



CITY OF CHICAGO • OFFICE OF THE MAYOR



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 26, 2020

CONTACT:

Mayor's Press Office
312.744.3334
press@cityofchicago.org

MAYOR LIGHTFOOT AND CDPH ANNOUNCE \$56M RFP TO BOLSTER CONTACT TRACING EFFORTS FOR COVID-19 CASES IN CHICAGO

At least 600 Chicagoans to be hired as contact tracers directly from communities of high economic hardship

CHICAGO — Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot, alongside the Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH), today announced a plan to expand contact tracing for COVID-19 cases at the community level. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, CDPH has been working to develop the groundwork for a community-focused, citywide contact tracing operation. This operation includes a [Request for Proposals](#) (RFP), in which the City has allocated \$56 million in COVID-19 relief funding from the CDC and the Illinois Department of Public Health for community organizations in areas of high economic hardship to train and certify a 600-person workforce to support contact tracing.

"This exciting new RFP represents a win-win for our city by both stemming the spread of COVID-19 among our most-impacted communities, as well as addressing the underlying health inequities these same communities have faced for generations," said Mayor Lightfoot. "Thanks to our close community partnerships, our work to expand our contact tracing workforce will also empower these same individuals to apply their new skills towards long-term career opportunities in our healthcare economy, and strengthen ability to become the inclusive, equitable city we all know we can be."

The \$56 million RFP released today seeks organizations to apply to lead coordination of contact tracing and resource referral efforts across the city. The RFP mandates that the lead agency will be required to sub-grant 85% of contact tracing funding to at least 30 neighborhood-based organizations located within, or primarily serving residents of, communities of high economic hardship. Many of these same communities have been the most adversely impacted by COVID-19. These neighborhood-based organizations are responsible for recruiting, hiring and supporting a workforce of 600 contact tracers, supervisors, and referral coordinators to support an operation that has the capacity to trace 4,500 new contacts per day.



CITY OF CHICAGO • OFFICE OF THE MAYOR



Employees hired through this program will be supported by an “Earn-and-Learn” program that helps them pursue higher education and credentialing, which will give contact tracers the ability to pursue stable, middle-income jobs that can support their livelihoods beyond the height of the pandemic. Contact tracers will earn \$20 an hour with supervisors earning \$24 an hour. CDPH will also require that applicants meet these minimum salary requirements and provide full health benefits. Organizations who are not able to meet these criteria will be able to submit a written statement to provide an explanation.

“As we ease out of shelter in place, it is more important than ever to implement all proven practices to prevent further spread of the virus,” said CDPH Commissioner, Allison Arwady, M.D. “Contact tracing at the community-level will help us build out our public health infrastructure to reach even more Chicagoans. This approach provides the opportunity not only to operationalize an important tool in the fight against COVID-19, but also leverage the economic investment sourced from federal COVID relief funding to create thriving wage jobs and address long-standing health inequities caused by unequal economic opportunity and access to education.”

Alongside greater access to testing, contact tracing is an important tool to help control spread of the disease. Contact tracing is a multi-step process of identifying and contacting anyone who has been in close, prolonged contact with a person diagnosed with COVID-19. The process begins by interviewing people who have tested positive for the virus to create a list of individuals with whom they have been in contact during their infectious period. Once contacts have been identified, contact tracers reach out to these individuals to provide guidance about appropriate steps they can take to protect the public, such as self-quarantine. Public health officials then stay in touch with these individuals – mostly via electronic means (text services or reporting on a web/mobile platform) – to track the progression of any symptoms throughout the course of an illness. The City will continue to connect individuals with needed services who must quarantine as a result of being identified through contact tracing.

“We recognize that contact tracing is not historically a health system endeavor, but in this unprecedented time, it will take all hands on deck to reduce the spread of COVID-19,” said Brenda Battle, Chief Diversity, Inclusion and Equity Officer at University of Chicago Medicine. “The south side community is nearly 77% African American and 12% Hispanic. These populations have been impacted the most by the COVID-19 crisis. It is critically important that we participate in contact tracing efforts to support the city’s strategy to reduce the spread of COVID-19.”



CITY OF CHICAGO • OFFICE OF THE MAYOR



Since the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, CDPH has been conducting case investigations and contact tracing, primarily among persons diagnosed in congregate settings and among healthcare workers. Contact tracing efforts were originally focused on congregate settings, since people living in such settings are at particularly high risk because COVID-19 spreads rapidly among close contacts. The City has been working alongside medical providers, shelter operators, academic centers and advocacy organizations to prevent transmission of COVID-19 among Chicago's congregate populations, using data to guide the response. CDPH will apply the contact tracing strategy and tactics that were successfully used in congregate settings to their work in community settings.

"Federally qualified health centers can play a key role in supporting contact tracing of COVID-19," said David Munar, president and CEO of Howard Brown Health. "Not only have we been supporting contact tracing of other communicable disease like STIs for many years, but we can help link contacts to healthcare services to ensure their needs are met if they do test positive for COVID."

In addition to CDPH's own contact tracing efforts, they will partner with organizations who are already diagnosing COVID-19 cases over the next few weeks, such as hospitals and federally qualified health centers, to initiate or expand their contact tracing efforts. This practice will be beneficial for patients as many of them already have existing relationships with their healthcare providers and may feel more comfortable answering questions; and contact tracing can begin very quickly after someone is diagnosed.

"Through testing, isolating, and using infection control practices like universal masking, we have been able to stop outbreaks in congregate settings," said Dr. Elizabeth Davis, a primary care doctor at Rush University Medical Center who has been leading the healthcare system's efforts to partner with city officials on congregate setting outbreak investigations. "We are all one city, stopping the spread of an outbreak in one area helps the city as a whole."

"The goal of the City of Chicago in this effort is not just to hire contact tracers, but to ideally train a workforce that can fill that role now and then transition to community health work or other health care entry-level/support positions later," said Helen Margellos, president of Sinai Urban Health Institute. "Consistent with the City's efforts in Healthy Chicago 2025, The Sinai Urban Health Institute's Center for Research, Outcomes and Workforce Development model will help enhance workforce capacity and ensure this effort is more than a 'one and done' opportunity."

###