



# LORE 2026–2027 Cohort Application

## Program Information

**Background & Overview:** LORE is an 8-month executive certificate program for public sector leaders building the case and capacity for equity-driven systems change within their organizations. Two four-month sessions are offered: a fall session focused on communication and decision-making processes and a spring session focused on project implementation and process change.

A core component of the program is the development of a pilot project based on an existing challenge or opportunity within participating organizations. These projects are used to apply concepts from the curriculum and guide a structured process change analysis.

**Eligibility:** Participating organizations must send a minimum of two participants. One of these individuals should be an executive- or senior-level leader (e.g., City Manager, County Administrator, Assistant City Manager, Department Head, etc). Additional participants may be staff at any level who will be directly involved in pilot project implementation.

**Program Expectations & Commitment:** Participants are expected to commit approximately 4-5 hours per month to LORE activities, including attending all in-person sessions (3 hours) at the NIU Naperville campus and completing 1-2 hours of interactive online course materials, readings, and homework connected to their pilot projects.

**Workshop Dates & Times:** All in-person sessions will take place from 9am - 12pm at the NIU Naperville Campus on the following dates:

- **Fall Session 2026:** 9/2, 10/7, 11/4, 12/2
- **Spring Session 2027:** 2/3, 3/3, 4/7, 5/5

### Application Timeline:

- **Application Opens:** May 15, 2026
- **Scholarship Deadline:** June 30, 2026 at 11:59 PM
- **Informational Sessions:** TBA – Please check our website and LinkedIn for updates
- **Application Deadline:** July 31, 2026 at 11:59 PM
- **Notification of Selection:** Anticipated by August 15, 2026



**Cost Breakdown:** The base cost for participation is \$840 per semester for the first two participants, and \$720 for each additional participant. The cost covers 12 hours of in-person instruction per semester, access to an online learning platform for coursework, peer learning, and coaching between sessions, and a certificate upon completion of the program. Organizations receive a reduced rate of approximately 10% off if they pay in full by September 1.

	Per Semester Cost	Full Program Cost	Full Program with ~10% Discount (if paid in full by Sept 1)
<b>Participant 1</b> <i>(required)</i>	\$840	\$1680	\$1500
<b>Participant 2</b> <i>(required)</i>	\$840	\$1680	\$1500
<b>Participants 3</b> <i>(optional)</i>	\$720	\$1440	\$1300
<b>Participant 4</b> <i>(optional)</i>	\$720	\$1440	\$1300

**Scholarships & Financial Aid:** Members of affiliate organizations are eligible for partial scholarships to participate in LORE. A limited number of scholarships are available for the 2026-2027 program. If your organization would like to be considered for a scholarship, please indicate which affiliate organizations you are a member of in the contact information section of the application. A maximum of two scholarships per affiliate group will be offered. C3E additionally offers a sliding scale and payment plans for communities and/or individuals facing financial barriers to participating in the program. To explore options with our team, please contact Katie Friedman at [kfriedman@c3elocalgov.org](mailto:kfriedman@c3elocalgov.org).

**How to Apply:** Please submit your responses online via google form by **11:59 on Friday, July 31**. The application form can be accessed at this link: [LORE 2026-2027 Application](#)

For questions or additional information, please visit <https://c3elocalgov.org/lore/> or contact Katie Friedman at [kfriedman@c3elocalgov.org](mailto:kfriedman@c3elocalgov.org).



## Contact Information

Participating organizations must send a minimum of two participants. One of these individuals should be an executive- or senior-level leader (e.g., City Manager, County Administrator, Assistant City Manager, Department Head, etc). Additional participants may be staff at any level who will be directly involved in pilot project implementation. Please provide the contact information for the individuals you plan to send to LORE.

Organization Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant 1 (required):

- Name \_\_\_\_\_
- Title \_\_\_\_\_
- # Years at current org \_\_\_\_\_
- Department \_\_\_\_\_
- Email \_\_\_\_\_
- Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Participant 2 (required):

- Name \_\_\_\_\_
- Title \_\_\_\_\_
- # Years at current org \_\_\_\_\_
- Department \_\_\_\_\_
- Email \_\_\_\_\_
- Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Participant 3 (optional):

- Name \_\_\_\_\_
- Title \_\_\_\_\_
- # Years at current org \_\_\_\_\_
- Department \_\_\_\_\_
- Email \_\_\_\_\_
- Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Participant 4 (optional):

- Name \_\_\_\_\_
- Title \_\_\_\_\_
- # Years at current org \_\_\_\_\_
- Department \_\_\_\_\_
- Email \_\_\_\_\_
- Phone \_\_\_\_\_



Checkbox:

- “We understand that LORE requires a significant time commitment, including participation at all monthly in-person sessions at the NIU Naperville Campus, completion of readings and materials prior to sessions, and independent project work. The estimated time commitment for full participation is approximately 6 hrs/month”*

### **Scholarship Consideration**

Members of affiliate organizations are eligible for partial scholarships to participate in LORE. A limited number of scholarships are available for the 2026-2027 program. If your organization would like to be considered for our scholarship, please indicate which affiliate organizations you are a member of below. A maximum of two scholarships per affiliate group will be offered. Selection is based on the quality of your application and pilot project proposal.

*Our organization would like to be considered for a scholarship for the 2026-2027 program*

- Yes
- No

*At least one member of our team is affiliated with the following organizations (select all that apply):*

- Illinois City/County Management Association (ILCMA)
- Illinois Government Finance Officers Association (IGFOA)

In addition to scholarships, C3E offers a sliding scale and payment plans for communities and/or individuals facing financial barriers to participating in the program. To explore options with our team, please contact Katie Friedman at [kfriedman@c3elocalgov.org](mailto:kfriedman@c3elocalgov.org).



## Motivations for Participation

LORE is an 8-month executive certificate program focused on supporting executive leaders in public institutions to build and articulate the business and governance case for implementing equity-centered systems change. Please reflect on C3E's definition of equity-centered systems change below and answer the following narrative questions. It is important to ensure that the motivations of each participant are reflected in your responses.

### C3E's Definition of Equity-Centered Systems Change

Equity-centered systems change involves recognizing the unequal impacts of outdated, inefficient, or ineffective local government systems on staff and the communities they are meant to serve. This approach is grounded in an understanding that local government leaders today are tasked with leading organizations which still carry the legacies of policies and practices which were designed to exclude, and that the consequences of these inherited organizational structures impact not only the efficiency and effectiveness of public services and programs, but also the public's perception and trust in government. Change happens when leaders engage in deliberately redesigning the institutional conditions that produce persistent challenges and inequitable outcomes so that fairness and inclusion become the standard by which your organization's performance is measured.

C3E's approach to equity-centered systems change uses small-scale, iterative pilot projects to test innovative solutions to persistent organizational challenges before scaling them across an institution. It is grounded in the belief that those closest to a problem (i.e. frontline staff, middle managers, and community members) often hold the most important knowledge about what is and isn't working. By testing and learning in real time, organizations build both the evidence and the internal capacity needed to sustain meaningful change over time.

1. **What is drawing you to this work right now?** Is your interest in LORE driven by a specific challenge or crisis your organization is facing, such as a moment of public scrutiny, a persistent gap in service delivery, or a growing recognition that something in your internal systems isn't working? Or is it more of a moment of opportunity, like a window of leadership support or organizational readiness that feels worth acting on?
2. **Who stands to gain the most from the change you are imagining?** If your organization were able to achieve equity-centered change, what would that mean for the employees who currently have the least access to resources, opportunity, or voice within your systems? How might their engagement, sense of belonging, and ability to contribute fully to your organization's mission shift, and what would that mean for the residents they serve?



## Organizational Readiness

LORE teaches city leaders how to drive organizational and process change through the transformation of internal operational practices which inhibit an organization's ability to function equitably, effectively, and efficiently. Please reflect on the following categories of internal operations and select the options that are of most interest to your team.

3. **Where does your organization stand today?** How would you describe the current level of understanding across your organization about what equity means in practice? When you look at your workforce and leadership, does the composition and culture of your organization reflect the full range of people it serves?
4. **What is a persistent challenge you keep coming back to?** If you could identify one internal change that would have the most meaningful impact on how your community experiences your government, what would it be?
5. **Who is already in your corner?** Who in your organization (or in affiliated agencies and partner institutions) has the knowledge, relationships, or credibility to help build the case for equity-centered change? And what would it mean to bring two of your organization's leaders into an 8-month process designed to help you understand that challenge more deeply and design a first real test of a new approach?



## Pilot Project Proposal

LORE blends theoretical classroom-based learning with real-time application by allowing participants to develop pilot projects with direct relevance to their roles and organizations. The organizations that get the most out of their participation in LORE come to the program with an existing project or challenge that they would like to workshop through their participation in the program. Please describe a project or challenge that you envision addressing through LORE.

6. **What specific project or challenge would you like assistance addressing through this program?** Please explain the nature of the challenge or project and how your participation in LORE will support any existing efforts to address it.



Thank you for taking the time to apply to the 2026–2027 LORE cohort. We are grateful for your interest and encouraged by the work you and your organization are doing to build more equitable, effective, and efficient local government.

Applications will be reviewed on a rolling basis following the July 31 deadline, and we anticipate notifying applicants of their selection status by August 15, 2026. In the meantime, if you have any questions, please visit [c3elocalgov.org/lore](https://c3elocalgov.org/lore) or reach out to Katie Friedman at [kfriedman@c3elocalgov.org](mailto:kfriedman@c3elocalgov.org).

We look forward to being in touch. You can also follow us on LinkedIn for program updates and news from the C3E community.