



Professional Development Opportunity: Sharpen Data-Driven State Advocacy Skills for School Finance Equity

Bellwether Education Partners is leading the development of a School Finance Equity Training Center to build deep knowledge and capacity among advocates to influence school finance policy at the state level. The training is free for selected participants, and additional stipend support is available to cover some participants' time.

Participants will take part in a sequence of virtual courses over summer and fall 2021 to build data analysis and modeling skills, demystify school funding policy, and accelerate advocacy on behalf of underserved students. Inaugural training cohorts will be equipped with the knowledge, skills, and tools to fuel state-by-state change in school finance systems, giving schools the resources they need to support excellent and equitable educational outcomes.

All courses will focus on the educational success of historically underserved students — especially Black, Latinx, and/or low-income children — and on ensuring that they attend equitably and sufficiently funded schools to provide them with an excellent education.

Applicant Criteria

Course capacity is limited, with priority consideration given to:

- Applicants from states with a strong need for improvements in state funding formula to support greater equity in allocation.
- Applicants from states with high potential and political will to significantly change funding formulas within a one-to-three-year horizon.
- State and local advocates with strong advocacy track records on behalf of underserved students, but without strong existing capacity to model finance policies and their impact in the state.

Application Information

Applicants interested in one or all of the courses are encouraged to apply no later than Thursday, May 20 for priority consideration. To apply, please fill out a brief [application form here](#). Email bonnie.okeefe@bellwethereducation.org with any questions.

Courses are made possible with the support of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Walton Family Foundation.

About Bellwether Education Partners

Bellwether Education Partners is a national nonprofit focused on dramatically changing education and life outcomes for underserved children. We do this by helping education organizations accelerate their impact and by working to improve policy and practice. Bellwether envisions a world in which race, ethnicity, and income no longer predict opportunities for students, and the American education system affords all individuals the ability to determine their own path and lead a productive and fulfilling life. Learn more at bellwethereducation.org.

Course Overviews *(Future training opportunities will be announced depending on demonstrated interest.)*

Course I: R for Education Research

- **Learning Goals:** This hands-on training covers how to use R, an open-source software package, for education research and modeling, with an emphasis on education finance data. Participants will:
 - Learn best practices for importing and cleaning data and processing it into datasets.
 - Develop techniques for answering common research questions.
 - Visualize the analysis, and export the results as static or interactive tables, plots, and maps.
 - Create an interactive notebook or dashboard to share their results in a visually compelling way using R Shiny or R Pubs.
 - Complete and visualize their own data project through a capstone that uses R to tie together skills learned in the course.
- **Target Audience:** This training is intended for advocates who would like to incorporate robust data analysis and visualization into their work. No pre-requisite skills are required; this training is appropriate for those with no prior experience in R up to those with intermediate R skills.
- **Time Commitment:** Approximately seven to 12 hours of work per week over a 10-week period. This will be broken up into:
 - Virtual class time: two-hour class sessions, weekly on Thursday afternoons for eight weeks, with occasional additional office hour support available with the instructor, as needed.
 - Asynchronous work time: five to 10 hours per week of follow-up work throughout the class period, and 10 hours per week for the final two weeks of the class to complete a final project, with additional office hour support available with the instructor, as needed.
- **Dates:**
 - Class: June 3 - July 22.
 - Capstone Project: July 23 - Aug. 5.

Course I+: Applied R Knowledge to Key Principles in School Finance Equity

- **Learning Goals:** All participants who complete Course I are invited to participate in Course I+, directly following the conclusion of the 10-week initial skill-building training. This course will introduce participants to the essential content knowledge that will enable them to use the R skills built in the previous course to analyze state school funding formulas, and determine the best funding levers to increase equity. Participants will specifically learn:
 - Key elements of a state school finance best practices for equity.
 - Principles of how to leverage census and NCES data to assess and compare equity in education revenue, and model the impact of changes in revenue.
- **Target Audience:**
 - Course I graduates.
 - Other applicants with demonstrated capabilities in the core learning goals/competencies covered in Course I.
- **Time Commitment:** Approximately seven to 10 hours of work per week for four weeks. This will be broken up into:
 - Virtual class time: two-hour class sessions weekly on Thursday afternoons for three weeks.
 - Asynchronous work time: five to 10 hours per week of follow-up work, and 10 hours for the final week of the class to complete a final project.
- **Dates:**
 - Class: Aug. 12 - Aug. 26.
 - Capstone Project: Aug. 27 - Sept. 2.

Course II: Building a School Funding Formula Simulator

- **Learning Goals:** Participants from Course I+ may apply to Course II, a more advanced and intensive course where a small group of participants will learn how to create a bespoke school finance formula simulator for their state. The capstone in this course will be the completion of a custom-built state simulator of a weighted student funding formula. Participants will complete the course with an understanding of how to build, modify, and maintain an R-based state school funding formula simulator, develop a prototype simulator of their own, and use knowledge and skills to deploy that simulator in various advocacy scenarios.
- **Target Audience:**
 - Select Course I+ graduates.
- **Time Commitment:** Approximately 12-17 hours of work per week for 12 weeks. This will be broken up into:
 - Virtual class time: two-hour class sessions weekly on Thursday afternoons for nine weeks with occasional additional office hour support available with the instructor, as needed.
 - Asynchronous work time: 10-15 hours per week of follow-up work, and 10 hours per week for the final three weeks of the class to complete a capstone, with additional office hour support available with the instructor, as needed.
- **Dates:**
 - Class: Sept. 23 - Nov. 18; Dec. 16.
 - Capstone Project: Nov. 29 - Dec. 16.