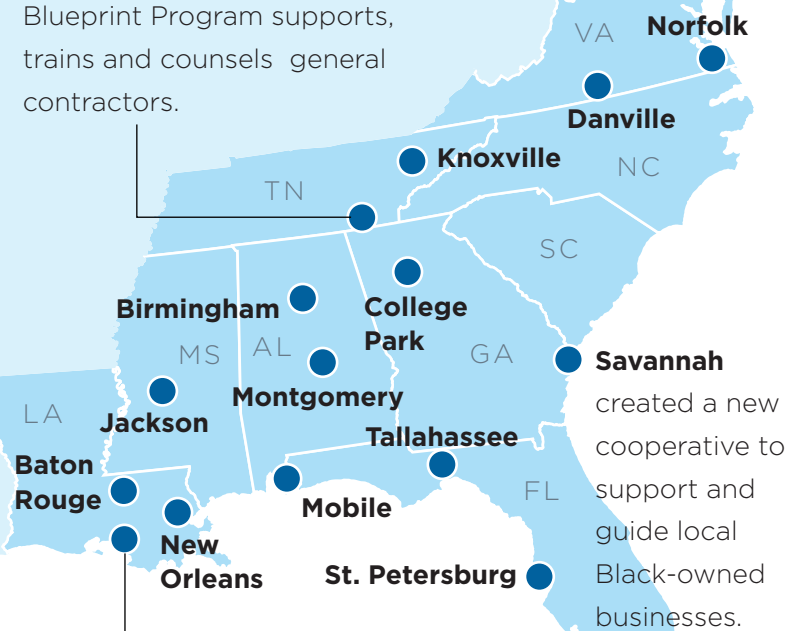


SOUTHERN CITIES ECONOMIC INCLUSION (SCEI)

Approach, Accomplishments,
and Lessons

Fifteen cities participated
in SCEI from 2022-2024

Chattanooga's Builder's
Blueprint Program supports,
trains and counsels general
contractors.



Patterson's new Office of Economic &
Business Opportunity promotes growth
for small, minority-owned businesses.

**Structural racism and
exclusionary practices
have marginalized
communities of color,**
deepening inequities
in small business growth, job
access, and wealth building.

To address these issues,
economic inclusion is necessary.
Therefore, the National League of
Cities (NLC), in collaboration with
the W. K. Kellogg Foundation,
the Annie E. Casey Foundation,
and the Federal Reserve Bank of
Atlanta, launched the Southern
Cities Economic Inclusion (SCEI)
Initiative. The program builds the
capacity of cities in the South to
implement economic inclusion
(EI) strategies that close racial,
economic equity gaps, and
expand economic opportunities
for residents and entrepreneurs
of color.

The SCEI Initiative's Five Components



Engaging and Building Capacity at Multiple Levels of City Government through Two Connected Cohorts

Deepening the Bench cohort: High-level municipal staff and partners built their capacity to identify assets and equity gaps, strengthen community engagement, and implement targeted EI strategies.

Building Leadership cohort: Elected officials, senior staff, and community leaders strengthened their leadership capacity to lead economic inclusion policy changes.



Grant Funding

SCEI cities received planning and implementation grants to help develop and/or refine economic inclusion goals, execute their economic inclusion agenda, and pay for city teams' travel to project convenings.



In-Depth Tools and Technical Assistance

SCEI cities received technical assistance including monthly one-on-one technical assistance calls with NLC, monthly all-city calls, in-person convenings, site visits, data support from the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, and an economic inclusion assessment, to support their EI goals.



Peer Learning

A key element of the SCEI was peer learning and networking, allowing cities to exchange challenges, lessons, and strategies for overcoming obstacles.



Local Match

Participating SCEI cities matched funds from a local source.

*Note: The SCEI model is being refined based on lessons learned from this phase of the initiative.

SCEI Accomplishments and Lessons



I think SCEI has been a great accountability partner to ensure that we're making progress in the goals and doing that in a way that is informed by best practices. Training and accountability have been the key success factors in helping us move it along.”

A PARTICIPATING
CITY LEADER

An evaluation of SCEI by the Center for Culturally Responsive Engagement (CCRE) at MPHI found that the participating cities focused their economic inclusion goals on a range of topics including inclusive procurement, strengthening the capacity of minority and/or women-owned businesses, workforce development for historically marginalized populations, and strengthening community partnerships. The evaluation revealed insights to guide the next phase of SCEI and similar programs supporting capacity building and economic inclusion in the South.

Accomplishments

- ◆ **Hosting events to engage businesses of color:** Several SCEI cities hosted events for small businesses to conduct outreach, provide services, and build their capacity (e.g., getting business certifications, building capacity to work with the city/anchor institutions, etc.).
- ◆ **Fostering public-private partnerships:** Many of the SCEI cities made progress in fostering public-private partnerships with community organizations, businesses, workforce development providers, anchor institutions, and others to collaborate on economic inclusion goals.
- ◆ **Implementation of programs or policies to advance economic inclusion:** Cities implemented programs or policies to increase opportunities for residents of color and minority-owned businesses, including workforce development programs in sustainable wage industries and setting Diversity Business Enterprise participation targets. A few cities changed their procurement practices to ensure greater equity.



\$2.3 million

Norfolk debundled a \$2.3 million janitorial contract to distribute work among 8 Black-owned firms. The city also launched a program to support local minority food businesses to cultivate a diverse pool of contracts with the city.



\$1 million

Baton Rouge advocated for state legislation to expand the Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) program and received \$1 million for implementation.



Lessons Learned from SCEI

- ◆ **Equity and inclusion in the design and implementation of strategies are central to this work.** Include community member and community partner voices in the design and implementation of strategies. This ensures that the economic inclusion plans reflect the strengths, assets, and priorities of the community.
- ◆ **Leadership commitment to economic inclusion goals and the right team composition are essential for progress and success.** Both strong leadership and team commitment and engagement are needed to make progress on economic inclusion goals.
- ◆ **Accountability to the SCEI Initiative and the city is critical.** City staff are accountable to the initiative and their cities to steward their time and resources to improve their communities.
- ◆ **Peer city learning strengthens economic inclusion work.** Peer learning includes not reinventing the wheel but rather seeking inspiration and best practices from successful initiatives in other cities.
- ◆ **It is necessary to move from policy development to policy implementation.** This involves developing standard operating procedures, ensuring accountability, and moving beyond having policies on paper.
- ◆ **Capacity building, both within the city and the broader community, is important.** This involves providing support, resources, and training to ensure small, minority-owned businesses are equipped to apply for, qualify, and fulfill government contracts.

Acknowledgements

SCEI is an initiative of the National League of Cities in partnership with the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta and made possible with support from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and the Annie E. Casey Foundation. However, the views expressed in this report are those of the authors.

Special thank you to all the Southern Cities Economic Inclusion (SCEI) cities that participated in the interviews used to inform the report.

