

# **RCT Opportunity Request for Proposals:**

**Randomized Controlled Trials to  
Evaluate Social Programs Whose  
Delivery Will Be Funded by  
Government or Other Entities**

**January 2021**

*(Submissions are accepted on a rolling basis;  
there is no deadline.)*

## I. Overview:

Arnold Ventures' (AV) Evidence-Based Policy team invites grant applications to conduct randomized controlled trials (RCTs) of social programs in any area of U.S. policy in which:

- (i) AV will fund the RCT, and government or another entity will fund the program's delivery; and
- (ii) The RCT meets the additional selection criteria set out below.

Our main goal in funding such RCTs is to build the body of programs rigorously shown to produce sizable, sustained effects on important life outcomes. We recognize how challenging this is: Surprisingly [few](#) programs are found to produce the hoped-for improvements in participants' lives when evaluated in a well-conducted RCT. This Request for Proposals seeks to optimize the chances of success by prioritizing RCTs of programs with highly-promising prior evidence or other compelling policy reasons for a rigorous evaluation.

## II. Application Process and Selection Criteria:

**A. We ask applicants first to submit a letter of interest (maximum three pages). Applicants whose letters are reviewed favorably will be invited to submit a full proposal (maximum six pages).** There is no deadline for submitting a letter of interest; applicants may submit a letter at any time via email to [RCTopportunity@arnoldventures.org](mailto:RCTopportunity@arnoldventures.org). We will notify applicants within one month whether they are invited to submit a full proposal (full proposals must be invited). Applicants may use their own format, with single or double spacing, and an 11-point font or larger. The page limit does not include attached letters or other documents specifically requested in this Request for Proposals.

**B. Letters of interest and full proposals will be reviewed by the AV Evidence-Based Policy team and, as needed, outside reviewers, based on the selection criteria below.** Both the AV team and outside reviewers have expertise in RCT evaluations.

### C. **Selection Criteria:**

We ask applicants to address the following four criteria in both the letter of interest and the full proposal. The full proposal should provide more detail (*e.g.*, on the study design) than the letter of interest, and also address any questions or issues identified by AV in its invitation to submit a full proposal.

- **PROGRAM FUNDER: Will the proposed RCT evaluate a program whose delivery is paid for by another funder, and does that funder, or do other essential parties, agree to the study?** To verify such agreement(s), the reviewers will look for attached letters or other communications showing that the necessary parties (*e.g.*, program funder and/or program provider) assent to the study, including random assignment. Such agreement(s) may be tentative at the time the letter of interest is submitted, but should be finalized before submission of the full proposal. We especially encourage agreements in which the necessary parties not only assent to the study, but also provide a credible description of how they or others would use the study findings to inform program or policy decisions.

➤ **IMPORTANCE: Is the applicant proposing to evaluate a program –**

- **That is backed by highly-promising prior evidence, suggesting it could produce sizable impacts on outcomes of recognized policy importance** – such as educational achievement, workforce earnings, criminal arrests, hospitalizations, child maltreatment, and government spending. For example, we specifically encourage applications seeking to replicate findings from prior rigorous evaluations that are especially promising but not yet conclusive—*e.g.*, due to only short-term follow-up, a single-site study design, or well-matched comparison groups but not randomization. (Please provide full citations to the relevant prior studies as an attachment to the letter of interest.) As a threshold condition for “highly promising” evidence, applicants should show that the program can be or (preferably) has been successfully delivered under real-world implementation conditions, since effective implementation is usually necessary for a program to produce meaningful impacts.

- or -

- **For which there are other compelling policy reasons to evaluate its effectiveness – *e.g.*, it is, or soon will be, widely implemented with significant taxpayer investment**, and its impact on its targeted outcomes is currently unknown.

Please note that, to meet this criterion, it is not sufficient to establish that the program seeks to address an important problem, or that the study will fill a gap in the research or test a theory. Applicants must also present a compelling policy reason, as described above, to evaluate the specific program.

➤ **STUDY DESIGN: Is the applicant’s proposed RCT design valid?** In other words, does it have a sufficiently large sample (as shown through a power analysis) and other elements needed to generate credible evidence about the program’s impact on one or more targeted outcomes of high policy importance? We strongly encourage designs that measure such outcomes in both the short and longer term, as appropriate for the type of program and study, to determine whether the effects endure long enough to constitute meaningful improvement in people’s lives. Reviewers, in assessing an applicant’s proposed design, will use [Key Items to Get Right When Conducting RCTs of Social Programs](#) as a reference.

Applicants, in discussing this criterion, should specify the study’s primary outcome(s) of interest; how they will measure the outcome(s) and over what length of time; and what analyses they plan to conduct (*e.g.*, any subgroups to be examined, regression methods to be used).

➤ **EXPERIENCED RESEARCHER: Does the applicant’s team include at least one researcher in a key substantive role who has led or played a key role in a prior well-conducted RCT?** A well-conducted RCT is characterized, for example, by low sample attrition, sufficient sample size, close adherence to random assignment, and valid outcome measures and statistical analyses. To address this criterion, we request that applicants submit at least one, and not more than two, reports from such prior RCTs (please send the full study reports as email attachments to the letter of interest). Reviewers will rely primarily on these reports in assessing this selection criterion.

We recognize the need to expand and diversify the pool of researchers with RCT experience. Thus we strongly encourage researchers who are new to RCTs, including those from groups historically underrepresented in the research community – such as researchers of color and women – to participate in this funding opportunity. We therefore want to clarify that such individuals who do

not meet the “experienced researcher” criterion themselves may still serve as a study’s lead researcher as long as they partner with a colleague who does meet the criterion and will play a key substantive role in the study. (Prospective applicants are welcome to contact us for assistance in addressing this criterion; see contact information in section IV below.)

**D. Other items to include in the letter of interest and invited full proposal:**

- 1. Applicants should specify the amount of funding requested**, and, for the full proposal only, attach a one-page project budget that is consistent with AV’s indirect cost policy (see attachment). To reduce study costs, we encourage the use of administrative data (*e.g.*, wage records, state educational test scores, criminal arrest records) to measure key study outcomes, wherever feasible, in lieu of more expensive original data collection. In addition, if the applicant proposes any implementation research to complement the RCT, we suggest streamlined approaches that do not greatly increase the overall study cost. If additional funding from other sources is needed to carry out the study, we request that the applicant’s budget show (i) the total study cost, and (ii) the portion of that cost to be covered by AV; and include an attached letter or other communication showing that the additional funding will be in place prior to AV’s grant award.
- 2. Applicants should specify the proposed recipient of the grant award, which we generally expect to be a tax-exempt organization** (*e.g.*, nonprofit organization, university, or governmental unit). If an organization is not tax-exempt and wishes to apply, please contact David Anderson (see contact information below).
- 3. Applicants should briefly address how their study meets recognized ethical standards for research with human subjects.**

**III. What To Expect in the Grant Agreement: We will ask awardees, as a condition of their award, to –**

- **Pre-register the study on the Open Science Framework (OSF) [website](#)** and, prior to commencement of the study, upload a copy of the research and analysis plan described in their proposal.
  - **Provide us with brief phone or email updates on the study’s progress on a periodic basis, and before making any key decisions that could materially affect the study’s design or implementation.**
  - **Submit concise reports on the impact findings at appropriate intervals.** These reports should make it easy for readers to see the study’s main results and gauge their credibility (*e.g.*, by showing the similarity of the treatment and control groups in pre-program characteristics, the amount of sample attrition, and the statistical significance of the impact findings).
- and -
- **Make their datasets and related materials (*e.g.*, survey instruments, code used to clean and analyze datasets) publicly available on the OSF site.** We ask applicants to do this within one year of the last data collection, and only to the extent allowed under any confidentiality/privacy protections.

[Note: The above list previews the main items in the grant agreement, but is not an exhaustive list of the conditions of the award.]

**IV. Questions? Please contact Erin Crossett, Evidence-Based Policy Manager ([ecrossett@arnoldventures.org](mailto:ecrossett@arnoldventures.org), 202-655-2022).**



**Arnold Ventures  
Indirect Cost Policy  
Effective February 1, 2018**

**Policy Purpose**

Arnold Ventures (“AV”) requires that any resources awarded by AV to an organization be dedicated to the costs necessary to accomplish the purpose of a grant.

**Direct & Indirect Cost Definitions**

AV permits grantees to request funding for all of the direct costs associated with a project, including salaries and federally required benefits for employees, travel, meetings and conferences, data access fees, and payments to third-party consultants and sub-grantees that are directly attributable to or created specifically for the purpose supported by a particular grant. Moreover, 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 their indirect costs. AV’s Indirect Cost Policy (the “Policy”) defines indirect costs as organizational costs incurred for a common or joint purpose benefitting more than one project and not exclusively attributable to or created for the project supported by a particular AV grant. Please see Appendix A for examples of indirect costs covered under this Policy.

**Allowable Indirect Cost Rates**

The Policy permits institutions of higher education, including community colleges, to receive an indirect cost rate of 15 percent (15%) of total direct project costs; all other organizations (e.g., non-profit, governmental, for-profit, etc.) may receive an indirect cost rate of 20 percent (20%) of total direct project costs.<sup>1, 2</sup>

**Requirements**

For each grant proposal, grantees must provide: (i) a project budget, (ii) a corresponding budget narrative that clearly outlines and defines<sup>3</sup> the total direct project costs, and (iii) fringe rate calculation detail for all personnel allocated to the project within the project budget.

Each new grant request received by AV will be independently reviewed and approved subject to the provisions set forth in this Policy. AV maintains the sole discretion to determine the approved classification of direct and indirect costs for each grant.

Please contact Bridget Williamson, AV’s Finance Manager, at [BWilliamson@arnoldfoundation.org](mailto:BWilliamson@arnoldfoundation.org) with any questions regarding this Policy.

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<sup>1</sup> Grants with the primary purpose of providing general operating support are not subject to this Policy.

<sup>2</sup> Third-party consulting or subcontract expenses, sub-awards, and tuition (if applicable) shall not be included as part of the total direct project cost base for the indirect cost calculation.

<sup>3</sup> Please review AV’s Budget Template for additional guidelines.



### Examples of Indirect Costs

The examples listed in this Appendix A are for general guidance. The list is not exhaustive, and AV, in its sole discretion, will make the final determination on the approved classification of direct and indirect costs for each grant.

Expense Type	Indirect Expense Examples
<b>Personnel</b>	Executive Management ( <i>e.g.</i> , CEO, COO, CFO, Executive Director, etc.) and Central Operational Functions ( <i>e.g.</i> , Accounting, HR, IT, Legal, etc.) <sup>4</sup>
<b>Consultants</b>	Contracted work for general operational functions ( <i>e.g.</i> , legal work or audits)
<b>Travel and Accommodations</b>	Any travel not required to achieve the grant’s purpose; accommodation costs over and above the market rate for a specific area
<b>Equipment</b>	Equipment that can be used by an institution for other purposes or projects ( <i>e.g.</i> , computers, telephones, office furniture)
<b>Rent</b>	Office space rental and utilities associated with central operational functions ( <i>i.e.</i> , rent expenses incurred whether or not the subject grant is awarded)
<b>Other</b>	All materials and supplies used for more than one purpose or project, printing and postage costs, memberships and subscriptions, hardware and software programs for general operational functions, organizational insurance, etc.

Note: Direct and indirect costs awarded to grantees may only be used for charitable, educational, and/or scientific purposes as such purposes are generally defined by those authorities interpreting the provisions of Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, and may not be used to carry on propaganda, influence legislation, fund any political campaign, influence the outcome of any election, carry on any voter registration drives, or violate any applicable local, state, federal, or foreign law.

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<sup>4</sup> To the extent members of an executive management team are contributing to the 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.