



PROJECT OVERVIEW AND REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS:

BUILDING RIGOROUS EVIDENCE ABOUT HOW TO IMPROVE PUBLIC SAFETY AND OTHER IMPORTANT CRIMINAL JUSTICE OUTCOMES

Overview:

The Laura and John Arnold Foundation (LJAF) is a 501(c)(3) private foundation, whose core objective is to address our nation's most pressing and persistent challenges using evidence-based, multi-disciplinary approaches. This Request for Proposals (RFP) is a collaborative effort of LJAF's Criminal Justice, Evidence-Based Policy, and Evidence-Based Innovation initiatives. (For more information on these initiatives, please visit www.arnoldfoundation.org/initiatives.)

This RFP is soliciting research and evaluation project proposals. First, we are seeking proposals to conduct randomized controlled trials (RCTs) that are designed to build policy-important evidence about “what works” across all areas of criminal justice (see attachment 1).

Second, recognizing that many innovative ideas will not be ready for RCTs until they can be successfully piloted in real community settings, we are also soliciting proposals to faithfully implement and study small-scale criminal justice interventions that are supported by compelling logic (see attachment 2).

We are particularly interested in RCTs and innovations involving policing, prosecution, alternatives to arrest, and diversion programs – *i.e.*, the front end of the criminal justice system (from arrest through sentencing) – as well as juvenile justice and medication-assisted treatment. However, proposals in all areas of criminal justice are welcome.

LJAF has committed up to \$14 million for these solicitations: \$12 million to fund at least 4-5 RCTs, and \$2 million to fund innovative earlier-stage research projects on interventions which, if successful, could advance to RCTs.

Why These Projects are Needed:

Credible evidence about what works may be the missing piece needed for progress in criminal justice. Governmental agencies are becoming more accountable for improving criminal justice outcomes. Yet, if public officials ask *how* they can meet these goals – that is, which specific programs work to reduce crime, help victims, and instill confidence in the accuracy of convictions – the answer is that too little is known.

Specifically, the number of criminal justice practices proven in rigorous studies to produce sizable gains in public safety, community-police relations, fairness, or other key outcomes is small. This is because rigorous evaluations of criminal justice programs and practices – particularly RCTs, the “gold standard” method of evaluating effectiveness – are few and far between. Thus, for the most part, policymakers are operating in a vacuum of knowledge about which criminal justice strategies can truly make a difference. And, unfortunately, predominant *unproven* strategies are too often found not to work when rigorously evaluated – including many that are acclaimed by experts or backed by less-rigorous studies.

Research holds a key to identifying important ways of improving criminal justice outcomes. That is why it is important for criminal justice reform not only to expand the few strategies with credible evidence that currently exist, but also to use rigorous evaluations to build additional knowledge about what works – and what does not work – to improve the system.

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Randomized Controlled Trials Designed to Build Policy-Important Evidence About “What Works” To Improve Criminal Justice Outcomes

I. **Overview:** LJAF has allotted up to \$12 million to fund randomized controlled trials (RCTs) in any area of criminal justice that meet the criteria described below. We plan to fund at least 4-5 RCTs, assuming we receive a sufficient number of high-quality submissions, and we encourage applicants to use cost-efficient approaches (as discussed below) to enable us to fund a greater number of RCTs within the allotted budget. We are particularly interested in funding RCTs in the following areas: policing, prosecution, alternatives to arrest, and diversion programs – *i.e.*, the front end of the criminal justice system (from arrest through sentencing) – as well as juvenile justice and medication-assisted treatment. However, submissions in all areas of criminal justice are welcome. Proposals will be reviewed by a panel comprised of experts in both criminal justice policy and RCT evaluation.

II. Application Process and Selection Criteria:

A. The following table shows the requested application materials and timeline:

Stage of application process	Date
All prospective applicants are asked to submit a letter of interest (maximum three pages)	Deadline: January 15, 2016
Applicants will be notified whether they are invited to submit a full proposal (full proposals must be invited)	February 2016
Invited applicants submit a full proposal (maximum six pages)	Deadline: April 15, 2016
Applicants will be notified whether they have been selected for award	May 2016
Grants will be awarded	June – July 2016

B. **Letters of interest and invited full proposals should address each of the selection criteria below, within three pages (for the letter) and six pages (for the proposal).** Applicants may use their own format, with single or double spacing, and a font of 11 or larger. The page limit does not include attached letters or other documents specifically requested in this RFP. Please submit all items via email to Peter Katz (pkatz@arnoldfoundation.org).

C. **Selection Criteria:**

For the letter of interest: While we ask applicants to address all four selection criteria below, we do not expect applicants to have finalized all aspects of the study design and partnership agreements; therefore, reviewers will focus more on the other two criteria – “importance” and “experienced researcher” – in determining which applicants to invite to submit a full proposal.

For the invited full proposal: Reviewers will consider whether all four criteria are satisfied.

➤ **IMPORTANCE: Is the applicant proposing to evaluate an intervention –**

- **That is backed by highly-promising evidence, suggesting it could produce sizable impacts on outcomes of recognized criminal justice policy importance** – such as crime rates, incarceration rates, recidivism, community-police relations, fairness, government expenditures, and/or post-incarceration employment and earnings. For example, we specifically encourage proposals 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, and/or matched comparison groups but not randomization). As a threshold condition for “highly promising” evidence, proposals should show that the intervention can be or (preferably) has been successfully delivered under real-world implementation conditions.

- or -

- **For which there are other compelling 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; or it is a promising low-cost strategy that could readily be implemented on a large scale if found effective.

Please note that, to meet this criterion, it is not sufficient to establish that the study addresses an important problem; applicants must also present compelling reasons to evaluate the specific intervention.

- **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 endure long enough to constitute meaningful improvement in individual and/or community well-being. Reviewers, in assessing an applicant’s proposed design, will use [Key Items to Get Right When Conducting an RCT in Social Policy](#) as a reference.

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 to be examined, regression methods to 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 (i) an agency that delivers the intervention has agreed to participate in the study, including random assignment; and (ii) a data agency has agreed to provide the researcher(s) with access to the appropriate administrative data.

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. To reduce study costs, we encourage the use of administrative data to measure study outcomes such as arrests and incarcerations, wherever feasible, in lieu of more expensive original data collection. In addition, if any implementation research is proposed 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 LJAF; and include an attached letter or other communication showing that the additional funding will be in place prior to LJAF's grant award.

LJAF allows for project-related overhead expenses such as salaries, benefits, equipment, supplies, and travel to be included in direct costs; however, LJAF will only provide funding for indirect costs, up to a 10% limit, if extenuating circumstances exist and have been preapproved.

- 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 a tax-exempt organization and is interested in applying, please contact Peter Katz and David Anderson (see contact information below).¹
- 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: Awardees will be asked, as a condition of award, to –

- **Pre-register the study**, on the Open Science Framework (OSF) [website](#), and upload a copy of the research and analysis plan in their proposal.
- **Provide us with brief phone or email updates on the study's progress on a quarterly basis, and before 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 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.** Applicants will be asked to do this within one year of the last data collection, and only to the extent allowed under any confidentiality/privacy protections. [Note: This list previews the main research-related requirements that will be included in the grant agreement but is not an exhaustive list of the conditions of the award.]

IV. Questions? Please email Peter Katz, Director of Criminal Justice (pkatz@arnoldfoundation.org), and David Anderson, Director of Evidence-Based Policy (danderson@arnoldfoundation.org). They may also be reached by phone at 212-430-3624 (Peter) and 202-239-1248 (David).

¹ This is an amended version of paragraph 2 as it appeared in this RFP when initially released on November 10, 2015. This new version clarifies the types of organizations that may apply.

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Innovation Tier

I. **Overview:** LJAF has allotted up to \$2 million to fund innovative earlier-stage proof-of-concept projects which, if successful, could advance to RCTs. Our Innovation Tier is designed to support feasibility testing for highly promising ideas not yet ready for an RCT. Instead of asking whether an intervention is effective, this tier 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 the Innovation Tier is 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 from LJAF.

II. Application Process and Selection Criteria:

A. The following table shows the requested application materials and timeline:

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B. Letters of interest and invited full proposals should address each of the selection criteria below, within three pages (for the letter) and six pages (for the proposal). Applicants may use their own format, with single or double spacing, and a font of 11 or larger. The page limit does not include attached letters or other documents specifically requested in this RFP. Please submit all items via email to Peter Katz (pkatz@arnoldfoundation.org).

C. Selection Criteria:

For the letter of interest: While we ask applicants to address all four selection criteria below, we do not expect applicants to have finalized all aspects of the study design and strategy for a follow-up RCT; therefore, reviewers will focus more on the other two criteria – “importance” and “team” (with particular attention to the experience of the researchers – as we also understand that applicants may not have finalized all aspects of the partnership agreements) – in determining which applicants to invite to submit a full proposal.

For the invited full proposal: Reviewers will consider whether all four criteria are satisfied.

- **IMPORTANCE: Is the applicant proposing to implement an intervention –**
 - **That targets outcomes of recognized criminal justice policy importance**, such as crime rates, incarceration rates, recidivism, community-police relations, fairness, government expenditures, and/or post-incarceration employment and earnings.
 - **That is supported by compelling logic, which is informed by the most relevant and rigorous evidence available, that the intervention has the potential to produce large impacts on the target area.** For example, the applicant might (the following examples are for illustrative purposes only):
 - Review the literature on medication-assisted treatment’s success in reducing recidivism and improving health outcomes for offenders with addiction and mental illness, and propose to test a new form of treatment that combines the most promising elements of previous models with new therapies tailored to address specific problems that have limited success in the past;
 - Present evidence that delinquent peers are a major risk-factor in youth crime, as well as convincing logic that its proposed intervention can prevent the formation of delinquent peer groups and instead engage at-risk youth with pro-social peers; or
 - Present rigorous experimental evidence that an intervention reduces recidivism in one population (*e.g.*, youth violent offenders) and propose to develop and test an adapted version of that intervention for another population (*e.g.*, young adult violent offenders).

- **STUDY DESIGN: Will the applicant’s proposed feasibility study design –**
 - **Deliver an intervention at a small or modest scale in a real world context** (*e.g.*, police department, juvenile court, correctional facility).
 - **Document the key elements of the intervention** (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 intervention was successfully delivered, in close adherence to its key elements** (*e.g.*, what tasks were performed to implement the intervention and how closely did those tasks match the model, which people were involved in each intervention task, and how widespread/intense was the intervention among the population targeted; for service-delivery interventions, the data should show who showed up, who received the targeted amount of services, 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 in place structures to document recidivism, health, education, and employment for the individuals treated by 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 to 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 (a) an appropriate agency that delivers the intervention has agreed to participate in the study; and (b) a data agency has agreed to provide the researcher(s) with access to the administrative data needed to measure study outcomes.

- **STRATEGY FOR FOLLOW-UP 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?

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. LJAF allows for project-related overhead expenses such as salaries, benefits, equipment, supplies, and travel to be included in direct costs; however, LJAF will only provide funding for indirect costs, up to a 10% limit, if extenuating circumstances exist and have been preapproved. To reduce study costs, we encourage the use of administrative data to measure study outcomes. 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 LJAF; and include an attached letter or other communication showing that the additional funding will be in place prior to LJAF’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 a tax-exempt organization and is interested in applying, please contact Peter Katz and Robin Lipp (see contact information below).²
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: Awardees will be asked, as a condition of award, to –

- **Pre-register the study**, on the Open Science Framework (OSF) [website](#), and upload a copy of the research and analysis plan in their proposal.

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- **Provide us with brief phone or email updates on the study’s progress on a quarterly basis, and before any key decisions that could materially affect the study’s design or implementation.**
- **Submit concise reports on the findings at appropriate intervals.** These reports should make it easy for readers to see the main results and gauge their credibility.

- and –

- **Make their datasets and related materials (e.g., survey instruments, code used to clean and analyze datasets) publicly available on the OSF site.** Applicants will be asked to do this within one year of the last data collection, and only to the extent allowed under any confidentiality/privacy protections. [Note: This list previews the main research-related requirements that will be included in the grant agreement but is not an exhaustive list of the conditions of the award.]

IV. Questions? Please email Peter Katz, Director of Criminal Justice (pkatz@arnoldfoundation.org), and Robin Lipp, Manager for Evidence-Based Innovation (rlipp@arnoldfoundation.org). They may also be reached by phone at 212-430-3624 (Peter) and 202-854-2863 (Robin).