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National Skills Coalition's Supportive Services Academy Application

National Skills Coalition is launching a Supportive Services Academy to support state teams in advancing state policies that expand access to supportive services so that people with lower incomes can complete education and training programs. Applications for participation are currently being accepted and are due November 1, 2019. **Priority in team selection will be given to SkillSPAN partners.** The Academy will officially launch in December 2019 and run until December 2020.

I. Why a Supportive Services Academy?

The cost of participating in skills training goes beyond tuition or costs of a training course and includes non-tuition costs like transportation, childcare, books and supplies, equipment, etc. For too many people with low incomes – particularly people balancing the costs of training with family expenses – those costs present huge obstacles to accessing and completing a postsecondary training program.

Federal human services programs – e.g., Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) – can provide these critical supportive services. However, they are often underutilized by states or not used in alignment with postsecondary and workforce training efforts.

Changing this paradigm can help more people with low incomes complete training that leads to careers while helping address the skilled worker shortage. Supportive services can also advance racial equity by providing more financial resources to workers of color who, due to systemic racism, have higher rates of poverty and lower average earnings. In particular this dearth of financial resources leaves today's community college students – who are more likely to be Black and Latinx – with higher rates of food and housing insecurity.

National Skills Coalition believes that supports like food, transportation, childcare, and cash assistance are essential to student completion, closing racial gaps in credential attainment, reaching state attainment goals and closing the skills gap. National Skills Coalition has issued numerous resources identifying key policies that states can adopt to strengthen access to non-tuition supports, including our [Broadening the Apprenticeship Pipeline](#) brief highlighting the importance of childcare, [Building Skills through SNAP Employment and Training: Lessons Learned in Four States](#), and the [Arkansas Career Pathways Initiative: How TANF can support skills for low-income parents, and how policymakers can help.](#)



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II. What is the Supportive Services Academy?

NSC's Supportive Service Academy will consist of multi-stakeholder teams led by an organization engaged in policy advocacy and comprised of 3-5 members focused on developing and advancing the policy proposals below. The Academy will include ongoing support from NSC, opportunities to learn from subject matter experts and practitioner experts from our coalition, as well as peer learning among Academy teams.

NSC's Supportive Services Academy will focus on helping state teams advance policies that expand access to education and training supportive services in the following areas:

- State policy agendas for increasing access to **childcare** for people participating in education, training, and/or work-based learning. These state policy agendas could expand access to childcare assistance, which can help cover the costs of childcare for parents and caregivers. Childcare assistance can be funded in several ways, including through the Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG), SNAP Employment and Training Programs (SNAP E&T) and TANF.
- **Career pathways** programs that include career navigation and supports for childcare and transportation, financed with state higher education funding, TANF and/or SNAP E&T funding. Career pathways use career coaches who connect people with the right training and supportive services, expedite training, and provide in-demand "stackable" credentials. TANF and SNAP E&T funds can be used to provide wraparound supportive services for adults so that they can complete their college credentials within in-demand fields.
- State-established support funds to provide supportive services such as coaching, service coordination, childcare, transportation, and other assistance to people with low incomes as they prepare for and succeed in **work-based learning**. Work-based learning support funds assist adults as they transition into employer-sponsored apprenticeship and work-based learning opportunities. They also help to diversify pipelines to work-based learning opportunities by providing critical support.
- Policies that **expand access to SNAP for students** participating in postsecondary education. Federal SNAP rules explicitly exclude any students enrolled in college at least half time. However, there exceptions to this rule and levers states can pull to expand access to SNAP, including deeming career-oriented postsecondary programs as equivalent to employment and training programs and disregarding state-funded financial aid as income when determining SNAP eligibility.
- Establishment and/or expansion of **skills-focused SNAP E&T and/or TANF** programs. Both SNAP E&T and TANF can provide education and training to recipients of SNAP food assistance and TANF cash assistance respectively. "Skills-based" SNAP E&T and



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TANF programs utilize partnerships with community colleges, community-based organizations, employers and others so that participants can earn postsecondary credentials with value in the labor market.

- **Any other policy area** that helps students and workers to address the non-tuition costs of training so that they can secure in-demand skills and postsecondary credentials. *Academy teams have the flexibility to develop and promote specific policy proposals that expand access to supportive services and work in the unique context of their individual state.*

Supportive Services Academy teams will be required to **apply a racial equity lens** to their work advancing policies in these areas. Applying this lens can include activities such as utilizing a [Racial Equity Impact Assessment](#) for proposals, engaging stakeholders from different racial and ethnic groups and organizations serving communities of color, as well as structuring policy proposals to maximize racially equitable impacts.

III. What Will the Academy Involve?

Financial grants for participation. NSC will provide financial grants of \$10,000 per state to organizations acting as team leads. These grants will support organizations' participation in the academy as well as any expenses involved in hosting in-state meetings. Grant monies can be used to educate policymakers on the chosen issues (e.g., developing/designing briefs or collateral, hosting in-state meetings), but not to intervene in any election or support or oppose any political party or candidate for public office or engage in any lobbying.

Developing and implementing a plan for advancing a supportive service policy. Over the course of the Academy, each state team will develop a supportive services policy proposal for their state, based on the general policy areas listed above in Section II, and will implement a strategy for advancing their policy proposal with state policymakers or agencies. "Policies" can include state legislation, an executive order, a budget item, or a policy requirement or guidance adopted by a state agency.

Direct assistance with development of policy proposal and advancement strategy. NSC staff will provide regular support to state teams to help them develop a specific policy proposal and identify action steps for getting it adopted. NSC will provide assistance to state teams in crafting, messaging, and advancing their policy asks, along with resources that analyze and highlight innovation happening at the state level that can inform other states (e.g., existing fact sheets, reports, and articles). NSC will also connect academy teams to leaders from the field and subject-matter experts in specific supportive services policies as needed. NSC staff will be available on a monthly basis for check-in calls or pre-scheduled in-person meetings. (See anticipated meeting schedule below.)

If Academy teams are successful in getting state human services, workforce, and higher education agencies to adopt their policy proposals, NSC will offer additional technical



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assistance on implementation (e.g., identifying funding transfer policies, necessary memorandums of understanding, etc.).

Meetings and Opportunities for Cross-State Learning. NSC will provide at least three opportunities for in-person cross-state presentations and learning. (Please see tentative schedule below.) All team members are expected to attend. For in-person meetings, NSC will cover the cost of attendance for team leads and up to four additional team members. At these meetings participants will learn about fellow academy members' areas of focus, build relationships, identify shared challenges, and share lessons learned from successful efforts to expand access to supportive services programs, including effective messaging and tactics. States could also learn from subject matter experts and leaders in the field about effective supportive services policies employed by states outside of the Academy.

While exact dates for all meetings are yet to be selected, the Academy and anticipated meeting schedule is as follows:

- November 1, 2019: Applications Due
- December 2019: Academy participants announced
- March 2020: In-person kick-off meeting
- June 2020: In-person meeting
- October 2020: In-person closing meeting as part of NSC's Skills in the States Forum
- December 2020: Final report-out on projects

Only technical assistance for Academy teams successful in getting state human services, workforce, or higher education agencies to adopt their policy proposals will extend through the first quarter of 2021.

IV. Who Should Apply?

Academy team leads should be organizations with the capacity, expertise, and willingness to analyze state policy landscape and work with agency leaders and elected officials to impact policy change. Team leads should build teams that consist of at least three to five people from different organizations statewide. Team members cannot be from the same organization. Teams can include representatives from community-based organizations, policy research and advocacy organizations, community and technical colleges, state and local government agencies, workforce intermediaries, labor organizations, business representatives, chambers of commerce, other organizations working on behalf of students and/or workers of color and other organizations serving or advocating on the behalf of low-income communities. Please note that because of the Academy's focus on the advancement of state policy, practitioners serving on teams should be prepared to advocate for a particular policy position.



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Priority in team selection will be given to SkillSPAN partners. NSC will select states to attain geographic and political diversity as well.

Teams should meet the following criteria:

- A lead team member/organization engaged in policy advocacy with the capacity to be the point of contact with NSC and organize team meetings
- Agreement on which supportive services policy issue the team will work on as part of the Academy. Policy issues must be aligned with NSC's list of policy priorities included in Section II of this announcement.
- Commitment to ensuring that the chosen policy goal will advance access to and completion of postsecondary training and/or credentials for workers of color.
- One or more members with state policy advocacy experience on the chosen supportive service, including knowledge of the state policy landscape for that service
- One or more members with knowledge of their state's workforce development and postsecondary training policy landscape
- One or more members that serves or advocates on the behalf of low-income communities and students and/or workers of color
- All team members should have the ability to commit to attending all in-person or virtual meetings (travel and lodging for in-person meetings to be covered by NSC) and the ability to represent their organization's position on policy issues and in advocacy activities

V. How to Apply

Teams should work together to submit an application no longer than 5 pages in length that includes answers to the following questions:

1. What supportive services policy are you most interested in pursuing in your state and why? Please refer to the list in Section II.
2. How do you plan to ensure that your chosen supportive services policy goal will advance access to and completion of postsecondary training and/or credentials for workers of color?
3. What are the opportunities and challenges you expect to encounter at the state level on this issue?
4. What type of help does your team specifically hope to gain from NSC?
5. How does your team meet the criteria described in Section IV?
6. Do any of your team members have a relationship with state human services agency leadership? If so, please describe that relationship.



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7. What is your plan for working together to develop and execute an advocacy strategy?
E.g., individual roles and responsibilities, key milestones.
8. Who is the lead team member who will be the point of contact for NSC and responsible for convening conversations between academy meetings?
9. Separately, please include bios for each team member, including relevant state policy and advocacy experience (does not count towards 3-page limit).

*Applications should be submitted by **November 1, 2019**.* Please send application materials to Michael Richardson, State Network Manager, at MichaelR@nationalskillscoalition.org.