



REQUEST FOR LETTERS OF INTEREST

The Laura and John Arnold Foundation's (LJAF) core objective is to address our nation's most pressing and persistent challenges using evidence-based, multi-disciplinary approaches. LJAF is seeking Letters of Interest from organizations with ideas for piloting and rigorously evaluating innovative diversion and alternative to arrest programs.

Background information

LJAF's Criminal Justice initiative aims to reduce crime, increase public safety, and ensure that the criminal justice system operates as fairly and cost-effectively as possible. In order to achieve these goals, we are seeking to expand the use of data, rigorous evaluation and research, and evidence-based policymaking in criminal justice. One of our primary areas of focus is the front end of the criminal justice system—the period that runs from the time a defendant is arrested until the case is resolved. The decisions made at this stage can have a significant impact on individuals and communities. As such, we are developing tools, piloting and evaluating innovative approaches, and conducting foundational research on diversion programs and community-based supervision in an effort to improve outcomes during the pretrial phase.

There are a number of pretrial diversion and alternative to arrest programs currently in use across the country. These programs are intended to achieve various objectives, including reducing recidivism rates among offenders; providing mental health or substance abuse treatment to individuals; ensuring that law enforcement and court resources are spent on high-priority cases; and limiting other societal and economic costs of arrests, convictions, and incarceration. For example, many jurisdictions use citations in lieu of arrest for certain minor infractions. Other jurisdictions divert low-level offenders or individuals suffering from substance abuse or mental health issues to treatment programs without filing charges against them. And some prosecutors' offices suspend or defer prosecution of individuals who agree to meet certain conditions, and dismiss the charges once the conditions are met.

Although there is increasing interest in pretrial interventions, we know little about whether these programs work as intended or how they could be improved. Thus, LJAF is seeking to substantially expand the evidence base in this area by funding rigorous research into diversion and alternative to arrest programs, supporting evaluations of specific programs, improving data collection, and identifying and scaling programs that are proven to work. Specifically, we are requesting proposals related to adult and juvenile diversion programs, alternatives to arrest, and deferrals of felony or misdemeanor arrest and prosecution in state or federal courts.

We are primarily interested in measuring the impact of such programs on public safety, fairness, and cost efficiency. Particular outcomes of interest include recidivism (*e.g.*, frequency of re-arrest, additional charges, additional convictions); the use of criminal justice and/or other public resources (*e.g.*, jail booking, jail days, court costs, emergency room admissions, failures to appear); and socio-economic indicators (*e.g.*, housing, employment, income, and education).

Examples of programs and policies of interest include:

- Citations in lieu of arrest
- Behavioral/mental health diversion
- Drug and substance abuse diversion
- Problem-solving courts
- Deferred prosecution
- Community service diversion
- Restorative justice/victim impact panels

Selection criteria

All Letters of Interest should include a description of the program, which stakeholders in the criminal justice system are involved, how long the program has been in existence, and how it works. Letters should also include an explanation of the data that is generated and monitored by the program and/or available to measure outcomes. We are primarily interested in three types of projects. The selection criteria are discussed in more detail below.

I. Evaluation of an existing program

If a **randomized controlled trial (RCT)** is proposed, Letters of Interest, and any subsequently invited full proposals, should address the selection criteria below.

Experienced researcher

Does the applicant's team include at least one researcher in a key substantive role who has previously carried out a well-conducted RCT? A well-conducted RCT is one with low sample attrition, sufficient sample size, close adherence to random assignment, and valid outcome measures and statistical analyses. To address this criterion, applicants should provide reports from prior RCTs that the researcher has conducted (please send them as email attachments, no more than two reports in all). Reviewers will rely primarily on these reports in assessing this selection criterion.

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 intervention's impact on one or more targeted outcomes of high criminal justice policy importance? We strongly encourage designs that measure such outcomes in both the short and longer term, as appropriate for the type of intervention and study, to determine whether the effects persist long enough to constitute meaningful improvement in individual and/or community well-being. LJAF will use [Key Items to Get Right When Conducting Randomized Controlled Trials of Social Programs](#) as a reference in its review.

Applicants, as part of their discussion of this criterion, should specify the study's primary outcome(s) of interest, how the outcome(s) will be measured and over what length of time, and what analyses are planned (*e.g.*, any subgroups that will be examined or regression methods that will be used).

Partners

Does the applicant's team include all parties needed to perform the RCT? Examples of necessary parties include researcher(s), an agency delivering the intervention, and, if needed, an agency housing the administrative data that will be used to measure outcomes (*e.g.*, arrest records). To verify the existence of such partnerships, the reviewers will look for attached letters or other communication showing, for example, that (1) an agency that delivers the intervention has agreed to participate in the study, including random

assignment; and (2) a data agency has agreed to provide the researcher(s) with access to the appropriate administrative data.

II. Innovative earlier-stage proof-of-concept projects

We also invite Letters of Interest for innovative earlier-stage proof-of-concept projects which, if successful, could advance to RCTs. In addition, we are interested in supporting feasibility testing for highly promising diversion/alternatives to arrest ideas that are not yet ready for an RCT. Instead of asking whether an intervention is effective, this category provides funding to answer whether an approach can be implemented with fidelity to a model in a real-world community setting and whether outcomes of interest can be measured reliably. The ultimate goal of these ideas should be to prepare such interventions for an RCT that can be seamlessly conducted after successful feasibility testing.

Interventions that demonstrate success in achieving fidelity to a model in a real-world setting and can measure key outcomes of interest will be good candidates for follow-on RCT grants. Letters of Interest and any subsequently invited full proposals for this category should address each of the selection criteria below.

Study design

Will the applicant's proposed feasibility study:

- Document the key elements of the program (including the program model, training, supervision, and cost) so that future practitioners and researchers will be able to replicate it?
- Collect data to show whether the program was successfully delivered, in close adherence to its key elements (*e.g.*, what tasks were performed to implement the program and how closely did those tasks match the model; which people were involved in each intervention task; how widespread was utilization of the program among the population targeted; who participated in the program; and who completed the program)?
- Measure proximal outcomes to assess whether the intervention may be affecting the elements of behavior the intervention seeks to change (*e.g.*, police or judicial decision-making)?
- Demonstrate the ability to measure ultimate outcomes of interest for those receiving the intervention that could be used to compare a treatment and control group if the project goes forward to an RCT (*e.g.*, having a process for documenting recidivism, health, education, and employment for the individuals receiving the intervention)?

Team

Does the applicant's team include all parties needed to conduct a feasibility study that can transition to an RCT? Such parties include:

- An experienced practitioner or agency leader who has successfully implemented an innovative intervention in a real world setting, with documented adherence to the intervention's key elements.
- One or more researchers who have previously (1) conducted implementation studies and documented key elements of a program model for use in replication studies; and (2) carried out a well-conducted RCT (an RCT with low sample attrition, sufficient sample size, and valid outcome measures and statistical analyses) and who will help the team design the feasibility study so that it can flow seamlessly into an RCT.
- Personnel familiar with agency administrative data who can assist researchers in accessing and understanding the data, if such data will ultimately be needed to measure RCT outcomes.

Note: To verify the existence of such a team, the review panel will look for attached letters or other communication showing, for example, that (1) an appropriate agency that delivers the intervention has agreed to participate in the study; and (2) a data agency has agreed to provide the researcher(s) with access to the administrative data needed to measure study outcomes.

Strategy for a follow-on RCT

Does the applicant's proposal describe a strategy for transitioning to an RCT, including a statement of approval from the parties mentioned above that an RCT is possible given successful implementation of the feasibility study?

III. Scaling diversion or alternative to arrest programs

Finally, we are also soliciting Letters of Interest to scale diversion and alternative to arrest programs that have already been demonstrated through rigorous research to be successful in achieving the outcomes listed above. Letters of Interest and any subsequently invited full proposals for this category should include the following:

- A copy of any study evaluating the program's effectiveness (whether positive or negative result)
- A plan to scale the program that includes letters of commitment from agencies that have agreed to support the program; documentation of the key elements of the intervention (including the program model, training, supervision, and cost) so that it can be replicated and fidelity to the model can be assessed; and the data that will be collected to show whether the intervention was successfully replicated
- An evaluation plan to assess whether the intervention was successfully replicated.

Submission guidelines

Letters of Interest *must* be of domestic importance and should meet the following guidelines:

- Address each of the selection criteria in no more than **three** pages
- Be single- or double-spaced and use an 11-point font or larger
- Specify the proposed recipient of the grant award, which LJAF generally expects to be a tax-exempt organization (*e.g.*, public charity or governmental unit)
- Specify the amount of funding required to conduct the proposed initiative.

Letters should be submitted by Dec. 15, 2016, to CriminalJusticeLOI@arnoldfoundation.org. If LJAF determines that your Letter of Interest meets the criteria outlined above, you will be asked to submit a full proposal.

Additional information

LJAF grant funds may only be used for charitable, educational, and/or scientific purposes. LJAF does not fund efforts to influence legislation, to intervene in political elections or campaigns, to promote propaganda, or to conduct voter registration drives. LJAF does not make grants or loans to individuals and does not directly fund scholarships, fellowships, or prizes.