

CHICAGO BEYOND → SIX CORE EQUITY PRINCIPLES IN RESPONDING TO COVID-19

We have been asked: How have you *pivoted* to respond to COVID-19? And what about the work that was planned before?

We have been spurred to move with even greater urgency due to the crisis, but the work that needs to be done is still what always needed to be done. We have asked ourselves though – how can we re-orient?

Below are some of our reflections as it relates to this movement, and what guides us as we respond to not only this current, urgent moment, but as we think about the collective work in the long-term.

The foundation is trust—recognizing our relatedness—and consciousness that our own assumptions and biases determine what is possible.

1. THE FULL POTENTIAL OF ALL HUMANS REMAINS OUR NORTH STAR, WITH EQUITY AS OUR LIGHT.

Chicago Beyond has always been dedicated to the fullest potential of young people, focused on those up against the most barriers.

Implications with COVID-19:

Who does not have the privilege of “[staying at home](#)?” What about those who do not have homes? How do we reach those who are not otherwise reached?

The so what:

Simply put, if we do not intentionally focus on equity, we are almost guaranteed to generate more inequity.

Therefore, we are [hyper-focused](#) on who we can reach, and who is employed in the process.

2. MAY WE LIFT UP WORKERS WHO HAVE ALWAYS BEEN ESSENTIAL – WHO RISK THEIR LIVES, WELL BEYOND THEIR JOB DESCRIPTION – REMEMBERING HOW ESSENTIAL RELATIONSHIP SUPPORT IS.

We have seen again and again – outreach workers, social workers, organizers, counselors, teachers – they are the frontline for our young people. These are the people who often build and tend to relationships with young people.

Implications with COVID-19:

In this age of having to be physically distant, with many important community structures and safe spaces for our young people needing to physically close down, these *essential* workers are critical to maintaining and intensifying relationships with those who institutions often find difficult to connect with. Disruptions of these relationships, especially those nurtured over time, will exacerbate challenges as these connections are hard to replicate once interrupted.

The so what:

While we do our duty to be less physically proximate wherever possible, we must invest in, strengthen, and deepen social connection. We have intentionally focused on [delivering basic needs supports](#) through hyperlocal organizations, like IMAN, the Institute for Nonviolence Chicago, RAGE, and more. We believe that investing in keeping networks and relationships alive between organizations and residents will help more people over the long-term.

3. FULLY STEP INTO WHAT WE CAN CONTROL, AND HAVE THE HUMILITY TO UNDERSTAND THE LIMITS OF WHAT WE CAN SEE.

At our core, our organization is designed for adaptation, for challenging dogma (i.e. the way it's always been done), and practicing something new. To us, this is essential to equity work—because the systems we have inherited are designed to reproduce inequity. If we were to adopt their practices, however good our intentions, further inequity is the result. For example, please check out our approach to [evidence and knowledge](#).

Implications with COVID-19:

With COVID-19, we have seen many moments of the “we never do this” and “we can’t” falling away. At the same time, given the novel nature of this virus, we are learning new things every day, and being challenged to quickly adapt.

The so what:

We are getting out of our own way, leaning into the energy of “just get started.” This week, we collaborated with a hotel supplier, American Hotel Register to get hygiene supplies to street outreach workers to start conversations about the virus of COVID-19 and violence.

We are in supply chain relationships we could not have imagined at the start of the year, connecting to diapers and food and trucking.

We are taking this chance to go deeper on challenging dogma and “how things get done.”

We have assembled cross-domain, flat teams with authority to move with the working assumption that in a few weeks needs may be different, and our response must adapt.

4. APPROACH THE LONG-TERM WITH WISDOM, UNDERSTANDING THE SLOW CRISIS BENEATH THE FAST CRISIS, AND EMBRACING THAT THE LONG-TERM STARTS NOW.

There is a fast crisis we are focused on, and there is a slow crisis beneath it. This virus shows us how we have been doing on building an equitable society. The long-term work was always crucial, and we have an opportunity to re-orient.

Implications with COVID-19:

Especially in a time when we may be unsettled, grieving, looking for something familiar or something to distract ourselves, it is easy to just recreate on videoconferencing platforms, like Zoom, patterns from before. It is easy to jump to a solution.

The so what:

Start from clarity of thought.

We are having structured, intentional discussion on equity and history of crises with our team, as we act.

We have always developed our strategies acknowledging uncertainty and the importance of learning and pivoting. We do quick-and-dirty strategy updates: knowing what we know now, what do we change? What are new opportunities to serve? How do we just get started? And design our actions so we learn as we go?

The focus stays on the long-term ecosystem, on holistic work.

Complexity sometimes gets confused with diversity. Coordination is important, but monoculture solutions are partial. Who is left out? Who are the smaller nonprofits that might have the critical trust, but are not necessarily perceived as “having capacity,” particularly in crisis?

We are cognizant that we must be vigilant in our support for hyper local non-profits, especially during this time. There is imbedded knowledge and relationships that can help ensure no one is left behind in the immediate or long term.

5. BE THOUGHTFUL IN CALLING IN AND COLLABORATING, WHILE WE ARE UNWAVERING IN SPEAKING UP—AGAINST RACISM, OUR NARRATIVES OF “US” AND “THE OTHER.”

We have a chance to take on our history and our present – a chance to truly disrupt society. [The map of the virus's impact](#) shows in full color where our systems fall short.

Implications with COVID-19:

With COVID-19, old narratives of “us” and “other” are reborn and new ones created. In personal conversations, in public policy, in public narratives.

The so what:

We must fall together, so we are paying attention to coordinated efforts throughout the city, and seeing how we can contribute.

And, we must not entertain assumptions that drive us apart. We endeavor to use our voice, for example this Op-Ed piece about those in the jail whose [voices are muffled](#).

There is no “other”. There is only us.

6. MAY WE HEAL. MAY WE EXHALE WHAT DOES NOT SERVE US. MAY WE RE-BECOME WHOLE.

Human relatedness and healing was the core of the restorative justice models at [Fenger](#), in how [Beyond Incarceration](#) brings children and incarcerated parents together, in the holistic work of many of our [investments](#). It is critical in how we move forward from here.

Implications with COVID-19:

COVID-19 and the shutdown adds just another layer of stress and complexity. How can we heal holistically during and after COVID-19?

The so what:

Healing is not a self-centered act or a luxury. This is part of taking seriously the work of liberation. Taking seriously the idea of self-determination and fullness of potential in every human.

In our investing, we are focused on healing of adults who support young people, their families, our communities.

We are holding space in our personal interactions and many texts, calls, Zoom calls, messages with partners for breathing, and for love. This was always the case, but all the more important now.

About Chicago Beyond:

Chicago Beyond is an impact investor that backs the fight for youth equity by fueling organizations, individuals, and learning. Since its inception, they have invested more than \$30 million in local nonprofit organizations and community leaders that fight for all youth to achieve their fullest human potential. Learn more at ChicagoBeyond.org.