Center for Education Policy Research
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

STRATEGIC DATA PROJECT

Making the Case: SDP Fellowship

A guide to requesting your organization's support and nomination for the next SDP Fellowship cohort.

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. Our partner organizations identify a "strategic data project," which fellows will complete with support, training, and resources from SDP. During and after the fellowship, fellows have access to SDP's network of 700+ current and former fellows.



WHY SDP?

The SDP Fellowship offers a unique opportunity for personal development that also benefits your entire organization by focusing on educator and student outcomes. Fellows learn within a cohort of peers, engage in working groups, and receive guidance from expert advisors. The fellow and organization benefit from a completed strategic data project, commissioned and approved by your leadership, and evidence of impact after the two years.



VALUE FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION

Your organization will gain valuable insights from the field through their fellow learning alongside cohort and network members facing similar questions, and receiving guidance from an expert advisor to execute on a key analytic project identified by your leadership. SDP supports are grounded in evidence and assistance to keep your work rigorous and on track. Supervisors play a key role and participate in touchpoints throughout the fellowship.



GETTING STARTED

If the core responsibilities of your current role include regularly working with data, and you are positioned to drive change, the SDP Fellowship may be aligned with what your agency needs. The nomination process is initiated by the organization itself, but you may be the person to start the conversation. The following page provides guidance on how to present this opportunity to your organization.

Outlining your ask:

FOCUS ON ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT, NOT PERSONAL IMPROVEMENT

- SDP aims to build capacity within the organization.
- Better use of data leads to better outcomes within the organization and for students.
- The agency approves the data project to address a real need.
- Connect the fellowship to specific challenges within your role or department.

PRESENT THE RETURN ON INVESTMENT

- **Cost:** $49,500 over 2 years. Covers all programming and travel/lodging for 4 workshops for the fellow and 2 for the supervisor. Compare this to other professional development costs your organization may provide.
- **Network:** The SDP alumni network connects you and your organization to education data leaders across the country. SDP has trained over 700 fellows.
- **Retention:** The fellowship is a 2 year commitment for you to stay with your organization.
- **Shared learning:** Fellows and supervisors can bring their learning and resources to others at the organization.

PROVIDE RESOURCES

- **SDP Fellowship overview:** https://sdp.cepr.harvard.edu/apply
- **Past partners:** https://sdp.cepr.harvard.edu/our-partners
- **Example fellow projects:** https://sdp.cepr.harvard.edu/blog
- **Nomined fellow overview:** https://mailchi.mp/07c9cca6ae5b/nominated
- **Questions?** sdprecruitment@gse.harvard.edu

MAKE A CLEAR AND SPECIFIC ASK

- "I would like [organization] to apply for the next cohort of the SDP Fellowship and nominate me."
- Include the potential strategic data project, outlining challenges that will resontate with leadership.
- **Applications due:** May 4, 2027 (*reviewed on a rolling basis*)
- **MOU executed by:** July 2027
- **Fellowship:** Summer 2027 to Summer 2029

FOLLOW UP

- Send written confirmation after a verbal yes.
- Schedule an SDP info call, ideally with your supervisor.
- Confirm the MOU process and signatory.

IF YOU DON'T GET A YES

- Ask: "What would we need to make this happen for the next cycle?"
- Find the real barrier: budget, capacity, timing, or doubt about value.