



*Invitation
to apply*

COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

Cities Addressing the Basic Needs of Postsecondary Students

Postsecondary education is critical for the economic competitiveness of cities. As of Spring 2020, undergraduate enrollment is down nearly 6 percent nationally, threatening to cut off millions of students from economic opportunity. One major cause of this decline is that today, more than 58 percent of all postsecondary students face food insecurity, housing insecurity, or homelessness. Further, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted that many students also lack access to childcare and transportation, hindering their ability to obtain postsecondary credentials that lead to workforce success.

To respond to this crisis, the National League of Cities (NLC) is launching a new Community of Practice cohort for 12 selected city teams to help cities work in partnership with their postsecondary institutions, employers, and other community partners to remove barriers to basic needs such as food, housing, childcare, mental health services, transportation, or digital access for postsecondary students. Unmet basic needs often derail students' efforts to attain postsecondary credentials, and the COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated the inequities many postsecondary students experience. While increased vaccinations are allowing many colleges and universities to reopen for in-person instruction this Fall, the economic impacts of the pandemic still affect postsecondary students' ability to re-enroll and persist. The Community of Practice (CoP) will provide city leaders with tools and guidance to help their community gain knowledge about their residents' postsecondary completion challenges, identify basic need barriers to tackle, and connect with their peers to share and refine approaches that hold promise in overcoming barriers to college completion. This initiative is meant to increase equitable opportunities for low-income students and students of color and to position postsecondary completion as a strategy to increase pathways out of poverty and workforce success.

GOALS FOR PARTICIPATING CITIES

- Develop greater awareness regarding the basic needs gaps of your city's postsecondary students;
- Develop a vision, goals and an action plan;
- Engage key partners to achieve your goals;
- Use data to understand your local challenges, and to inform your strategies;
- Learn from peer cities tackling similar issues, including from cities that participated in the initial cohorts in 2019 and 2020;
- Document and share best practices and lessons learned;
- Solve locally defined problems related to students' unmet basic needs; and
- Become a champion and voice for municipal leadership to address postsecondary basic needs.

APPLICATIONS DUE

August 13, 2021, by 5:00 pm EST

SUBMISSION INFORMATION

Only one application per city will be considered and must be received with the full support of the mayor and/or city manager and at least one postsecondary institution leader. Please email your application form and responses to Mike Bartlett at bartlett@nlc.org.

SELECTION ANNOUNCEMENT

Cities will be notified about their selection status in late August 2021.

INFORMATIONAL CALLS

NLC will host an informational call for interested cities to learn more about the Community of Practice and to ask questions of NLC staff on July 1, 2021, at 2:00pm Eastern Time. Interested individuals may register for this meeting.

NLC CONTACTS

Audrey M. Hutchinson, Director, Education and Expanded Learning, Institute for Youth Education, and Families hutchinson@nlc.org

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Mike Bartlett, Program Manager, Postsecondary Success Basic Needs Initiative, Institute for Youth, Education, and Families bartlett@nlc.org

GOAL

To help mayors and other local elected leaders develop policies, practices, and programs in partnership with postsecondary institutions, school districts, business leaders and community organizations, to remove barriers to basic needs that often prevent college students from successfully completing postsecondary degrees, certificates or other credentials needed to gain access to rewarding careers.

WHO SHOULD APPLY?

Cities that meet the following criteria should consider applying for this new NLC Community of Practice:

- Does your city seek to ensure more residents attain postsecondary credentials in fields leading to in-demand, high-wage jobs and careers?
- Is your city concerned about the inequitable access to postsecondary credentials facing low-income individuals, populations of color, parents, or others in your community due to challenges they face meeting their basic needs which may have grown during the COVID-19 crisis?
- Is your mayor concerned about the number of postsecondary students missing classes, dropping out of school, not enrolling once accepted, or never showing up on campus because their basic needs in areas such as food, housing, transportation, childcare, mental health, or digital access are unmet?

- Is your city worried that the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic are preventing postsecondary students from enrolling and completing credentials because they are more focused on securing income to address their basic needs and/or the total household income of their families?
- Is the city looking for guidance on how to work with cross-sector partners to tackle food and housing insecurity, transportation, childcare gaps and other basic needs to help postsecondary students stay on track to graduate and obtain necessary credentials?
- Would your city find it beneficial to be part of a community of cities working together and sharing strategies on how to address postsecondary basic needs?
- Do unmet basic needs limit the number of new students with degrees or certificates in needed fields entering the workforce, and is your city's business community concerned about how to fill higher-skilled jobs when the economy recovers?

If the answers to the above questions are "yes," your city is strongly encouraged to apply for this unique opportunity. NLC, through its Institute for Youth, Education, and Families (YEF Institute), will provide technical assistance and support over a 12-month period to a cohort of 12 cities tackling this issue using a Community of Practice model. City teams will have the opportunity to bring in one or more postsecondary partners as well as other community partners to work alongside other city teams to address barriers such as food insecurity, homelessness, and lack of adequate childcare, mental health services, transportation, and digital access.

THE OPPORTUNITY

NLC, with generous support from the ECMC Foundation, invites senior municipal staff in mayors'/ city managers' offices or economic development offices/agencies to join the Community of Practice – Cities Addressing the Basic Needs of Postsecondary Students to address barriers to basic needs that prevent city residents from obtaining postsecondary degrees or certificates. New policies, programs or practices to help students meet basic needs are essential to increase the odds that they will persist through graduation to attain their degree or credential. These findings are well-documented by the latest research by the [Hope Center for College, Community and Justice at Temple University](#):

[#RealCollege 2021: Basic Needs Insecurity During the Ongoing Pandemic.](#)¹

Cities are well positioned to build partnerships that lead to policies, practices and programs that remove such barriers, and NLC is poised to support such efforts. City leaders, in partnership with their postsecondary institution leaders, will identify a locally defined problem that they will work to address over the course of this one-year Community of Practice. Cities will pick one basic need topic (e.g., food insecurity, housing insecurity, transportation, digital access, childcare, or mental health) and develop specific policy or programmatic action steps to tackle the problem. Cities are not required to have done any prior work on these issues. NLC envisions this CoP as a learning opportunity to both introduce cities to this problem, and engage them on identifying and enacting solutions.

Cities will participate in monthly peer-to-peer virtual learning opportunities with the full cohort and receive frequent individualized technical assistance from NLC's staff and national content experts to help advance the city's efforts. To kick off and level set the Community of Practice, NLC will share research that illuminates the size of gaps in basic needs as a critical impediment to postsecondary attainment nationwide and inspire city leaders to be champions for this work at the local level. NLC will work with city leaders to develop their vision, short-term and long-term goals, and local action plans that will help them make progress on their identified problem. At the end of the 12-month Community of Practice, city teams will share their successes, lessons learned, and plans for next steps to further their progress. NLC will continue to engage cohort cities over a second year on a quarterly basis to track continued success and support with longer-term goals. Further, cities of this CoP will have the opportunity to learn from prior cohorts of cities launched in 2019 & 2020.

NLC's established peer learning network, Postsecondary Success City Action Network (PSCAN), includes cities that have already engaged in deep work to promote postsecondary success over the past decade. After a successful two years in the Community of Practice, cities may be ready to expand their commitment and efforts to develop a city-wide postsecondary completion agenda tied to workforce development goals. If the city moves in this direction,

it may be ready to join PSCAN to remain connected to NLC and peer cities pursuing similar postsecondary agendas. NLC convenes PSCAN cities on an annual basis to foster peer learning.

NLC believes in the power of in-person relationship building and learning, but while social distancing rules are in place, NLC will support the Community of Practice virtually. When it becomes safe for NLC staff and city leaders to travel again, NLC will host an in-person convening bringing together cohort cities to learn from each other (tentatively targeted for November/early December 2021). NLC will cover the costs of travel (airfare, hotel, ground transportation, and food) for one person per city to attend the meeting. Cities will be able to bring one or two additional partners to participate in the convening at their own cost.

THE NEED FOR ACTION

The evidence is clear that postsecondary credentials leading to career pathways that pay a living wage is essential in today's economy. Since the Great Recession, [more than 95 percent of all new jobs have gone to workers with at least some college education.](#) Further, Americans with some type of postsecondary credential earn 25 percent more on average over their lifetimes than those with only a high school degree or less. Today 75 percent of Americans without a degree report that further [education would help them advance in their careers.](#) While the ongoing recovery post COVID-19 may look somewhat different, early indications are that the nation will experience similar trends, with those with postsecondary credentials faring the best. High levels of educational attainment are directly linked to a city's economic vitality and competitiveness, so it is in the best interest of municipal leaders to partner with postsecondary institutions to support and promote postsecondary credential attainment.

The current COVID-19 crisis has pulled back the curtain on existing inequities in postsecondary success and completion. Students who were already food and housing insecure, lacked transportation, childcare, or mental health services, or did not have access to technology or the internet are struggling even more. Meeting the basic needs of postsecondary students is crucial to help ensure continued pursuit of

¹ For further research on this topic, see [Hunger and Homelessness in College: Results from a National Study of Basic Needs in Higher Education.](#); and [Where Did All the Students Go? Understanding the Enrollment Decline at Community Colleges During the Pandemic](#)

their educational and training objectives to obtain a credential that will offer them successful entry into the workforce.

NLC will work with cities to address this issue through an equity lens with the knowledge that expanded opportunity is even more crucial for low-income students and students of color who are more likely to be left behind without bold interventions at the city level. In response to the need to increase postsecondary certificate and degree attainment, city leaders are well-positioned to play a pivotal role to help remove barriers that impede a student's ability to succeed.

BENEFITS FOR CITIES THAT PARTICIPATE IN THE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

NLC's *Community of Practice – Cities Addressing the Basic Needs of Postsecondary Students Cohort Two* runs from August 2021 through August 2022 with a follow up year of light technical assistance support and check-in calls regarding progress through January 2023, including a planned culminating convening in 2022. The CoP seeks to stimulate and support city-level progress by fostering a rich exchange of ideas among municipal leaders, their multi-sector partners and national experts who are steeped in strategies to address the basic needs and barriers to success for postsecondary students. NLC's goal is to have lessons from the field inform future work, while lifting up the voices of local elected officials and the roles they can play to improve postsecondary attainment to support workforce development.

NLC will work with selected cities to achieve the following:

- **Develop a vision, goals, and an action plan:** City action plans and implementation strategies will be designed to address a locally defined problem. Cities' action plans will include timelines, interim targets, partners, peer-to-peer learning and sharing, and benchmarks to create an accountability framework that ensures momentum is sustained. Specific roles, responsibilities, assignments, and metrics will be identified to drive and measure success.
- **Engage key partners to achieve your goals:** City leaders will engage their postsecondary institution presidents, deans, or other senior leaders as well as other critical community partners to develop local action plans that outline goals for removing barriers to basic needs for postsecondary students.

- **Use data to understand your local challenges, and to inform your strategies:** City teams will gain guidance on accessing data from their postsecondary institutions to determine the level of unmet basic needs of students. The city may already have data on housing and transportation that can be leveraged to inform this work, and NLC will also connect cities to national organizations with local data on housing and transportation to support the project.
- **Focus on Equity to Change Policies and Practices for Marginalized Populations:** NLC will provide racial equity frameworks and tools to help cities focus their efforts.
- **Confer with National Experts and Philanthropic Leaders:** NLC will broker relationships between city teams and key national partners to inform city strategies for removing barriers to postsecondary attainment.
- **Join a National Cohort of Cities Tackling Basic Needs:** Through this opportunity, twelve new cities will join a network of 20 cities from earlier cohorts, raising ideas and strategies to address this topic. The cities will develop relationships with each other and learn how other cities support their postsecondary students. NLC will host monthly virtual webinars or group conversations and possibly one in-person convening (when it is safe to travel again) to bring the full cohort of city leaders and their partners together.
- **National and Local Attention for Commitment to Basic Needs:** NLC will work with each city's communications office to announce the selection of the cities as part of a new national initiative engaging municipal leaders on postsecondary basic needs. NLC will produce a blog on NLC's [CitiesSpeak.org](https://www.citiespeak.org) blogsite as well as use social media to feature the selected cities and help generate media attention and recognition for the city's commitment to this topic, as well as work with the cities to produce their own blogs, articles and social media content.
- **Document and Share Best Practices and Lessons Learned:** NLC will capture the lessons learned from cities throughout the initiative to produce a brief outlining the cities' successful strategies that will be disseminated broadly to NLC's membership and posted on NLC'S website from which other communities may learn.

TIMELINE

Invitation to Apply Released	June 17, 2021
Informational Call for Interested Cities	July 1, 2021
Applications Due	August 13, 2021
Notification of Selected Cities	August 20, 2021
Virtual Orientation Call for Full Cohort	September 9, 2021 at 2:00pm Eastern Time
Individual City Technical Assistance Begins	October 2021 continuing every six weeks
Full Cohort Technical Assistance Webinars and Peer Sharing Calls	Monthly beginning October 2021
First In-person Cohort Meeting (expenses covered by NLC)	November or early December 2021/ Early Spring 2022*
Community of Practice Monthly Engagement Ends	September 2022
Year 2 Follow-up Sustainability Calls with NLC	Quarterly Calls through 2023

*Assuming national, state, and local guidance permit city staff and NLC staff to travel and host meetings this year. This convening will be held in conjunction with a National Summit on Postsecondary Basic Needs which will bring together the thirteen cities from the 2020 Community of Practice cohort including : Akron, Ohio; Arlington, Texas; Aurora, Ill.; Jacksonville and Orlando, Fla.; Las Vegas, Nev.; Tempe and Mesa, Ariz.; Newark, N.J.; Richmond and Rancho Cordova, Calif.; St. Louis, Mo.; and Winston-Salem, N.C., as well as seven cities in NLC's 2019 technical assistance cohort on postsecondary basic needs supported by the Kresge Foundation which include Chula Vista, CA; Denver, CO, Oakland, CA, Philadelphia, PA, Richmond, VA, Rochester, NY, and San Diego, CA.

HOW TO APPLY FOR THIS INITIATIVE

This is a competitive application process. Up to 12 cities will be selected to participate in this Community of Practice. Cities interested in applying must submit their application to NLC by August 13, 2021. NLC aims to select a diverse set of cities from different regions of the country. Preference will be given to NLC members.

REQUIREMENTS FOR PARTICIPATION INCLUDE:

- A high-level mayoral policy advisor or senior advisor from the city who will serve as the main point of contact/city team lead.
- The mayor's demonstrated interest to address issues of postsecondary equity and access connected to local workforce and economic development, and in particular, the basic needs of postsecondary students.
- The commitment from the president or a senior administrator of a local community college or other postsecondary institution to partner with the city on this Community of Practice and to jointly work on a plan to address at least one aspect of postsecondary basic needs.
- Willingness and ability to convene a city team to participate in monthly CoP virtual convenings, individual city NLC technical assistance calls every six weeks, as well as one in-person cross-city meeting

if travel and in-person meetings are deemed safe again. (NLC will cover travel expenses for the city team lead. Up to two additional team members are welcome to participate in the cross city convening at the city's or partners' expense.)

- Willingness of the mayor to convene key and relevant city/county agencies, state agencies and community partners to pursue policies and practices that can create or strengthen the ecosystems of support for postsecondary students.
- **Letter of support from the mayor or city manager** depending on the city's governance model.
- **Letter of support from the local college or university president or senior administrator.**

SELECTION CRITERIA:

- Commitment from the mayor to play a leadership role throughout the duration of the Community of Practice and designate and support the city team lead to bring in multi-sector partners who will help drive this agenda and develop a set of action steps and outcomes.
- Commitment by city leaders and community partners to develop strategies to address food or housing insecurity, childcare, mental health, transportation, broadband and digital access as well as other barriers that impede postsecondary students' success. (Note: No prior work in this area is required.)

APPLICATION FORM

SUBMISSION DEADLINE: August 13, 2021

City Information:

City Name, State:

City Population Size:

Demographics (%): Caucasian African American Hispanic Asian Other

Percentage of population that is considered low-income:

Form of Government (check one): Strong Mayor Council/City Manager

City's Official Twitter Account handle:

City Representative – Team Lead:

Name:

City:

Title:

Office/Agency:

Street Address:

City, State, and Zip Code:

Phone:

Email:

City Representative's Twitter Account handle:

Postsecondary Institution Partner:

Name:

Organization/Agency:

Title:

Street Address:

City, State, and Zip Code:

Phone:

Email:

Postsecondary Institution's Twitter Account handle:

Other Team Members (not required for application):

Name:

Organization/Agency:

Title:

Phone:

Email:

Other Team Member's Twitter Account handle:

Other Team Members (not required for application):

Name:

Organization/Agency:

Title:

Phone:

Email:

Other Team Member's Twitter Account handle:

TEAM APPLICATION QUESTIONS

CITY TEAM APPLYING TO BE PART OF THE INITIATIVE

Please complete the form above and provide responses to the questions below. Only one application is required per city. Multiple applications from the same city will not be accepted. Please limit the length of the application to no more than four pages in narrative form. NLC strongly encourages partners to collaborate in the preparation of the application.

Local Context

1. Provide a brief description of why your city is applying for this opportunity to address postsecondary students' basic needs.
2. Summarize any available evidence regarding the needs of postsecondary students who are unable to complete their postsecondary credentials because of barriers such as the lack of adequate housing, food insecurity, childcare, transportation, mental health, etc. Cities are not required to have comprehensive data at the time of application. NLC will support selected cities' data collection efforts through the Community of Practice.
3. In addition to your supporting postsecondary institutional partner, what other partner(s) have you engaged or are willing to engage in addressing the ecosystems of support for college students (such as a chamber of commerce, workforce board, relevant city and or county agencies, community-based organizations, etc.)?
4. What do you believe are the major obstacles to addressing basic needs for city residents attending postsecondary institutions in your city?
5. How has the COVID-19 crisis impacted postsecondary students' ability to complete their education in your city?

State & Federal Context

6. Please list any known major state funding streams, initiatives or barriers at the city, state or county levels that are likely to help or hinder your city's efforts to address postsecondary students' basic needs.
7. Please list any known federal funding streams that you currently have or that you hope to pursue that could help or hinder local efforts to address postsecondary basic needs (American Rescue Plan Act, CARES Act, etc).

Desired Goals/Results

8. What specific outcomes do you hope to achieve as a result of participating in this initiative? What is the city's short term (1 year) and a long-term goal (5 years)?
9. What do you hope to learn from the initiative and how would you apply the information gained through the Community of Practice?
10. If selected, what basic need* will your city be prioritizing for action?
11. Is there a specific existing policy, program, or practice related to postsecondary success that you have in mind and hope to gain support for during the CoP? Are you looking for ideas of where to start to help students better meet their basic needs?

* For example, including (but not limited to) food insecurity, housing insecurity, lack of access to transportation, lack of access to childcare, mental health, or digital access.

City Team Composition

Please identify a team lead from the mayor's office to serve as the primary contact and resource for NLC and other participating cities. Please also include the names and title of a senior administrator from a local postsecondary institution who will serve as a critical partner to tackle and implement strategies to address one locally defined basic needs goal.

Cities may optionally choose to identify one to two additional team members from key city agencies and community partners who will attend virtual convenings and may attend the Cross-Cities convening. These community partners will play an important role to work in partnership with the City Lead to advance the goal identified. A strong team could include representative from the mayor's office, local community colleges, business sector, city agencies, nonprofits addressing hunger and housing issues, chambers of commerce or workforce board leaders, etc.

NLC will cover travel expenses for the city team lead for in-person meetings. Up to two additional team members are welcome to participate at the city's or partner's expense.

Application Admissions Checklist:

- Application form
- Responses to the required questions (no more than 4 pages single sided)
- Two Letters of Support (Mayor/City Manager & Postsecondary Institution President or senior Administrator)
- Email your application to Mike Bartlett at Bartlett@nlc.org by 5:00 pm Eastern on August 13, 2021.

Only applications that are submitted online will be accepted.