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Best Practice - City of Chicago

How training local Chicago citizens to better understand environmental challenges is helping turn the Windy City into the "Greenest City in the USA".

By Edouard Biot, published 02/10/07

Company: City of Chicago

Location: Chicago, USA

Industry: Government

Number of employees: Approx. 6,300 employees in all of its facilities in Canada

Overview

Third largest city in the USA with a population of nearly 2.9 million people, Chicago, has given itself the ambitious goal of becoming the "greenest city in the USA". As part of this initiative, the City launched an innovative and inclusive training program designed to help citizens understand the global impact of their everyday actions and engage them in further sustainable development action, through training and support.

The opportunity

The City of Chicago was looking for a way to capitalize on the numerous demands received from Chicagoans to help promote and protect the city's environment. Furthermore, the City of Chicago wanted to help its citizens connect to the bigger world-wide environmental picture by getting involved in their own city's greening plan.

The solution

The "C3 Explorer Training Program" (Chicago Conservation Corps Leader Projects) is made accessible to Chicagoans of all different backgrounds and ages (schools project included) who wish to get involved and implement some of the many ways people can improve the quality of life in their neighbourhoods through one-time environmental service projects.

Expertly-trained

Citizens participate in five 3-hour training classes that equip them with a broad understanding of urban environmental challenges and opportunities. Local experts teach these classes, which cover environmental principles and skills in five subject areas (water, air, energy, land and community organizing). Special attention is given to teaching grassroots community organizing skills. Experts share their real-world experience, making important connections for future action.

Making a difference

Following the classes, these citizens become "leaders" who turn their learning into action by developing and leading an environmental service project in their communities with support from C3 Partners and staff. Trained C3 Leaders can choose from the list of Chicago Conservation Corps Leader Projects suggested by Partners and staff, or create a project of their own that meets a specific need in their neighborhood.

Support includes project development guidance, mentoring on community outreach, and up to \$500 worth of materials and supplies for the project. After the project is complete, the Leader earns the C3 Leader Certificate.

Playing important roles in their communities

With training and experience, certified C3 Leaders are valuable resources to communities and organizations that want to improve Chicago's environmental quality of life. They develop a solid understanding of how to run a successful environmental service project and how to serve as a resource for environmental service across Chicago. Leaders can go on to develop new projects for years to come, pursue further training, and learn more about certain subjects that interest them.

Supported with a growing network

C3 Leaders become part of a growing network of environmental movers and shakers who are working together to improve Chicago's environment on a large scale. C3 Partners and staff work with Leaders to support new efforts they would like to pursue.

Outcome

This innovative program helped citizens learn about and experiment with a range of environmental actions. These participants saw, first-hand, the real difference anyone can make in their neighbourhood and across the city, and ultimately, the world we live in.

Leader projects turn theory into action. They are meaningful and fun environmental service projects that have a measurable impact on the local environment and community by addressing a need in one of Chicago Conservation Corps' four natural resource subject areas.

This unique program increases the broad-based knowledge about environmental issues, raises the level of awareness about individual impact on the environment, engages community groups, and ultimately creates goodwill with all citizens.

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