



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVE (CEI) Request for Applications

The California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (CCEE), the San Diego County Office of Education (SDCOE), Eskolta School Research and Design, and the University of San Diego (USD) are excited to announce the recruitment of the next cohort for the Community Engagement Initiative (CEI). The initiative was established in 2019 as part of the California Statewide System of Support (SSOS) with the goal of building the capacity of schools, districts, and communities to authentically engage each other for the purpose of improving outcomes for all students, particularly English Learners, low-income students, Foster Youth, and students from other underserved student groups.

Who Should Apply

Local Education Agencies (LEAs) (i.e. school districts, County Offices of Education, and Charter Schools) looking to develop quality engagement programs, and/ or those with established systems and processes to:

- 1. Expand** the resources around best practices for improving community engagement identified across various communities around the state.
- 2. Commit** to self-reflection and growth to support transforming current practices within/across their LEA.
- 3. Assist** the continued development of building capacity within LEAs and local communities for meaningful and sustainable engagement.



Background of the Community Engagement Initiative (CEI)

The CEI was established to strengthen the California State System of Support by building the capacity of schools, districts/LEAs, and communities to authentically engage, have difficult conversations, and build trust.

The focus is on improving student outcomes through a series of Peer Leading and Learning Networks (PLLN).



The CEI offers a remarkable opportunity for LEAs to revolutionize their community engagement practices by participating in the PLLN. The PLLN model, conducted through a combination of eight virtual, hybrid, and in-person meetings, guides participating teams in an improvement science-based curriculum to identify their specific community needs as they relate to the districts/LEAs current community engagement practices.

The meetings, statewide and regionally, allow participants to identify strengths-based approaches to improvement, exchange strategies with peers, and network with other role-alike participants and districts/LEAs. A key feature of the initiative is the chance to engage and partner with districts/LEAs from every region of California. Teams openly share their experiences (both successful strategies and obstacles encountered) in achieving authentic community engagement for shared decision-making. The CEI's comprehensive approach facilitates transformative change within participating communities, promoting effective and authentic community engagement practices, and fostering a culture of continuous improvement in education.

Benefits of Participating in the CEI PLLN

- ✓ **Be a part of systemic change** for community engagement in the California State System of Support.
- ✓ **Learn effective practices** for community engagement from LEAs across the state.
- ✓ **Discover strategies** to strengthen the capacity of LEA teams to effectively engage their educational partners through the Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP).
- ✓ **Engage in an open dialogue** on issues related to improving local pupil outcomes.
- ✓ **Partner with other communities** and LEAs to improve community engagement practices, policies, systems, structures, and procedures.
- ✓ **Receive an annual stipend** used to support the LEAs community engagement efforts and team members' participation in the CEI (including internal staff, parents, community members, etc).

Commitments of LEA Teams

If selected, each LEA team must commit to contribute to the statewide effort to build capacity for authentic community engagement through the CEI and be willing to:

1. Participate in the professional learning network for no less than two years.
 - Includes eight Peer Leading and Learning Network convenings per year, consisting of a combination of virtual, hybrid, and in-person sessions.
 - Travel and overnight stay will be required (accommodations and air transportation covered by the CEI).
 - Additional time for collaboration and coaching will be required between convenings.
2. Engage in difficult conversations with each other and build trust, with a focus on improving outcomes for pupils.
3. Identify a specific school site that would be represented by staff/families/students on the district/LEA team and where your community engagement improvement efforts will be initially focused.
4. Collaborate to improve community engagement. This collaboration could include offering financial support to the partnering organizations to support their capacity for meaningful collaboration with the district/LEA team at the local level to practice and implement learnings from the CEI.
5. Select a CEI Team Lead and Backup Lead who is responsible for direct communication with the CEI Lead Agencies and facilitators. They will oversee and guide the team on their community engagement journey.
6. Replace any team member who leaves, keeping within the requirements for participants set forth below, and notify the CEI designee of changes.
7. Ability to provide space that is video-conference equipped at specified school/district sites for hybrid network convenings.



The CEI Team Lead will create a team comprised of the following roles (*teams will be solidified after notification of acceptance*):

- **LEA staff/leadership:** Leadership that includes a cabinet-level administrator (e.g. Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, or Board Member) who oversees community engagement for the district and (if different) a district staff member who leads community engagement implementation for the district
- **School site staff/leadership:** Leadership that includes the principal, assistant/vice principal, dean, or other leadership team members who oversee community engagement at the school. School site staff include school counselors, teachers, and classified personnel.
- **Student/Family:** Upper elementary, middle, and high school students and family members or caregivers of elementary, middle, and high school students enrolled at the selected school site.
- **County Office of Education:** A representative who oversees or provides support for community engagement to LEAs in the county.
- **Community Partner:** A representative of a community-based organization that works with the district or specified school.



Teams should have no more than 12 members in total and no less than 6 members.



Application Process & Timeline Summary

Interested LEAs must submit a completed Request for Application Form by 5:00 p.m. PST on Tuesday, April 15, 2025. The form must include a one-page Letter of Interest (details below) signed by the Superintendent or designee.

The 1-page Letter of Interest must include the following:

- ✓ A description of the LEA, its community, and its student population
- ✓ Why the LEA is interested in participating in the Community Engagement Initiative
- ✓ How the LEA hopes to improve community engagement with its community (students, families, community partners) in school and/or district-level decision-making
- ✓ Examples of efforts that have been made and/or barriers to:
 - build capacity to have difficult conversations with their school community and build trust, with a focus on improving outcomes for all students
 - engage communities that have not historically been engaged
- ✓ The Superintendent's signature must be a wet signature in blue ink or an electronic signature.
 - If the letter is signed by the Superintendent designee, it too, must be a wet signature in blue ink or an electronic signature.
 - Signature examples:

Wet Signature



Electronic Signature



- ✓ Point of contact: The letter must include the name and contact information (phone and email) for the LEA employee who will serve as the School or District Point of Contact.

Timeline Activity	Date
Request for Applications posted	February 3, 2025
Acceptance for Applications open. Visit CaliforniaEngage.org	March 3, 2025
Request for Applications form final submission date	April 15, 2025 - 5:00 p.m. PST

Applications will be timestamped and reviewed in the order in which they are received. Incomplete applications (i.e., missing ANY of the required criteria outlined above for the Letter of Interest) WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED. LEAs will need to resubmit their application, which will receive a new timestamp based on the SECOND submission. Once enrollment capacity has been reached, completed applications will be added to a waitlist.

Sample Cohort VI Calendar of Meetings for 2025-26

August 2025 Team Lead Orientation/Contract Overview	Virtual
September 2025	Virtual
December 2025	2-day In-person
February 2026	Virtual
March 2026	2-day In-person
April/May 2026	2-day In-person

Anyone with questions is encouraged to contact the Community Engagement Initiative at info@californiaengage.org