

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Cities of Opportunity Initiative:

2025 Community Engagement Academy

OVERVIEW

The **Cities of Opportunity Community Engagement Academy** will take six selected cities on a transformative journey to create a resilient and robust infrastructure for integrating resident voices into city governance.

This 12-month program is your opportunity to build new relationships with community partners and ensure that every community member is heard, especially those from historically marginalized groups. Through tailored technical assistance, practical tools, and peer learning engagements, you will develop the fundamental capacity to develop a more inclusive and community-led approach to governance.

If your city is ready to lay the groundwork for a community-driven future, this program is for you.

Proposal Due: June 30, 2025,
by 11:59pm EST

**Selection
Announcement** September 1, 2025

Cohort Dates: September 2025 –
September 2026

**Submission
Information:** Please submit completed
applications online [via](#)
[Submittable](#).

Questions?

Contact Megan Greig, Senior Program Specialist for Health and Wellbeing at greig@NLC.org.

CITIES OF OPPORTUNITY

The National League of Cities (NLC) Cities of Opportunity (CoO) initiative operates from a core belief: where you live should not determine how healthy you are, how long you live, or how well you live. Yet, across America, city residents who live just a few blocks apart have life expectancies that vary by as much as five, 10 or 20 years, with drastic differences in their quality of life and wellbeing. NLC seeks to strength city leaders' capacity to tackle these disparities and foster inclusive and healthy cities where all residents can thrive.

ABOUT THE ACADEMY

City governments can unlock transformative potential by moving beyond transactional, one-time engagements and instead authentically engaging residents through ongoing two-way dialogue and shared decision-making. This deeper level of involvement not only creates more impactful solutions but also repairs trust with historically marginalized communities, particularly when prior engagement has been lacking or dismissive.

The **CoO Community Engagement Academy** (the Academy) offers a 12-month cohort experience for six cities seeking to deepen their approach and build essential capacity and infrastructure for long-term community engagement.

Over the course of the Academy, city teams will be guided through a stepwise process to evaluate their current community engagement efforts and pinpoint opportunities to strengthen existing capacity, ultimately developing a concrete workplan outlining the strategies and milestones needed to implement vital community engagement infrastructure.

The Academy will include:

- ◆ **Bimonthly workshops** for capacity building and strategy development to create sustainable and bidirectional community engagement infrastructure;
- ◆ **Paid travel to an in-person convening in Washington, DC** in February 2026 for three team members;

- ◆ **One-on-one technical assistance** support with subject matter experts from NLC and partner organizations;
- ◆ **Peer engagement opportunities** for city teams to connect with one another and exchange ideas and experiences in building out their community engagement infrastructure, and;
- ◆ **Additional tools, resources, and networking opportunities** through the Cities of Opportunity initiative.

This work will be guided by subject matter experts from NLC, in collaboration with CoO's strategic partner, Consilience Group, LLC.

CITIES WILL GAIN

The Academy will empower city leaders and their community partners to fundamentally shift their approach to community engagement by building capacity and establishing essential infrastructure for long-term, sustained engagement beyond one-off interactions.

As a result, participating cities will establish:

- ◆ **An institutional commitment to community engagement** as a core value of their operations. This may include formal policies, process or program changes, dedicated resources and staff, and formal declarations articulating the city's commitment to bidirectional communication and incorporating resident feedback into decision-making.
- ◆ **Infrastructure for long-term engagement** such as community outreach departments or leads, accessible communication channels for regular dialogue (e.g., online portals, resident advisory boards), staff practices that support long-term community engagement, and consistent processes for soliciting and integrating resident input for decision-making (e.g., co-design models, city-wide community engagement protocols).
- ◆ **Enhanced capacity for community partnerships** through reimagining the potential of city relationships with community partners. Cities will lay the foundation for more intentional, transparent, and authentic partnerships with community groups representing residents most impacted by health disparities.

TEAM COMPOSITION & TIME COMMITMENT

Effectively building sustainable structures for community engagement in municipal practice must be a collaborative effort.

The Academy requires cities to assemble a core team of individuals who will be engaged in the process throughout the 12-month cohort. Team members commit to attendance at all Academy events and independent city work between sessions, totaling approximately six hours a month.

The ideal team will consist of up to six individuals representing a broad range of perspectives. This should be a combination of senior department staff from the city, frontline staff, as well as principals from community organizations and community representatives

In developing the core team composition, cities are required to include:

- ◆ **A team lead** who will serve as the main point of contact with NLC as well as convene the city team and coordinate work on deliverables;
- ◆ **City staff** who lead current community engagement work (e.g., community health workers, neighborhood liaisons, community navigators);
- ◆ **Individual(s) with decision-making ability** who can drive policy and systems change (e.g., Director of Community Engagement, Community Development Director);

In addition, teams are strongly encouraged to include:

- ◆ **Community members or community organizations** deeply connected to the communities they serve (e.g., frontline service providers, community organizers, neighborhood groups);
- ◆ **Funding and other strategic partners** (E.g., United Way, community foundations)

** Note: One person may fulfill multiple roles listed above.*

SELECTION CRITERIA

The city teams selected to participate in this cohort will be evaluated based on their responses to the questions outlined in this RFP.

In their submitted applications, successful applicants will demonstrate:

- ◆ Support of the mayor and/or city manager for participation in the Academy;
- ◆ Readiness and commitment to assemble an effective core team as detailed in 'Team Composition';
- ◆ Commitment to participation in the full Academy programming including all workshops, 1-1 technical assistance sessions, and independent preparation;
- ◆ An understanding of key priorities and existing gaps in community engagement for the city, including specific populations who are underrepresented in the current community engagement structure;
- ◆ A commitment to engaging with residents that have been historically underrepresented;
- ◆ Dedication to advancing health and wellbeing for all residents in their community;
- ◆ An issue or opportunity that could ultimately benefit from an improved engagement process; and
- ◆ A commitment to sustain meaningful engagement with the community beyond the timeframe of the Academy.

PROJECT TIMELINE

The technical assistance period will run from September 2025 to September 2026. During this time, city teams can expect five full cohort workshops, including one in-person in Washington, DC, and three city-specific, individualized technical assistance sessions. Cities will also have access to further assistance and technical expertise through periodic office hours.

ACTIVITY	ESTIMATED DATES
RFP Informational Webinar	May 20, 2025
Optional Letter of Intent Due	June 3, 2025
Proposal Due	June 30, 2025
Finalist Interviews	August 11-22, 2025
Cohort Announced	September 1, 2025
Workshop 1: Cohort Kickoff	September 2025
1-on-1 TA Sessions	October 2025
Workshop 2	November 2025
Office Hours for City Teams	December 2025 – January 2026
In-Person Convening in Washington, DC	February 2026
1-on-1 TA Sessions	March 2026
Workshop 3	April 2026
Office Hours for City Teams	May 2026 – June 2026
Workshop 4	July 2026
1-on-1 TA Sessions	August 2026
Cohort Closing	September 2026

PROPOSAL INSTRUCTIONS

To be considered for this initiative, the applicant must submit a fully completed online application. Submit the proposal [here](#).

PROPOSAL MATERIALS

- ◆ Letter of Interest from Mayor City/Manager June 3, 2025 (Encouraged but not required. Submit directly to CoO@nlc.org.)
- ◆ Cover Sheet
- ◆ Narrative

APPLICATION PROCESS

Up to six cities will be selected for this project. Only one application per municipality will be considered and must be submitted with the full support of the mayor and/or city manager. ***Interested applicants are encouraged, but not required, to submit a letter of interest from their Mayor or City Manager by Tuesday, June 3.***

All proposals must be submitted online by 11:59 PM EST on June 30, 2025.

If you have questions or would like more information, please contact Megan Greig, Senior Program Specialist at greig@nlc.org.

The narrative should respond to the following questions and prompts:

Proposal

- ◆ **Letter of Interest from Mayor City Manager by June 3.** (Encouraged but not required. Submit directly to CoO@nlc.org.)

A. Cover Sheet

City	Team Lead Email
Population Size	Other Contact (e.g., assistant to staff lead, other staff to contact with application questions)
Mayor/City Manager:	Other Contact Phone
Term Dates	Other Contact Email
City Staff Lead for City TA Cohort	
Team Lead Phone	

B. Narrative

City Commitment

1. Does your application have the support of your city's top executive (mayor or city manager)? Although direct involvement in the technical assistance activities is not expected of your city's top executive, their support and informed understanding of the city team's work are vital for the project's success.
Yes/ No
2. Does your city commit to participating in all activities of the Community Engagement Academy? City teams agree to participate in all individual technical assistance calls, virtual workshops, and the in-person convening in Washington, DC in February 2026 (**expenses paid for three team members**). Teams will also complete all assignments and independent preparation work between formal sessions of the Community Engagement Academy.
Yes/ No

Team Composition

1. List the three to six individuals you have in mind for your Community Engagement Academy core team. Include each individual's role and organizational affiliation. *Note: Finalists will have the opportunity to discuss team composition with NLC during the Finalist interviews. These conversations, alongside feedback from proposal evaluators, may result in suggested changes to your team composition.*
Name and title
Pronouns (optional)

Organization or City Department

City

Contact email

Short description of their role (i.e., data, community partner, current program lead)

Narrative

1. Describe your city's community engagement practices. Who is responsible for community engagement? What are your areas of strength? What are your areas of weakness and opportunities for growth? **[800 words]**
2. Describe how you envision your city's participation in the Community Engagement Academy improving the relationship between city government and residents at an individual and community level. What are the challenges and barriers you hope to address? What areas are you hoping to build upon? **[500 words]**
3. How does your city use data to identify needs and priorities in the community? How are residents engaged in your city's current data practices? How are residents involved in city decision-making? **[500 words]**
4. What are the existing local partnerships (i.e., relationships with local businesses, community groups, local organizations, etc.) that you plan to leverage or build as part of your participation in the Community Engagement Academy? Why do you believe these partners are the right people to have at the table for improving community engagement in your city? **[500 words]**
5. What resources might your city mobilize to support this work? Examples of resources include staffing capacity, favorable circumstances (e.g., strategic alignment with city or community initiatives), budgetary (e.g., allocations, grants) and/or existing community assets (e.g., community centers, local organizations). **[500 words]**