

**Illinois Workforce Advantage:  
State of Illinois' Place-Based  
Community Development Initiative**

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**Richard S. Kordesh, Ph.D.  
Director  
Illinois Workforce Advantage**

**Office of the Governor  
State of Illinois**

## **Introduction**

In September, 2000 Governor George H. Ryan announced the start-up of Illinois Workforce Advantage (IWA), his new place-based initiative focused on the revitalization of distressed communities. Senior staff from the Governor's Office and eighteen state agencies have engaged with working groups from nine targeted communities to strengthen anchor institutions, to institutionalize a public-private community development process, bolster family enterprises, and encourage outcome-driven project design.

## **IWA's Pilot Program Implementation Plan (March, 2000)**

During the Spring and Summer of 2000, a steering committee comprised of staff from the Office of the Governor, state agency directors, and agency senior staff laid the foundation for IWA. The steering committee established the project's goals, its desired outcomes, and the characteristics that would distinguish its pilot projects in six distressed target areas. Those target areas were to include:

- The Chicago communities of North Lawndale, Humboldt Park, and Englewood;
- The Chicago suburb, Harvey;
- East St. Louis, and
- The "Southern Seven" Counties: Hardin, Pope, Massac, Alexander, Union, Pulaski, and Johnson.

(In 2002, IWA added three new target areas to the above list: the Little Village neighborhood in Chicago, the Chicago suburb, Maywood, and Rock Island (focusing on the Longview, Douglas Park, and Old Chicago neighborhoods).

The committee produced an implementation plan during March, 2000 that laid out IWA's overall strategy.

**Goal of the Pilot Projects** IWA engages state agencies and community organizations in joint efforts to attack the underlying, environmental causes of the high levels of distress experienced by families in these areas. As the steering committee stated, healthy anchor institutions are vitally important to the viability of any community (March, 2000, IWA Implementation Plan, p.1):

*The Illinois Workforce Advantage Initiative (IWA) is a location-based community development program. The ultimate goal is to improve the outcomes for families. **The primary strategy for accomplishing this goal is to change the environment in historically distressed communities by creating new or revitalized anchor institutions such as schools, health clinics, human service agencies, and businesses.** This IWA targeted initiative in human services infrastructure will ultimately promote the prevention or amelioration of social problems, more effective treatment*

*interventions for individuals and families, and opportunities for community residents to succeed in the workforce.*

IWA would seek new strategies for utilizing human services as tools for community development: “The IWA pilot projects will address a fundamental barrier between what human service agencies deliver and what communities really need to grow and thrive.”

### **Outcomes**

Reflecting its comprehensive orientation, IWA was charged with devising state-local strategies to pursue the following outcomes:

- IWA will create opportunities for community members to be successful in the workplace;
- IWA will improve the health status of its target communities;
- IWA will improve graduation rates;
- IWA will tailor one-stop services to meet the unique needs of each community;
- IWA will institutionalize a sustainable, public/private community development process; and,
- IWA will support the success of local businesses.

Within the above outcomes, IWA would work with communities to tailor them to fit with their most pressing concerns and opportunities for impact.

### **Essential Characteristics of the Pilots**

According to the IWA implementation plan, five characteristics would distinguish these pilot projects. They would be (March, 2000, pp.1-2.):

*Place-based, that is, carefully targeted to particular needy areas.*

*Outcome-driven, focusing on measuring community improvement rather than the amount of service delivery.*

*Collaborative, by engaging community residents to partner in the solution of critical problems. Existing community collaboratives would be pulled into this process whenever possible.*

*Intentional, by thoughtfully and deliberately using public resources to leverage informal and private resources in ways that will strengthen communities.*

*Strategic, in focusing not on the restoration of the status quo, but rather, on transforming existing environments.*

Working within the above parameters, IWA began implementation in September, 2000.

## **Anchor Institutions as Virtual Family Resource Centers**

“Anchor institutions” are schools, businesses, agencies, religious institutions and community centers that help maintain the identity and viability of a community. Because of their strong local roots, they produce goods and deliver services in ways that are tailored for the local culture. People see these institutions as reflective of their own beliefs and as responsive to their personal and familial concerns. Thriving communities enjoy the presence of many diverse, interconnected anchor institutions. They help ensure the stability of capital and cultural assets. Their stability buttresses property values. They provide public gathering places and function as hubs for forming strong social networks.

IWA is helping each community to rebuild its anchor institutions, especially those that are critical to education success, getting people employed, and making human services as accessible as possible. It is doing so by working with community leaders to select a vital institution building priority, and then to create the networks, the digital linkages, the multi-organizational consensus, and agreement on outcomes around this opportunity. The anchor institution will not only provide services, but will serve as a hub for rebuilding working networks among other organizations in the community.

IWA has been referring to these institutions as “**virtual family resource centers.**” They create productive roles for mothers and fathers to play in their children’s education and in their own efforts to improve their employment prospects. They link parents to local health and human services through co-location of services and improved referral and tracking systems. They enable parents and youth to bridge the digital divide. They provide links for families to the state’s workforce development system, including one-stop employment and training centers. By tying together diverse public and nonprofit agencies, they act virtually as comprehensive resource networks for families.

**Harvey’s Family Education Center** Based in Harvey elementary schools, this center offers a core program of early childhood assessment, plus linkage for parents to the services of ten local and state agencies in Harvey. Over two years, IWA will have allocated \$410,000 to create this new institution. Two new health projects funded by grants from the Illinois Department of Public Health add to Harvey’s base of anchor institutions. A \$100,000 grant to Elementary School District 152 will support a new school health curriculum and outreach effort. A three-year grant of \$1,180,000 will support a new federally qualified health center. IWA is also providing \$550,000 for the new state one-stop employment and training center in Harvey.

**The Alpha Omega Work Readiness Center in East St. Louis** A high priority IWA investment in a new anchor institution in East St. Louis is strengthening the Alpha Omega Work Readiness Center. Created by an East St. Louis family, this center will contain the family’s own growing business, a computer lab with capacity to train youth in computer-aided design, a training facility for youth in repairing and upgrading computers, and a comprehensive work readiness program for TANF clients to be operated by Better Family Life, Inc. Better Family Life is a nationally renowned community development corporation now located in St. Louis. IWA has provided \$390,000 in funding for the Better Family Life project.

**Southern Seven's Community Resource Centers** Building on the Southern Illinois Delta Empowerment Zone's efforts, IWA's first focus on creating a virtual family resource center in the southern seven counties focuses on school-based community learning centers. A grant of \$450,000 from IWA funds is enabling FoCUS of Southern Illinois to make mini-grants to centers in schools in all seven counties. Moreover, FoCUS has created a central website, enabling the centers to operate as a regional learning network. Formal referral agreements will be established with the state's workforce development system, including the new, comprehensive employment and training one-stop that will be opened in Marion. FoCUS will serve as the network's hub, offering training, coordination of joint grant writing, and other value-added services.

**Humboldt Park's Strategic Learning Network** The Chicago community of Humboldt Park is taking an approach that is similar to the southern seven strategy. With the Near North Neighborhood Network (NNNN) operating as the hub, the community is building a network of learning centers in nine elementary schools. These centers are similar to the network of five centers already operating in nearby Logan Square schools. IWA has directed \$600,000 to the centers coordinated by NNNN plus \$100,000 for stipends for parent mentors in the Logan Square centers.

**Englewood's School-Family Support Network** The IWA working group in Englewood formed a multi-organizational committee to begin working with public schools to improve educational outcomes. IWA is making grants worth \$350,000 to Southwest Women Working Together and the Mary McDowell Settlement House to coordinate a multi-faceted effort aimed at strengthening five local elementary schools. New school social workers will provide intensive case management to at-risk schools. Parents will get classes in parent education and literacy. IWA is providing \$97,000 to Community Organizing for Family Issues (COFI) to run leadership development seminars for parents. A youth council will be formed with youth representing all of the participating schools. IWA and the Futures for Kids office steered a grant from the private company, G-Tech, into the Holmes School in Englewood to create a state-of-the-art computer lab.

**Ex-Offender Reentry Network in North Lawndale** The North Lawndale working group chose to focus on a vexing issue that is facing many inner-city communities: the large numbers of ex-offenders reentering the neighborhood from prison. Thus, a network of agencies and community organizations has devised a community-wide strategy for helping ex-offenders restart their lives successfully. IWA has granted \$300,000 in support of this effort. IWA has also positioned this project to receive a \$2 million grant from the federal Department of Justice. As a further effort to bolster anchor institutions in North Lawndale, IWA leveraged grants of over \$1.2 million through the Illinois Department of Public Health to establish a community-wide immunization outreach effort and to expand a federally qualified health center. The immunization project, jointly operated by the Sinai Community Institute and the Lawndale Christian Health Center, utilizes trained community members to go into homes, churches, and other neighborhood sites and find parents who have yet to get their preschool children immunized. One new health center, also operated by Lawndale Christian Health Center, is serving families in North Lawndale's new Homan Square Community Center.

**Little Village Violence Prevention Collaborative** The Little Village Community Development Corporation has created a community-wide strategy for reducing violence in the neighborhood. IWA is providing \$300,000 for several components of this effort: parent leadership development, youth involvement in community planning, gang intervention, and the creation of school-based learning centers. IWA is also supporting Circle of Family Leadership with a \$75,000 grant. This church-based program engages parents in mutual support and education aimed at family violence prevention. In addition, IWA worked with the Illinois Department of Public Health to provide \$600,000 over three years for a federally qualified health center in Farragut High School.

**Maywood Family Education Center** The Elementary School District 89 has partnered with Loyola University Health Systems and a group of other nonprofit and state agencies to create a new family resource center in Maywood. IWA is contributing \$300,000 to this initiative. Opening in October, 2002, the Family Education Center will provide a host of resources to families with children in the school district. These will include health screening, Head Start, early childhood development, and other services. New computers will link parents to on-line education and job finding.

**Martin Luther King Center, Rock Island** A new workforce training program will be established in the Martin Luther King Center in Rock Island. This project will focus on residents in the IWA target neighborhoods of Longview, Douglas Park, and Old Chicago. This unique project will link residents to employers in the Sunset Business Park, which is across a highway from the Longview neighborhood. Operating the program in the context of the Center's comprehensive services will enable residents getting placed in the businesses to also draw on various family support programs. IWA is providing a grant of \$136,000 toward this effort.

### **Community Members Strengthening Anchor Institutions through AmeriCorps**

In addition to helping community agencies form family resource centers and create new health institutions, IWA, with the assistance of Mrs. Ryan's Futures for Kids office, secured a significant allotment of federal AmeriCorps funds through the Illinois Commission on Volunteerism and Community Service. In 2002-2003, seventy-seven community members have been enrolled in full-time AmeriCorps positions in community organizations in seven of the IWA areas. Many tutor and mentor children in the schools where the virtual family resource centers are located. Others work with ex-offenders, technology centers, homeless shelters, and environmental education facilities.

Loyola University's Policy Research Action Group (PRAG) has overseen the recruitment and placement of thirty-three members in the Chicago communities. PRAG has also sponsored monthly training workshops for members and host agencies in a variety of topics, including nonprofit incorporation and management. A PRAG research team conducts field research to document the experiences of each of the AmeriCorps members placed in Chicago sites. The researchers produced an evaluation of IWA in Chicago in 2002, and will complete a second such study in 2003.

PRAG is particularly active in Englewood. It is working with the Mary McDowell Settlement House and Chicago State University to create a program that encourages young people in Englewood public schools to pursue post-secondary education. PRAG also introduced IWA to the Ford Motor Company training program at Kennedy-King Community College that is administered by Reverend Henry Barlow. An IWA grant of \$150,000 will enable this program to get up to 20 city residents to earn certification as automotive technicians. With this certification, technicians will be placed in Ford and Mercury dealerships, as well as in other auto repair shops.

### **Institutionalizing a Public/Private Community Development Process**

Healthy communities not only have strong anchor institutions, they also know how to plan. The leaders of their economic, political, and educational institutions know how to work together. They are able to build consensus around future directions. They are capable of bringing plans for business expansion, land use changes, transportation improvements, capital projects, and job creation to government and business organizations outside of the community in order to attract investments and impact policy.

IWA has made local capacity building in community development a major priority in each of its target areas. It recognizes that a certain critical mass of skilled, stable, and integrated local development corporations are needed to increase investments from the outside and to direct how those investments will be utilized. Because of the central role of education in this process of capacity building, IWA has thus far reached out to the applied community development institutes of three state universities.

**Neighborhood Technical Assistance Center in East St. Louis** Through its strong relationship with the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign's Neighborhood Technical Assistance Center (NTAC), IWA is investing in capacity building in East St. Louis. Part of a \$161,000 grant will be used to make mini-grants to community-based organizations that are designing local community development projects. NTAC will also provide technical assistance for these organizations in project design, planning, research, and proposal writing.

In a related project, IWA is teaming with the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, the Illinois Department of Commerce and Community Affairs, and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign to support a highly sophisticated balanced growth analysis of the Metro East region. The East-West Gateway Foundation is mobilizing interest for this project on the Missouri side of the Mississippi River. The analysis will develop and map the results of models of economic, housing, transportation, and environmental changes to take place in the area over the coming decades. This project will help community developers in East St. Louis place their economic development strategies in the context of regional planning trends.

**The Dunn-Richmond Center for Economic and Business Development**, an applied unit of Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, is working with IWA to support promising community economic development projects in the southern seven counties. Close to \$250,000 in mini-grants and technical assistance will be made available to local governments, producer cooperatives, and economic development groups. Some of these grants will be targeted at commercial and tourism projects along

the Ohio River. A new hatchery will be created in the Southern Seven area, enabling area shrimp farms to lower their production costs and raise profit margins. A new juice processing plant will enable better marketing of produce from local orchards and wineries. Complementing funds to be allocated through the Mississippi Delta Commission, these grants will support planning of river-walks, river taxi tours, bed and breakfast businesses, marinas, and other projects.

In addition to the valuable resources of the university, IWA has also leveraged support for community development in the southern-seven counties through state agencies. The Department of Commerce and Community Affairs provided a workshop for local government and civic organizations on how to use its powerful website for marketing commercial and industrial properties. The Department of Agriculture organized the strategic planning forums for family farmers that led to the creation of the Southernmost Illinois Agricultural Alliance. The Illinois Emergency Management Agency provided approximately \$50,000 in grants for local disaster readiness planning. The Illinois Housing Development Authority is providing additional bonding authority to southern seven counties to finance the rehabilitation and construction of affordable housing.

**IWA Partnership with the Great Cities Institute of the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC)** IWA is making a grant to UIC, with which UIC's Center for Urban Economic Development (CUED) will issue planning grants, provide management training, and deliver other forms of intensive technical assistance to community development organizations in these IWA target areas.

In Humboldt Park, **The Near Northwest Neighborhood Network (NNNN)** will receive a \$90,000 IWA planning grant through UIC in support of its efforts to plan, design, and in partnership with youth-serving organizations, build a new, state-of-the-art youth center. NNNN is teaming with Association House, Casa Central, Erie Neighborhood House, and the Youth Services Project (along with four state agencies) to conduct a feasibility study. This innovative project is engaging local youth in a variety of productive research and design roles, helping to ensure that the result will appeal to Humboldt Park's young population.

In Englewood, **The New Englewood Village Collaborative (NEVCORP)** will use a \$90,000 planning grant to create a business and business site data base, a referral service for businesses examining potential investments in Englewood, and a business roundtable. The grant will enable this Englewood community development corporation to organize community efforts to best take advantage of the tax benefits that will be available due to the area's recent designation as a federal Urban Renewal Community. Through IWA, the Rebirth of Englewood Community Development Corporation received technical assistance from the Illinois Financial Institutions Agency that led to its application for a state charter to create a community development credit union.

In North Lawndale, **The 16<sup>th</sup> Street Revitalization Project** will receive a \$90,000 grant to further its efforts to plan and develop this long-neglected, now partly vacant, commercial and residential street. CUED is helping the advisory group of community residents and leaders that AMPS has convened to create a new community development corporation dedicated to this area's revitalization. The new CDC will serve

as the vehicle for engaging residents and community leaders, along with state and city agencies, in planning for further improvements along 16<sup>th</sup> Street. Already, the City of Chicago is building a new fire station. A major school remodeling has taken place. A new Access Community Health Care clinic is planned.

In Little Village, CUED will work with the Little Village Community Development Corporation and the Resurrection Project to further the **26<sup>th</sup> Street and Kostner Avenue neighborhood development project**. Approximately \$100,000 will be made available to further community planning on this effort.

In Maywood, CUED will provide (and subcontract) intensive property research and urban design assistance to the Village of Maywood to further the **5<sup>th</sup> Street Corridor Project**. This important commercial street runs through the center of Maywood, and contains many of the Village's prime commercial properties. CUED will also develop an industrial site inventory for the Village. Approximately \$100,000 in planning and design funds will be allocated by IWA for this effort.

UIC also plans to use its grant from IWA as leverage to work cooperatively with local CDCs in all three Chicago communities to pursue additional federal grants, state grants, and foundation funds. It will draw from its existing faculty seed fund to encourage faculty to conduct applied research to strengthen these community development projects. Scholarships for community leaders will enable them to pursue UIC's certificate in nonprofit management.

IWA is working with **the City of Rock Island, Renaissance Rock Island, and Project NOW** on a plan to develop a new, mixed-income neighborhood that would connect the downtown with the Old Chicago area. In addition, IWA, in concert with the Illinois Policy Academy on Homeless Families, is supporting Project NOW's efforts to create a new family supportive housing development in this same zone. IWA will make close to \$100,000 available to these efforts for planning and development activity.

A project in community economic development that is impacting two areas – the Southern Seven and North Lawndale – is the entrepreneurship education effort led by the **Illinois Institute for Entrepreneurial Education (IIEE)**. Bolstered by a \$40,000 grant from IWA, IIEE is helping community leaders formulate strategies for improving the local entrepreneurial culture. Workshops are offered to aspiring entrepreneurs. Resource inventories of capital sources are being compiled. Entrepreneurship fairs are being organized. IIEE is making a special outreach to youthful entrepreneurs and teachers.

### **Investing in Fathers and Productive Family Institutions**

Given IWA's mission – making communities into better places in which parents can raise children – the project is also investing further in fathers and family institutions. The loss of manufacturing jobs and the demise of small farms over the past thirty years has hit the IWA areas very hard. Many working fathers lost their abilities to provide for their families. These dispiriting developments helped increase the high rate of absence of fathers from their children's lives.

The flight of capital from these communities, coupled with the isolation of fatherless families, made it more difficult for families to do for themselves what working class families have always done to raise themselves above poverty: create their own enterprises. Thus, IWA is instituting several initiatives aimed explicitly at engaging fathers with their children and at helping families create their own productive enterprises.

With a \$150,000 IWA grant, UIC's **Institute for Research on Race and Public Policy** will be conducting a series of forums in IWA areas, beginning in Englewood, to help community leaders study the status of fatherhood and to devise strategies to strengthen it. These forums will lead to a national conference on African American fatherhood that will generate broader support for the strategies. The project will spawn new grant proposals for projects that will strengthen the ties of fathers to their children.

In a complementary initiative to the forums, IWA is making grants totaling \$125,000 to **De Paul University's Egan Urban Center**. One project will train African American fathers in entrepreneurship. A second project, located in Humboldt Park, will engage youth in a media-sponsored outreach to fathers who are not currently involved with their children.

Finally, approximately \$400,000 will be allocated to **the Sinai Community Institute** and the **Lawndale Business and Local Development Corporation** for the creation of a new **Family Enterprise Institute**. This center will work directly with mothers and fathers in North Lawndale to help them conceptualize new for-profit and non-profit enterprises, help them formulate sound business plans, help them access start-up financing, and help them sustain their enterprises. The center will also provide individual and family counseling to help these entrepreneurial families manage family and work responsibilities. The center will operate its own revolving loan fund and help connect families with other sources of capital as well.

### **Driving Toward Outcomes through the Use of Community Indicators**

The engagement between state agencies and community organizations that IWA has fostered has been guided by the outcome indicators targeted at the outset by the IWA steering committee. Community leaders who brought their projects and plans forward, seeking value-added resources from the state, did so with the pursuit of at least some of these indicators in mind. With guidance and monitoring from state agency staff, each community has projects underway that are pursuing at least several of the original IWA indicators. Each community has also added its own.

With the Statewide Office of Performance Review, IWA is instituting a path-breaking approach to tracking agency performance outcomes at the community level. In 2002, seven state agencies will collect outcomes in health, job placement, and human services in each of the nine IWA areas.

IWA is continuing to organize this effort to drive its state-community-university partnerships toward these outcomes. CUED at UIC is developing a set of economic and

social indicators matched up with the Chicago communities. IWA is participating with the Department of Community Affairs, the Illinois Development and Finance Authority, the City of Chicago, and the Civic Committee in an effort to routinely track data that are indicative of the economic viability of distressed communities.

Moving toward outcome-driven planning in IWA has been an incremental process. All *projects* funded through IWA are required to identify and track performance indicators. However, *tracking project performance must be followed by tracking community change*.

### **Conclusion: The Promise and Challenge of Place-Based Community Development**

Illinois Workforce Advantage has taken on a unique challenge: encouraging very diverse state agencies and community organizations to work together to revitalize communities that have long experienced high levels of economic and social distress. IWA has sought to balance its focus on core concerns – strengthening anchor institutions, institutionalizing a community development process, engaging in outcome-driven planning – with being responsive to the unique assets and unpredictable opportunities that surface in very different places.

This focus on places has challenged agencies to work within their statutory authority and yet find creative ways to add value to projects. Adding value – not synonymous with grant-making – involves drawing on existing staff skills, technology, current programs, knowledge of funding opportunities, and where feasible, grants, to help community leaders and families pursue their strategies for making their neighborhoods into good places to raise children.

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