



Notice of Fund Availability: Social Media Research Center

Application Deadline: 5 p.m., Friday, September 11, 2026

Term: October 5, 2026 – September 30, 2027

Youth mental health is a critical priority of the Sherrill Administration. Over the past decade, [a growing number of children and adolescents](#) have reported symptoms of anxiety, depression, self-harm, and suicidal ideation. These rates coincide with the [rapid growth of social media](#), which has changed how people communicate, learn, and socialize.

The State of New Jersey has a compelling interest in protecting the health, safety, and welfare of its children and residents by ensuring State policies, programs, and services reflect the emerging evidence on the impacts of technology on development and mental health.

The New Jersey Office of the Secretary of Higher Education (OSHE), in coordination with the New Jersey Department of Health, announces the availability of funds to establish a social media research center at a four-year public institution of higher education in New Jersey. The purpose of the Social Media Research Center will be to carry out collaborative and interdisciplinary research to understand social media use, to mitigate the negative impacts of social media, and to promote healthy and responsible social media use.

Outcomes: S3412

The Social Media Research Center shall engage in high-quality research, analysis, and outreach that is accessible to policymakers and the public. The Center's activities will include, but are not limited to:

- Studying the impacts of social media consumption on the residents of the State and mitigating any negative impacts of such consumption;

- Making policy recommendations to the Legislature, Governor, and key stakeholders to address the mental, physical, and behavioral health challenges posed by social media use, particularly for children and adolescents;
- Establishing online courses and training modules concerning safe social media use, which shall be made available at no charge to schools in the State;
- Conducting research, and making recommendations, on such topics as may be required by law related to the impact of addictive social media behaviors on children and minors and the extent to which warning labels and other disclaimers reduce addictive social media behaviors; and
- Addressing relevant research requests and questions from State departments and agencies.

The Social Media Research Center must submit an annual report to the Governor and to the Legislature regarding its work, including at a minimum: 1) information on the Center's current research projects; 2) the amount and sources of funding utilized; 3) research requests and questions from State departments and agencies; 4) expectations concerning the direction of the Center's future research; and, 5) if applicable, information about any grant programs created. All research publications of the Social Media Research Center and any subgrantees shall be provided to the Governor, Legislature, and any State departments or agencies that supplied data.

The Social Media Research Center will generate timely, relevant, and impactful research advancing awareness and solutions to the critical mental health issue facing communities throughout the Garden State.

Eligibility Criteria & Funding

This notice of funding opportunity is open to New Jersey four-year public institutions of higher education. The State will grant one award. Eligible applicants can apply for \$500,000.

Institutions will be required to expend the funds by September 30, 2027. Please consider this date when developing an application for submission.

As State funding is subject to annual appropriations, the selected partner must be able to sustain the Center through funding opportunities (including grants, gifts, donations, etc.) that may not include future State appropriations.

Application Instructions

The State seeks an academic partner capable of fully operating and managing the Social Media Research Center. The host institution will be selected based upon institutional capacity, interest, and existing expertise, as demonstrated through their submission.

Applications must include two documents: 1) Grant Narrative, and 2) Budget Justification Plan.

Grant Narrative

Use the headings listed below within the application. The total length of the grant narrative must not exceed 20 (twenty) pages single-spaced.

Contact Information

- Provide the name(s), title(s), phone number(s), and email(s) of the primary contact(s) for any follow-up regarding this notice of funding application.

Interest and Capacity

- Describe the institution's commitment and capacity to take on the development and management of Social Media Research Center, including detailing organizational support and programs that exists for implementing the proposed center.
- List in-kind resources (office, workspace, software, equipment, and more) that the institution is willing to provide to advance the Social Media Research Center.

Expertise

- Explain how and why the institution is ideally positioned to carry out the stated goals of the Social Media Research Center detailed in this document, including how the institution is able to respond to timely and emergent related issues.
- Provide the name(s), title(s), email(s), relevant expertise, and brief description of roles of anticipated staff supporting the Social Media Research Center, if selected.
- The selected institution should demonstrate a record of related scholarly research and/or other contributions in state and local government public policy. Provide a list demonstrating past examples of related research and/or contributions.

Partnerships

- Describe existing or proposed partnerships related to the goals of the Social Media Research Center that the institution has or will pursue. These partnerships may include relevant programs and departments within the institution, with other institutions, local, state, or national level entities.

Project Activity/Operational Plan

- Provide a detailed description of main activities for the development and implementation of the Social Media Research Center, including:
 - Proposed research and outreach that could be published within the first six (6) and 12 months of the Social Media Research Center's establishment, respectively;
 - Proposed activities and programs to be pursued during the initial year;
 - Anticipated timeline for successful implementation of activities;

- Clear ties to the budget proposed and parties responsible; and
- A detailed sustainability plan for the Social Media Research Center beyond its first year.

Budget Justification Plan

The budget portion of the application must be submitted as an Excel spreadsheet utilizing the template provided. In the budget template, institutions must complete the following areas: contact information, original budget column, and narrative budget description column. A key component of the budget template and scoring is the field designated for the “Narrative Budget Description.” For each category of budgeted expenses, institutions must provide a Narrative Budget Description consisting of a detailed list and justification for each planned expense. The funding should be clearly tied to the Project Activity/Operational Plan section of the application. If the Narrative Budget Description cannot be provided within the space allowed in template, institutions may submit a secondary spreadsheet tab with this detail using the same budget category headers, but all submissions must be in an Excel spreadsheet format.

Please note Facilities and Administrative Costs (F&A/Indirect costs) are not an allowable expense.

Link to Budget Template: [Institution Name_FY2027_SMRC Budget](#)

Budgets will be reviewed for reasonable and eligible expenses. Institutions may be asked to revise their budgets. Funding must abide by State guidelines.

Use of Funds/Administrative and Operational Expenses:

The Social Media Research Center will be housed in and operated by one of New Jersey’s four-year public institutions. In addition to providing leadership for the lab and management of its objectives and outcomes, the host institution will provide facilities and related services and resources, including the administrative support necessary and oversight by the institution’s existing research review protocols.

Submission of Application: Due by 5:00 p.m. on Friday, September 11, 2026.

Completed applications are due by 5:00 p.m. on Friday, September 11, 2026. Applications after this deadline will not be considered. The application should be submitted as two files (one PDF grant narrative and one budget as an Excel spreadsheet) to **both** Stefani.Thachik@oshe.nj.gov and Sara.Lipsett@oshe.nj.gov with the subject line “Institution Name_FY27_Social Media Research Center.” OSHE will send an email confirming receipt.

Only one application per institution will be accepted. Additional submissions or submission modifications will not be accepted. Please carefully review all components of the application for compliance with this Notice prior to submission.

Application Review

The applications will be reviewed in coordination with the New Jersey Department of Health Office of Youth Online Mental Health Safety and Awareness. The following point values apply to the evaluation of applications reviewed in response to this Notice:

- Interest and Capacity [15]
- Expertise [15]
- Partnerships [10]
- Project/Activity Plan [30]
- Budget Justification [30]

Maximum Potential Score: 100

Questions

Questions about this Notice may be submitted via email to Stefani Thachik, Senior Advisor, at Stefani.Thachik@oshe.nj.gov with a copy to Sara Lipsett, Grants Manager at Sara.Lipsett@oshe.nj.gov through August 24, 2026, at 5:00pm. All responses to questions submitted will be posted on the [OSHE Finance website](#) by August 28, 2026.