Chicago Design Competition

Reducing Youth Violence in Chicago:
A Design Competition

Phase I: Request for Letters of Interest

February 3, 2015
OVERVIEW

Project Goal
Chicago, like most large cities in the United States, has been struggling to reduce youth violence for decades. Cities across the country have tried a variety of programs and strategies over the years, all with the hope of identifying effective and lasting approaches to reduce the number of young people involved with violence as either victims or offenders, and to improve the life outcomes for those at highest risk. Nevertheless, youth violence remains a chronic problem across the country, and is the leading cause of death for African-American males ages 10 to 24, responsible for more deaths than the next nine leading causes combined. To address the problem of youth violence by bringing together the front-line knowledge of practitioners, the leadership of policymakers, and the insights of researchers, Get In Chicago and the University of Chicago Crime Lab, with support from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, announce the Chicago Design Competition.

Design Challenge
With this design challenge, Get In Chicago and the University of Chicago Crime Lab, with support from the MacArthur Foundation, will work to identify promising intervention ideas to improve life outcomes of youth at elevated risk for violence involvement. The Chicago Design Competition selection committee will choose one or a small number of intervention(s) that will receive funding to be brought to scale and rigorously evaluated. The aim of this design challenge is to generate evidence about what works to improve youth life outcomes, in particular by lowering the risk of violent behavior or violence victimization. This evidence in turn could help inform large-scale violence prevention efforts in Chicago and other cities.

Evaluations will be carefully structured not only to determine the overall effectiveness, but also to determine which program components are beneficial for whom and why. For this reason, if a program is selected for funding, the relevant agencies and organizations will be asked to implement the program in a way that can be rigorously evaluated by the Crime Lab.

Practitioners, policymakers and researchers are encouraged to propose their most innovative ideas and to harness the collective power of their varied perspectives and experience to collaborate on design and implementation.

Request for Letters of Interest
For this first phase of the competition, we are seeking three-page letters of interest (LOIs) from not-for-profit organizations. The LOI should describe a promising idea
aimed at improving life outcomes of young people at risk for violence involvement, for example by increasing high school completion rates; connecting youth to full-time careers; reducing risk of violence involvement and victimization, recidivism, or juvenile justice involvement; and/or supporting other positive developmental outcomes known to be protective against violence involvement.

The target population of these interventions should be Chicago youth (ages 13 to 18). Based on the LOIs, a small number of applicants will be invited to submit full proposals. One or more winning entries will be selected to receive up to $1 million each in funding support.

APPLICANT REQUIREMENTS AND INSTRUCTIONS

To be considered for the competition, all applicants will be required to:

- Focus on youth ages 13 – 18 who live in communities with high levels of violence, and/or on the parents of these youth.
- Present a clear description of the problem the intervention seeks to address and include any relevant data to support the magnitude and scope of the problem and likely demand for the intervention.
- Explain the theory of change behind the proposed intervention (i.e., how will it work to improve the life chances of young people at risk of violence or victimization).
- Have demonstrated a capacity for providing service in the past, including successful recruitment and retention of youth and/or families, especially youth at high risk of violence or victimization.
- Include a list of key partners in the intervention.
- Include an estimated project timeline.
- Include an estimate of the overall annual project cost of the intervention (not including evaluation costs).
- Have been in existence (or be working with a nonprofit organization that has been in existence) for at least two years, and have worked either with justice-involved youth or with youth who have disengaged from school.
- Be willing to work with the University of Chicago Crime Lab to structure the intervention so that it can be rigorously evaluated.
- Produce audited financial reports for the last two years (only if a full proposal is invited).

LOIs should not exceed three pages. LOIs should be submitted via email to chicagodesigncompetition@lists.uchicago.edu.

Organizations invited to submit a full application will be asked to prepare a proposal not to exceed 10 pages (excluding audited financial reports). Requirements for the full proposal will be distributed to invited applicants.
TIMELINE

• February 3, 2015 Request for letters of interest
• March 2, 2015 Letters of interest due
• March 25, 2015 Most promising ideas selected and proposals invited
• April 24, 2015 Proposals due from selected applicants
• May 22, 2015 Awards announced
• Summer/Fall 2015 Funded program(s) begin service delivery

Applicants to this design competition must be ready and able, if selected as recipients of an award, to implement their intervention during the July 1, 2015 – June 30, 2016 program year.

RIGOROUS EVALUATION

A total of 415 people were murdered in Chicago during 2013. The vast majority was male, and approximately half were between the ages of 10 and 25.¹

Over the past 50 years, our society has made far less progress in understanding how to protect people from violence than from other serious threats to life and health. Federal, state, and local governments as well as nonprofits throughout the U.S. have implemented a wide variety of innovative programs to reduce youth violence over the past 50 years – but almost never in a way that can be rigorously evaluated. The logic behind these programs often seems quite promising. Claims of dramatic success are not in short supply. Yet the youth violence problem remains. Progress in addressing youth violence in Chicago, or anywhere, is extremely difficult without data and evidence about what programs work, for whom, and why.

The Crime Lab’s objectives are very similar to those of the MacArthur Foundation and Get in Chicago. We all want the most rigorous evaluation evidence possible, since that has the greatest chance of ensuring that positive findings translate into policy change and long-term sustained support for promising programs. At the same time, we all also recognize that there are limits on what is feasible in practice. The right way to balance different objectives — rigorous evaluation vs. ensuring the success of the programming efforts themselves — is likely to vary across organizations that are operating in different environments. Once grantees are announced, the Crime Lab will work with the chosen organization(s) to develop a recruitment and evaluation plan with each organization that makes sense given the context in which the organization is operating.
THE JOHN D. AND CATHERINE T. MACARTHUR FOUNDATION
The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation supports creative people and effective institutions committed to building a more just, verdant, and peaceful world. In addition to selecting the MacArthur Fellows, the Foundation works to defend human rights, advance global conservation and security, make cities better places, and understand how technology affects children and society. For more information about the MacArthur Foundation, visit http://www.macfound.org/.

GET IN CHICAGO
Get In Chicago is a public-private partnership focused on violence prevention and intervention. It was launched in March 2013 to identify, fund and rigorously evaluate evidence-based programs that lead to sustainable reductions in violence for individuals and communities most affected by violence and poverty. For more information on Get In Chicago, visit http://www.getinchicago.org/.

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO CRIME LAB
The University of Chicago Crime Lab was launched in spring 2008 in partnership with the City of Chicago to help develop, implement, and evaluate promising youth violence prevention interventions in a way that generates objective outcomes data — about what works and why — that is as rigorous as the gold-standard evidence used in medicine. The Crime Lab draws upon the expertise of some of the world’s leading social science experts in youth violence and related areas, who also have extensive experience implementing and evaluating complex social interventions. For more information on the University of Chicago Crime Lab, visit http://crimelab.uchicago.edu.

Notes
1 These figures are from Chicago Police Department, CompStat.
2 Mortality figures reported in the text come from the NCHS report Health, United States, 2007 (table 29) and infoplease.com/ipa/A0779935.html (downloaded December 27, 2008).
3 This discussion draws on the excellent argument made by MDRC for the importance of using fair, random lotteries for implementing and evaluating promising new pilot programs.

Photos by Robert Kozloff/The University of Chicago.