WHAT IS THE SDP FELLOWSHIP?

Education agencies have more data than ever. But decision-making to improve student outcomes requires more than data—it requires talented individuals to organize, analyze, and communicate that data to the people who need it most.

Founded in 2009, the Strategic Data Project, a program of the Center for Education Policy Research (CEPR) at Harvard University, works with school systems and education organizations to transform data use and improve student outcomes. Through our SDP Fellowship program, we find and develop talented leaders who will elevate your organization’s use of data to inform decision-making with evidence.

Through our SDP Fellowship program, we find and develop talented leaders who will elevate your organization’s use of data to inform decision-making with evidence. Since 2009, the Strategic Data Project has partnered with more than 165 education organizations and school systems, training more than 375 future and current data leaders to generate insights in their organizations to improve outcomes for students.

By participating in the SDP Fellowship program, partners will grow analytic capacity, develop clear priorities and plans for data use, build organizational willingness to use data for decision-making, and uncover valuable insights about obstacles to success.

We look forward to the opportunity to collaborate and transform your agency’s use of data to inform decisions as we work together to improve outcomes for all students.

HOW WILL YOU BENEFIT?

We collaborate with partner organizations to help develop your data dream team. As an SDP partner, your organization will:

Increase Data-Use Capacity
Partners hire our Data Fellows—recruited and screened by Harvard-affiliated researchers for our two-year fellowship program—or they enroll one or more of their own employees as Agency Fellows to receive tools and training to support the organization’s needs.

Advance a Critical Initiative
Advised by renowned faculty and mentors, data and agency fellows carry out a transformative data project specific to our partner’s strategic priorities. This work results in action-oriented insights to aid practitioners and policymakers in decision-making.

Join a Community of Experts
Become part of a network of Harvard affiliated researchers and data leaders sharing insights and lessons learned at multiple workshops and events.

IMPACT AREAS

› Closing Opportunity and Achievement Gaps
› Rethinking Education Delivery
› Growing Talent
› Improving Culture and Climate
› Measuring Early Learning
› Equitable and Strategic Education Finance
SDP Fellows uncover valuable findings and help organizations to better use evidence to inform their decisions. Fellows have a strong record of making lasting change.

- **Moving students to college.** SDP Fellows in Fulton County Schools (Georgia) conducted a college-going diagnostic that revealed significant summer melt—students’ applying to college and gaining acceptance but ultimately failing to enroll. Their discovery led to the design of a new summer counseling intervention program, Personalized Assistance for College Enrollment (PACE). Low-income students experienced an 8 percentage-point increase in college enrollment.

- **Helping policymakers to improve the teaching workforce.** At the Delaware Department of Education, a team of SDP Fellows discovered that new teachers were more likely to be assigned to the least prepared students, high-poverty schools had higher rates of teacher turnover, and teachers’ impact on student test scores increased most in the teachers’ first years. This work led to the passage of Delaware’s Senate Bill 51 to strengthen the teacher preparation pipeline.

- **Putting usable data in the hands of schools and families.** In New Jersey, SDP Fellow Jessica Merville helped the Department of Education redesign their School Performance Report cards in order to promote greater parental engagement in schools. As a result of Merville’s work, parent use of the reports more than doubled across the state. In Prince George’s County Public Schools (Maryland), a team of SDP Fellows developed an early warning indicator system for students at-risk for grade failure, providing valuable insight to increase ninth-grade promotion rates in the district.

After the fellowship, more than half of fellows remain at their education agencies. Many SDP Fellow alumni have gone on to become research leaders within their own organizations, start their own education nonprofits, or become faculty. Specifically, fellows have become Chief Accountability Officers or Superintendents within their districts in the years following the conclusion of the fellowship.
WHO ARE SDP FELLOWS?

Fellows come from diverse professional backgrounds but share an interest in effecting change in education organizations and a commitment to making a difference in the lives of students across the country. Our partners can choose from two fellowship models:

MODEL 1: Host a Data Fellow, recruited and matched for your organization

Data Fellows are recruited by SDP via a competitive nationwide search. They are matched to an SDP partner organization where they serve as full-time, paid, agency employees for two years. They bring impressive credentials in statistics, data management, and research methods.

MEGAN LANE
Data Fellow
Chicago Public School

Impact: An increased demand for substitute teachers in Chicago Public Schools was significantly disadvantaging some schools, leaving an average of 350 classroom substitute teacher requests unfilled each school day. Lane looked to the data to understand substitute preferences, identify high-need schools with low fill rates, and developed a stipend program to incentivize substitute teachers to work in high-need schools.

MODEL 2: Enroll one of your own employees as an Agency Fellow

Agency Fellows are current employees who have been identified as analytic leaders in their organization. They are the rising stars who, with additional training and support, will take on leadership roles.

JANELL CHERY
Agency Fellow
Impact Tulsa

Impact: In 2015, only 47% of Tulsa area high school senior students were completing the FAFSA, an indicator of college enrollment. Chery implemented a two-year continuous improvement study using various interventions, which resulted in a 12% increase in the number of FAFSA forms completed. Tulsa now has evidence these strategies work to help more students go to college.
RECRUITING AND SELECTING TALENTED DATA FELLOWS

The SDP Fellowship is a comprehensive two-year professional development program that provides analytic skill-building and leadership training, while supporting knowledge growth in education policy and practice. Partners may host one or more Data Fellows recruited by SDP and matched to their needs, or enroll one or more of their own talented employees as an Agency Fellow. Partners and fellows participate in trainings, work on a project specific to your organization’s needs with support from a faculty advisor, and have access to online communities and resources. Before being admitted, Data Fellow candidates must successfully complete a rigorous selection process:

- **SDP conducts a nationwide search for strong researchers and analysts with a passion for education.**

- **Candidates who demonstrate promise prepare a memo in response to a challenging analytic problem for a phone case interview.**

- **Successful candidates are invited to present findings to a room of Harvard researchers. They also participate in a live case challenge that tests their ability to solve problems.**

- **Following successful completion of the screening process, Data Fellow candidates are matched with SDP partners. SDP partners interview their match(es) before making a hiring decision.**

ENROLLING AN AGENCY FELLOW

**What is an Agency Fellow?**

An Agency Fellow is an existing employee within your organization who currently works with data/analysis, is considered a “rising star” and shows great promise for current or future education data leadership, and who could lead an important analytic project for your organization. This project might be a new data tool, a system for data use, or a key finding to inform policy decisions. Agency Fellows and Data Fellows participate in the fellowship cohort together, attending the same workshops, learning from experts and one another, and executing on their capstone projects.

**Who should we nominate to be our organization’s Agency Fellow?**

While Data Fellows are required to have, at minimum, a Master’s degree and 3-4 years of work experience, SDP does not have the same baseline requirements for Agency Fellows. Your organization should consider whether your proposed Agency Fellow meets the characteristics and qualifications below:

- Works with data and strategy as a core function of their role
- Positioned to move critical initiatives forward and share their learnings across the organization
- Has growth potential within the organization
- Excited to learn and continue their growth
- Committed to remaining with your organization for the next two years, at minimum, given this opportunity

Finally, an Agency Fellow’s supervisor should ensure they are prepared to make time for this person to attend workshops, complete fellowship-related tasks, etc., over the course of the fellowship.
BENEFITS FOR SDP PARTNERS

SDP Partners have the unique opportunity to
• Build their own data capacity by engaging in trainings, problem-solving conversations, and learning from others
• Join a network of more than 165 other education organizations, more than 375 data leaders, and faculty, field experts, and education researchers, and
• Commission a fully executed, actionable strategic data project

YOUR STRATEGIC DATA PROJECT

Early in partnership with SDP, we will work with you and your fellow(s) to identify a key research question or analytic challenge/initiative to move forward. Throughout the fellowship, your fellow will gain the skills to execute on this project, and in the second year, will be matched with a Harvard-affiliated faculty advisor to support the work. The SDP program team, instructors, alumni, and SDP network will also serve as a valuable resource to help your fellow overcome challenges that come up in this work. This capstone project, or strategic data project, will result in an actionable finding, tool, system, or resource for your organization.

At the conclusion of the fellowship, fellows will present on their project, findings, and lessons learned to the broader SDP network, as well as publish a short impact paper to inform the field.

Learn more about SDP capstone projects at sdp.cepr.harvard.edu/blog
SDP PARTNER ELIGIBILITY

Who can partner with the Strategic Data Project?

Current and former partners include local and state education agencies, charter management organizations, education-focused nonprofit organizations, and education-focused foundations. Examples of SDP partners include:

- Boston Public Schools
- IDEA Public Schools
- Wake County Public School System
- Texas Education Agency
- Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
- Chicago Public Schools
- Schusterman Family Foundation
- Detroit Public Schools Community District
- Tennessee Department of Education
- Office of the State Superintendent of Education (DC)
- Hawaii Department of Education
- Denver Public Schools
- Tulsa Public Schools
- Mississippi Department of Education
- Cleveland Metropolitan School District
- TNTP
- KY STATS
- Albuquerque Public Schools
- The College Board
- Orange County Public Schools (FL)

Is my organization eligible to partner with SDP?

SDP partners should be committed to using evidence for change and prepared to position their fellows to execute on an ambitious project, as SDP Fellows’ work should solely focus on routine reporting and data management. SDP partners:

- Are a local or state education agency, charter management organization, education-focused nonprofit, education-focused foundation, or institution of higher education
- Are committed to the use of data to inform decisions and policy
- Value the culture of data use
- Have an ambitious data project in mind for an SDP Fellow

How can my organization support a fellow?

- Engage the fellow’s supervisor and agency leadership in SDP conversations and activities to further the fellow’s project
- Participate in supervisor-related fellowship activities, including SDP check-ins by phone, workshop pre-work, and in-person workshop sessions
- Prioritize fellows’ time [approximately 10% of the fellow’s time] for fellowship activities, including in-person workshops and strategic data project completion
- Provide the fellow with access to data and leadership to execute on important projects and improve data culture
- Fairly compensate their fellow with salary and benefits
- Execute a contract between their organization and Harvard
- Provide the SDP Fellowship fee
PROGRAM AND SUPPORTS

Each Strategic Data Project cohort launches in the fall and continues through two years. Programming is organized into six workshops (four in-person and two extended virtual events), working groups, and other virtual opportunities for learning and sharing across the network such as webinars led by field experts and facilitated community conversations. Partner supervisors attend three of the four in-person workshops in Fall I, Spring I, and Spring II. The fellow and supervisor will also check in with the SDP program team regularly to ensure projects are on track, make connections to people and resources from across the network, and problem-solve in real time.

All programming and supports are in service of the successful execution of an impactful strategic data project, commissioned by your agency.

PLAN TOGETHER
• Supervisors and fellows attend kick-off events and participate in facilitated conversations to better understand existing data capacity and define and dissect the problems and strategic data projects they will tackle together

BUILD CAPACITY
• Interim virtual modules for fellows throughout the two-year partnership refine their skills to execute on key work for their agency, covering topics such as data governance, visualization, leadership and management, data communication, data analytics, data ethics, predictive analytics, and research brokering
• Support from alumni mentors, topic-based working groups, and an assigned faculty advisor

LEARN ACROSS THE NETWORK
• Fellows and supervisors attend two annual SDP Convening workshops to learn from current and former fellows and experts across the network
• Mentoring support from Harvard-affiliated faculty and SDP alumni

REFINE AND EXECUTE
• With support from the SDP network and their peers, fellows design measures of success for their projects and a communications plan for results

COMMUNICATE
• Fellows present the results of their strategic data project and plan for sustainability to the SDP network and write up an impact story to showcase the challenge, solution, and lessons learned for future cohorts of SDP
PARTNER SELECTION TIMELINE

The partnership application opens each fall. The application process is as follows:

1. Submit online application found at **sdp.smapply.io** to propose your strategic data project goals and vision. Applications are reviewed on a rolling basis leading up to deadlines, and screening calls may be scheduled in advance of a deadline.*

2. Complete a screening call with the SDP Selection Team to deepen understanding of partnership goals. (Note that partners and Agency Fellows will join the “partner screening call.” Agency Fellows will also participate in a separate call with SDP staff to assess their readiness for the program)

3. SDP will make a decision on fit for the partnership within 2 weeks following the screening calls

4. Execute a contract/memorandum of understanding with Harvard

5. If applicable, review Data Fellow candidate matches, interview 1-2 top matches, and determine a hire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>For partners hiring a Data Fellow</th>
<th>Round I Deadlines (Priority)</th>
<th>Round II Deadlines (Regular)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Data Fellow Partners app closes</td>
<td>Friday, December 11, 2020</td>
<td>Friday, May 28, 2021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contract Fully Executed</td>
<td>Friday, January 29, 2021</td>
<td>Friday, June 25, 2021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partners interview Data Fellow candidate matches</td>
<td>February 2021</td>
<td>July 2021</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>For partners nominating an Agency Fellow</th>
<th>Round I Deadlines (Priority)</th>
<th>Round II Deadlines (Regular)**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agency Fellow Partners app closes</td>
<td>Friday, January 15, 2021</td>
<td>Tuesday, June 15, 2021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contract Fully Executed</td>
<td>Monday, February 15, 2021</td>
<td>Friday, July 9, 2021</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Deadlines are subject to change. For up-to-date information, visit **sdp.cepr.harvard.edu/apply**.

** While the Agency Fellow regular deadline is not until summer 2021, we highly recommend beginning the application process as soon as possible to guarantee your spot in the upcoming cohort.

To apply, visit **sdp.cepr.harvard.edu/apply**
PARTNERSHIP INVESTMENT

Whether you choose to host a Data Fellow who has been recruited and matched to your organization or to enroll one of your own employees as a fellow, a partnership fee covers all participation for your agency in the program.

Data Fellows, who are employed by your organization, should receive a salary between $75,000–$90,000 plus benefits. Salaries and benefits for Agency Fellows, who are existing employees of your organization, are at your own discretion.

The partnership fee is payable over two years and includes:

• Participation in four workshops for the fellow and three for the supervisor over two years
• Access to SDP resources and network of support, including a network of more than 375 current and former fellows across more than 165 education organizations, researchers, faculty, and instructors
• Regular check-in calls for the fellow and supervisor with SDP leadership
• Support for a fully executed, actionable strategic data project, commissioned by your agency in response to a challenge or opportunity to improve
• Guidance from a Harvard-affiliated faculty advisor
• Online learning modules to build the technical skills on your team
• Airfare and lodging for in-person events
• Recruitment, screening, and matching of your Data Fellow, as well as an in-person interview with your final match (if applicable)

The total program fee for enrolling an Agency Fellow is $45,000. The total fee for hiring a Data Fellow is $49,500, plus paying salary and benefits directly to the Data Fellow.
OTHER OPPORTUNITIES

Our unique approach combines rigorous analytic techniques, a deep knowledge of education policy and practical, on-the-ground expertise to advance the culture of data use in education. In addition to the SDP Fellowship, we offer the following additional training opportunities and resources:

SDP Institute for Leadership in Analytics
SDP offers short-term professional development opportunities for hands-on analytic training, both in person and online.
The SDP Institute for Leadership in Analytics is a week-long data “bootcamp” workshop providing a foundation or refresher course on problem analysis, technical methods, program evaluation, and communicating with data.
Learn more: sdp.cepr.harvard.edu/institute

Open Resources
SDP has developed a robust set of resources that provide practical support for analysts, leaders, and the education sector broadly, including:
• Technical guides that enable analysts to replicate SDP diagnostic research and analytic methods
• Practitioner how-to handbooks that guide and support leaders as they conduct interventions and perform program evaluations
• Case studies of best practices and lessons learned from our researchers, fellows, and partners
Download: sdp.cepr.harvard.edu/tools

LEARN MORE

For questions or other inquiries, please contact the SDP Outreach Team at sdprecruitment@gse.harvard.edu or visit sdp.cepr.harvard.edu/become-partner to learn more.