

# Getting Started Guide for State Suicide Prevention Infrastructure

This Getting Started Guide is designed to help states implement the [Recommendations for State Suicide Prevention Infrastructure](#) (Infrastructure Recommendations). Please be sure to read the full Infrastructure Recommendations before using the Getting Started Guide.

If your state has little suicide prevention infrastructure, you can use this resource as a guide to launch your efforts as you begin the suicide prevention journey. Specifically, it will help states with little current infrastructure to develop the fundamental recommendations of the Infrastructure Recommendations' Authorize, Lead, and Partner essential elements. The Getting Started Guide should be used as a supplement to the Infrastructure Recommendations and not as a stand-alone document.

We have highlighted where the steps below connect to specific Infrastructure Recommendation. We have also linked many steps to accompanying worksheets or related resources to help you with implementation. As you work through each step, be sure to click on the recommended links. In particular, use the [Recommendations for State Suicide Prevention Infrastructure: Essential Elements Assessment Tool](#) (Essential Elements Assessment Tool) in conjunction with this guide to help you assess your state's suicide prevention infrastructure and prioritize which elements to improve.

If your state has the basic aspects of the Authorize, Lead, and Partner elements in place, the Getting Started Guide may not be as useful for your efforts. Instead, turn to the full list of Infrastructure Recommendations and focus on improving your infrastructure in the Authorize, Lead, and Partner elements using the recommendations listed under the headers "To further strengthen...." Also work on implementing the Examine, Build, and Guide essential elements.

Phase 1: Convene a State Suicide Prevention Coalition	
<b>Step 1</b>	Carefully read the <a href="#">Authorize</a> , <a href="#">Lead</a> , and <a href="#">Partner</a> essential elements in the Infrastructure Recommendations, and the State Infrastructure Success Stories from <a href="#">Colorado</a> and <a href="#">Tennessee</a> .
<b>Step 2</b>	<p>Bring together core agency and organizational representatives (public and private partners) to form a statewide suicide prevention coalition.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This coalition can be called a council, board, or any other name. Make sure the group represents a variety of regions, demographics, occupations, community sectors, and needs encompassing the entire state.</li> <li>• If possible, charge an organization with group administration and logistics.</li> <li>• Establish regular meetings of this coalition.</li> </ul> <div style="border: 1px solid #0072bc; padding: 5px; margin: 10px 0;"> <p><b>Related Infrastructure Recommendations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Lead</a>: Where interests intersect, establish a formal connection between relevant government divisions or offices.</li> <li>• <a href="#">Partner</a>: Form a statewide coalition with broad public and private sector representation.</li> </ul> </div> <div style="border: 1px solid #000; padding: 5px; margin: 10px 0;"> <p><b>Related Tool:</b> Use the lesson and worksheets from SPRC's <a href="#">Virtual Learning Lab: Statewide Partnerships</a> module to help you prioritize and approach partners in your state.</p> </div>
<b>Step 3</b>	<p>As a coalition, create a realistic timeline and work plan for completing the steps laid out in Phases 2 through 5.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include key dates for completing each major phase.</li> <li>• Allow your state coalition to be flexible and adjust the timeline as needed.</li> <li>• Use the timeline to keep your infrastructure development moving forward.</li> <li>• Be aware that infrastructure development will take time and that gaining support for suicide prevention infrastructure will be influenced by the state's political, social, and administrative environment.</li> </ul> <div style="border: 1px solid #000; padding: 5px; margin: 10px 0;"> <p><b>Related Tool:</b> Use the <a href="#">Getting Started Guide for State Suicide Prevention Infrastructure: Timeline Development Worksheet</a> to lay out a realistic work plan for your statewide suicide prevention coalition.</p> </div>

## Phase 2: Analyze Your State's Existing Infrastructure and Suicide Trends as a Coalition

### Step 1

Assess your state's current infrastructure in the six essential elements of the Infrastructure Recommendations.

- Identify areas of strength and need in your state's current infrastructure.

**Related Tool:** Use [SPRC's Essential Elements Assessment Tool](#) to identify and assess areas of strength and need in your state's infrastructure.

### Step 2

Assess your state's current data and trends in suicide attempts and deaths.

- The data you can access may be limited at the beginning of the infrastructure development process. However, it is still important to ensure your coalition understands the state-level suicide rates across as many demographics as possible.
- Compare your state data to [national U.S. data](#) to note any differences in suicide-related trends in your state.
- If county-level data is available, be sure to analyze differences in suicide rates across regions/legislative districts. This will enable your coalition to provide state leaders with data specific to areas of concern (including, for legislators, areas they represent) as you complete the steps in this Getting Started Guide.

#### Related Infrastructure Recommendation

- [Examine:](#) Identify, connect with, and strengthen existing data sources.

**Related Tool:** SPRC's [Locating and Understanding Data for Suicide Prevention](#) is a free, online training on accessing suicide data from public databases, interpreting data, and applying data to your state suicide prevention efforts.

## Phase 2: Analyze Your State's Existing Infrastructure and Suicide Trends as a Coalition

### Step 3

Create a state-specific handout on suicide prevention needs—including the cost of lives lost to suicide and other data highlighting the extent and impact of suicide—and recommendations for infrastructure that would address the identified needs. This handout will provide state leaders with a tangible document they can turn to during the decision-making process. It can remind them of the state's suicide issue and related core needs.

- Your state's fact sheet from the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention is one resource that can help you get started. (See "Related Tools" section of this step.) *If you have access to additional data showing suicide-related disparities in your state's populations or geographic areas, it may be important to highlight these high-need groups or regions in your handout.*
- Include information on how your state's suicide-related statistics compare to national statistics on suicide.
- Make sure to include information about your state's current infrastructure for suicide prevention and any gaps.
- Estimate the cost of the infrastructure needed to reduce suicides.
- Plan to use copies of this handout as you prepare to request state decision-makers' support for suicide prevention infrastructure in Phases 3 and 4 of this guide.

#### **Related Infrastructure Recommendations**

- **Lead:** Identify and fund core staff positions, training, and technology needed to carry out all six essential functions.
- **Partner:** Adopt a shared vision and language across partners.

**Related Tools:** Your [state fact sheet from the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention \(AFSP\)](#) includes some of the information needed for your handout.

To guide the content of your handout, consult the AFSP resource [Using the SPRC State Suicide Prevention Infrastructure Recommendations](#).

## Phase 3. Identify an Organizational Leader and Suicide Prevention Champions

<p><b>Step 1</b></p>	<p>Based on your analysis of needs vs. strengths, and trends vs. infrastructure available, identify the agency that should serve as your state’s suicide prevention lead.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This agency can be a government agency, an existing nonprofit, a new nonprofit that you create, or another organization. It should have the administrative support and expertise to address the infrastructure needs identified in Phase 2.</li> <li>• Your suicide prevention lead organization should also house staff, resources, skills, and expertise that are directly connected to areas of need in your state.</li> <li>• State legislation may dictate which agency serves as your state’s lead in suicide prevention.</li> <li>• This lead must be agreed on by the majority of coalition members.</li> <li>• Ensure that all existing suicide prevention groups remain actively engaged in the coalition as the lead agency for suicide prevention is identified, and that all members’ viewpoints, input, and needs are valued.</li> </ul> <div data-bbox="370 821 1349 1024" style="border: 1px solid blue; padding: 5px;"> <p><b>Related Infrastructure Recommendations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Authorize</a>: Designate a lead division or organization.</li> <li>• <a href="#">Lead</a>: Develop division/agency commitment to spur cross-discipline collaboration and integrate programs across funding sources.</li> <li>• <a href="#">Partner</a>: Adopt a shared vision and language.</li> </ul> </div>
<p><b>Step 2</b></p>	<p>Identify appropriate champions in the lead agency and wider coalition to serve as spokespeople to decision-makers in the state.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make sure some of these champions have established relationships with key decision-makers in your state.</li> <li>• Ensure some of these champions are individuals with personal experience of suicidality or suicide loss (i.e., “lived experience”) and can speak to the personal impact of suicide attempts and/or death, and the importance of supporting prevention efforts.</li> </ul> <div data-bbox="370 1388 1349 1528" style="border: 1px solid blue; padding: 5px;"> <p><b>Related Infrastructure Recommendation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Lead</a>: Develop capacity to respond to information requests from officials, communities, the media, and the general public.</li> </ul> </div> <div data-bbox="370 1560 1349 1703" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p><b>Related Tool:</b> To involve individuals with lived experience in a safe, respectful, and effective way, use SPRC’s <a href="#">Engaging People with Lived Experience: A Toolkit for Organizations</a>.</p> </div>

## Phase 4: Identify Sources for and Pursue Needed Funding and Authorization

**Step 1**

Research potential funding sources for the needed infrastructure and related costs that you identified in Phase 2.

- This may be through legislation, such as a line item in the state budget, or by working with a state division to increase funding (for example, by designating a larger portion of their budget to suicide prevention).
- Some other sources include nongovernmental organizations, foundations, and private sector partners.
- Grants are especially useful for infrastructure that requires a lot of initial support and less intensive maintenance. Because grants are time-limited, if you are relying on a grant for intensive, ongoing infrastructure maintenance, your infrastructure will likely erode after the grant ends.
- In-kind donations can support the development of smaller pieces of your infrastructure, such as food for an annual conference, meeting space for your coalition, or trainer fees for evidence-based trainings.

**Step 2**

If you are pursuing an increased commitment to suicide prevention from state policymakers, take your handout from Phase 2, Step 3 on the suicide issue vs. available infrastructure to state leaders (e.g., legislators, governor, health commissioner or similar senior executive). Use it to present on the suicide issue and make your request for needed infrastructure.

Key things to consider about your presentations:

- Be prepared to present on your unique state issues and needs, including topics covered in the handout, and infrastructure examples from other states. When making a funding request, also be prepared to discuss the return on investment from infrastructure development.
- When presenting to department or division leadership, address areas within the department or division’s sphere of influence.
- When presenting to state legislators/staff, bring suicide-related data and stories of loss and prevention from the districts they represent.
- Make sure meetings and presentations with state leaders include both agency lead representatives and individuals with lived experience in suicide prevention.

**Related Infrastructure Recommendation**

- Authorize: Identify and secure resources required to carry out all six essential functions.
- Lead: Establish formal connections between relevant government offices.
- Lead: Develop division/agency commitment to spur cross-discipline collaboration and integrate programs across funding sources.

## Phase 4: Identify Sources for and Pursue Needed Funding and Authorization

**Related Tools:** To guide the content of your presentation, see AFSP's [\*Using the SPRC State Suicide Prevention Infrastructure Recommendations\*](#).

Find examples of other states' infrastructure under [each essential element recommendation](#).

Consider providing the [\*Summary Recommendations for State Suicide Prevention Infrastructure\*](#) as a handout for decision-makers, and if presenting to a representative of your governor's office, include the National Governors Association's [\*State Strategies for Averting Early Deaths\*](#).

## Phase 4: Identify Sources for and Pursue Needed Funding and Authorization

### Step 3

If you ask for funding to address the suicide trends and infrastructure needs you have identified:

- Frame your request as seeking *ongoing* support.
- Request enough money to support one full-time state suicide prevention coordinator and additional staff and administrative support as applicable.
- Ask for budgetary line items for prevention strategies that reach populations in your state at increased risk for suicide (e.g., tribes, people in the justice system, those living in counties with elevated suicide rates) and include a comprehensive, lifespan approach to suicide prevention.
- Identify sources of federal funding being given to the state, such as federal block grants, that state leadership can also apply toward suicide prevention infrastructure. *These federal funds should be used as an addition to state budget line items for suicide prevention and should **not** be used to negate the need for state budget funds set aside for suicide prevention.*

#### Related Infrastructure Recommendations

- **Authorize:** Identify and secure resources required to carry out all six essential functions.
- **Lead:** Maintain a dedicated leadership position.
- **Lead:** Identify and fund core staff positions, training, and technology needed to carry out all six essential functions.
- **Examine:** Ensure that sufficient funding and personnel are allocated to support high-quality, consistent, privacy-protected suicide morbidity and mortality data collection and analysis.
- **Build:** Build a multifaceted, lifespan approach to suicide prevention across the state in concert with the state plan.
- **Build:** Designate sufficient funding to carry out or support a multifaceted approach.
- **Guide:** Identify and allocate resources needed to support consultation and capacity-building training for state, county, and local efforts.

**Related Tools:** Refer to these three resources for additional guidance on setting up a comprehensive, lifespan approach to suicide prevention:

- The National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention report [\*Transforming Communities: Key Elements for the Implementation of Comprehensive Community-Based Suicide Prevention\*](#)
- The Center for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC's) [\*Preventing Suicide: A Technical Package of Policy, Programs, and Practices\*](#)
- SPRC's [\*Comprehensive Approach\*](#) to suicide prevention

## Phase 4: Identify Sources for and Pursue Needed Funding and Authorization

### Step 4

Understand that your request may not be granted at first. The process may include multiple presentations to key state leaders and legislative hearings on the subject. As the implications of budgetary line items for suicide prevention are reviewed and debated, the decision-making process may be slow.

- As you prepare to present to state decision-makers, keep in mind key timeframes such as fiscal year planning windows, legislative sessions, and budgetary deadlines.
- Be prepared to respond to leaders' information requests with accurate, high-quality information during key state legislative decision-making times.
- If your requests are denied at first, consider strengthening your request and returning to key leaders in future fiscal years.

## Phase 5: Launch the State Suicide Prevention Program

<p><b>Step 1</b></p>	<p>Identify one full-time state suicide prevention coordinator to guide the implementation of the state suicide prevention plan.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This individual may be someone who has been part of the infrastructure development process or a new hire.</li> <li>• This person should be housed in the lead agency identified in Phase 3, Step 1.</li> <li>• Ensure this person will be able to work full time on suicide prevention <i>across the lifespan</i> in the state.</li> </ul> <div data-bbox="370 571 1354 747" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p><b>Related Infrastructure Recommendations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Lead</a>: Maintain a dedicated leadership position.</li> <li>• <a href="#">Build</a>: Build a multifaceted, lifespan approach to suicide prevention across the state, in concert with the state plan.</li> </ul> </div> <div data-bbox="370 764 1354 905" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p><b>Related Tool:</b> View a packet of <a href="#">State Suicide Prevention Coordinator Position Descriptions</a> to use in developing your own state's description for this position.</p> </div>
<p><b>Step 2</b></p>	<p>In conjunction with the coalition, the state coordinator should formalize a three- to five-year state suicide prevention plan that is supported by state decision-makers. <i>If a state coordinator has not been identified, the state coalition should still create a state suicide prevention plan.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The plan should describe how funding provided by the state will be used.</li> <li>• The plan should include expectations to report back to decision-makers.             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» If possible, include a stipulation for formal evaluation of the plan's activities and impacts on suicide attempts and deaths.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• The plan should represent the needs identified by the state coalition and include roles for each coalition member to play in plan implementation. Use the handout created in Phase 2, Step 3 as a starting point.             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» If possible, have coalition members provide formal endorsement of the state plan.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• To the extent possible, include infrastructure improvements in the plan.</li> </ul> <div data-bbox="370 1476 1354 1749" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p><b>Related Infrastructure Recommendations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Authorize</a>: Maintain a state suicide prevention plan that is updated every three to five years.</li> <li>• <a href="#">Partner</a>: Build partner capacity to integrate suicide prevention efforts into their structures, policies, and activities.</li> <li>• <a href="#">Partner</a>: Develop written agreements with partners detailing each party's commitment.</li> </ul> </div>

## Phase 5: Launch the State Suicide Prevention Program

**Related Tools:** Visit SPRC's "[States](#)" webpage to view existing state plans and model your own state plan after a state with similar demographics, needs, or visions for suicide prevention.

Use SPRC's [Strategic Planning Approach to Suicide Prevention](#) and its accompanying [free, online course](#) to guide your state planning process.

### Step 3

State leadership should provide formal support for the state plan. State leadership includes legislators, government officials, agency leads, and/or the governor. This support can be provided in a variety of ways including the following:

- Approving legislation or mandates that require implementation of the state plan
- Writing letters of support or providing signatory endorsement for the state plan
- Participating in the state planning process
- Requesting or requiring annual reports for state leadership on plan implementation

#### Related Infrastructure Recommendations

- [Authorize](#): Authorize the designated suicide prevention agency to develop, carry out, and evaluate the suicide prevention plan.
- [Authorize](#): Require an annual report to the legislature or governor on the state of suicide and prevention efforts, the extent and effectiveness of any statute or rule related to suicide, and emerging needs.

### Step 4

Develop relationships with your state's major media outlets and notify them, as appropriate, of the state suicide prevention plan release and implementation.

- As you develop relationships, begin sharing safe and effective messaging on suicide prevention with your state's major news outlets.
- Keep news outlets up to date on implementation of strategies laid out in the state plan and evaluation of its impacts.

#### Related Infrastructure Recommendations

- [Lead](#): Develop capacity to respond to information requests from officials, communities, the media, and the general public.
- [Lead](#): Build staff capacity to effectively communicate across multiple audiences and formats.

**Related Tool:** Visit the Action Alliance's [Framework for Successful Messaging](#) for guidance on developing successful messaging, as well as suicide prevention resources you can share with major media outlets.

**The five phases listed above will help your state begin to put in place the Authorize, Lead, and Partner elements of the Infrastructure Recommendations.** The length of time it takes a state to develop these three essential elements will depend on a variety of factors at the state level, including funding availability, legislative buy-in, and the state's ability to form a cohesive suicide prevention coalition. Be prepared for a marathon, not a sprint, and celebrate the small victories.

As you move forward in your state infrastructure development, be sure to initiate and/or strengthen the other three essential elements of the Infrastructure Recommendations: Examine, Build, and Guide.