

# **Guide to the Application for NLC's Southern Cities Economic Inclusion Initiative**

## **What is the Southern Cities Economic Inclusion Initiative?**

The Southern Cities Economic Inclusion Initiative (SCEI) affords cities 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 a cohort of cities through a competitive process in early 2025 to participate in the technical assistance, grant and peer learning program which consists of:

1. A six-month planning phase with a \$15,000 grant; and
2. An opportunity to apply to continue into a second and longer implementation phase in which selected project cities will receive technical assistance and additional grant funding.

Participating cities will work to identify and launch strategies that reduce racial disparities and fuel economic expansion in the south. SCEI adds value through peer learning, targeted expert technical assistance, leadership training, and national visibility. Based on learning from past cohorts, these supports can help cities make significant and measurable progress by crafting policies and practices to benefit communities and reduce racial economic disparities.

The SCEI initiative is a collaboration of several NLC philanthropic partners including the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, and The Annie E. Casey Foundation, and is conducted in partnership with the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta.

## **Cities in 10 southern states are eligible to apply**

Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia

## **Project Background and Details**

Inequities across the Southern United States in small business growth, access to jobs, family economic mobility, and affordable housing are deep and persistent. These inequities are exacerbated by decades of structural racism and exclusionary practices and policies that have marginalized communities and businesses of color, particularly Black families. Recent climate events in the region have also fueled economic disparities and further challenged city leaders to meet community needs. Studies have

shown that economic inclusion strategies – the intentional engagement by cities and communities to implement strategies that expand the participation of businesses and residents of color in the economy – are the superior economic growth model, because they harness untapped talent and economic potential.

The Southern Cities Economic Inclusion Initiative (SCEI) is designed to help cities design and implement economic inclusion strategies in their communities through peer learning, technical assistance, and grant funding. NLC's SCEI project began in 2021, following a successful five-year inaugural initiative managed by The Annie E. Casey Foundation that convened southern cities for peer learning and networking. From 2021-2024, NLC and project partners supported a cohort of 15 southern cities focusing on a range of strategies to improve economic outcomes for communities of color, including:

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

Learn more about the progress, success and lessons from participating southern cities in the [advancing economic resilience and equity report](#).

The goal of SCEI is to support municipalities across the south identify and successfully implement economic inclusion strategies that increase economic mobility and resilience for residents and businesses of color and to reduce disparities.

NLC will select municipalities for the initiative that propose to develop and implement projects that seek to meet this goal. In addition, NLC will prioritize proposals that incorporate:

- (1) deep community engagement to shape and implement strategies;
- (2) intent to secure and implement federal funds (such as infrastructure or climate change funds), using an economic inclusion lens.

Selected city teams will be expected to fully participate in the technical assistance and peer learning events that are part of the project, including monthly technical assistance calls, monthly all-city peer learning calls, and project convenings (virtual during the planning phase in in-person during the implementation phase). Cities will also be asked to work with the SCEI team to secure a partial funding (or in-kind) match from community foundations or other local sources.

## Benefits to Participating Cities

Southern cities selected for this initiative can expect a range of benefits.

During the planning phase, benefits include:

- A planning grant and an opportunity to apply for the project's implementation phase;
- Tailored technical assistance and access to national and regional experts;
- Supported use of an economic inclusion assessment tool that can pinpoint opportunities for change;
- Structured peer-learning opportunities and problem-solving with peers in the region;
- Data support from the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta and NLC; and
- Participation in a virtual planning "Boot Camp" to support cities' planning activities.

Cities that are selected to progress to the implementation phase will have all the benefits listed above plus:

- A larger implementation grant;
- In-person city convenings that lift best practices, offer space for networking, and bring leadership tools and training to benefit all team members;
- Site visits for individual technical assistance and for cities to visit with each other to dig deeply into topics of mutual interest; and
- Visibility of local strategies in NLC publications and communications.

## Next Steps

**Interested?** Complete the online letter of interest (LOI) to provide NLC with more information about your community's economic inclusion priorities. Cities that submit a LOI will receive follow-up information with more details about informational webinars and the release of the online application.

[Submit Letter of Interest](#)

Municipalities of all sizes in the following states are eligible to apply: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia

The full application for this project will open in January 2025 and will be posted on NLC's [SCEI initiative webpage](#). The online application will ask interested municipalities to answer questions about their economic inclusion goals and desired results; demonstrated support from city leaders for economic inclusion efforts; proposed economic inclusion strategies and outcomes, and anticipated challenges. Applicants will also be required to submit a support letter from the mayor or other city executive stating intent to fully participate in the SCEI initiative.

For more information, please contact NLC at [eofoe@nlc.org](mailto:eofoe@nlc.org) and put SCEI in the subject line.