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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metric</th>
<th>Value</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of RCT grants funded</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total funding amount</td>
<td>$17,300,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Average RCT grant award</td>
<td>$1,200,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Range of RCT grants funded by the Criminal Justice team</td>
<td>$50,000 - $2,943,916</td>
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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.
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

• Questions?
Amanda Moderson-Kox
(AModersonKox@arnoldventures.org)

• Visit our RFP here: