



Recommendations to the Chicago Workforce Investment Council (CWIC)

Launched in 2006 by the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA), the City of Chicago, and The Partnership for New Communities, Opportunity Chicago simultaneously targets the unmet needs of low-skilled public housing residents, the need for changes within the workforce development system and the needs of Chicago-area employers. Based on four years of experience developing and implementing programs, the initiative proposes five recommendations for CWIC.

- 1. Transitional Jobs (TJ) Programs:** *Between now and 2011, Opportunity Chicago recommends creating approximately 1000 subsidized employment positions for program participants*, which provide time-limited, subsidized employment opportunities coupled with intensive wraparound services. This estimate is based on current contractual obligations between CHA and program providers. The typical cost per participant is \$7,000 for a three month TJ program, based on estimates from the National Transitional Jobs Network. CWIC should commit to finding short term subsidized employment opportunities for CHA residents who are participating in TJ programs, similar to CWIC-developed internships for Chicago Public School students. Additionally, CWIC should help TJ providers find unsubsidized employment opportunities. Between now and 2011, Opportunity Chicago estimates needing approximately 800 unsubsidized jobs for residents. Each year, from 2011 to 2015, an additional 500 subsidized positions and 400 unsubsidized positions should be created.
- 2. Contextualized Literacy Programs:** *Opportunity Chicago recommends that CWIC build on the promising outcomes of Opportunity Chicago's contextualized literacy programs, which raise literacy levels within a particular occupational context, and support expansion of these programs using public workforce dollars.* To grow these programs, CWIC should work with the Chicago Department of Family and Support Services (DFSS) to determine how additional resources can be directed toward this program model in the coming years. In conversation with CHA and other partners, CWIC should also determine how to best leverage the capacity of City Colleges of Chicago (CCC) to serve as the next step in the career path for residents who participate in contextualized literacy programs. CWIC should monitor the success of the expanded contextualized literacy programs. As the programs serve greater numbers of residents (and other low-skilled job seekers), CWIC should gather data to inform future programmatic decision making.
- 3. Bridge Programs:** *Opportunity Chicago recommends that CWIC incorporate the expansion of bridge programs into its ongoing work with CCC.* Bridge programs seek to raise the academic level of participants while teaching basic information about, and skills for, a particular occupation. As the contextualized literacy programs are expanded, CWIC should work with those providers and CCC to ensure that CHA residents who participate in the literacy programs are linked to bridge programs at CCC. Better coordination across these programs will enable more CHA residents to take advantage of the opportunity presented by the Intergovernmental Agreement between CHA and CCC. This will also allow more residents to be successful in completing a program oriented toward the world of work.
- 4. Supply and Demand Side Coordination:** *Opportunity Chicago urges CWIC to incorporate a mechanism for injecting supply side input into its existing demand-focused groups.* If CWIC hires a staff person or creates a task force to work on supply side issues, the staff person or a representative from the task force should attend all meetings of the sector-focused groups. As CWIC fleshes out its plans for addressing labor supply concerns, Opportunity Chicago stakeholders have four years of demonstrated experience and should be contacted to provide input on how to ensure that the needs of CHA residents (and other disadvantaged populations) are met.

5. **Infrastructure and Management:** Opportunity Chicago has learned a great deal about successful management of a long-term, multi-stakeholder initiative, much of which is likely applicable to the staff of CWIC as it considers how to effectively set up and manage its task forces and advisory groups. ***CWIC could: 1) engage a neutral facilitator with content knowledge to ensure the initiative remains true to its original goals, desired outcomes, and proposed timelines; 2) ensure that all key partners are involved in the initial setting of goals and priorities and that these goals are revisited periodically to verify that they are still appropriate; and 3) leverage the infrastructure and expertise of other related initiatives whenever possible.***