



# Board of Commissioners of Cook County

118 North Clark Street  
Chicago, IL

## Legislation Text

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**File #:** 23-4095, **Version:** 1

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### **PROPOSED PREVIOUSLY APPROVED ITEM AMENDMENT**

**Department:** Bureau of Economic Development

**Request:** Change of title from “Grow the Talent Solution Ecosystem” to “The Innovation Nexus” and the addition of Forefront as the fiscal agent for the Chicagoland Workforce Funders Alliance.

**Item Number:** 23-0876

**Fiscal Impact:** N/A

**Account(s):** N/A

**Original Text of Item:**

### **PROPOSED RESOLUTION**

### **PROPOSED RESOLUTION TO ~~GROW THE TALENT SOLUTION ECOSYSTEM~~ THE INNOVATION NEXUS**

**WHEREAS,** Cook County Bureau of Economic Development seeks to advance talent driven economic development; and

**WHEREAS,** the Cook County Policy Roadmap, includes a key objective under Vital Communities to “Grow economic clusters by launching and supporting industry-led partnerships”; and

**WHEREAS,** the Policy Roadmap recommends meeting the above objective through the use of strategies to “Identify, prioritize and support new and emerging sectors that lead to living wage jobs” and to “Create a center for industry partnerships to lead, coordinate and support key economic sectors’ competitiveness, productivity, resiliency and adaptation to rapidly changing technology”; and

**WHEREAS,** the Cook County Equity Task Force Report includes a recommendation under Vital Communities to “Align Cook County’s workforce investment intentionally and strategically to support high quality jobs that promote residents’ economic mobility and equity”; and

**WHEREAS,** to advance the above objectives and strategy from the Policy Roadmap as well as those related to workforce investments outlined by the Equity Task Force, the Bureau of Economic Development has partnered and collaborated with the Chicagoland Workforce Funders Alliance (CWFA), an initiative of the Chicago Community Trust, since 2020 to establish the Network for Employer Driven Talent Solutions and the Talent Solution Connector; and

**WHEREAS,** Forefront, Illinois’ statewide association representing both grantmakers and nonprofits, as well as their advisors and allies, has agreed to serve as the fiscal agent for this initiative for the Chicagoland Workforce Funders Alliance; and

**WHEREAS,** Cook County has a commitment to talent driven economic development which includes supporting industry-led partnerships to meet the talent needs of employers and to ensure that residents have opportunities for good jobs; and

WHEREAS, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the pre-existing challenges both employers and workers encounter, leaving businesses in desperate need of workers and many workers without meaningful and family-sustaining employment; and

WHEREAS, both employers and workers find the existing workforce ecosystem complex, segmented, varied across sectors, as well as generally difficult to understand and navigate; and

WHEREAS, only a small percentage of private sector employers use the public workforce system; and

WHEREAS, because of ongoing collaboration, the Cook County Bureau of Economic Development and the ~~Chicagoland Workforce Funders Alliance~~ FOREFRONT, as the fiscal agent for the ~~Chicagoland Workforce Funders Alliance~~, propose an intentional and cooperative effort to prioritize, support and facilitate employers' and workers' ability to navigate, engage, and shape the workforce system to meet their needs through a program called, ~~Growing the Talent Solution Ecosystem~~ The Innovation Nexus; and

WHEREAS, ~~Growing the Talent Solution Ecosystem~~ The INNOVATION NEXUS represents a three-year effort to support the further development of capacity, integration, coordination and promotion of the following services and resources:

1. **Network of Employer-led Workforce Solutions** ~~<<https://chiworkforcesolutions.org/>>~~ (“NEWS”), a hub for networking, capacity building and resources for sector partnerships and other employer-led initiatives collaboratives. Sector partnerships are now considered a best practice and encouraged by many federal funding agencies for economic and workforce development; and
2. **Talent Solution Connector** ~~<<https://talentsolutionsconnector.net/>>~~ (TSC) a service that assists employers find workforce services to address talent challenges while prioritizing equity and diversity; and
3. **Chicagoland Career Pathways** ~~<<https://www.careerpathways.net/>>~~ ~~<<http://www.careerpathways.net/>>>~~ (CP.Net) is an online directory that identifies and outlines onramps to good jobs through existing Cook County based career pathway programs with a focus on low-barrier options for young adults planning their post-secondary path; adult career-seekers/changers coupled with access to guides, counselors, and mentors; and

WHEREAS, to ensure accountability and the implementation of shared objectives, Cook County wants to leverage the expertise of ~~the CWFA Forefront~~ Forefront and its resources to advance these programs and administer the Program; and

WHEREAS, the duties and responsibilities of Forefront, on behalf of the CWFA, will be outlined in a Scope of Services of a grant agreement between BED and CWFA Forefront necessary to support and operate the Network of Employer Solutions pursuant to which the CWFA Forefront will:

- Provide technical assistance to NEWS members to increase their capacity to meet the talent needs of their sectors;
- Support the planning and launching of new sector partnerships as requested by employers.
- Provide operational support to existing partnerships as needed;
- Provide grant writing assistance to secure additional resources to support sector partnerships;
- Create a business plan and launch a pilot program that provides access to financing for

- the purchase of an automobile for workforce program participants/graduates;
- Expand the capacity and resources of NEWS and NEWS members;
- Additional duties agreed upon by Cook County and ~~CWFA~~ Forefront ; and

**WHEREAS**, in order to enhance and maintain both the Talent Solution Connector and Chicagoland Career Pathways, the grant agreement with ~~the CWFA~~ Forefront will also require ~~the CWFA~~ Forefront to :

- Maintain these resources, websites, and related databases to ensure accuracy and completeness of all content;
- Conduct ongoing evaluation regarding use and satisfaction of sites;
- Improve effectiveness of the above sites through new features and partnerships;
- Coordinate and leverage stakeholders throughout the workforce ecosystem to bring value to the stakeholders and the Program;
- Expand outreach in Suburban Cook to gather additional information on career pathways and workforce resources available through local public schools, community colleges and community organizations;
- Conduct marketing efforts to expand the reach and usage of the sites;
- Additional duties agreed upon by Cook County and ~~CWFA~~ Forefront; and

**WHEREAS**, ~~the CWFA~~ Forefront will develop metrics and report quarterly to Cook County on programmatic and fiscal progress along with an annual report summarizing impact and success stories; and

**WHEREAS**, since 2021, the CWFA has invested significant resources to support and lay the foundation for the NEWS (including support for Early Childhood Workforce Partnership and the Healthcare/Public Health), development of the Talent Solution Connector, and CP.Net, 3.6 FTE for approximately \$390,000 (salary, fringe & administration), \$260,000 for consultants (facilitators, project managers, web platform design) and an additional \$20,000 per year on technology costs (licenses, hosting fees etc.) for a total of \$640,000 per year or a total of \$1,280,000; and

**WHEREAS**, the CWFA estimates that the cost of providing these services for ~~Growing the Talent Solution Ecosystem~~ The Innovation Nexus from 2023 - 2025 will be \$715,000; and

**WHEREAS**, the Bureau of Economic Development has \$300,000 in its 2023 corporate budget to support the services outlined for 2023; and subject to approval of this resolution will seek approximately \$300,000 in 2024 and \$125,000 in its 2025 budget to complete this work; and

**WHEREAS**, providing employers with new and improved channels to meet their talent needs, coupled with developing a comprehensive system to share the plethora of existing career pathway opportunities to both employers and job seekers will assist all parties.

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, that the Cook County Board of Commissioners does hereby authorize the Bureau Chief of the Bureau of Economic Development to enter into a three-year agreement to provide a grant with ~~the Chicagoland Workforce Funders Alliance~~ Forefront to establish the program, ~~Grow the Talent Solution Ecosystem~~, The Innovation Nexus, to provide employers with new and improved channels to meet their talent needs, coupled with easy access to a directory of existing career pathway opportunities to both employers and job seekers to assist all parties and advance Cook County's policy objectives as outlined in the Policy Roadmap and the Equity Task Force Report.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Cook County Board of Commissioners hereby authorizes the Bureau Chief of BED or its designee to modify the agreement and funding amount based upon need, performance, and utilization, subject to annual appropriation by the Board.