



**ASPIRE CHALLENGE
CHICAGO URBAN LEAGUE SUBMISSION**

Contestant Capacity

The Chicago Urban League (the League) works for economic, educational and social progress for African Americans and promotes strong, sustainable communities through advocacy, collaboration and innovation. Founded in 1916, the Chicago Urban League is one of the nation's oldest and largest community-based movements devoted to empowering African Americans to enter the economic and social mainstream. Through unique community, corporate and civic relationships, the League helps clients find jobs, affordable housing, educational opportunities, and grow businesses.

The League delivers its programs and services through three (3) key areas of focus: Educational Opportunity, Economic Empowerment and Social Justice. While the League's programs have changed to meet evolving needs, they have always focused on providing pathways to success for individuals and families in the African American community. Driven by our organization's mission, the League strives to achieve the following goals: (1) Be a leader on issues impacting African Americans; (2) Achieve measurable and sustainable results in critical focus areas of economic empowerment, educational equality, and social justice; (3) Develop and engage the next generation; and (4) Build a strong financial foundation. Last year, the League served approximately 10,000 Chicagoans, equipping them with the skills and resources needed to excel in school, attain a viable career, save their homes in jeopardy of foreclosure, escape a life of crime and violence, and infuse wealth and jobs into our neighborhoods by supporting small businesses.

While the *Entrepreneurship Center* has not specifically targeted formerly incarcerated individuals, the organization does have extensive experience with this target population. According to a study done by the Justice Policy Center in Washington, D.C., more than half of the 24,000 ex-offenders released in Illinois will move or return to Chicago. According to the Illinois Department of Corrections, Cook County received 13,389 (54.2%) of the statewide parolee population in 2011. The majority of individuals will return to the following communities in Chicago: Austin, North Lawndale, East Garfield Park, West Englewood, Humboldt Park, Roseland, and Auburn Gresham.¹ The League currently serves the Englewood/West Englewood, Auburn Gresham, Humboldt Park and Austin neighborhoods. Reports from the Community Support Advisory Councils (CSAC), which are funded by the Illinois Department of Corrections to provide support services to ex-offenders, also confirm that considerable service need exists in Englewood and West Englewood.² The League has developed targeted programming for ex-offenders and has an exceptional staff that has provided effective mentoring and career readiness training. For the past four (4) years, the League has partnered with the National Urban League to provide pre- and post-release education and job training services to 50 male and female ex-offenders involved in the adult criminal justice system through our Training to Work program. Additionally, The League's Male Involvement Program (MIP) provided supportive services to 250 men annually, ages 18 to 40, for over 22 years before the program was closed out. MIP participants were non-custodial or custodial fathers, many of whom had criminal backgrounds.

The League is a pivotal community resource, providing holistic and synergistic programs and services that advance the economic development of African Americans and the communities in which they live. When more African American businesses are successful and jobs are created in our communities; when youth are advancing academically by successfully graduating from high school, entering and graduating from college; when families are staying together and in their homes, not only does the African American community benefit, but the entire city of Chicago benefits.

¹ Source: <http://www.icjia.state.il.us/public/pdf/ResearchReports/IERTF%20Final%20Report.pdf>

² Source: http://www.illinois.gov/publicincludes/documents/Governor_Reentry_Commission_Report_FINAL.pdf