

A Partnership for Change

How Opportunity Chicago
Helped Create New
Workforce Pathways for
Public Housing Residents



OPPORTUNITY
CHICAGO

Opportunity Chicago

A Partnership for Change

CHANGE.
CHICAGO HOUSING AUTHORITY

 **family**
& support services

**The Partnership
for New Communities**
Civic Leadership for Chicago's Neighborhoods

5,000
Public Housing
Residents
in Jobs
in 5 Years.

How did
it happen?

Opportunity Chicago

- ▲ Established a strong **sense of urgency** around its mission to help 5,000 public housing residents prepare for and find work in five years
- ▲ Formed a **powerful partnership** to guide a well-facilitated and managed process
- ▲ Created a **compelling vision** with a concrete timeline and clear strategic objectives
- ▲ Was highly **sensitive to residents' life experiences** and realistic about their educational and employment strengths and challenges
- ▲ **Empowered public agencies** with greater flexibility to change rules and use resources in unique ways, which maximized innovation
- ▲ **Blended public and private resources** in ways that had not been tried before
- ▲ **Created a platform** for experimentation and adaptation
- ▲ **Measured its outcomes** through a formal evaluation
- ▲ Remained **focused on sustainability** and permanent institutionalized changes

We are pleased to share this report which tells the compelling story of collaboration that, since 2006, has made extraordinary strides in connecting low-skilled, low-income Chicagoans—all residents of public housing—to quality jobs.

In fact, as of June 2010, more than 5,800 Chicago Housing Authority residents have prepared for and found work and thousands more have benefited from training and support services through this strategic effort called Opportunity Chicago.

This is a story of transformation at many levels.

Opportunity Chicago has forged new public-private partnerships. It is coordinating and strengthening systems that serve people who need a helping hand to move forward in their lives. It is advancing public policy that will expand and sustain effective programs and practices. And it is promoting family and community stability through employment.

These changes never would have been possible without leaders being willing to take risks, learn from failure, persist and aim higher—even in the face of the toughest economic climate in generations.

A Partnership for Change examines both what this partnership has been able to accomplish and how the partners achieved it. Although a rigorous formal evaluation is under way, we are able to take some of the lessons learned from Opportunity Chicago and apply them to similar endeavors now.

We also recognize that the challenges posed to job seekers by the slowly recovering economy make it more important than ever to share these lessons with policymakers and our colleagues in the field.

Sincerely,

*Maria P. Hibbs, Ph.D.,
Executive Director,
The Partnership for New
Communities*

*Linda J. Kaiser,
Executive Vice President of
Resident Services,
Chicago Housing Authority*

*Lewis A. Jordan,
Chief Executive Officer,
Chicago Housing Authority*

*Mary Ellen Caron, Ph.D.,
Commissioner,
Chicago Department of Family
and Support Services*



Background:

An Urgent Need for Change: The Plan for Transformation

Chicago's Plan for Transformation is an ambitious \$1.6 billion endeavor to renovate or replace high-rise public housing developments—emblematic of failed public housing policy that concentrated and isolated the poor—into thriving mixed-income neighborhoods.

By the 1990s, Chicago Housing Authority high rises were infamous for being some of the most dangerous places in the United States. In 1995, the federal government stepped in and took over the Chicago Housing Authority, maintaining control of the agency for three years.

In the late 1990s the need for change had never been so dire. With the reins returned to Chicago, Mayor Richard M. Daley and a new CHA management team headed by then-CEO Terry Peterson led the agency on the largest, most ambitious redevelopment effort of public housing in the nation's history. Their goal was to rehabilitate or redevelop the city's entire stock of public housing. Approved in 2000, the CHA began demolishing many of its high rises as part of the new \$1.6 billion, 15-year **Plan for Transformation** (the Plan).¹

But the Plan goes beyond bricks and mortar. It ushered in a new era of increased accountability and transparency with the public and other municipal and federal agencies. Over time it has helped institute reforms to ensure managerial and financial accountability.

Ten years into the Plan, a more comprehensive turnaround of place and people has occurred. By offering residents a new range of opportunities—better housing, connections to employment, improved social services—it has revitalized communities and offered new hope. A commitment to better understanding residents' assets and challenges has forged stronger connections between public housing residents and critical services, such as education and employment training programs, and fostered economic self-reliance. As a result, public housing transformation holds the promise that attractive, safe, and economically vital communities can strengthen the city as a whole.

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A Core Hypothesis:

Public Housing Can Offer Connections to Work, and Connections to Work Can Transform Public Housing

What would a workforce system that worked for public housing residents look like?

Embedded in the **Plan for Transformation** were goals to equip public housing residents with skills for economic and personal growth; to decrease reliance on government subsidies; and ultimately, to break cycles of intergenerational poverty. And in the early stages of the Plan, one thing was clear: paths to employment were essential.

If the CHA was going to simultaneously renovate or rebuild 25,000 units of housing and help residents acquire new skills to become economically self-sufficient, the looming question was how? The public housing authority and human service and workforce agencies could not work separately. Historically, these public agencies did not collaborate often or to great effect, largely because public policy set up barriers preventing them from doing so. The CHA was going to have to break free of what had been tried in the past and rally a wide variety of stakeholders around a new way of doing business centered on working together in the interests of low-income Chicagoans.

It would have been easy to fall into a trap of focusing only on the people part of this equation—poverty, low education levels, limited or non-existent work histories. But instead of getting mired in a complex analysis of these issues, leaders asked more positive questions focused on changing the situation or environment. What would a workforce system that worked for public housing residents look like? How would a public housing authority facilitate the access and delivery of employment and training services for residents? What could be done differently to make an impact on residents' lives? And, importantly, how would public housing be transformed if more residents were working?



CAN PUBLIC HOUSING OFFER
CONNECTIONS TO WORK?

CAN CONNECTIONS TO WORK
TRANSFORM PUBLIC HOUSING?

Enter Opportunity Chicago: A Partnership for Change

Some of Chicago's most determined leaders confronted the challenge of answering these questions and set a tangible goal:

5,000 residents in quality jobs in 5 years.²

As a means of reaching this goal, the CHA, the Chicago Department of Family and Support Services³ and The Partnership for New Communities (The Partnership)—a funder group of business, civic and foundation leaders committed to the Plan's success—came together to create Opportunity Chicago.

Opportunity Chicago is a \$27.5 million⁴ collaborative of government agencies, foundations, non-profit organizations and employers committed to helping connect 5,000 public housing residents to jobs through skills training and education, beginning January 2006 and ending December 2010. Initiative leaders prioritized creating effective programs and ensuring that promising programs and practices would be institutionalized through new resource allocations and public policy changes. Opportunity Chicago is led and administered by the Chicago Jobs Council, a non-profit organization that works to ensure access to employment and career advancement opportunities for people living in poverty.

Through Opportunity Chicago, thousands of residents have had access to an array of services designed to help meet their varying needs—including job-readiness training, transitional jobs programs, contextualized literacy programs, customized skills training and bridge programs into technical training through City Colleges of Chicago. To help target training and education to career-path jobs in high-demand sectors, Opportunity Chicago's strategy has focused on five industries: energy efficiency, healthcare, hospitality (retail, restaurant and hotel), manufacturing and technology.

As of April 2010, more than 5,000⁵ individuals found work through Opportunity Chicago. And Opportunity Chicago's goals to improve inter-agency coordination and streamline service delivery from entry-level through advanced skills training are well under way. The initiative is being evaluated by the Center for Urban Economic Development at the University of Illinois at Chicago (CUED) and Abt Associates. The goal is to establish a documented, replicable model that effectively addresses the challenges of disadvantaged job seekers.

Opportunity Chicago is a collaborative of government agencies, foundations, non-profit organizations and employers committed to helping connect 5,000 public-housing residents to jobs through skills training and education, beginning January 2006 and ending December 2010.

How Did Change Happen?

How Opportunity Chicago developed and evolved to reach its goal of placing more than 5,000 public housing residents in employment mirrors the story of the residents' lives transformed in the process. From the start, Opportunity Chicago leaders paid close attention to the process of leading change.⁶

Large-scale change efforts advance through stages that build on each other. Years of research on major transformation efforts—in both public and private domains—have concluded that eight essential ingredients lead to successful change:*

* John Kotter. Why Transformation Efforts Fail. Harvard Business Review. March-April 1995.

- 1 Establishing urgency
- 2 Forming a powerful guiding coalition
- 3 Creating a vision
- 4 Communicating the vision
- 5 Empowering others to act
- 6 Planning for and creating short-term wins
- 7 Consolidating improvements and producing more change
- 8 Institutionalizing change

Opportunity Chicago's success as a major collaborative process, and in helping housing authority residents find and keep jobs, can be attributed in large part to the following ingredients:

1 ESTABLISHING URGENCY: REACHING BOTTOM

The Plan for Transformation was borne out of a great sense of urgency established at the highest levels because of public housing's dire circumstances. The status quo was no longer acceptable. There was an imperative for leaders to create solutions. The Plan created the platform from which Opportunity Chicago was launched.

2 FORMING A POWERFUL GUIDING COALITION: LEADERSHIP CHEMISTRY TO MAKE CHANGE

The triad—The Partnership for New Communities, City of Chicago and CHA—motivated other civic leaders to sign on to the effort. The resulting team composed of workforce development experts and stakeholders became the **Strategic Advisers Group**. It has met regularly since January 2006 to review and advise the initiative's strategy; consider new proposals for services, tools, and resources that have a positive impact on the initiative; and advocate for public policy and systems change. In addition, Opportunity Chicago designated another important civic organization, the Chicago Jobs Council, to facilitate and manage the initiative. Having an outside facilitating agency for such a large-scale collaboration helped clarify partner roles and responsibilities and generated momentum. It also leveraged its appeal to stakeholders with the notion that a funding collaborative could have significantly more impact than any one organization—public or private—alone. Finally, this coalition weathered leadership and staff changes but was able to maintain continuity and focus: Even as leaders assumed positions in different agencies, they stayed connected to Opportunity Chicago.

3 CREATING A VISION: 5,000 RESIDENTS IN JOBS IN 5 YEARS

Opportunity Chicago leaders fueled urgency by setting a concrete placement goal and a timeline: **5,000 residents in jobs in 5 years**. In addition to this overarching goal, the group created a set of strategic objectives. This was a powerful motivating force for Opportunity Chicago leaders and the broader set of stakeholders in the City that was watching the Plan for Transformation's progress.

The Strategic Advisers Group

Participants are leaders from key city and state agencies, private foundations, and non-profit organizations. Collectively, the group has a wealth of workforce development and systems change expertise, especially in meeting the needs of disadvantaged populations.

Annie E. Casey Foundation

Chicago Department of Community Development

Chicago Department of Family and Support Services

Chicago Housing Authority

Chicago Workforce Investment Council (CWIC) / Chicago Workforce Board

Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce

City Colleges of Chicago

City of Chicago, Office of the Mayor

The Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity

The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation

The Joyce Foundation

The Lloyd A. Fry Foundation

The Partnership for New Communities

U.S. Department of Labor

Women Employed

In addition to the Strategic Advisers Group, other stakeholders have contributed to the initiative. A small group of key implementation partners meets regularly to continue to integrate their systems and leverage resources to expand the employment of CHA residents. At various points, unique sets of stakeholders were tapped as needed to form working groups on specific components of the initiative's strategy. These groups were tasked with idea-building or problem-solving on such topics as employer engagement, data collection, service delivery, and policy advocacy and initiative sustainability.

Opportunity Chicago leaders encouraged other partners to take risks and think in nontraditional ways.

4 COMMUNICATING THE VISION: CALLING ALL STAKEHOLDERS

Knowledge of Opportunity Chicago’s goal and its strategic objectives grew as concentric circles of stakeholder working groups expanded outward. The goal became ubiquitous and easy to communicate. Opportunity Chicago leaders also focused intensively on better understanding residents’ life experiences, assets and challenges and communicating what they were learning to the various city agencies responsible for workforce, human services and more. Part of that core message: Public housing residents need skills training and jobs, just like other low-income, low-skilled individuals. Broadcasting this message helped trigger many programmatic and policy changes, an indication that Opportunity Chicago’s workforce innovations were being integrated into larger scale workforce development efforts.

5 EMPOWERING OTHERS TO ACT: THE POWER TO MAKE CHANGE

With the triad of the CHA, the Chicago Department of Family and Support Services and The Partnership for New Communities at the core, Opportunity Chicago designed its governance structure to empower stakeholders and partner agencies to become part of the movement to change systems. The initiative created an entire cadre of change agents with its Strategic Advisers Group and other working groups. Because the Chicago Jobs Council was managing the process and people, core partners were free to focus on what obstacles to clear and which systems or structures were undermining the vision. Opportunity Chicago leaders encouraged other partners to take risks and think in nontraditional ways, which promoted steady movement toward action. Importantly, Opportunity Chicago was also able to marshal resources in groundbreaking ways, which fostered an ethos that change was indeed possible.

Opportunity Chicago's Strategic Priorities

1. *Expand and/or enhance the existing workforce service delivery system to maximize employment opportunities for CHA residents.*
2. *Promote the development and expansion of innovative and intensive employment skills and training programs.*
3. *Implement an employer engagement strategy that involves employers in the design and execution of sector or industry-based partnerships.*
4. *Engage in public policy advocacy to achieve long-term sustainability.*
5. *Evaluate the initiative's effectiveness and determine the relevance of its model for other low-income communities and populations.*

Opportunity Chicago's Goals

- ▲ *Place 5,000 residents into jobs*
- ▲ *Offer a range of employment services*
- ▲ *Work in key industry sectors*
- ▲ *Focus on reaching self-sufficiency through employment*
- ▲ *Streamline services*
- ▲ *Engage employers in new ways*
- ▲ *Address gaps in services*
- ▲ *Provide a more efficient model*
- ▲ *Document the model and lessons learned*

To achieve these goals, Opportunity Chicago employs a process and structure that incorporates best practices, utilizes workforce development expertise through a committee of strategic advisers, pools resources through The Partnership's collaborative funding structure, and develops resources that are more flexible than most government sources, but also involves careful financial oversight.

The initiative would not have used funds to their maximum advantage if it had not been creative and flexible in how both public and private resources were deployed.

**6 PLANNING FOR AND ACHIEVING SHORT-TERM WINS:
SMALL VICTORIES MATTER**

Opportunity Chicago was careful to measure its success for resident outcomes and fund-raising goals and celebrated programmatic and policy victories along the way.

▲ **FLEXIBILITY PRODUCES WINNING CHANGE.**

The initiative would not have used funds to their maximum advantage if it had not been creative and flexible in how both public and private resources were deployed. Using flexible funding wisely and creatively was critical in creating new programs and testing best practices.

▲ **UNDERSTANDING THE POPULATION LED TO PROGRAM IMPROVEMENTS.**

Literacy was flagged early on as a significant challenge to employment. Knowing this, Opportunity Chicago has focused time and attention on ways to assess literacy levels and match residents with appropriate services. Opportunity Chicago has improved the process tremendously, but improvements still can be made concerning how to be cost-effective and accelerate services.

▲ **DATA MAY BE HARD TO COLLECT, BUT IT WAS USED TO MAKE IMPORTANT MID-COURSE CORRECTIONS.**

Gathering information for the formal evaluation was not easy. However, considerable improvements were made on this front. Among them: New assessment tools, expanded opportunities for providers to report in “real time” using a single system; incorporating referral tracking; incorporating workforce development outcomes in all vendor contracts; and instituting pay-for-performance standards.



Learning from failure was as important as learning from success.

7 CONSOLIDATING IMPROVEMENTS AND PRODUCING MORE CHANGE: AIMING HIGH

Learning from failure was as important as learning from success. Reflection led to improvement. Opportunity Chicago leaders were willing to share the lessons about what failed and what succeeded. Given the high stakes and the agencies involved, Opportunity Chicago did not shy away from admitting when something wasn't working and showed a strong willingness to change course when necessary. Concrete examples include revamping employer engagement strategies; testing but choosing not to implement a work readiness credential for residents because it was not having the desired effect; and changing CHA's resident service model from a referral-based system (Service Connector) to a more comprehensive case management system, including employment supports (FamilyWorks).

8 INSTITUTIONALIZING CHANGE: FROM HERE TO THERE

From the start in 2006, the Strategic Advisers Group was thinking about sustaining lessons learned, effective programs and systems coordination beyond Opportunity Chicago's end date of 2010. It created a vision of permanent changes to be accomplished through institutional and policy improvements (see next page for details). As a result the following are in progress:

- ▲ *CHA residents are now considered a priority population within the Workforce Investment Act programs.*
- ▲ *Teaching literacy in an occupational context - or "contextualized literacy" - was a promising employment strategy that is on its way to becoming standard practice in various institutions.*
- ▲ *Silos between public agencies have been dismantled and new cross-agency collaboration is becoming standard operating practice.*
- ▲ *CHA institutionalized a comprehensive referral and service approach with stronger support services, an evolution from the previous standard job placement system.*

Opportunity Chicago: Institutionalizing New Approaches

From

To

Focus on job seeker as customer

Dual-customer orientation with a focus on job seekers and employers

CHA residents rely exclusively on CHA resources for services

Aligned public resources (across agencies and levels of government) and private resources (corporate and foundation) support CHA resident services

Reliance on rapid replacement model

Comprehensive strategy that offers programs and services that meet people where they are and move them along a career path

Organizational silos

Collaboration and cooperation

Restricted funding

Combined public-private and more flexible public funding

Little or no information available to support decision-making

Data-driven decision-making, evaluation, and continuous improvement

No industry strategy

Opportunities in high-growth industry sectors identified and developed

Implementation:

New Pathways to Employ Public Housing Residents

Connecting public housing residents to employment and reducing their dependence on public housing and other government subsidies are principal goals of the Plan for Transformation.

Working against a backdrop of a rapidly eroding economy, Opportunity Chicago and its core partners focused on a hypothetical question: **What would a workforce system that could better help public housing residents look like?** The group harnessed Opportunity Chicago leaders' expertise and resources to begin problem-solving and creating new answers to this question.

The path toward economic self-sufficiency, however, is not readily mapped for most public housing residents. Many face significant barriers to employment, including little or no work history, low education and literacy levels, physical and mental health issues for themselves and their children, and lack of access to child care and/or transportation. Residents also face a labor market where a growing proportion of positions—even at the entry level—require more than a high school diploma. And despite facing similar and multiple challenges, the resident population is not a homogeneous group. The reality is that residents needed a range of employment preparation services and supports.

To that end, the lead partners in Opportunity Chicago recognized that they needed a better understanding of the residents' abilities and needs in order to think about what the ideal set of services might look like. The Chicago Housing Authority sought to learn more about its residents through assessments and data matching in other public systems, including job placement activities.⁷ With this information, it became clear that many residents need additional support to obtain meaningful, long-term employment. And recognizing the challenges residents face in staying employed, CHA in 2008 shifted its focus away from conventional job placement to a more comprehensive approach that includes wraparound support services in addition to education, training and job placement. This new referral network, called FamilyWorks, ensures that residents have greater access to appropriate supports and services.

Armed with a more sophisticated understanding of the kinds of barriers residents face in their connection to the labor market and the knowledge about what types of programs might be best suited to residents' employment needs, Opportunity Chicago created a three-part menu of programs and services that offered basic employment services, intensive employment services, and technical training programs (*see next page*).

What would a workforce system look like that would improve how public housing residents find and keep their jobs?

All the programs emphasize career advancement (as opposed to job placement). Opportunity Chicago partners developed a targeted sector strategy that focuses on entry-level demand in the **energy efficiency, healthcare, hospitality (retail, restaurant and hotel), manufacturing and technology** industries. Within each industry, Opportunity Chicago partnered with organizations that are deeply integrated in Chicago’s workforce development system. Through work with employers, institutions of higher education and public agencies, Opportunity Chicago developed programs and policies to address the employment needs of both businesses and the workforce.

OPPORTUNITY CHICAGO’S 3 PART MENU OF EMPLOYMENT SERVICES <i>(emphasizing employment and career advancement)</i>		
BASIC EMPLOYMENT SERVICES	INTENSIVE EMPLOYMENT SERVICES	TECHNICAL TRAINING PROGRAMS
Provide rapid job placement in opportunities such as paid internships and full- and part-time jobs. Residents receive help obtaining personal documents, preparing resumes with career exploration, and developing and implementing an employment plan.	Provide access to targeted program models, such as transitional jobs programs, contextualized literacy and adult basic education programs, and industry focused or customized skills training programs.	Provide career pathways offered through City Colleges of Chicago for residents who enroll in certification or degree programs leading directly to employment in their chosen fields.

Independently but simultaneously, CHA was working on several fronts to reshape the employment pathways for its residents. One of them was to create a work requirement that went into effect January 1, 2009. Every adult member of a public housing unit between the ages of 18 and 61 would be required to be employed or engaged in an activity leading to work at least 15 hours⁸ a week (unless exempt or granted “Safe Harbor,” which includes job loss, medical condition or other situations, like domestic violence).⁹ In addition, to qualify for residency in most mixed-income developments, heads of household must be employed or engaged in training for at least 30 hours per week.¹⁰

A 2004-5 analysis of residents’ employment status showed that more than half of all CHA residents had no connection to the labor market within the past two years.¹¹ But five years later, 91 percent of all residents were in compliance with the work requirement.¹² This work requirement helped motivate residents to connect with the range of employment preparation supports and services offered through Opportunity Chicago partners.





Rose Ballard

Pathways to Success

Less than one year ago, Rose Ballard was unemployed and lacked the computer skills needed to enter a job training program. Today she is a training manager at Siemens under a resident hiring opportunity with CHA.

Ballard achieved this career leap with help from the IT-Workforce Development Initiative, a program designed to connect public housing residents with jobs in the information technology (IT) sector.

The IT-Workforce Development Initiative is part of Opportunity Chicago, funded in part by The Partnership for New Communities and jointly administered by Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce Foundation, TEC Services, Inc. and the Chicago Housing Authority Resident Services Division.

With help from TEC Services' program training coordinator, Ballard registered for a basic computer literacy class and quickly progressed through a series of online courses, enjoying the flexible schedule and pace. Soon she qualified for and was accepted into the job training program.

"The adaptability and high-touch nature of this program is essential for participants who have limited skills and work history," said Greg Sutton, Education and Workforce Programs Director of TEC Services, who leads the initiative's training component. "We can help interested residents at nearly any skill level and work them up to where they want to go."

Many residents need more than training alone. The CHA's role in the initiative is to provide supportive services, helping participants overcome a variety of obstacles and life challenges that might otherwise derail their involvement in the program.

After Ballard completed the job training, TEC Services decided to hire her. In a new role as a training coordinator, Ballard helped other public housing residents develop basic technology skills and urged them to work hard and finish the program.

"I was able to let them know it actually works and helps you be more qualified," said Ballard. "It's good to have someone that you know that did it. I did it, so they can do it, too."

TEC Services later informed Ballard of an open position with Siemens. Using her recently honed resume writing and interview skills, Ballard was offered and accepted a full-time training manager position with Siemens, resulting in a 25 percent salary increase.

Opportunity Chicago has generated important lessons about what kinds of programs and services are most effective in helping public housing residents and other low-skilled, low-income job seekers enter and succeed in the workforce. Rose Ballard is one of thousands of public housing residents who have succeeded in gaining skills and employment through new and improved pathways to work.

Opportunity Chicago: Numbers at a Glance

\$27.5 million invested
over 5 years

Over **85 percent** spent
on work readiness,
skills training, and job
placement

5,696 residents placed
in jobs

926 residents completed
certificate training

206 participated
in Contextualized
(workplace) Literacy

178 participated in
Industry Skills Training

1,487 participated in
Transitional Jobs

Nearly **20** providers
involved

data from April 2010

Excerpt from The Partnership for New Communities April 2010 Newsletter

Flexible Funding Makes a Difference

The transformation that has occurred as a result of Opportunity Chicago—for both residents and institutions—would not have been possible without significant changes to the way operations are funded. Even without the final evaluation results for residents complete, Opportunity Chicago’s funding story is a successful one.

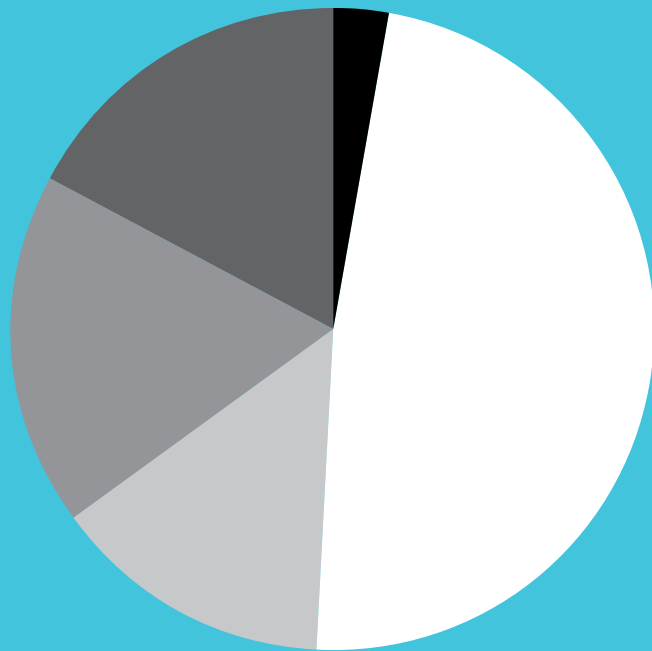
The Partnership for New Communities’ collaborative funding structure pools private and some public resources to support Opportunity Chicago. Its resources are more flexible than most government sources but also involve careful financial oversight. In the end, the initiative surpassed both its resident placement goal and its fund raising goal of \$23 million.

The inclusion of private dollars as a funding source has been a key part of the collaborative, as regulations make certain targeted programs and services ineligible to receive the City’s public workforce development funds. Opportunity Chicago’s public/private funding structure has encouraged cross-sector collaboration to leverage multiple funding streams.

In addition, the CHA is part of HUD’s Moving to Work (MTW) demonstration program, which provides public housing authorities the opportunity to develop and test innovative, locally designed strategies that use federal dollars more efficiently; help residents find employment and become self-sufficient; and increase housing choices for low-income families. The MTW designation gives CHA exemptions from many existing public housing and voucher rules and more flexibility with how they use their federal funds. This flexibility has allowed CHA to be more innovative than otherwise would have been possible.

Opportunity Chicago has lean operations, using less than eight percent for administrative costs, including the formal evaluation. It has committed the bulk of its resources—over 85 percent, or more than \$21 million—toward work readiness preparation, intensive skills training and employment placement.

Total Revenue 2006–2010: \$27.5 Million



- CHA
\$13.2 million (48%)
- Department of Family and Support Services*
\$3.8 million (14%)
- State of Illinois
\$5 million (18%)
- The Partnership for New Communities
\$4.8 million (17%)
- U.S. Department of Labor
\$690K (3%)

*Does not include Community Development Block Grant

The Partnership for New Communities is a funder collaborative structured as a donor advised fund of The Chicago Community Foundation. Opportunity Chicago funders include:

Bank of America

The Chicago Community Trust

Chicago Department of Family and Support Services

Chicago Housing Authority

ComEd, an Exelon Company

Harris Bank

*The Illinois Department of Commerce
and Economic Development*

The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation

The Joyce Foundation

Living Cities

The Lloyd A. Fry Foundation

McCormick Foundation

National Fund for Workforce Solutions

Peoples Gas

Polk Bros. Foundation

State of Illinois

State Street Foundation-State Street Global Advisors

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

U.S. Department of Labor

Measuring the Effects: Opportunity Chicago Evaluation

The Center for Urban Economic Development (CUED) at the University of Illinois at Chicago and Abt Associates were selected to evaluate Opportunity Chicago. The evaluation involves a hybrid of formative and summative measurement methodologies involving the collection and analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data along the following dimensions:

- ▲ *Resident Achievement*
- ▲ *Employer Engagement and Satisfaction*
- ▲ *Systems Integration*
- ▲ *Initiative Development and Management*
- ▲ *Resource Development*

This mix seeks to answer questions not only about resident outcomes, such as how many residents were placed, how long they remain employed and how much they are earning, but also about program outcomes, including what interventions worked with this population and which resident segments performed best in which programs.

The process or “implementation” part of the evaluation has provided information necessary to make evidence-based course corrections to achieve continuous improvement throughout the initiative. It also has allowed stakeholders to refine and assess performance benchmarks for the initiative; documented the strategies and processes being used to prepare public housing residents for employment success; and identified emerging lessons and key issues.

The summative aspect of the evaluation will report on:

- ▲ *Whether or not Opportunity Chicago achieved its stated goal of placing 5,000 residents into jobs over five years*
- ▲ *Which interventions and services produced the best results for public housing residents and employers and which were most cost-effective*
- ▲ *The effects of improved inter-agency coordination on efficiency, process, and outcomes*
- ▲ *The impact of having a dedicated civic fund act as a leader/convener/funder for a specific issue*
- ▲ *The extent to which the initiative’s strategies, systems changes, and processes prepared public housing residents for employment success and whether those strategies are replicable*

The evaluation will be published in Fall 2011.



What's Next for Opportunity Chicago?

As originally conceived, Opportunity Chicago will end in December 2010. Its formal evaluation report will be published in Fall 2011.

In addition to building on the lessons described in this document, the initiative continues to rigorously focus on engaging both residents and employers; on job retention and support services for residents to succeed; and on maintaining and growing the interconnectedness between what the residents need to attach to the labor market and what the larger workforce development system offers them.

Opportunity Chicago created a leadership platform that led to significant policy progress and victories. For example, Opportunity Chicago leaders drove an effort to redirect foundation funding raised to support the city's (ultimately unsuccessful) 2016 Olympic bid to instead leverage federal stimulus dollars for a new initiative using Opportunity Chicago workforce innovations. Opportunity Chicago efforts also have resulted in Chicago's Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) resources being allocated to transitional jobs and contextualized literacy programming. Through The Partnership for New Communities' leadership, Opportunity Chicago was awarded a competitive federal U.S. Department of Labor grant (via the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act) for "green" pathways out of poverty. And Opportunity Chicago leadership has been instrumental in sharing lessons that helped shape the overhaul of the City's workforce investment board.

Ultimately, Opportunity Chicago is about more than assisting public housing residents in their progress toward work. It is about applying the lessons learned in focusing on these residents to all low-income Chicagoans. Opportunity Chicago is advocating for expanded transitional jobs, contextualized literacy and bridge programs. And it has advocated for and helped secure funding for the Chicago Workforce Investment Council to spearhead a collaborative to develop a comprehensive workforce development strategy for all disadvantaged Chicago residents.

In the end, more than goodwill drives this effort. It is about smart public policy advocacy and operational strategy. Opportunity Chicago envisioned the end goal of employed public housing residents and experimented with creative solutions. It recognized that employment is necessary for strong families and healthy communities. Over five years, it prioritized workforce development for public housing residents; institutionalized innovative program models; and changed systems and policies to support connecting residents to work.

Endnotes

- 1 The timeline was changed from 10 years to 15 years.
- 2 The original Opportunity Chicago goal was to help employ 3,000 residents in 3 years. It was later extended to 5,000 residents in 5 years.
- 3 The Mayor's Office of Workforce Development was the original City of Chicago partner. The Mayor's Office of Workforce Development merged with the Chicago Department of Community Development (DCD) in 2008, and then DCD transitioned its workforce development programs to the Chicago Department of Family and Support Services in January 2010.
- 4 Data from Opportunity Chicago's Resource Analysis, January 2010. This document reflects estimated expenditures for Opportunity Chicago between 2006 and 2011.
- 5 Most recent data from April 29, 2010.
- 6 Opportunity Chicago: Year One Assessment. March 2008. Abt Associates and University of Illinois-Chicago.
- 7 CHA has current data shares with Illinois Department of Employment Security, Illinois Department of Human Services, Chicago Public Schools, Chicago Department of Family and Support Services, and the Chicago Department of Community Development.
- 8 This requirement increased to 20 hours per week in 2010.
- 9 CHA, FY 2007 Admissions and Continued Occupancy Policy (ACOP).
- 10 CHA, Minimum Tenant Selection Plan for Mixed-Income/Mixed-Finance Communities.
- 11 Data from 2004-5. The chronically unemployed group did not work during any portion of 2004-2005; the sporadically employed worked from one to seven quarters, and the consistently employed worked all eight quarters.
- 12 Data from Chicago Housing Authority.

Photo Credit:

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