

## REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

NATIONAL LEAGUE OF CITIES – INSTITUTE FOR YOUTH, EDUCATION,  
AND FAMILIES

### SOUTHERN CITIES ECONOMIC INCLUSION INITIATIVE Expanding Capacity, Building Resilience

#### KEY INFORMATION

The National League of Cities (NLC) is launching the Southern Cities Economic Inclusion (SCEI) initiative to support cities in building their capacity to implement economic inclusion strategies that close racial economic equity gaps through city-led strategies that expand economic opportunities for residents and businesses of color. As part of the SCEI initiative, cities will participate in one or two peer learning cohorts that deepen capacity and build leadership skills while receiving technical assistance and innovation funding of up to \$30,000, with support from national philanthropic partners to raise additional local matching funds.

SCEI will be implemented in partnership with, and with support from, the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta and build upon previous work led by these organizations in a number of southern cities.

<b>Proposal Due:</b>	January 14, 2022 by 5:00 PM ET
<b>Virtual Information Session:</b>	December 9, 2021
<b>Selection Announcement:</b>	February 16, 2022
<b>Project Dates:</b>	February 2022 - November 2023
<b>Submission Information:</b>	Please submit completed applications <a href="#">online</a> .

Questions? Contact Denise Belser at [belser@nlc.org](mailto:belser@nlc.org)

## PROJECT GOALS

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- Build cohorts of networked leaders and high-level city staff in participating cities in the South to increase their capacity to implement a range of economic inclusion strategies that result in greater economic mobility and resilience for communities of color.
- Create space for city leaders and staff to share challenges and support each other during times of increased hardship and workload in city government.
- Support cities to leverage incoming federal resources with a focus on investments that are sustainable and build economic inclusion momentum.
- Build a broader understanding across the South of economic inclusion as a superior growth model essential to the resilience of southern local economies.

## BACKGROUND

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Millions of Americans in communities across the country face economic hardship and instability amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, but the impacts in the Southeastern states are disproportionately severe.

Deep and persistent inequities in small business growth, access to jobs, and affordable housing are exacerbated by decades of structural racism and exclusionary practices and policies that have marginalized communities of color, particularly Black families and businesses. Studies have shown that economic inclusion strategies – the intentional engagement by communities to implement strategies that expand the participation of businesses and residents of color in the economy – are the superior growth model for communities, because they harness untapped talent and economic potential. As funds from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and other federal and state spending enter cities, SCEI offers an opportunity for cities to create economic inclusion strategies that harness that funding toward a growth

model that offers cities, their residents and businesses, greater economic prosperity.

For over twenty years, the National League of Cities' Institute for Youth, Education & Families (YEF Institute) has transformed how municipal leaders envision their roles in improving outcomes for all children, youth, and families in their communities. Building upon this work, NLC is launching the Southern Cities Economic Inclusion (SCEI) initiative to support cities in building their capacity to implement economic inclusion strategies that close racial economic equity gaps through city-led strategies that expand economic opportunities for residents and businesses of color.

The W. K. Kellogg Foundation is the lead funder of the project and has a priority around economic inclusion in cities in the southern region across workforce development, anchor institutions, procurement and enterprise development. They fund in various cities and states throughout the south through their national work and have also designated two priority places with offices and significant investments in New Orleans, LA, and Jackson, MS. With investments in municipal economic inclusion efforts in several cities within the Southeast region and WKKF engagement and grantees being a part of the earlier SCEI cohort, it created a natural partnership and alignment for the next phase of this initiative in partnership with NLC, AECF, and the Atlanta Federal Reserve Bank.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation facilitated peer convenings over the past six years with seven cities through which cities identified and implemented economic inclusion strategies in small business development, procurement, workforce development, housing, and anchor institution partnering. More recently, NLC is working with 46 cities in the South to utilize American Rescue Plan (ARP) funds. In both efforts, the value of peer learning and networking has been critical to cities identifying effective economic inclusion approaches in a southern context; SCEI takes those lessons and embeds them in this initiative.



## PROJECT OVERVIEW

The COVID pandemic, economic decline and racial justice uprisings have all had a significant impact in cities across the South over the past year. As cities move forward, embedding economic inclusion strategies in a framework of well-being and resilience is essential to supporting families, businesses and communities to thrive amidst so much change.

Mirroring their communities, city leaders, staff and stakeholders are stretched thin after months of responding to critical and immediate needs of city residents and businesses. NLC and its partners recognize that we are in unprecedented times and local leaders may not be able to add more work onto their already full plates. SCEI will be sensitive to city staff capacity in the timing and the amount of technical assistance and peer learning activities included in this project. A top priority for SCEI is that cities' economic inclusion efforts within the project complements and enhances work already underway in each city. In addition to the tangible work of the cohort, SCEI offers those committed to economic inclusion a place and space to collectively breathe, take stock, and regain energy for the work ahead. Convenings will offer time for reflection, inspiration, and recharging through connection to peers.

SCEI recognizes that change is facilitated through a combination of commitment and action from leaders as well as deep capacity within cities to implement new economic inclusion strategies and is comprised of two key approaches: "Deepening the Bench" and

"Building Leadership." In the South in particular, it is essential for local leaders to learn from peers about how to implement economic inclusion strategies that are effective despite systems and policies that limit opportunity for people and businesses of color.

1. The 15-month "**Deepening the Bench**" cohort cities will build capacity in selected cities to implement a range of economic inclusion strategies resulting in greater economic opportunity and resilience for communities of color. Working both inside city government, with elected leaders, and with key outside stakeholders, the 10 cities participating in this cohort will utilize a range of tools to identify assets and equity gaps through data and community engagement and implement targeted strategies.
2. The "**Building Leadership**" cohort of elected officials and civic leaders will work to lead economic inclusion policy change both at the city and state levels. Through two 10-month rounds, pairs of city and community leaders will engage in peer learning and support from NLC, as well as leadership development in economic inclusion and time for deep reflection. Mayors and city executives will be expected to participate in at least three meetings to align strategic direction of the city with economic inclusion goals and offer the chance for significant peer discussion and leadership development. Content will be designed to help local leaders lead the way for southern cities in creating change through implementation of policy and programmatic changes in their communities. Recognizing that local leaders are stretched very thin, the cohort experience will offer a safe space for local leaders to support each other while strengthening their leadership capacity.

SCEI aims to align the cities in both cohorts to allow deep city-level engagement of both leaders and their senior staff to work together to transform communities. Both cohorts rest in a deep appreciation for the expertise and perspectives of those engaged in the work daily to improve racial equity outcomes

throughout southern cities and will be constructed to offer opportunities for candid conversations and peer advising. Optimally, there will be 10 communities participating in both cohorts, and an additional six cities participating in the Building Leadership cohort, with the aspiration for the latter cohort to both offer inspiration and gather ideas to bring to their cities and to state policy work.

### **Tools to inform economic inclusion**

A focus on racial equity and reducing the racial wealth divide will be incorporated into SCEI to support local leaders in utilizing a racial equity lens while planning and developing strategies and policy changes, which may include: 1) Entrepreneurship, access to capital and small business development including city procurement strategies; 2) Strategies to increase employment and wages, including employer engagement, anchor institution engagement, education and training access, and wraparound supports, such as housing; 3) Financial inclusion and debt reduction strategies; and 4) economic empowerment strategies targeted to youth and young parents.

Data provided by the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta will undergird city decisions, using both quantitative and qualitative data to assess economic conditions, design strategies, and evaluate progress. A new economic inclusion assessment tool developed with support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation will support cities in identifying their strengths and opportunities for change.

### **Peer Learning**

SCEI is rooted in the firm belief that peer learning, especially in a southern context, is at the core of creating change in cities. To that end, all activities in both cohorts will offer cities the opportunity to learn deeply from their peers on what works, what is challenging, and how to overcome barriers at the local level to moving economic inclusion efforts forward. SCEI will focus less on outside expert advice, although that will also be available, and more on the knowledge, expertise, and strategies of participating city teams and leaders, thus creating a network of allies across the South in both cohorts.

### **Technical Assistance**

Through SCEI, participating cities will have access to a range of technical assistance opportunities from NLC, the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, national experts and intermediaries.

Technical assistance may include:

- ◆ Regular check-in calls as needed with NLC and city teams to share updates and troubleshoot challenges;
- ◆ Ongoing all-city calls or webinars to facilitate focused discussions of design and implementation challenges, link city teams to peers working on similar initiatives, and promote cross-site sharing of best practices;
- ◆ Connection to consulting researchers, including the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, with expertise in economic inclusion topic areas, data tracking and evaluation;
- ◆ Connections to advanced or “faculty” cities to enhance learning; and
- ◆ Convenings with all participating cities to share strategies and promote peer learning opportunities.

### **Grant Funding**

To support cities’ economic inclusion efforts, participating cities in both cohorts will be invited to apply for two rounds of grants, minimally awarding \$30,000 with the possibility of significant additional funding to test innovations, and through local philanthropic funds.

#### **Planning grants**

A planning grant of \$10,000 for Deepening the Bench communities, and a \$5,000 grant for Building Leadership-only communities, will support work in the first three months. This grant will be awarded to participating cities upon selection into the project.

#### **Implementation grants**

After the planning phase, all cities in both cohorts will be able to apply for a second grant to launch their economic inclusion strategies that were developed

during the planning phase. Cities with participants in both cohorts can apply for up to \$30,000 and cities in the Leadership-only cohort can apply for up to \$25,000 for implementation. These funds are designed to support cities' efforts to garner widespread support to implement policy reforms and other crucial elements of a sustainable economic inclusion agenda. Cities will be encouraged to use the grant to leverage funds from the federal American Rescue Plan Act to maximize their impact toward improving economic outcomes, with the opportunity to test new far-reaching strategies. These funds should also be used to pay for city teams to travel to project convenings.

### Local Match

**Cities selected to participate in an SCEI cohort must agree to work with SCEI partners to secure matching funds from a local source that equal the total grant amount.** Funds can be secured from a local or regional foundation, a business partner, or another source. NLC and other project partners will work with cities in the first three months of the project to approach local philanthropy and other sources to secure the match.

## BENEFITS TO PARTICIPATING CITIES

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Cities selected to join the technical assistance cohort will gain access to a broad range of benefits, including:

- ◆ Shared learning and support with peers from cities across the south in how to approach economic inclusion in a southern context; peer advice to solve complex challenges; and inspiration on doing things differently.
- ◆ Ongoing technical assistance in developing and implementing a broad set of economic inclusion strategies that meet the needs of low-income families and are based on best practices to achieve economic inclusion.
- ◆ Access to resources and expertise through virtual and in-person convenings, peer support and learning, and shared materials.

- ◆ Heightened stature and national visibility through participation in this national initiative.

## ELIGIBILITY

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Only cities located in the Southeastern United States are eligible to apply for this opportunity. Cities selected for SCEI will represent various population sizes and different municipal structures. NLC seeks to select cities located in “target states” of significant priority for the philanthropic organizations funding the initiative, as well as those in the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta’s region. Taken together, these states are: AL, FL, GA, LA, MS, NC, TN and VA. To be selected and receive grant funding, cities must commit to secure financial support from a local or regional philanthropic or other source to support the city’s goals and participation in the project in the first three months of the project; national philanthropic partners are committed to support engagement by cities with local philanthropy to build bridges between local and national levels. Cities will be selected based on high-level municipal and civic leadership to support innovative local economic inclusion policies and programs and a commitment to utilize a racial equity lens while developing strategies and policy changes.

## PROJECT TIMELINE

The project will take place between February 2022 and November 2023

ACTIVITY	DATES
SCEI <a href="#">Application</a> Released	November 18, 2021
Virtual Information Session	December 9, 2021
City Applications Due	January 14, 2022
Finalist Interviews	January 24 – February 4
Cities Notified	February 16
Cities secure local match	April 30
Deepening the Bench cohort peer learning and technical assistance	March 2022 – November 2023
Building Leadership cohort 1 peer learning and technical assistance	March 2022 – December 2022
Building Leadership cohort 2 peer learning and technical assistance	December 2022 – October 2023
First convening: Deepening the bench and Leadership Cohort 1 *	May/June 2022
Implementation Grants application process	June 2022
Second convening: all cohorts	December 2022
Third convening: Deepening the bench and Leadership Cohort 2 *	May/June 2023
SCEI Economic Inclusion Summit: all cohorts	October 2023
Final City Reports Due to NLC	November 1, 2023

**\*Leadership Retreats are adjacent to Building the Bench convenings 1-3. All cohorts come together for the final Economic Inclusion Summit.**

## EXPECTATIONS OF SELECTED CITIES

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SCEI expects Deepening the Bench cities to also participate in the Leadership Cohort in order to maximize potential impact and outcomes for cities. Ten cities will be selected for this cross-cohort opportunity and up to six additional cities may join the Leadership Cohort only.

### All Deepening the Bench Cohort cities will:

- ◆ Obtain mayor or city executive commitment and sign off for city participation throughout the 15-month project;
- ◆ Commit to developing a team of three core stakeholders including a team lead who is a high-level city staff member, such as a department head; and one external stakeholder;
- ◆ Attend four all-city convenings (anticipated to be in-person, depending upon public health conditions);
- ◆ Participate in virtual meetings during the year on relevant topics;
- ◆ Bring an additional two local stakeholders to convenings and to other meetings based on content, for a team total of five members;
- ◆ Work with local leaders participating in the Leadership Cohort to conduct an economic inclusion assessment as a first step to identify strategies and capacity building goals;
- ◆ Develop a set of economic inclusion strategies based on the assessment, and commit to implementing 1-2 strategies during the initiative; and
- ◆ Work with SCEI partners to secure local match funding totaling 100% of the grant (either funds or in-kind services) related to the project.

### All Leadership Cohort cities will:

- ◆ Commit one city elected official and one external stakeholder to participate in one of two 10-month cohorts (2022 and 2023), including:
- ◆ Participation by mayor or other city executive in at least three meetings (may be virtual or in-person).

- ◆ Participation by a senior city staff member designated by the mayor or city executive (approved in advance by NLC) to attend an additional series of meetings (virtual or in-person) in which the mayor or city executive is not in attendance.

### Leadership cities not also participating in the Building the Bench cohort will also:

- ◆ Conduct an economic inclusion assessment as a first step to identify strategies and capacity building goals; and
- ◆ Identify one strategy to implement during the project, including advocacy on state policies to further economic inclusion.

## ROLES OF PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

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### National League of Cities

The National League of Cities (NLC) Institute for Youth, Education and Families (YEF Institute) is the lead organization implementing the SCEI initiative and providing the technical assistance and peer learning opportunities to participating cities. NLC is the oldest and largest national organization representing municipal government throughout the United States. Its mission is to strengthen and promote cities as centers of opportunity, leadership, and governance. The YEF Institute collaborates with city leaders to build place-based solutions through community voice – working with local communities through technical assistance; peer networks; multi-sector partnerships; member convenings and direct assistance. The YEF Institute centers values of racial equity, economic empowerment, high-quality education, equal justice, and strong health outcomes irrespective of zip code.

### W.K. Kellogg Foundation

The W.K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF) is the primary funder of the SCEI initiative and a member of the project planning team, providing guidance and support on the development of the initiative. WKKF, founded in 1930 as an independent, private foundation by breakfast cereal innovator and entrepreneur Will Keith

Kellogg, is among the largest philanthropic foundations in the United States. Guided by the belief that all children should have an equal opportunity to thrive, WKCF works with communities to create conditions for vulnerable children so they can realize their full potential in school, work and life.

### **The Annie E. Casey Foundation**

The Annie E. Casey Foundation (Casey) is a supporting funder of the SCEI initiative. With an extensive background in working with cities in the southern region, Casey also is a member of the project planning and implementation team, offering guidance and support to the initiative. Casey

strengthens families, builds stronger communities and increases economic opportunity, as all three play critical roles in determining the well-being of children and youth. Casey supports the well-being and success of young people from birth through early adulthood. In all of its work, Casey aims to advance racial and ethnic equity and inclusion and build paths to opportunity so that all children and youth can realize their potential, regardless of race, ethnicity or ZIP code.

### **Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta**

The Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta will host project convenings and provide selected cities with in-kind support including research and data, webinars and some one-on-one support to cities in the cohorts. The Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta is one of 12 reserve banks within the federal reserve system, executes the central bank's monetary policy by reviewing price inflation and economic growth, and by regulating the banks, bank holding companies, and savings and loan holding companies within its territory. Headquartered in Atlanta, GA, branch banks are located at Birmingham, AL; Jacksonville and Miami, FL; Nashville, TN; and New Orleans, LA.

## **SELECTION CRITERIA**

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Up to 16 cities, or groups of small cities in a specific region, in total will be selected to participate in the SCEI project based on the following criteria:

Strength and clarity of project goals and successfully communicating how these goals can be achieved through the city's participation in SCEI;

Demonstrated commitment from the mayor or another city executive to advance economic inclusion strategies as part of their agenda and a commitment that the mayor or another elected official or city executive will participate in the Leadership Network cohort;

Evidence that the city is prepared to, and has capacity to implement a new economic inclusion initiative;

A committed team of stakeholders (e.g., mayor's staff, a local nonprofit leader, a university leader, or a financial institution partner) to support the city's vision to increase economic opportunity for residents, including a team lead who has direct access to the mayor and who will be responsible for corresponding with NLC and with local team members throughout the project and acting as a peer resource to additional cities; and

Demonstrated capacity to participate fully in peer learning and technical assistance opportunities provided, including ongoing calls, and virtual and in-person convenings.



## PROPOSAL INSTRUCTIONS

To be considered for participation in this project, please complete responses to the following questions through this [online form](#).

### Questions for cities applying to participate in both the Deepening the Bench and the Building Leadership cohorts:

- i. **Municipal government structure:** Please briefly describe the structure of your city government, including whether it is a strong or weak mayor system and who is the chief executive officer.
- ii. **Local economic inclusion context:** Provide information about any past and/or current economic inclusion strategies in your city and state. Please identify the leadership structure of these programs - are they run by city government or community organizations? What is the mayor's role in these initiatives?
- iii. **Project goals:** Briefly describe why the city is applying to SCEI and the overarching reason why economic inclusion is a priority for city leadership.
  - a. What outcomes do local leaders hope to achieve?
  - b. How does this issue connect with the mayor's broader agenda for the city?
- iv. **Strategies/Scope of Work:** Outline the possible strategies you hope to implement as part of the project. From where you sit now, what would look different in two years in your city because of engagement in this work?
- v. **Data Capacity:** What information will your city need or is your city already collecting to assess its progress toward the economic inclusion outcomes you seek to accomplish?
  - a. What capacity does your city have to analyze data and use tools that enable your city leaders to understand how they can increase economic inclusion outcomes?
  - b. How, if at all, is the city using data to assess residents' economic inclusion needs?

- vi. **Organizational capacity (including coalitions and partners):** List individuals and groups available within or outside your city government that will be involved and the experience they bring that is relevant to the work proposed.
- vii. **Attachments** (not included in page limit)
  - ◆ List of three core and two additional proposed project team members
  - ◆ Evidence of commitment from senior city leadership should include a support letter from the mayor or other city executive and an expression of intent to participate in the Leadership Cohort and support for the city's participation in the Deepening the Bench cohort

### Questions for cities applying to participate only in the Building Leadership Cohort:

- i. Please respond to questions i. and ii. above (Municipal government structure and Local economic inclusion context): Provide information about any past and/or current economic inclusion strategies in your city and state. Please identify the leadership structure of these programs - are they run by city government or community organizations? What is the mayor's role in these initiatives?
- ii. Will the mayor or another senior executive participate in the leadership cohort meetings? If not the mayor, who will participate and why?
- iii. How will your city benefit from participating in the leadership cohort? What do you hope to gain from networking with other leaders across the South on economic inclusion?
- iv. Who is the community or civic leader who will participate with the mayor, and why have you chosen them as a partner? What influence do they bring to economic inclusion work in your city?
- v. Please describe 1-3 areas of leadership capacity you hope to gain from the leadership cohort.
- vi. Please describe 1-3 system and policy issues that you would like to address through your participation in the leadership cohort.

## APPLICATION PROCESS

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**All proposals must be submitted to NLC [online](#) no later than close of business January 14, 2022.**

If you have any questions about the project or the application process, please contact Denise Belser at [belser@nlc.org](mailto:belser@nlc.org) or visit our website at <https://www.nlc.org/initiative/southern-cities-economic-inclusion-scei-expanding-capacity-building-resilience>

