



The National Governors Association Center for Best Practices launched the Outdoor Recreation Learning Network in partnership with state outdoor recreation leaders in July 2019. This network helps governors and their outdoor recreation staff explore strategies to leverage their unique natural, cultural and historical resources to improve access to and help promote economic, health and environmental benefits.

Governors Care about the Outdoors

The U.S. outdoor recreation economy is significant. In 2017, nearly half of all Americans participated in outdoor recreation activities such as hiking, mountain biking, sailing, skiing, camping, fishing and hunting. The U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis estimates that the industry employed more than 5.2 million people in 2016, generated in excess of \$778 billion in economic impact and accounted for 2.2 percent of U.S. GDP. Inflation-adjusted (real) GDP for the outdoor recreation economy grew by 3.9 percent in 2017, faster than the 2.4 percent growth of the overall U.S. economy. Beyond the manufacture and sale of outdoor products, outdoor recreation is an important economic multiplier. Outdoor recreation helps develop economies, increase rural prosperity, improve health outcomes, and promote environmental stewardship and responsible resource development. Governors across the country recognize the importance of this industry and are uniquely positioned to support its growth through state policies, programs and incentives.

In 2013, Governor Gary Herbert of Utah launched the first U.S. state outdoor recreation office to support and promote outdoor recreation and implement an outdoor recreation strategic plan. Now 15 more states have launched similar efforts and other states are considering them. These initiatives are led by a mix of governors' advisors, state offices, commissions and councils, located in governors' offices or various state agencies. While they may be housed in a department that oversees economic development, tourism or natural resource management, the initiatives cut across these and other topics. In 2017, state outdoor recreation directors created an ad hoc group to support the sharing of best practices. As momentum built and there was a need to institutionalize their strategies, state outdoor recreation officials approached NGA to serve as a convener and assist in thought leadership.

About the Outdoor Recreation Learning Network

Through the Outdoor Recreation Learning Network, NGA convenes state leaders of outdoor recreation efforts from across the country. Participants are designated by their governor's office and include governors' office staff and officials from departments such as commerce, environment, natural resources, tourism and economic development who may be designated as a state outdoor recreation director. Participants include signatories to the [Outdoor Recreation Industry Confluence Accords](#) that embody 12 best-practice principles that help guide state efforts.

The network uses peer-to-peer exchanges, research and dialogue to highlight how states can best advance outdoor recreation and explore issues related to conservation, stewardship, education, workforce training, economic development, infrastructure, equity, inclusion, public health and wellness. It also provides insights into federal developments and related impacts, opportunities and resources for states. The effort harkens back to the founding of the National Governors Association when, in 1908, President Theodore Roosevelt hosted the first meeting of the nation's governors at the White House to discuss conserving America's natural resources that led to the creation of the NGA.



Activities

Activities of the learning network will include hosting monthly calls with states and quarterly webinars with outside experts, convening biannual gatherings of outdoor recreation officials, and maintaining an online repository of data and supporting documents that helps share best practices and showcase state initiatives.

Outdoor Recreation State Check-Ins (Monthly)

NGA hosts monthly calls with learning network participants. These sessions focus on peer-to-peer exchanges that highlight new developments and lessons learned, provide a forum for group discussion, and help states develop new strategies.

Outdoor Recreation Webinars (Quarterly)

NGA hosts quarterly webinars based on topics suggested by learning network participants. These sessions invite experts from the research organizations, academia, federal government and the private sector to share updates and discuss emerging issues.

Outdoor Recreation Summits (Biannually)

NGA convenes two summits each year to gather leaders on outdoor recreation from the public and private sectors to discuss state policy ideas, learn about best practices and identify opportunities for collaboration to advance outdoor recreation.

Repository of Outdoor Recreation Information (Ongoing)

NGA maintains an online repository of outdoor recreation information and state best practices. The repository includes governors' executive orders, governors' task force reports, sample legislation, the Outdoor Recreation Industry Confluence Accords, research papers and other documents.

Sponsors and Support

The founding sponsors of the Learning Network include REI Co-op, the Outdoor Industry Association and the Outdoor Recreation Roundtable. In addition to providing thought leadership, the sponsors help support NGA staff time and travel and meeting expenses for state officials.

About NGA Solutions: The Center for Best Practices

The NGA Center for Best Practices works with governors and their staffs to identify innovative solutions to today's most pressing public policy challenges. It is the only research and development organization that directly serves the nation's governors. The NGA Center has five divisions. The Energy, Infrastructure and Environment division (EIE) leads the Outdoor Recreation Learning Network and engages other elements of NGA on health, workforce and economic development, among other issues. For more information, please email: outdoors@nga.org.