

The Milbank Memorial Fund's **Emerging Leaders Program (ELP)** is a 10-month leadership development program for early and mid-career legislative and executive branch state, large-county, or large-city government officials who are committed to improving the health of all people in their communities.

The program will provide participants with opportunities to:

- Develop practical, applied leadership skills and personal insights that will enhance their capacity to improve population health
- Partner with colleagues from states across the country who have different life experiences, professional expertise, and cultural norms than their own
- Expand their network of colleagues, both from within the cohort and the broader Milbank State Leadership Network
- Access and apply evidence, best practice, and experience to their work as leaders and health policy decision makers

Convened by Milbank Memorial Fund in partnership with a nationally recognized expert in leadership development, ELP sessions will feature guest faculty who bring experience and insight into state and local policymaking. **The Fund will invite up to 24 participants and cover all costs of sessions and materials, including three in-person meetings.**

Michelle Au, State Representative, Georgia



“What has been most valuable about the program is the cohort itself, meeting leaders who are deeply committed to this work and who have become a trusted sounding board. Learning how other states that are similarly situated are approaching shared challenges has been incredibly valuable.”

## Program Format

ELP participants will have an opportunity to gain insight into their leadership styles and preferences. Further, they will learn from nationally recognized leaders in state health policy, as well as expert trainers, on topics such as developing strategic priorities, addressing health disparities, building negotiation skills, and connecting across branches and with a broad range of partners.

ELP sessions will be highly interactive and will feature presentations, experiential learning exercises, and small group engagement. ELP participants will represent states, counties, and cities from across the nation and have unique opportunities for nonpartisan dialogue. Watch this [video](#) to hear from past Emerging Leaders on their experiences in the program.

Participants in ELP take part in a continuous learning cycle that features:

- three in-person meetings
- seven virtual sessions
- individual leadership assessments
- an optional mentorship program that connects cohort members with national experts
- connections to the Milbank State Leadership Network and population health resources

## Nomination & Selection Process

The Fund will select up to 24 participants for the 2026-2027 cohort. Participants can apply using the [online form](#). The process also requests that applicants submit a short letter of recommendation from a senior health leader in the state in which they work and a current resume. All materials must be submitted no later than **Friday, June 19, 2026**.

## Who is a strong ELP candidate?

Milbank Memorial Fund invites applications from professionals who have:

- An interest in expanding their health policy knowledge base and leadership skills
- A commitment to learning from and working with those with differing viewpoints and backgrounds
- Curiosity and enthusiasm that fosters engagement with others and sparks lively discussion
- A deep commitment to improving the health of all people in their communities and addressing health disparities
- Capacity to lead in a complicated and complex policy environment

ELP will be a good fit for:

- Legislators who are either newly elected or in the early years of their tenure, who serve on committees that have jurisdiction over health, human services, and related budget matters
- Executive branch staff of health and human services, public health, insurance, or Medicaid agencies who are responsible for direction of a major program or initiative

Renia Dotson, State Epidemiologist, Mississippi State Department of Health



“Learning from others’ successes and challenges, seeing how they plan over time, and applying those insights in my own work has been incredibly valuable. It has also been an empowering experience that has helped me feel more confident working across silos, contributing to broader conversations, and taking a more thoughtful approach to decision-making.”

## Selection Criteria

The Milbank Memorial Fund will focus on the following characteristics in selecting participants for the ELP:

- **A commitment to improving** the health of all people in their communities with the use of evidence-based practices
- **Demonstrated leadership**, as reflected by experience in positions of significant responsibility as well as public impact
- **Inquisitiveness**, as evidenced by interest in continuous learning and self-improvement
- **A focus on impact**, with an emphasis on developing and implementing innovative, practical policy solutions that will demonstrably improve the health of people and communities
- **Collegiality and receptivity**, as exemplified by eagerness around exchange of ideas and interest in building lasting relationships with colleagues

## Our Network

Our participants have found that the ability to interact with extraordinary leaders who they would not have otherwise known has been one of their greatest learning tools. The breadth of backgrounds and experiences challenges participants to think differently and to learn from different approaches.

The Fund is committed to creating a cohort of participants that includes:

- **Leaders with differing backgrounds and experiences** – we strongly encourage nominations of people with a variety of demographic backgrounds
- **Regional representation** – we strive to have participants from a broad range of states and regions
- **A range of political perspectives** – we include a range of political perspectives from all sides of the aisle
- **Position and role** – we strive to have a mix of legislators and executives from state and large-county and large-city government

## Key Dates for the 2026–2027 ELP Cohort

All participants who are accepted into the 2026–2027 cohort must commit to the following:

- Fall 2026 in-person introductory meeting, **September 14–16, 2026 in Baltimore, MD**
- Winter 2026 in-person meeting, **November 17–19, 2026 in Phoenix, AZ**
- A final meeting to be scheduled in early **June 2027** (Date and Location TBD)
- Seven virtual (1–2 hour) sessions to be scheduled monthly between October 2026 and May 2027
- Optional monthly virtual/phone meetings with a mentor (for participants who opt in to the mentoring program)

Gary Crum, State Senator, Wyoming



“The in-person meetings have been a highlight. Connecting with peers from around the country and learning from guest speakers has strengthened my decision-making and team-building skills, and the relationships built through the program have given me a trusted network to turn to for perspective.”

Marvia Jones, Health Director, Kansas City  
Health Department



"This is the training I did not know I needed. It focuses on practical skills like negotiation and decision-making that we usually do not have time to develop, and it made them directly applicable to my work."

Annie Spell, State Representative, Louisiana



"The mentoring has been incredibly valuable, especially in learning how to be an effective legislator, how to prioritize, and how to recognize when it is time to move forward."

James Rajotte, Director of Strategy and Innovation, Rhode  
Island Executive Office of Health and Human Services



"The in-person sessions have been the most valuable part of the program. The purposeful structure, intentional peer exchange, and reflections focused on practical takeaways have been helpful not just for me, but for my team as well. I often bring those insights back into our work and planning."

## For More Information

If you are interested in participating in the Emerging Leaders Program and would like to learn more, please contact Rich Callahan, Lead Program Consultant, at [rich@tapinternational.org](mailto:rich@tapinternational.org) or call 916-803-7022.

## About the Emerging Leaders Program

This program is designed and run by the Milbank Memorial Fund National Director for Population Health Morgan McDonald and Program Associate Sofia Espinosa in collaboration with the Lead Program Consultant Rich Callahan. The Milbank Memorial Fund believes that state policymakers are key agents of change in improving health outcomes, reducing health care costs, and improving population health overall. Launched in 2015 to support the development of health policy leaders, the Emerging Leaders Program alumni serve in a variety of critical health policy leadership roles across the country.

The Milbank Memorial Fund is a nonpartisan, trusted foundation whose mission is to improve population health and health equity by connecting leaders with evidence and sound experience. For more than 100 years, the Fund has connected leaders with the expertise of policymakers and the evidence that they need to advance policies and practices that improve health. Our work is guided by core values of collaboration and community; diversity, equity, and inclusion; humility and optimism; objectivity and non-partisanship; and stewardship and leadership. Our organization has had a unique journey that has shaped our values; we invite you to learn more at [www.milbank.org](http://www.milbank.org).

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*Using evidence to improve population health*