



OPPORTUNITY CHICAGO

What is Opportunity Chicago?

Chicago's sweeping plan to reinvent public housing is also transforming its workforce development system. **Opportunity Chicago**, a five-year initiative launched in 2006, is improving services for Chicagoans who face formidable employment barriers. Driven by the Chicago Housing Authority's (CHA) Plan for Transformation, Opportunity Chicago is using cutting-edge job training and placement programs and system-wide alignment to help 5,000 public-housing residents prepare for and find quality employment over five years. Because of its coordinated approach, Opportunity Chicago stands to have an impact on individual lives and the broader workforce development system.

Opportunity Chicago is a collaborative of government agencies, foundations, nonprofit organizations and employers committed to helping low-skilled, low-income Chicagoans secure meaningful jobs that pay well and offer room to advance. This \$25.9-million initiative was developed jointly by the CHA, the Chicago Department of Family and Support Services¹ and The Partnership for New Communities, a group of business, civic and foundation leaders that supports the people and places impacted by the 15-year Plan for Transformation.

Rationale and Objectives

Many residents face barriers in their climb up the employment ladder, despite having the desire and the potential to advance. Understanding those barriers and how they can successfully be overcome, Opportunity Chicago supports programs that meet resident jobseekers where they are with the goal of moving them toward permanent employment, stable housing and economic self-sufficiency.

To this end, **Opportunity Chicago's goals and intended outcomes** include:

- More than **5,000 residents** will find full-time, unsubsidized employment over 5 years (2006-2010).
- Thousands of residents will access a **range of services** designed to help them meet their varying needs – including job readiness training, transitional jobs programs, contextualized literacy programs, customized skills training and bridge programs.
- Hundreds of residents will learn about **career opportunities in key industry sectors**.
- More job seekers with low literacy and skill levels and a range of work histories will access programs and services that prepare them to **reach self-sufficiency through employment**.
- **Streamlined and enhanced service delivery** will result from improved inter-agency coordination and integration of CHA residents as a service population.

Outcomes to date:

- **5,696** individuals have secured jobs through Opportunity Chicago
- **926** residents have completed certificate and degree programs through the City Colleges of Chicago
- More than **550** individuals have accessed services through the City's Workforce Investment Act provider network

¹ The Mayor's Office of Workforce Development was a founding partner of the initiative but has since been restructured as the Chicago Department of Family and Support Services and the Chicago Department of Community Development.

- More **employers will be engaged** in and satisfied with the public workforce system, leading them to use it when seeking qualified workers and to give back by providing career advancement opportunities for entry-level and incumbent workers.
- Public workforce system partners will be **better equipped to address gaps in service**, improving their effectiveness in meeting the needs of both low-income job seekers and local industry.
- Opportunity Chicago will **become a documented model** for local and national public workforce systems seeking to more effectively address the challenges of low-skilled, low-income job seekers.
- Low-income jobseekers will be **served more efficiently** by programs modeled after the initiative.

In pursuit of these goals, **Opportunity Chicago** incorporates best practices in the field, taps workforce development expertise through a committee of strategic advisers, pools resources through The Partnership for New Communities' collaborative funding structure, and develops resources that are more flexible than most government sources while still involving careful financial oversight.

Services

Opportunity Chicago has developed a range of targeted employment services in response to the needs of resident jobseekers.

- **Basic Employment Services** provide rapid placement in opportunities like paid internships and full- and part-time jobs.
- **Work Readiness Prep** equips residents with the tools necessary to access employment opportunities, such as obtaining personal documents, developing and updating a resume, determining career interests and creating an employment plan.
- **Intensive Employment Services** assist residents with a range of workforce development needs using program models that include transitional jobs, contextualized literacy and adult basic education, and customized skills training.
- **Technical Training** programs through City Colleges of Chicago provide career pathways for residents who enroll in certification courses leading directly to employment in their chosen career fields.

Additionally, we know that there are a number of industry sectors in Chicago that face significant labor shortages that could be met, in part, with a pool of well-trained applicants from Opportunity Chicago's target population. To address this issue, Opportunity Chicago developed a targeted sector strategy that focuses on the **hospitality, healthcare, manufacturing, information technology** and **energy efficiency** industries. In each sector, Opportunity Chicago supports an individual or institution that is responsible for involving employers in the design and implementation of new workforce partnerships and helping to make Chicago's broader sector-focused efforts more inclusive of the needs of low-skilled workers.

Opportunity Chicago's successful approach to workforce development for public-housing residents earned it the support of two national funder collaboratives – **Living Cities** and the **National Fund for Workforce Solutions** – and **Jobs for the Future** through the **U.S. Department of Labor**.

More information at www.opportunitychicago.org.

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