



## **REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS**

### **National Governors Association Center for Best Practices Policy Academy to Drive Thriving Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing**

<b>Purpose:</b>	To support 4-6 Governor’s Offices in developing and advancing a holistic agenda to protect and support strong youth mental health and emotional wellbeing across all state agencies, including strategies across prevention, awareness, treatment, and community and youth engagement
<b>Eligibility:</b>	All U.S. states, commonwealths, and territories in good standing with NGA are welcome to apply.
<b>Opportunities Provided:</b>	Through the Policy Academy, up to six competitively selected states will: (1) participate in a kick-off meeting and wrap-up meetings, (2) attend monthly virtual learning and peer-sharing opportunities and participate in monthly 1:1 check-ins with the NGA team, (3) develop a strategic action plan to implement new strategies or strengthen existing strategies, (4) receive ongoing technical assistance from NGA Center staff and partners in support of project goals, (5) identify and nominate a youth to participate in the Policy Academy’s Youth Advisory Council and serve as the voice of lived experience on the state team, (6) begin the work of enacting the plan, (7) submit a brief final report on progress to the National Governors Association in tandem with a presentation at the wrap-up meeting.
<b>Applications Due:</b>	Please email a single PDF document with application materials to Jess Kirchner ( <a href="mailto:jkirchner@nga.org">jkirchner@nga.org</a> ) by Friday, January 19 <sup>th</sup> , <b>at 11:59 pm EST</b>
<b>Selection Announcement:</b>	Friday, January 31 <sup>st</sup> , 2024
<b>In-Person Kick-off Meeting:</b>	Early March 2024, Date and Location TBD
<b>Project Period:</b>	January 2024 – January 2025
<b>Virtual informational call for prospective applications:</b>	December 19 <sup>th</sup> , 2023, from 2-3pm EST January 10 <sup>th</sup> , 2024, from 2-3pm EST
<b>NGA Contacts:</b>	Jess Kirchner, Children and Families Policy Analyst <a href="mailto:Jkirchner@nga.org">Jkirchner@nga.org</a> Jordan Hynes, Children and Families Program Director <a href="mailto:Jhynes@nga.org">Jhynes@nga.org</a>

## OVERVIEW:

With support from the Funders for Adolescent Science Translation and the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) is launching the “Policy Academy to Drive Thriving Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing”. In July 2023, NGA released a [Playbook for Governors](#) with recommendations for state actions to strengthen youth mental health from prevention through treatment. Through this new policy academy, states are encouraged to use the Playbook to inform key policy priorities or develop a statewide youth mental health agenda: Each state will have the flexibility to tailor solutions that fit their needs of their constituency. This Policy Academy is an opportunity for Governors’ offices and other state public health officials to design, implement, or expand youth mental health initiatives and policy strategies over an eleven-month project period.

The NGA Center will support a cohort of 4-6 Governors’ offices in developing and advancing an agenda to protect and support youth mental health and emotional wellbeing, including strategies across prevention, awareness, treatment, and community and youth engagement. Throughout the policy academy, states and territories will explore how to implement strategies that address governance structure, stakeholder engagement, policy best practices, funding opportunities, regulatory flexibilities, legislative pathways, and messaging methods to advance their Governor’s youth mental health agenda. States and territories will receive expert facilitation, strategic planning guidance and support, and technical assistance related to the implementation of their agenda from the NGA Center team and key partners. At the conclusion of the cohort, States and territories will showcase their progress towards a comprehensive agenda to strengthen youth mental health, which may include prospective legislative priorities, unlocking new funding streams, collaborating across multiple agencies, and engaging youth.

The aim of this Policy Academy is to help states initiate and strengthen policies, programs, and initiatives that improve resiliency and mental well-being for youth. This can include projects that align with any of the recommendations from NGA’s [Youth Mental Health Playbook for Governors](#).

The Policy Academy will include an in-person kick-off meeting; monthly virtual meetings to include peer learning, presentations from subject matter experts, and facilitated discussion and activities; in-state site visits; and individualized technical assistance. As part of Policy Academy, participating states will create a state-specific action plan related to their unique goal, share successes and best practices with other states, and learn about current innovative and evidence-based policies, initiatives, and practices from national, state, and local experts. States will be selected for participation based on the strength of their proposals, which should include short-term deliverables that are actionable within the eleven-month project timeline but may also include long-term goals and objectives that extend beyond that period. NGA and its partners do not expect that all applying states already have a fully formed plan to address youth mental health and understand that the development of a plan may be a targeted state outcome for the policy academy. To support Governors’ offices in designing policy and agendas that meet the needs of those directly impacted, the Policy Academy will entail a compensated youth council, supported by experts from Young Invincibles, in which selected applicant states will be financially supported in engaging a youth nominated by the state.

The Policy Academy will culminate in the publication of case studies on the state initiatives and feature successes of each participating state as part of a Symposium Event. Potential outcomes from the Policy Academy could include:

- Developing a robust and discrete statewide agenda or action plan to strengthen youth mental health, that includes buy-in across the Departments of health, human Services, child welfare, juvenile justice, and education
- Strengthening supports for youth with behavioral health challenges by identifying opportunities to reinforce crisis care, respite programs, in-school or in-community services, and parental supports
- Establishing systems that elevate and embed lived experience in policymaking decisions
- Building partnerships with state universities, employers, and licensing agencies to assess and address workforce shortages for youth mental health professionals and strengthen career pathways for youth with mental health conditions.
- Integrating infant and early-childhood mental health infrastructure into statewide early childhood education systems

**BACKGROUND:**

Driven by sobering statistics, the voices of families, and the needs of a struggling system, strengthening youth mental health and wellbeing is a top priority for Governors across the country: Nearly half of the 55 Governors, across both parties, mentioned youth mental health in their 2023 State of the State addresses. States and territories are considering a wide breadth of approaches across the continuum of care, from upstream prevention to intervention and treatment and crisis care, and Governors are poised to leverage their leadership across state government to take these actions to the next level. Similarly, states and territories are working to support youth across developmental stages--from infant and early childhood through late adolescence and young adulthood--to create a network of programs that protect the wellbeing of children. Engaged political leadership is a critical element for driving momentum and amplifying alignment across agencies in these efforts. The NGA 2022-2023 Chair’s Initiative on Strengthening Youth Mental Health culminated in the publication of a [Playbook for Governors](#) that highlighted actionable and innovative policy solutions. These solutions represent some of the options states and territories may pursue across four key pillars: 1) building prevention and resilience, 2) increasing awareness and reducing stigma, 3) improving access to quality and affordable care, and 4) caregiver, educator, and community engagement.

**TIMELINE:**

<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Activity</b>
December 1 <sup>st</sup> , 2023	Application period opens
December 19 <sup>th</sup> , 2023	Policy academy informational call 1
January 10 <sup>th</sup> , 2024	Policy academy informational call 2
January 19 <sup>th</sup> , 2024	Application period closes
January 31 <sup>st</sup> , 2024	State selection announced
Early March 2024	In-person state team cohort kickoff meeting
February – December 2024	Bi-monthly virtual meetings, technical assistance period, (2) in-state site visits



December 2024	In-person wrap-up meeting
January 2025	Policy academy case study publication
June 2025	Six-month policy academy update

**DESCRIPTION OF REQUIRED ACTIVITIES**

During this Policy Academy, the NGA Center will work with selected state and/or territory teams to develop and execute an action plan to strengthen youth mental health around the priorities identified by each state. The specific focus area and strategies will vary for each applicant state/territory and should reflect the current landscape and needs related to youth mental health in the state. The intended activities should be paired with measurable goals and should be associated with the creation or expansion of a statewide policy agenda, policy changes, or new strategies and approaches.

Participating states must identify a core team who can serve as key players and decision-makers to champion and support activities that progress the team towards the action plan objectives. The core team will be expected to participate in the monthly check-in calls and will be responsible for ensuring continuation of the work in the state throughout the project period. Please note that core team members will be required to attend the in-person policy academy meetings, including the kick-off meeting in January 2024 and the wrap-up meeting in November 2024.

The Policy Academy will require active participation from selected states. States participating can expect to:

1. **Attend the in-person kick-off and wrap-up meetings:** The NGA Center will host an in-person kick-off meeting in March 2024 and in-person wrap-up meeting in December 2024 (locations TBD). State and territory teams will be expected to present their project plans at the kick-off meeting and present their action plan and progress at the wrap-up meeting. The NGA Center will pay for travel and accommodation for up to six team members, including the state’s youth advisor, per state or territory for each meeting.
2. **Attend bi-monthly virtual meetings:** The core team will be expected, as possible, to attend or send a representative to bi-monthly virtual convenings of all policy academy state teams, where states can engage in peer learning and information sharing between teams. The NGA Center will facilitate these meetings to share best practices and connect participating states to each other as well as subject matter experts.
3. **Create an action plan:** With assistance from the NGA Center, states and territories will create a high-level action plan designed to develop and implement or expand policies, programs, and strategies in alignment with the goals identified in the application. The action plan will include an overarching goal, specific action steps, team member responsibilities, and timelines for completing work during the eleven-month project period. If the state has an existing youth mental health agenda, this action plan will result in movement or expansion of larger goals. However, applying states and territories need not have assembled a robust youth mental health agenda or plan at time of application and the development of said plan could be a goal of the Policy Academy.
4. **Communicate technical assistance needs and participate in monthly state team calls:** In addition to the bi-monthly policy academy calls, the NGA Center team will be hosting individual monthly check-ins with

each of the selected states and territories. These calls will serve as regular touchpoints to check-in on project progress, support states' individual needs, and identify specific technical assistance opportunities. The NGA Center will provide ad-hoc technical assistance throughout the Policy Academy. Such assistance could include telephone consultation, facilitated conversations with other states and experts, presentations, and other best practices research.

5. **Identify and nominate a youth with lived experience to participate in the Policy Academy Youth Advisory Council:** Upon selection, states and territories will identify and nominate a local youth to serve as youth representative on the Policy Academy team. As part of the project, NGA Center will be offering a stipend to compensate youth for their time, perspectives, and expertise. Requirements for the Youth Advisory Council can be seen below, and state and territory team members must make a good faith effort to include the youth in monthly meetings, technical assistance, action plan development, and project implementation, depending on schedule availability. Such youth advisory council members will be required to attend a quarterly check-in with the NGA Center team and their other state counterparts.
6. **Receive in-state technical assistance/Site Visits:** Each state and territory selected will have an opportunity for two (2) in-person site visits from the NGA Center team and/or partners over the course of the Policy Academy. These meetings may be leveraged to develop an action plan, examine a policy topic, work through the creation or implementation of policy tools, build buy-in from stakeholders, or advance specific action items.
7. **Present at NGA Symposium:** Selected states and territories will be required to present a final report on project outcomes, progress, and potential plans for continuation at a Youth Mental Health Showcase for Governors Advisors. The NGA Center will incorporate these reports into a final publication.
8. **Six-month update:** States are required to provide a brief update six months after the conclusion of the Policy Academy

#### **REQUIRED APPLICATION CONTENT AND SELECTION CRITERIA:**

Applications may receive up to 100 points. To apply, states and territories should submit the following:

1. **Letter from the Governor.** A signed letter of support from the Governor is required. The letter must include the state or territory's interest in and expected outcomes related to the technical assistance opportunity. The letter should indicate whom the Governor is designating as the team leader. The team leader will serve as the main point of contact between the NGA Center and the state or territory.
2. **Statement of Interest.** A brief statement (~5-7 pages total) that should include the following elements:
  - ***Brief assessment of state or territory's existing youth mental health initiatives related to the project (25 points).*** Applications should provide a description of the current landscape, addressing the following questions as they apply to the state or territory's proposed scope of work:
    - Which agencies within the state or territory operate youth mental health programs and services? How well do these agencies collaborate, and what infrastructure exists to enable this collaboration?
    - Is your state looking to develop a youth mental health agenda, implement a new state-level initiative, or expand existing work? Please note all participating agencies for expanding

existing work and any additional details on the scope and current impact of initiatives within the state.

- How does your state or territory leverage, or anticipate leveraging, funding streams to develop, implement, or strengthen youth mental health initiatives (e.g., Medicaid, federal grant dollars, state general funds, or potential future federal or state funding streams)?
- Does your state or territory have existing executive or legislative policies that impact your proposed projects and areas of focus?
- Has your state or territory held or participated in a statewide convening (e.g., roundtable, conference, summit) on youth mental health initiatives?
- **Landscape and area of focus (25 points).** Applications should provide a brief description of the public health and child welfare landscape as it relates to youth mental health, which may include suicide rates, hospitalization rates, occurrence rates, recent increases or trends, disproportionately impacted populations, and other specific population of focus for this collaborative. Applicants are encouraged to reflect on recent developments, existing challenges, and system limitations across mental health outcomes, substance use, healthcare access and utilization, or workforce shortages. Based on the landscape presented, identify any key target population(s) intended for intervention and support through this collaborative, which may include specific age ranges, underserved communities, regions with high risk, those exhibiting early signs or symptoms, groups in crisis, and any other priority groups relevant to the goals of improving youth mental health, resiliency, and wellbeing at scale.
- **Policy Academy preliminary goals and expected outcomes (35 points).** Provide an overview of the state or territories' goals, the steps necessary to achieve these goals, ideal outcomes, how these goals fit into the current policy landscape, and the role NGA's Policy Academy will play in achieving these goals. Priority will be given to state teams that outline an achievable scope of work and the capacity to meet state goals in the 11-month project period.
  - Is there an existing plan to strengthen youth mental health that the state will use as a reference for the Policy Academy, or does the state intend to receive support through the Policy Academy to develop a robust plan?
  - What tangible outcomes does the state or territory expect to accomplish during the project period?
  - What long-term impacts does the state anticipate beyond the project period?
  - How will the policy academy specifically help your state or territory achieve those outcomes?
- **Policy Academy Team (15 points).** Each participating state or territory must assemble a high level "core team" of four to eight representatives, including a representative from the Governor's office and from at least two agencies, one of which should be designated as the team leader as outlined above. States and territories have the flexibility to determine their own goals for the project, and as such, maintain discretion over who constitutes a "decision-maker" for the project. Please provide the names, titles, and contact information and indicate who the Governor has designated as the team leader. An administrative contact who is connected to the team lead should also be identified to help schedule conference calls and team logistics. Members of the core team may, but not limited to, include individuals from the following:

- The Governor’s Office (e.g., governor’s criminal justice, human services, and/or health policy advisor)
- State Health leadership
- State Human Services Leadership
- State Education Leadership
- State Juvenile Justice leadership
- State Children and Families agencies
- State Children’s Cabinet Leadership
- Other health and human services agencies
- Community leaders and additional partners

We recognize that states and territories may have different structures or unique positions. States may select other participants not listed here as additional team members so long as the core criteria for team members are met. States will have the opportunity to identify and nominate youth to serve in the Policy Academy Youth Advisory Council upon selection. As only six team members will be able to travel to the in-person meetings, please indicate who from the team would attend, if selected.

#### **SUBMISSION INFORMATION**

All applications must be received by **11:59 p.m. ET on Friday, January 19<sup>th</sup>, 2024, with the subject line “YMH Policy Academy Application - [STATE]”**.

Applications must be submitted by the Governor’s office. Please combine all application materials into a single PDF document and email Jessica Kirchner at [jkirchner@nga.org](mailto:jkirchner@nga.org). Following submission, applicants will receive a confirmation email from the NGA Center verifying receipt of your application.

All questions about this Policy Academy and the “Request for Application” process should be directed to Jess Kirchner ([jkirchner@nga.org](mailto:jkirchner@nga.org)) and Jordan Hynes ([jhynes@nga.org](mailto:jhynes@nga.org)).

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*This request for application (RFA) is not binding on the NGA Center, nor does it constitute a contractual offer. Without limiting the foregoing, the NGA Center reserves the right, in its sole discretion, to reject any or all applications; to modify, supplement, or cancel the RFA; to waive any deviation from the RFA; to negotiate regarding any proposal; and to negotiate final terms and conditions that may differ from those stated in the RFA. Under no circumstances shall NGA be liable for any costs incurred in the preparation and submission of a response to this RFA.*