

Frequently Asked Questions



What is the goal of the SCEI initiative?

The SCEI initiative aims to build a sustainable community/network of southern leaders who are leaders in economic inclusion.

What cities are eligible to apply?

SCEI invites municipalities of all sizes—large, medium, and small—with diverse governance structures to apply. Cities located in the following 10 states are eligible to participate: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia.

What are the specific criteria for selecting cities to participate in the SCEI program?

Cities must have clear project goals addressing a specific community need as well as strong interdepartmental coordination and leadership support from the mayor or a municipal executive. A stakeholder team, led by someone with direct access to the mayor or city manager, should be ready to collaborate with NLC and other cities. Participants must also commit to leadership convenings, peer learning, and technical assistance opportunities. If you don't meet all these criteria but think you'd be a good fit, don't hesitate to get in touch with Rosanna Mulcahy at eofe@nlc.org with any questions!

Are any baseline data or assessments required for the application process?

No baseline data or assessments are required as part of the application process. During the planning phase, you will have the opportunity to explore relevant data and use an economic inclusion inventory tool to help shape your strategy.

What is the typical timeline for implementation once selected, and how long is the program's support period?

The program consists of two distinct phases: the Planning Phase and the Implementation Phase.

When selected, your city enters the Planning Phase, which lasts six months. During this period, your team will receive robust support, including participation in a Boot Camp and ongoing technical assistance, to develop a comprehensive "Economic Inclusion Business Plan." This business plan serves as your city's application to advance to the Implementation Phase.

It's essential to complete the plan within the designated timeline and ensure it reflects the principles and models introduced during the planning phase. If these criteria are not met, your city may not transition to the implementation phase.

Once accepted into the Implementation Phase, your city will receive two years of tailored support. This includes on-site assistance, convenings, and peer-learning opportunities to help execute and sustain your economic inclusion initiatives.

What types of economic inclusion strategies have been most successful in past iterations of the program?

There is no one-size-fits-all strategy for success in the SCEI program. The team composition is more important than the specific strategy. However, some successful examples from past iterations include legislation to expand services to disadvantaged businesses, programs enabling small local minority food businesses to secure city contracts and other opportunities, and youth employment projects in partnership with public schools. Each city's success is driven by its unique approach and the strength of its team.

Are there any matching fund requirements or expectations for cities receiving grants through the program?

There is a matching grant expectation for cities receiving grants through the program, but this match can be in the form of in-kind support from a partnering agency, actual funding, or a combination of both. This requirement applies only to the implementation grant. No grant match is required for the planning grant.

Will there be opportunities for cities to collaborate directly with philanthropic partners during the planning and implementation phases?

Our funding partners are highly engaged, and city staff can connect with them during in-person convenings. Additionally, other opportunities for interaction may arise throughout the program.

What level of commitment is expected from city leadership and community stakeholders throughout the program?

City leaders and community stakeholders must show a strong, ongoing commitment to the program. This includes active involvement from the mayor or a municipal executive who prioritizes economic inclusion and attends a leadership convening in spring 2026. Cities

should also form a stakeholder team—such as members from the mayor’s office, nonprofits, or universities—led by someone with direct access to the mayor or city manager.

What is the monthly time commitment required during each phase of the program?

During the planning phase, cities will participate in a Boot Camp, requiring an estimated time commitment of 5 to 6 hours per month in direct engagement with NLC staff and partners during the first two months. This time commitment will decrease to approximately 2 to 3 hours per month for the subsequent four months and during the implementation phase. While these hours reflect direct interactions with NLC, cities should also allocate additional time for team collaboration, project development, and internal meetings, which will vary based on the specific project scope and schedule.

What activities will take place during each phase?

Planning Phase: This phase is six months and participants will engage in foundational activities, including:

- Attending a Boot Camp to kickstart their work;
- Joining monthly All-City Calls to share progress and collaborate;
- Participating in a 4-hour online convening to align goals and strategies; and
- Receiving tailored support through one-on-one Technical Assistance (TA) calls.

Implementation Phase: this phase is two years and participants will be encouraged to maintain momentum by:

- Continuing to join monthly All-City Calls for updates and peer learning;
- Continuing one-on-one TA meetings for focused guidance;
- Attending in-person convenings to deepen collaboration and learning; and
- Hosting and participating in site visits to share successes and strategies.

Can cities partner with neighboring cities on an application?

Yes, cities are welcome to partner with their neighbors on a joint application, and we highly encourage this approach for smaller cities that may face capacity challenges due to their size. Collaborating on a shared strategy can help align efforts with leadership goals and maximize impact.

When submitting the RFP, a section will outline the details of your partnership. Make sure to designate one city as the primary point of contact for the initiative. This ensures clear communication and streamlines throughout the program. If you have questions about applying as a partnership, please contact Rosanna Mulcahy at eofoe@nlc.org for additional guidance!

If the mayor cannot be the lead contact for this program, which role or city leadership function is the best fit to engage in this program?

The mayor doesn't have to be the lead contact. The lead should be a senior city leadership official who has the authority and capacity to drive economic inclusion initiatives. This could include the city manager, deputy mayor, or a director from a key department such as economic development, planning, or community services.

What equipment or technology requirements are there for participation in the program?

To participate in the program, you'll need standard technology: a computer, internet connection, and a camera for video calls. You'll also be provided with access to a dashboard powered by Airtable.

System requirements for the dashboard:

- Windows users: Windows 7 or newer (64-bit).
- Mac users: macOS 10.12 or higher, with either an Intel processor or Apple silicon (via Rosetta).

How many cities will be selected from each state in the planning and implementation phases?

We plan to select up to 20 cities across the ten states for the planning phase without targeting a specific number of cities per state. During the implementation phase, cities will be selected based on the successful completion of a comprehensive business plan. We anticipate advancing up to 15 municipalities to the implementation phase with no predetermined allocation of cities per state.

What are the benefits of participating in SCEI?

Selected southern municipalities will receive:

Planning Phase:

- \$15,000 planning grant and eligibility to apply for implementation;
- Tailored technical assistance and expert support from NLC, FRBA, and partners;
- Access to an economic inclusion inventory tool to identify opportunities.
- Peer-learning and problem-solving sessions;
- Data support from NLC and the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta; and a
- Virtual Boot Camp for planning activities.

Implementation Phase (in addition to the above):

- \$30,000–\$60,000 implementation grant;
- Three in-person convenings (travel expenses covered by NLC);
- Site visits for technical assistance and peer learning;
- Guidance from experienced faculty;
- Recognition in SCEI and NLC publications; and
- Leadership development via The Annie E. Casey Foundation's Results Count program.

How does peer networking work?

Peer networking in the SCEI program is a cornerstone of our approach to driving economic inclusion. It allows participating municipalities to connect, collaborate, and learn from each other's experiences. Participants share successes, challenges, and innovative strategies through structured peer-learning sessions. Additionally, the program includes in-person convenings and site visits where cities can engage more deeply, explore best practices, and build relationships.

These connections foster an open exchange of ideas, enabling cities to solve problems collaboratively and apply insights tailored to their unique contexts. Participants also have access to technical assistance and guidance from faculty and seasoned leaders, enhancing peer learning experience.