

# Community Engagement Initiative (CEI) **REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS** Cohort VII



**T**he California Collaborative for Educational Excellence, 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 households, 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 Statewide System of Support by building the capacity of schools, 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 Network meetings.

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

The CEI Team Lead will create a team of no more than 12 members in total and no less than 6 members 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.

**County Office of Education:**

A representative who oversees or provides support for community engagement to LEAs in the county.

**Student Leaders:**

Upper Elementary, middle, high school, or adult school students. Student participants engage in CEI student leadership spaces and collaborate with their CEI team members by sharing their perspectives, experiences, and ideas related to school and community.

**Community Partner:**

A representative of a community-based organization that works with the district or specified school.

**Family/Caregivers:**

Family members or caregivers of students enrolled at the selected school site.



## 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 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 with other communities and LEAs to improve community engagement. This collaboration should 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 network convenings.



## Application Process & Timeline Summary

Interested LEAs must submit a completed Request for Application Form by 5:00 p.m. PST on Tuesday, April 17, 2026. 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, please include a copy of the board policy that confirms the designee’s authority to act on behalf of the Superintendent.
  - 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 5, 2026
Acceptance for Applications open	March 2, 2026
Informational Webinar	March 2, 2026 at 3:00pm
Request for Applications form <b>final submission date</b>	April 17, 2026 - 5:00 p.m. PST

To support equitable participation across California’s educational landscape, only one application will be accepted per charter management organization (CMO) or charter school network. In addition to the order in which applications are received, the selection process may also consider broader statewide priorities in alignment with the goals of the CEI.

Applications will be timestamped and reviewed in the order in which they are received. Only complete applications, including all required criteria outlined above for the Letter of Interest, will be reviewed. Incomplete applications (e.g., missing any required information) will not be accepted. LEAs will need to resubmit a complete application, which will receive a new timestamp based on the second submission. Once enrollment capacity has been reached, any additional completed applications will be placed on a waitlist.

### Sample Cohort VII Calendar of Meetings for 2026-27

- August 2026 - Team Lead Orientation and Contract Overview - Virtual
- September 2026 --- Virtual
- December 2026 --- 2-day In-person
- February 2027 - Virtual
- March 2027 --- 2-day In-person
- April/May 2027 --- 2-day In-person

Anyone with questions is encouraged to contact the Community Engagement Initiative at [info@californiaengage.org](mailto:info@californiaengage.org).

