

Scaling Promising Practices in Youth Mentoring

How Chicago's Department of Family & Support Services Built on the Success of the Becoming a Man (BAM) Model to Serve 7,000+ Young Men



COMMON GROUND FOUNDATION

SUMMARY

In 2016, the City of Chicago embarked on a bold initiative to expand the evidence-based Becoming a Man (BAM) group mentoring model to serve thousands of young men. To reach this ambitious goal, the City's Department of Family and Support Services (DFSS) quickly expanded existing contracts for BAM and 11 other mentoring programs. It then undertook an innovative Request for Proposal (RFP) process—which elevated best practices identified in a rigorous evaluation of the BAM program—and awarded 45 community-based organizations new contracts to grow their mentoring programs and infuse them with evidence-based practices. DFSS increased the number of youth receiving high-quality mentoring from 800 to more than 7,000 in less than three years. It also built a data-driven, equitable service delivery model that harnessed the collective strength of existing community-based organizations. Philanthropic support, which helped the program expand, has now been largely replaced by City funding (more than \$50 million since 2017) to ensure that Chicago youth continue to benefit from these services into the future.

INTRODUCTION

It started with a phone call. In 2016, Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel called the Commissioner of the Department of Family and Support Services (DFSS), Lisa Morrison Butler, with an urgent request. As part of a broader public safety strategy to help address a surge in homicides in Chicago, the Mayor wanted the City to significantly increase mentoring services for young men in 8th to 10th grades, and he wanted it done quickly. He specifically referenced one program—Becoming a Man (BAM)—as the model for the City’s approach.

Under city ordinance, the department would be required to go through a Request for Proposal (RFP) process to allow for competitive bidding for these new services. Morrison Butler also knew that no organization would be able to accomplish the ambitious task alone, and that many community-based organizations had deep relationships with local youth and their families that could help expand mentoring equitably across the city.

THE CHALLENGE

The goal of the Mayor’s Mentoring Initiative (MMI) was to connect young men with counseling and mentoring services to help them stay in school, build healthy relationships, stay out of the juvenile justice system, and contribute positively to their communities. DFSS worked with University of Chicago’s Crime Lab researchers to identify the focal population: 7,200 young men, enrolled in 8th, 9th and 10th grades in the Chicago public schools, who were living in or attending school in 22 specific neighborhoods and were considered at risk of not graduating high school and becoming involved in the criminal justice system.

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In human and social services, not every program will have its own randomized controlled trial. With this initiative, we said: How can we leverage this RCT [of the BAM program] to help expand effective mentorship programs so we can serve not just hundreds but thousands of young men?”

— Lisa Morrison Butler

Former Commissioner, Chicago Department of Family & Support Services

In two [randomized controlled trials](#) (RCTs), the University of Chicago’s Crime Lab [found](#) that Youth Guidance’s BAM program reduced violent-crime arrests among youth by 45-50% and increased the high school graduation rates of participants by almost 20%. Launched in 2001, BAM helps young men learn and practice social cognitive skills necessary to make the best decisions for their future. The program’s success has drawn national recognition, including helping inspire President Obama’s My Brother’s Keeper Initiative.



CIRCLE FOUNDATION

Young men from the Washington Heights area participate in group cohort activities with the Circle Foundation.

Scaling Effective Youth Mentoring

The biggest challenge for DFSS was scale. At the time, City-funded mentoring programs served about 800 local youth. To begin quickly recruiting young men for the initiative, the department expanded Youth Guidance’s BAM program and 11 other programs providing mentoring services under already-existing City contracts. But to achieve the Mayor’s goal of widely expanding access to mentoring, the department would need to create a new RFP process built on evidence of what works and tap into the expertise, skills and networks of a broad range of community-based partners.

MAYOR’S MENTORING INITIATIVE IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE



SEPTEMBER 2016

Youth Guidance expands to mentor 1,300 more young men

JANUARY 2017

11 mentoring agencies expand to serve 660 more young men

APRIL 2017

45 community-based organizations awarded contracts to mentor 1,200 young men

Step 1: Research and Identify Best Practices

After the Mayor's call, Morrison Butler's first step was to assemble her agency's internal experts—the youth team that oversaw all youth-related contracts and services—and to direct them to develop outcomes for the initiative and research best practices for effective mentorship programs.

Dedicating time before writing the RFP for gathering information and asking questions was novel. Quickly releasing RFPs had more often been a priority. But Morrison Butler and the youth team recognized the importance of articulating clear outcomes for the initiative and offering guidance for how grantees might achieve them. The youth team ultimately identified three outcome areas: positive school outcomes, lowering justice involvement, and linkage to appropriate employment opportunities.

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If we couldn't describe success in RFPs to prospective grantees then we weren't going to get anywhere.”

— Christian Denes

Former Director of Strategic Planning & Impact, Chicago Department of Family & Support Services

Using the RCTs conducted by the University of Chicago's Crime Lab—as well as resources from MENTOR, a national nonprofit that helps expand quality mentoring across the United States—the youth team also developed five best practices for mentoring:

1. **Sustained contact.** Youth and caring adults have at least five hours of contact per month.
2. **Group/cohort participation.** Youth participate in a cohort during the program and become an important support system for each other.
3. **Skill development and training.** Mentors use a set curriculum as well as experiential learning to help youth grow and develop new skills.
4. **Socio-emotional needs.** Programs provide the support and resources necessary for youth to grow socially and emotionally.
5. **Positive setting.** Programs incorporate positive values, principles and practices.

Step 2: Build an Evidence-based RFP

Based on the information it had gathered, the youth team realized its existing RFP for mentoring did not support the goals of the new initiative. Instead, the team developed a new RFP that clearly identified the focal population and outcome areas, and incorporated the five best practices highlighted from the research.

PHALANX FAMILY SERVICES



Phalanx Family Services recruits young men to its mentoring program.

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[The RFP] was structured differently to provide applicants with clear guidance and structure for implementing programming. Applicants knew the expectations, such as capturing data, service delivery, and targeted youth to be served. We ultimately had partners who were ready to deliver services.”

— **Monica Dunleavy-Gerster**

Youth Services Coordinator, Chicago
Department of Family & Support Services

The RFP also included clear selection criteria. Organizations had to demonstrate a neighborhood presence, prior experience mentoring young men, and the administrative, financial and staff capacity to expand their programs. If they met these baseline qualifications, organizations were invited to submit proposals describing how they would use the five best practices to support the initiative’s goals. In submitting a proposal organizations agreed to data collection and evaluation requirements, and to participate in a DFSS-sponsored learning cohort.

The new evidence-based RFP was a visible manifestation of a larger shift within DFSS towards a more results-oriented and data-driven approach to delivering services, which the department detailed in its Commitment to Outcomes framework. This institutional and behavioral change was challenging and time-intensive for DFSS staff, but also critical to successfully expanding the mentoring initiative.



COMMON GROUND FOUNDATION

Common Ground Foundation mentors gather for training and planning.

Step 3: Engage the Community

For the initiative to have the far-reaching impact the Mayor wanted, Morrison Butler and the youth team knew they needed to enlist the support of dozens of smaller community-based organizations. The department decided to administer the RFP in two phases. In the first phase, DFSS identified and engaged potential community partners. In the second phase, it helped organizations that met the selection criteria develop proposals based on the evidence outlined in the RFP. DFSS held webinars during both phases of the RFP process to walk potential grantees through what they were looking for, answer questions and receive feedback.

“It wasn’t easy for our unit,” said Monica Dunleavy-Gerster, Youth Services Coordinator, DFSS. “Smaller and medium organizations loved the idea that we were going to serve all these boys, but we had to get buy-in.” The department received some pushback about the targeted nature of the initiative, which some organizations thought should include a broader age range and young women. Later iterations of the mentoring RFP took this feedback into consideration.

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We were really trying to lift up organizations that maybe had never had a contract with the City of Chicago. We were supporting agencies to do this if they had a good mentoring program... and the agencies really followed up with fidelity to the best practices.”

— Mary Ellen Messner

Former Deputy Commissioner, Youth Services Division, Chicago Department of Family & Support Services



In 2018, Chicago Child Care Society (CCCS), which participated in the Mayor’s Mentoring Initiative, reported that 100% of the youth in its Kings Achieving Leadership and Understanding (KALU) mentoring program graduated from high school and enrolled in college.

FUNDING: A PHILANTHROPIC KICKSTART FOR SUSTAINED CITY SUPPORT

The Mayor’s Mentoring Initiative (MMI) was initially launched with a combination of public and philanthropic dollars, with a total investment of \$36 million over the first three years. Philanthropic support allowed the initiative to be funded at a higher per participant amount (\$2,300 per participant) than previous mentoring contracts, which in turn allowed grantees to dedicate full-time staff to it. Staff appreciated the opportunity to build deep relationships with participants and their families.

The City of Chicago has gradually increased its annual general fund appropriation for youth mentoring from \$6 million in 2017 to \$7 million in 2018, rising to \$7.4 million each year from 2019 to 2023. This additional funding helped the City to expand the program to serve 6th through 12th graders as well as young women. In fiscal 2023, the total funding allocation for mentoring programs (\$9.6 million) was sustained in part by American Rescue Plan funds, allowing DFSS to support 4,155 mentoring slots.

While philanthropic support was key to launching the MMI, community-based organizations credit the City’s ongoing financial commitment to sustaining the evidence-based mentoring programs. “The private landscape is not what it was before so the public dollars are critical,” said Theresa Lipo, Director of Government Funding and Partnerships with Youth Guidance. “Being able to rely on the City for that consistent funding is important.”

The two-phase application process took longer, but helped the department be more deliberate with their engagement. DFSS did not want to launch entirely new mentoring programs, but would help qualified organizations incorporate evidence-based practices into their existing mentoring programs. Because of this strategic engagement, prospective grantees understood what the City was trying to accomplish and, at the end of the day, DFSS was able to fund most of the organizations that applied.

Step 4: Select Proposals and Align Work Plans with the RFP

The department created and used a tool to score the proposals it received. The questions on the score sheet mirrored the RFP. Decisions were based on the RFP. There were no surprises.

Having an evidence-based RFP that clearly articulated program requirements and outcomes streamlined the selection process. The department only considered proposals that used the defined best practices and that committed to satisfying all data collection and evaluation requirements, and to participation in a one-year learning cohort.

Similarly, work plans for grantees mirrored the requirements in the RFP. Carefully hewing to the details of the RFP meant the program partners were prepared to deliver on the service requirements. This allowed staff to shift their focus from providing technical assistance and monitoring for contract compliance to supporting grantees in achieving the outcomes outlined in the RFP—a big win for a department managing 1,500 contracts.



Participants of Youth Guidance's Becoming a Man (BAM) mentoring program meet a local school board member.

Step 5: Require a Commitment to Learning and Evaluation

The department required grantees to participate in a learning cohort for the first year of the contract. Participation by both executive directors and program staff helped ensure buy-in across organizations. Workshops included topics such as implementing effective mentoring, tracking outcomes, fundraising, and navigating City processes and systems. Professional development opportunities for small, youth-serving organizations were rare at the time, so people were excited to be learning about resources and sharing with other organizations.

Prior to the cohort's quarterly meetings, each organization submitted data on its progress in the mentoring initiative. DFSS and Urban Labs would compile the data and the cohort would review it and share their struggles and successes for the quarter. Getting all the organizations to enter their data into the department's system wasn't always easy—particularly since it was a new requirement for City contracts—but in the end it was rewarding when the numbers showed progress towards outcomes.

The regular opportunity for peer-to-peer sharing helped organizations more quickly identify solutions to challenges. For example, organizations that struggled to recruit mentors could turn to others that excelled at it for advice.

The learning cohort had the added benefit of building a professional community for group mentoring in Chicago. It also helped the department manage a large number of contracts focused on the same outcome, and changed the dynamic between grantees and DFSS, with organizations viewing staff as partners in achieving their goals.

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[The learning cohort] was pioneering. What we ultimately started to build was a very targeted form of contract management. Bi-weekly, sometimes weekly, check-ins. Deliberately set-up dashboards. Relationship building, because all the grantees were going to be sharing data. It was the first time saying that on a regular basis – we're getting together and we're going to follow through on supporting things we are asking you to do in the RFP.”

— **Christian Denes**

Former Director of Strategic Planning & Impact, Chicago Department of Family & Support Services

PARTNERING FOR SUCCESS

Implementing the mentoring initiative in a thoughtful way that centered outcomes and expanded evidence-based practices throughout the city was a new and challenging task for the staff at DFSS. Relationships with several external partners helped ease the way.

The University of Chicago's Urban Labs—including the Crime Lab, the Education Lab and the Inclusive Economy Lab—had long-standing relationships with DFSS and provided critical assistance to the department. The Crime Lab helped the City define the focal population of youth by identifying 22 high-needs neighborhoods, based on the number of homicides per 100,000 residents. The Crime Lab and the Education Lab filled gaps in the department's technology and expertise, helping DFSS collect and analyze data, build the curriculum for the learning cohort, and track mentee outcomes, such as tardiness, truancy and school engagement.

A year and a half into the initiative, Urban Labs conducted a study comparing program participants to other students to help DFSS ensure it was reaching the right population. "It was an honest, real partnership," Mary Ellen Messner, former Deputy Commissioner, said about DFSS' relationship with Urban Labs. "We could talk about obstacles. They also understood the fast, tight clip of wanting to get things done."

For Urban Labs and its team of researchers and policy experts, it was an opportunity to put years of evidence-building into action to improve young people's lives, right in their home city. "To actually distill the insights of broader national research on mentoring programs and talk with the department about ways to build that into the contracting process, to develop together what the [learning cohort] would do, to build a plan for capacity building for nonprofits together, to be able to advise on the survey tools. It was a really intentional, iterative, bi-directional, and ultimately rich opportunity for learning," said Carmelo Barbaro, Executive Director of the Inclusive Economy Lab.

Similarly, DFSS leaned on Mentor Illinois, which had deep experience in youth mentoring when crafting the best practices outlined in the RFP and to plan and run workshops during the learning cohort.

The mentoring initiative also changed the way DFSS interacted with its grantees. Before the department's role had primarily been that of funder. Now, through its work with the learning cohort, it was also a partner with grantees in achieving outcomes. Being an active partner of 57 organizations took a lot of monitoring and support, but the DFSS staff was committed to the change and proud of its work. "These were great organizations that were all-in serving their communities and that

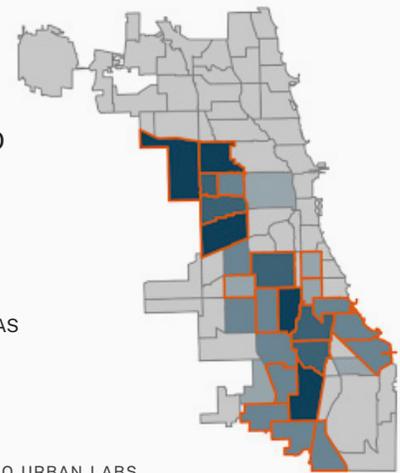
felt good,” said Monica Dunleavy-Gerster, Youth Services Coordinator, DFSS. “We don’t often get to bring in new organizations to work with the City. We really tried to help the agencies with less capacity be a driving force in their communities.”

Grantees noted and appreciated the department’s enhanced role. “For this initiative [DFSS staff] were more involved. For some of the folks who worked there, direct services wasn’t something they were familiar with. This was a good learning experience because they had to come out and be involved,” said Tina Sanders, Executive Director, Phalanx Family Services. “They still do that now. They have a feel for what’s going on now.”

THE 22 HIGH-NEEDS NEIGHBORHOODS IDENTIFIED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO’S CRIME LAB

- | | |
|---------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Austin | 12. Riverdale |
| 2. Chatham | 13. Roseland |
| 3. East Garfield Park | 14. South Chicago |
| 4. Englewood | 15. South Lawndale |
| 5. Gage Park | 16. South Shore |
| 6. Grand Boulevard | 17. Washington Heights |
| 7. Greater Grand Crossing | 18. Washington Park |
| 8. Humboldt Park | 19. West Englewood |
| 9. Morgan Park | 20. West Garfield Park |
| 10. New City | 21. West Pullman |
| 11. North Lawndale | 22. Woodlawn |

FOCUSING IMPACT IN 22 NEIGHBORHOODS



COURTESY OF CHICAGO URBAN LABS

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Policymakers trying to scale effective programs are usually under pressure to make decisions with imperfect or incomplete information. What DFSS did with the Mayor’s Mentoring Initiative was incredibly thoughtful in thinking about who needed these services most, what we know as a field of practice from research happening in Chicago and around the country, and how to strike a balance in scaling programs with an urgency that was appropriate for the problem at hand, while maintaining uniformity of program delivery and the best practices from the research.”

— Carmelo Barbaro

Executive Director, Inclusive Economy Lab at the University of Chicago

Step 6: Manage with Data

The learning cohort and data collection requirements gave DFSS real-time information on grantees' progress towards the initiative's goals. This was new. Before, the department had primarily been a steward of the money, checking outputs, like the number of people served, at the end of the contract.

After the first 18 months of the initiative, the department enlisted Urban Labs to review data on participating youth. Urban Labs found that 5,853 young men had enrolled in mentoring programs and that 99% of them resided in or attended school in one of the 22 high-need neighborhoods. Compared to similarly-aged young men attending Chicago Public Schools, those in mentoring programs were more than twice as likely to have experienced temporary living situations (an indicator of homelessness), were 2.3 times more likely to have had at least one arrest, and were 2.4 times more likely to have experienced crime victimization. The data indicated that MMI was largely reaching its intended population.

The study also showed that more than half of the young men spent more than 5 months in mentoring programs. On average, participants received 3 hours of group mentoring and 1 hour of one-on-one mentoring each month. Mentoring hours increased during the summer months, possibly because participants had more time to devote to it.

In the first years of the initiative, the department focused on gathering demographic data on the youth and mentors. Later, it also turned its attention to surveying participants about their relationships with their mentors, what they were learning, and how they were feeling. The surveys provided the department with an



Participants of Breakthrough's boys mentoring program visit a local restaurant.

BREAKTHROUGH FAMILYPLEX

important perspective, but they also added a layer of complexity to data collection for both DFSS and the grantees. DFSS staff say that ideally the department would have a robust data division to manage data collection and analysis.

Point-in-time surveys conducted in June 2021 and May 2022 asked youth in the mentoring programs about their relationships with adults and peers, and about their social emotional growth. Research shows that young people who have relationships with caring adults and peers are more likely to show signs of increased academic learning and a sense of responsibility, as well as reduced engagement with high-risk behaviors.

The survey results were overwhelmingly positive for participants with 86% (in 2021) and 79% (in 2022) reporting strong relationships in their mentoring programs and 78% (in 2021) and 71% (in 2022) reporting strong levels of social emotional competencies. DFSS incorporated these findings into the 2022 RFP for youth mentoring and created a set of performance indicators for grantees based on them.

Step 7: Keep Improving

DFSS has released the evidence-based mentoring RFP two more times since 2017. While the best practices within the RFP have largely remained the same, each iteration has been slightly different. The department has used the data collected throughout previous



NICOLE WONG/YOUTH GUIDANCE

Mayor Emanuel talks with participants of the Becoming a Man (BAM) mentoring program, led by Youth Guidance.

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It is vital to collect, analyze, and maintain data in order to assess, enhance, and maintain the quality of youth programs. It empowers program providers to make informed decisions, track progress, and ultimately to improve outcomes for the young people they serve. Most importantly, data is critical in ensuring that young people have access to high-quality programs and services.”

— Brandie Knazze

Commissioner, Chicago Department of Family & Support Services

grant cycles to make adjustments to better meet outcomes. For example, when quarterly reports showed that grantees were not consistently reaching the focal population with their services, the department made recruitment and focal group engagement an outcome in the next RFP. The mentoring initiative was also expanded to include a wider age range of young men as well as young women.

The most recent mentoring RFP, released in October 2022 under the guidance of current DFSS Commissioner Brandie Knazze, focuses on trauma-informed mentoring for youth with complex needs, includes a larger focal population, and allows for both in-school and out-of-school mentoring programs. The RFP continues the department’s commitment to outcomes. Grantees must assess their progress towards the stated goals through surveys of youth and by tracking output metrics such as the number of youth who meet the focal population and the number of hours youth receive group mentoring annually.

Creating a data governance system that allowed the department to track progress towards outcomes and make ongoing improvements was one of the department’s big-picture goals. “The ideal state to be in is an iterative state with grantees. Looking at data, making changes. What levers can we pull along the way to impact the outcomes?” said Christian Denes, former Director of Strategic Planning & Impact, DFSS.



CHICAGO CHILD CARE SOCIETY

The Kings Achieving Leadership and Understanding (KALU) mentoring program, run by the Chicago Child Care Society, was designed to build strong, supportive relationships between youth and their mentors.

Conclusion

The challenge Mayor Emanuel put before Morrison Butler and DFSS was to connect more young men in Chicago with counseling and mentoring services to help them stay in school and contribute positively to their communities. Before the end of the three year initiative, over 7,000 young men had benefited from City-funded mentorship programs, all of which were using research-tested best practices. The Mayor, DFSS and its many community-based partners successfully met the challenge and, at the same time, created a new model for scaling promising practices citywide.

The City's and the department's continued investment in youth mentoring, beyond the three years of the Mayor's Mentoring Initiative and despite changes in mayoral administrations, is testament to the power of stating and tracking outcomes and the hard work the department undertook to become more outcomes-driven. It also demonstrates the flexibility that can come from shaping a program around evidence-based practices. The department has been able to hold constant the core evidence-based tenets of the initial RFP while adapting the focal population and program details to meet evolving community needs.

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Change management is a journey, and helping staff and non-profit partners to evolve is critical – that includes listening, reviewing data, having hard conversations, training and providing the necessary [technical assistance] to help young people succeed.”

— Brandie Knazze

Commissioner, Chicago Department of Family & Support Services



Common Ground Foundation mentoring alumni spend time with current students.

COMMON GROUND FOUNDATION



BBF FAMILY SERVICES

Participants of the BBF Family Services' mentoring program in Garfield Park graduate from 8th grade.

Other results of the initiative included:

- Mentoring contracts with 57 different agencies, including 45 new contracts with mostly small and medium-sized community-based organizations.
- Professional development for youth-serving organizations.
- An evidence-based framework for group mentoring in Chicago.
- Increased attention and private funding for mentorship programs.
- A model RFP for incorporating research-based requirements and outcomes. A similar process was later used to develop an RFP for afterschool programs.
- A more straightforward RFP scoring and contract writing process.
- Programmatic problem solving through shared data and experiences.
- Increased ability to track progress throughout the life of the contract.
- A new perspective on the department's role as a funder that included being an active partner in achieving outcomes for families and children.

Obstacles

The department faced four major obstacles in meeting the Mayor’s request to significantly increase mentoring services in the City.

1. **The scale of the increase.** Such a big increase in the number of youth being served meant an uptick in the department’s contract management responsibilities. Including the same best practice and learning requirements in the RFP and individual contracts helped relieve some of the pressure on the department. Also, the learning cohort allowed the department to meet with all grantees at least once each quarter.
2. **The rapid timeline.** By taking time early in the RFP process to research and identify best practices, gather data on the young men they wanted to reach, and meet with community-based organizations, the department was able to get buy-in for their approach and help potential grantees develop strong proposals. As a result, organizations could move quickly to launch programs once contracts were awarded. Awarding smaller contracts also made implementation more manageable for organizations. Finally, enlisting the help of external partners helped DFSS fill knowledge gaps, overcome challenges and maintain accuracy despite the fast timeline.
3. **Making the process and the outcomes equitable.** The department could have awarded a single large contract to Youth Guidance to scale its BAM program. But such a significant expansion in such a short time seemed neither feasible nor equitable. Instead, the department expanded the contracts for Youth Guidance and the 11 other organizations already providing City-funded mentoring services and used the best practices in the RCT to guide 45 community-based organizations in developing proposals for their own evidence-based mentoring programs. Community-based organizations received contracts to mentor between 25 and 125 young people. Smaller contracts kept the mentoring initiative from being disruptive to organizations’ existing programs and helped to spread capacity throughout communities.

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It is our goal to leave not just a legacy of stronger opportunities for our youth, but stronger community organizations for all of our neighborhoods and residents to benefit from. Each of our partners mirrors the diversity that makes our city unique, and has demonstrated the ability to hit the ground running to serve our youth.”

— Lisa Morrison Butler

Former Commissioner, Chicago Department of Family & Support Services

4. **Lack of staff and data infrastructure.** The mentoring RFP was part of a larger shift at DFSS toward using data and evidence to improve outcomes for Chicago families and children. The department was creating new processes and systems as it went –which meant that it did not have specialized data staff or infrastructure in place. Eventually the department was able to hire additional staff, but in the beginning existing staff were learning new ways of thinking and new roles. Seeing staff embrace new ideas, even if it was at times uncomfortable, was trust building for grantees, who were being asked to do the same. DFSS also leaned on external partners to fill gaps as they built internal capacity.

Factors that Drove Success

Several factors helped the department successfully scale promising youth mentorship practices citywide, including:

- **Leadership support for a more outcomes-focused approach.** Institutional changes like contract reform are not headline-grabbing processes, but the Mayor, Morrison Butler, and leaders throughout DFSS recognized the importance of it for improving outcomes. The Commissioner set high expectations and asked for proof that the department was changing lives for the better. That leadership helped division heads push themselves and their staffs to make change.
- **A commitment from department staff to developing a new RFP process.** DFSS staff understood that the old approach of re-issuing previous RFPs was outdated. As a result, they were willing and prepared to do the “pre-work” of gathering data and identifying best practices in order to develop an RFP that would solicit proposals grounded in evidence.
- **A combination of public and philanthropic financial support.** Mayor Emanuel dedicated City funds to the initiative. He also used the City’s financial commitment to gather philanthropic support. As a result, the initiative was well-funded and could spread the funds to community-based organizations. However, while philanthropic support was key to quickly expanding evidence-based mentoring practices throughout the city, partner organizations note that the private funding landscape changes and that sustained funding from the City has been critical for continued programming and progress.
- **Good data.** Not only did the department have randomized controlled trials on a local mentorship program to inform its RFP, but it also had data on the youth it wanted to reach through its partnership with Urban Labs. Data collection did not end with the issuance of the RFP either. DFSS staff and Urban Labs worked with grantees to collect and analyze data throughout the life of the contract and to use that data to help inform program decisions and improvements.

RESOURCES

- City of Chicago, Mentoring RFP: [2016](#), [2019](#), [2022](#).
- [National Bureau of Economic Research paper presenting findings from the BAM randomized controlled trials](#)
- [University of Chicago Urban Labs webpage on BAM](#)
- Department of Family and Support Services, [Commitment to Outcomes](#)

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