

**Memo to Chicago's New Mayor**  
**Developed at America's Urban Campus's**  
**On the Table Conversation**  
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**Memo Title:**

Engaging the city's universities in revitalizing Chicago's low income neighborhoods

**What about the topic or issue should be a priority for the mayor?**

The Mayor-elect has indicated that one of her top priorities will be to transform the city's blighted neighborhoods by a concerted and strategic initiative. The universities already work in these neighborhoods, doing research, providing student teachers and interns, and supporting neighborhood organizations. America's Urban Campus, the consortium of 20 of the city's higher education institutions, has been organized with a mission to leverage the collective resources for the benefit of the city. This memo begins the conversation on how universities can be engaged.

**Mayor-elect Lightfoot's values are equity, diversity, inclusion, transparency, accountability and transformation.**

**How does the topic or issue connect to these values?**

AUC proposes to support the engagement of its member institutions using these six values as the lens for their participation. The focus is directly on transformation of the neighborhoods, particularly those neighborhoods of color affected by years of disinvestment. The universities will work collectively to promote diversity and inclusion in their support of neighborhood organizations and to be both transparent and accountable in undertaking research, economic development and community development activities.

**What are suggestions from the conversation for Chicago's new mayor to consider as she creates her priorities?**

The Mayor should take a strategic approach to neighborhood improvement, by establishing a process that respects the community organizations, promotes listening and planning with, not for the neighborhoods. She should use her convening power to bring industry, universities, foundations, non-profits and religious organizations together to work with the communities on revitalization. Implementation should be based first on listening to the individual neighborhoods, not providing prescriptive decisions.

Chicago's universities have a presence in many of these neighborhoods, and some have a long-standing history of working with the neighborhoods—not all of that history is perceived as positive by local residents, however. AUC has created a “snapshot” of the programs run by the universities and a “heat map” providing their geographic location at: <https://www.americasurbancampus.org/addressing-poverty-racism-and-violence.html> these resources can be a starting point for both understanding the role of universities in the neighborhoods and their direct connections to community groups, schools and churches.

**How could the ideas and suggestions presented in this memo help make the Chicago region better for all Chicagoans?**

By engaging the universities, the mayor can leverage important resources to complement the overall initiative to transform the neighborhoods—thereby reducing violence, increasing the economic productivity of the region, and providing for a more equitable society. The region will be able to tap the talent of these neighborhoods through better education and pathways to careers of youth that heretofore had no opportunity. Long term, these activities if successful can reduce the loss of population and its multiple negative consequences.