

Michigan Technical Assistance Partnership (M-TAP) Program

An Initiative to Help Michigan Organizations Leverage Data to Improve Program Design and Service Delivery for At-Risk Youth

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

The [Youth Policy Lab](#) was founded to help improve life outcomes for Michigan youth, from birth through age 25. The Lab is a hands-on initiative to support the growing demand for rigorous evidence about the likely outcomes of proposed policy interventions.

One goal of the Youth Policy Lab is to provide technical assistance to state and local agencies, school districts, and nonprofits that serve Michigan's youth, by helping them conduct the analyses that they need to do their jobs most effectively. This request for proposals is designed to identify partner agencies with whom the Lab will work to answer questions about the clients they serve, the problems they seek to address, and the effectiveness of their programs while, at the same time, building the internal capacity to address future questions.

This request for proposals is open to Michigan-based organizations (or organizations doing substantial work in Michigan) seeking to use data to improve service delivery or program design for Michigan youth. The most suitable proposals will be selected through review by the Youth Policy Lab based on the criteria described below.

This initiative builds upon our years of experience partnering with service providers and agencies to evaluate programs and is made possible with funding from the Laura and John Arnold Foundation.

Please review additional information about the program, application process, and awards on the subsequent pages. If you have any questions about our services or your proposed project, please email us at youthpolicylab@umich.edu.

Completed applications are due by **May 1, 2017**.

M-TAP PROGRAM COMPONENTS

Selected partners will receive pro-bono technical assistance for up to 24 months to help them use data to answer a clearly specified question or set of questions related to improving service delivery or design. Assistance will cover each step of the proposed project, including needs and feasibility assessment, analysis and evaluation and policy design.

DEDICATED YOUTH POLICY FELLOW

Selected partners will receive assistance from a Youth Policy Fellow, who will be employed by the Youth Policy Lab. Fellows are recruited from top public policy, economics, business, data science and public health programs and have background in benefit-cost analysis, evaluation design, management strategies, and negotiation techniques. The fellow will serve as an onsite technical expert, working alongside partner personnel to coordinate the project and perform onsite analysis.

ACCESS TO SENIOR TECHNICAL ADVISORS

Partners will also receive senior technical assistance and support from content area and methodological experts. University of Michigan faculty and PhD level professional staff members from the Youth Policy Lab will provide thought leadership, help evaluate the overall feasibility of prospective projects, develop goals and objectives for the project, and check-in with partners and fellows throughout the process. Senior staff will also provide direct support to partners as needed by assisting with data analysis, evaluation design, and implementation planning as well as knowledge transfer of critical technical skills.

DATA ANALYSIS

Resources for data matching and analysis will be available to partners requiring this type of assistance. Based on previous experience, extensive matching of data sets across agencies (for example, earnings histories and criminal records) is often required to establish historic performance trends, analyze the amount of variability in these trends, and target individuals to be served by organizations and agencies.

KNOWLEDGE SHARING, GOVERNMENT PARTNER NETWORK, AND CAPACITY BUILDING

We will help connect our partners with other agencies in Michigan and around the country who are engaged in similar work. Partners will have the opportunity to participate in trainings together with members of the Youth Policy Lab and a network of other Arnold Foundation-funded labs in internal capacity building to sustain the effort once formal engagement with the Youth Policy Lab ends. For instance, training could focus on utilizing data to improve service delivery or program design, including project design, conducting randomized controlled trials, data visualization and effective presentation, and other pertinent activities.

EXAMPLES OF POTENTIAL PROJECTS

- A school district is implementing a computer-based math program for students to use at home and wants to figure out the most effective way to get students to use the tool regularly. The Youth Policy Lab might work with the school district to test whether text reminders to parents and caregivers or a reward system for students who use the tool regularly is more effective. This project would likely use “meta-data” created by the program itself to assess frequency of use and students would be randomly assigned to one of the two types of encouragement.
- The state department of health and human services is providing support to pregnant mothers and their children to help ensure that babies get a healthy start in life. The program is designed to provide extra support to mothers and babies who are at greatest risk based on their level of poverty. The state wants to better understand which mothers are being served by the program currently and whether or not they are meeting their goal of reaching the most at-risk families. The Youth Policy Lab might work with the state to combine program enrollment data and state Medicaid data to explore who the program is serving currently and whether it could be redirected to a more disadvantaged population.
- Child Support Services assists in collecting financial support from noncustodial parents, but is often stymied when it appears that parents have no employment and thus no income. Every employer is federally mandated to report new hires to the Department of Labor, however, often employers fail to do so. The Youth Policy Lab might work with Child Support Services to test methods for educating and encouraging employers to complete federally-mandated reporting requirements. Employers could be randomly assigned to one of several different groups that differ on method of contact and notification to determine the optimal method for achieving reporting compliance.¹
- The Department of Corrections wants to set up a new prisoner re-entry programming to reduce recidivism. The Youth Policy Lab might help them use existing criminal justice data on recidivism rates to help them determine whether or not the program is effective.

¹ This example is taken from BetaGov (www.betagov.org), an organization engaging in similar type of work.

APPLICATION DETAILS

The program is open to state or local agencies and nonprofits whose mission is to serve Michigan youth, as well as to Michigan's education sector (agencies, districts, schools and nonprofits). Eligible organizations include, for example, the state department of corrections, county-level foster care agencies, local school districts, or nonprofits focused on youth employment. We accept proposals from individual organizations as well as from two or more distinct organizations who are collaborating on a project or issue, including government-government partnerships, government-nonprofit partnerships, state-local partnerships, public-private partnerships or any combination of the former.

SELECTION CRITERIA

1. **IDENTIFICATION OF CLEAR, IMPORTANT QUESTION** - We will prioritize projects with a clearly specified question or set of questions, the answers to which have the potential to provide insights that improve outcomes for youth in Michigan. The potential to apply project findings broadly within the program, agency or jurisdiction or in other contexts is a plus.
2. **EXISTING ADMINISTRATIVE DATA** - All projects must have existing administrative data that can be used to help address the specified question or questions. We will provide assistance in obtaining access to necessary data and ensuring that it is in the right form to address questions of interest. However, this technical assistance grant is generally not designed to conduct primary data collection activities, although data collection may be possible under limited conditions.
3. **HIGH-LEVEL ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT** - Project personnel must demonstrate a high level of commitment and enthusiasm for the project. Commitment from individual project staff as well as senior decision makers is required. Support from senior decision makers will be particularly important for projects that require access to data across departments or agencies. Applicants are encouraged to submit letters of support from their senior leadership and leaders of partner organizations that indicate their backing for and willingness to cooperate in achieving the project's objectives.
4. Priority will be given to agencies or organizations that have not undertaken similar projects previously or wish to expand their capabilities in using data to better meet the needs of the populations they serve.

Note: Selected agencies and organizations will need to enter into a memorandum of understanding with the Regents of the University of Michigan, covering terms such as data sharing and security; project scope, timeline and resources; knowledge sharing, etc.

APPLICATION AND AWARD PROCESS

PHASE 1: APPLICATION FOR YOUTH POLICY LAB TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Youth Policy Lab staff will be available for in-person or telephone consultations with organizations that want to learn more about the M-TAP program and to help them prepare stronger applications. Applicants interested in consultations should contact the Youth Policy Lab youthpolicylab@umich.edu.

Applicants should submit a completed application by May 1, 2017. The application form is available for download [here](#).

PHASE 2: INTERVIEWS

The Youth Policy Lab will conduct in-person (when practical) or telephone interviews with the most promising applicants. Interviews will be structured to allow applicants an opportunity to further demonstrate the level of commitment to developing the project and to discuss the possible projects already identified.

PHASE 3: SELECTION AND AWARD

The Youth Policy Lab will select successful applicants with the decision announced in the first half of April 2017, and project start dates in June 2017. Upon confirmation by the selection committee, the applicants will be awarded Youth Policy Lab technical assistance for up to 24 months.

PHASE 4: PROJECT DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

Over a 24-month period, Youth Policy Lab staff will work with selected partners to define overall project objectives and deliverables, identifying data sources, develop MOUs or data agreements with third parties, communicate with external partners, clean and link data and conduct analysis and evaluation activities.