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**Advancing Whole Student Support Through Improved Mental Health and Wellness Learning Community**

**Request for Proposals (RFP)**

**Summary of Opportunity**

Inadequate campus support for student mental health, such as student isolation and difficulty accessing care, extreme wait times, understaffing, and underfunding, predates 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic, however, exacerbated preexisting conditions that failed to adequately support students. The impacts have been particularly pronounced for students of color and students from low-income circumstances. Systemic inequities, mental health disparities (related to both additive stressors and lower access to care), and higher levels of harassment and violence, combined with (and exacerbated by) pandemic trauma and the aftermath have rendered these populations more vulnerable to mental health challenges and suicide risk than peers from less marginalized groups.

Five states will be selected for a planning grant of $25,000 to facilitate their participation in the inaugural Student Mental Health and Wellness Learning Community from 2023-2024. A key objective of this project is to develop and implement state- and system-wide policy recommendations. These recommendations will focus on collaborative strategies and innovative solutions aimed at bolstering institutions' ability to effectively promote and support student mental health, thereby fostering educational success and overall life fulfillment.

More comprehensive background information should be reviewed on the [project website](https://sheeo.org/project/student-mental-health/) before your team addresses the RFP questions that follow.

**Proposal Requirements**

The activities of this learning community will center on the following topical areas over the next year:

* Coalition building and making the return on investment (ROI) case for investments in mental health,
* Aligning student mental health to state higher education priorities,
* Planning for equity-based, systems-scaled student mental health projects, and
* Sustainable budgeting and productive funding models.

The questions within this RFP are all aligned with these topics. Please review the [RFP selection process](https://sheeo.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Student-Mental-Health-RFP-Selection-Process.pdf) details and respond thoroughly to the questions below to put forward the best possible proposal.

State teams should download this document, type directly in it to complete the RFP responses, and then save as a single PDF of their complete RFP responses and submit it to Sakshee Chawla ([schawla@sheeo.org](mailto:schawla@sheeo.org)) no later than **4 PM ET** on **Tuesday, September 26, 2023** (NOTE: Deadline has been extended from September 22). Selected states will be notified of their award on or before **Friday, September 29, 2023**.

***Coalition Building and Making the ROI Case***

A successful state-driven effort to support student mental health will require a coalition of organizations with a shared vision for intensive high-impact change that, if strategically scaled, has the potential to curtail the student mental health crisis that was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. This section requests details on the individuals and organizations that will lead the coalition building in your state toward the development and implementation of state- and system-wide policy recommendations that advance student mental health care. To that end, please identify the individuals and their affiliated organizations (no more than seven) that will act as your state’s SHEEO student mental health coalition core planning team and respond to the questions that follow regarding organizational roles and prior working history.

Daniel Eisenberg from the Health Minds Network developed an [ROI calculator](https://umich.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6xN9QUSlFtgtRQh) for college mental health services and programs. This tool can be used by institutions to calculate the economic returns on services or programs that improve mental health in their student populations. This tool may be useful as you identify coalition-building strategies in your state and collaborate with other stakeholders to speak to the ROI associated with investments in mental health care.

***State Planning Team***

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| **Name** | **Title & Organization** | **Email** |
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1. If not the state SHEEO agency, please identify which coalition organization will serve as coordinating lead and agrees to act as fiduciary for the subgrant.
2. List each partner organization represented on your state planning team and describe their role in your coalition building toward the development and implementation of state- and system-wide policy recommendations that advance student mental health.
   1. SHEEO organization
   2. Partner organization(s)
      1. List and description
3. Have these organizations collaborated on large-scale student success and/or student health or mental health projects before? If so, please briefly describe past or current projects, outcomes, and scale.
4. Are there other organizations you may engage with as your coalition builds momentum?
5. How is your coalition thinking about defining ROI (return on investment) to garner statewide and system-wide support for this work? Please comment on your plans to communicate ROI for individual campuses and within the larger state context.
6. In addition to engaging with our planned learning community and communities of practice activities throughout the project, please describe what activities your state planning team is considering to advance coalition building, plan strategically for a larger systems-scaled project, and pursue funding for such work after this initial planning grant period. Please discuss how you plan to communicate about this work among various stakeholders and whether you will gather college leaders to further consider investments in student health as part of your efforts.

***Aligning Student Mental Health to State Higher Education Priorities***

Your student mental health project will be most successful if aligned with current state higher education priorities. Please respond to the questions below to help us understand how student mental health care fits into existing state priorities, particularly any complementary programs or initiatives that may provide existing infrastructure upon which to build.

1. Please discuss any history of student physical or mental health efforts or discussion of such efforts in your state to date. If there is no such history, please comment on why now is the time to pursue this opportunity for high-impact change.
2. How does your coalition’s interest in student mental health align with state higher education priorities and goals? Please discuss short- and long-term outcomes you would like to see from a potential replication project.
3. Describe any complementary programs or initiatives in the state that may provide the existing infrastructure upon which to build a student mental health pilot (e.g., existing state scholarship and/or student support programs; depression screening; free therapy).

***Planning for Equity-Based, Systems-Scaled Student Mental Health Projects***

The Jed Foundation (JED), our partner for the project, advocates for emotional health and prevents suicide among the nation’s teens and young adults by giving them the skills and support they need to thrive. SHEEO is committed to equitable advancement of supporting the whole student through improved mental health through advancing policy, practice, and advocacy for state higher education leaders. In partnership, SHEEO and JED embrace a central focus on equity as the imperative for this work. This project will support state teams in naming equity gaps and planning for state- and system-wide policy recommendations that enhance institutions’ capacity to support student mental health for educational and life success.

1. How does your state measure success in the design, implementation, and scale of student mental health projects that create a community of care, thereby fostering educational success and overall life fulfillment?
2. How does your state engage with different stakeholders (either at the state, local, or institutional level) to design a community of care that promotes and supports student mental health, thereby fostering educational success and overall life fulfillment?
3. What steps does your state undertake to identify, measure, and ameliorate equity gaps in student access to mental health services? What are some privacy and confidentiality challenges that your state faces regarding student data?
4. Given that the focus of this work is closing access gaps for underserved and underrepresented students, which two- and four-year institutions in your state make sense to invite in our initial work? Please list the name of the institutions and share relevant data disaggregated by racial/ethnic subgroups.

***Sustainable Budgeting and Productive Funding Models***

While initiating a student mental health project often involves short-term funding prospects, sustaining and scaling programs that have lasting impact requires a longer-term investment from states, institutions, and other funding partners. The technical assistance activities planned for the learning community will address budgeting and fund development further. Responses to the questions below will help us understand your early thoughts on funding systems-scaled student mental health projects in both the short and long term.

1. What are your current funding prospects?
2. Please comment first on short-term contingent funding opportunities to support the development of this work.
3. What thoughts do you have on more sustainable longer-term funding prospects you might pursue to maintain and scale your state’s student health programs?
4. Do you intend to pursue federal grant opportunities or private funding to support this work? Please share any funding opportunities you may be considering to support this work.
5. Are there any statewide efforts or correlated state policy work in progress to advance whole-student support through improved mental health care efforts across colleges/universities (e.g., existing state grants, special gubernatorial fund lines, opportunities for state appropriation request)?

**Planning Grant Budget**  
The $25,000 planning grant associated with this project will support your state planning team’s work on improvements in student mental health care. Please propose a budget for your planning grant below. While other travel expenses may be included, travel to the in-person learning community event should not be budgeted in your subgrant as separate grant funds will reimburse state teams for travel expenses associated with this convening.

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| **$25,000** | **Total** | |

**Questions**

Please refer RFP questions to the contacts below no later than **Tuesday, September 26, 2023**.

**Contacts**

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Senior Policy Analyst

State Higher Education Executive Officers Association (SHEEO)  
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State Higher Education Executive Officers Association (SHEEO)

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