



Associate

Hybrid (any U.S. location) | ~15% travel

About Formation

Formation is a national consulting firm that helps regions act with clarity and confidence to create inclusive, durable growth. We work in three domains – regional economic strategy, workforce and education systems, and the energy transition. We are sought after by leading economic and workforce development organizations around the country. We collaborate with philanthropies and think tanks that are advancing the field nationally.

Formation is a growing firm with a strong reputation, high standards, and a competitive streak. We work differently from most firms because our goal is to transform the field, not just serve clients. That's why Formation's work involves a carefully constructed portfolio of **field work** (client projects, where we apply what we know and test new ideas) and **field building** (peer learning networks and spreading new models nationally).

The work we do is challenging. Our projects require a high degree of discernment and creativity, a high tolerance for ambiguity, and the confidence and ability to slow down and go deep at the right times.

The Role

We are hiring an Associate to take on meaningful responsibility across our client portfolio. You'll work directly with our co-founders, a small team, and a tight-knit group of external collaborators. You'll have real ownership of components of complex engagements. This role is designed for someone who has spent three or more years doing analytical and strategic work in or around economic development, has worked directly with state and regional economic development actors, and is ready to step into a consulting role and work closely with leading practitioners. The role requires a substantial degree of independence, including remotely managing parts of fast-paced and fluid projects.

What You'll Do

Field work – client projects (~55%). You'll play a substantial role on 3-4 concurrent engagements, with the ability to shape projects from proposal through delivery. The mix of work on any given project includes desk research and quantitative analysis; interviews with industry, government, and civic leaders; drafting memos, decks, and reports;



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participating in and sometimes leading client meetings; and designing and facilitating workshops. Examples of the types of current and recent projects you'd be working on:

- **Seattle:** The City partnered with Formation to produce a wide-ranging analysis of the city's business climate and competitive position, taking into account the forces that are changing the city's role in the regional and national economy (AI, immigration policy, the energy crunch, remote work). This project involved extensive analysis, interviews with local leaders and national experts, and lots of free-flowing idea generation with the City's Office of Economic Development. It will inform numerous high-stakes policy decisions over the next several years.
- **Illinois:** Formation worked with a nationally-recognized regional organization to figure out how Illinois could meet two seemingly incompatible policy goals: growing the economy by turning Chicago into a quantum computing hub while staying within the limits of the state's ambitious environmental legislation. Formation first established a shared fact base showing that it was possible for the state to create enough clean energy to meet its economic ambitions, if it was creative, then developed an agenda for a cross-sector group to pursue, combining policy ideas and recommendations for redesigning institutions.
- **Philadelphia:** Formation is leading efforts to stand up the coordination architecture for a newly launched five-county regional partnership. This includes facilitating sector tables across electronics, biomed, and manufacturing, drafting governance models for a regional manufacturing council, and advising the Partnership on sequencing and role clarity.

Field building – convenings and learning networks (~25%). Much of Formation's work is designing and managing the platforms through which leading practitioners come together to refine their craft and spread new models to other regions. You'll have a meaningful role in this work: designing the content and agendas for our convenings, managing the logistics and participant experience, building and maintaining relationships with the practitioners in our networks, and helping shape the curricula that emerge and the ways in which we deliver them. This is real Formation work, not "nice-to-have" – and over time, it's a direct path to becoming a known voice in the field.

Business development and thought leadership (~10%). Formation grows by being useful in public. You'll have dedicated time to support prospective work – scoping new engagements, drafting proposals, conducting early-stage diagnostic work with prospective clients, and pursuing relationships with funders and partners. This category also includes writing for Formation's external channels (essays, newsletters, op-eds) on topics where you have something to say. We'll expect you to bring your own questions and angles to this work, not just execute on existing threads.



Operations and firm-building (~10%). Like any small firm, we share the work of running the place – invoicing, expense management, scheduling, project administration, and contributing to our internal systems as the firm grows.

Where This Role Goes

We expect that, within a few years, the person in this role will grow into an independent contributor to the firm. We'll invest in this trajectory deliberately Tthat looks like:

- **Leading projects end to end**, with Formation's co-founders and senior team serving as as-needed advisors rather than day-to-day managers.
- **Writing proposals that bring Formation into new topics, new geographies, or new client types** – not just executing on the engagements we already have.
- **Introducing new methods, frameworks, or analytical approaches** to the firm, and helping codify them so the rest of the team can use them.
- **Attaining a fellowship with a national entity** – a think tank, a university, a foundation initiative – that builds your platform while extending Formation's reach.
- **Becoming a recognized voice in the field** through writing, speaking, and the relationships you build through our convenings and networks.

Who You Are

- **Three years of full-time experience** in regional economic development, urban policy, workforce, energy, or a closely related field. Backgrounds that fit well: think tanks (Brookings Metro, EIG, Urban, Aspen), public-sector-facing consulting (HR&A, RTI/SRI, EcoNorthwest, Fourth Economy), state or regional EDOs, philanthropies funding this work, or governor's or mayor's offices.
- **Direct experience working with state and regional economic development actors** – EDOs, community colleges, regional business leadership groups, city economic development departments, state energy agencies, or comparable entities. This is essential – we work with these leaders constantly; you need to understand how they operate, how they think, and how to be useful to them.
- **A high tolerance for ambiguity.** The work we do rarely arrives with a clean problem statement. Clients and funders shift, scopes evolve, the right answer in month one is often not the right answer in month four. You can hold the core purpose or motivating question of a project firmly in your mind even as demands change – and you know the difference between a real reframe and a distraction.
- **Abundant curiosity** about the economy overall, the industries and regions you're working in, and why clients act the way they do. The last one matters as



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much as the first. A lot of our work is figuring out what's actually going on inside an organization, and that requires genuine interest in people, not just systems.

- **A strong analytical foundation** including familiarity with federal datasets (BLS, Census County Business Patterns, BEA, and so on), comfort with tools like Lightcast or similar labor market data, and the ability to read academic literature and extract useful concepts and methods.
- **Excellent writing.** You can readily shift from a memo for a mayor's chief of staff, a section of a longer report, and a piece of public-facing thought leadership.
- **A sense of humor.** This work is consequential, but the people doing it well don't take themselves too seriously. We don't either.
- **The ability to manage your own time across multiple concurrent projects** with senior collaborators in a remote-first firm.
- **Bachelor's degree** in economics, urban planning, political science, or a related field. We do not require a master's degree; relevant experience matters more.

What We Offer

- **Compensation:** a base salary of \$80,000 to \$95,000, depending on experience, with potential to grow in subsequent years depending on the firm's performance and individual contributions. Formation anticipates offering year-end discretionary bonuses in the range of 5 to 10 percent of salary.
- **Reviews and progression:** Semiannual performance reviews with Formation's co-founders, covering project ownership, skill development, and progression toward the trajectory described above.
- **Benefits:** Health, dental, and vision insurance; retirement plan with employer contribution; paid time off; professional development budget.
- **Work arrangement:** Fully hybrid within the U.S. Need to be available during core hours (10am – 3pm ET) but otherwise flexible, except as client calls dictate.
- **Travel:** Roughly 15% of time (three days per month on average, likely less for first six months), split between client meetings, field-building convenings that Formation organizes or shapes, and other conferences.
- **Reports to:** Ryan Donahue, Co-founder and Managing Partner.

How to Apply

Send a resume, a short cover letter (no more than one page), and a writing sample of your choice to contact@formation.works. We're reviewing applications on a rolling basis;



the position will remain open until filled. Target start date: September 14, 2026. Formation is an equal-opportunity employer. We value candidates from a wide range of backgrounds and lived experiences.

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