

Best for Chicago: A Campaign to Create Cross-Sector Change

The Community of Illinois B Corps 24 April 2017

Chicago has problems large enough that no single entity or even sector will be able to fix them all. To make real change happen, long-lasting partnerships need to be forged and nurtured between civic, nonprofit and business institutions. A new campaign with partners from all sectors aims to engage the private sector in solving some of our city's biggest issues.

If you look at Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the basics of eating, sleeping, and breathing form the foundation, with safety—job security, health and well-being, a place to live, etc.—right above that. Take away these things and any chance at the others—love/belonging, esteem or self-actualization—crumble. In other words, it's hard to get people engaged in concepts like sustainability or even community organizing when they're worried about finding a job or keeping their kids safe.

In Chicago's B Corp community, we believe solutions start with good business. Giving people a living wage and job security opens up many possibilities for greater good at a larger scale. In other words, by considering all

stakeholders, not just shareholders, we can collectively create lasting impact and society overall enjoys a more durable prosperity.

But business is in no shape to fix things on its own. The solutions needed go way beyond simply writing a check or sponsoring an event. While charitable donations offered by altruistic means are indeed admirable, to create this shared prosperity we need cross-sector collaboration that produces results beneficial to all: better jobs, stronger communities and a cleaner environment.

Many companies want to create deeper social impact, yet are often ill-equipped to do so. Conversely, nonprofits and civic agencies don't often speak the language of business, where strategic partnerships between companies yield mutually beneficial results that help each party achieve success and growth. In Chicago, we are trying to bring this cross-sector model to life with Best For Chicago. This program is being launched by our growing B Corp community, along with Forefront and several other community partners which are working to engage the private sector to address these issues. The campaign was conceived as a collaborative, cross-sector initiative from the beginning.

Best For Chicago

The Best For... campaign was started by B Lab, a nonprofit that supports the global community of certified B Corps

using business as a force for good in the world. Piloted in NYC, efforts there were largely driven by city government with support from B Lab and local nonprofit partners. In Chicago, the campaign was set in motion by business owners (the local B Corp community), will be run by local nonprofit partners, and requires commitments from all sectors, including local government. Chicago's city treasurer Kurt Summers has been supportive since the campaign's early days.

"The campaign is important because it directly addresses some of our city's biggest challenges," Treasurer Summers said. "To address our city's challenges, all sectors need to collaborate. By focusing on Chicago-based businesses and implementing nonprofit partners into the equation, Best for Chicago supports economic development in each of Chicago's 77 neighborhoods."

How it Works

Best For Chicago will teach local businesses to create higher quality jobs, build stronger communities and preserve a healthier environment. Over several years, the campaign will engage businesses in a three-step process:

1. Educate them on how to measure what matters using a free, confidential assessment tool based on the B Impact Assessment, already in use by 50,000+ businesses globally.
2. Equip these businesses with the tools and support

they need to make a difference.

3. Celebrate companies that participate and improve.

A leading nonprofit partner will work with neighborhood-based community organizations and city government to provide workshops that will help local business owners create a roadmap for improving their business. Here are just a few examples from the pilot campaign in New York City:

- Brooklyn Kitchen started a carbon take-back program with its suppliers.
- Manducatis Rustica Trattoria developed an employee volunteer program.
- First Steps Urban Outreach transitioned its contractors to full-time employees.
- Dirty Gloves Drain Service formalized training for people with barriers to employment.
- Mason Technologies started a system to hear and implement employee feedback.
- 67 Burger is implementing a bonus plan and performance reviews.

While these may initially seem like small steps, consider that more than 40 community partners engaged 1,300 businesses which employ over 63,000 workers throughout New York City. More than 60 educational workshops helped these business leaders measure what matters and create profit-driven companies that are better for workers, better for communities and better for the en-

vironment. The pilot ran for six months but the campaign itself will continue for several years, giving Best For New York a chance to significantly increase these numbers.

Local Partners

To bring Best For Chicago to life, the campaign will need a partner from either the civic or non-profit sector to take the lead as well as numerous local community partners to join them in en-gaging the businesses in their areas.

Currently, Forefront (formerly Donors Forum) has set its sights on being the primary nonprofit partner to run the campaign in Chicago. There is also community partner interest coming from organizations all over the city that focus on a wide range of issues, including neighborhood economic development, employment for women, environmental sustainability, income inequality, racial equity, and many other social justice issues.

The Best For... campaign and the B Corp movement are directly in line with Forefront's rebrand a couple years back. Their quarterly Social Innovation Roundtable already brings together lead-ers from all sectors to focus on problem solving in our region. This campaign offers a chance to put many of the ideas developed during those roundtable discussions into action.

"Forefront is delighted to partner with the local B Corp community to promote Best for Chica-go," said Dawn Melchiorre, Vice President, Member Engagement at

Forefront. "We need to leverage the tremendous capacity of for-profit companies to help create quality jobs and vibrant communities. Businesses are critical partners in our work."

Mentorship from Chicago's B Corp community will guide both businesses and community partners alike throughout the campaign. Certified B Corps already live these values every day. They use the B Impact Assessment to benchmark performance and continuously improve results in five categories:

1. Community
2. Workers
3. Consumers/Products
4. Environment
5. Governance

While Best For Chicago isn't about creating more certified B Corps, it is meant to help standard businesses better measure their efforts and identify areas for ongoing improvement, which is similar to how B Corps operate. By being cognizant of their impact in these areas, businesses are equipped with the means to improve over time and can play an active role in creating stronger communities, providing better jobs and remediating our massive environmental impact. In this equation, everyone wins.

Best For Many Cities

Chicago and New York are not the only cities taking part in Best For... campaigns. Similar efforts are cropping up in Denver, Grand Rapids, Lancaster, Philadelphia, and numerous others in the U.S. as well as Geneva, London, Rio de Janeiro, Sydney, Taipei, Vancouver and other cities around the globe. All of these campaigns are independently operated and driven by locals from various sectors. Each campaign takes its own unique shape as leaders learn what works best in their market.

What's the End Game?

What if millions of dollars more were spent with locally-owned businesses each year? What if tens of thousands of people from underrepresented groups were given great jobs with retirement accounts, excellent benefits and leadership opportunities? What if hundreds of thousands of tons of waste produced by Chicago area businesses was diverted from landfills? What if hundreds of millions of dollars more were raised for local charities each year? These are the types of things conscientious companies do to improve quality of life for people and the planet. Yet, they represent a significant shift from the way, as a society, we currently do things. The Best For... campaign provides a roadmap for achieving these great things with the help of all sectors, not just one.

For more information about B Corps in Illinois and local B Corp events, visit the Illinois B Corps website at

<http://illinoisbcorps.org>. To learn more about Best for

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