

# TOWARDS A NEW CULTURE OF CIVIC LEADERSHIP FOR CHICAGO

*A draft white paper for discussion*

March 19, 2018

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**BACKGROUND ..... 2**

**THE CULTURE OF CIVIC LEADERSHIP ..... 4**

**CIVIC CONSULTING ALLIANCE: WHAT’S OUR ROLE? ..... 6**

**BUILDING BLOCKS TO SUPPORT A NEW CULTURE ..... 7**

**INITIAL WORK PLAN ..... 7**

# TOWARDS A NEW CULTURE OF CIVIC LEADERSHIP FOR CHICAGO

## BACKGROUND

### **So much progress, so little change . . .**

As the third-largest region in the country and in the top 25 for global cities, Chicago provides uniquely deep and vast resources for many of its residents. Some of the best schools and universities in the world are located in the region. Tens of millions of tourists flock to the City every year to enjoy the beautiful lakefront and Riverwalk, outdoor concert venues and the vibrant restaurant, nightlife and unparalleled richness of cultural activities. The broadly diversified economy provides economic opportunity for millions, and the majority live in stable, safe communities where they feel at home.

These and other outcomes are, in many cases, the result of decades of sustained civic leadership and engagement that many are rightly proud of. In education, for example, Chicago Public Schools, once called by the US Secretary of Education the worst school system in the nation, is now recognized as one of the best.<sup>1</sup> The causes of this progress are many and varied, and without doubt include the civic leadership of Chicago, the business, non-profit, philanthropic, neighborhood-based and public sector leaders who have kept school improvement and student success at the top of their agenda for decades.

At the same time, race, ethnicity, and gender still predict many educational outcomes. For example, while 36% of White women entering 9<sup>th</sup> grade in Chicago Public Schools, less than half that number (16%) of Latinas earn a bachelor's degree in the same time and a mere 6% of Black men meet this mark.<sup>2</sup>

This pattern of progress that proceeds to a point but falls short of equity (i.e., outcomes that cannot be predicted by race, ethnicity, or gender) is similar in other quality of life indicators. For example, in health collaborations like the Metropolitan Chicago Breast Cancer Task Force are addressing specific racial disparities with inspiring results. Since the inception of the Task Force in 2008, Chicago has led the nation in lowering the death rate from breast cancer for African American women. Disparity in survival between African American and White women in Chicago is down 35 percent over the last five years.<sup>3</sup>

At the same time, life expectancy in the Loop (85 years) is 16 years greater than in West Garfield Park (69 years), few stops west of the Loop on the Blue Line (Figure 1).<sup>4</sup> The last time life expectancy in the US was 69 years was in the 1940s for women and 1970s for men.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Reardon, S.F., & Hinze-Pifer, R. (2017). Test Score Growth Among Chicago Public School Students, 2009-2014.

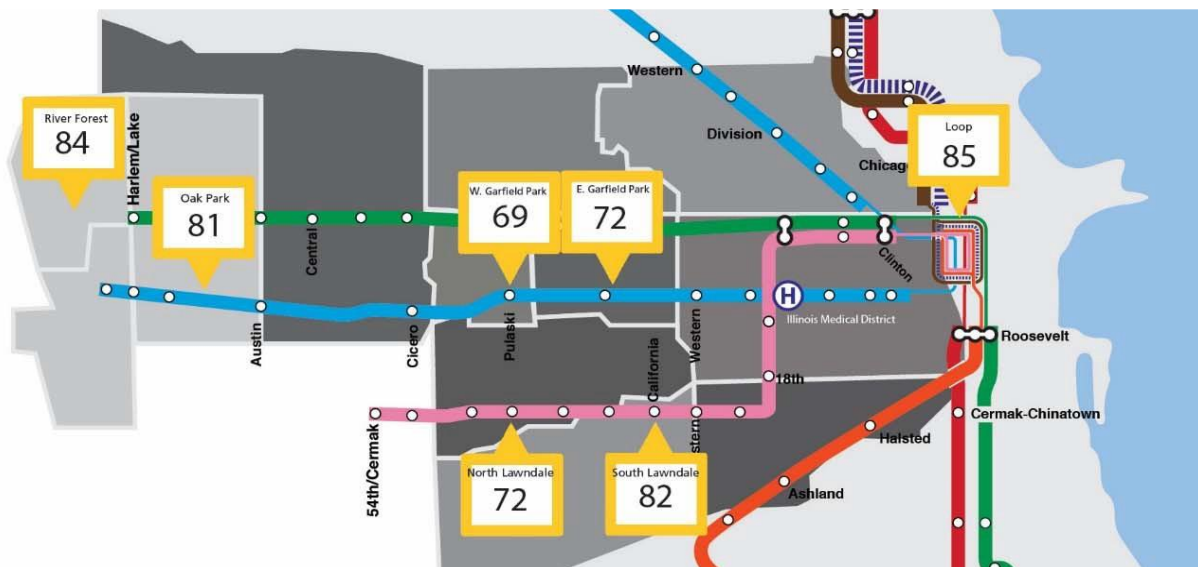
<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>3</sup> Source: <http://www.chicagobreastcancer.org/hearstprize/>

<sup>4</sup> *A Tale of Three Cities: The State of Racial Justice in Chicago*, UIC Institute for Research on Race and Public Policy, by Henricks, Amanda E. Lewis, Iván Arenas, and Deana G. Lewis and published May 19, 2017

<sup>5</sup> Source: <http://www.demog.berkeley.edu/~andrew/1918/figure2.html>

Figure 1: Life Expectancy (years) at birth from the Loop to River Forest<sup>6</sup>



The main driver of this disparity is neither gun violence nor a lack of access to advanced medical treatments. Rather, it is the social determinants of health – basic things like access to healthy food, stable housing, predictable employment, exposure to violence and trauma, and the like – that turn what is for most minor health issues into life-threatening challenges for others.

Moreover, in addition to the dramatic impact on the quality of life for individuals, these inequities are not in line with the values and norms inherent in maintaining a democratic society. When some groups of people are systematically excluded from decision-making, the basic premise of democracy - that the power to govern is granted by the consent of those governed - erodes. For example, despite our region being home to the fifth-largest population of Asian-Americans in the country, in the history of Chicago's City Council only one Asian-American has been elected as alderman<sup>7</sup>. This exclusion and erosion of a democratic principle reduces trust in all society's institutions, public and private. Over time, those not included becoming further alienated, which reduces their ability to fundamentally impact their living conditions in the way those included can.

These and many other inequities combined with the lack of inclusion at times feel intractable. In his seminal work *Great American City: Chicago and the Enduring Neighborhood Effect*, Robert Sampson chronicled the character of Chicago neighborhoods between 1970 and 2000. Despite so much progress in so many important aspects of quality of life over 30 years, the best predictor of a neighborhood characteristic in 2000 was its characteristic in 1970. Where changes have occurred, they often inadvertently increase, rather than mitigate segregation and inequity. The map of Chicago on most any dimension still looks like it did nearly 40 years ago: residents in the central business district and North

<sup>6</sup> Source: Rush University Medical Center

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.chicagotribune.com/ct-the-chicago-city-council-meet-the-members-20150516-htmlstory.html>

experiencing a much higher quality of life and ability to impact their living conditions than fellow residents in the South, Southwest, and West of the region. So much progress, but so little change.

## THE CULTURE OF CIVIC LEADERSHIP

Chicago benefits from a long and extraordinary culture of civic leadership. Our tradition of private sector involvement in the advancement of the region is the envy of other cities. Today, the context in which civic leadership is exercised is changing. Senior corporate leaders must increasingly focus on national and global responsibilities, younger leaders have higher expectations for civic engagement of themselves and their employees but often find it difficult to connect, and attitudes and trust in public and private institutions and the leaders of those institutions have deteriorated. Moreover, the complexity of the opportunities and seemingly intractable nature of the enduring challenges suggest that deep change is needed.

But what change is needed? We address that question by examining the culture of civic leadership in Chicago. Culture, in any human system, is the compilation of the *mindsets and beliefs*; *behavioral norms*; and *shared expectations* that a group of people exhibits. It is the combination of these elements that set the stage – formally and informally – for how decisions are made by individuals and groups and how the entire system operates.

To understand better the culture of civic leadership in Chicago, we interviewed more than 50 leaders from a range of sectors and organizations – from large public agencies to small community-based non-profits, educational institutions and healthcare providers, business leaders and foundation program officers, and others. As we began to understand some of the elements of today's culture, it became apparent that many of the past accomplishments can be understood, at least in part, as manifestations of the region's extraordinary culture of civic leadership. At the same time many of the persistent barriers can also be understood, again in part, as the result of different aspects – real or perceived – of Chicago's culture of civic leadership.

For example, there is a very strong *behavioral norm* that business leaders should be involved in improving education in Chicago. This has undoubtedly been a factor in the aforementioned improvements in Chicago Public Schools. However, another *behavioral norm*, making inviting in those without decision-making authority after decisions are for the most part made, creates significant friction, especially between CPS and the communities it serves.

Similarly, the *shared belief* among Leaders in Chicago that together they can make great things happen, a collective “can-do” attitude, was no doubt an important element in launching the Metropolitan Chicago Breast Cancer Task Force. At the same time, in some groups *behavioral norms* dictate that it is impolite to bring up structural racism and how our existing policies have created the inequities mentioned earlier. Progress in addressing the broader social determinants of health is likely also limited by the *shared expectation* among some that this is “just the way it is” in some neighborhoods.

If the culture of civic leadership has contributed to both past progress and also contains elements that limit long-term change, what would characterize a future culture, able to address today’s larger challenges and opportunities?

The interviews identified common themes for a vision of the future culture that is more inclusive, crosses traditional barriers, allows many to plug in, exhibits more distributed decision-making, and assigns high urgency to resolving persistent inequities of opportunity. Some of these elements are described in Table 1 below. Importantly, many brought up the need for a vision – indeed, shared expectations – for what the future could be in Chicago. Many are hopeful, energized and focused on designing a future where the path to prosperity is possible for everyone.

**Table 1:** Potential elements of a future civic leadership culture

<b>DRAFT FOR DISCUSSION - Potential Elements of Culture - DRAFT FOR DISCUSSION</b>		
<b>Mindsets and Beliefs</b>	<b>Behavioral Norms</b>	<b>Shared Expectations</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Everyone can be successful</li> <li>• Sharing data and ideas can lead to better solutions</li> <li>• Including those impacted can lead to better solutions</li> <li>• Everyone in the region is a valued human being</li> <li>• Segregation is not a natural phenomenon – it takes energy to maintain</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Young leaders are involved across sectors and power structures early in their careers</li> <li>• Developing relationships in and across all Chicago neighborhoods is the norm</li> <li>• Individuals routinely come together and interact across socioeconomic, racial, and other divides, knowing each other in the pursuit of common objectives</li> <li>• Leaders within organizations routinely draw upon established trust-based relationships across power structures and other divides to help solve common problems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What defined the past 50 years does not need to define the future; outcomes cannot be predicted by racial or ethnic status</li> <li>• Chicago is a place where everyone is connected and can participate in the future of the region</li> <li>• The city grows in a way that connects people and reduces racial segregation</li> <li>• Everyone works to heal the earth, moving from a focus on separate to unity and equity</li> </ul>

The culture of civic leadership as described above is a group phenomenon. For individuals, a new culture would imply new definitions of what it means to be a civic leader. For example, if elements of Table 1 characterize the collective culture of civic leadership in Chicago one day, a civic leader may be anyone who creates the above conditions by actively engaging in efforts to make the region a great place for everyone to live in and work by reducing inequities that effect the health and economic well-being of our community and by creating a better environment for individuals, families and businesses to thrive. The definition of individual leaders is one part of the work ahead.

## CIVIC CONSULTING ALLIANCE: WHAT'S OUR ROLE?

The mission of Civic Consulting Alliance is to **make the Chicago region a great place for everyone to live in and work**. This work is carried out through initiatives in four platforms: Public Safety and Criminal Justice; Education, Economic Vitality; and Civic Leadership.

Traditionally, CCA has helped public sector leaders drive critical change within institutions such as the City Colleges of Chicago, the Chicago Police Department, the Cook County State's Attorney, etc., leveraging the support of pro bono partners from across the region. This work continues, but increasingly efforts to improve outcomes under the purview of any single institution is limited by a lack of trust between the communities the institution aims to serve and the institutions – public and private – themselves.

At the same time, the model of helping a single client improve its effectiveness has limitations. To meet our mission, CCA is increasingly being called on to lead multi-client, cross-sector initiatives, usually spanning the responsibility of multiple public sector officials and non-profit leaders to advance a common social goal. These more complex efforts are critical because the issues facing the region are more complex than any single institution can address. But the thin fabric of human connectivity in many cases inhibits jointly pursuing the stated objectives of equitable outcomes. Individuals or organizations close to the frontlines often do not trust people perceived to be in power to have the best intentions. Those with resources and power often do not have the will or patience to spend the time necessary to agree on common approaches. And when people do meet across their respective silos, they find it difficult to bridge the gaps in background, power dynamics, and belief systems to collaborate openly and achieve better outcomes.

In both our traditional and new work, the lack of trust – aspects of Chicago's culture of civic leadership – limits our ability to succeed. To achieve our mission, CCA must help create a more connected fabric. And as a part of the region's business community, enjoying trust in the business community and public sector entities, and with increasing ties to community-based organizations, CCA is in a unique position to lend a hand to this work, along with the many others who are working, collectively and individually, to make our region a better place for everyone.

## BUILDING BLOCKS TO SUPPORT A NEW CULTURE

Building on our interviews over the past year, and drawing from work on cultural transformation in large organizations in the business context, we have developed four “building blocks” that we believe will help develop a new culture of civic leadership in Chicago:

- 1. Assume personal growth and ownership:** This region’s leadership structure is a human system, and for any human organization to transform, its members must be open to a journey of personal change. This means re-thinking the basic assumptions that drive our actions. Those leading need to be the first ones to dive into the deep end of the pool, taking personal ownership of the problems and opportunities and simultaneously challenging their own assumptions.
- 2. Enlist across current power structure:** In addition to working across traditional boundaries of race, class, sector, and age, communities of purpose need to work across traditional power siloes. It is the human connections between communities that do not today exist and must be nourished, and this can only happen if connections are made across our greatest divides.
- 3. Facilitate communities of purpose:** A new culture of civic leadership must intentionally develop and support people finding each other through communities of purpose across all sectors. Leaders must grow and develop in these communities while they realize tangible results and develop trust in one another. It is only by working together that trust is built where it is currently lacking. At the same time, these communities are examples of the new culture that will in turn inspire others to initiate meaningful change themselves.
- 4. Increase the scale of the civic leadership:** Many more people must be involved than currently for many years to substantively impact leadership structures and the trajectory of Chicago and the region. Having a substantial impact on the trajectory of a region with more than eight million people, all must challenge themselves to develop and participate in approaches that involve tens of thousands of people to move towards a tipping point where the culture, nature, and impact of civic leadership is qualitatively different.

These building blocks outline one potential approach, cognizant that many are possible and likely necessary. As described in the work plan below, part of our work will be to both develop these building blocks further, while informing and learning from others who are pursuing similar goals.

## INITIAL WORK PLAN

The work of transforming the culture of civic leadership will require a very long-term approach. Fully expecting this, it is even more important to begin with urgency. We recognize that the path will not be linear. There will be twists and turns and starts and stops. But we must begin, and to do so we have developed a plan for the coming year’s work, one that allows for doing and learning simultaneously, to begin a virtuous cycle that will inform and potentially form the core of a multi-year effort.



*Doing*

**Identify potential paths** to test building block elements and combinations of elements by segmenting CCA's current initiatives according to:

- Type of problems that new leadership structures might address. Some types of problems may be more amenable to being solved by new leadership culture than others;
- Presence of building blocks in current initiatives. In some cases, large-scale efforts in the region are already working on two (or three) elements, and a test would involve adding two (or one) more elements. In other cases, smaller efforts might be working on all four elements, but require a plan and resources to scale;
- Approaches CCA might take to add new building blocks or scale for each type of problem and current initiative.

**Create a client:** In the absence of a clear, singular client for this work, it will be important to create what is in effect a client, likely an advisory committee consisting of business, non-profit, community, and philanthropic leaders. Potentially this would also include public sector leaders, our traditional clients.

**Use our existing close networks to help test elements:** Using the segmentation described above, building on CCA's existing engagements (West Side United, Partnership for Safe and Peaceful Communities, etc.), and engaging our existing partner structures (Board and Leadership Council, in particular) CCA will develop pilots with several existing efforts, bringing resources and capabilities to each. For example:

- Providing opportunities for facilitated personal learning that allow individuals include intentional personal growth as part of the work. This could involve activities such as:
  - Deep, semi-structured interviews to help participants identify current belief systems and potential paths for change, and
  - Wilderness retreats to facilitate personal growth, connection with participants, and development of internal capabilities
- Adding new members to initiatives that do not span power structures
- Developing a plan to scale existing efforts that are already working on all four elements but lack a plan and resources to scale

**Build new partnerships and capabilities – including where CCA may have less credibility:** While CCA enjoys high credibility within some of Chicago's power structures, the organization's credibility is less consistent in some communities. To broaden our reach and ability to work with leaders across the entire region, we will look for opportunities to build specific new partnerships in all of our work.

## *Learning*

**Formalize our thinking:** This paper is our starting point from which to find and engage collaborators as well as inspire others to participate. Going forward, we will develop a more thorough articulation of these elements, including potential avenues for developing scale over 2- and 10-year timeframes, will also serve as a baseline of thinking that we can modify as we learn what works and what does not.

**Benchmark:** Chicago is not the only city struggling with the issue of inclusion, equity, and culture. We will aim to understand who else in Chicago is doing or has tried similar work, and what lessons can we learn. Similarly, we will look at what other regions, or even countries, have tried, with what results and what are the implications for Chicago.

**Conduct in-depth interviews:** Building on the several dozen interviews we have already conducted with leaders across Chicago, CCA will conduct 20-30 additional, deep semi-structured interviews with current leaders of organizations within the existing civic infrastructure. The goal of these interviews will be to yield insights on the mindsets and current belief systems held by civic leaders, outline how these can be changed to advance Chicago as a more equitable, vibrant region, and start the creation of a group of individuals having gone through similar experiences.

**Map the current network of civic leadership:** Using a methodology of personal referrals and principles of mapping social networks, CCA will undertake an analysis and mapping of the current civic infrastructure. This will help identify the individuals who are informal and formal influencers across current power structures and enable CCA to perform targeted outreach.

**Create a network of interested practitioners who share approaches and learnings:** The need for more effective civic leadership is well recognized. Indeed, many are working on different approaches. We recognize that ours is one approach – a business informed approach – and that learning from others and connecting to other approaches is critical. As no single approach will be *the* right path for Chicago, CCA aims to be a part of and support the development of a network of practitioners who will share both ideas and lessons learned, as well as help structure new pilots that, collectively, will provide some of the scale that is ultimately needed.

## **CONCLUSION: PATH FORWARD**

Civic Consulting Alliance is committed to the work of creating a new culture of civic leadership in Chicago for years to come. Building anew, jointly creating what ties all together and creating a new fabric of connections will be paramount to greater equity. We welcome all who want to be part of moving forward together and help write the next chapter in Chicago's rich history.