A child’s development is affected by his or her family, neighborhood, community, and institutions, as well as local, state and federal policies. A well-designed early childhood system takes this into account and addresses how the whole community can support children.

City leaders are well positioned to champion the needs of children and families and create communities where all children can thrive. City Leadership for Building an Early Learning Nation is a two-year initiative to support local officials in developing and strengthening community plans to ensure that young children in our cities grow up safe, healthy and ready to learn. It is made possible by generous support from the Bezos Family Foundation. National League of Cities (NLC) is partnering with the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) to deepen the early learning efforts in a select group of communities and expand the number of communities working to improve early childhood experiences. The ultimate goal is to build an Early Learning Nation made up of communities that prioritize kids and families and promote learning and development for early and life-long success.

**Networks of Early Learning Communities**

NLC and CSSP are working with two networks of communities to foster continued learning and growth as they build early learning systems to help young children get the best possible start in life. NLC’s Early Learning Nation (ELN) network of seven cities came together in July 2015 for NLC’s first year of the City Leadership for Building an Early Learning Nation initiative. CSSP has convened ten communities in Early Childhood-LINC (Learning and Innovation Network for Communities) since 2014.

NLC provides teams from each ELN city with individual assistance to improve their early learning systems including information about the latest research and promising practices; assistance with developing and implementing local plans with goals and outcomes; and connections to national experts and resources.

**NLC's Early Learning Nation Cities**

- Dayton, Ohio
- Jacksonville, Florida
- Kansas City, Missouri
- Minneapolis, Minnesota
- Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
- Portland, Maine
- San Francisco, California
Additionally, ELN cities can engage with EC-LINC through community conference calls and in-person meetings with opportunities for peer learning and sharing across project sites to discuss challenges, best practices and strategies, mentor each other and develop new approaches that promote early learning and early childhood system development.

Building an Early Learning Nation

NLC and CSSP have created two foundational resources to help communities become Early Learning Communities. *Early Learning Communities: Building Blocks for Success* is a framework defining a vision of communities where all children learn and thrive. The *Early Learning Community Action Guide* helps community leaders take action to put the building blocks in place and build Early Learning Communities. The Guide provides guidance for city, county and other local leaders looking for ways to put their commitment to early childhood into action, with suggested action steps to strengthen and support each of the building blocks necessary to achieve better outcomes for young children and their families.

NLC and CSSP also developed a progress rating tool designed to help communities assess their efforts as they create action plans and implement the elements of the Action Guide. The progress rating tool helps them identify their starting point and next steps for action. Currently, NLC and CSSP are piloting the Action Guide in the ELN and EC-LINC networks. Beginning in 2018, other communities across the country will be invited to join the Early Learning Nation and have access to the *Early Learning Community Action Guide* and progress rating tool. They will be able to assess where they are as an Early Learning Community, self-select action steps, and develop an action plan to create and improve their early childhood system.

As communities use these resources, we will share their results and the lessons they learn for the benefit of other communities and their leaders so that community by community, we will become an Early Learning Nation.

About the National League of Cities
The National League of Cities (NLC) is dedicated to helping city leaders build better communities. NLC is a resource and advocate for 19,000 cities, towns and villages, representing more than 218 million Americans.

About the Institute for Youth, Education, and Families
NLC’s Institute for Youth, Education, and Families (YEF Institute) helps municipal leaders take action on behalf of the children, youth, and families in their communities. NLC launched the YEF Institute in 2000 in recognition of the unique and influential roles that mayors, city councilmembers and other local leaders play in strengthening families and improving outcomes for children and youth.

To Learn More
Contact Katie Whitehouse
Senior Associate - Early Childhood
at whitehouse@nlc.org