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**Rural Leaders for Economic Mobility Cohort Application and Information Sheet**

The National Association of Counties (NACo) is partnering with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to create a peer-learning opportunity for rural local leaders to advance equitable upward economic mobility to move individuals and families out of poverty. **NACo will select 10 member counties, parishes or boroughs with populations of less than 50,000 to be part of the new Rural Leaders for Economic Mobility (RLEM) initiative.**

Over an 18-month period, selected counties, parishes or boroughs will receive virtual and in-person learning opportunities to foster economic development and reduce poverty. Each applicant two-person team will designate one elected local government official from the county, parish or borough (e.g., commissioner, supervisor, police juror, county/parish executive, etc.) and one local government employee or community member who will help implement policy change (e.g., chief of staff, administrative officer, department head, nonprofit leader, community college president, industry leader, etc.).

RLEM members will convene in member counties to discuss strategies for creating rural prosperity, addressing subjects such as housing; land use; broadband access; residential, commercial and community infrastructure; workforce development; and rural entrepreneurship. Cohort members will learn from peers and experts on proven strategies to create equitable economic opportunity in rural America, receive technical assistance for policy and program implementation, receive travel funds to participate in all in-person activities and be awarded a $50,000 subgrant to support implementation and integration of data and evidence-based policies into local government decision-making.

**Important Dates and Deadlines**

**Open Call for Applications:** Thursday, March 21, 2024

**Application Information Session:** Wednesday, April 3, 2024, 3:00 p.m. ET

**Application Deadline**: Monday, April 22, 2024, 11:59 p.m. ET

**Announcement of Selected Teams**: May 2024

**Kick-Off Webinar with Selected Teams:** Thursday, June 6, 2024, 2:00-4:00 p.m. ET (required attendance)

**NACo 2024 Annual Conference:** Tampa, Hillsborough County, Fla., July 12-15, 2024 (required attendance, travel funding and registration fee provided)

**NACo 2025 Annual Conference:** City and County of Philadelphia, Pa., July 11-14, 2025 (required attendance, travel funding and registration fee provided)

**Duration of the Action Challenge Program:** 18 months

**Program Information**

**What is Rural Leaders for Economic Mobility?**

With the support of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Rural Leaders for Economic Mobility (RLEM) initiative is a knowledge-sharing peer learning network that will empower local government leaders and partners from 10 low-population counties, parishes or boroughs to use reliable and localized data and best practices to develop equitable economic opportunity that moves individuals and families out of poverty. The National Association of Counties (NACo) has partnered with Results for America, the Urban Institute and Opportunity Insights to develop educational programming and provide community coaching support. RLEM members will participate in in-person and virtual learning activities and receive travel funding to support their participation. RLEM members will also receive $50,000 grants to their local governments.

**How does NACo approach Economic Mobility?**

Since 2018,NACo has partnered with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to advance upward economic mobility in America’s counties. Local governments play an instrumental role in building the economic resilience and vitality of communities and supporting the economic wellbeing of all our residents.

Policy areas that advance upward economic mobility include community improvements like quality housing supply and safe neighborhoods; services like public health programs, early childhood education and workforce development training for jobseekers; and connectivity to the marketplace through technology, infrastructure and information support. Local government leaders are uniquely positioned as changemakers through local authorities, partnerships and resource allocation to have a direct impact on each of these and more.

In the United States, economic mobility is centered on the goal that each generation can achieve greater financial well-being than the previous one. In recent decades, this goal has become harder to reach. According to [Opportunity Insights](https://opportunityinsights.org/paper/the-fading-american-dream/), only about half of Americans born since 1980 go on to earn more than their parents did. Using evidence-based economic development strategies, local government leaders can reverse this trend and help move Americans out of poverty and achieve well-being for themselves and their families.

**Who should apply?**

RLEM aims to support counties, parishes and boroughs that have limited technical and staffing resources but who are deeply committed to building stronger and more resilient economies in their communities. Applications should be submitted jointly by a two-member team from NACo member counties, parishes and boroughs with fewer than 50,000 people. Applications must identify both proposed team participants. One team member must be an elected county, parish or borough official (e.g., commissioner, supervisor, police juror, county/parish executive, council/assembly member, etc.) and one team member must be a local government employee or non-governmental community member who will help implement policy change (e.g., chief of staff, administrative officer, department head, nonprofit leader, community college president, industry leader, etc.).

**What will RLEM members do?**

Selected teams will participate in and receive the following activities, which are required for all participants:

* Monthly virtual meetings with RLEM members, NACo staff and subject-matter experts to learn best practices and share strategies.
* Three three-day in-person peer exchange convenings in a host RLEM member location (to be selected through mutual agreement and coordination). Each convening will focus on an example of working toward upward economic mobility in rural areas (e.g. housing, workforce development, etc.), with travel funding provided.
* Two RLEM member workshops on rural development at NACo’s Annual Conferences in 2024 (Tampa, Hillsborough County, Fla.) and 2025 (City and County of Philadelphia, Pa.) with registration fee and travel funding provided.
* $50,000 subawards to their local governments to drive adoption of data-informed and community driven evidence-based policymaking.
* Training on how to use key economic mobility resources ([Results for America’s](https://results4america.org/) [Economic Mobility Catalog](https://catalog.results4america.org/), the [Urban Institute’s](https://www.urban.org/) [Upward Mobility Framework](https://upward-mobility.urban.org/) and [Opportunity Insights’](https://opportunityinsights.org/) [Opportunity Atlas](https://opportunityatlas.org/)) to inform decision-making in rural communities.
* One capstone event at NACo’s Rural Action Caucus Symposium in Fall 2025, with travel funding provided.

**Will selected local governments receive funding?**

Yes. Selected county, parish or borough governments (not cohort members themselves) will receive $50,000 subawards from NACo to utilize data and evidence-based policymaking to drive upward economic mobility in their localities. RLEM members and NACo staff will co-develop work plans for use of funds with expected awards to be made in Fall 2024. Both team members will also be provided registration fees and travel funding for participation in all in-person activities, including peer exchange visits, NACo Annual Conferences and the RLEM Capstone at NACo’s Rural Action Caucus Symposium.

**Are there any requirements for the applicant teams?**

Yes. Teams should:

* Represent counties, parishes or boroughs with a population under 50,000 people.
* Include one elected local government official.
* Include one local government staffer or community member who will help drive policy implementation.
* Commit to fully participating in monthly virtual meetings, in-person peer exchange visits (3), NACo Annual Conferences (2), and NACo’s Rural Action Caucus Symposium (1).
* Commit to community engagement activities to solicit feedback and provide public information on local strategies to promote upward mobility.

**How will applications be evaluated?**

Applications will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

* Authority, responsibility and commitment of the applicant team members to address equitable upward economic mobility to move local residents out of poverty.
* Strength of partnership between the team members, with evidence of past joint effort or demonstrated commitment to future collaboration, if this is a new partnership.
* Clear anticipated benefit to team members to strengthen their knowledge, capacity and efficacy from participating as a member of the RLEM.
* Clear anticipated benefit to county, parish or borough to improve the economic opportunity of all residents, especially the least advantaged and historically underserved.
* Level of economic vulnerability and hardship faced by the county, parish or borough, including for historically marginalized communities.

**Is there an application fee?**

No.

**Who will review the applications?**

NACo staff will screen each application to ensure the key eligibility criteria are met. Scoring of applications will be conducted by a team of local government leaders who have participated in past NACo economic mobility projects as well as economic mobility research partners. Final selections will take into account geographic, economic and demographic diversity of the overall RLEM membership.

**Will there be travel funds for selected cohort members?**

Yes, registration fees and travel costs will be covered for both team members to attend all in-person activities, including peer exchange visits (dates and location to be confirmed, tentative: September 2024, April 2025, September 2025), NACo Annual Conferences (July 2024, July 2025) and RLEM Capstone at NACo’s Rural Action Caucus Symposium (Fall 2025).

**How To Prepare & Submit Your Application**

**Application Instructions**

Completed applications containing all the requested information should be emailed as a Word or PDF attachment to [economicmobility@naco.org](mailto:economicmobility@naco.org) by **Monday, April 22, 11:59 p.m. ET.** Complete applications will answer the following questions:

**Application Questions**

1. **County, Parish or Borough Information**.
   1. County, parish or borough name.
   2. State.
   3. Total Population. (Must be below 50,000)
   4. Number of Local Government Employees.
   5. Total local government annual budget.

1. **Describe your county, parish or borough.** Include a description of the population at large as well as any communities with unique needs, challenges or vulnerabilities. (Suggested word count: up to 300)
2. **Describe your county, parish or borough’s economic conditions.** Include main industries, infrastructure, assets and any related challenges. (Suggested word count: up to 300)
3. **Describe the benefits to your county, parish or borough that your team seeks to achieve through active participation in the Rural Leaders for Economic Mobility initiative.** (Suggested word count: up to 300)
4. **Describe the benefits to each of your team members through active participation in the Rural Leaders for Economic Mobility initiative.** (Suggested word count: up to 300)
5. **Describe how your team will work on this joint effort.** Please describe how both team members will work together, including how they have or have not worked together in the past and why is this an effective pairing in order to advance economic mobility in your region. (Suggested word count: up to 300)
6. **Please list any limitations you may have that would prevent your team members from fully participating in the cohort activities,** including virtual meetings, national travel and engaging with local community stakeholders.
7. **List of Team Members**. Please provide the information below for each of your team members. Teams should have two members, one of whom must be a county, parish or borough elected official. The other team member should be a key partner for implementing economic mobility policies, programs or activities that benefit the community (e.g., local government staff, representative from nonprofit, community development organization, area business or Chamber of Commerce, philanthropic organization, educational institution, regional or local economic development organization, other critical community stakeholder).
   1. First and Last Name.
   2. Professional Title.
   3. Organization Name.
   4. Email Address.
   5. Phone Number.
   6. Sector the team member represents (e.g., local government, nonprofit, private sector, educational institution).
   7. Each listed team member should answer the following questions:
      1. Why have you chosen to be part of this initiative, and how can you contribute to the strength of the team?
      2. How can you contribute to building a diverse team with diverse perspectives (sector of work, age, race, gender, background, experience, etc.)?
   8. Any other information important about yourself that you would like to add.

Please indicate by checking this box that both listed team members are jointly submitting this application, have the support of their respective organizations to advance upward economic mobility efforts and understand and agree to the participation requirements, if selected.

*If you have any questions about the application, please contact* [economicmobility@naco.org](mailto:economicmobility@naco.org)