the academy for community behavioral health

FY27 Youth Mental Health Advocate Program

Frequently Asked Questions for NYC Community-Based Organizations
Updated October 29, 2026

This document provides responses to questions about hosting Youth Mental Health Advocates in 2027.

For other key program information, we recommend that you view complete **application resources** here. This includes: a) YMHA Program Overview with eligibility considerations and program launch timeline, and b) detailed description of the Academy's approach.

Applications to host Youth Mental Health Advocates are due **Monday, November 2, 2026**.

RECRUITING YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH ADVOCATES

Can we recruit Youth Mental Health Advocates from young people who currently receive services at our organization?

Yes, young people who currently or previously have received services from your organization are eligible for the Youth Mental Health Advocate fellowship, as long as they meet other eligibility criteria. YMHA can help young people transition from roles as program participants to professional helping roles.

In Years 1-2, some Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) chose to recruit from current or prior service recipients because:

a) They knew these young people well, and the young people knew their organization;
b) They had observed particular strengths and interests that might make these young people a good fit for the YMHA role;
c) These young people could draw from direct personal experience to support other youth at the organization.

If you plan to recruit from current or prior service recipients, we will ask you to describe what services these young people can still receive from your organization, if any, as Youth Mental Health Advocates. Since the YMHA fellowship is designed to nurture the personal and professional development of Youth Advocates, we invite organizations to make services available where possible, while protecting the Youth Advocates' choice of when and where to access services, confidentiality, and work experience.

Can a young person with an associate's degree, but not a bachelor's degree, become a Youth Mental Health Advocate?

Yes, if they are not currently enrolled in college.

What support does the Academy provide for YMHA recruitment?

Selected organizations will attend a virtual orientation on **Tuesday, December 1** at **10:00am** to review YMHA eligibility criteria and recruitment resources.

The Academy will provide a general YMHA fellowship description for recruitment. Each CBO will customize this to include a description of your organization, the program YMHAs will work in, and any added eligibility considerations specific to your programs. The Academy will also provide a set of YMHA interview questions that CBOs may supplement.

CBOs have the option to request help recruiting YMHAs from the Academy. This can include sharing your organization's YMHA fellowship posting with a wider network of NYC community-based organizations and facilitating referrals from other youth-serving organizations. Some organizations may want to nominate current or former service recipients to work as YMHAs, but either they or the young people would prefer being placed at an organization where they do not also receive services.

YMHA WORK EXPERIENCE

How should we choose the program(s) YMHAs will work in?

In general, we recommend considering whether the program can provide:

a) Meaningful opportunities for Youth Advocates to deliver youth mental health support in 1:1 conversations & groups. This includes applying core YMHA skills at least 75% of the time. We have found it can be helpful for YMHAs to be slightly older (even by one year) than the youth they are supporting.

b) A commitment by key program staff to nurture the development of Youth Advocates. Do program leaders demonstrate a sense of openness and enthusiasm about the contributions YMHAs can make? Do they want to support Youth Advocates' professional development, and have ideas about how to do so? Will they integrate Youth Advocates into key program meetings and activities?

c) Program capacity. YMHA may be a good fit if your program is fully or near fully staffed, has stable leadership, is not taking on other significant new initiatives at the same time, and does not anticipate other significant changes during the YMHA work experience. It is also important that the Lead YMHA Supervisor have regular (weekly) contact with YMHAs. If the Lead YMHA Supervisor does not work on-site at a program YMHAs will be placed in, how

supportive and available is the on-site supervisor? How easily can the Lead YMHA Supervisor coordinate with the program and visit YMHAs at their work site?

d. Where possible, we recommend co-locating YMHAs at the same work location or program. This allows for more interaction among YMHAs and may reduce burden on the Lead YMHA Supervisor to coordinate across sites.

Each organization is different. We invite your thinking about how to provide Youth Advocates with a meaningful learning and work experience at your organization. In your application, please propose the approach that makes most sense for you.

Does our program need to serve youth between ages 10-21, or can we serve a subset of that age range?

Programs that serve young people of any age between 10-21 are eligible to apply. This may mean a program that serves young people ages 14-16, 16-21, etc.

What if our program serves youth ages 16-24 or 18-24?

Yes, we invite you to apply if it seems that YMHA is a good fit for this program.

This may change how you approach YMHA recruitment. Youth Mental Health Advocates themselves will be between ages 18-24. If your program serves young people in this same age range, you may want to consider recruiting Youth Advocates on the higher end of that range (e.g. 22-24).

Please use the application to describe the approach that you think will work best at your organization.

Can YMHAs work remotely?

No, YMHAs are expected to work in-person. On work days that include virtual Academy coaching, we expect YMHAs to participate from a computer at your organization.

There may be circumstances where programs decide to make a good cause exception and allow temporary remote work (such as due to an injury, weather, etc), if you can provide YMHAs with equipment to work remotely.

How are Youth Mental Health Advocates paid?
YMHAs will be paid a Fellowship stipend through the Research Foundation of CUNY. The total fellowship award, to be split over recurring payments, is $10,000. YMHAs will receive a first payment at program start and subsequent payments at regular intervals, as long as they remain engaged in the program.

This stipend is intended to help YMHAs meet their essential expenses so they can fully participate in this comprehensive learning and work experience. It is not wages for work.

CBO COMMITMENTS

How do CBOs receive the $4,500 grant? What can these funds be used for?

CBOs will receive a one-time payment from the Academy via the Research Foundation of CUNY. This flexible grant can be used in any way that supports your organization's participation in YMHA.

Examples of how prior CBOs have applied these funds include:

- Purchase technology Youth Advocates will need for their work at your program (e.g. computer, laptop, headset)
- Food or materials for youth programming
- Compensation for the YMHA Lead Supervisor
- Other program needs

What does supervising YMHAs involve?

We expect the Lead YMHA Supervisor to have weekly scheduled contact with Youth Mental Health Advocates. This will include scheduled 1:1 supervision and group supervision for YMHAs, which may occur on alternating weeks. If your organization is hosting 3 YMHAs, you might expect the Lead YMHA Supervisor to provide a total of 6 hours 1:1 YMHA supervision per month and 2 hours of group YMHA supervision per month.

We expect that YMHAs will need more support and more frequent check-ins at program start, especially in the first 4 weeks of their work placement.

We also expect programs to let Youth Advocates know how they can access immediate, on-call support (from the Lead YMHA Supervisor, on-site supervisor, or both) where needed.

How much time should the Lead YMHA Supervisor plan to dedicate to this program?

We expect the Lead YMHA Supervisor will dedicate 3-4 hours per week to this program, with some weeks requiring more or less time.

In addition to supervising YMHAs, the Lead YMHA Supervisor will manage the YMHA work experience, including by coordinating with Program Directors or site supervisors, as needed; serve as the primary point of contact between your organization and the Academy; and, attend monthly Academy learning network activities and periodic 1:1 meetings.

What qualifications does the Lead YMHA Supervisor need?

We recommend that the Lead YMHA Supervisor have:

- Prior successful experience providing supportive or clinical supervision and administrative supervision. This would include experience helping staff reflect on specific client interactions and identify helpful approaches or next steps.
- Expertise in youth development and/or youth mental health. While no specific degree or license is required of the Lead YMHA Supervisor, where possible, YMHAs may benefit from working with:
    - An experienced mental health clinician
    - A supervisor who can model and help YMHAs apply core YMHA skills, such as supportive listening and psychoeducation; identifying and making mental health referrals; and, group facilitation.
- A thoughtful view on developmentally appropriate supervision for the YMHA fellows (ages 18-24); a commitment to nurturing the personal and professional growth of these young people, who may never have held professional helping roles before.

Where possible, it would also be helpful for Lead YMHA Supervisors to have:

- Prior experience supervising young adults (staff, intern, or volunteer roles), or
- Prior experience in a formal Youth/Peer role

What support does the Academy provide to Lead YMHA Supervisors?

The Academy will provide an orientation for Lead YMHA Supervisors in January 2027, as well as monthly learning network activities and periodic 1:1 check-ins. The Academy will also provide tools to support strengths-based YMHA supervision, such as a rubric and reflection forms that YMHAs and their supervisors can use to demonstrate YMHA learning and progress over time.

What do the program site visits involve?

The Academy will coordinate with selected CBOs to schedule two program site visits:

a) January-February 2027: this visit is intended to help CBOs prepare for the YMHA work experience.
b) Late March-April 2027: this visit is intended to discuss how things are going and make any program adjustments that may be needed (by the Academy or CBO).

Site visits are primarily for learning and program improvement. They are not audits. They will allow the Academy to better understand each CBO's priorities and work environment, and may make it easier for both CBOs and YMHAs to raise questions or issues specific to their work site.

In addition to program site visits, in FY27, we are asking CBOs to host the wider YMHA cohort for a visit in Spring or Summer 2027. By seeing how the YMHA fellowship works at other organizations, Youth Advocates may get ideas they want to try at their sites. They will also learn more about the diversity of community-based organizations, services, and professional roles in NYC as they consider a next step in their own education or career.

What are the reporting requirements for CBOs?

We will ask CBOs to submit a brief monthly report that includes quantitative and qualitative questions. At minimum, we expect to measure the number of youth that YMHAs serve and at least one indicator about the impact that YMHAs have. We use this reporting for real-time program improvements and overall program evaluation.

The Academy will also coordinate with CBOs and NYC Opportunity to measure a range of program outcomes, either through data that the Academy collects or by providing CBOs with surveys or other tools. In prior years, for example, we have measured YMHA education and employment outcomes as of program end; changes in YMHA's perception of their own wellness, helping behaviors, skills, and feelings of effectiveness; and, changes at the CBO as a result of having YMHAs.

As a pilot program, we will continue to work with CBOs, YMHAs, and other stakeholders to determine indicators that are meaningful and feasible to track.

Beyond reporting, we will invite both CBOs and YMHAs to shape the program model through ongoing participatory design activities.