

CASE STUDY: CITY OF CHICAGO – SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGIES AND ENERGY PROGRAMS THROUGH DIRECT SUPPORT PARTNERSHIP



SUMMARY:

From 2012-2016, the C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group established a partnership with the City of Chicago, philanthropic funders, and local environmental organizations to provide strategic and tactical support in implementing the *Chicago Climate Action Plan* and the *Sustainable Chicago Action Agenda*. For nearly five years, C40's Chicago Director of Energy & Climate Innovation served as an embedded sustainability official in the office of Mayor Rahm Emanuel, working closely with the City's Chief Sustainability Officer, key officials in the City's municipal departments and agencies, and environment and public interest leaders across the Chicago community.

Throughout this period, the Chicago – C40 partnership provided vital capacity and expertise for Chicago's climate-related priorities, allowing the City to pursue environmental leadership despite public resourcing constraints. Specific partnership activities and deliverables fell into four focus areas:

1. Supported Chicago sustainability strategy development, governance, and implementation
2. Strengthened and expanded high-impact Chicago energy programs
3. Developed new, innovative sustainability initiatives
4. Managed key City partnerships and facilitated cross-city lesson-sharing

The continuity of the work achieved or started during the Chicago – C40 partnership was then ensured by vigorously transitioning all plans, documents, and deliverables from the C40's Chicago Director of Energy & Climate Innovation to City of Chicago staff and ongoing support in the above areas from C40 networks and the Director of Regions.

PARTNERSHIP ACTIVITIES:

Over 4.5 years, Chicago's City Director took part in a broad range of activities and contributed to crucial climate outcomes on behalf of the City of Chicago and the broader community. The following summary contains an overview of key contributions from 2012-2016:

- 1. Supported Chicago Sustainability Strategy Development, Governance, and Implementation:** Supported planning, launch, and delivery of the *Sustainable Chicago Action Agenda*; facilitated Sustainable Chicago implementation and engagement with City officials and community members to drive and track progress on specific goals and outcomes; contributed to senior-level municipal strategy-setting and review processes; reported Chicago's progress through C40 and the Carbon Disclosure Project to ensure transparency and accountability.
- 2. Strengthened and Expanded High-Impact Chicago Energy Programs:** Launched and coordinated key energy efficiency and clean energy policies and programs – including the Chicago Energy Benchmarking & Transparency Policy, Retrofit Chicago's Energy Challenge, the Green Office Challenge, and related efforts.
- 3. Developed Innovative Sustainability Initiatives:** Identified, developed, and pursued new opportunities to advance City of Chicago environmental priorities, including efforts to promote sustainable development, environmentally-conscious business and government operations, and Chicago's local healthy food economy.
- 4. Managed Key City partnerships and Facilitated Cross-City Lesson-Sharing:** Through direct participation and engagement of other city officials, C40's Chicago City Director facilitated cross-city learning and lesson-sharing through C40 and other regional partnerships.

REASONS FOR SUCCESS:

In addition to monetary support, City officials and C40 staff members identified several additional aspects of the Chicago - C40 Partnership that made it particularly effective:

- 1. Local Opportunity & Willingness to Collaborate:** The 2011 reorganization of the Chicago Department of Environment – which delegated specific environmental priorities to related municipal departments and agencies – created strategic opportunities as well as new support needs to achieve Chicago’s ambitious environmental goals. With the creation of a new Chief Sustainability Officer role, Chicago’s Office of the Mayor took responsibility for setting and implementing sustainability priorities through a network of teams and individuals. As this new governance structure promoted shared accountability for environment and climate-related initiatives, it also created new opportunities for outside partnership and support on strategy and program implementation (particularly in light of policy and program opportunities that benefit from cross-city knowledge and that may not fit traditional municipal departments’ scope or expertise). Chicago’s Office of the Mayor has been a willing partner and collaborator in C40 direct support, actively identify, shaping, and facilitating C40 engagement within local government and the broader community.
- 2. C40 Regional & Global Support:** The Chicago - C40 partnership also benefitted from a global C40 staffing model that provided support, autonomy, and flexibility for on-the-ground staff and City officials to identify the most pressing or promising needs and take action to address them. With direct supervision by C40’s Regional Director for North America, the Chicago C40 City Director had access to a broad network of urban climate expertise, including international peers and city contacts. C40’s direct support model also benefitted from the longstanding partnership and subsequent merger between C40 and the Clinton Climate Initiative’s Cities Program, which had a history of direct collaboration with leading global cities, including Chicago.
- 3. City Director Background & Fit:** In addition to the right opportunities, the right governance structures, and the right support model, Chicago’s C40 City Director brought a specific set of skills and experience to the Chicago - C40 partnership. Successful collaboration required the C40 City Director to think strategically, deliver tangible results, operate effectively in a complex and dynamic environment, and adapt to diverse situations and audiences. The ability to develop and exercise informal authority, to internalize client and stakeholder needs, to quickly develop required content expertise, and to alternate between big-picture and detailed technical perspectives were also critical to the success of this role.
- 4. Continuity:** During a three-month transition period at the end of the Chicago - C40 Partnership, all Chicago - C40 Partnership plans, documents, and deliverables were transitioned from C40’s City Director to City of Chicago and partner staff members who will continue the Partnership’s ongoing efforts. Chicago City officials will continue to work with C40’s Regional Director for North America and participate in C40 Initiatives and Network activities that align with local climate priorities.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

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