

Chicago Beyond Awards First-Ever Innovation Challenge Investments

Three Nonprofit Organizations to Receive Investments Totaling Nearly \$3 Million

CHICAGO – Chicago Beyond today announced the winners of its first-ever innovation challenge and will present three nonprofits with investments that total nearly \$3 million overall. Launched by Chicago Beyond in April, the GO Innovate challenge sought early-stage ideas that offer innovative programming in two areas: Supporting College Matriculation and Graduation; and Reengaging Youth in Work and School.

For each winning organization, Chicago Beyond is also funding a research partnership with the University of Chicago's Urban Labs to evaluate the impact of each investment. Every investment recipient has worked with Chicago Beyond and Urban Labs to develop a unique research question that will allow detailed study of the program and better understanding of what works, in order to positively impact a greater number of young Chicagoans and increase the field of knowledge in these topic areas.

More than 200 organizations applied for the first innovation challenge. Applications were reviewed by the Chicago Beyond team and finalists were selected by two independent selection committees which were formed for each topic area.

“Our first innovation challenge brought out some of the best and most innovative ideas in programming to help our city’s youth succeed in school and in life,” Chicago Beyond Managing Director, Liz Dozier, said. “There is no shortage of passion for and commitment to the young people of Chicago. We are grateful for the opportunity to present these three organizations with investments to not only reach more young Chicagoans immediately, but to learn from and share our research outcomes in order to have a greater impact on the future of our youth nationwide.”

Given the enormous social and economic costs of crime, the financial gains associated with a college degree, and the positive impact on both individuals and their children that comes with stable employment, these programs, if successful, have extremely high potential to be cost-effective on society.

Reengaging Youth in Work and School

In Chicago alone, more than 45,000 youth age 16 to 24 are out of work and out of school – a number four percentage points higher than the national estimate – and a majority of these young people live in Chicago’s neighborhoods that also are home to high rates of poverty and crime. Chicago Beyond’s Reengaging Youth in Work and School challenge sought early-stage ideas designed to prevent disconnected youth’s involvement in violence by providing paid employment, workforce skill development, and/or educational reengagement.

The two investment recipients for program ideas in Reengaging Youth in Work and School include:

- **The Dovetail Project, \$990,000:** Through a 12-week curriculum and year-long case management support, the Dovetail Project focuses on reengaging young fathers in the lives of their children and setting them on a path to success through education in parenting, life and job skills. The investment from Chicago Beyond will help study the effect of participation in Dovetail on the labor market outcomes, including long-term employment, wages and, when appropriate, GED completion for 220 participants over a two-year period.

- **Storycatchers Theatre, \$900,000:** Storycatchers' Changing Voices program takes a trauma-informed approach by providing small groups of young people who have been recently released from juvenile and criminal justice facilities with year-long, paid employment focused on playwriting, production training and performance. Participants write, choreograph, score and ultimately perform real-life stories of struggle and trauma for youth audiences around Chicago, helping participants overcome their own struggles and learn the soft skills necessary to obtain and hold a long-term job. Chicago Beyond's investment will serve 90-100 students over a two-year period with a research design to test if the program increases long-term employment and reduces recidivism.

Supporting College Matriculation and Graduation

One of the strongest predictive factors against crime involvement is a high school diploma and further post-secondary educational success is one of the most powerful predictors of earnings, voting, giving back to one's community, staying healthy and safe, and having children who succeed in school. Yet in Chicago, only 18 percent of incoming public school ninth graders will earn a bachelor's degree at a four-year college by their mid-20s¹.

Chicago Beyond's College Matriculation and Graduation challenge sought programs that could dramatically increase that pipeline of Chicago high school students on a path to completing two and four-year college degrees. The investment recipient for the Supporting College Matriculation and Graduation challenge topic is Genesys Works Chicago:

- **Genesys Works Chicago, \$790,000:** Genesys Works empowers students to build a better future by exposing them to real-life experiences in the professional world; the program provides at-risk high school seniors with workforce training, a year-long paid internship, college-prep and ongoing support through college, empowering students to ultimately pursue a professional career. The investment from Chicago Beyond will test the effectiveness of the program on college matriculation, graduation rates, and future workforce participation. To test these research questions, Genesys Works will serve one cohort of students with approximately 205 students receiving the program.

The commonality between each of the investments from Chicago Beyond is a learning component. A partnership with Urban Labs allows Chicago Beyond to assess the impact of every program through rigorous scientific evaluation methods and expert analysis. Studying and measuring each investment is essential not only to see what works, but it also serves as a vehicle for sharing findings with other nonprofit organizations so they can learn from the investment of Chicago Beyond to ultimately impact more youth.

Launched in April 2016, Chicago Beyond is a privately held organization that seeks to create opportunity and access that the young people of Chicago deserve in school, career and life. Chicago Beyond invests in innovative ideas and scalable programs to amplify impact in two areas that are flip sides of the same coin – youth safety and educational attainment. Over time, Chicago Beyond aims to leverage its findings to spark further public and philanthropic investments in work that does the most good per dollar to improve the lives of Chicago's young people.

The next investment cycle will be announced in 2017. For more information about investment opportunities and the programs Chicago Beyond is supporting, please visit ChicagoBeyond.org.

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¹ Nagoaka, J. and Healy, K. (2016). The Educational Attainment of Chicago Public Schools Students: 2015: A Focus on Four-Year College Degrees. UChicago Consortium on School Research.