

The Partnership for New Communities

Civic Leadership for Chicago's Neighborhoods

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Opportunity Chicago Nationally Recognized as Pioneer in Finding Workforce Solutions

***Workforce Development Initiative Selected as One of
Four Regional Sites to Receive Money in Launch of National Fund***

CHICAGO – (September 5, 2007) Opportunity Chicago, a \$23 million collaborative of the Mayor's Office of Workforce Development, the Chicago Housing Authority, The Partnership for New Communities and other partners, has been recognized for its work to connect low-wage, low-skilled workers to more job opportunities with a \$450,000 award from the newly launched National Fund for Workforce Solutions.

Opportunity Chicago is one of four regional partnerships from across the country selected in a highly competitive process for the initial round of grants from the Fund.

A collaborative effort of the U.S. Labor Department, the Annie E. Casey, Ford and Hitachi Foundations and other funders, the National Fund for Workforce Solutions aims to raise \$50 million to strengthen and expand effective workforce initiatives around the country and place at least 50,000 people in jobs nationwide.

"The programs and initiatives that this fund supports will help people develop the skills they need to be economically successful, and that's good for American families, for the economy and for the nation as a whole" said Susan Berresford, president of the Ford Foundation. "The fund seeks to nurture these innovations and to build partnerships in the private and public sectors that reach people in need."

In Year 1 of Opportunity Chicago, more than 1,300 public-housing residents gained employment, exceeding its goal of 1,000 placements per year. Year 2 is on track to deliver similar results by December 2007.

"We are pleased to partner with the National Fund for Workforce Solutions," said David Hanson, commissioner of the Mayor's Office of Workforce Development. "This affiliation will further

enhance Chicago's existing workforce development system by enabling us to expand our reach to employers as well as job seekers. It also helps us create opportunities for public housing residents who are transitioning to self-sufficiency."

By incorporating best practices, capitalizing on expertise through a committee of expert advisers and engaging employers in program development, Opportunity Chicago is working to offer employment and career advancement opportunities for low-skilled and low-income workers.

"Rebuilding public housing is not just about bricks and mortar. It's also about people - their neighborhood, their education and their work," said CHA CEO Sharon Gist-Gilliam. "Through Opportunity Chicago residents receive the resources they need to find permanent jobs and take an active role in the Plan for Transformation."

Along with Opportunity Chicago, the Fund has made grants to workforce collaboratives in San Diego, Los Angeles and greater Washington, D.C.

The Fund's founders maintain that high-quality workforce partnerships are critically needed because the nation faces a shortage of well prepared workers. During the next 20 years, the American workforce is expected to grow by only half of its earlier pace, and the nation will see no growth in the number of native-born workers in their prime working years.

"Employers are struggling to find well-trained workers, while many low-wage workers lack the skills or training they need to become financially secure," said Maria Hibbs, executive director of The Partnership for New Communities, a group of Chicago business, civic and philanthropic leaders supporting the goal of public-housing transformation. "We have developed a strong employment initiative to address both of these pressing needs in Chicago."

The Chicago Jobs Council manages the initiative. Monies from the Fund and other Opportunity Chicago investors are solicited and pooled through The Partnership for New Communities, a fund of the Chicago Community Foundation.

Other investors include The Chicago Community Trust, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Bank of America, the Polk Bros. Foundation, the Joyce Foundation, the McCormick Tribune Foundation, the Lloyd A. Fry Foundation and ComEd, an Exelon company.

For more information, visit the following websites:

The Partnership for New Communities – www.thepartnershipfornewcommunities.org

The Chicago Housing Authority – www.thecha.org

The Mayor's Office of Workforce Development – www.cityofchicago.org/mowd

The Chicago Jobs Council – www.cjc.net