# Strategic Data Project Fellowship:
# Becoming a Partner

**STRATEGIC DATA PROJECT**

## 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 SDP Fellows—recruited and screened by Harvard-affiliated researchers for our two-year fellowship program—or nominate one or more of their own employees as SDP Fellows to receive tools and training to support the organization's needs.

**Advance a Critical Initiative**
Advised by renowned faculty and mentors, SDP 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.

# SDP FELLOWS' IMPACT

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:
## Hire an SDP Fellow, recruited and screened by SDP and matched to your organization

SDP Fellows can be 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
**SDP 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 SDP Fellow

Organizations can nominate existing employees who have been identified as analytic leaders. They are the rising stars who, with additional training and support, will take on leadership roles.

### SUE MUKHERJEE
**SDP Fellow**
**Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education**

**Impact:** In order to better understand how education translates to career outcomes for Pennsylvania's workforce, Mukherjee developed a replicable process to link student records and workforce profiles to produce outcomes data that gives educators and employers a common framework for workforce outcomes.

# RECRUITING AND SELECTING SDP 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 hire one or multiple fellows recruited by SDP and matched to their needs, and/or nominate and enroll one or multiple of their own talented employees as fellows. 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 an organization hires an SDP Fellow, they will have 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, fellow candidates are matched with SDP partners. SDP partners interview their match(es) before making a hiring decision.**

# NOMINATING SDP FELLOWS

Your organization can choose to nominate an existing employee as an SDP Fellow. The ideal candidate is someone 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, such as a new data tool, a new system for data use, or a key finding to inform policy decisions. Whether fellows are nominated or hired by your organization, they will participate in the same Fellowship training, learning, and network, and will all execute on a strategic data project commissioned by your organization.

## Who should we nominate as an SDP Fellow?

While candidates recruited by SDP are required to have, at minimum, a Master's degree and 3-4 years of work experience, there are different requirements should you nominate an existing employee as an SDP Fellow. Before nominating an employee, you should ensure they:
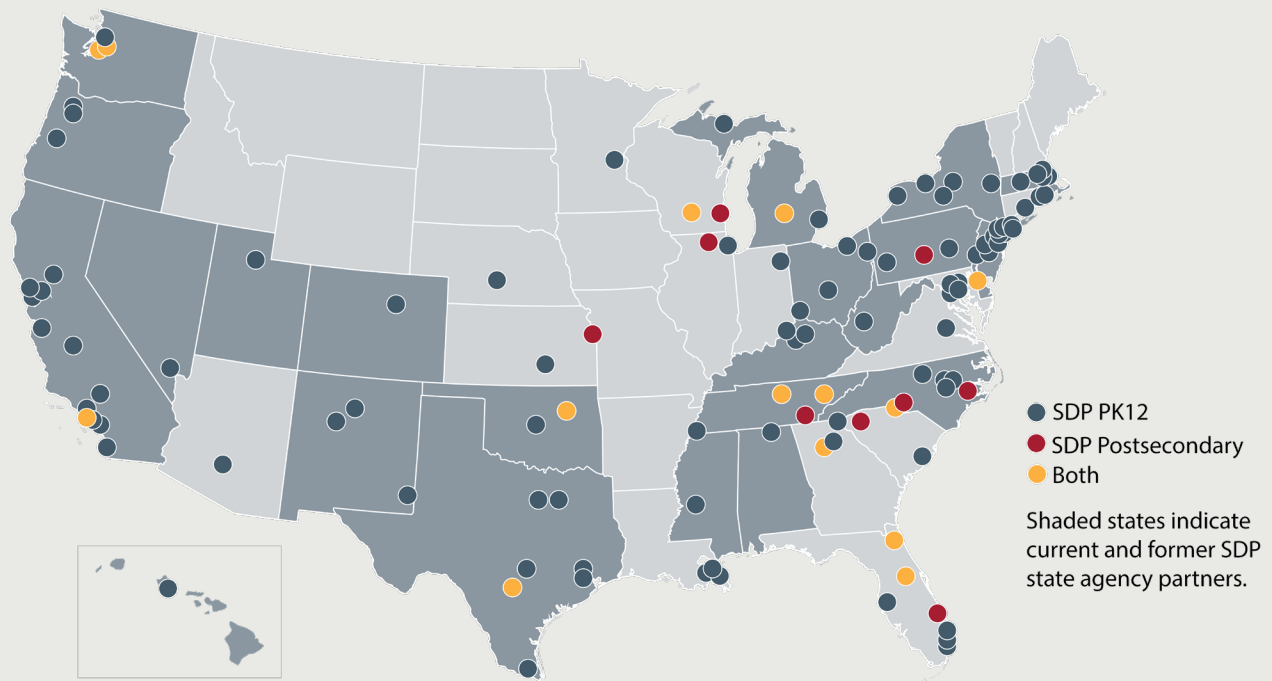
• Work with data and strategy as a core function of their role

• 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 SDP 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 215 PK-12 and Higher Education agencies, more than 425 data leaders, and faculty, field experts, and education researchers, and
- Commission a fully executed, actionable strategic data project



- SDP PK12
- SDP Postsecondary
- Both

Shaded states indicate current and former SDP state agency partners.

# 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 Fellows' 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

- San Antonio College
- Cleveland Metropolitan School District
- TNTP
- KY STATS
- Albuquerque Public Schools
- The College Board
- American Indian Higher Education Consortium

## 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 5% of the fellow's time for Fellowship-related training and commitments and 20% of the fellow's time for focusing on the strategic data project
- 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

# BECOMING AN SDP PARTNER

**Education organizations can nominate an existing employee to become an SDP Fellow and join the Fellowship and/or apply to hire an SDP Fellow who has been recruited and screened by SDP to join the Fellowship.**

## Nominating an SDP Fellow for your organization:

1.  Submit an online application found at **sdp.smapply.io** to propose your strategic data project goals and vision as well as nominate an employee to become an SDP Fellow. Applications are reviewed on a rolling basis leading up to deadlines, and screening calls may be scheduled in advance of a deadline.*
2.  SDP will review the partnership application and invite your nominee to complete their own accompanying application.
3.  SDP will conduct a phone screen with your nominee to gauge their technical skillset, readiness, and interest.
4.  Complete a screening call with your nominee, the nominee's supervisor, and the SDP Selection Team to deepen understanding of partnership goals.
5.  SDP will make a decision on fit for the partnership within 2 weeks following the screening calls.
6.  Execute a contract/memorandum of understanding with Harvard.
7.  Participate in trainings and other activities beginning in the fall.

## Hiring an SDP Fellow for your organization:

1.  Submit an 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.
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 SDP Fellow candidate matches (who have already been screened and selected into the matching pool by SDP), interview 1-2 top matches, and determine a hire.
6.  Hire the chosen SDP Fellow as a full-time employee with a start date no later than early September and participate in trainings and other activities beginning in the fall.

## To apply and view deadlines visit sdp.cepr. harvard.edu/apply

# PARTNERSHIP INVESTMENT

Whether you choose to hire an SDP Fellow who has been recruited and matched to your organization or to nominate one of your own employees as a fellow, a partnership fee covers all participation for your agency in the program. Fellows matched to your organization as new full-time hires become employees of your organization and should receive a salary between $75,000– $90,000 plus benefits. For nominated SDP Fellows, who are existing employees of your organization, salary and benefits are at your own discretion.

**The partnership fee is payable over two years and includes:**

- Participation in six workshops for the fellow (two virtual and four in-person) and three for the supervisor over two years

- Access to SDP resources and network of support, including a network of more than 425 current and former fellows across more than 215 education organizations, plus 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 SDP Fellow hire and/or screening of your SDP Fellow nominee

The total program fee for nominating an SDP Fellow and participating int he Fellowship is $45,500 over two years. The total program fee for hiring a fully screened SDP Fellow and participating in the Fellowship is $49,500 over two years.

# 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 short-term, virtual data "bootcamp" workshop offering synchronous and asynchronous learning modules covering the foundations of education data strategy, data visualization and communication, education data equity and ethics, and other topics.

**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.

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