

# **How to Craft Successful Proposals to Arnold Ventures for Randomized Controlled Trials of Criminal Justice Programs**

The Evidence-Based Policy and Criminal Justice  
Research Teams at Arnold Ventures





**Jocelyn Fontaine**  
Vice President of Criminal Justice Research



**Amanda Moderson-Kox**  
Director of Evidence-Based Policy



**Arnold Ventures' core mission is  
to invest in evidence-based  
solutions that maximize  
opportunity and minimize  
injustice.**



# Evidence-Based Policy RCTs – By the Numbers

Number of RCT grants funded **107**

Total funding amount **\$60,688,599**

Average RCT grant award **\$567,183**

Grant awards under \$500,000 **68%**

Range of all RCT grants funded by the  
Evidence-Based Policy team **\$50,000 -  
\$2,943,916**



# Criminal Justice RCTs since 2019 – By the Numbers

Number of RCT grants funded **15**

Total funding amount **\$17,300,000**

Average RCT grant award **\$1,200,000**

Range of RCT grants funded by the  
Criminal Justice team **\$50,000 -  
\$2,943,916**



# Our Selection Criteria

## 1. PROMISING OR WIDELY ADOPTED INTERVENTION

The proposed study would evaluate an intervention:

- That is backed by promising prior evidence suggesting it could produce sizable impacts on criminal justice outcomes of clear policy importance
- *Or* for which there are other compelling policy reasons to evaluate its effectiveness; e.g.:
  - The intervention is widely adopted in practice, but has not yet been rigorously evaluated and its impacts on key criminal justice outcomes are thus largely unknown *or*
  - The intervention is growing in use and likely to become widely adopted, but has not yet been rigorously evaluated

# Our Selection Criteria

## 2. VALID STUDY DESIGN

- Will the proposed study generate credible evidence about the intervention's impact on one or more targeted outcomes of high policy importance?
- Applicants should specify:
  - The study's primary outcome(s) of interest
  - How outcomes will be measured and over what length of time
  - Proposed analysis methods
- Certain quasi-experimental evaluation proposals will be considered if the applicant can make a convincing case that an RCT is not feasible

# Our Selection Criteria

## 3. 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?
  - The qualifying researcher does not necessarily need to have been the principal investigator on a well-conducted RCT, but would need to have played a substantive role in carrying one out.
  - Prospective applicants are welcome to contact us for assistance in addressing this criterion.



# Our Selection Criteria

## 4. FUNDING AND OTHER PARTNERS

- Would the intervention be (primarily) funded by another party?
- Do the funders of the intervention and any other essential parties agree to the study, including random assignment?

# Our Review Process

- We accept applications on a rolling basis (no submission deadline)
- Initial submission: 3 page Letter of Interest (LOI)
- If the LOI meets needed criteria, reviewers will then request a 6 page Full Proposal.
- We aim to have our reviews of both LOIs and Full Proposals completed within approximately one month after submission.

# Advice for developing a successful proposal: *Promising or widely-adopted intervention criterion*

- When discussing prior evidence:
  - Cite relevant studies of the specific intervention(s) providing promising evidence of effectiveness
  - Set realistic expectations about what impacts you'd expect to see based on effect sizes from prior studies
- When discussing (soon-to-be) widely-adopted:
  - Make clear case that the intervention is being (or will soon be) implemented on a wide scale with significant taxpayer investment



# Advice for developing a successful proposal: *Promising or widely-adopted intervention criterion*

- Demonstrate intervention being evaluated is very similar in key components to intervention that's being cited as prior evidence or widely-adopted
- Demonstrate the proposed intervention has been successfully fielded prior to launching the study.
- Note that it is not sufficient to show that the study will fill a gap in the literature or evaluate a program that tries to address an important issue



# Advice for developing a successful proposal:

## *Valid study design criterion*

- Ensure the study is well-powered.
- Measure important outcomes, ideally over the long(er)-term.
- Include a “pure” or treatment-as-usual control group.
- Keep the design simple and include what’s necessary to answer the primary research question.



# Advice for developing a successful proposal:

## *Cost Considerations*

- Expensive original data collection (e.g., surveys, site visits) should only be proposed when key questions about program impact cannot be well-measured with administrative data.
- The study cost should be commensurate with the level of evidence supporting and/or existing public investment in the intervention being evaluated.



# Funded Example: Functional Family Therapy-Gangs (FFT-G)

- A previous, well-conducted RCT of FFT-G found reductions in the percent of youth arrested and those adjudicated for any offense.
- Although the study was well conducted, it had a small sample (n=129) at a single site in Philadelphia, making it a prime candidate for replication.
- With implementation support from two judicial districts in the Denver, CO area, experienced researchers are evaluating the impact of FFT-G in a new setting with a larger sample of n=400 juveniles.
- The study's primary outcomes will be recidivism (charges and adjudications) measured 18 months after random assignment.



# Question and Answer



- ***Applying?***

[CrimJusticeRCTs@arnoldventures.org](mailto:CrimJusticeRCTs@arnoldventures.org)

- ***Questions?***

Amanda Moderson-Kox  
([AModersonKox@arnoldventures.org](mailto:AModersonKox@arnoldventures.org))

- ***Visit our RFP here:***

<https://craftmediabucket.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/RFP-for-RCTs-in-Criminal-Justice-CJ-EBP.pdf>