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Toward A Community Renaissance: The New Chicago School for Community Economic Development

Our Intent

We have created a network called the New Chicago School of Community Economic Development. It is intentionally in contrast to the internationally known “Chicago School of Economics” centered in the University of Chicago. According to Wikipedia, the traditional “...*Chicago school's methodology has historically produced conclusions that favor free market policies and little government intervention. The school has been blamed for growing income inequality in the United States.” The New Chicago School rejects the notion that there is a “free market”. Every system represents the intersection and influence of values within the market, the state, and in civil society. We seek economic democracy and innovation in the market; an entrepreneurial and strong state that defends the interests of the overwhelming majority of people; and social and political democracy in civil society. We seek development that is economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable and restorative.*

Our Principles/Values

1. We are focused on issues of income inequality, social exclusion, race, gender, poverty, democracy, and the environment.
2. We believe the problems of our society are systemic and require a systemic solution.
3. We are a school of thought recognizing that these issues are complex and nuanced; and require critical thought, study, and debate. We acknowledge the assets and knowledge of our members as the foundation for our discussion.

4. We recognize the importance of promoting and supporting the manufacturing sector as the essential means to create a society that is economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable and restorative.
5. We believe in a strategic partnership of labor, business, government, community, and educators as the foundation for all of our work.
6. We believe in the mix of strong leadership; vibrant economic, social, and political democracy; and democratic consultation.
7. We see the purpose of our school as creating the broadest range of partners in programs that have the biggest possible impact in changing our society rather than a small debating society.

Background

Historically, the South, the Southwest, the West Sides of Chicago as well as the Southland had a vibrant manufacturing sector that provided family supporting jobs for our residents including African Americans, Latinos, and a broad range of immigrant communities. Beginning in the late 1970s, we saw the loss of many of the jobs that provided security for our community with the closing of literally thousands of companies representing hundreds of thousands of good jobs. We also witnessed the increasing disconnect of our community from the manufacturing sector that still exists in the region. The result has been the dramatic growth of poverty and marginalization of our communities.

Forty or fifty years ago, Chicago had a relatively stable and expanding economy. The challenge for inner city communities was the lack of inclusion in the distribution of wealth, the deep patterns of racial discrimination including practices of redlining, discrimination in hiring as well as treatment during work, etc. Neighborhood-based strategies championed by the Alinsky movement and the traditional Community Development Corporation model were effective. The squeaky wheel got the grease and competent local development initiatives could work on a community level.

Under the conditions of the last thirty to forty years with the de-industrialization of the region in general as well as the increasing complexity of work in manufacturing, the problems of the inner city required an approach that is regional, has scale, and is premised on an appreciation of the complexity of work in manufacturing as well as being focused on particular communities. Traditional approaches to community development that were popular and effective in the 1960s have become less and less effective.

Currently, a broad range of leaders and organizations from the President, to Mayors, to educators, and others are beginning to focus on advanced manufacturing, education and workforce development, advanced technology, and partnerships. This is welcomed. On the other hand, many of the efforts are timid and of a small scale in relation to the scope of the challenge. Often the initiatives are exclusive and don't reach out to a broader constituency including communities of color, poor communities, the labor movement, and others. Often the thinking is short term.

Typically the discussion on manufacturing has been anchored in a traditional *private sector agenda* It is the private sector that has been the historic leader in the development of our manufacturing base. There have been many positive aspects to this agenda and many collateral benefits for society in the

creation of good paying jobs and broader development. There have also been negative aspects where the interests of key stakeholders in manufacturing including employees, the surrounding community, and the broader society are minimized or opposed.

There is a growing network of leaders and organizations that are advancing a *public agenda* on advanced manufacturing that recognize the need to a reasonable return on investment by owners, management, and shareholders, but are principally driven by a commitment to manufacturing as the essential means to achieving social objectives including ending poverty and income inequality, building the tax base of society that supports the social safety net and education, building strong individuals and families, building strong communities—particularly those of color--and addressing the crisis in the environment. This *public agenda* is distinct from the *private agenda* which sees manufacturing principally as the means to accumulate personal wealth. We recognize the need for a strong financial return for shareholders but insist on an equivalent return for the key stakeholders e.g. our people and our communities. We believe that philanthropic and government support for manufacturing must secure the strongest possible ROI for the public sector and identify with and support the public agenda on manufacturing.

We are committed to building a High Road partnership with those from the private sector who see the benefit of the public agenda on manufacturing. We all recognize that if advanced manufacturing is going to benefit from the kind of broad public support that is essential for increased investment in education, research, and programs that encourage and support innovation, the public interests in manufacturing must be recognized and prioritized as well as private interests. Social inclusion makes business and political sense as well as social sense.

We believe that our society must make a huge leap in policy and practice around these issues or we are in serious danger of being pushed to the margins of the global economy, losing what advantages we cling to now and with a huge impact on our society. If we lose our global leadership in advanced manufacturing, our communities—in particular—will be pushed even further to the margins of an increasingly polarized society.

Following is an ambitious vision for regional development that recognizes that our problems can't be solved only on a neighborhood level, that organizations that service neighborhoods can best meet their local needs through being part of a broader effort; and for our region to be globally competitive we must overcome the fragmentation of our community development efforts. We can demonstrate that community-led regional development can be powerful as has been demonstrated in international projects such as Mondragon in Spain and Emilia Romagna in Italy. We don't have to wait for the traditional political, development, and economic leaders. In fact, we can't wait.

The New Chicago School for Community Economic Development

Suddenly, we now recognize that there are a number of organizations and initiatives working with essentially the same assumptions, the same aspirations, and with remarkable talent and position that can play a major role in not only serving their own immediate communities but in leading the development of the regional economy. They recognize that their communities will suffer the most if we don't prevail as a region in the global economy. Ready or not...it's time to step up to a new level of aspiration, organization, and program.

All of us are deeply alarmed by growing income inequality in our society, environmental contamination, and polarization based on race and politics. Each of our organizations and leaders has strong track records in innovative approaches in their fields as well as deep practical experience particularly in communities of color. Our members are engaged in community building, education and training, and policy. Explicit in our call is:

- A recognition that building a formal network of organizations around our shared strategy allows us to more fully and aggressively engage in the important policy discussions in the region, encourages greater partnerships and taking small projects to a larger scale, and finally having greater power in determining the future of our region.
- Such a network acknowledges the history of similar organizations gathered around the Alinsky style and vision such as the Industrial Areas Foundation. The New Chicago School represents a similar network gathered around a contemporary vision of development and will contend with the Alinsky and other dated visions of development and community leadership.
- The recognition that re-building our manufacturing sector in the region is fundamental to the success of the region as a whole. This isn't your grandparent's manufacturing sector but a 21st Century advanced manufacturing sector that must be driven by technological as well as social innovation. We need to change the perception of manufacturing. Manufacturing is the sector that lifts all boats and is central to the interests of the whole society not just those directly involved in manufacturing;
- The recognition that building our regional manufacturing sector must be led by a strong strategic partnership of communities, labor, manufacturing companies, government, and educators.
- The recognition that we must dramatically transform our Pre-school to Grade 20 Education System and our Work Force Development System to maintain our position in the global economy.
- A commitment to creating a range of businesses in all sectors that are both cooperatively as well as privately owned that are deeply imbedded in our strategic partnership and values. We welcome the membership in the New Chicago School with manufacturing and other companies that are eager to support the public agenda on manufacturing and seek High Road partnerships with the public sector.
- The recognition that current efforts at the federal, state, and local level by government, philanthropy, and various trade associations are too timid and operating at too small a scale to address the growing crisis in manufacturing manifested most sharply in the skills gap and the continued deterioration of our communities.

This network of organizations is forming a membership organization called the New Chicago School of Community Economic Development. Our objectives are to:

- Create a rigorous and creative debate on policies and programs related to economic and community development pointing out the challenges as well as examples of innovation and creativity.
- Organize public forums, activate a media strategy including the sophisticated use of social media, print, and talk to extend this discussion to every corner of our region.
- Bring together practitioners in practical work related to our issues in order to increase their financial strength, to create new partnerships, and to offer critical assessment as the foundation for increasing innovation.
- Reach out to the philanthropic and policy community and engage them on the themes and practices of the New Chicago School.
- Borrow heavily from promising practices nationally and internationally in developing our intellectual as well as practical work. We seek to be a center for discussion and debate.

Our intent is to change economic and social policy in the region by building a grassroots base that transcends the traditional labels of Democrat, Republican, Independent, Alinskyite, radical or conservative. We seek to build a social base for these ideas that can't be ignored, and can serve as a foundation for systemic change at all levels in our region and contribute to the growing similar efforts on a national scale.

Organizational Structure and Staff: We will be a membership organization with organizational and individual members. We will develop a dues structure to support our activities,

Organizational Values: Fundamental to this effort is a commitment to building extensive partnerships with all related organizations, agencies, and institutions who share these values and objectives to minimize duplication of work and services, zero-sum competition, and fragmentation. Siloed initiatives are a luxury that we can't afford. We have to move in a coordinated way that meets the scale of the challenge in a relatively short period of time—10 or 15 years. We must master the style of adaptive fluidity and operational unity recognizing that we will focus on the important strategic principals that unite us as we place to the side secondary differences that divide us.

The Key Functions of the New Chicago School.

Thought Leadership. We recognize the value and importance of intellectual work. We are addressing complex problems that took decades in their making. We can't be successful in understanding those problems or advancing solutions without embracing complexity. We need to counter the anti-intellectual traditions that have dominated community-based and activist organizations for the last 40 years. Yet complex ideas must be converted into simple and easy-to-understand bits that can be understood and embraced by the overwhelming majority of people in our communities. We need to walk on both legs.

No more safety in silos and simplistic thinking. Our intent is to be provocative although well-informed. We will have an aggressive use of social media and the media in general to promote discussion and

debate around policies and practices related to our issues. We will create opportunities to discuss difficult issues.

Facilitation: We will organize forums both large and small targeting the region as a whole as well as small community forums hosted by congregations, block clubs, local unions, and social organizations.

Building the program base: Finally, big ideas must be connected to practical work and directly influence the residents and youth in our communities. We will assist our members in attracting financial support for their critical initiatives in a way that promotes broader partnerships, economies of scale, and innovation. We will promote and support the development of new prototypes for program development that can be replicated and taken to a much larger scale.

The New Chicago School is an aggregator of talent, practical skills and critical thinking. Our collaboration guided by adaptive fluidity and operational unity.

Conclusion

These are bold objectives because these are times that require bold actions. We have to reverse 30 to 40 years of decline with the knowledge that we have limited time to advance a compelling regional strategy as well as the capacity to implement this strategy in light of an increasingly competitive global economy. Success in achieving our objectives depends on effective partnerships with the many organizations and individuals who have served our area over the decades. We can't wait for others to assume responsibility. We recognize the risks, but more importantly the rewards for leadership in this dangerous and dynamic period.