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Phila. could consider work force training approaches in N.Y., Chicago

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In 2007, Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley found himself in the middle of a problem, but without the data to solve it.

On one side were businesses that couldn't find enough skilled workers for occupations that paid well. On the other were residents and city aldermen that said people couldn't find and get jobs.

Daley's solution was Chicago LEADS (Leading Economic Advancement, Development, and Sustainability), a multiyear initiative to align the city's work force development, education and economic development systems to more effectively meet the needs of businesses and residents for skilled jobs. From that effort emerged the **Chicago Workforce Investment Council**, which was created in 2009 to oversee the more than \$300 million in public funding invested annually to support work force development.

"In general there were a lot of unanswered questions about how the money flowed and who gets it and what the outcomes are," CWIC Chief Executive Director Evelyn Diaz said of the organization that exists alongside the Workforce Investment Board.

CWICstats, a research and data initiative launched in partnership with the Chapin Hall research center at the **University of Chicago** last summer, was created to answer those questions, Diaz said. CWICstats collects and analyzes data on all of the area's public job training and education programs and provides in-depth research, which will provide the big picture on what's working and what isn't.

"We utilize the data they already collect," CWICstats coordinator Elizabeth Weigensberg said. "We are not just gathering information. We are going to provide them with useful information."

Among the data that will be available through CWICstats is whether people are completing work force development programs, getting employed and retaining jobs and their wages. CWICstats will also be able to drill down for information on education programs, such as high school completion rates, post secondary enrollment and college graduation rates.

Through CWICstats, Chicago has become a trendsetter in solving a problem that plagues many, Corporation for a Skilled Workforce President and CEO Jeannine M. La Prad said.

"A lot of communities are struggling because I think there are a lot of stakeholders and citizens that need to know how money is being allocated and utilized and what the outcomes are that are related to that and there aren't necessarily great, transparent reporting structures in place," said La Prad, whose Michigan nonprofit consults on worker training.

Meanwhile, in New York, the New York City Workforce Investment Board has focused three of its nine career centers on specific industries to tailor its efforts to growing sectors. The WIB launched a transportation career center in 2008 and, after seeing its success, opened career centers focusing on health care and manufacturing, officials reported.

As Philadelphia officials explore ideas for restructuring their own work force development system, exploring the same strategy may not be a bad idea, Pennsylvania Deputy Secretary of Workforce Development Robert Garraty said.

"That is something a new board may want to consider given the number of folks in Philadelphia, because everything is sector-based and industry cluster-based and it just makes sense I think to have individuals working with employers within certain industries and those employees within a certain industry," Garraty said. "I think it's a good idea."