The Cook County Bureau of Economic Development appreciated the opportunity to learn about Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership’s updated strategic approach during our session together on February 10, 2020 and have subsequently reviewed both the Northeast Economic Development Region (NEEDR) Regional WIOA Plan and the Illinois Local Workforce Innovation Area 7 2020 Local Plan.

Our comments and suggestions below reflect the opportunities we see for increased partnership and collaboration to align our strategies to ensure broad and coordinated benefits to Cook County businesses and residents. We appreciate the recognition of several of our initiatives including EDAC, CMMC, South Suburban Economic Growth Initiative, the updated Cook County Consolidated Plan and Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) and our new apprentice navigator function. We are particularly excited about the opportunity to collaborate with The Partnership’s team around apprenticeships. As you know our updated CEDS (attached) and work with the Civic Consulting Alliance resulted in the Bureau of Economic Development’s revised strategies and initiatives that reflect an increased focus on economic clusters including manufacturing as well as the importance of talent-driven economic development.

To the extent that you might modify the plan and your priorities, we would like the Partnership to give serious consideration to the following:

1. An expressed commitment to strive for greater parity of facilities and investments between Chicago and Cook County. There are essentially the same number of people in the City and the suburbs, and with an increasing suburbanization of poverty – we believe there is the need and potential to ensure the equitable distribution of resources. For example, there are some programs that are currently only offered in the City of Chicago. What would it take to offer Chicago Codes and Career Launch to suburban communities? We realize the delivery of programs and services to suburban Cook is inherently more challenging as there are multiple school systems – but that only suggests the need for more resources and efforts to reach these communities and populations. Are there additional targeted approaches to ensure access to services for the County’s individuals with barriers to employment including homeless, disabled, returning residents, youth and basic skills deficit?

2. Consider the “Priority Communities” as identified in the Cook County 2020 CEDS as prioritized for strategy implementation.

3. The critical importance of supporting the manufacturing sector. The United States faces an unprecedented set of challenges as identified in the 2018 Report to the President on Assessing and Strengthening the Manufacturing and Defense Industrial Base and Supply Chain Resiliency in the United States. One of the primary challenges impacting the industrial base are the “gaps in American human capital, including a lack of STEM talent and declining trade skills, diminish domestic capabilities to innovate, manufacture, and sustain” operations and equipment.

Cook County continues to identify manufacturing as a critically important driver of the region’s economy. Cook County employs 192,500 persons in manufacturing, more than any other county in the Illinois. Manufacturing jobs have among the highest multiplier effects. The average income for
manufacturing workers with wages and benefits is $88,691. These are jobs that provide salaries that can support a family. We recognize there are thousands less manufacturing jobs than before, however, manufacturing productivity has increased substantially due to advances in technology. Given the above, we recommend that the Partnership re-establish Manufacturing Sector Center(s) to focus on the employment needs of manufacturers.

4. **Consider expanded and pro-active “lay-off” aversion strategies.** The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act requires states to commit part of their rapid response program for economic dislocation to efforts to prevent layoffs. Other states in the US have supported the capacity to provide pro-active business turnaround assistance in partnership with skilled organizations outside the workforce system. This includes assistance to business in economic distress and helping retiring owners convert to employee ownership. *Example: Pennsylvania Strategic Early Warning Network https://www.steelvalley.org/sewn*

5. **Deeper collaboration with Cook County Bureau of Economic Development regarding sector partnerships.** Economic development best practices are increasingly cluster driven and sector based, as opposed to just transactional. In that context it is the synergy and connective tissue between our two agencies becomes increasingly important. The Bureau of Economic Development has adopted this approach for manufacturing (including some sub-sectors like metals, machinery and equipment, aerospace and medical devices) TD & L and the ‘green economy. There are a variety of models, but salient characteristics are employer driven, sector based and community supported efforts to strengthen the competitiveness of a sector. Such partnerships often focus on workforce but may not be limited to that. As the Bureau of Economic Development, we may have access to tools and resources that might assist a business. We realize that the Partnership may be engaged in such efforts already and would hope that they would engage the Bureau of Economic Development, as we have engaged the Partnership with CMISP and the Cook TD & L.

6. **Develop and share mutually beneficial tools.**
   a. Explore TPM (Talent Pipeline Management) as a shared tool. TPM is a demand-driven, employer-led approach to close the skills gap that builds pipelines of talent aligned to dynamic business. This is a tool that the State of Illinois requires of grant recipients that serve as Apprenticeship Navigators and/ or Intermediaries.
   b. Develop an approach to share tax relief entities.

7. **Provide common platforms to engage employers.** Employer engagement is a critical activity and ensuring outreach approaches are connected, consistent and business friendly will result in stronger employer relationships. Are their ways we can collaborate more and leverage resources? We have access to tools (loans, innovation vouchers, export resources, certification training) that might be of interest to employers.

8. ** Adopt a forward-looking approach to skills training and credentials** – Examples of this would include universal focus on increased digital fluency, more plastic injection molding training, multi-skilled technician, and educating employers to focus on competencies instead of credentials.