

Southern Education Foundation

**Racial Equity Leadership Network | Fellowship Application**

# The Opportunity & Aim

Despite decades of public education reforms, race and class remain among the most reliable predictors of student success in school, particularly in southern states. This is a direct result of students of color and low-income students being taught within school systems that were explicitly designed to exclude them and have not been updated to adequately serve the diverse student population of today. These students face numerous and complex barriers to educational achievement, from inexperienced, underqualified teachers to disproportionately referred discipline. This disparate treatment of Black and Brown children has lifelong effects ranging from increased health risks to decreased earning potential.

Correcting these disparities and ensuring equitable, not just equal, educational opportunities for all students will require a bold and significant shift for school systems, rooted in an explicit understanding of the historical legacy in which they are situated and how it continues to result in opportunity gaps for students of color. Districts committed to racial equity will recognize that students require supports based on their individual experiences and opportunities, which are deeply contextualized in the social reality of institutional racism. For this reason, providing all students with ‘the same’ services and supports is insufficient to ensure that each of them has what they need to develop academically, socially, emotionally, and physically. The system we need requires educational leaders in every corner of our nation to respond in new ways to the complex challenges they navigate and to pay attention to the social, historical, economic, and political contexts of the communities they serve. As school districts enact policies and practices to equitably support students, they begin to ameliorate the systems that perpetuate unequal opportunities.

# Fellowship Overview

The Southern Education Foundation (SEF) believes that district leaders are a critical lever to systems change and are the proverbial “secret sauce” to incite the shift that is needed to transform schools and ensure that all students have deeper learning outcomes, regardless of background. As such, we believe we need to invest in cultivating and strengthening their knowledge of, commitment to, and skills for advancing equitable school policies and practices.

We are answering this call with the [Racial Equity Leadership Network (RELN)](https://www.southerneducation.org/what-we-do/leadership-development/reln/). Launched in partnership with the National Equity Project (NEP) and Learning Policy Institute (LPI), the Southern Education Foundation’s Racial Equity Leadership Network is an 18-month, cohort-style fellowship program for school district leaders who are committed to addressing persistent disparities in their systems and ensuring that race and class are no longer the most reliable predictors of student success.

Fellows will attend five (5) two-and-a-half-day network convenings focused on the essential levers for equity leadership and system transformation. In between network convenings, the fellows also receive customized coaching and webinars to support the identification of a context-specific equity challenge. Finally, fellows receive grant support and other technical assistance to implement an action plan addressing their unique equity challenge during a six-month in-district work period.

Each cohort of the Racial Equity Leadership Network will be comprised of up to twelve leaders (i.e., Superintendents, Deputy Superintendents, Chief Academic Officers, etc.) from across the South who are interested in making progress on an equity challenge in their district.

As members of the *Racial Equity Leadership Network*, fellows will:

* Experience opportunities for renewal, inspiration, healing, and sustenance as an equity leader.
* Sharpen racial equity lens, gaining greater understanding and knowledge on the role that implicit bias, privilege, history, and structural racism play in perpetuating racial inequity in education.
* Test, prototype, or pilot innovative solutions to address and make progress on a specific racial equity challenge in their respective context/school system, laying the foundation to improve the learning environments, experiences, and outcomes of black, brown, and low-income students in the fellow’s respective district.
* Gain a supportive equity-focused community of practice, and by extension, peer learning network that extends beyond the conclusion of the fellowship.
* Receive and make use of tools, resources and coaching support to practice a racial equity leadership approach to the work you are doing in your system. This approach includes critical self-reflection, bias identification and confrontation, empathetic listening, and reimagined ways of identifying and tackling equity challenges by leveraging role authority to create desired changes in policy and practices.

# Network Benefits

# As members of the Racial Equity Leadership Network, fellows should walk away from this experience with a more nuanced understanding of existing and potential equity challenges their districts face and could encounter in the future. They will be provided with a cadre of tangible tools and resources in the form of critical time and space to strategize, peer networking, access to experts, and technical assistance. Additionally, fellows will have the opportunity to engage in thought partnership with coaches to assist in strategizing how best to address their challenges. Fellows may also earn a chance to assert themselves as experts in the discipline through possibilities for shared publication and peer-to-peer learning. Finally, fellows will receive a host of suggestions for ways to utilize their current team and resources more efficiently and promote buy-in for future initiatives so that they might scale their efforts moving forward.

* Time & Space: Fellows will have a chance to step away from the daily pressures and demands of their roles to engage and reflect thoughtfully and share intellectually and practically as educational leaders.
* Peer Networks: Fellows will have an opportunity to share and receive lessons and support from peers who understand the complexity of the challenges leaders confront, while capitalizing on opportunities for peer learning, support and advising, and building alliances.
* Access to Exclusive Networking & Learning Opportunities:Fellows and their district colleagues will be invited to participate in exclusive *Racial Equity Leadership Network* events (ex. Speaker Series, Regional Development Events, Symposiums, District Learning Visits, etc.), that allow them to engage with other thought leaders, policymakers, and innovators in the field of education.
* Racial Equity-In-Action Inquiry Cycle: Fellows will receive support identifying a challenge, designing an approach, executing a strategy, and reporting back on progress and lessons learned. Fellows will also have access to other resources that will enable effective implementation of their chosen strategy.
* Coaching & Technical Assistance: Fellows will work with SEF and partner organizations to co-design and customize coaching and technical assistance designed to support district teams to advance an equity agenda. Coaching and technical assistance could include but is not limited to:
	+ Communications Strategy
	+ Equity Strategy Development
	+ Executive Coaching and Team Development
	+ District Equity Audits
	+ Listening Campaigns
	+ Equitable School Finance
	+ Community Schools Strategy Development

# Network Convenings At a Glance

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| CONVENING 1JUNE 2021 | CONVENING 2OCT/NOV 2021 | CONVENING 3FEB/MAR 2022 | CONVENING 4JUNE/JULY 2022 | 6 MONTHFOLLOW UP | CONVENING 5DEC 2022/JAN 2023 |
| Fellowship Launch! Taking Leadership for Equity in Complex Systems | Exploring New Approaches to Advance Educational Equity | Building Empathy & Healing Relationships to Transform Power Across Systems | Redesigning Structures to Interrupt Inequity & Increase Belonging | Prototype Innovations to Address Your Equity Challenge | Sharing Emerging Results & Lessons Learned |

  *\*Convening topics are in development and subject to change.*

# Eligibility

The *Racial Equity Leadership Network* is targeted at executive leaders in school districts in the South that are committed to reducing inequities in their districts and exhibit readiness to implement innovative, transformational change in their systems.

Candidates selected for inclusion in the *Racial Equity Leadership Network* may vary in the size of the district they lead, demographic composition, budget, geographic location, and in the types of equity challenges they identify. Our selection will be foremost guided by the districts’ ability to demonstrate a true need and willingness to seek equity-centered systemic change and the fellow’s commitment to be a consistent participant and contributor to the *Racial Equity Leadership Network*. Ultimately, the *Racial Equity Leadership Network* will come to be reflective of the racially and economically diverse communities that constitute our southern region.

# Fellowship Application

Interested applicants should submit the following responses to our Applicant Review Team using the [online application form](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeqYH9J7nYPU5dSw3PPlmj32zrmGGpOvH7T8o1kKT1b20T5ag/viewform?usp=sf_link) by **December 1, 2020 (deadline extended due to COVID-19 pandemic):**

1. Candidate Information (Please include resume or CV)
2. District Description & Data
3. District Goals, Priorities & Equity Orientation
4. Identification of District’s Racial Equity Leadership Design Team
5. Optional: Additional Attachments *(Up to 5 total)*

# A. Candidate Information

1. Candidate’s Full Name
2. Title/Role and Tenure in the District
3. Demographics: Candidate’s Gender, Ethnicity/Race, Date of Birth
4. Identify previous fellowship programs in which you have participated.
5. What attracts you to this fellowship experience?
6. How do you define equity? Who do you think is responsible for ensuring equity in a school system?
7. In your opinion, what does it mean to “lead for racial equity”? What skills, capacities, and disposition should a leader have?
8. What has been your experience addressing racial equity issues and/or reducing disparities in your district? What lessons or insights did you gain?
9. What gifts and contributions would you bring to this fellowship cohort?
10. What questions or concerns are you grappling with in your work to address inequity in your system?
11. Do you have support/approval to participate in all five Network Convenings? Y N
12. Please indicate specifically how you heard about the Racial Equity Leadership Network.

(indicate multiple sources if applicable)

# B. Candidate’s District Description & Data

1. District Name
2. District Office Address
3. District Vision & Mission
4. Organizational Structure *(organizational chart)*
5. School Board Members (*list by name)*
6. District Size *(number of schools & total number of students)*
7. Student Demographics *(% of students by race/ethnicity, % of students on free/reduced lunch)*
8. Teacher Demographics *(% of teachers by race/ethnicity)*
9. District Total Budget $\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
10. Type of District: (urban, suburban, rural, or other?)
11. Student Achievement Data *(please provide data that illustrate the racial inequity or disproportionality that exist in your system)*
12. Please list any partner organizations that are currently supporting the district to achieve its strategic priorities. Briefly describe the type of support they typically provide? *(i.e. financial, programmatic)*

## C. District Goals, Priorities & Equity Orientation

1. What are the current strategic priorities/goals of your district *(i.e. high level goals)*?
2. In order to accomplish your strategic priorities, identify 1-2 areas *you* believe your district must address to make progress?
3. How would you describe the key racial equity challenges in your district today?
4. What do you think your system needs to learn and be able to do to make progress or in order to solve the aforementioned equity challenges?
5. To what degree or how explicitly does your district name race, and/or equity in their analysis and communications (internal or external)?
6. Are there any formal structures that your district employs to promote parity or equity in student access and outcomes?
7. Please describe the specific data/measures you use to understand your organizational impact and how often the collection of these measures occurs. How do you use this data to continuously learn and improve?
8. Describe your efforts engaging families and communities in advancing equitable outcomes and/or transforming student experience in your district? Where have you had success? Where (or with whom) has community and family engagement been a challenge? What do you want to learn or improve in this area?

## D. District’s Racial Equity Leadership Design Team

In the RELN Fellowship experience, fellows will be asked to enroll a team of colleagues from your district to apply a new liberatory approach to addressing an identified equity challenge. Members of your design team will be responsible for identifying an equity issue in your district that is in your sphere of influence. Design Teams also commit to learning about and experimenting with new ways to address or influence the desired outcome.

1. Please list the names and roles of your District’s Design Team (inclusive of 5-7 members).

We strongly recommend including at least one member of your cabinet level team (i.e. Chief Academic Officer, Deputy Superintendent, etc.) to promote support and consistency.

1. Describe your rationale for the composition of your team. Describe how you will ensure that your design team is fully engaged in the Network, as well as how you will ensure that the learning of your Design Team will strongly influence the work of your broader organization.

**\*Please note: We understand that this District Design Team may change over time, and fellows should not feel required to adhere to the Design Team membership set forth in their application.**

## Statement of Confidentiality

All information and data provided in response to this application by the candidate and/or district will remain private and will not be shared with the public without expressed written consent by an authorized party. Applicant information and data will only be used by the Applicant Review Team to determine candidates’ interests, needs, and conditions for successful participation and contribution in the *Racial Equity Leadership Network*.

## Statement of Non-Discrimination

It is the policy of the *Racial Equity Leadership Network* to ensure equal opportunity without discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, disability, marital status, citizenship, genetic information, or any other characteristic protected by law. None of the aforementioned factors will significantly disqualify or qualify you to be an ideal candidate for the work that we will embark upon in this program.

## Mission Statement

The faculty and partners involved in the *Racial Equity Leadership Network* recognize a need to more fully engage in thought partnership with district decision makers and support their efforts as they work toward addressing the significant equity challenges that increasingly exist in our classrooms and communities. We are committed to advancing promising solutions through a combination of collaboration, coaching, policy, practice, advocacy, and action research, and in doing so, we believe we will arrive at a more equitable education system together.

# About the Southern Education Foundation



## Southern Education Foundation

The Southern Education Foundation’s (SEF) mission is to advance equity and excellence in education for all students in the South, particularly low-income students and students of color. SEF uses collaboration, advocacy, and research to improve outcomes from early childhood to adulthood. Their core belief is that education is the vehicle by which all students get fair chances to develop their talents and contribute to the common good. The Southern Education Foundation seeks a South and a nation with a skilled workforce that sustains an expanding economy, where civic life embodies diversity, and where democratic values and practice are promoted.

# About Our Partner Organizations



## National Equity Project

The National Equity Project’s (NEP) mission is to dramatically improve educational experiences, outcomes, and life options for students and families who have been historically underserved by their schools and districts. NEP’s unique leadership and organizational development approach focuses on the technical, relational, social, and cultural aspects of complex change efforts focused on educational equity. NEP works to build culture, conditions, and competencies for excellence and equity in districts, schools, classrooms, nonprofits, and communities. NEP offers a blend of technical expertise and coaching support to achieve systems change, including strategy development, leadership and team development, culturally responsive and instructional decision-making, and process design and facilitation. NEP’s commitment lies in increasing the capacity of leaders (formal and informal) across a system to diagnose, develop, and design new ways to achieve more equitable experiences and results in their communities.

## Learning Policy Institute

The Learning Policy Institute (LPI) conducts and communicates independent, high-quality research to improve education policy and practice. Working with policymakers, researchers, educators, community groups, and others, the Institute seeks to advance evidence-based policies that support empowering and equitable learning for each and every child. Nonprofit and nonpartisan, LPI connects policymakers and stakeholders at the local, state, and federal levels with the evidence, ideas, and actions needed to strengthen the education system from preschool through college and career readiness.