

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

NATIONAL LEAGUE OF CITIES

SOUTHERN CITIES ECONOMIC INCLUSION INITIATIVE
Building Economic Inclusion and Resilience for All

In Partnership with



Federal Reserve
Bank of Atlanta

With Support from:

The W.K. Kellogg Foundation, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, The Annie E. Casey Foundation, and the Nathan Cummings Foundation

KEY INFORMATION

The National League of Cities (NLC), in collaboration with the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta (FRBA) and NLC's philanthropic partners, invites municipalities located in the southern US to apply to participate in the Southern Cities Economic Inclusion Initiative (SCEI).

SCEI affords municipalities an opportunity to create and accelerate economic inclusion strategies that will harness the potential of communities to move toward greater economic prosperity. NLC will select up to 20 municipalities through a competitive process to

participate in this grant and peer learning program which consists of (1) a six-month planning phase with a \$15,000 grant and technical assistance; and (2) an opportunity to apply to continue into an implementation phase where up to 15 municipalities will be selected to receive in-depth technical assistance and a grant between \$30,000 and \$60,000.

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| Proposal Due: | February 24, 2025 by 11:59 PM ET |
| Selection Notice: | April 21, 2025 |

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| Project Dates: | 04/2025 – 01/2028 |
| Eligible States: | AL, AR, FL, GA, LA, MS, NC, SC, TN, VA |
| Submission Information: | Apply Here |

Questions? Contact the NLC Economic Opportunity and Financial Empowerment Team at eofo@nlc.org

BACKGROUND

Inequities across the southern United States in small business growth, access to jobs, and affordable housing are deep and persistent. These inequities are exacerbated by decades of practices and policies that have marginalized communities and businesses.

[Studies have shown that economic inclusion strategies](#) and the intentional engagement by municipalities and communities to implement strategies that expand the participation of businesses and residents not currently in the economy are an important growth model. Harnessing untapped talent and economic potential is a key strategy to expand the economy.

The Southern Cities Economic Inclusion Initiative (SCEI) is designed to help municipalities plan and implement economic mobility and inclusion strategies in their communities through research, data support, peer learning, technical assistance, and grant funding. Participating municipalities will develop and launch strategies that increase economic mobility, resilience, and wealth-building opportunities for all and fuel local economic expansion. SCEI offers tremendous value to participating municipalities through research, data support, peer learning, targeted technical assistance, leadership training, and national visibility. Based on learning from past cohorts, these supports can help municipalities make significant and measurable progress by crafting policies and practices to create an economy for all, while removing barriers that prevent people, especially residents in underserved communities, from achieving their full economic potential.

NLC’s SCEI project began in 2021, learning from a successful 5-year initiative managed by The Annie E. Casey Foundation that convened southern municipalities for peer learning and networking. From 2021-2024, NLC, the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, and project partners supported a cohort of 15 southern municipalities focusing on a range of strategies to improve economic outcomes for all, including:

- ◆ Inclusive procurement policies and practices;
- ◆ Small business technical assistance to support their expansion;
- ◆ Workforce training and apprenticeship programs, and;
- ◆ Innovative community engagement approaches.

Learn more about the progress, success, and lessons from participating southern municipalities in [NLC’s report "Progress, Successes, and Lessons from the Southern Cities Economic Inclusion \(SCEI\) Initiative."](#)

NLC and the selected municipalities benefit from the active participation and support of the SCEI partners, including the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta and the following philanthropic partners:

- ◆ W.K. Kellogg Foundation
- ◆ Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
- ◆ Annie E. Casey Foundation
- ◆ Nathan Cummings Foundation

The Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta does not provide funding, nor does it participate in participant selection or decisions of grant funding of SCEI participants.

BENEFITS TO PARTICIPATING MUNICIPALITIES

Southern municipalities selected for this initiative can expect a range of benefits throughout the project.

During the planning phase, benefits include:

- ◆ A \$15,000 planning grant and an opportunity to apply for the project's implementation phase;
- ◆ Tailored technical assistance and access to experts within NLC, FRBA and from other project partners;
- ◆ Use of an economic inclusion inventory tool that can pinpoint opportunities for change;
- ◆ Structured peer-learning opportunities and problem-solving with peers;
- ◆ Data support from the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta and NLC; and
- ◆ Participation in a virtual "Boot Camp" to support municipalities' planning activities.

Municipalities that progress to the implementation phase will have access to all the benefits listed above, plus:

- ◆ An implementation grant between \$30,000 and \$60,000;
- ◆ At least three mandatory in-person city convenings that highlight best practices, offer networking opportunities, and bring leadership tools and training to benefit all team members (travel expenses are paid by NLC);
- ◆ Site visits, both for individual technical assistance and for cities to visit with each other to dig deeply into SCEI topics of mutual interest;
- ◆ Visibility of local strategies in SCEI and NLC publications and other partner communications;
- ◆ Gain valuable insights and guidance from experienced participants who have been thoughtfully selected as faculty; and
- ◆ Municipal leaders participating in the SCEI cohort will gain access to a convening featuring The Annie E. Casey Foundation's Results Count Leadership Development program.

PROGRAM DETAILS

The goal of SCEI is to support municipalities to identify and successfully implement economic inclusion

strategies that increase economic mobility and resilience for residents and businesses.

While each municipality's effort should be tailored to their unique economic, social, and political contexts, proposed projects should seek to meet this goal. Past SCEI municipalities focused on workforce development strategies, small business development, inclusive procurement, and other economic mobility and inclusion strategies. NLC will prioritize proposals that incorporate: (1) a deep community engagement to shape and implement strategies; (2) clear leadership support for economic inclusion strategies and goals; and (3) a commitment to collaborate with key community stakeholders including local nonprofit organizations and private sector partners.

This SCEI initiative has two phases—a planning phase and an implementation phase. A subset of municipalities participating in the planning phase will be selected to participate in the implementation phase based on a business plan they develop and submit to NLC during the planning phase. Municipalities not selected to advance to the implementation phase will be referred to other relevant NLC and/or partner initiatives.

1. **Planning Phase** (6 months): 15-20 selected municipalities will receive a \$15,000 planning grant and technical assistance. The phase will include a virtual "economic inclusion boot camp," data support, and peer-learning opportunities. Building on these supports, each municipality will develop an "Economic Inclusion Business Plan" that describes how the municipality will implement a strategy that includes at least one new or expanded economic inclusion program or policy change that will result in increased opportunity for residents and businesses. This plan will serve as the municipality's application for the Implementation Phase.
2. **Implementation Phase** (2 years): Up to 15 municipalities will be selected from those that complete the planning phase based on planning phase participation, business plan viability, and demonstrated capacity, leadership, and commitment to implementing

the proposed plan. Selected municipalities will receive an additional implementation grant between \$30,000 and \$60,000 and engage in peer learning, technical assistance, leadership training, site visits, and at least three mandatory convenings designed to foster successful implementation of the proposed economic inclusion strategies. In addition, participating mayors or other senior executives will be asked to participate in an in-person leadership development for economic inclusion training. Municipalities selected to participate in the implementation phase will work with NLC and other SCEI funding partners to secure a match of their implementation grant (cash or in-kind support) from a local source. Funds can be secured from a local or regional foundation, a business partner, or another source.

Anticipated outcomes for municipalities participating in the implementation phase:

- ◆ Municipalities implement a community engagement strategy to understand community needs and inform their economic inclusion goals;
- ◆ An economic inclusion strategy is implemented by each municipality that includes at least one programmatic or policy change expected to expand economic opportunities for residents and small businesses;
- ◆ Municipalities develop a data agenda that measures change and progress toward their economic inclusion goals.
- ◆ Participating municipalities leverage additional support through federal funding streams, local matching grants, or in-kind contributions;
- ◆ Municipal participants engage in a peer network with other municipal staff and leaders that provides support, guidance, and learning beyond the scope of the project; and
- ◆ Demonstrated improvements occur in economic circumstances for communities, including benefits to children and families, tracked through agreed-upon metrics.

PARTICIPANT EXPECTATIONS

Municipalities selected for the SCEI project will be expected to participate fully in all technical assistance activities, virtual and in-person meetings, and meet the expectations in a collaborative MOU signed upon selection.

For the Planning Phase:

- ◆ **Municipal team:** Each selected municipality must identify three core team members. A municipal staff member responsible for managing the work should serve as the team leader. Other team members can include a senior municipal official, a community leader engaged in economic inclusion, other municipal staff involved in the work, or other community stakeholders such as nonprofit or private sector representatives.
- ◆ **Project participation:** Municipal teams should plan to participate in one-hour technical assistance calls with NLC and partner staff, as well as all-city cohort calls monthly (total of 2 hours/month after the Boot Camp).
- ◆ **Assessment:** Participating municipalities will be required to use a provided economic inclusion inventory tool to inform their local strategy and will receive guidance in completing the inventory.

For the Implementation Phase:

- ◆ **Project convenings:** Implementation team members must attend three in-person convenings with the full cohort during the project. These convenings will take place in one of the southern cities. An elected leader or municipal executive must attend the SCEI Results Count Leadership training in Spring of 2026 which will be hosted by NLC and the FRBA.
- ◆ **Site visits:** NLC and partners will conduct a site visit to participating municipalities that may include other cohort participants at least once during the project period.
- ◆ **Local match:** Participating municipalities will be asked to work with NLC and the SCEI funders team to secure a local match (cash or in-kind support) equal to 100% of the implementation grant award.

- ◆ Data collection and reporting: Selected municipalities will collect and report data on economic inclusion programs, including participation and outcome data. A final narrative and financial report are due to NLC at the end of the project (January 1, 2028).

| PROJECT TIMELINE | |
|---|---|
| The technical assistance period will occur May 1, 2025, and December 20, 2025 (if enrolled in both the planning and implementation phases). | |
| ACTIVITY | ESTIMATED DATES |
| INFORMATIONAL SESSIONS | January 28, 2025 (1pm to 2pm ET) February 4, 2025 (1pm to 2pm ET) February 11, 2025 (1pm to 2pm ET) |
| PROPOSAL DUE | February 24, 2025, 11:59 PM ET |
| PLANNING PHASE BEGINS | April 24, 2025 |
| BOOT CAMP SESSION #1 | May 1, 2025 |
| BOOT CAMP SESSION #2 | May 15, 2025 |
| BOOT CAMP SESSION #3 | June 5, 2025 |
| BOOT CAMP SESSION #4 | June 12, 2025 |
| ALL COHORT CALL | July 10, 2025 |
| ALL COHORT CALL | August 7, 2025 |
| VIRTUAL CONVENING OF PLANNING PHASE MUNICIPALITIES | September 2 and 4, 2025 |
| ALL MUNICIPALITIES HAVE COMPLETED THEIR BUSINESS PLAN | October 31, 2025 |
| IMPLEMENTATION PHASE BEGINS | January 1, 2026 |
| LEADERSHIP IN-PERSON CONVENING | May 2026 |
| IN-PERSON CONVENING #1 | September 1, 2026 |
| IN-PERSON CONVENING #2 | March 1, 2027 |
| IN-PERSON CONVENING #3 | September 1, 2027 |

Selection Criteria

Municipalities located in the following states are eligible to apply— Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. NLC will select a diverse group of municipalities of all sizes across the southern region, representing different structures and demographics. Only municipalities that participate in the planning phase can apply to participate in the implementation phase of SCEI. For each phase, preference will be given to NLC member municipalities.

PLANNING PHASE—Municipal selection is based on the following criteria:

1. Strength and clarity of project goals to serve a defined need in the community and how these goals can be achieved through the city's participation in SCEI;
2. Demonstrated commitment from the mayor or another municipal 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 a Leadership convening during the implementation phase (in spring 2026);
3. Demonstrated municipal capacity to implement a new economic inclusion initiative such as dedicated staffing, partnerships, strong interdepartmental coordination, knowledge about economic inclusion strategies, and citywide commitment;
4. A committed team of stakeholders (e.g., mayor's staff, a local nonprofit leader, a university leader, or a financial institution leader) to support the municipality's vision to increase economic opportunity for residents, including a team lead who has direct access to the mayor or city manager 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 municipalities; and .

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

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE—Following the planning phase, up to 15 planning municipalities will be selected to continue to the implementation phase based on the:

1. Strength of and capacity to implement the economic inclusion business plan developed during the planning phase; and
2. Participation level of each municipal team in the planning phase cohort activities.

PROPOSAL INSTRUCTIONS

[All applications must be submitted online.](#)

Application questions are included below as a guide.

This opportunity requires participation from core team members representing city leadership and staff committed to developing and implementing the proposed project. Either a single municipality or a group of municipalities may apply. All applications will be scored according to a pre-established rubric.

REQUIRED PROPOSAL MATERIALS

- ◆ Contact Information
- ◆ Proposal Narrative submitted via an online application portal
- ◆ Core Team information: List of key proposed project team members, including a team lead (e.g., a senior official, a leader engaged in economic inclusion in the community, staff member responsible for managing the work, community partner, etc.).
- ◆ Material to be Uploaded:
 - ◆ [Proposed project budget using provided template](#)

- ◆ Support letter from the mayor or other municipal executive stating intent to fully participate in the SCEI project
- ◆ *(optional)* Provide any supporting information (such as documents, reports, press releases, etc.) that provides evidence related to your responses; clearly indicate where the supporting information is relevant.

To be considered for participation in this project, please complete your responses to the following questions through this online form.

1. Contact Information

- a. Team Lead (name, title, municipality, email, organization, organization address)
- b. Second Team Contact (name, title, municipality, email, organization, organization address)
- c. Third Team Contact (name, title, municipality, email, organization, organization address)
- d. Alternative Team Contact (name, title, municipality, email, organization, organization address)

2. Proposal Narrative

- a. Indicate if your application represents a single municipality or a partnership among municipalities.
- b. **Project Title** (10 words)
- c. **Project Purpose** (25 words)
- d. **Project Background** (250 words). Describe any existing economic inclusion or mobility initiatives in your municipality, how the mayor or other elected leaders support these efforts, and current opportunities to increase economic inclusion in your municipality or region.
- e. **Project Overview and Goals** (1000 words). Describe your proposed economic inclusion strategies if you were to be selected into SCEI.

Include a response to the following questions in your answer: What is your municipality’s or region’s capacity to implement the proposed strategy? What are the anticipated challenges to implementation? What are the anticipated outcomes? Does your initiative target any specific groups? If so, who and why?

- f. **Partnerships** (250 words). What partners are engaged in your economic inclusion efforts now and how do you plan to engage local partners strategically to increase the potential success of your strategy? Include any partnerships between municipal departments as well as with external partners. Please describe the roles of each partner.
- g. **Data** (250 words). What data is your team currently tracking related to your proposed economic inclusion strategy? What additional data is necessary to track progress on your proposed project goals?
- h. **Team Capacity** (250 words). Describe the commitment of your “core team” to participate fully in peer learning and technical assistance opportunities provided. If selected, how will one or more staff be given the bandwidth to participate?
- i. **Community Engagement** (250 words). Provide one example of how your team has meaningfully incorporated community feedback into city practices and policies in the past.
- j. **Finances** (250 words). Describe your process to receive grants from outside entities and the expected time from fund acceptance to fund appropriation.

- k. **Rationale** (250 words). Describe what your team hopes to gain from participation in the SCEI program.

APPLICATION PROCESS

All proposals must be submitted online by 11:59 PM ET on Monday, February 24, 2025.

If you have questions or would like more information, contact the NLC Economic Opportunity and Financial Empowerment Team at eofe@nlc.org.