



NGA Workforce Innovation Fund & Workforce Innovation Network: Request for State Proposals

Overview

Purpose: The National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center), in partnership with the Cognizant U.S. Foundation, is launching the Workforce Innovation Fund and Workforce Innovation Network (NGA WIN) to help states respond to COVID-19 impacts on the labor market and help them improve employment and workforce outcomes. The first round of grants from the Workforce Innovation Fund will support technical assistance for up to twelve states on rapidly connecting unemployed jobseekers to essential support services, work or training via people-centered, coordinated-service delivery models. Potential focus areas include regulatory reform, aligning program quality measures, leveraging the adoption and implementation of technology and data exchange, and developing new communities of practice with local providers. The NGA Center will engage staff and subject matter experts to provide targeted technical assistance to Workforce Innovation Fund grantees over a five-month period beginning in March 2021. States not selected as Workforce Innovation Fund grantees or those not interested in applying for a grant will be eligible for membership in the Workforce Innovation Network, with access to a limited set of peer learning opportunities.

Project start/end dates: March 1 – July 31, 2021

Eligibility: This opportunity is open to all U.S. states, commonwealths, and territories in good standing with NGA.

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Interested Parties' Webinar & Information Session: January 19, 2021 at 3:00 PM ET
To participate in this optional webinar, please register [here](#).

Proposals due: Thursday, February 11, 2021, 5:00 PM Eastern time. Only one proposal per state will be considered and must be received from, or with the full support of, the Governor's office. Please see below for further submission requirements.

State selection announcement: On or before March 15, 2021. Representatives from the selected states will be required to attend a cross-state launch meeting in early March 2021.

Assistance Available to State Awardees: Workforce Innovation Fund grantees will be awarded Network membership and will receive:

- Up to \$100,000 in direct funding to support personnel and project coordination;

- Support in developing a state action plan and policy recommendations to increase employment and deliver stronger workforce outcomes by rapidly connecting unemployed jobseekers to essential support services, work or training via coordinated-service delivery models;
- Virtual or in-person site visits and regular coaching calls from NGA Center staff, as well as with national experts and consultants to meet individual state needs and priorities;
- Access to other NGA WIN states and organizations to identify best practices and share lessons learned on innovations across the education and workforce development system, including, but not limited to, open-source digital navigation and data tools to improve social service delivery; and
- Ongoing engagement and participation in NGA WIN activities throughout the life of the Network, including the receipt of resources and invitation to participate in milestone convenings.

States not selected to receive grants from the Workforce Innovation Fund, or those not seeking a grant but interested in connecting with other states will have an opportunity to join the Network as non-grantee members to benefit from limited peer learning opportunities. These opportunities may include periodic virtual learning events and access to written resources during the grant period. Workforce Innovation Fund grantee states as well as states who join the Network but do not receive grants will be recognized via public announcement and on a project website.

Expected Outcomes for Workforce Innovation Fund Grantees:

- Greater capacity to identify and address challenges faced by jobseekers when entering or participating in the workforce development system.
- A state action plan to rapidly connect unemployed jobseekers to essential support services, work or training via people-centered, coordinated-service delivery models.
- A strategy to improve digital access to community and government programs, including the use of digital navigation tools and expansion of cross-program training for state and community service providers.
- Increased capacity to identify and pursue policy or programmatic changes, including executive orders, pilot programs, or funding strategies, that scale state-identified solutions.
- Written resource(s) documenting state innovations and emerging best practices.
- Connections with and resources from NGA's partners, including corporate partners and national nonprofit organizations, as relevant to each state's goals and action plan(s).

NGA Workforce Innovation Fund & Workforce Innovation Network

Founded in 1908, the National Governors Association (NGA) is the nonpartisan organization of the nation's 55 Governors. Through NGA, Governors share best practices, address issues of national and state interest and share innovative solutions to improve state government and support the principles of federalism. The Center for Best Practices (NGA Center), the research and development arm of NGA, provides opportunities for Governors' staff to learn about promising practices and develop innovative solutions in various areas of public policy. The NGA Center Workforce Development & Economic Policy Program, which will be leading this project, provides technical assistance across a range of issues including reducing barriers to economic participation, fostering economic dynamism and job growth, and providing training and employment opportunities that support employers' talent needs and lead to family-sustaining careers.

Background and Overview

The pace of recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic remains highly uncertain and highly uneven, with certain sectors and population groups experiencing substantial hardship while others have experienced few impacts. Workers with relatively high pre-pandemic wages and education have generally fared well, while families and communities with higher rates of unemployment and poverty before the crisis now face deep and enduring economic challenges. Without bold intervention, these trends pose a substantial threat to families and to our nation's long-term economic trajectory.

Today's crisis also presents an extraordinary opportunity to close widening disparities and advance positive transformations across the economy and the workforce. Addressing the vulnerabilities this crisis has exposed will require not only new resources, but collaborative problem solving by governmental leaders in partnership with business and civic communities, who together will determine the speed and inclusivity of recovery. In this environment, aligning workforce and supportive services programs will become an increasingly important part of reimagining our post-pandemic economic future.

Governors have already begun to address high unemployment with new policies and practices that more rapidly connect jobseekers and the underemployed with essential services. It is critical, however, that states provide services via a focused and coordinated system that is easy to use, comprehensively assesses a person's needs and connects them with the right services, and tracks outcomes over time. Comprehensive, coordinated service delivery not only improves jobseeker outcomes, but also enhances states' ability to collect and analyze data, improves accountability toward shared goals, and mitigates duplication of efforts.

Governors and senior state officials play a critical role in shaping these coordinated systems. However, due to the unprecedented number of job seekers—many of whom are new to the workforce development system, implementing this strategy remains an acute challenge. Failing to learn from and scale innovative solutions launched during the pandemic response will undermine this opportunity to transform workforce service delivery and ultimately improve economic outcomes for individuals and families.

To help states develop and implement near-term innovation and longer-term strategy to prepare the workforce for a post-COVID economy, the NGA Center's Workforce Development & Economic Policy program is launching the NGA Workforce Innovation Fund and Workforce Innovation Network (NGA WIN). NGA WIN will serve as a bipartisan learning and action collaborative for state leaders committed to building an inclusive and resilient workforce.

NGA WIN Activities and Grantee State Commitments

The success of Workforce Innovation Fund grantees and the NGA Workforce Innovation Network (NGA WIN) requires sustained commitment and active participation from grantees. State teams will collaborate across workforce development systems, human services systems, and industry partners to assess and improve coordinated service delivery with the aim of connecting jobseekers with essential services, work or training as quickly and effectively as possible. Each grantee must undertake the following activities throughout the grant period that will help achieve the project objectives:

- Participate in convenings with NGA Center staff and relevant Network Advisors, including at least two virtual or in-person team site visits, two cross-state Network meetings, and monthly one-on-one calls with NGA Center staff.
- Identify and gather available data, and/or conduct a data gap analysis to understand the barriers facing jobseekers in connecting to work and accessing essential support services, including specific challenges related to digital access and inclusion.
- Complete and submit to the NGA Center a strategic vision and state action plan that includes goals to pilot or scale strategies that will rapidly connect unemployed jobseekers to essential support services, work or training via people-centered, coordinated-service delivery models. States will have the opportunity to explore topics such as:
 - How the state plans to align quality measures across programs.
 - How the state will improve current data infrastructure practices, data sharing and data use for improved service delivery.
 - How the state will engage the business community in identifying and implementing steps to rapidly connect jobseekers to high-quality employment.
 - How the state will address equity and inclusion in efforts to improve employment and workforce outcomes, particularly for populations that have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19.
 - How the state will incorporate technology and digital navigation tools to increase access to, and outcomes of, virtual and in-person employment and support services.
- Submit a brief final report within one month of the close of the grant period summarizing the work performed, the extent to which the work met desired outcomes, lessons learned, and next steps to continue the work beyond the grant period. This final report must also include information on funds obligated or spent from the grant, with the expectation that all funds will either be expended or obligated by the end of the grant period. More details and a report template will be provided to grantees at least one month prior to the close of the grant period.

Proposal Process

Eligibility: This opportunity is open to all U.S. states, commonwealths, and territories in good standing with NGA.

Interested Parties' Webinar and Information Session: Tuesday, January 19, 2021 at 3:00 PM ET. To participate in this optional webinar, please register [here](#).

Submission Information: All proposals must be received by **Thursday, February 11, 2021 at 5:00 PM Eastern time**. Only one proposal per state will be considered. The proposal must be received from the Governor's office or must contain evidence of the full support of the Governor's office. Please assemble all proposal materials (described in detail below) into *one PDF* document and email it to Shanelle Oliver, Policy Coordinator for the Workforce Development & Economic Policy Program, at soliver@nga.org.

Selection of States: The NGA Center will review state applications and select up to twelve states to receive grants and participate in the targeted activities described above. The selection criteria may include the following (please see further below for more information on the selection criteria):

- The state's goals for participating in NGA WIN;
- The state's current level of involvement in coordinated-service delivery activities, including but not limited to virtual service delivery; and
- The team members the state proposed to include (which may be adapted at a later date).

Timeline: The following is a tentative schedule for NGA WIN thru July 2021:

January 13, 12:00 PM ET	RFP released
January 19, 3:00 PM ET	Interested parties' webinar and information session
January 13 – February 11	NGA Center staff available to answer questions
February 11, 5:00 PM ET	State applications due; state selections will be shared with states by end of February
Early March	NGA Center publicly announces participating states
March 1 – July 31	Technical assistance and virtual or in-person site visits for grantees
March 10	NGA WIN kickoff virtual convening (all applicants save the date)
July Date TBD	NGA WIN final convening
August 31	State final reports due to NGA Center

Proposal Content and Selection Criteria

The following summarizes the required proposal content and scoring values assigned to each section for the selection process. Each proposal can receive up to 100 points. **The proposal narrative should not exceed eight pages** (excluding the cover sheet and letter of support from the Governor).

- **Cover Sheet (Required)**

The cover sheet should identify the state team leader's contact information, including his or her title, email address, telephone number and mailing address, as well as the state's fiscal agent. The cover sheet does not count toward the eight-page limit.

- **Letter of Support from Governor (Required) – 10 Points**

A letter of support from the Governor is required. The letter should state the Governor's interest in and desired outcomes for participation in NGA WIN and how those outcomes fit within the Governor's workforce and economic recovery agenda. The letter should identify who will be part of the state team (at least four, but no more than six members) and who will lead the team's efforts with the NGA Center. The team should include at least one representative from the Governor's office and state officials from relevant state agencies and community partners. (See more about recommended team composition under State Team Membership, below.) The letter of support from the Governor does not count toward the eight-page limit.

- **Context and Vision for Policy Change – 30 Points**

Describe the state context and the Governor's vision for more rapidly connecting unemployed jobseekers to essential support services, work or training via people-centered, coordinated-service delivery models. This description should include:

- An overview of the current challenges jobseekers and workers face when accessing employment services and essential support services, including key barriers in coordinated-service delivery that the state wishes to address;
- A description of the Governor's top workforce and economic recovery policy priorities and how this proposal aligns with them. If applicable, please also describe the Governor's previous efforts to improve coordinated-service delivery for unemployed jobseekers and workers; and
- A brief overview of partners and technical assistance providers engaged in workforce and economic recovery in your state. For example, if your state has partnered with other national organizations, businesses or services to design and implement policy or programmatic innovations, please include a brief summary of these partnerships and how they contribute to the state's overall recovery agenda.

- **Goals and Strategies – 40 Points**

Describe how your state will use the technical assistance (TA) provided by NGA WIN to develop and implement the Governor's priorities for rapidly connecting unemployed jobseekers to essential support services, work or training via people-centered, coordinated-service delivery models, including:

- An overview of the state's goal(s) for this project;
- A brief description of the proposed strategies and activities the state team will undertake to reach these goals, and TA support needed to carry out these activities;

- An overview of the innovations that the state has implemented in response to COVID-19 to coordinate service delivery, and state partners engaged in this work;
- A description of proposed indicators of progress toward the state's goals; and
- A description of how the state proposes to use the funds.

- **State Team Leadership and Membership – 20 Points**

Applicants must include the names and positions of their state team members, which may include at least four, but no more than six, representatives that will develop and carry out the state's plans. Teams will be evaluated on the comprehensiveness of the entities represented by their proposed team members and each team members' ability to influence state policy and practice.

Briefly discuss the composition of the team, experience of its members, how they were chosen and how they will contribute to the state's work. Please identify the intended team lead/point of contact. Please note states will have an opportunity to revise team membership if needed when they receive an award.

Required team members include:

- A representative from the Governor's office.
- A representative of the state's workforce system responsible for overseeing relevant programs and services.
- A representative of the state's human services agency or equivalent department responsible for overseeing relevant programs and services.

The team may also include representatives of other relevant state agencies; a non-governmental leader, such as an industry leader, with a role or ability to support the state in achieving its goals; a state legislator or other elected official; or others as the Governor's office and team lead determine relevant to the state's goals.