



Application Guidelines for the NGA Policy Academy:

Improving Outcomes for Young Adults with Disabilities

The National Governors Association (NGA) Center for Best Practices invites states to apply for its upcoming policy academy on improving outcomes for young adults with disabilities, aged 14 to 30.¹ This academy will provide teams of leaders from six states a special opportunity to identify weaknesses in their state's current policies and practices and to develop and begin implementing realistic strategies for improvement.

Proposals Due: July 1, 2005 – one application per state

Selection Announcement: July 29, 2005

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Funding: Travel, lodging and per diem expenses will be covered for up to 7 team members from each selected state or territory to participate in the Policy Academy.

INTRODUCTION

Today, there are more than 54 million Americans living with a disability, representing a full 20 percent of the U.S. population. Almost half of these individuals have a severe disability affecting their ability to see, hear, walk or perform other basic functions of life. In addition, there are more than 25 million family caregivers and millions more who provide aid and assistance to people with disabilities.

Young adults with disabilities are but a subset of this larger population, but one of special interest because their stage in the life-cycle encompasses the crucial transition to adult employment and independence and because health, housing, education, transportation, and community integration play such a major role in that transition for all youth.² Thus, state and federal governments expend large sums on special education, vocational rehabilitation, accessible transportation and other services, all aimed at achieving what the Olmstead Supreme Court decision now mandates:

¹By disabilities, the NGA refers to any physical, sensory, intellectual, cognitive, developmental, emotional, or other single or co-occurring disability.

² While no reliable estimate for this population currently exists, the 2003 American Community Survey estimates about 4 million young adults with disabilities aged 14 to 30 years in the U.S. A significantly larger estimation of 8 million can be roughly calculated from the U.S. Census 2000, Population Reference Bureau 2000, and the National Health Interview Survey 2003. The discrepancy is likely a result of employing different definitions of disability.

“the opportunity to live close to their families and friends, to live more independently, to engage in productive employment, and to participate in community life.”

Yet, young adults with disabilities continue to attain less education than their peers without disabilities and to experience higher rates of unemployment, homelessness, poverty, and institutionalization, including incarceration. Faced with such unsatisfactory outcomes and a growing number of legal actions, many state governments are looking for ways to address these problems. In the process, they are discovering that they spend as much as ten percent of their total budgets on programs that operate out of numerous state agencies with different eligibility and accountability requirements. The result is a complex array of uncoordinated services that is inefficient from the perspective of service provision and discouragingly difficult to navigate from the perspective of consumers.

The Improving Outcomes for Young Adults with Disabilities Policy Academy will assist states to develop more integrated, comprehensive and cost-effective state administrative infrastructures to provide services for populations with disabilities. While each participating state will determine the most effective strategies for it, given its specific challenges and opportunities, all will be urged to:

- Develop clear goals and realistic strategies for making both tangible short-term progress and key first steps toward broader system change;
- Design a governance structure that drives implementation of innovative strategies and ensures coordination across all relevant agencies;
- Undertake service integration and coordination such as mapping delivery systems, integrating case management, coordinating funds, and implementing effective memoranda of understanding among agencies; and
- Develop cross-system outcomes and performance measures for the targeted population, including strategic data collection and analysis techniques in order to determine what strategies are successful and where change is required.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

This project is being conducted by the NGA Center for Best Practices, supported by funding from several federal agencies, and in coordination and consultation with the HHS Office on Disability.³ States will be represented by a core team, appointed by the governor and comprised of senior state leaders who are in a position to develop and later implement substantial changes in policies and practices. With support from a broader-based home team, the core teams will develop the plans for those changes through a five-month action planning process in concert with NGA staff and associated disability policy experts. The major activity is a three-day academy workshop (October 5-7, 2005) convening all the core teams. In the weeks before the workshop, state teams (home and core) are expected to conduct a needs assessment. At the academy workshop itself, the core teams are expected to analyze strategic policy options and to develop state-specific action plans. In the process, they will meet with team members from other states to network and share best practices in transitioning young people with disabilities to independence.

³ In addition to the Department of Health and Human Services, federal partners include the Departments of Labor, Education, Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, Commerce, Justice, Interior, and the Social Security Administration.

The Policy Academy workshop will not be a conference, but an interactive policymaking process. **As such, it will require substantial preparation by team members and their colleagues prior to the meeting, active team participation during the meeting, and a strong commitment to completing the process back home and implementing the plans generated.**

The Policy Academy will be carried out in four stages:

1. **Pre-Academy Workshop Strategic Planning and On-site Meeting.** Prior to the formal Policy Academy in October, staff from NGA will conduct a one-day site visit to each selected state to facilitate discussion and prepare state team members for the Academy workshop. The on-site planning meetings are anticipated to take place during August and September. Prior to the site visits, states will be asked to assemble data that will begin to distinguish the targeted population in terms of their characteristics, disability (s), service needs, and degree of self-sufficiency. States will also need to identify the programs and resources available to assist this population, and the barriers that might be preventing access to those resources. The specific requirements for this phase are outlined in the Criteria section of this document.

Between the on-site meeting and the formal Policy Academy workshop, state teams will be required, with technical assistance from the NGA and expert faculty, to begin resource mapping of the current delivery system. This process will build from the strategic data collection and analysis phase discussed above.

2. **Policy Academy Workshop.** The one all-team workshop of the Policy Academy will be held October 5-7, 2005. State teams will meet during that time to develop and refine a state action plan that specifies their goals, strategies for meeting them, and the mechanisms for securing their adoption by key stakeholders. During the three-day workshop, teams will also hear from national experts about what's working elsewhere, and receive technical assistance as needed. Attendees will also have the opportunity to interact with teams from other states. The workshop will be facilitated by NGA staff.
3. **Post-Academy Workshop follow-up and technical assistance.** After the Policy Academy workshop, the NGA Center will follow each state's progress in implementing its action plan, and provide technical assistance on an as-needed basis. Technical assistance may include background research, telephone consultations, and onsite visits from NGA staff and other experts. State teams will be expected to issue interim reports detailing their progress. These reports will be available to other states. Follow-up is anticipated to continue through December 2006.
4. **Evaluation.** During the Policy Academy process, state teams will identify specific measures that will indicate progress toward the outcomes they have identified. Technical assistance, available during the October workshop and the post-Academy follow-up period, will guide state teams as they develop cross-system and outcome specific performance measures. Additionally, the NGA and participating states will be independently evaluated throughout the process in order to assess progress toward Policy Academy goals.

TEAM COMPOSITION

States will be expected to identify members of a core team, who will attend the October Policy Academy workshop, and a broader-based home team, who will support the work of the core team.

Ideal core teams will include a cross-section of policymakers from relevant state agencies and stakeholder groups, and will reflect the proposed direction and issues that the state is considering. These individuals should include governor's policy advisors, agency leaders reflective of the state goals for integration and infrastructure improvement (for example, Directors of Medicaid, Education, Transportation, Public Health, Mental Health, Workforce/Development, relevant fiscal agents), and may include leaders from the legislature, employer community, advocacy groups, and Tribal governments if appropriate.

NGA will cover the transportation, lodging, and per-diem costs for up to seven (7) people from each state to attend the workshop in October. Because we encourage states to form teams that cut across multiple agencies and stakeholder groups, states may send up to three additional members at their own expense if necessary. States must identify a team leader, designated by the Governor, who will play a leadership role throughout this process. In order for the state team to achieve its goals and stay on track, this individual will be responsible for assisting and managing the team's activities, including setting work plans, organizing the overall process, and communicating with the NGA. To demonstrate their commitment to this position, states should also identify support staff responsible to the leader and his/her responsibilities to the project.

The broader-based home teams can be as expansive as is necessary. When determining the size and membership of the home team, states should consider striking a balance between effective cross-agency coordination and inter-governmental collaboration with efficient, feasible outcomes.

COMPETITIVE SELECTION PROCESS

Up to 6 state teams will be selected to participate. Only one application per state will be accepted. Successful applications will identify current transition initiatives for young adults with disabilities in their state. States with such initiatives underway are welcome to apply but must describe how the academy process will be used to enhance the current initiatives and/or develop new ones. Preference will be given to applications from states that can demonstrate readiness and commitment to implementing the strategies developed during the academy, including evidence that team members serve in positions to influence policy making or program development and will continue in those positions through the end of 2006.

PROPOSAL GUIDELINES

To apply for the Academy, states must submit a proposal that includes the following:

- A letter of support from the Governor that designates the team's leader, and his/her support staff;
- A list of confirmed state core team members, as described in the *Team Composition* section, and reference to the home-based team. Please include each core team member's name, title, address, phone and fax numbers, email address, and 1-2 sentences explaining the reason for each member's participation, including a description of their ability to assist in implementing state strategies. Core team members must be able to attend the October 5-7 workshop;
- An agreed upon first- and second-choice date in which all core team members could participate in an NGA site visit to your state. Site visits must occur between Monday, August 15th and Friday, September 16th and should be scheduled to last from 9:00 a.m.

to 3:00 p.m. All core team members must agree to be present at the site visit since they are a critical component of a successful experience at the policy academy; and

- A 5-7 page narrative, described below in the “Criteria for Assessing the Narrative” section, that explains why the state is seeking selection for the Policy Academy and how the state expects to benefit from the Academy process. The narrative should include a clear definition of system problems and the state’s readiness for change; a vision addressing current challenges; indications of specific outcomes and possible strategies to achieve them; and a demonstrated commitment of the state team to implement changes.

CRITERIA FOR ASSESSING THE NARRATIVE (100 Points)

The narrative portion of the application should address each of the criteria laid out below.

- 1. The State has a clearly defined problem and indicators of readiness for change. (30 pts)**
 - Describe the current environment in your state including supporting factual data about the target population, a frank appraisal of current system barriers and assets, and other relevant factors that help define the areas the state wishes to address. If the state looks to target any subpopulations of particular interest, it must justify this with supporting data and rationale.
 - Briefly identify ongoing related efforts (such as demonstration/pilot projects, funding opportunities, political interest, or successful systems reform in these and related areas), and how they will contribute to or complement participation in this Academy.
- 2. Vision for addressing current challenges. (10 pts)**

Briefly describe the state’s vision for a comprehensive system that will effectively assist young adults with disabilities to transition to self-sufficiency to their fullest capacity. If Tribal governments exist within the state, please indicate how the vision is inclusive of the need to effectively assist young adults with disabilities within their population.
- 3. Proposals should indicate the specific outcomes and possible strategies that the state hopes to achieve during the policy academy process. (30 pts)**

Describe potential outcomes the state seeks to achieve as a result of participation in the policy academy, including reference to what the state sees as its greatest challenges, what strategies it may want to explore, and how systems-change outcomes might ultimately be expressed in the system and in the population. These descriptions should reflect as many of the following strategies as appropriate, but at least three. States are encouraged to identify others.

 - Resource mapping of the current delivery system through strategic data collection and analysis.
 - Improving inter-agency collaboration through, for example, fund coordination, developing integrated case management, developing effective inter-agency agreements and methods to enforce them, and other strategies for cross-system integration.
 - Improving capacity where needed through additional investments in technology, personnel, training, etc.
 - Strengthening accountability by developing common performance measures and standards, data collection and reporting systems (scorecards) and suitable incentives for meeting those standards.
 - Empowering consumers through more individualized, community-based services and greater participation in governance bodies. This might include, among others, the use of vouchers, independent “navigators,” or website development.

- Institutionalizing the changes and sustained capacity to keep evolving through appropriate governance mechanisms.
- Targeting under-represented groups such as, among others, those with co-occurring mental illness or minority groups such as American Indians.

4. **Breadth, depth, influence, and high-level commitment of proposed state team. (30 pts)**

Applicants must provide compelling evidence and documentation that the state will dedicate the staff time and resources necessary to participate in and benefit from the project. Minimally, this includes a team leader dedicated to the project that reports to, or is designated by, the Governor. The core team should be composed of those that can best address the problems as defined in the narrative, that represent major stakeholders in this issue, and that have a committed interest in the population of young adults with disabilities in transition. Teams must include high-level officials that have authority over key programs and have established relationships with critical decision-makers.

Preference will be given to those states that include in their core teams the governor's policy advisor(s), recipient or beneficiary representatives, and Tribal governmental representation where warranted.

Confirm seven critical participants on the core team, and suggest up to three additional, state-funded participants. Comment on the composition and relevance of home-team members.

Each state application will be reviewed by a selection team designated by the NGA and the Department of Health and Human Services Office on Disability. Applications will be accepted until 5:00 p.m. (EST) on July 1, 2005, and should be sent to the following address:

Attention: Lindsey Woolsey
National Governors Association
Hall of the States
444 North Capitol Street, Suite 267
Washington, DC 20001-1512

Applications may also be sent by **Fax:** (202)624-5313 or by **E-mail:** lwoolsey@nga.org

If you have any questions, feel free to call NGA policy analyst Lindsey Woolsey at (202) 624-5366 or the above e-mail address.

Include with the complete application:

- A signed letter of commitment from the Governor.
- The name of the contact person responsible for the application along with his or her title, organization, address, phone and fax numbers, and e-mail address.