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Bridging Workers to Skills and to Jobs

Skills for Chicagoland's Future is regarded as one of the most forward-looking and innovative job placement organizations of its kind. Its origins date back to 2009, during the depths of the Great Recession, when Mayor Daley was looking to bridge displaced workers with jobs by working closely with prospective employers. Skills for Chicagoland's Future (first known as Chicago Career Tech) became that bridge.

Civic Consulting Alliance and its partners provided critical support in both the creation of the original Chicago Career Tech program and its subsequent evolution into Skills for Chicagoland's Future.

Challenge

The Great Recession produced a significant and unique spike in unemployment across Chicago. Unlike past recessions, where workers were called back after the economy turned around, during this recession jobs were being eliminated — and many of them for good. Without greater levels of technological competence, long-working Chicagoans risked joining the ranks of the long-term unemployed.

Many of the newly unemployed found themselves stuck in a “no-man’s land” between government job training services, which are typically aimed at entry-level jobs for low-skill individuals, and private sector outplacement services, which are typically provided to displaced workers making \$80,000 or more. This gap between the low- and high-wage jobs left workers in the middle without recourse.

Action

Chicago Career Tech (CCT) was the City's response to this gap. In 2009, the Mayor's Office approached Civic Consulting Alliance for help in assessing the feasibility of creating a train-to-hire program. The resulting program was CCT, which focused on connecting classroom training and hands-on learning with direct pathways to employment.

Working with partners such as Huron Consulting, DeVry Education Group, Microsoft, Lee Hecht Harrison and Challenger, Gray & Christmas, Civic Consulting Alliance analyzed the demographics of recently laid-off workers, likely job openings and opportunities for job retraining. Mayer Brown helped to

evaluate the legal requirements for allowing participants to receive a training stipend without reducing their unemployment benefits. CNA, Microsoft and other local funders stepped up to provide seed funding that underwrote the first class of workers. And in May of 2010, CCT officially launched, with World Business Chicago assuming operational responsibility.

After its launch, CCT continued to evolve. Employers provided training in the skills they desired as a part of pilot programs — and analysis of those pilots showed promising results. Placement in jobs for these programs was 20-25% greater than traditional, classroom-based workforce programs.

Fast Facts

2,500+

Unemployed job seekers hired between 2012 and 2015 through Skills for Chicagoland's Future partnerships

50+

Partnerships with Chicagoland employers created

370+

Unemployed job seekers enrolled in train-to-hire programs between 2012 and 2015

With this success already achieved, CCT again sought Civic Consulting Alliance's help in 2011 — this time to transform CCT into a new, demand-driven intermediary: Skills for Chicagoland's Future.

To accomplish this transformation, a working group of critical stakeholders was formed, including World Business Chicago, the Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership and funders including the Joyce Foundation and the Pritzker Traubert Family Foundation.

Over the course of several months, this working group developed a three-year business plan to guide the approach, organizational structure, funding and overall strategy for the new entity.

Results

Today, Skills for Chicagoland's Future is a nationally-recognized public-private partnership working to match businesses with qualified jobseekers. It has operationalized a new kind of model for workforce training and job placement: one focused on teaming up directly from the start to meet the specific, existing needs of employers.

More than 2,500 unemployed job seekers have been hired through partnerships with more than 50 employers since Skills for Chicagoland's Future launched. Additionally, more than 370 unemployed job seekers have been enrolled in train-to-hire programs, which result in immediate employment upon successful completion of the programs.

Pro Bono Partners

Carolyn Grisko and Associates

Cecilia Loftus Design

Challenger, Gray & Christmas

Devry Education Group

Huron Consulting Group

Lee Hecht Harrison

Mayer Brown

Microsoft Corporation