INVITATION TO APPLY

New Cities of Opportunity Initiative: Healthy People, Thriving Communities

The Vision and Impetus for Action

Cities of Opportunity are places where all residents can reach their full potential and live healthy, productive and fulfilling lives as part of a thriving community. In these cities, all residents—regardless of geography, race/ethnicity, age, background, gender or wealth—have access to:

- **Opportunities to learn and grow**, from early childhood through postsecondary education;
- **Affordable, safe and healthy housing**;
- **Economic opportunities**, including family-supporting jobs and essential income supports;
- **Transportation and social networks** that connect them to jobs, schools and community resources;
- **Safe neighborhoods** that include accessible places to play and maintain active lifestyles; and
- **Affordable, healthy foods** and other community and family necessities.

Yet in cities across the country, the life expectancies of residents who live a few miles apart, and sometimes even blocks apart, vary by as much as five, ten or even 20 years. The above economic, environmental and social conditions all play a role in shaping health outcomes in our communities. Undergirding these factors are historical and current policies and systems that erode the health status and economic prospects of many communities and cities, that disproportionately burden people of color.

*City leaders are uniquely positioned to advance cross-cutting approaches that address underlying factors affecting the health of all of their residents and the vibrancy of their city.*

The Opportunity

The National League of Cities (NLC) Institute for Youth, Education, and Families (YEF Institute) invites city leaders to join Cities of Opportunity, a new initiative to make transformative policies and systems change for Healthy People and Thriving Communities. With the generous support of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, this new 12-month technical assistance initiative will help city teams take a comprehensive approach to address factors that affect how long we live and how well we live.

**Cities of Opportunity Cohort**: Up to six city teams will be selected to participate in a 12-month program that offers learnings and supports for policy and systems change on factors that affect health in communities.

The following benefits to participating cities will be offered:

- City-centered and context-specific technical assistance to help cities develop action plans for policy and/or systems change in issues and area(s) that affect...
the health of residents and strength of the city.
• Thought partnership with peer cities, nationally recognized subject matter experts, and philanthropic leaders.
• A focus on equity and race, with an approach that values equity that actively addresses the way that people are situated differently. At the same time, it includes a focus on “closing the gaps” so that race does not predict one’s success, while also improving outcomes for all.
• Strategic use of data and emphasis on the importance of disaggregating data by race and ethnicity to help cities target challenges, identify solutions and guide policy recommendations.
• Peer-to-peer convenings at the beginning and latter end of the 12-month period, as well as monthly technical assistance sessions (with individual city teams and with peers across the cohort) to stimulate dialog on the city’s progress and challenges; to learn about best practices and develop/adapt solutions; and to share accomplishments and lessons learned.
• Access to recent research and innovations to support policy recommendations. This includes an integrated framework for local elected officials and municipal leaders to improve the health and well-being of city residents:
  • Policies, programs and practices across Economic Opportunity, City Planning and Design, and Housing (other issues to be added later) at the intersection to health.
  • An equity and race lens to inform and advance core capacity areas to help cities zero in on who to work with, where to focus, and how to resource and sustain city efforts: data, civic engagement, financing, multi-sector collaborations and sustainability.

Upcoming Pilots for New Components of the Cities of Opportunity Initiative

In addition to the 12-month technical assistance cohort, NLC is also offering two new, less-intensive options for a broader range of cities to join the Cities of Opportunity initiative in the coming year. Indications of interest are invited from cities to learn more about these initial pilot program opportunities. More information will be forthcoming this fall:
• **Community of Practice (CoP)** The goal will be to convene together up to 12 cities to engage in a deep dive effort specific to shared areas of interest to support the Cities of Opportunity overall framework. This will likely start with a pilot on Health System Partnerships and will be time limited (6-8 months). Through the CoP, cities will engage in expert-supported and peer-to-peer focused strategy development. The aim is to better support engaged cities in building and strengthening strategic relationships with health systems partners and local health officials, vital to building and sustaining bold change in communities.
• **Learning Network** For up to 20 cities, a six-month pilot program, largely supported through virtual learning platforms, to build foundational knowledge in core capacity areas to drive change, with a focus on equity and race, data, civic engagement, financing, multi-sector collaborations and sustainability.

What are Participating Cohort Cities Committing To?

Over the course of the 12 months, a selected cohort of up to six cities will work together within their teams and across cities to share challenges, ideas and solutions. Team members will commit to:
1. Craft or enhance a comprehensive set of policies/policy recommendations, using an equity and race lens to drive systems change required to design and implement a comprehensive policy agenda. For example, improved mechanisms for cross-sector alignment and strategic partnerships, data-driven practice to tailor and target interventions where they are most needed, and authentic community engagement to drive change;  

2. Take part in pre- and post-assessments on capacity and progress toward comprehensive city policy and systems change;  

3. Participate in two in-person convenings for peer-to-peer learning and consultations with leading experts and philanthropic partners;  

4. Participate in virtual technical assistance meetings with NLC staff and subject matter experts - monthly, alternating between individual teams and across all teams; and  

5. Capture and share stories and lessons learned with NLC’s larger membership network.

The work and learnings of the 12 cities in the pilot now inform this new initiative. Pilot teams made tangible achievements in a relatively brief (six-month) period. These include:  

• Codifying policies and practices that promote equity into the city’s master plans/plan sections and agreements with developers;  
• Intentionally aligning investments by anchors and other partners with the city to improve the health of residents and neighborhoods;  
• Structures to work across silos with accountability across city departments to align actions and support residents;  
• Data support to track progress and use of resources, and to drive continuous improvement; and  
• Creative approaches to advancing equity through authentic community engagement, council actions and city priorities.

Read the [executive summary from the pilot](#).

**Background - Pilot Cities:**  
**Informing the Path**

NLC launched Cities of Opportunity in 2018 with a pilot to strengthen the capacity of city leaders to work in a more holistic way across multiple, inter-connected factors that converge in the city. The pilot cities focused on working within and across three issue areas identified as top priorities for cities based on interviews with local elected officials and other municipal leaders including Economic Opportunity, City Planning and Design, and Housing at the intersection of health.
**Application**

Applying to join the Cities of Opportunity 12-month cohort

NLC welcomes cities across geographic locales and of various types (e.g., rural, urban, suburban) to join Cities of Opportunity. Up to six cities will be selected to join this cohort. Interested cities should submit an online application to NLC by end of day (in your time zone) Friday, August 30, 2019.

**How to Apply:** Applications must be submitted via an online form. Access the online application form here.

Your application is limited to a total of 2,000 words. Please respond to each section of the application within the word limits specified on the online form. We suggest completing the form on a Word document first and then pasting within the relevant sections of the online form.

View the Scoring Rubric that NLC will use to score applications here.

**QUESTIONS TO BE COMPLETED ON THE ONLINE FORM**

1) **Current Landscape**
(Please respond briefly and clearly to each item below, within word limits specified on online application form) NOTE: Additional points will be awarded based on solid descriptions of how current priorities fit into longer-term, more comprehensive goals for improving health within the city. And, how does this work align with other current priorities/work within the city?

   a. What is your current priority for policy and/or systems change within and across the following factors/issue areas that affect the health of your city: Economic Opportunity, City Planning and Design, and Housing (Affordable and Healthy)? Or for greater alignment across city agencies and/or with partners?

   b. How are broader health considerations of residents currently informing these priorities/efforts in the city? How do those health considerations vary for residents of color or others that are disproportionately impacted?

   c. What is the city’s current commitment to advancing equity, including racial equity?
How does the city define equity and race? Why are equity and race important to the city’s efforts in the current priorities addressed above?

d. What is your primary target population for policy/systems change(s) noted above and why? Include key facts on city demographics. Charts, maps or other visuals may be included as an addendum.

e. What local partners have you engaged or plan to engage in this work? (examples: local health officials, hospitals, community foundations, community-based organizations)

2) City Efforts to Date
(Please respond briefly and clearly to each item below, within word limits specified on online application form) NOTE: Additional points will be awarded based on strong description of how current city efforts relate to improving the health of all city residents, including those with disproportionate outcomes (e.g. lower life expectancy among people of color).

a. What are your city’s efforts to date on the issue area(s) you want to address in this initiative? Consider within these areas and efforts to coordinate policies and practices across these areas? Briefly describe key strategies used to date to spur change.

b. How have health considerations been a factor? How have or can equity and race be considered?

c. What indicators have been established in the city to track and measure progress on achieving desired results? What data are being collected and analyzed as part of this effort?

d. How does your work include innovative efforts in the effective use of one or more of the following areas? Data? Broadening financing strategies? Harnessing authentic civic engagement? Expanding existing strategic partnerships? and/or Strategies to ensure sustainability?

e. Is there local funding currently supporting this work? If so, briefly describe funding vehicle(s)/funders.

f. What are the major barriers or challenges to advancing policy change? How do health and/or equity and race impact these challenges/barriers?

3) Desired Policy and Systems Change Goals/Results
Below are examples of policies cities can affect under the three issue areas, Economic Opportunity, City Planning and Design, and Housing as part of a comprehensive, coordinated policy agenda.

Use these examples along with the Cities of Opportunity Policies, Programs, and Practices list to respond to the questions below. You are welcome to suggest what is of relevance to your city:

- Economic Opportunity – (some examples include those below, but not limited to these options)
  - Establish city contract purchasing requirements for minority-, women-owned and locally-owned small businesses.
  - Ensure that all large economic development projects within the city include a community benefit agreement with funding commitments re: jobs, wages, purchasing/contracting and neighborhood investments.

- City Planning and Design – (some examples include those below, but not limited to these options)
  - Adopt a complete-streets policy to promote walking/biking, improve safety, connectivity and aesthetics.
  - Establish a city goal for every city resident to have access to healthy food retail, open/green space...
spaces (parks or nature), transit, community centers and libraries, schools, jobs and other services.

- **Housing (Affordable and Healthy)** – (some examples include those below, but not limited to these options)
  - Award tax credits (e.g., LIHTC, NMTC) to developers based on criteria for Affordable and Healthy Housing as a lever for health and wellness in targeted, underserved areas.
  - Develop a land bank or local affordable housing trust to acquire, hold, rehabilitate and manage properties such as vacant lots, abandoned buildings, or foreclosures; sell/transition them to income-qualified buyers or mission-focused nonprofit housing developers.

(Please respond briefly and clearly to each item below, within word limits specified on online application form.)

a. Describe at least one specific policy or systems change outcome your city wants to see as a result of participation in this initiative. **NOTE: Additional points will be awarded based on a good description of how this outcome fits into a longer-term, comprehensive plan to address the root causes of poor health in the city.** Examples of policy and systems changes from the pilot cities may be illuminating:
  - **Systems Change** – Birmingham is operationalizing the Mayors’ Comprehensive Community Initiative with a model of governance, accountability and staffing structures for a “no wrong door” service model for all city neighborhoods.
  - **Systems Change** – Lansing is building a citywide data infrastructure for aligned policies and practices, encompassing their program-based budgeting system.
  - **Policy Change** – Atlanta’s Department of Watershed Management built hyper-local hiring requirements into their solicitations for Environmental Impact Bonds for innovative green infrastructure projects. (This was a prototype for infusing policies for equitable economic development throughout city infrastructure projects.)
  - **Policy Change** – Grand Rapids developed a new objective for health equity and Health in All Policies in the city’s new Strategic Plan.

b. Describe how current community conditions foster furthering this policy or systems change goal. Are you leveraging a specific opportunity or distinct moment in time? How will this build on longer-term plans within the city to better address the root causes of poor health?

c. How will this policy or systems change goal advance the health of city residents? How does this goal advance equity and race?

d. What do you hope to learn from the initiative? How would you apply it?

**City Team Composition**

a. Identify a team lead to serve as the coordinator for your team, primary contact and resource for NLC and other participating cities. Include the names, titles and affiliations of 3-4 additional team members from key city agencies and community partners who will actively engage in the city’s efforts (i.e., attend the cohort convenings, monthly TA meetings and conversations with team members and key stakeholders in the city) to drive comprehensive policy change.

b. The ideal team will include both city
representation and external partners with enough influence to effect change and catalyze action. This includes decision-makers and essential staff from the city on policy recommendations, the city’s health system, local health department or public health partners, and a funding partner or key stakeholder with access to funding partners.

c. If you are selected as a finalists, a one-hour phone interview is required with your team lead and Mayor or City Manager between September 19 and 25, 2019. Please indicate if that presents a problem.

**Letter of Support**

A letter of support from the top city executive (Mayor or City Manager, depending on governance structure of your city) must be submitted with your application. As well, forward a letter of support from one or two external partner(s) proposed for your team. These letters must indicate support for the specific policy or systems change priorities noted in your application.

**Gaps and Opportunities**

Please rank the level of the city’s current need for support in each of the areas below:

Using the online form, rank from 1 to 10: 1 for highest needed/10 for lowest needed item on this list.

- Education and outreach to policy decision makers and their influencers
- Partnership with Hospitals/Health Systems
- Partnership with Public Health Department
- Civic Engagement – ensure residents have voice in decisions that affect their lives
- Data – identify issues and specific populations for focused action
- Equity and Race – tailor and target efforts where they are needed most, especially to address historic, systemic exclusion
- Financing – strategies to help city leaders stretch value for every dollar
- Partnerships & Collaboration – align actions, expand and deepen relationships and engage all key stakeholders
- Sustainability – focus actions to ensure solutions are long lasting
- Communications – to city residents and institutional stakeholders
### Key Application Dates

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Contact Details</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>August 30, 2019</strong></td>
<td>Deadline for submission of city’s applications (Cities are also welcome to indicate interest in the Community of Practice or Learning Community - no application necessary)</td>
<td><strong>Send to Kitty Hsu Dana <a href="mailto:dana@nlc.org">dana@nlc.org</a> AND Laura McDaniel <a href="mailto:mcdaniel@nlc.org">mcdaniel@nlc.org</a></strong></td>
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<td><strong>September 17</strong></td>
<td>Notification of Finalists</td>
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<td><strong>September 19-25</strong></td>
<td>Interviews of Finalists - Must include Mayor or City Manager and key members of team from city and partner organizations - Must be available for one-hour interview during this time period</td>
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<td><strong>September 30</strong></td>
<td>Notification of cities on selection decisions (up to six cities will join the cohort)</td>
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<td><strong>November 4-8 - Save the Date!</strong></td>
<td>First convening with peer cities, subject matter experts and funding partners - Focus: factors that affect health and policies and systems that affect these factors; promote equitable access to services and service delivery, and mitigating structural racism; high-performing intersectionality across city departments; insights from pilot city leaders</td>
<td><strong>Washington, DC</strong></td>
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<td><strong>December 2019 to November 2020</strong></td>
<td>TA Calls with Individual City Teams; and Group Learning Labs with All Peer City Teams (alternating months for each above)</td>
<td><strong>Virtual Meetings</strong></td>
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<td><strong>September or October 2020</strong></td>
<td>Second convening with peer cities, subject matter experts and funding partners - Focus: share accomplishments re: policy and systems change; capture lessons learned</td>
<td><strong>TBD</strong></td>
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Deadline for Application: end of day (in your time zone) **Friday, August 30, 2019.**

Apply by [accessing the online application form here.](#)

- For applications for the new 12-month cohort, please contact **Kitty Hsu Dana**, Senior Health Policy Advisor, YEF Institute - Dana@nlc.org
- For inquiries regarding the pilot Community of Practice or Learning Network, please contact **Laura McDaniel**, Manager, Health & Wellness, YEF Institute - McDaniel@nlc.org