



**REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS**

# **Building Evidence: Support for Causal Studies to Evaluate Social Programs and Policies**



**Arnold Ventures**

Evidence and Evaluation

February 2024



**Arnold  
Ventures**



## 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 about what works to solve them. Using this research, we advocate for policy reforms at all levels of government and build durable, bipartisan coalitions to drive 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. This funding targets the first two phases of that goal – identifying and evaluating potential solutions – and is geared toward studies examining the causal effects of a policy, program, or intervention that aligns with key AV policy areas. Causal research employing strong, quasi-experimental methods are a critical component of the evidence-building process and are important for increasing the knowledge base for decision-makers and stakeholders. Examples of causal research methods include natural experiments, regression discontinuity, difference-in-differences, and instrumental variable designs.

**This Request for Proposals (RFP) aims to bolster the knowledge base about potentially effective policies, programs, and interventions by funding researchers to conduct rigorous, causal research that aligns with key AV policy areas.**

We seek studies that will advance the knowledge base within key AV policy areas, including higher education, infrastructure, contraceptive choice and access, and public finance.

(If you are thinking about a study employing random assignment, you should check out our other RFP focused on randomized controlled trials [here](#) and if you are focused on criminal justice outcomes see a separate RFP [here](#)).

- **Higher Education:** The Higher Education initiative seeks to identify and scale effective practices that improve student success and address equity gaps in higher education outcomes. Projects responding to this RFP will help build credible evidence about 'what works' to improve student success outcomes, including but not limited to student learning, persistence, degree or certificate completion, job placement, post-college earnings, and debt burden.
- **Infrastructure:** The Infrastructure initiative supports research, policy development, and advocacy aimed at bolstering U.S. capacity to build infrastructure – including housing, transportation, climate and clean energy infrastructure – faster, better, and at a lower cost. Projects responding to this RFP will expand the knowledge base of 'what works' when building infrastructure in the United States at any level of government. This initiative is particularly interested in using rigorous research to address cross-cutting challenges, such as supply-side bottlenecks, accelerating the permitting process, and improving state capacity.
- **Contraceptive Choice and Access:** The Contraceptive Choice and Access initiative aims to close the gaps in contraceptive affordability and access via research, policy reform, and implementation. Projects responding to



this RFP will evaluate existing policies’ impacts on contraceptive access and identify barriers to care at the state and federal levels. This initiative is most interested in policies targeting contraceptive availability, including contraceptive coverage standards; payment reform; healthcare workforce and staffing issues; expansion of delivery channels (over the counter, pharmacist prescribed, telehealth); and expansion of Medicaid and state funded family care programs.

- **Public Finance:** The Public Finance initiative seeks to advance tax and budget policies that both promote fiscal stability in government and advance Americans’ economic opportunity, mobility, and security. Specific areas of interest include place-based policies, such as opportunity zones, benefits programs, and federal or state-level policies encouraging economic development within a community. Broadly, projects under this RFP will help us answer the question “how are tax and benefit policies improving people’s lives?”

## 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
<p><b>Policy Relevance</b></p>	<p><b>Why it matters:</b></p> <p>We believe research should inform actionable strategies and resource allocation, aligning with the priorities and pressing needs of decision-makers and communities.</p> <p><b>What we are looking for:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research on a program, policy, or intervention being tested in the United States</li> <li>• Clear description of how the program, policy, or intervention is relevant to policymakers in the U.S.</li> <li>• Demonstration of how the research project has the potential to inform or influence policy/practice at the local, state, and/or federal level</li> <li>• 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)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Study Design</b></p> <p><i>(continued on the next page)</i></p>	<p><b>Why it matters:</b></p> <p>We support research that aims to accurately measure impact and ensure that conclusions drawn are valid and reliable.</p> <p><b>What we are looking for:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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</li> </ul>

CRITERION	DETAIL
<p><b>Study Design</b> <i>(continued from previous page)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Study design overview, including the proposed estimation strategy, plans to address threats to validity, necessary robustness checks, and if this is a prospective or retrospective study</li> <li>• Articulation of why the study design was selected and how it will protect against selection bias</li> <li>• Sample sizes for the primary outcome(s)</li> <li>• Data sources and plans to secure data sharing agreements (preferably using administrative data, wherever feasible)</li> <li>• Study timeline that outlines key steps in the project</li> </ul>
<p><b>Implementation Feasibility + Funding</b> <i>(for prospective studies)</i></p>	<p><b>Why it matters:</b></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><b>What we are looking for:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brief description of history of program 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.)</li> <li>• Discussion of whether and how funding or policy changes for program delivery has been secured</li> <li>• Discussion of programmatic partner and funder support for the study (if relevant). (Note: formal agreements are not necessary for the LOI but will be required for full proposals).</li> </ul>

## Other Considerations

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

- If appropriate, there is a clear pathway to more rigorous testing of the program (such as an RCT or additional quasi-experimental study) following this study. This can be demonstrated by including letters of support for further evaluation from policy or program leadership (these are not necessary for the LOI stage)
- The primary outcomes are of recognized policy importance to the AV policy areas listed above
- 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



## How to Apply:

We ask interested researchers to submit a letter of interest for AV consideration (maximum of three pages) via our applicant [portal](#). This RFP will remain open until June 1, 2024, and all letters of interest must be submitted by then. 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 based on the timeline below. 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).<sup>1</sup>

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

STAGE OF APPLICATION PROCESS	DATE
Deadline to receive letters of interest	June 1, 2024
Notification if invited to submit a full proposal	By July 15, 2024
Deadline for invited applicants to submit full proposal	August 15, 2024
Notification if selected for award	October 31, 2024
Grants awarded	November-December 2024

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](mailto: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

<sup>1</sup> 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.



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.

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## **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.)<sup>2</sup>
- 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
- 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)

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<sup>2</sup> 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

Please contact Bridget Williamson, Vice President of Finance at [bwilliamson@arnoldventures.org](mailto:bwilliamson@arnoldventures.org) with any questions regarding this Policy.

