

**Board of Advisors**

December 17, 2013

**MEMORANDUM**

FROM: Jon Baron

RE: Announcing a competition: Low-cost randomized controlled trials (RCTs) to drive effective social spending

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We're pleased to announce the launch of a competition to select and fund low-cost RCTs designed to build policy-important evidence about "what works" in U.S. social spending. Brief background is provided below, and for additional information please see:

- [Competition webpage](#) – including application packet
- [Press Release](#) – Laura and John Arnold Foundation
- [Blog posts](#) – White House Office of Science and Technology Policy and Office of Social Innovation and Civic Participation

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**Demonstrating How Low-Cost Randomized Controlled Trials Can Drive Effective Social Spending**

In response to the White House and Office of Management and Budget (OMB) [call to action](#) for evidence-based reforms across the federal government, the [Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy](#) is launching a competition for low-cost randomized controlled trials (RCTs) that seek to build valid, actionable evidence about "what works" in U.S. social spending.

This is designed as a high-visibility, three-year initiative, whose purpose is to demonstrate the feasibility and value of low-cost RCTs to a wide policy and philanthropic audience. In its first year, the competition will select and fund three low-cost RCTs that meet the criteria for policy importance and other factors described in the application materials. We will also be co-sponsoring a workshop on low-cost RCTs with the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) in mid-2014 in Washington DC, aimed at exploring wider government and philanthropic use of such studies with leading researchers, and officials of the White House and OMB, federal agencies, Congress, philanthropic foundations, state/local government, and other organizations that help shape social spending.

This initiative complements – and provides external reinforcement for – recent Executive Branch efforts to advance low-cost RCTs. For example, the concept of low-cost RCTs is prominently featured in the July 2013 White House and OMB guidance to the federal agencies on [Next Steps in the Evidence and Innovation Agenda](#), and in OMB's May 2012 memo to the agencies on [Use of Evidence and Evaluation](#), which cites the [brief](#) we developed on such studies. The concept and brief are also discussed in the President's FY 2014 budget ([here](#), page 94).

The Coalition is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that is unaffiliated with any social programs or program models. This initiative is funded through philanthropic grants to the Coalition from the Laura and John Arnold Foundation and the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

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