



**Request for Proposals**  
**Youth-to-Youth Peer Support with specific focus on BIPOC and 2SLGBTQ+ Youth**

Proposals are due no later than September 1, 2023, 5:00 p.m. Mountain Time.

**Overview**

Youth see things that adults do not or cannot. They can see their peers struggling well before adults and provide different types of supports than an adult might. We want more youth to benefit from their interactions and increase the number of trained BIPOC and 2SLGBTQ+ youth peer supporters in Denver, Adams, Arapahoe, and Jefferson counties. It can be hard for youth to access peer supporters who identify the same or similar way that they do and sometimes accessing peers in their own schools or community is a barrier to getting help. It is no secret that BIPOC and 2SLGBTQ+ youth struggle with their wellbeing more than their cis-het white peers because of systemic racism and homophobia, and we need to strengthen supports for youth with these identities. What if we could create a network of BIPOC and 2SLGBTQ+ youth peer supporters throughout the metro area so that youth could have a breadth and depth of other young people to turn to if they are anything but fine? We believe in the power of this youth-to-youth peer support, and the research behind its impact is strong (see the appendix for more details).

We envision a world in which youth peer supporters receive the training and credentials that position them, while still in school, to easily enter careers or postsecondary learning in the behavioral health field. We further envision a world in which public payers - in particular, Medicaid would make these services reimbursable and thereby beneficial both to nonprofits and to youth themselves.

For these reasons, Gary Community Ventures is initiating a youth-to-youth BIPOC and 2SLGBTQ+-focused peer support learning cohort with a focus on growing peer support programs.

**Description**

Gary is seeking to identify a cohort of approximately 4-5 youth-to-youth peer support programs, organizations, or agencies serving Denver, Jefferson, Adams, and/or Arapahoe counties, with a particular focus on those that support BIPOC and/or 2SLGBTQ+ youth. Applicant organizations will be interested in learning from and collaborating with other peer support organizations as well as expanding their programming.

Programs, organizations, or agencies of any size that effectively serve 2SLGBTQ+ and/or BIPOC youth and operate either in the community or in schools who want to grow and enhance their ability to serve these youth populations should apply. Organizations should also be interested in exploring, updating, and/or implementing meaningful credentials for youth peer supporters that will lead to careers in behavioral health or other in-demand careers.

### **Estimated Cohort Time Commitment**

- Up to 5 days of in-person cohort meetings in Denver
- 1 monthly virtual call with Gary staff
- Work to enhance and grow program services, including credential creation/expansion in between in-person meetings
- End of term reporting

### **Cohort Objectives and Work**

We are looking for proposals that can be executed over a 13-month period (December 2023 through December 2024) and will achieve the following objectives:

- **Cohort Collaboration and Shared Learning:** During the grant term, grantees will learn from each other and from local and national experts to do two things: 1) further their program impact and 2) inform a long-term policy and systems environment that supports their programming by identifying barriers to scale and public payers for this work. Precise shared learning goals will be co-developed with the cohort based on cohort needs.
- **Achieve Greater Scale:** During the grant term, grantees will determine a path to and plan for responsible growth to serve more (number dependent on program) youth with a focus on BIPOC and/or 2SLGBTQ+ youth, that can be planned for and the beginning phases initiated in year 1.

During the cohort's term, Gary Community Ventures and consultants will be doing concurrent research, to be shared with and informed by grantees, to determine:

- **Credentials:** The peer support training or credentials that could stack to be eligible to become a Behavioral Health Aide or another professional behavioral health role and/or help youth achieve postsecondary program credits.
- **Public Funding:** The training/credentials youth can get before they turn 18 that would allow their peer support work to be billable or reimbursable by Medicaid individually or through an organization.
- **Network:** Potential of a BIPOC/2SLGBTQ+ youth peer support network for the Denver Metro Area or some other connectivity structure among youth peer supporters/ organizations to increase BIPOC and 2SLGBTQ+ youth access to support.

### **Budget Requirements**

Based on these objectives, the RFP Budget should include:

1. **Participation in the cohort:** We ask that 1-2 staff (ideally 1 organizational decision maker and 1 program expert) commit to attending all events and calls for continuity and

to strengthen connection with other cohort members. You may include the costs associated with their participation in your budget.

2. **Program enhancement and/or growth costs** Detail the costs associated with your plans to enhance and/or grow your program services over the next year. This could include, but is not limited to: staff support, staff training, materials, research, youth supports/stipends, other costs associated with peer training, etc. We want to learn more about how you envision growth and/or program enhancement.

### **Proposal Requirements**

We are looking for proposals that:

- Demonstrate the applicant's strong connection and focus on the BIPOC and 2SLGBTQ+ communities
- Serve youth in Denver, Arapahoe, Adams, and/or Jefferson counties
- Can articulate their youth-to-youth peer work and define impact and outcomes
- Prioritize active and meaningful youth involvement in program development, implementation, and evaluation
- Exhibit a willingness to take risks and innovate their programming
- Describe how they plan to expand/scale their program
- Describe their interest in participating in this cohort, including their interest in developing and/or expanding credentials and informing the potential creation of a youth peer support network

Priority will be given to proposals that:

- Are organizations led by BIPOC and/or 2SLGBTQ+ community members
- Incorporate active and engaged youth engagement and voice mechanisms
- Primarily serve BIPOC and/or 2SLGBTQ+ youth and their families
- Come from organizations that have not received funding from Gary in the past three years
- Foster long-term equity, justice, and opportunity for BIPOC and/or 2SLGBTQ+ youth within systems
- Have some youth-to-youth peer support training already in place (formal or informal)
- Are based in Colorado

*We will not consider funding proposals that:*

- Do not serve the target population in the specified communities
- Fail to engage the community and youth regularly and meaningfully
- Are traditional mentoring programs, such as adult/youth pairings or programs focused primarily on career or educational attainment

We typically do not fund:

- Capital expenses (buildings, vehicles, etc.)
- Solely sustaining current programming/operations
- Hiring of clinical staff

- Events or sponsorships

### **Grant Awards**

We anticipate awarding grants of up to \$60,000 for successful proposals. Please note that these grants are one-time awards, which we expect to be executed over one year.

### **Application**

To complete the online application and or obtain a copy of the application questions to share with your team, view the Application Process section of the [RFP landing page](#).

### **RFP Process**

Applications are due at 5:00 pm MT on September 1, 2023. Applications will be reviewed during the month of September. Finalists will be notified no later than October 4 and may be asked for additional information, which could include interviews and/or site visits. All applicants will be notified of final decisions by 5:00 pm MT October 20, 2023.

### **Definitions**

- Youth: 12-19 years old. This cohort would focus on middle and high school age youth.
- Peer: Youth would be able to define who they feel is a peer within their age range (i.e. middle school age youth would support other middle school age youth, high school youth would support other high school age youth).
- Peer Support: General, prevention-focused supports provided by trained youth peers. Peer Support, for the purpose of this RFP, could have elements of crisis, substance, and clinical training, but these should not be the focus of the program.
- BIPOC: Black, Indigenous, People of Color
- 2SLGBTQ+: Two Spirit, Lesbian, Gay Bisexual, Trans, Queer/Questioning, and other identities.
- Public Funding: As Gary is a sunseting organization, our goal is to support organizations in accessing permanent public funding streams. Public funding streams come from federal or state or local funds and are used for the public good.

### **Questions**

For questions regarding this RFP, please contact Sara Nadelman ([snadelman@garycommunity.org](mailto:snadelman@garycommunity.org))

### **Informational Webinar**

There will be an optional information webinar where you can learn more about the RFP and ask questions on August 10 at 11:00 am. Zoom link: <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/85201921454>

### **Office Hours**

Office hours are an optional opportunity to seek assistance and ask questions about the RFP. It will be held on: August 23rd at 3PM MT. Zoom link: <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/81847053154>



**Appendix:**  
**Evidence of need and power of youth-to-youth peer support programs**

Youth-to-youth peer support is well-documented to help not only young people in distress but also the individuals providing support.<sup>1</sup> Peer support programs equip young people with skills to help themselves and those around them. Youth are often in one of the best positions to assist their peers as they can identify signs of struggle, understand community issues, and notice warning signs before adults do.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, youth peer support programs in schools and communities contribute to the informal behavioral health workforce,<sup>3</sup> addressing a recognized need identified by Children's Hospital Colorado,<sup>4</sup> the Colorado Behavioral Health Administration,<sup>5</sup> and the U.S. Surgeon General.<sup>6</sup>

Further, we have a behavioral health workforce crisis not only in Colorado, but nationwide. In Colorado in 2022, nearly 40% of youth with major depression did not receive treatment.<sup>7</sup> Statewide, community mental health centers, one of the biggest sources of mental health care for people on Medicaid or who are experiencing homelessness, remain understaffed and many private providers are unable to accept Medicaid or low-income patients or are so poorly reimbursed by either Medicaid and/or private insurance that they are not accessible to those without means. We need to find creative and effective ways to expand the youth mental health workforce.

In partnership with providers, we are interested in demonstrating the value in 16+ youth-to-youth peer support training and credentialing. Our hope is to encourage more nonprofits to train, hire, and retain youth who want to gain skills before they exit high school, while financially benefiting the nonprofit and the young people. The Colorado Behavioral Health Administration wants to expand the peer support and other behavioral health professional workforce, and states and counties around the U.S. found creative ways to credential 16+ and 18+ youth to do peer support work that is eligible for Medicaid payment through nonprofit organizations.

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<sup>1</sup> ["You can kind of just feel the power behind what someone's saying": a participatory-realist evaluation of peer support for young people coping with complex mental health and substance use challenges | BMC Health Services Research](#)

<sup>2</sup> [The Contributing Role of Family, School, and Peer Supportive Relationships in Protecting the Mental Wellbeing of Children and Adolescents - PMC](#)

<sup>3</sup> Kaufman, L., Brooks, W., Bellinger, J., Steinley-Bumgarner, M., & Stevens-Manser, S. 2017. Peer Specialist Training and Certification Programs: National Overview 2016. Texas Institute for Excellence in Mental Health, School of Social Work, University of Texas at Austin.

<sup>4</sup> [CU Anschutz Medical Campus and the Colorado Behavioral Health Administration Announce Initiative to Increase Diversity in the Behavioral Health Workforce](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Colorado Behavioral Health Administration Strategic Plan 2022](#) or [Investing in the Peer Support Workforce.pdf](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Protecting Youth Mental Health: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Black Indigenous and People of Color \(BIPOC\) Mental Health Fact Sheet](#)