

LORE 2026-2027 Application

Program Information

Background & Overview: LORE is an executive certificate program designed for local government leaders who are ready to move equity from intention to practice by embedding it into the policies, processes, and decisions that shape how their organizations operate. Co-designed with practitioners from the Illinois City/County Management Association, LORE is offered through a partnership with the Center for Equity, Effectiveness, and Efficiency and DePaul University's Chaddick Institute for Metropolitan Development.

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.

Application Timeline:

- **Application Opens:** May 15, 2026
- **Scholarship Deadline:** Reviewed on a rolling basis. First review June 30, 2026
- **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.

This PDF is for planning purposes only. All applications must be submitted via online form by July 31, 2026.

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

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

How to Apply: Please submit your responses online via this form by **11:59 on Friday, July 31**.

We recommend completing your responses in a word document prior to submitting them in the online form. Access the online application link here: <https://tinyurl.com/LORE2026-2027>

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

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Application Instructions

This application is intended to function as a self-assessment to help you think through a concrete operational equity issue inside your organization that you may want to workshop through your participation in LORE. Responses will also help Program Instructors tailor the curriculum to meet the real-time needs of local government participants.

You do not have to answer every all of the questions, but we recommend you have a conversation with your LORE partner to respond.

For questions related to any application questions, please reach out to Katie Friedman at kfriedman@c3elocalgov.org.

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Section I: Contact Information and Scholarship 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). One or two additional staff members of any level who will be directly involved in pilot project implementation may also join. Please provide the contact information for the individuals you plan to send to LORE.

Organization Name *

Participant 1 (required) *

Name
Title
Department
years at organization
E-mail
Phone Number

Participant 2 (required) *

Name
Title
Department
years at organization
E-mail
Phone Number

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I. Contact Information & Scholarship Eligibility

Participant 3 (optional)

Participant 4 (optional)

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. *

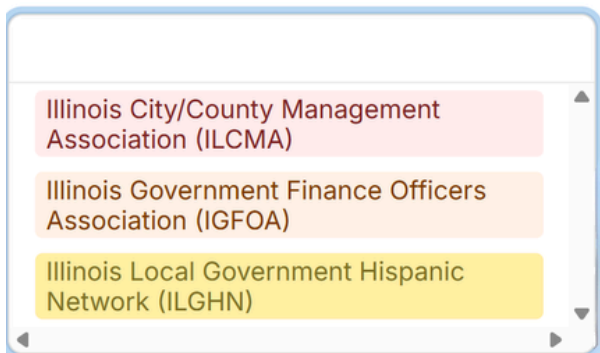
☐ Yes

Scholarship Consideration

Members of affiliate organizations are eligible for full to 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. Applicants are automatically considered for a scholarship if they meet the eligibility criteria.

A maximum of two scholarships per affiliate group will be offered. Selection is based on the quality of your application and pilot project proposal. Scholarships will be awarded on a rolling basis, with the first review on June 20th, 2026.

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



A screenshot of a digital form element, likely a multi-select dropdown or checkbox list. It contains three items, each in a colored box: a pink box for 'Illinois City/County Management Association (ILCMA)', an orange box for 'Illinois Government Finance Officers Association (IGFOA)', and a yellow box for 'Illinois Local Government Hispanic Network (ILGHN)'. The list is enclosed in a light blue border with a scrollbar on the right side.

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 or budget constraints in paying for the program by the specified payment dates. If you would like to be considered for financial assistance, please indicate below, and a member of our team will be in touch to discuss options:

Please let us know if you would like to talk to our team about alternative payment options:

Please let us know if you would like to talk to our team about alternative payment options.

- ☐ Our organization has financial constraints that may prevent us from participating without assistance.
- ☐ Our organization can participate but would benefit from a payment plan or reduced rate.

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Section II: Motivations for Participation

Section II helps us understand why your organization wants to participate in LORE right now. Your responses should give us a sense of your organization's readiness to engage and openness to examining equity through an operational lens.

Question 1. What is drawing you to this work right now?

a) Check the box that applies most to your organization.

- ☐ Our interest in LORE is driven by a specific challenge or crisis that our organization is facing, such as a moment of public scrutiny, a persistent gap in service delivery, or a growing recognition that something in our internal systems isn't working.
- ☐ Our interest in LORE is driven by a moment of opportunity, like a window of leadership support or organizational readiness that feels worth acting on.
- ☐ Other

b) Please provide more context about the selection you made in Question 1a.

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Section III: Equity Inside Your Organization

Section III asks you to reflect on the connection between internal equity and external equity within your own organization and community. This involves considering who within your organization has the least access, voice, and opportunity, and how this ultimately impacts the residents they serve.

Each question includes a multi-choice response with common examples from other Illinois municipalities, and a narrative response asking you to provide more context about your organization.

Question 2: Understanding Equity Inside Your Organization.

Within any organization, some employees have less access to resources, opportunities, or decision-making than others. This can show up in many ways. The question below provides common examples we have observed across close to a decade of work with local governments.

What employees currently have the least access to resources, opportunities or voice within your organization?

a) Do you observe any of the following dynamics in your organization?
Select all that apply.

- ☐ Frontline or hourly staff are rarely included in decisions that affect their work.
- ☐ Staff in certain departments (e.g. public works, parks, facilities, public safety) have less access to professional development or advancement.
- ☐ Staff without college degrees are overlooked for leadership opportunities despite relevant professional experience.
- ☐ Certain teams or roles are excluded from planning and budgeting processes or other key conversations and decisions.
- ☐ Other

b) Please provide more context about your response to question 2a.

Question 3: Connecting Internal Equity with External Community Outcomes.

When employees feel unseen, undervalued, or overworked inside an organization, it shapes how they show up for the people they serve. A staff member who doesn't feel heard is less likely to make space for a resident who also feels unheard; similarly, a staff member who must spend a lot of time navigating inefficient systems is less likely to have capacity and time to respond thoughtfully to resident needs.

Think about the staff you described in Question 2. How does their engagement, sense of belonging, and ability to contribute fully to your organization's mission impact the residents they serve?

Have you observed any of the following dynamics in your organization?
Select all that apply.

- ☐ Staff who feel disengaged are less likely to go the extra mile for residents
- ☐ Teams that lack diverse perspectives miss important context about community needs
- ☐ Employees who face barriers internally may struggle to advocate for residents facing similar barriers
- ☐ Our internal culture doesn't yet reflect the values we are trying to advocate for externally
- ☐ Other

b) In your own words, how does the internal experience of your employees connect to the outcomes you're trying to create in your community?

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Section IV: Organizational Readiness and Openness to a New Approach

Section IV asks you to take stock of where your organization stands today, both in terms of your current culture around equity and your prior experience with equity work. LORE asks organizations to approach equity differently than most DEI programs, focusing on internal systems and operations rather than awareness alone. Understanding where applicants are starting from helps us tailor the program to meet communities where they are at.

There are no right or wrong answers here. We are looking for organizations willing to be honest about their current culture and curious about a different way of approaching this work. The most important indicator of organizational readiness for LORE is leadership support, buy-in, and commitment to learning. What comes next is what the course focuses on.

Question 4: Your Organizational Culture Around Equity.

Equity culture shows up differently depending on where you look. Leadership may be fully bought in while frontline staff feel unsure, or residents may be vocal about equity while elected officials stay neutral. This question asks you to describe where your organization currently stands across five areas: leadership, elected officials, staff, residents, and infrastructure.

a) Which statements best reflect your organization's current culture around equity? Within each category below, select all that apply.

Leadership & Administration

- ☐ Our administrative leadership (city/county manager, department heads) is actively supportive of equity work.
- ☐ Support for equity varies significantly across departments and leadership.
- ☐ Some of our leadership is resistant or skeptical of equity as an organizational priority.
- ☐ Other

Elected Officials

- ☐ Our elected officials are publicly supportive of equity and DEI efforts.
- ☐ Our elected officials are neutral or uninvolved on equity issues.
- ☐ Some elected officials are publicly supportive of equity and DEI efforts while others are skeptical or resistant.
- ☐ Equity and DEI have become politically contested in our jurisdiction.
- ☐ Other

Staff & Internal Culture

- ☐ We have staff who are enthusiastic about equity work and ready to lead it.
- ☐ We have meaningful internal resistance to equity among our staff.
- ☐ Equity is a stated organizational value but hasn't translated into consistent practice.
- ☐ Other

Residents & Community

- ☐ Our residents are actively engaged and vocal about equity issues.
- ☐ Equity is not a prominent issue in our community conversations.
- ☐ Our community is divided on equity and DEI.
- ☐ Other

Organizational Infrastructure & Strategic Planning

- ☐ We have dedicated DEI staff or an equity office.
- ☐ We have provided DEI or equity training to staff.
- ☐ We have begun embedding equity into policies, processes, or budgeting.
- ☐ Equity work in our organization is largely informal or volunteer-driven through a citizen commission.
- ☐ Equity is stated in public-facing materials such as value statements or organization-wide strategic plan.
- ☐ Other

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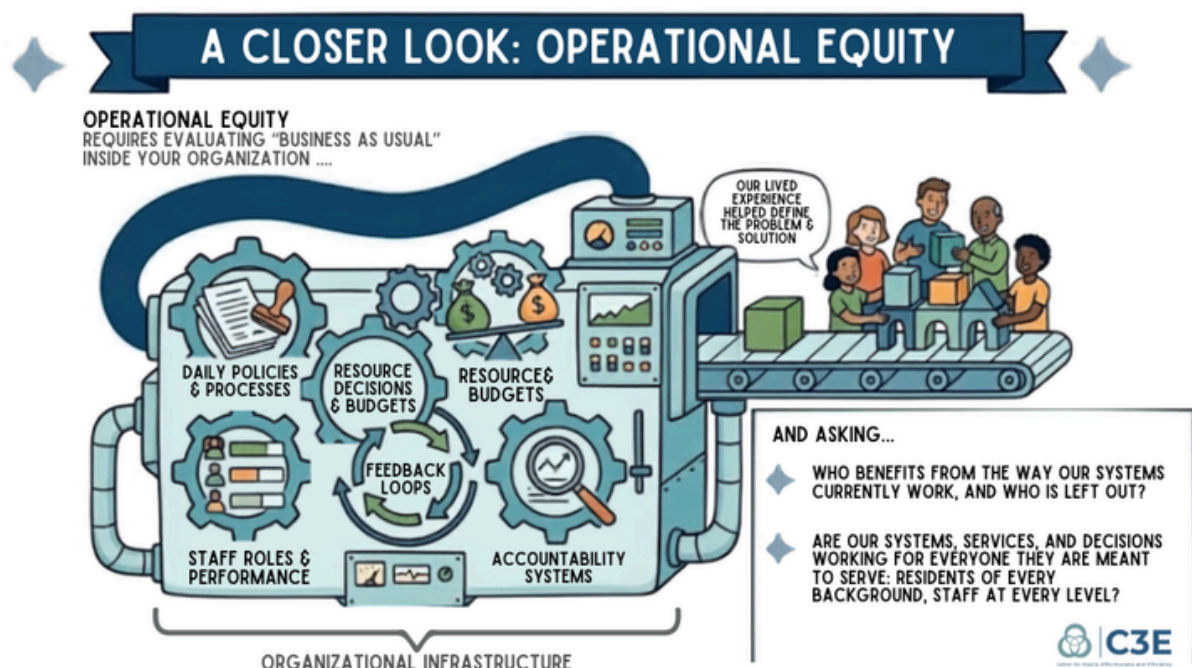
Question 5: Openness to A Different Approach to Equity

LORE approaches equity differently than most DEI programs. Rather than focusing on awareness or community-facing initiatives, it asks organizations to examine the internal systems, processes, and decisions that shape who has access, voice, and opportunity inside your organization.

We call this **operational equity**: the measurable integration of equity into an organization's internal systems so that public institutions remove structural barriers, improve organizational performance, and produce better outcomes for everyone they are meant to serve: residents of every background, staff at every level.

An organization's internal systems may include, but are not exclusive to how decisions are made, resources are allocated, policies are written, workflows are managed, staff are supported, and outcomes are evaluated. In the graphic below, this is represented by the machine and all of the gears that work together to make it function and produce outputs that the community and staff experience.

Put another way, operational equity involves evaluating "business-as-usual" within your organization to understand who benefits from the way your systems currently work, who is left out, and what gaps remain not because of individual intent, but because of structures and standard operating procedures that have never been revisited.



a) How would you describe your organization's prior equity efforts?

Select all that apply.

- ☐ Our equity work has focused more on increasing awareness (i.e. implicit bias trainings) than embedding an equity lens in operations and everyday practices.
- ☐ Our equity work has focused more on external community outcomes or community engagement than internal organizational systems.
- ☐ We have tried to implement equity initiatives (internal or external) before and faced resistance from staff, residents, or elected officials.
- ☐ Equity efforts (internal or external) have been inconsistent across departments or administrations.
- ☐ We are relatively new to this work and still building shared understanding or buy-in that equity should be a value.
- ☐ What we've tried hasn't produced the kind of change we were hoping for.
- ☐ Other

b) Please elaborate on your responses to Question 5a. What has been most effective about your equity efforts so far, and where have they fallen short or stalled?

c) What do you hope to learn from LORE that is different than what your organization has tried before?

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Section V: From Awareness to Action

This section asks you to share some initial thinking about a challenge your organization keeps coming back to and how it connects to the internal-to-external equity connections you reflected in Section III. We will use your responses to get a sense of your organization's challenges. What you describe here does not have to be what you ultimately focus on in LORE.

Question 6: Identifying a Persistent Challenge

The questions below ask you to identify that challenge and reflect on how it connects to the people inside your organization and the community they serve.

a) What type of persistent challenges do you face in your organization?
Select all that apply.

- ☐ Recruiting, hiring, or retaining a diverse workforce.
- ☐ Supporting frontline or hourly staff to grow and advance within the organization.
- ☐ Building consistent internal communication across departments.
- ☐ Ensuring equitable access to professional development and leadership opportunities.
- ☐ Addressing language access for staff or residents.
- ☐ Improving onboarding so new employees feel a sense of belonging.
- ☐ Operationalizing equity into policies, budgets, or procurement processes.
- ☐ Other

b) Where does this challenge primarily live in your organization? Select all that apply.

- ☐ A specific department or division.
- ☐ Across departments organization-wide.
- ☐ Senior leadership and administration.
- ☐ Elected officials or governing board.
- ☐ Other

Question 7: 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 LORE come with an existing project or challenge they would like to workshop through their participation in the program.

This question asks you to share your initial thinking about a challenge you would like to address through your participation in LORE. It can be related to the challenges you indicated in Question 6 or something else. You do not need to have a fully developed idea at this stage.

a) Is there a specific project or challenge you would like assistance addressing through this program? Please explain the nature of the challenge and any existing efforts to address it.

b) Please describe any internal equity challenges (i.e. staff feelings of access, voice, belonging, or opportunity) or external equity challenges (resident experiences of your government) connected to the project you describe in Question 6a.

Question 8: Your LORE Team

LORE is designed for two leaders from your organization to work through a specific challenge together over eight months to build understanding, design a first test of a new approach, and learn how to bring others along. This question asks you to share more about the participants you would like to bring and why you feel they are the right people to bring into this learning process.

a) What best describes the participants you are bringing to LORE?

Select all that apply.

- ☐ At least one participant has direct decision-making authority over policies, budgets, or staffing.
- ☐ At least one participant has deep knowledge of or proximity to a challenge we would like to focus on in LORE.
- ☐ At least one participant has relationships and credibility to build internal support for change.
- ☐ Our participants represent different levels or functions within the organization.
- ☐ Other

b) What is each participant's role, and why are they the right people to bring into this process?

Submit →

Thank You!

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 31st 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 or reach out to Katie Friedman at kfriedman@c3elocalgov.org.

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