

Request for Information: Growth Intermediary Practitioner Network

June 2023

Overview

In September 2023, Brookings Metro and the Center for Economic Inclusion will launch the Growth Intermediary Practitioner Network. **Growth Intermediaries** are organizations or partnerships that work with and through the business community to advance socially beneficial economic change. These entities can take a variety of forms, including economic development organizations, chambers of commerce, corporate leadership groups, civic leadership groups, or broader civic coalitions. This 18-month collaborative learning network, made possible by generous support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, seeks to both learn from and inform the work of Growth Intermediaries in up to eight regions—each anchored by a small- or mid-sized city (SMC)—that strive to advance greater economic and racial inclusion in their communities. For each participating region, the Network will yield:

- a) a locally relevant set of **diagnostics and solutions** that can compel attention and action toward economic and racial inclusion;
- b) a **process for engaging the business community** in building more racially equitable and inclusive workplaces and business models that contribute to economic inclusion and growth, both organizationally and regionally;
- c) more **employers that understand the current state of their business practices** with respect to economic and racial inclusion and a plan to act on that understanding; and
- d) a **greater understanding** among government, non-profit, and community-based leaders of how Growth Intermediaries—and the businesses with which they work—can contribute to economic and racial inclusion in their city/region.

Participation in the Network will require significant local commitment over the 18-month period and will be accompanied by a \$100,000 stipend. This **request for information** is designed to help Brookings Metro and its partners understand the motivations and gauge the capacity and readiness of interested regions, as demand is expected to exceed available slots. The application process will also enable Brookings Metro to form a balanced cohort of participants that maximizes the value of peer learning.

Responses to this RFI are due by 6:00pm ET on Friday, July 14, 2023. More details follow.

Background

Small- and mid-sized cities (SMCs) are central cities with populations between 50,000 and 500,000. With their existing infrastructure, diverse populations, and relatively affordable costs of living, SMCs and their surrounding metropolitan areas are a nationally critical locus for catalyzing inclusive economic growth—economic progress that generates higher wages and employment and reduces longstanding disparities by race and place. Yet, over the last decade, only two of the nation’s 139 mid-sized metro areas registered positive progress on each of the Brookings Metro Monitor’s indicators of growth, prosperity, and economic, racial, and geographic inclusion.

Now, a severe pandemic, historic economic crisis, and social and racial reckoning has reinforced the need for local leaders to design and implement policies and practices that generate inclusive economic growth. Especially in SMCs—which generally have fewer large, well-resourced institutions—this approach requires building multi-sector coalitions that can marshal the collective commitment, capacity, and investment to achieve equitable development at a meaningful scale.

Recent research by Brookings Metro and others has documented why **Growth Intermediaries** are key actors in this process. Growth Intermediaries—organizations or partnerships that work with and through the business community (e.g., economic development organizations, chambers of commerce, corporate leadership groups, civic leadership groups, or broader civic coalitions)—influence both local markets and civics. In their role as stewards of the business community, they can help the private sector learn and adopt more equitable business models, practices, and norms. Likewise, in their role helping to set economic priorities on the civic agenda, they can help coordinate private sector commitments in equitable economic development, talent development, and community development strategies. Both intermediary functions are necessary complements to the activities of public and community-based stakeholders.

Yet, to realize their potential on this front, Growth Intermediaries must further develop their goals, capabilities, and strategic investments to center economic and racial inclusion as key economic objectives. To make this shift, Growth Intermediaries must seed the conditions for change in their own organizations; understand how Growth Intermediary practice is shifting across the country; and introduce new tools that bring greater private sector commitment and capacity to supporting economic and racial inclusion.

The Growth Intermediary Practitioner Network

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anchored by a small- or mid-sized city (SMC)—that strive to advance greater economic and racial inclusion in their communities. Together, we will engage in a suite of activities to advance the following objectives:

1. **Support the conditions for inclusive economic growth** by connecting Growth Intermediary leaders to national experts, strategic frameworks, and actionable data that clearly links economic and racial inclusion and regional economic performance.
2. **Help Growth Intermediary leaders further develop their civic role** by codifying and sharing case studies of how Growth Intermediaries are embedding economic and racial inclusion, including place-based approaches, into their goals, missions, practices, and strategic investments.
3. **Catalyze private sector change** by helping Growth Intermediaries work with regional employers to complete a Racial Equity Dividends Index that assesses inclusive business practices across seven key domains—including leadership, hiring, culture, and procurement—and in doing so provide a roadmap for new private sector interventions in regional inclusive growth strategies.

NETWORK ACTIVITIES AND FORMAT

The Network will undertake four kinds of activities, each tied to specific outcomes:

1. **Diagnostics and Solutions:** New frameworks and actionable data that clearly link economic and racial inclusion and regional economic performance can serve as critical enablers for action. Over the course of 18 months, Brookings Metro share insights with participating regions that ultimately result in an **Inclusive Growth Diagnostic** that helps them understand the state of economic and racial inclusion in their region, and how disruptive trends in technology, work, real estate, neighborhood change, and capital access are impacting historically excluded communities. To translate research to action, Brookings Metro will expose Network members to a portfolio of **Inclusive Growth Solutions** related to inclusive work, inclusive placemaking, and inclusive capital access. Through case studies, briefings, and access to national experts, we will explore the distinct roles that Growth Intermediaries are playing in implementing those solutions.
2. **Quarterly Meetings:** The Network will gather in-person on a quarterly basis for 1-2 days in member cities. Quarterly convenings will include a range of activities, in part depending on the interests of the host, and may include: “research roadshow” events to engage public audiences; private “solutions sessions” with core Network members and key partners; and tours of key sites and exposure to novel interventions in the host city. These activities will expose Network members—and their partners and key stakeholders—to new research, framing, and tools, draft solutions case studies and guidebooks, and peer-to-peer insights.

3. **Racial Equity Dividends Index:** Developed by the St. Paul-based Center for Economic Inclusion, the Racial Equity Dividends Index is a comprehensive tool that businesses use to measure their progress toward building inclusive workplaces. In 2022, 40 Minnesota companies, including 3M, Target, and U.S. Bank, completed the Index. Building on this pioneering work, the Racial Equity Dividends Index will help Network members and their business community achieve the following objectives:
- ***Understand how the local business community is supporting economic and racial inclusion.*** The Racial Equity Dividends Index will help local companies assess their current states and then evaluate annual progress on dozens of racial equity standards in areas such as hiring and training, procurement, retention, and products and services.
 - ***Measure and advance actionable strategies to work with and through employers to advance economic and racial inclusion.*** Drawing on the Index, Brookings Metro's solutions research, and case studies from the Center for Economic Inclusion, each Growth Intermediary will facilitate the business community in utilizing this research and the Index to both measure and advance leading practices to advance economic and racial inclusion.
 - ***Build local credibility, capacity, and commitment to economic and racial inclusion.*** Through deployment of the Index, the Network will catalyze a civic process that maximizes the chances that Growth Intermediaries can credibly make and advance new commitments to advancing economic and racial inclusion, in coordination with a broad set of stakeholders.
 - ***Enable leading businesses to benefit from the dividends of racially equitable workplaces*** – including higher retention, more innovation, higher employee satisfaction scores, higher productivity, access to new markets, and more.
4. **Briefings and Sprints:** Network members can also opt-in to benefit from additional opportunities to make progress between quarterly convenings. Through **Briefings**, Brookings Metro and its partners will be available to conduct virtual presentations to frame issues, share new data, and offer new solutions to key stakeholders in each region (e.g., local government, business community, community-based organizations, philanthropy, etc.). Through **Sprints**, Network members can opt-in to gain access to a multi-month structured curriculum designed by experts at Brookings' Bass Center for Transformative Placemaking to identify hyperlocal places most conducive to integrated strategies involving both Growth Intermediaries and community development organizations.

BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION

Each selected organization will receive:

- A stipend of \$100,000 to support participation in the Network (i.e., to offset the cost of staff time, travel and meeting expenses).
- Access to coaching to help set the conditions for success (with employers, community-based groups, and other civic players), implement the Racial Equity Dividends Index, engage key stakeholders in the findings, and link the findings from the Index to new strategic action.
- An aggregated regional Racial Equity Dividends Index Report. Participating businesses will also receive customized, confidential individual Racial Equity Dividends Index Score Reports for their business.
- Exposure—of Network members and their local partners and key stakeholders—to new research, framing, tools, solutions, and peer-to-peer insights across a broad array of topics related to inclusive growth.
- Tailored support through virtual briefings to key local stakeholders and optional strategy sprints on key topics of interest.
- Opportunities to participate in virtual Reckoning to Rise learning experiences, hosted by the Center for Economic Inclusion, that equip employers with knowledge, tools, and relationships necessary to drive action and shared accountability toward increasing shared prosperity and inclusive economic growth.

BROOKINGS METRO AND CENTER FOR ECONOMIC INCLUSION ROLE

Brookings Metro and the Center for Economic Inclusion will be responsible for:

- Stewarding the Network and its activities including the planning and execution of quarterly convenings, in partnership with host sites.
- Facilitating ongoing peer learning and exchange.
- Providing virtual offerings between convenings, including localized briefings; optional sprints to advance progress on key topics; and coaching and support as needed.
- Developing frameworks, research, data and other resources and tools that advance inclusive growth, including guidebooks and case studies.
- Support and coaching in the recruitment of local businesses to complete the Racial Equity Dividends Index and the presentation of Index findings.
- Analyzing findings of the Racial Equity Dividends Index to produce organization reports for individual employers and a public-facing aggregated regional report.

LOCAL ROLE

Each Growth Intermediary selected to participate in the Network will be responsible for:

- Actively participating in Network activities and engaging thoughtfully with Brookings Metro, its partners, and other regions by providing feedback and sharing ideas and challenges on calls, webinars, and in meetings.

- Ensuring participation of the president/CEO, mid- to senior-level implementers (e.g., VPs, directors, etc.), private sector board members, and its coalition of partner organizations in quarterly in-person Network convenings, as appropriate, and hosting (up to) one quarterly convening in their region.
- With support and guidance from the Center for Economic Inclusion, engaging local businesses and supporting the completion of the Racial Equity Dividends Index by 15-20 businesses with offices in their region and presenting Index report results and insights. Related activities include:
 - Leveraging existing relationships to recruit businesses to participate in the Index through a combination of high visibility event(s) (e.g., annual meeting) to announce the opportunity and one-on-one meetings/calls with interested businesses (estimated 30 minutes each), either focused solely on this or as part of regular business-to-business activities. Note that it usually requires, on average, two meetings with businesses to secure their participation.
 - Supporting local businesses, as needed, in the completion of the Index survey. (Note that the Index survey can easily be completed by one or more senior leaders within a couple of days, but businesses should be offered roughly one month to do so.)
 - Hosting a release or launch event to showcase regional insights, trends, etc. (This may be incorporated into an existing event program.)
- Serving as active knowledge contributors that will be expected to review, react to, and, if interested, co-produce research products with Brookings Metro scholars.

CRITERIA FOR SELECTION

Brookings Metro and its partners will select Network members through a competitive process. Eligible entities are those that work with and through the business community to advance societally beneficial economic change—examples include economic development organizations, chambers of commerce, corporate leadership groups, civic leadership groups, or broader civic coalitions—within a small to mid-sized city (population between 50,000 and 500,000) or region anchored by a center city that meets this definition.

Strong responses to this RFI will demonstrate the following:

- **Organizational readiness, capacity, and commitment** to engage in the Growth Intermediary Practitioner Network as described in this request for information and a **strong core team** with relevant expertise, to include the President/CEO, mid- to senior-level implementer(s) (e.g., VPs, directors), and private sector board member(s).
- **Engaged business members and/or partners** that include traded sector employers—those that sell products or services across regions or countries—in addition to local-serving sectors (e.g., healthcare, retail, education, small business) and companies of 50 or more employees.
- Experience in bringing together and **facilitating action with diverse and influential constituencies**—including private sector businesses; community-based organizations or

social and economic justice organizations; education and training providers or other workforce organizations (as applicable); and key public sector leaders, such as agency leads and elected officials, with particular attention to Black, Indigenous, Latino or Hispanic, and Asian American leaders across these constituencies.

- **Commitment to economic and racial inclusion** principles and practices and that those principles and practices are expressed in an existing organizational or regional strategy.
- **Knowledge, engagement, and influence** in relevant policy domains and the political landscape.
- **Willingness to actively participate and share openly** experiences and approaches, and to inform research products.

A response to this request for information is a pre-requisite for consideration. Guidance for submitting a response can be found on Page 8.

About Brookings Metro

Founded in 1996 as part of the world's premier public policy think tank, Brookings Metro collaborates with local leaders to translate original insights into policy and practical solutions that scale nationally. Our vision is for every community in our nation to be prosperous, just, and resilient, no matter its starting point.

About the Center for Economic Inclusion

The Center for Economic Inclusion is committed to closing racial employment, income, and wealth gaps, and building racially inclusive and equitable regional economies. Founded in 2017, the Center is the nation's first Black-woman founded and led organization dedicated exclusively to strengthening public- and private-sector civic infrastructures and collective capacity to disrupt systems and influence market forces while advancing an inclusive economy.

RFI Response Requirements

Responses to this request for information should address each of the categories below. Applicants may provide additional justification beyond the identified topics. **The full submission should not exceed seven (7) pages. Supporting documents (e.g., letters of support) do not count against the page limit.**

I. BACKGROUND AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

Describe the context for your prospective participation in this Network, including the trends and challenges in your region, and existing efforts.

- Define the local geographic area your organization/coalition represents (city, metropolitan area, region, etc.) and provide an overview of that geography's demographics (e.g., total population, population breakdown by race/ethnicity, etc.). *Note that data availability and comparability will be most robust for standardized areas such as counties and metro areas.*
- Provide an overview of your organization, your city/region's economic growth strategy, the role your organization plays in driving it, and how participation in this Network would help advance your organizational and regional strategy.
- Outline major local challenges around economic and racial inclusion and the role your organization plays in addressing them.

II. CIVIC LANDSCAPE AND PARTNERSHIPS

Provide an overview of significant existing institutional partnerships and other stakeholders engaged in inclusive growth and racial equity efforts in your region and identify any with whom you would propose collaborating on this project.

- Provide an overview of the composition of your private sector business membership and/or business partners—including factors such as traded-sector versus local-serving businesses and numbers of small, mid-size, and large businesses.
- Private sector buy-in is critical to successful implementation of the Racial Equity Dividends Index. Describe, offering specific examples, ways in which your organization has engaged with and activated the businesses community in efforts to drive inclusive economic growth.
- Describe the 2-3 most significant collaborations your organization has undertaken with private sector businesses; community-based organizations or social and economic justice organizations; education and training providers or other workforce organizations; or key public sector leaders, such as agency leads and elected officials, with particular attention to Black, Indigenous, Latino or Hispanic, and Asian American leaders across these constituencies.
- Describe your organization's knowledge, engagement, and influence in relevant policy areas—e.g., higher education/workforce development, supplier diversity, entrepreneurship support—with a focus on promoting public policies that prioritize inclusivity, equity, and social responsibility.

III. CAPACITY AND COMMITMENT

Describe your organization's readiness, capacity, and commitment to engage in this Network and its activities over a roughly 18-month period, to commence in September 2023. Selected organizations will receive \$100,000 stipends to support their participation and ideally to build capacity and sustain long-term commitment.

- Participation in the Network and related activities will implicate and require commitment from several internal—including President/CEO and VP or mid- to senior-level implementers—and external stakeholders.
 - Who will be charged with leading your organization's (and regional coalition's) participation in this Network from inception through completion?
 - Who will manage the Racial Equity Dividends Index process and what is their experience in leading and/or facilitating discussions on racial equity with the private sector?
 - Who will provide strategic communications around the project, to build local visibility and commitment, and deliver wide engagement with the Index?
 - Who on your Board or among your membership will serve as a private sector champion for the Index?
- Identify any other national initiatives in which key personnel currently participate.
- Describe your organization's readiness and capacity to recruit at least 15 – 20 private sector businesses (ideally with significant representation of businesses with 50 or more employees) to participate in the Racial Equity Dividends Index and to share back out the findings from both individual business reports and an aggregated regional report.

IV. SUPPLEMENTAL

- Provide any other information helpful to justify your organization's participation in this Network.
- Attach any letters of support from key stakeholders.

Request for Information Submission

Responses to this request for information are due by **6:00pm ET on Friday, July 14, 2023**. Submit responses via email, using the subject line "**YOUR ORGANIZATION NAME_GIPN RFI RESPONSE,**" and direct any questions to [**GIPN@brookings.edu**](mailto:GIPN@brookings.edu).

Please include the following information in your submission.

Prepared by: Name and Title
Organization
Phone
Email
Date

Final selections will be announced in August.