b>Study partnership strength and commitments:</b> 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.</li> <li>• <b>Funding readiness for program delivery and evaluation:</b> 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.</li> </ul>

# 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.