ENLACE

CHICAGO

On September 20, 2012 the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority (ICJIA) informed Enlace Chicago (Enlace) that it would no longer be contracted to serve as the lead agency for the Neighborhood Recovery Initiative (NRI) for the Pilsen and Little Village communities. The decision was based on Enlace's performances specifically related to the submission of reports and paperwork. While Enlace acknowledges that there were issues on all sides from the onset of the NRI, the organization has steadily improved and worked closely with all partners (including the Illinois Violence Prevention Authority) to ensure the delivery of quality violence prevention programming in Little Village and Pilsen, and that a high level of accountability exists for all partners who receive state funds. It is Enlace Chicago's contention that in spite of the evolving nature of the NRI and more specifically 1) an inefficient reporting system, 2) staffing issues, 3) real problems with a small number of partners and 4) the inequitable distribution of resources to our community that Enlace did an effective job as lead agency and has made steady improvements in its performance as lead agency.

In August of 2010, Enlace was approached by the IVPA to apply for the lead agency role for the Little Village and Pilsen communities in the NRI. Enlace went through the IVPA's Request For Proposal process and was provided with an overview of each component area. By the time the selection process for our community began, the School-Based Counseling component as was laid out to Enlace originally had changed. While this is not unusual for a completely new initiative, it underscores the fluidity of programmatic expectations and structure for that first year of the NRI. As IVPA added more staff so as to deal with the increased workload that came with NRI, Enlace was assigned to four different grants managers, and at times had two in the same time span. The constant change in staff led to repetitive requests from IVPA for documentation and confusion as to what had been submitted, to whom, and when. These issues persisted into year two of the grant, when lead agencies had their fiscal quarters shortened and due dates for reports changed at IVPA meetings[i]. There was enough sufficient confusion from all lead agencies about due dates that IVPA sent out an email on May 3, 2012[ii] which contained a revised due date chart for lead agencies and partners.

The constant changes to NRI's requirements and supervising staff led to the creation of an inefficient reporting structure for both IVPA and lead agency staff. One program form was sent out four days before the due date,[iii] thus reducing the time partners had to return the program report. On a separate occasion, Enlace staff received multiple emails from different IVPA staff members requesting missing reports that had already been submitted. Even IVPA staff acknowledged the redundancy of the requests[iv]. In another instance, Enlace's Executive Director mailed out signed contracts on time which were never received by IVPA. After this instance Enlace began using a messenger service to provide verification that IVPA had received all documents on time[v].

Throughout NRI programming, serious inefficiencies regarding protocol and communication made it difficult to resolve issues as they arose. As a new initiative, the NRI had many issues that Enlace and the IVPA faced regarding partners that were uncharted territory. For example, Enlace's SBC coordinating partner purchased testing materials for students that IVPA staff

characterized as being outside of the contracted scope of work. The SBC partner, upon Enlace's request, provided documentation demonstrating that the materials were within the scope of the contract. After deciding that the materials were in line with the programmatic goals, Enlace requested a meeting with IVPA staff and their SBC consultant to address this issue. Enlace provided some dates and times for a possible meeting, and waited to hear back from IVPA. Enlace Chicago and the partner organization sent dates and times on three separate occasions and never received a response. Then, on April 17, 2012, IVPA sent an email[vi] asking for the SBC partner's fiscal report. It was Enlace's understanding (associate director, controller and program coordinator) that the conversation about the materials needed to take place before any financial reports could be submitted, as the decision directly impacted the SBC partner's report[vii]. In subsequent correspondence, Enlace was then told that the IVPA's decision was final, but there was no indication of that fact prior to that email, after Enlace's numerous attempts at gaining clarification. After finally receiving clarification regarding the testing materials, Enlace worked with the SBC partner to submit the fiscal report.

In two additional instances with the SBC consultant Enlace was asked to provide a partner's summer implementation plans. In an email[viii] dated June 8, 2012 Enlace was asked to submit summer implementation plans for both SBC partners. Yet, both reports had been submitted as part of the SBC FY13 renewal packet. In fact, IVPA would not consider the renewal packets complete unless they contained a detailed and completed summer implementation plan along with a budget and contracts. In another email[ix] exchange, Enlace was asked to coordinate a meeting with a partner and the executive director of the IVPA for May 8, 2012. When Enlace staff emailed to confirm the room location of the meeting the morning of May 8, 2012, they were informed the meeting had been cancelled. Enlace was then asked to send out additional dates and times for a rescheduled meeting, yet they never heard from the consultant again. It is understood that May was a hectic time for IVPA staff and Enlace NRI staff remained flexible, but Enlace's requests for clarification and information often went unanswered.

When partner organizations did have reporting issues, Enlace worked with the IVPA and the partner to not only correct problems but develop systems that would ensure all reports would be completed correctly in the future. This was noted and acknowledged by IVPA staff. An example of that growth is Enlace working with its M + J partner.

The closeout report submitted by our M + J coordinating partner included financial information that upon first glance did not look correct[x]. Enlace relayed this information to IVPA, who then asked Enlace to execute a full review of payroll registers, participant program and consent forms, GLs, and other items[xi]. Enlace Chicago's Controller led this effort and it became clear that more than anything the partnering organization required technical assistance in how to manage and report out on financials of a project of this size. Our Controller spent many hours working closely with the financial staff of the partnering organization to ensure that not only were the financial reports completed accurately and on time, but that the staff had the knowledge and systems in place to ensure quality reporting, for NRI and other programs, moving forward. This process also allowed the partner organization to clean up errors in its report before final submission to IVPA.

With the M+J partner Enlace identified that the quality of the expense report worksheet was weak, lacked revealing and consistent accounting controls, especially in the calculation of

salaries and fringe benefits. Enlace's Controller created a group of interrelated templates that facilitated the production of expense reports with a higher degree of accuracy, reasonability and most of all verifiability. There was a certain level of complexity in these templates but they were needed in order to produce high quality financial information.

The M+J partner's staff showed a lot of progress in the timeliness and completion of subsequent expense reports as well as in the corresponding backup templates, allowing us to check one by one, each one of the figures entered in the expense reports. These improvements allowed simpler verification of adherence to the original budget and provided a higher level of reliability in terms of the veracity and accuracy of the reports.

Enlace then scheduled training meetings with each partners' financial staff and went through the templates, held follow-up meetings and even adjusted them to each partners' particular needs while still adhering to the minimum accounting quality requirements of IVPA. These one-on-one meetings have varied in time from a few hours to a two day stretch with the same partner.

Due to consistent issues with M+J partners, Enlace requested that it be allowed to select new partners through its NRI advisory committee using an RFP process instead of renewing all partners regardless of performance as was directed by the IVPA. After an exchange of phone calls and waiting, Enlace received notice that we could select new partners a week before signed and executed contracts were due to the IVPA. After Enlace leadership deliberated, it was determined that it could not release an RFP, allow time for completion and submission, convene the NRI advisory committee to review applications and select partners in five days. As such, Enlace had no real choice but to renew its M+J partners.

Enlace then instituted new measures and protocols to ensure the quality of the partner reporting improved. On March 22, 2012 Enlace called a meeting of its partners to review these new procedures[xii]. This protocol included: documentation reviews for partners; site visits by Enlace Chicago's Controller to assist with fiscal reports; a clear explanation of reporting procedures, expectations, and due dates; the creation of a salary and fringe benefits worksheet to increase accuracy and verifiability of expenses; a detailed instruction sheet to assist partners with the reallocation process; monthly component meetings with all NRI staff in reentry and school-based counseling components; and quarterly feedback to administrative coordinators of PLAN and M+J.

Since Enlace's selection as the lead agency for the NRI in Little Village and Pilsen, a new accounting structure and processes have been instituted internally to implement financial best practices. Aside from the new processes, Enlace's Controller meets regularly with the NRI program coordinator to review and assess NRI fiscal matters. Also as policy, whenever Enlace staff receive an email or call from IVPA staff, a response is required within twenty-four hours and should include a timeline for an additional response or resolution as well as next steps. Similarly, Enlace is responsive and available to its partners for any issues that may arise programmatically, fiscally or otherwise. Subsequently Enlace was selected by IVPA to undergo a documentation review[xiii]. Enlace provided all documentation requested by the date due and the review was successful. Enlace provides updates regarding any issues, changes or general information to the NRI partners and staff via phone calls, emails and at meetings[xiv].

The Little Village and Pilsen communities, aside from being the second largest NRI community, together comprise one of the largest concentrations of youth in the city and county. According to the Chicago Department of Family and Support Services, these communities have some of the highest density of disconnected youth in Chicago. Disconnected youth are defined as youth ages 16 and 24 who are not in school or in the workforce. Studies show that these youth are the most at risk of being a victim or perpetrator of violence. Consolidating these two distinct and unique communities further would be a complete disregard of the stated purpose of the NRI to provide communities afflicted by violence some much needed resources to help address the violence.

As recognized leaders in the violence prevention field locally and nationally, for Enlace not to be the lead agency for the NRI in Little Village and Pilsen would be to ignore Enlace's track record, reputation and results of ten plus years of work in the field. There should be no further consolidation of geographically dense communities like the Little Village and Pilsen communities and these limited resources should be sustained in communities that are already serving the largest populations of youth. The proposed allocation of NRI funds does not address these realities and combined with Enlace's exclusion as lead agency would curtail violence prevention efforts and further alienate disconnected youth, or youth on the verge of becoming disconnected.

As the lead agency for the NRI in the Little Village and Pilsen communities, Enlace understands its responsibility for all programmatic work and reporting. Enlace has worked hard with our partners to ensure quality programming and our efforts have been recognized by the IVPA: Our reentry partners were selected by the IVPA to facilitate outreach training for all NRI reentry providers, out of 23 NRI communities our PLAN program was highlighted in the IVPA newsletter and had high retention numbers in year one of M+J.

Enlace also understands that part of the NRI's stated goal was to develop capacity in communities that needed it. As part of the selection process the NRI advisory committee selected partners who were not as large as other applicants but who are recognized as emerging or establish leaders in their component area but who ultimately needed more technical support than anticipated. As such Enlace feels strongly that our growth as a community (our partners) and organization is being completely overlooked when assessing our overall performance as a lead agency.

To have the NRI lead agency role taken away from Enlace at this point would be disadvantageous to ICIJA due to Enlace's experience with the NRI and having gone through the growing pains of this initiative and a loss on the investment that Governor Quinn made in the Little Village and Pilsen communities.

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[i] email dated April 4, 2012 Subject Line "IMPORTANT – Year 2 Lead Agency program Report Form"

[ii] email Subject Line "NRI Lead Agency & Component Reporting Dates"

[iii] email dated August 21, 2012 Subject Line :M+J 2nd Quarter Program Report Template

[iv] emails dated June 27, 2012 Subject Line "Missing Program Report" and August 8, 2012 Subject Line "Missing Program Reports".

[v] email dated June 28, 2012 Subject Line "Signed Lead Agency Amendment"

[vi] email Subject Line "AMC FY Q3 Report & Reallocation form"

[vii] email on April 29, 2012 Subject line "Alivio SBC Conversation"

[viii] email Subject line "FW: Report"
[ix] email Subject Line "SBC Performance Review for Project Vida"
[x] email dated March 21, 2012 Subject line "NRI, Update & Next Steps
[xi] email dated March 23, 2012 Subject Line "IDPL Documentation"
[xii] email Subject Line "Fiscal Procedures meeting
[xiii] email dated April 4, 2012 Subject Line "Lead Agency Documentation Review"
[xiv] email dated May 3, 2012 Subject Line "NRI Fiscal & Program Reports"