

**REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS**

**2026 – 2027 Pathways for Early Childhood  
Leadership Initiative**

## OVERVIEW

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Across the country, cities, towns, and villages are navigating unprecedented challenges, while continuing the critical work of ensuring young children and families have what they need to thrive. *In moments like this, local leadership matters more than ever.*

The Early Childhood Success (ECS) team is launching a new phase of work designed to meet this evolving moment. Through a 15-month intensive leadership program, 10 cities across **Michigan** and **Tennessee** (*five cities per state*) will engage in three interconnected strands of learning:

- ◆ **Cities in Action** offers intensive coaching and support to design Early Learning Community Action Plans in partnership with community leaders.
- ◆ **Leadership Bootcamp** equips elected officials and executive staff to embed early childhood priorities into municipal governance, creating a strategic link between executive decision-making and project implementers.
- ◆ **Common Ground Forums** bring elected municipal leaders together with their county and state counterparts to engage in cross-jurisdictional collaboration and develop shared policy solutions for young children and families.

*Participating cities will also join a broader [Peer Cities Network](#), strengthening relationships and accelerating shared progress nationwide.*

## BACKGROUND

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Building on the historic foundation of the Early Learning Nation Initiative, this next chapter recognizes a core truth: municipal staff – at every level of city government – play a vital role within a broader, collaborative ecosystem that supports young children and their families.

This unique technical assistance opportunity is intentionally designed to reach across multiple levels of municipal leadership – equipping both the decision-makers and the on-the-ground implementors with the expertise, confidence, tools and peer support needed to champion early childhood success in their communities.

**Info Session Webinar:** April 8, 12:00 PM ET  
[Register here.](#)

**Proposal Due:** April 17, 2026, by 11:59 PM ET

**Selection Announcement:** May 4, 2026

**Project Dates:** May 2026 – July 2027

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

**Questions?** Contact Amirh Moore, Sr. Program Specialist, at [Amirh.moore@NLC.org](mailto:Amirh.moore@NLC.org), 203-584-0786

## HOW CITIES WILL BENEFIT

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- ◆ **Cities in Action:** Municipal staff and their community partners are supported and equipped to design, implement, and advance equitable Early Learning Community Action Plans in partnership with community leaders.
- ◆ **Leadership Bootcamp:** Elected officials (council members and mayors) and executive staff will be equipped with the knowledge, tools, and peer network needed to serve as visible and sustained champions for early childhood – working in tandem with their municipal staff engaged in Cities in Action to drive holistic, systems-level progress.
- ◆ **Common Ground Forums:** Local and state leaders will discover common ground across jurisdictions, creating the conditions for lasting, unified change—anchored in their shared commitment to the young children and families they serve.

## PARTICIPATION & COMMITMENT

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Cities selected to participate will commit to ongoing engagement throughout the 15-month timeline:

### Cities in Action:

- ◆ Nine (9) Virtual Learning Sessions
- ◆ One (1) In-person Site Visit
- ◆ One (1) In-person All Cities Convening

### Leadership Bootcamp:

- ◆ One (1) Two-day In-person Event

### Common Ground Forums

- ◆ Three (3) In-person Convenings

*Please note: This initiative is designed with busy schedules in mind; multiple representatives from the same city government are encouraged to participate to ensure flexibility and sustained engagement.*

## PROJECT TIMELINE

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The technical assistance period will occur May 2026 – July 2027

ACTIVITY	ESTIMATED DATES
INFORMATIONAL SESSION	April 8, 2026
PROPOSAL DUE	April 17, 2026 11:59 PM ET
PROJECT DATES	May 2026 – July 2027

## Selection Criteria

Cities will be selected from the following states:

1. Tennessee
2. Michigan

### Review

NLC will engage a panel of subject matter experts to review proposals. Cities will be notified of their selection status by **May 4, 2026**.

## PROPOSAL INSTRUCTIONS

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

### REQUIRED PROPOSAL MATERIALS

- A. Cover Sheet
- B. Proposal Questions
- C. Supplemental Materials
  - a. Letter of Commitment from an Elected Official
  - b. Letter(s) of Support from Partner Entities
  - c. Supporting Information

## PROPOSAL PROCESS

The ECS team will host an informational session on *Pathways for Early Childhood Leadership Initiative* to learn more about the initiative and ask questions ahead of the submission deadline.

The session will take place on **April 8, 2026, at 12:00 PM ET**. [Register here](#).

**All proposals must be submitted online by 11:59 PM ET on April 17, 2026.** NLC will engage a panel of NLC staff to review proposals. Cities will be notified of their selection status by May 4, 2026.

If you have questions or would like more information, please contact Amirh Moore, Sr. Program Specialist at [amirh.moore@nlc.org](mailto:amirh.moore@nlc.org) or 203-584-0786

## Proposal Materials

### A. Cover Sheet

City:

County:

State:

Mayor:

Mayor Term Dates:

City Staff Lead/Primary Contact

Name/Title:

Phone:

Email Address:

Role/Title:

Office/Agency:

City or Community Partner Co-Lead/Secondary Contact

Name/Title:

Phone:

Email:

Role/Title:

Office/Agency:

DEMOGRAPHICS

Population:

Percentage of population- Children under age 8:

## B. Proposal Questions

NLC will select cities, towns, and villages in **Michigan** and **Tennessee** to join the Pathways for Early Childhood Leadership Initiative.

Please respond to the following questions with information that best tells your city's story and demonstrates why your community is a strong candidate for this initiative.

1. Does city leadership currently prioritize early childhood within broader strategic goals? (Word Count: 500)
  - a. If yes, briefly describe the plan, strategy, or blueprint?
  - b. If not, is there political will to develop a plan, strategy or blueprint? Please explain
2. Describe any current or prior municipal investments in early childhood within the last 5 years.
3. Does the city engage parent, family, and/or youth voice in decision-making? (Word Count: 500)
  - a. If yes, please explain how parent, family, and/or youth voice is involved in decision-making?
  - b. If not, is there political will to engage parent, family, and/or youth voice?
4. Is there coordination and/or alignment across executive, legislative, or city departments that serve young children and their families? For example, any inter-agency task forces, cabinets, commissions, councils, working groups etc.
  - a. If yes, please provide an example or two. Including the list of members in your supplemental materials.
  - b. If not, is there political will to coordinate/align across executive staff or city departments that serve young children and families.
5. If applicable, please list 2-5 community-based organizations who you work closely with in support of young children and families.
6. Are there certain challenges that children and families are facing in your community that would benefit from stronger collaboration with either county or state government partners?

## C. Supplemental Materials

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

1. **Letter of Commitment from an Elected Official:** Please provide a brief letter of commitment from a local elected official describing how they will support the city's successful participation in the *Pathways for Early Childhood Leadership Initiative*. The letter should affirm the city's commitment to actively engage in all components of the initiative.
2. **Letters of Support from Partner Entities:** Please provide two to three letters of support from partners that you may engage with in support of participation in this initiative. Please have the letter demonstrate the existing partnership with the city.
3. **Supporting Information:** Please provide supporting documentation (e.g., plans, reports, press releases, meeting summaries, parent or youth testimonials) that demonstrates your city's readiness and current progress in advancing early childhood priorities.