

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Municipal Action Cohort:

Connecting Adults to Postsecondary and Workforce Success

KEY INFORMATION

To help cities connect adults with postsecondary educational opportunities that lead to good jobs – particularly those who already have some college education and may be close to a terminal credential.

Below you will find the instructions to complete this request for proposal. Use this document as a guide to complete and then submit your online application.

This initiative is made possible through the generous support of the Kresge Foundation and Strada Education Foundation.

Proposal Due: February 16th, 2024

Selection Announcement: March 2024

Project Dates: March 2024 – December 2025

Information Session: December 12th
3:00 pm ET

Eligibility: All cities in California, Florida, Michigan, and Texas.

Submission Information: [Please use this link to submit your city's application.](#)

Questions? Contact Tashfia Hasan, Senior Program Specialist, at Hasan@nlc.org, 202-626-3186.

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS CONTENT

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PART I: CONNECTING ADULTS TO POSTSECONDARY & WORKFORCE SUCCESS INITIATIVE BACKGROUND

Economic mobility is out of reach for too many Americans, particularly for those without a postsecondary credential, including many adults – from young adults whose pathways to and through postsecondary education were disrupted by COVID-19 to adults who previously stopped out and are under or unemployed or never enrolled in the first place. While national levels of educational attainment have been steadily rising – as of 2021, 53.7 percent of adults aged 25-64 had earned a credential beyond high school – this still falls short of the anticipated long-term demand for degrees and credentials. By 2030, the Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that the number of jobs requiring postsecondary education will increase by 30 percent compared to 2022. Research released by the National Skills Coalition indicates that, while 92 percent of jobs today require competency with digital skills, more than one-third of adult workers today lack even foundational digital skills.

With more than 40 million Americans with some college experience, but no terminal credential, there's significant untapped opportunity to provide pathways to economic opportunity through responsive and flexible postsecondary offerings linked to in-demand fields.

Postsecondary success and the economic vitality of communities are deeply intertwined, and these trends pose a serious threat to the long-term economic opportunity for individuals, families, cities, and businesses across America's cities. According to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, the number of adults with Some College, No Credential (SCNC) has reach 40.4 million Americans and has grown in all 50 states. Not only are these numbers growing, but outcomes among this population (re-enrollment & completion) are declining. Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) are disproportionately represented among the SCNC population – particularly among those who have recently stopped out. At the same time, we know these communities are also disproportionately represented among industries such as healthcare, hospitality, service, childcare, and agriculture which

too often represent low-quality jobs with poor wages, scheduling volatility, a lack of flexibility, and few, if any benefits. These issues align closely with other long-term city priorities including infrastructure, economic development, and public safety.

City leaders – including mayors, city councils, and city staff – are uniquely positioned to create structural changes that promote long-term family and community economic security. An important strategy will be to reconnect and re-engage adults with postsecondary educational opportunities. Cities have an incredible opportunity to further understand the unique needs of their communities and respond to specific barriers to accessing and completing postsecondary education.

The National League of Cities (NLC) and the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) will provide technical assistance to a Municipal Action Cohort of four cities. With the support of NLC and CAEL, these cities will:

- Learn best practices and policies for re-engaging adult learners and supporting students through completion of a credential;
- Establish a baseline and measure progress to goals regarding outreach, enrollment, completion, and job placement;
- Build cross-sectoral city teams to create action plans to develop interim targets and ensure long-term success;
- Uplift accomplishments and lessons learned to enable solutions to be scaled and adopted in other communities; and
- Develop a learning network with other participating cities to establish a source of ongoing peer support.

PART II: RFP OVERVIEW

Benefits for Participating Cities

Participating in the Municipal Action Cohort will provide a wide variety of benefits to cities. Cities will engage with NLC, CAEL, national thought leaders, and peer cities to:

- I. Strengthen collaboration between city leaders, postsecondary, and workforce partners.
- II. Better understand the needs and desires of potential adult students and the barriers they are facing or may have previously faced during prior postsecondary experiences.
- III. Develop action plans to re-engage adult learners and support students through completion of a credential.
- IV. Access the latest data on in-demand skills and opportunity occupations in their community, to ensure that institutions recruit adult students for education and training relevant to jobs available in their local labor markets.
- V. Create innovative programs, policies, and practices to successfully bring adults back into postsecondary education settings that provide upward economic mobility.
- VI. Establish stronger city-led, cross-sector ecosystem of support for adult college students, including their critical basic needs.
- VII. Pioneer inventive and scalable solutions to build toward national movement of supporting postsecondary success and strengthened communities and economies.

NLC Objectives and Commitments

Through the Municipal Action Cohort, NLC and CAEL seek to support cities that are dedicated to changing policies, practices, and programs to lead to greater economic equity in their communities. NLC anticipates that its engagement with the cohort will create a more broadly shared understanding among city leaders of what it takes to achieve more equitable outcomes in postsecondary & workforce success for their residents. To help cities achieve their goals, NLC commits to take the following actions. As the work progresses, these activities may shift, and other activities may be added as determined by the need of participating cities.

- I. Work with a senior city leader to support the city's efforts, with a plan to ensure their longevity and engagement throughout the life of the initiative.
- II. Provide technical assistance to each city to enable them to develop strategic initiatives to advance their priorities.
- III. Provide a framework to help cities identify baseline measures of family and community economic security informed by adults interested in re-engaging with postsecondary training.
- IV. Facilitate discussions and help cities build trusted relationships with and between stakeholders to create a foundation for strong collaborative partnerships.
- V. Share examples of successful or emerging strategies used in other cities not within the Municipal Action Cohort which have addressed the structural barriers faced by adult learners who have been unable to newly engage or re-engage in postsecondary education.
- VI. Work with each city to develop and implement a strategy to directly incorporate the voices of adult learners who have not had equitable access to economic opportunity to ensure solutions are tailored to the unique needs of each community.
- VII. Convene regularly scheduled calls to help each city develop their cross-sector partnerships, vision, goals, and action plans to implement their strategies, as well as cross-city calls to enable peer information-sharing.
- VIII. Hold cross-city in-person meetings to allow city teams focused and in-depth time to think strategically about their work, meet with their peers, and learn from national experts.

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- IX. Hold national briefings to highlight the work of the selected cities to a broad policy, funder, and national thought leader audience.
- X. Conduct site visits to each city giving city leaders an additional platform through which to galvanize the community and its stakeholders, shine a spotlight on the city's progress, bring in national experts to share information, attract media attention for local efforts, and/or utilize the presence of NLC staff to help city leaders and partners see how their efforts are part of a national movement.

Requirements for Participation in the Municipal Action Cohort

NLC is prioritizing proposals from any and all interested cities in California, Florida, Michigan, and Texas that believe in the importance of building equitable education career outcomes in their communities. NLC is seeking cities that are willing to work closely with adult learners, postsecondary institutions, and other key partners to take bold and innovative actions to dismantle barriers that impede access to quality jobs and career pathways for adults interested in but unable to seek postsecondary training.

Cities selected to join the Municipal Action Cohort, will commit to engaging in the following activities over the course of the two-year initiative:

1. Secure the commitment of key local postsecondary institutions (the number of which may vary depending on the landscape of each city) to join as strong partners over the life of the initiative. Committed postsecondary institutions will participate at the outset of the project in CAEL's Adult Learner 360 survey of adult students to assess how they are currently serving their adult population and surface specific areas of potential improvement or opportunity. Additionally, the institution would be asked to participate in technical assistance from CAEL to support its adult student population.
2. Develop and begin to implement a city action plan based on a template provided by NLC & CAEL, including a commitment to track key metrics relating to adult postsecondary and workforce success.
3. Develop a clear strategy including conducting focus groups, hosting town halls, and/or listening sessions to better understand the needs and desires of potential adult students and the barriers they are currently or may have previously faced during prior postsecondary experiences.
4. City team participation in regular coaching calls with the designated NLC staff lead.
5. City team participation in regular Municipal Action Cohort peer learning calls.
6. Participate in two in-person cohort meetings (travel expenses covered by NLC). Additionally, commit to participation by the mayor in a summative in-person Mayors' Institute in year two of the initiative (travel expenses covered by NLC).
7. Commitment from the mayor to participate in one in-person site visit with NLC staff to accelerate progress on city action plans and address specific technical assistance needs identified by the city.
8. Participate in any national press briefings which would highlight successful city leadership strategies to create a system that empowers and prepares prospective adult students to acquire high quality jobs that ensure long-term financial stability and strengthen the community's local economy.

Preparing Your City's Proposal

Forming and sustaining a strong local team lays the foundation for achieving the outcomes cities seek to achieve through membership in the Municipal Action Cohort. To ensure your project proposal is comprehensive, your city should convene leaders from key entities you anticipate will be part of your cross-sector partnership. If your city is working with any adults who may have struggled to begin or complete a postsecondary credential, consider including them on your team. Together, your city team should plan and prepare the entire proposal so the views, assets, and interests of all key stakeholders are reflected throughout.

Cross-sector partnerships must be led by the mayor's office and must include representatives from:

Commented [RH1]: Again - are we including Memphis or New Orleans still as well?

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- Key postsecondary education institution(s), inclusive of 2-year, and 4-year institutions, public and private, with an emphasis on those institutions most directly serving adult learners;
 - For each postsecondary institution, the institution's President should appoint a designee to lead the institution's engagement in the initiative. Additionally, they may consider organizing an internal team with an array of perspectives relevant to enrollment and retention.

Additionally, your partnership should strongly consider including representatives with the following perspectives:

- Workforce and economic development intermediaries, such as a workforce development board;
- The business community, particularly those representing industries with greater needs for upskilling workers;
- Community-based organizations focused on increasing high quality jobs, particularly those with a focus on creating more equitable workforce opportunities;
- Local philanthropy, if appropriate; and
- Any other key local stakeholders.

PROJECT TIMELINE

The initiative will begin in March 2024 and conclude in December 2025.

ACTIVITY	DATES (estimated)
Announcement of selected cities	March 2024
In-person kick off meeting (Washington, DC)	Spring 2024
Monthly city coaching calls	March 2024 – December 2025
City Site visits	Fall & Winter 2024
Second in-person meeting	Summer 2025
Mayors' Institute	Fall 2025
Initiative End	December 2025

Selection Criteria

NLC will engage a panel of subject matter experts, and staff from NLC and CAEL to review proposals.

Cities will be notified of their selection status by March 2024.

- November 10, 2023:** RFP Release
- December 12, 2023:** RFP Information Session
- February 16, 2024:** City proposals due to NLC
- March 2024:** Announcement of selected cities

Proposals must be received no later than February 16, 2024, by 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time. Only one proposal per city will be accepted. Please submit all proposal materials via [this link](#).

PART III: PROPOSAL

To be considered for this initiative, the applicant must submit a fully completed online application.

REQUIRED PROPOSAL MATERIALS

- A. Cover Sheet
- B. City context
- C. City-led cross-sector partnership information
- D. City objectives and preliminary strategies)
- E. Required Supplemental Materials
 - 1. Mayor Letter of Commitment
 - 2. Letters of Support from Partner Entities
 - 3. Lead Partner Staff Bios
 - 4. Supporting Information

APPLICATION

Applications must be submitted online. **All proposals must be submitted by 11:59 PM ET on Friday, February 16, 2024.**

If you have questions or want more information, please contact Tashfia Hasan, Senior Program Specialist, at Hasan@nlc.org, 202-626-3186.

Proposal

Cover Sheet

Please provide the following information about your city and any additional information NLC should know related to the point of contact if selected for the *Good Jobs, Great Cities Academy*:

NAME OF PRIMARY POINT OF CONTACT:

TITLE OF PRIMARY POINT OF CONTACT:

EMAIL OF PRIMARY POINT OF CONTACT:

PHONE OF PRIMARY POINT OF CONTACT:

MUNICIPALITY/ORGANIZATION OF PRIMARY POINT OF CONTACT:

ORGANIZATION ADDRESS:

NAME OF SECONDARY POINT OF CONTACT:

TITLE OF SECONDARY POINT OF CONTACT:

EMAIL OF SECONDARY POINT OF CONTACT:

PHONE OF SECONDARY POINT OF CONTACT:

MUNICIPALITY/ORGANIZATION OF SECONDARY POINT OF CONTACT:

ORGANIZATION ADDRESS:

City Context

NLC intends to select cities to join the Municipal Action Cohort that are ready to take on the challenge of stepping into this complex but crucial work, regardless of where they currently are in their progress. Please respond to the following questions with information that tells your city's story. Your responses will help NLC understand your city's current environment, its history, and its readiness to take bold and ambitious action to create a more equitable and stronger workforce. Be sure to work with your proposal team to frame your responses carefully and candidly.

Why is your city a strong candidate for the *Municipal Action Cohort*?

Your response should be no more than 400 words.) Consider the following as you respond to this question:

- What key local challenge are you hoping to address by participating in the Municipal Action Cohort?
- What is your city's vision for what it will achieve by participating in the Municipal Action Cohort?
- How will your city's leadership ensure the success of your project?

What opportunities and challenges currently exist for adults to access postsecondary education and quality jobs?

Your response should be no more than 350 words.) Consider the following as you respond to this question:

- What information do you have (and what information do you hope to gather) about how adults are currently accessing existing or creating new opportunities to gain the skills and credentials required to access quality jobs?
- To what extent are supports (like digital access, childcare, transportation, healthcare, housing, and food) provided to make postsecondary education and quality jobs accessible to residents of your community?
- What strategies, programs, or policies might your city leaders and partners need to create

for adults to re-engage in postsecondary education to be able to access quality jobs?

What metrics will help you assess your progress in improving outcomes for adults in postsecondary access, completion, and workforce success?

Your response should be no more than 350 words.) Consider the following as you respond to this question:

- What data assets does your city already have related to postsecondary education, career pathways, employment of adults without postsecondary credentials, and other key factors in fostering economic opportunity?
- What capacity does your city (or key partners) have to analyze data and use tools that enable your city leaders to understand how they can achieve equitable postsecondary and career outcomes?

City-Led Cross-Sector Partnership Information

To effectively engage in the Municipal Action Cohort, your city must establish a city-led cross-sector partnership team to direct its proposed activities to meet its goals. Your partnership team may have as many members as your city believes will be necessary to effectively achieve its desired results. If your city is working with any adults who may have struggled to begin or complete a postsecondary credential, consider including them on your team.

Cross-sector partnerships must be led by the mayor's office and include representatives from entities with perspectives and expertise relevant to the objectives of the Municipal Action Cohort.

Cross-sector partnerships must be led by the mayor's office and must include representatives from:

- Key postsecondary education institution(s), inclusive of 2-year, and 4-year institutions, public and private, with an emphasis on those institutions most directly serving adult learners;
 - For each postsecondary institution, the institution's

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President should appoint a designee to lead the institution's engagement in the initiative. Additionally, they may consider organizing an internal team with an array of perspectives relevant to enrollment and retention.

Additionally, your partnership should strongly consider including representatives with the following perspectives:

- Workforce and economic development intermediaries, such as a workforce development board;
- The business community, particularly those representing industries and/or employers dedicated to ensuring high quality jobs in in-demand industries;
- Community-based organizations focused on increasing high quality jobs, particularly those with a focus on creating more equitable workforce opportunities;
- Local philanthropy, if appropriate; and
- Any other key local stakeholders.

City Objectives & Preliminary Strategies

An Objective of the *Municipal Action Cohort* is to help cities convene postsecondary education institutions, employers, and other key partners to identify and address barriers to adults accessing education that leads to workforce success. While NLC will work with cities to develop a more detailed action plan throughout the initiative, this section of the application is to allow you to describe your overarching objectives for participation in the cohort, and identify preliminary strategy to achieve those objectives.

To help you get started, refer to your responses in the City Context section about why your city wants to increase access to and completion of postsecondary credentials to build equitable career outcomes, and how you will engage these adults in achieving its goals. Consider what your city needs to do to build systems (for example, expand affordable childcare access to allow parenting students to be able to focus on their education knowing that their children are well cared for) that lead to the outcomes it seeks to achieve (for example, increased rates of adults completing postsecondary training).

1. **Briefly describe your city's objectives or overarching goals that will be served through participation in the *Municipal Action Cohort*.** (Your response should be no more than 250 words.)
2. **Briefly describe your strategy to better understand the needs and desires of potential adult students and the barriers they face (which might include focus groups, surveys, hosting town halls, and/or listening sessions, or other related strategies).** (Your response should be no more than 250 words.)
3. **Identify 2 – 4 preliminary strategies that your cross-sector team believes would generate progress towards your identified objectives and goals.** (Your response should be no more than 500 words.)
4. **What key partners are engaged (or would need to be engaged) to implement your preliminary strategies? What would their roles be?** (Your response should be no more than 250 words.)
5. **How do plan to track outcomes for adult learners, such as outreach, enrollment, persistence, graduation, and job placement? What other outcomes do you hope to measure to gauge your teams' success in meeting your previously stated objectives?** (Your response should be no more than 300 words.)

Required Supplemental Materials

Please provide links or attachments for the following required materials to supplement your proposal:

1. **Mayor Letter of Commitment:** Please provide a brief letter of commitment from your mayor articulating how they will ensure the success of your city's engagement in the Municipal Action Cohort including the inclusion of adults without a postsecondary credential in information gathering and decision-making. The letter must specify the senior-level staff member designated to be the city's lead for the project.

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2. **College President Letter(s) of Commitment:** For each engaged postsecondary institutions, please provide a brief letter of commitment articulating how they will ensure the success of your city's engagement in the Municipal Action Cohort, identifying a key point-of-contact, and sharing any current efforts to engage adult learners already underway.
3. **Letters of Support from Partner Entities:** Please provide brief letters of support from the key entities which will comprise your city-led cross-sector partnership. The letter should specify how the entity will engage in and contribute to the cross-sector partnership.
4. **Supporting Information:** Please provide any supporting information (such as documents, reports, testimonials, press releases, etc.) that clearly provides evidence related to your response. In your narrative responses, please clearly indicate where the supporting information is relevant.

Commented [RH2]: Do we want to specify a letter from the president of each engaged postsecondary institution?

Commented [BS3R2]: I agree that support from college/university presidents is critical.

Commented [WF4R2]: Yep