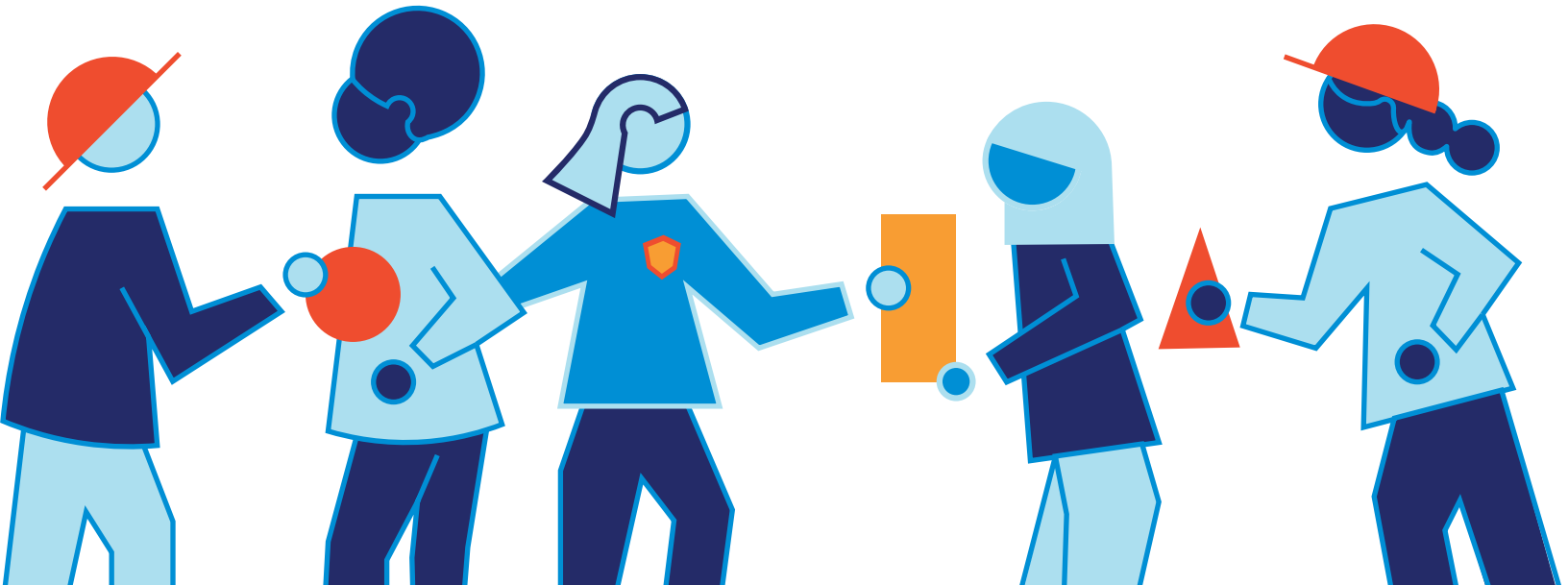

Capacity Building Program
Grant activities executive
summary

Boosting local government

A successful approach to building
resources across northeastern Illinois,
one community at a time



INTRODUCTION

The three-year Capacity Building Program offered by the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) was a pilot comprehensive program to help local governments throughout northeastern Illinois address challenges with training, technical assistance, and on-the-ground support.

Local governments can have **obstacles** such as a lack of staff planners, staff members who wear multiple hats, or part-time staff. Some communities have plans that need to be updated, or have updated plans but not enough **manpower** or **resources** for execution.

Overall, in pursuing local and regional goals, all communities encounter problems because of increasing **fiscal pressure** and often insufficient **local revenues**.

CMAP devised the Capacity Building Program in 2018. The work was made possible by a \$500,000 grant from the MacArthur Foundation, funding from the Illinois Department of Transportation, and seed money from the Chicago Community Trust.

The goal was for communities to have a visible impact — cleaned-up properties, shovels in the ground, enhanced public spaces — while advancing their long-term vision. A major objective was to assist local staff in creating and strengthening internal systems and operations, so the gains could be self-sustaining over time.

Participating communities applied for and received **more than \$4 million in grants** from a variety of funding sources, started or advanced **dozens of projects**, launched **four new public outdoor initiatives**, and created a **new county coordinator position** and a **new online portal** for intergovernmental cooperation.

THE WORK (PHASE I)

The Capacity Building Pilot Program launched in early 2019 with the **embedded staff planner program**, which assigned CMAP planners to work directly with the villages of Calumet Park and Sauk Village, and the **coordinated investment study** in McHenry County, which included the participation of more than 100 local governments.

The Embedded Staff Planner Program

Thanks to work done in collaboration with the CMAP planner, **Calumet Park** received more than \$3 million in grants, including \$1.5 million from the state's Rebuild Illinois: Shovel Ready Sites program for an innovative proposal to prepare for transit-oriented development on village-owned property near the Metra Electric line station.

The CMAP planner functioned as a bridge between village staff and consultants hired to work on the village's first comprehensive plan in 30 years. That allowed the village to crystallize its major objectives for the near- and long-term future.

The village made major advances in attracting a new grocery store and working on plans to develop more public recreational space and revitalize a major business corridor. The village also streamlined internal processes for the selection of contractors and developed an evaluation tool for internal review of proposals.

Thanks to the program, Calumet Park obtained \$400,000 in grants to tear down buildings to make space for a new village green. The plan is to create a "heart center" for the village, with a community garden, amphitheater, splash pad, and other amenities for the community.

Sauk Village received about \$750,000 in grants and moved forward with several projects after identifying priorities in a comprehensive plan from March 2019.

The village worked on an inventory of vacant properties and received \$250,000 from the Illinois Housing Development Authority's Abandoned Residential Property Municipality Relief Program to secure, maintain, demolish, or rehabilitate abandoned homes throughout the village. The grant came from a parallel project called HOMES for a Changing Region.

Sauk Village also worked a pavement management study and a streets infrastructure program, and developed recommendations for updates to the zoning code.

The village moved forward with planning for a new "smart neighborhood" development, a 53-home subdivision that will break ground next year on Torrence Avenue. With the help of the Metropolitan Planning Council, the village is completing a water loss audit.

Village staff and officials made major progress in planning for a multi-use path with regional connectivity and started a collaboration with Habitat for Humanity on neighborhood revitalization projects.

The McHenry County Coordinated Study

About **100 local governments in McHenry County**, including municipalities, townships, schools, parks, libraries, and fire protection and other districts, took part in the coordinated investment study, which was aimed at finding innovative and cost-effective ways of sharing services, facilities, and personnel.

In the first year of the study, CMAP staff facilitated the creation of an advisory committee that researched precedents and best practices, and collected data. In late 2019, 43 local

governments attended five workshops that focused on administration and finance; building and development; transportation and streets; emergency services; and fleet management.

The most significant accomplishment was the creation of a **new county coordinator** position, who facilitates idea sharing and collaboration regarding cost sharing among local governments. Chalen Daigle was hired as county coordinator in December 2020.

The study also prompted the creation of a **new shared online portal** for intergovernmental coordination, which streamlines the process of looking for ways to share costs and resources among local governments.

THE WORK (PHASE II)

The COVID-19 pandemic dictated the need for a shift within the Capacity Building Program. The shift took into account new necessities, such as remote working, while being responsive to municipalities' changing priorities. CMAP created three new programs:

The NEXT Program, to help communities take the “next” steps in implementing existing plans; the **Resource, Opportunity, Impact (ROI) Program**, for municipalities to identify transportation project priorities, apply for funding, build grant management capacity, and move projects forward; and the **Collaborative for Public Space Innovations**, designed for communities to address the shared challenges around the creative use of public space in response to the pandemic.

The NEXT Program

The program in **Matteson** launched with a focus on moving forward the streetscape improvement plan recently completed by the village. That grew to include assistance in revising and expanding the village's outdoor dining ordinance, adopting a new ordinance to regulate food trucks, soliciting proposals for new wayfinding and branding signage, and creating design standards for the Market Square Crossing mixed-use development on the 60-acre site of the former Lincoln Mall.

The **Lake County Land Bank** received assistance in researching how to establish sustainable funding methods, and identifying and tracking blighted, vacant and abandoned properties locally with a pilot program in Round Lake.

Work began in **Robbins** but progress slowed down after local elections led to a leadership change and a focus on that transition.

The Resource, Opportunity, Impact Program

Harvey identified seven priority transportation projects among 31 such projects in its pipeline, and obtained funding for three of them. The latter include a Dixie Highway cross-jurisdictional improvement project, important for the village because an Amazon facility coming to neighboring Markham is expected to increase traffic. The village also worked on establishing best practices to manage the grant process.

University Park got help in identifying the two village streets most in need of work and securing funding for a major traffic light project. The village expanded its search for funding sources and submitted three new grants applications, including for engineering and construction of a path along a major parkway; worked on moving forward its transit-oriented plan; and identified additional opportunities for economic development.

In **Dolton**, village officials began to discuss their planning priorities but progress slowed down after local elections led to a leadership change and a focus on that transition.

The Collaborative on Public Space Innovations

Berkeley, Harvey, Lemont, and Morton Grove engaged in collaborative idea sharing that resulted in **four public space projects in summer 2021**. All of the projects are reasonably budgeted, replicable, and sustainable.

Berkeley held a **Berkeley Park StoryWalk** in August consisting of a path marked by 18 stations where people learn about and read from a featured book. The stations feature art and pages, and the books will change quarterly. The event was in collaboration with the Berkeley Public Library and the Berkeley Park District.

Harvey planned a **Downtown Fest and Community Bike Ride** for September, with a farmers market, music, street art, participation from nonprofits and a public health component with COVID-19 vaccines available. The event promotes community cohesiveness and safe streets, and fits with the city's broader goal of revitalizing downtown and making it inviting for residents to spend time there.

Morton Grove held an educational **Tree Walk** in July, a one-mile, family-friendly walk guided by the village arborist and designed for residents to learn about the village's tree canopy. CMAP also helped create a tree strategy for the village.

Lemont **upgraded its public space** with **plans for a future park downtown** in a privately owned vacant lot downtown whose owner was interested in donating it to the village. The village also codified its outdoor dining guidelines and created an explanatory brochure for business owners.

INSIGHTS GAINED

Local government staff members and elected officials who took part in the Capacity Building Program found it **highly beneficial**. Many underlined the fact that, without a CMAP planner, some of the work likely would have never happened due to their staffing and capacity constraints. Most said they keenly felt the loss of their planner when the program ended.

The positive feedback centered around **a few major themes**: the benefits of developing and beginning to implement grant toolkits that facilitate internal and cross-departmental tracking of grant applications and progress; the benefits of devising criteria to prioritize projects, both short term and long term, to improve the quality of life of their residents; and the gains made by establishing relationships and fruitful communication with neighboring local governments, local and regional agencies, and nonprofit partners.

McHenry County is a testament to the efficiency and effectiveness of designating **someone in charge** of exploring and coordinating ways to share costs among local governments, particularly in times of crisis like the pandemic.

The municipalities were delighted about public space uses that invite **community participation and partnerships**. They also relished finding out that small things like twinkle lights can make a big impact.

MOVING FORWARD

CMAP and its staff have a **continued commitment** to giving **hands-on assistance** to local governments and addressing regional challenges while also working in **inclusive** ways and helping communities with **limited resources**.

In the second half of 2021, CMAP launched **another round of the NEXT program**, which includes Summit and Chicago Heights; **another round of the Resource, Opportunity, Impact program**, which includes Waukegan, Lansing, and Marengo; and a **new collaborative** to explore how local communities can collaborate to address decisions about development incentives, which are inherently competitive.

The agency expects to launch a **third round** of programs in early 2022.

The Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) is our region's comprehensive planning organization. The agency and its partners developed and are now implementing ON TO 2050, a long-range plan to help the seven counties and 284 communities of northeastern Illinois pursue strategies that address transportation, housing, economic development, open space, the environment, and other quality-of-life issues.

See cmap.illinois.gov for more information.