

## Workshops offer help to novice developers

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Six workshops are planned to teach fledgling developers in the city and suburbs the fundamentals of planning and executing projects.

With a mission to nurture community projects, particularly in redeveloping neighborhoods where affordable housing and commercial enterprises are needed, the Chicago Community Loan Fund offers the workshops, called Project Readiness.

The fund lends pre-development money to community projects that would not--at least in such early stages--get support from mainstream banks. The fund is supported by individual and institutional donations.

Since 1991, when it started with \$200,000, the fund has grown to \$16 million and has closed 134 loans totaling nearly \$25 million for community development initiatives across the city and suburbs, according executive director Calvin Holmes.

A good part of the fund's success comes from its mentoring, including Project Readiness workshops since 1997 and hand-holding new developers through in challenging times.

The workshops put a one-day focus on basics that often take considerable time and money to learn.

They aim to discourage the developers from "diving into a project without realizing the time and money needed. They end up piling their own equity into a deal before getting financing, and if it doesn't go forward they have lost that money," Holmes said. "We want them to pause, take a deep breath and think about whether they have the organizational structure and capacity to succeed."

Led by fund staff and experienced developers (Chicago non-profit Bickerdike Redevelopment's executive director, Joy Aruguete, and development consultant Teresa Prim head portions of the workshops), Project Readiness is an exercise in caution, teaching developers to scrutinize their organizations the way a lender will.

"They help to explain the process from conception through completion and helped us to think more broadly about how to do our projects, how to tap into other funding sources," Laurel Tustison said. She is executive director at Youthbuild Lake County, in North Chicago, and along with her construction manager attended one of the 2006 workshops.

Youthbuild, a non-profit training and housing development organization, learned of the workshops after receiving funding from the Chicago Community Loan group. The organization and its 42 youths had built one single-family home per year as part of a life-preparation course. The organization's work ranges from job-training skills or GED and college-prep courses to anger-management and parenting skills.

"All of our youths [from ages 16 to 25 and a variety of backgrounds that include high school dropouts, ex-gang members and those with jail records] participate in building a single-family house two days a week. Recently, one of them told me, 'A year ago, me and that [classmate] were shooting at each other. Now we are building a house together,'" Tustison said.

Youthbuild has expanded to build up to four houses a year. For 2007, two projects are under construction and one is in the planning stage.

Though non-profit developers and community groups have tended to be the target market, more for-profit developers with limited experience are taking the workshops, Holmes said. "We are working with more and more developers who build mixed-income projects," Holmes said.

"Occasionally a group comes to us at the end of a workshop and says. 'Wow, that was an incredible amount of work, and now we aren't sure that we have the infrastructure or financing to do the project,' or 'we now know that we should talk to X or Y organization,' or 'we think we should look for a partner rather than take on the risk,'" said Mark Fick, the fund's senior loan program officer.

Workshops are scheduled for Feb. 27, April 24, June 26, Aug. 28, Oct. 23 and Dec. 4.

The February, June and December sessions will be in Suite 1700 at the fund's office at 29 E. Madison St.

The April workshop will be at an undetermined location in Lake County, and the August one will be at a south suburban location, "probably in southern Cook County," Fick said.

"Our Oct. 23 workshop will specialize in building sustainable projects--those that are affordable, environmentally friendly and that have designs with curb appeal," Holmes said.

Fees range from \$60 for one person from a community group or organization to \$125 for three people from a group.

Those interested can visit [www.cclfchicago.org](http://www.cclfchicago.org).

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