



REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Strengthening Evidence: Support for RCTs to Evaluate Social Programs and Policies



Arnold Ventures
Evidence and Evaluation
February 2024





OVERVIEW

Arnold Ventures (AV) is a philanthropy dedicated to improving the lives of all Americans through evidence-based policy solutions that maximize opportunity and minimize injustice. AV focuses on improving systems where outcomes are falling short, incentives are misaligned, and the time is right for change. By funding rigorous research, we strive to better understand the root causes of problems and build the evidence base about what works to solve them. Using this research, we advocate for policy reforms at all levels of government and build durable, bipartisan coalitions for lasting change and impact.

The Evidence and Evaluation team has been at the forefront of AV’s mission to inform policy solutions through an evidence-based lens. We are driven by the core belief that by increasing the body of evidence about ‘what works’ – while also identifying programs and policies that do not demonstrate impact – we create opportunities for government to better target limited resources and drive improved outcomes.

The Opportunity

The Evidence and Evaluation team aims to identify, evaluate, and scale evidence-based solutions targeting the nation’s most pressing social problems. One of the strongest tools in the evidence-building toolkit is the randomized controlled trial (RCT). While not applicable to all policy and program contexts, RCTs are often the strongest choice for evaluating social programs because they fairly compare results between a treatment group and a control group, making it clear whether the program or policy truly works. This strong evidence can be important for informing decision-makers and stakeholders to support effective programs.

This Request for Proposals (RFP) aims to build the body of proven, effective policies, programs, and interventions by funding researchers to conduct rigorous RCTs across the spectrum of social policy.

(If you are thinking about other causal designs, you should check out our other RFP focused on quasi-experimental designs [here](#) and if you are focused on criminal justice outcomes see a separate RFP [here](#).)

Selection Criteria

AV is not interested in funding research for research’s sake; we are interested in supporting relevant, rigorous work that can ultimately inform decisions and improve the lives of kids and families in American communities. To that end, we have a few criteria that outline the research most likely to hit our sweet spot.

When working on a letter of interest (LOI), we ask interested partners to address the following: policy relevance, study design, and implementation feasibility.

CRITERION	DETAIL
Policy Relevance <i>(continued on the next page)</i>	Why it matters: We believe research should inform actionable strategies and resource allocation, aligning with the priorities and pressing needs of decision-makers and communities.

CRITERION	DETAIL
<p>Policy Relevance <i>(continued from the previous page)</i></p>	<p>What we are looking for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research on a program, policy, or intervention being tested in the United States • Clear description of how the program, policy, or intervention is relevant to policymakers in the U.S. • Demonstration of how the research project has the potential to inform or influence policy/practice at the local, state, and/or federal level • Local, state, and/or federal policy levers available to support scaling of this intervention if it is found to be effective (e.g. funding streams or regulatory changes)
<p>Study Design</p>	<p>Why it matters:</p> <p>We support research that aims to accurately measure impact and ensure that conclusions drawn are valid and reliable.</p> <p>What we are looking for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear articulation of the program, policy, or intervention being evaluated, the research question(s) for the evaluation, the primary outcome(s) of interest, and duration of follow-up • Study design overview, including how randomization will be conducted • Sample sizes for the primary outcome(s) • Data sources and plans to secure data sharing agreements (preferably using administrative data, wherever feasible) • Study timeline that outlines key steps in the project
<p>Implementation Feasibility + Funding</p>	<p>Why it matters:</p> <p>We support research that can be successfully completed by evaluating established programs with the capacity to be delivered at a sizeable scale.</p> <p>What we are looking for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brief description of history of implementation in real-world conditions. (Implementation can be demonstrated by providing measures of program participation, geographic reach, and other measures of a program’s history within a community.) • Casemaking that program is ‘mature’ and ready for an RCT • Discussion of whether and how funding for program delivery has been secured • Discussion of programmatic partner and funder support for the study, including random assignment. (Note: formal agreements are not necessary for the LOI but may be required for full proposals.)

Other Considerations

In addition to the selection criteria above, we encourage LOIs for RCTs that also demonstrate:

- The program has been evaluated previously and found positive impacts on important outcomes. For example, we encourage applications seeking to replicate findings from prior rigorous evaluations
- The primary outcomes are of recognized policy importance (e.g., educational achievement, workforce earnings, hospitalizations, and government spending)
- The study assesses key outcomes in both the short- and longer-term, as appropriate for the type of program and study
- Researchers that have not previously received funding from Arnold Ventures, including those from groups historically underrepresented in the research community, such as researchers of color and women
- The program being evaluated is aligned with AV's strategic areas of interest, such as higher education, housing, climate, transportation, and public finance. A full list of AV areas of investment can be explored [here](#). (RCTs primarily measuring [Criminal Justice](#) outcomes will not be considered under this RFP; for such studies, please see [this RFP](#))

How to Apply:

We ask interested researchers to submit a letter of interest for AV consideration (maximum of three pages) at any time via our applicant [portal](#). Partners may use their own format, with single or double spacing, and an 11-point font or larger. Applicants whose letters are reviewed favorably, based on the eligibility and selection criteria above, will be invited to submit a full proposal. In addition to the letter of interest, please also share the following:

- **Study team overview:** Outline the project team, including an overview of roles and responsibilities for key project members, and include brief biographies for all key project team members. You will be asked to upload brief (1-3 pages) CVs of key members of the study team on the portal.
- **Budget request summary:** Applicants should specify the amount of funding requested from Arnold Ventures, reflecting the project timeline and the study scope, and include an approximate project budget that is consistent with AV's cost policy (see Appendix). Applicants should provide some detail on the anticipated drivers of project costs (e.g., personnel time, data acquisition, travel, and administrative costs).¹

(continued on the next page)

¹ 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.



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

STAGE OF APPLICATION PROCESS	DATE
Deadline to receive letters of interest	October 15, 2024
Notification if invited to submit a full proposal	December 1, 2024
Deadline for invited applicants to submit full proposal	February 1, 2025
Notification if selected for award	March 15, 2025*

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

The Evidence and Evaluation team at Arnold Ventures oversees this Request for Proposals. You can find responses to frequently asked questions [here](#). Please direct other questions about the selection criteria or application process to EvidenceTeam@arnoldventures.org.

Statement on Commitment to Racial Equity in Research

Arnold Ventures is committed to promoting diversity and equity in research, as part of our mission of maximizing opportunity and minimizing injustice. We encourage applications led by diverse teams that come from varied backgrounds and those with lived experiences of social and economic challenges facing the US. Beyond a commitment to supporting diverse research teams, Arnold Ventures supports equitable research practices. We encourage research projects that use inclusive and equitable research methods and frameworks, including analyses of racial and ethnic disparities and assessments of whether policy and practice have an impact on equity whenever appropriate and possible.

Statement on Commitment to Transparency and Research Integrity

Arnold Ventures is committed to the principles of research transparency and integrity, as explained in our [Guidelines for Investment in Research](#). As a condition of any grant award, we will ask awardees to pre-register the study on the Open Science Framework website. Prior to the commencement of the study, we will ask grantees to make public a copy of the research and analysis plan described in the proposal. In addition, we ask applicants to make their datasets and related materials (e.g., de-identified data, programming/code and output) publicly available if permitted through data sharing agreements.



ARNOLD VENTURES INDIRECT COST POLICY

Effective February 1, 2018 | Updated February 2024

I. Purpose of Policy

Arnold Ventures (“AV”) requires that any restricted resources awarded by AV to an organization be primarily dedicated to the costs necessary to accomplish the purpose of a grant. AV also recognizes that in order to successfully accomplish the purpose of a grant, grantees often need additional financial support to cover a portion of indirect costs that are not directly created as result of project activities. The purpose of AV’s Indirect Cost Policy (the “Policy”) is to:

- i. Define a cost allocation framework that can be applied consistently across all projects and partners
- ii. Provide guidance, definitions, and examples to allow grantees to classify costs accurately

II. Application of Policy

AV’s project-specific budget template, which is completed by the grantee and reviewed by AV, is used to classify expenses and apply this Policy. Each new grant request received by AV will be independently reviewed for compliance and approved subject to the provisions set forth herein. Please review section III and IV of this Policy for the calculation, definitions and examples. However, please note AV maintains sole discretion to determine the approved classification of direct and indirect costs for each grant.

Universities and University-related Grantees

For institutions of higher education, including community colleges and university-related legal entities, the Policy is applicable to all grant funding that is restricted. The policy permits these grantees to receive an indirect cost rate of 15 percent (15%) of total modified direct project costs. Tuition remission expenses are allowed as direct costs but must be excluded from the direct cost base upon which the indirect cost calculation is made.

All Other Grantees

For all Other Grantees, the Policy is applicable to all grant funding that is restricted towards a specific project. The Policy does not apply to general operating grants and certain restricted grants, as advised by AV. The policy permits non-university grantees to receive an indirect cost rate of 20 percent (20%) of total modified direct project costs.

Outsourced Costs

If a project includes a sub-award or subcontract, this budget is also eligible for indirect cost recovery within its respective budget, subject to this Policy and caps noted above.

All outsourced costs must be excluded from the primary grantee’s direct cost base for the indirect cost calculation. Please review section III and IV of this Policy for the definition and examples of outsourced costs.

III. Calculation & Definitions

Indirect Costs = Modified Direct Costs x Indirect Cost Rate

Indirect Costs:	Grantee expenses incurred for a common or joint organizational purpose benefitting more than one project and not exclusively attributable to or created for the specific project funded by AV. This includes “direct allocable” expenses.
Direct Costs:	Grantee expenses directly created by and exclusively incurred as a function of the specific project funded by AV.
Outsourced Costs:	Costs paid by primary grantee to other organizations or individuals in support of a project.
Modified Direct Costs:	Direct Costs less Outsourced Costs and Tuition Remission, as applicable
Indirect Cost Rate:	15% or 20%, as applicable

IV. Examples

Direct Costs

- Personnel expenses (salaries and federally required benefits) of internal grantee staff contributing directly to project-related tasks
 - Travel expenses incurred by grantee directly related to project
 - Materials and supplies directly incurred by project-related tasks

Indirect Costs

- Standard personnel expenses (salaries and benefits) for the following internal staff:
 - Executive Management (CEO, COO, CFO, Executive Director, etc.)²
 - Central Operational Functions (Accounting, Administrative Support, Finance, Grants / Contract Management, HR, IT, Legal, etc.)
- Consultant expenses related to general operational functions (legal, audit, recruiting, fundraising, etc.)
- Equipment that can be used broadly by an organization for purposes aside from specific project (computers / laptops, telephones, office furniture)
- Rent and utility expenses

² To the extent a member of an executive management team contributes to a project beyond their normal role as an organizational leader, a grantee may request a direct allocation with a corresponding justification explaining the additional contributions of such individuals



- General materials and supplies that can be used broadly by an organization for purposes aside from specific project (printing and postage, memberships and subscriptions, hardware and software, organizational insurance, etc.)
- Fiscal sponsor fee
 - To the extent a member of an executive management team contributes to a project beyond their normal role as an organizational leader, a grantee may request a direct allocation with a corresponding justification explaining the additional contributions of such individuals

Outsourced Costs

- Sub-awards or Subcontracts
- Consultants
- Data Purchases and Software Licenses
- Participant Incentives, Stipends, and Honorariums
- Other Fees paid outside of grantee organization (e.g., IRB, peer review, editing)

Please contact Bridget Williamson, Vice President of Finance at bwilliamson@arnoldventures.org with any questions regarding this Policy.

