



**CITY OF CHICAGO**  
**ECONOMIC DISCLOSURE STATEMENT and AFFIDAVIT**  
**Related to Contract/Amendment/Solicitation**  
**EDS # 213373**

**SECTION I -- GENERAL INFORMATION**

A. Legal name of the Disclosing Party submitting the EDS:

Project Exploration

Enter d/b/a if applicable:

The Disclosing Party submitting this EDS is:

the Applicant

B. Business address of the Disclosing Party:

4511 South Evans  
Chicago, IL 60653  
United States

C. Telephone:

312-273-4026

Fax:

none

D. Name of contact person:

Mrs. Natasha K Smith-Walker

F. Brief description of contract, transaction or other undertaking (referred to below as the "Matter") to which this EDS pertains:

DFSS-CORP-YS-CYSC:

G. Which City agency or department is requesting this EDS?

DEPT OF FAMILY AND SUPPORT SERVICES

Specification Number

1306973

Contract (PO) Number

309182

Revision Number

0

Release Number

0

User Department Project Number

## **SECTION II -- DISCLOSURE OF OWNERSHIP INTERESTS**

### **A. NATURE OF THE DISCLOSING PARTY**

1. Indicate the nature of the Disclosing Party:

Not-for-profit corporation

Is the Disclosing Party also a 501(c)(3) organization?

Yes

Is the Disclosing Party incorporated or organized in the State of Illinois?

Yes

### **B. DISCLOSING PARTY IS A LEGAL ENTITY:**

1.a.1 Does the Disclosing Party have any directors?

Yes

1.a.3 List below the full names and titles of all executive officers and all directors, if any, of the entity. Do not include any directors who have no power to select the entity's officers.

**Officer/Director:** Mr. Timothy Kolschowsky

**Title:** Chair

**Role:** Both

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**Officer/Director:** Mr. Bryan Hunt

**Title:** Vice-Chair

**Role:** Both

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**Officer/Director:** Mrs. Deborah Williams Thurmond

**Title:** Treasurer

**Role:** Both

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1.a.5 Are there any members of the not-for-profit Disclosing Party which are legal entities?

No

### **SECTION III -- INCOME OR COMPENSATION TO, OR OWNERSHIP BY, CITY ELECTED OFFICIALS**

A. Has the Disclosing Party provided any income or compensation to any City elected official during the 12-month period preceding the date of this EDS?

No

B. Does the Disclosing Party reasonably expect to provide any income or compensation to any City elected official during the 12-month period following the date of this EDS?

No

D. Does any City elected official or, to the best of the Disclosing Party's knowledge after reasonable inquiry, any City elected official's spouse or domestic partner, have a financial interest (as defined in [Chapter 2-156 of the Municipal Code](#) ("MCC")) in the Disclosing Party?

No

### **SECTION IV -- DISCLOSURE OF SUBCONTRACTORS AND OTHER RETAINED PARTIES**

The Disclosing Party must disclose the name and business address of each subcontractor, attorney, lobbyist (as defined in [MCC Chapter 2-156](#)), accountant, consultant and any other person or entity whom the Disclosing Party has retained or

expects to retain in connection with the Matter, as well as the nature of the relationship, and the total amount of the fees paid or estimated to be paid. The Disclosing Party is not required to disclose employees who are paid solely through the Disclosing Party's regular payroll.

If the Disclosing Party is uncertain whether a disclosure is required under this Section, the Disclosing Party must either ask the City whether disclosure is required or make the disclosure.

1. Has the Disclosing Party retained or does it anticipate retaining any legal entities in connection with the Matter?

No

3. Has the Disclosing Party retained or does it anticipate retaining any persons in connection with the Matter?

No

## **SECTION V -- CERTIFICATIONS**

### **A. COURT-ORDERED CHILD SUPPORT COMPLIANCE**

Under [MCC Section 2-92-415](#), substantial owners of business entities that contract with the City must remain in compliance with their child support obligations throughout the contract's term.

Has any person who directly or indirectly owns 10% or more of the Disclosing Party been declared in arrearage of any child support obligations by any Illinois court of competent jurisdiction?

Not applicable because no person directly or indirectly owns 10% or more of the Disclosing Party

### **B. FURTHER CERTIFICATIONS**

1. [This certification applies only if the Matter is a contract being handled by the City's Department of Procurement Services.] In the 5-year period preceding the date of this EDS, neither the Disclosing Party nor any [Affiliated Entity](#) has engaged, in connection with the performance of any public contract, the services of an integrity monitor, independent private sector inspector general, or integrity compliance consultant (i.e. an individual or entity with legal, auditing, investigative, or other similar skills, designated by a public agency to help the agency monitor the activity of specified agency vendors as well as help the vendors reform their business practices so they can be considered for agency contracts in the future, or continue with a contract in progress).



I certify the above to be true

2. The Disclosing Party and its Affiliated Entities are not delinquent in the payment of any fine, fee, tax or other source of indebtedness owed to the City of Chicago, including, but not limited to, water and sewer charges, license fees, parking tickets, property taxes and sales taxes, nor is the Disclosing Party delinquent in the payment of any tax administered by the Illinois Department of Revenue.

I certify the above to be true

3. The Disclosing Party and, if the Disclosing Party is a legal entity, all of those persons or entities identified in Section II(B)(1) of this EDS:

- a. are not presently debarred, suspended, proposed for debarment, declared ineligible or voluntarily excluded from any transactions by any federal, state or local unit of government;
- b. have not, during the 5 years before the date of this EDS, been convicted of a criminal offense, adjudged guilty, or had a civil judgment rendered against them in connection with: obtaining, attempting to obtain, or performing a public (federal, state or local) transaction or contract under a public transaction; a violation of federal or state antitrust statutes; fraud; embezzlement; theft; forgery; bribery; falsification or destruction of records; making false statements; or receiving stolen property;
- c. are not presently indicted for, or criminally or civilly charged by, a governmental entity (federal, state or local) with committing any of the offenses set forth in subparagraph (b) above;
- d. have not, during the 5 years before the date of this EDS, had one or more public transactions (federal, state or local) terminated for cause or default; and
- e. have not, during the 5 years before the date of this EDS, been convicted, adjudged guilty, or found liable in a civil proceeding, or in any criminal or civil action, including actions concerning environmental violations, instituted by the City or by the federal government, any state, or any other unit of local government.

I certify the above to be true

4. The Disclosing Party understands and shall comply with the applicable requirements of MCC [Chapter 2-56 \(Inspector General\)](#) and [Chapter 2-156 \(Governmental Ethics\)](#).

I certify the above to be true

5. Neither the Disclosing Party, nor any [Contractor](#), nor any [Affiliated Entity](#) of either the Disclosing Party or any [Contractor](#), nor any [Agents](#) have, during the 5 years before the date of this EDS, or, with respect to a [Contractor](#), an [Affiliated Entity](#), or an [Affiliated Entity](#) of a [Contractor](#) during the 5 years before the date of such [Contractor's](#) or [Affiliated Entity's](#) contract or engagement in connection with the Matter:

- a. bribed or attempted to bribe, or been convicted or adjudged guilty of bribery or attempting to bribe, a public officer or employee of the City, the State of Illinois, or any agency of the federal government or of any state or local government in the United States of America, in that officer's or employee's official capacity;
- b. agreed or colluded with other bidders or prospective bidders, or been a party to any such agreement, or been convicted or adjudged guilty of agreement or collusion among bidders or prospective bidders, in restraint of freedom of competition by agreement to bid a fixed price or otherwise; or
- c. made an admission of such conduct described in subparagraph (a) or (b) above that is a matter of record, but have not been prosecuted for such conduct; or
- d. violated the provisions referenced in [MCC Subsection 2-92-320\(a\)\(4\)\(Contracts Requiring a Base Wage\)](#); [\(a\)\(5\)\(Debarment Regulations\)](#); or [\(a\)\(6\)\(Minimum Wage Ordinance\)](#).

I certify the above to be true

6. Neither the Disclosing Party, nor any [Affiliated Entity](#) or [Contractor](#), or any of their employees, officials, [agents](#) or partners, is barred from contracting with any unit of state or local government as a result of engaging in or being convicted of

- bid-rigging in violation of [720 ILCS 5/33E-3](#);
- bid-rotating in violation of [720 ILCS 5/33E-4](#); or
- any similar offense of any state or of the United States of America that contains the same elements as the offense of bid-rigging or bid-rotating.

I certify the above to be true

7. Neither the Disclosing Party nor any [Affiliated Entity](#) is listed on a Sanctions List maintained by the United States Department of Commerce, State, or Treasury, or any successor federal agency.

I certify the above to be true

8. [FOR APPLICANT ONLY]

- i. Neither the Applicant nor any "controlling person" [[see MCC Chapter 1-23, Article I](#) for applicability and defined terms] of the Applicant is currently indicted or charged with, or has admitted guilt of, or has ever been convicted of, or placed under supervision for, any criminal offense involving actual, attempted, or conspiracy to commit bribery, theft, fraud, forgery, perjury, dishonesty or deceit against an officer or employee of the City or any "sister agency" ; and
- ii. the Applicant understands and acknowledges that compliance with Article I is a continuing requirement for doing business with the City.

NOTE: If [MCC Chapter 1-23, Article I](#) applies to the Applicant, that Article's permanent compliance timeframe supersedes 5-year compliance timeframes in this Section V.

I certify the above to be true

9. [FOR APPLICANT ONLY] The Applicant and its Affiliated Entities will not use, nor permit their subcontractors to use, any facility listed as having an active exclusion by the U.S. EPA on the [federal System for Award Management](#) ("SAM")

I certify the above to be true

10. [FOR APPLICANT ONLY] The Applicant will obtain from any contractors/ subcontractors hired or to be hired in connection with the Matter certifications equal in form and substance to those in Certifications (2) and (9) above and will not, without the prior written consent of the City, use any such contractor/subcontractor that does not provide such certifications or that the Applicant has reason to believe has not provided or cannot provide truthful certifications.

I certify the above to be true

11. To the best of the Disclosing Party's knowledge after reasonable inquiry, the following is a complete list of all current employees of the Disclosing Party who were, at any time during the 12-month period preceding the date of this EDS, an employee, or elected or appointed official, of the City of Chicago.

None

12. To the best of the Disclosing Party's knowledge after reasonable inquiry, the following is a complete list of all gifts that the Disclosing Party has given or caused to be given, at any time during the 12-month period preceding the execution date of this EDS, to an employee, or elected or appointed official, of the City of Chicago. For purposes of this statement, a "gift" does not include: (i) anything made generally available to City employees or to the general public, or (ii) food or drink provided in the course of official City business and having a retail value of less than \$25 per recipient, or (iii) a political contribution otherwise duly reported as required by law.

None

#### C. CERTIFICATION OF STATUS AS FINANCIAL INSTITUTION

The Disclosing Party certifies, as defined in [MCC Section 2-32-455\(b\)](#), the Disclosing Party

is not a "financial institution"

#### D. CERTIFICATION REGARDING FINANCIAL INTEREST IN CITY BUSINESS

Any words or terms defined in [MCC Chapter 2-156](#) have the same meanings if used in this Part D.

1. In accordance with [MCC Section 2-156-110](#): To the best of the Disclosing Party's knowledge after reasonable inquiry, does any official or employee of the City have a financial interest in his or her own name or in the name of any other person or entity in the Matter?

No

#### E. CERTIFICATION REGARDING SLAVERY ERA BUSINESS

If the Disclosing Party cannot make this verification, the Disclosing Party must disclose all required information in the space provided below or in an attachment in the "Additional Info" tab. Failure to comply with these disclosure requirements may make any contract entered into with the City in connection with the Matter voidable by the City.

The Disclosing Party verifies that the Disclosing Party has searched any and all records of the Disclosing Party and any and all predecessor entities regarding records of investments or profits from slavery or slaveholder insurance policies during the slavery era (including insurance policies issued to slaveholders that provided coverage for damage to or injury or death of their slaves), and the Disclosing Party has found no such records.

I can make the above verification

### **SECTION VI -- CERTIFICATIONS FOR FEDERALLY FUNDED MATTERS**

Is the Matter federally funded? For the purposes of this Section VI, tax credits allocated by the City and proceeds of debt obligations of the City are not federal funding.

No

### **SECTION VII - FURTHER ACKNOWLEDGMENTS AND CERTIFICATION**

The Disclosing Party understands and agrees that:

- A. The certifications, disclosures, and acknowledgments contained in this EDS will become part of any contract or other agreement between the Applicant and the City in connection with the Matter, whether procurement, City assistance, or other City action, and are material inducements to the City's execution of any contract or taking other action with respect to the Matter. The Disclosing Party understands that it must comply with all statutes, ordinances, and regulations on which this EDS is based.
- B. The City's Governmental Ethics Ordinance, [MCC Chapter 2-156](#), imposes certain duties and obligations on persons or entities seeking City contracts, work,

business, or transactions. The full text of this ordinance and a training program is available on line at [www.cityofchicago.org/Ethics](http://www.cityofchicago.org/Ethics), and may also be obtained from the City's Board of Ethics, 740 N. Sedgwick St., Suite 500, Chicago, IL 60610, (312) 744-9660. The Disclosing Party must comply fully with this ordinance.

I acknowledge and consent to the above

The Disclosing Party understands and agrees that:

- C. If the City determines that any information provided in this EDS is false, incomplete or inaccurate, any contract or other agreement in connection with which it is submitted may be rescinded or be void or voidable, and the City may pursue any remedies under the contract or agreement (if not rescinded or void), at law, or in equity, including terminating the Disclosing Party's participation in the Matter and/or declining to allow the Disclosing Party to participate in other City transactions. Remedies at law for a false statement of material fact may include incarceration and an award to the City of treble damages.
- D. It is the City's policy to make this document available to the public on its Internet site and/or upon request. Some or all of the information provided in, and appended to, this EDS may be made publicly available on the Internet, in response to a Freedom of Information Act request, or otherwise. By completing and signing this EDS, the Disclosing Party waives and releases any possible rights or claims which it may have against the City in connection with the public release of information contained in this EDS and also authorizes the City to verify the accuracy of any information submitted in this EDS.
- E. The information provided in this EDS must be kept current. In the event of changes, the Disclosing Party must supplement this EDS up to the time the City takes action on the Matter. If the Matter is a contract being handled by the City's Department of Procurement Services, the Disclosing Party must update this EDS as the contract requires. NOTE: With respect to Matters subject to MCC [Chapter 1-23](#), Article I (imposing PERMANENT INELIGIBILITY for certain specified offenses), the information provided herein regarding eligibility must be kept current for a longer period, as required by [MCC Chapter 1-23](#) and [Section 2-154-020](#).

I acknowledge and consent to the above

## **APPENDIX A - FAMILIAL RELATIONSHIPS WITH ELECTED CITY OFFICIALS AND DEPARTMENT HEADS**

This Appendix is to be completed only by (a) the Applicant, and (b) any legal entity which has a direct ownership interest in the Applicant exceeding 7.5%. It is not to be completed by any legal entity which has only an indirect ownership interest in the Applicant.

Under [MCC Section 2-154-015](#), the Disclosing Party must disclose whether such Disclosing Party or any "Applicable Party" or any Spouse or Domestic Partner thereof currently has a "familial relationship" with any elected city official or department head. A "familial relationship" exists if, as of the date this EDS is signed, the Disclosing Party or any "Applicable Party" or any Spouse or Domestic Partner thereof is related to the mayor, any alderman, the city clerk, the city treasurer or any city department head as spouse or domestic partner or as any of the following, whether by blood or adoption: parent, child, brother or sister, aunt or uncle, niece or nephew, grandparent, grandchild, father-in-law, mother-in-law, son-in-law, daughter-in-law, stepfather or stepmother, stepson or stepdaughter, stepbrother or stepsister or half-brother or half-sister.

"Applicable Party" means (1) all executive officers of the Disclosing Party listed in Section II.B.1.a, if the Disclosing Party is a corporation; all partners of the Disclosing Party, if the Disclosing Party is a general partnership; all general partners and limited partners of the Disclosing Party, if the Disclosing Party is a limited partnership; all managers, managing members and members of the Disclosing Party, if the Disclosing Party is a limited liability company; (2) all principal officers of the Disclosing Party; and (3) any person having more than a 7.5% ownership interest in the Disclosing Party. "Principal officers" means the president, chief operating officer, executive director, chief financial officer, treasurer or secretary of a legal entity or any person exercising similar authority.

Does the Disclosing Party or any "Applicable Party" or any Spouse or Domestic Partner thereof currently have a "familial relationship" with an elected city official or department head?

N/A because the Disclosing Party is neither the Applicant nor has a direct ownership interest

## **APPENDIX B - BUILDING CODE SCOFFLAW/PROBLEM LANDLORD CERTIFICATION**

This Appendix is to be completed only by (a) the Applicant, and (b) any legal entity which has a direct ownership interest in the Applicant exceeding 7.5% (an "Owner"). It is not to be completed by any legal entity which has only an indirect ownership interest in the Applicant.

1. Pursuant to [MCC Section 2-154-010](#), is the Applicant or any Owner identified as a building code scofflaw or problem landlord pursuant to [MCC Section 2-92-416??](#)

N/A because the Disclosing party is neither the Applicant nor has a direct ownership interest.

## APPENDIX C-PROHIBITION ON WAGE & SALARY HISTORY SCREENING

This Appendix is to be completed only by an Applicant that is completing this EDS as a "contractor" as defined in [MCC Section 2-92-385](#). That section, which should be consulted ([www.amlegal.com](http://www.amlegal.com)), generally covers a party to any agreement pursuant to which they: (i) receive City of Chicago funds in consideration for services, work or goods provided (including for legal or other professional services), or (ii) pay the City money for a license, grant or concession allowing them to conduct a business on City premises.

On behalf of an Applicant that is a contractor pursuant to [MCC Section 2-92-385](#), I hereby certify that the Applicant is in compliance with [MCC Section 2-92-385\(b\)\(1\)](#) and (2), which prohibit: (i) screening job applicants based on their wage or salary history, or (ii) seeking job applicants' wage or salary history from current or former employers. I also certify that the Applicant has adopted a policy that includes those prohibitions.

This certification shall serve as the affidavit required by [MCC Section 2-92-385\(c\)\(1\)](#).

N/A - I am not an Applicant that is a "contractor" as defined in MCC Section 2-92-385.

## ADDITIONAL INFO

Please add any additional explanatory information here. If explanation is longer than 1000 characters, you may add an attachment below. Please note that your EDS, including all attachments, becomes available for public viewing upon contract award. Your attachments will be viewable "as is" without manual redaction by the City. You are responsible for redacting any non-public information from your documents before uploading.

Project Exploration creates transformative learning opportunities for youth underrepresented in the sciences -- particularly students of color and girls - by equipping them with the skills, practices, and mindset needed for a lifelong pursuit of learning. Project Exploration is a nationally recognized science education and youth development organization and serves as the backbone organization of the Chicago STEM Pathways Cooperative. Project Exploration brings equity and opportunity to traditionally overlooked communities by making science, technology engineering and math (STEM) education accessible through:   
• Experiential out-of-school-time programs led by university students and skilled professionals that empower and mentor underrepresented minority youth and girls   
• Building high-quality programs by developing effective and collaborative partnerships through our leadership in the STEM Co-op and community-building connections within neighborhoods.

List of vendor attachments uploaded by City staff

None.

List of attachments uploaded by vendor

PE program description

MY CHI MY FUTURE COMMUNITY PLAN

## **CERTIFICATION**

Under penalty of perjury, the person signing below: (1) warrants that he/she is authorized to execute this EDS, and all applicable appendices, on behalf of the Disclosing Party, and (2) warrants that all certifications and statements contained in this EDS, and all applicable appendices, are true, accurate and complete as of the date furnished to the City. Submission of this form constitutes making the oath associated with notarization.

/s/ 05/14/2025

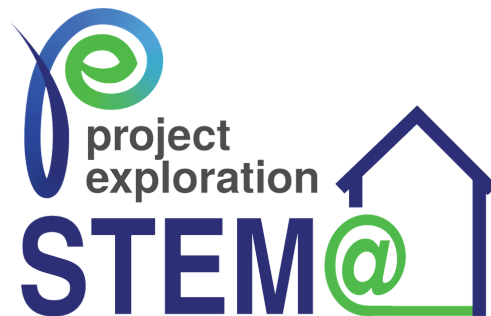
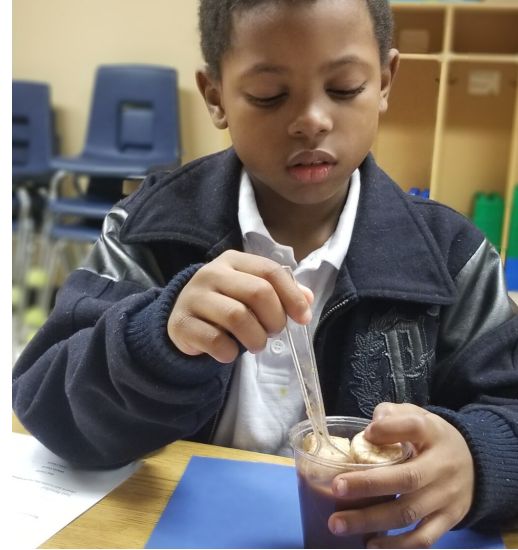
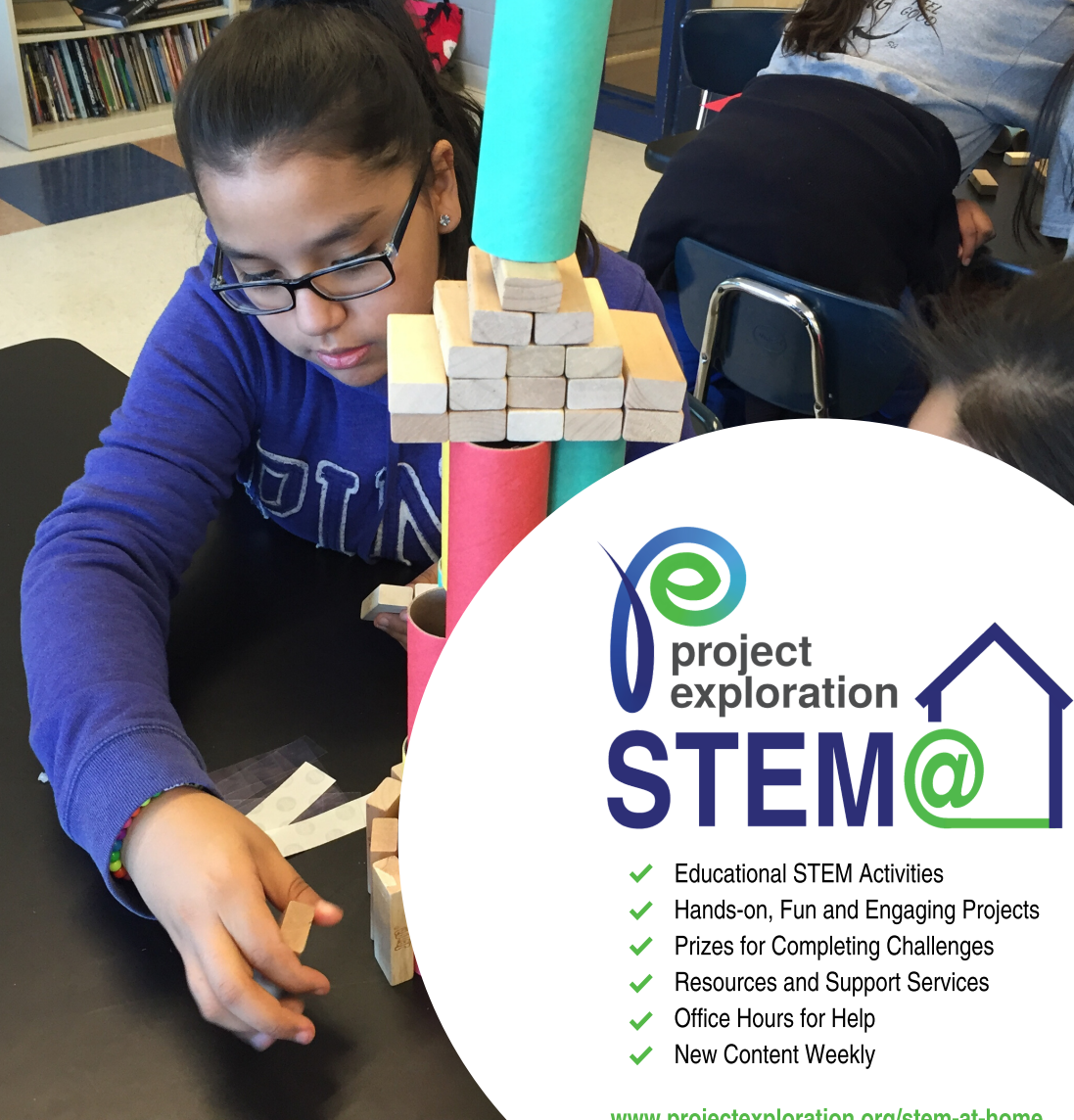
Mrs. Natasha K Smith-Walker

Executive Director

Project Exploration

This is a printed copy of the Economic Disclosure Statement, the original of which is filed electronically with the City of Chicago. Any alterations must be made electronically, alterations on this printed copy are void and of no effect.





- ✓ Educational STEM Activities
- ✓ Hands-on, Fun and Engaging Projects
- ✓ Prizes for Completing Challenges
- ✓ Resources and Support Services
- ✓ Office Hours for Help
- ✓ New Content Weekly

[www.projectexploration.org/stem-at-home](http://www.projectexploration.org/stem-at-home)



Project Exploration has created transformative learning opportunities for youth underrepresented in the sciences –particularly students of color and girls – for more than 20 years. In the face of the coronavirus crisis, our mission and resolve to reach and deepen our impact for young people and families remains strong.

[www.projectexploration.org](http://www.projectexploration.org)



The young people PE serves have always been at greatest risk of falling behind.

While learning loss can be expected among all students regardless of background during Covid-19 school closures, studies show that community wealth can provide the needed support for students who have missed too much school (The Atlantic, 2016). With 92% of families PE serves coming from low-income families, however, the concern is even greater than learning loss. As many as 45% of homes PE serves are estimated to lack internet access and even fewer estimated to have access to devices which have become necessities for e-learning. Furthermore, basic needs such as rental assistance, food security, and safety are of great concern. During this time of uncertainty, PE aims making learning fun and rewarding for entire families, as well as ensure our families have the resources they need to stay home and be safe.



### **For Students**

STEM@home provides fun, hands-on STEM activities to do with simple materials families already have at home. Kids follow along with challenges and activities and share their progress on our Share It Portal. Earning points for their work and cash prizes from the Explore Store, students stay engaged. During office hours, one-on-one support from PE staff and volunteers make sure no one falls behind.



### **For Parents**

Food security, internet and device access, and reduced access to resources such as rental assistance are of great concern during this crisis. Through PE Cares, families can leverage the strengths of PE and our partners to remain at home, safe, and well-resourced during this crisis. At the same time, parent toolkits available through STEM@home make engaging youth in STEM activities fun and rewarding.





The Austin Experience  
*Led by Project Exploration*

# MY CHI MY FUTURE COMMUNITY PLAN

AN OVERVIEW OF OUR GRASSROOTS APPROACH TO  
IMPROVING OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME PROGRAM PARTICIPATION



AUSTIN  
\*\*\*  
EXPERIENCE

Program Leads  
Janeicia Williams  
Corey Dooley

# ABOUT US

The Austin Experience initiative showcases community-led events and opportunities for youth and families in the Austin neighborhood by uniting wellness providers and out-of-school time stakeholders. Its mission is to reshape perceptions, both within and outside the community, by highlighting the vibrancy, potential, and positive aspects of the "Austin Experience."



## We are the experience.

The My CHI My Future initiative empowers Project Exploration to increase its work with community-based organizations in Austin to strengthen local, youth-serving opportunity ecosystems. As an "anchor organization," we convene community-level stakeholders and caring adults committed to youth development, such as youth workers, faith leaders, school staff, etc., to mobilize strategies to connect young people of all ages to engaging and meaningful out-of-school time programming in the Austin Community.

In collaboration with community stakeholders, we have developed the Austin Community Plan to outline our strategy for connecting youth to local out-of-school time programming. This plan aims to address and overcome challenges that limit youth access to these programs. A key component of our approach involved conducting a community needs assessment to evaluate the strengths and resources available to support children, youth, and families, as well as to identify existing gaps. The insights from this assessment will help our partners better understand regional barriers and uncover opportunities for improvement and growth.

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**The Austin Experience**  
*Project Exploration*





## Austin Community Needs Assessment

# A UNIQUE APPROACH

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Over the past year, we have advanced Project SYSTEMIC 2.0, a systems-thinking framework that builds on the foundational work of the original Project SYSTEMIC initiative, which applied a systemic approach to developing a STEM ecosystem in Chicago's Austin neighborhood. Initially designed to broaden STEM participation among African American and low-income Chicago Public School students, Project SYSTEMIC focused on uncovering systemic interdependencies contributing to youth access and participation barriers.

The original initiative engaged a wide cross-section of community stakeholders, using innovative, interactive problem-structuring and solving strategies to map the STEM ecosystem and develop evidence-based organizing and implementation strategies. This community-driven approach aimed to elevate historically excluded neighborhood voices, build local capacity, and enhance coordination and resource sharing among partners to address STEM access challenges.

Building on this legacy, Project SYSTEMIC 2.0 extends these principles to address out-of-school time (OST) programming barriers in Austin, one of Chicago's most underserved neighborhoods. To support this effort, we designed and implemented a survey capturing student interests across Austin community schools, Network 3, and Network 15, providing an empirical foundation for strategy development. This iterative and collaborative approach continues to leverage systems thinking and culturally responsive methodologies to foster sustainable, community-centered solutions for youth development and access.

## OVERVIEW

Since 2019, our initiative has assessed student interests and community factors like safety, transportation, and program availability, identifying key assets and barriers to out-of-school time (OST) participation. In 2021, we partnered with MAPSCorp to map Austin's assets, uncovering insights into youth activities, OST spaces, and accessibility. To address systemic barriers, we launched Project SYSTEMIC 2.0 in 2024, using a systems-thinking approach to gather qualitative data and improve OST programming.

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## The Austin Experience

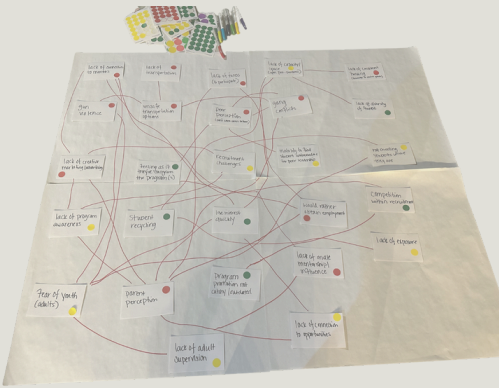
*Project Exploration*





# OUR FINDINGS

Nine targeted focus groups conducted with key stakeholders, including youth, students, community-based organizations, Chicago Public Schools (CPS) administrators, Chicago Park District representatives, parents, businesses, and public safety officials, informed the findings from Project SYSTEMIC 2.0. These diverse perspectives comprehensively understood the barriers impeding access to out-of-school time (OST) programming in Austin. The following are key barriers identified:



These findings highlight the interconnected nature of the barriers and the importance of employing a systems-thinking approach to address them effectively. Key recommendations include strengthening communication strategies to increase awareness of available programs, building partnerships to enhance transportation options, designing youth-centered programs that align with their interests, actively engaging parents to foster support and involvement, and implementing robust safety measures to ensure secure and reliable access to OST opportunities. These insights will inform the development of targeted, actionable strategies to promote equitable access and meaningful engagement in OST programming for Austin's youth.

## TRANSPORTATION

- A lack of reliable and affordable transportation emerged as a critical barrier, preventing many youth from accessing OST programs. This challenge was particularly pronounced for families without personal vehicles or those who rely on public transit, which may be limited or unsafe during specific hours.

## PROGRAM AWARENESS

- Many stakeholders noted that families and students are often unaware of the OST opportunities available in their community. The lack of centralized communication or effective outreach contributes to low participation rates and underutilizing existing programs.

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

- Parental engagement was a significant factor in encouraging youth participation in OST programs. Barriers such as work schedules, lack of trust in program providers, or limited awareness of the value of OST activities hinder parental involvement.

## SAFETY CONCERNS

- Both real and perceived safety concerns were frequently mentioned, particularly regarding travel to and from program locations. Violence, crime, and unsafe transit routes deter youth and their families from participating in OST activities, especially during evening hours.

## YOUTH APATHY

- Apathy or lack of motivation among some youth was highlighted as a barrier, stemming from limited exposure to programs that align with their interests or aspirations. This disinterest may also reflect broader systemic challenges, such as low expectations or a lack of role models demonstrating the value of participation.

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**The Austin Experience**  
*Project Exploration*



# STRATEGIES TO CONSIDER TO ADDRESS BARRIERS TO OUT-OF SCHOOL TIME PARTICIPATION

## Transportation

- Partner with local transportation services, community organizations, and schools to provide subsidized or free shuttle services for youth attending OST programs.
- Explore partnerships with ride-share companies for discounted youth transportation.
- Implement neighborhood-based programming to reduce the distance youth need to travel.

## Program Awareness

- Develop a centralized platform or resource hub, such as a community website or mobile app, to list all available OST programs and activities.
- Launch targeted marketing campaigns to reach parents and youth using social media, local radio, and school communications.
- Host community events to showcase OST opportunities and engage families directly.

## Parent Involvement

- To accommodate diverse schedules, offer flexible engagement opportunities, such as virtual information sessions or evening/weekend events.
- Build trust with parents through consistent communication and testimonials from other families.
- Highlight the long-term benefits of OST participation for youth development and academic success to encourage buy-in.

## Safety Concerns

- Partner with the 15th and 25th Police Districts and community safety organizations to ensure safe transit routes to and from OST programs.
- Offer programs within walking distance in safe locations, such as schools, churches, or community centers.
- Implement buddy systems or group travel arrangements to enhance security and parental confidence.

## Youth Apathy

- Conduct surveys and focus groups to identify youth interests and design programs that reflect their passions and aspirations.
- Incorporate mentorship and role models into programming to inspire and motivate youth.
- Include experiential, hands-on learning opportunities that demonstrate the real-world application of skills gained in OST programs.

Addressing these barriers through collaborative and targeted strategies aims to foster greater access and engagement in OST programming, ensuring all Austin youth have equitable opportunities to learn, grow, and thrive.

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## The Austin Experience

*Project Exploration*



# PROGRESS OF OUR PROJECT

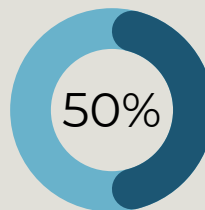
- ★ *Safe Spaces Shuttle Service (1)*
- ★ *Community Health Workers (2)*

In Austin, we are planning to launch a **Safe Spaces Shuttle** service. During our working group sessions we mapped local transportation stakeholders and providers, discussed capacity building, and addressed youth transit needs. Through a survey, we aim to identify Austin's safe spaces, program schedules, transportation challenges, and interest in a dedicated system.



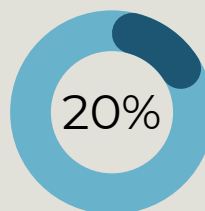
## Our progress is to build people's minds about the importance of the OST environment.

In Austin, we are planning to launch a **Safe Spaces Shuttle** service. During our working group sessions we mapped local transportation stakeholders and providers, discussed capacity building, and addressed youth transit needs. Through a survey, we aim to identify Austin's safe spaces, program schedules, transportation challenges, and interest in a dedicated system.



Project 1

About 50% of youth ambassadors in our program rely on the organization to supply transportation to and from local community events



Project 2

Our goal is to increase parent involvement in Austin schools by 20%. We would like to launch an example pilot program next fall in during SY 2025-26

Parent Engagement and Transportation are two critical barriers related to OST programming. Establishing CHW's & a Safe Spaces Shuttle Service is vital.

## The Austin Experience

*Project Exploration*





# CONCLUSION & NEXT STEPS

Project SYSTEMIC 2.0 represents a transformative effort to address systemic barriers to out-of-school time (OST) programming in Austin, one of Chicago's most underserved neighborhoods. Building on the foundational work of the original Project SYSTEMIC initiative, this project leverages a systems-thinking framework to develop sustainable solutions that elevate youth access to high-quality programming.

Through extensive community engagement, including nine targeted focus groups with diverse stakeholders, the project identified five critical barriers: transportation, program awareness, parent involvement, safety concerns, and youth apathy. These findings underscore the interconnected nature of these challenges and the importance of a coordinated, data-driven approach to overcome them.

## Key Achievements

- **Comprehensive Stakeholder Engagement:** Successfully brought together youth, families, schools, community organizations, businesses, and public safety officials to inform the work.
- **Empirical Data Collection:** Conducted surveys to capture student interests and assess community resources, laying a strong foundation for targeted interventions.
- **Strategic Framework Development:** Crafted actionable strategies to address each barrier, including partnerships to improve transportation, centralized communication platforms, and youth-centered program design.

## Next Steps

### 1. Implementation of Strategies

- To address mobility challenges, pilot transportation solutions, such as subsidized shuttles.
- Launch a centralized program information and awareness platform supported by targeted marketing campaigns.

### 2. Strengthening Community Partnerships

- Continue to work with Austin providers to build capacity and align resources toward shared goals.
- Engage parents through workshops and outreach initiatives that build trust and highlight the benefits of OST programs.

### 3. Safety Enhancements

- Partner with the 15th District and community groups to ensure safe travel pathways.
- Expand programming to locations within safe walking distances for youth and families.

### 4. Youth-Centered Program Development

- Use survey insights to design programs that align with youth interests, integrating mentorship and hands-on experiences to foster engagement.
- Continuously seek youth input to refine and adapt programming.

### 5. Monitoring and Evaluation

- Establish metrics to track participation, engagement, and the impact of implemented strategies.
- Use systems-thinking and culturally responsive evaluation methods to adapt and scale successful interventions.

This work sets the stage for creating a more equitable OST ecosystem in Austin, empowering youth with opportunities to thrive academically, socially, and personally. By addressing systemic barriers collaboratively and innovatively, Project SYSTEMIC 2.0 aims to transform the Austin community into a model for inclusive and effective youth development initiatives.

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**The Austin Experience**  
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## The Austin Experience

Led by Project Exploration



The Austin Experience is dedicated to reshaping perceptions of the Austin community by uniting wellness providers and out-of-school time stakeholders to highlight community-led events and opportunities for youth and families.

We aim to showcase the vibrancy, potential, and positive aspects of the "Austin Experience," fostering a sense of pride and engagement among residents and changing external narratives about our community.

# THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS

