

“THE CHICAGO WAY” GLOSSARY:
From A to Z on Race, Power, and Politics in Chicago
[WRITTEN BY THE 2019 CLASS OF CUE FELLOWS]

Affordable Requirements Ordinance (ARO)- Requires that if a housing development receives public funding, it must set aside a portion of the housing for Chicagoans who make below a certain income level. If this is not done, the developers must pay a fee to the city, which is used to fund housing subsidies.

Aldermanic prerogative- The power aldermen have over shaping neighborhoods through the control of zoning. Aldermen have the authority to dictate acceptable housing type and density, controlling the amount and type of housing units directly, impacting housing pricing and rent rates indirectly, and ultimately the type of households that may reside within the ward. Aldermen also control access to city funds and city-owned lots within their wards, effectively making or breaking affordable housing deals. Wards hostile to affordable housing become off-limits to developers by baking exorbitant financial risk into the development proposal process. Finally, aldermen can employ parliamentary and extra-parliamentary powers to delay development deals, ensuring that unwanted affordable housing will not be introduced or voted on before city council.

Block Club- Groups of people who have homes and families on any given block in the city and have organized to improve the quality of life in their neighborhoods. Block clubs can register as part of "alternative policing strategy."

Chicago Commission on Human Relations (CCH)- Works to eliminate prejudice and discrimination in 16 specific populations. CCH fights discrimination in housing, employment, credit transactions, bonding, and public accommodations. The Commission has the power to investigate claims of discrimination, hold hearings and issues rulings, and then impose fines, damages, and/or relief if discrimination is found.

Chicago Community Land Trust (CCLT)- Non-profit run by mayoral appointees that was founded to preserve the long-term affordability of homes created through city programs and maintain a permanent pool of homeownership opportunities for working families. In 2017, Chicago’s Inspector General found that the CCLT had never actually acquired land for construction of affordable housing units, because it has never been given the resources to acquire land and use long-term ground leases to preserve affordable housing.

Chicago Housing Authority (CHA)- A municipal not-for-profit corporation, governed by a Board of Commissioners that the mayor appoints. The CHA provides affordable housing through programs largely funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, such as public housing and the Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program.

Chicago Planning Commission- Reviews development proposals that involve TIFs, the sale or acquisition of publicly-owned land, and most large developments. It is largely filled with city staff and mayoral appointees.

Chicago Police Department (CPD)- Headed by a mayoral appointee and receives 40% of the city's general fund.

Chicago Public Schools (CPS)- Governed by a school board that the mayor appoints. About 500 schools are operated by the district and CPS oversees about 100 charter schools and about 30 “alternative” schools. Chicago students are outperforming their national peers - both students who are in wealthier districts and students in peer districts - but that growth is not consistent across the city.

Chicago Transit Authority (CTA)- Operates the nation's second largest public transportation system and covers the City of Chicago and 35 surrounding suburbs. The CTA is an independent governmental agency created by state legislation. The governing arm of the CTA is the Chicago Transit Board. The board consists of seven members, with four appointed by the Mayor of Chicago and three appointed by the Governor of Illinois.

Community Benefits Agreement (CBA)- Contracts between community groups and real estate developers that requires the developer to provide amenities and/or mitigations to the local community or neighborhood. Site-specific community benefits agreements ensure that particular projects create opportunities for local workers and communities and can pave the way for the enactment of community benefits policies citywide.

Cooperative (worker-owned co-ops)- Businesses designed to benefit workers. Workers own the business and they participate in its financial success on the basis of their labor contribution, workers can serve on and vote on the board of directors, and worker-owners often manage daily operations through various management structures.

Earned Income Tax Credit- Reduces federal and state tax bills for working people with low to moderate incomes.

Fair Market Rents (FMRs) are published yearly by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development. FMRs are used by the CHA to determine the amount of assistance granted through housing vouchers and other programs.

Gang Database- CPD maintains a database of over 120,000 Chicagoans labeled by officers as gang members. CPD has unlimited discretion to add names to the Gang Database – there are no consistent guidelines or approval requirements. The gang database has a disproportionate number of Black and Latino Chicagoans. People named in the Database have no due process protections, and no way to challenge being listed. In addition to using this information to harass and detain people, CPD provides the Gang Database to other agencies, including U.S. Immigrations and Customs (ICE). As a result, the false gang designations can affect an individual's ability to get employment, licenses, bond, parole, housing, immigration relief, and more.

Implicit Bias- Refers to the beliefs and attitudes that all humans have that impact our judgment. These beliefs are shaped by our interaction with the outside world – the news, books we read, movies watched, and personal experiences. Implicit biases do not require our awareness or consent. Some Chicagoans believe that city officials and government workers should be assessed for their implicit biases, given how these deeply-held beliefs can affect our decisions, especially in times of stress.

Local School Council (LSC)- The governing body that makes decisions for an individual school. Over 400 CPS schools are governed by these elected LSCs, which are made up of 6 parents, 2 teachers, 1 non-teaching staff, 2 community members, the principal and at high schools, a student. They are elected for two-year terms. LSC powers include principal evaluation and contract, approving the school budget and tracking the school improvement plan.

Metra- Operates 11 commuter rail lines connecting downtown Chicago with suburbs in six surrounding counties. Metra's Electric Line serves stations throughout the South Side of Chicago, including areas without easy access to the El. This service once operated as rapid transit, similar to the frequency of trains on the El today, but today's Metra service is too infrequent and expensive to be a viable option for many lower-income Chicagoans.

Money Bail- The practice of requiring cash payments from people awaiting trial. Those who can't afford cash bail wait in jail until their court date. This practice punishes those who don't have savings to draw on, and given wait times for trial, often causes people to lose their jobs while awaiting trial.

Participatory Budgeting- Process where voters work with their elected leaders to decide how to allocate funds. Some Chicago aldermen have used this to decide how to spend the yearly \$1.3 million ward improvements budget.

Progressive (Progressive Sliding Scale, Progressive Tax)- Illinois is one of only eight states that taxes all income at the same rate. A progressive income tax would require people with higher incomes to pay higher rates, while reducing the rate for moderate- and low-income households.

Public Bank- Banks owned by the government, funded with taxpayer money, and directly accountable to elected officials. Compared to the current system, where cities like Chicago use private financial institutions, public banks can offer lower debt costs to city and state governments, fund public infrastructure projects, and encourage entrepreneurship by providing loans to small businesses at lower interest rates and with lower fees. North Dakota has operated a public bank for almost a century, and several cities are currently exploring this idea, including Washington, DC, Oakland, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Portland, and Seattle.

Racial Equity Impact Assessment (REIA)- Process that requires government to examine how the benefits and burdens of a proposed development or policy change will affect different racial and ethnic groups. This is a public accountability tool that requires community voice to be centered in decisions about a community's future.

Rank Choice Voting or Instant Runoff- Voters rank candidates in first, second, third place (or more). Candidates do best when they attract a lot of first-choice support, but they also benefit from second and even third choice support. This system often allows challengers to receive more public support, and gives the public more ability to show who they will accept as a leader even if their top-choice candidate isn't elected.

Regional Transportation Authority (RTA)- Established in 1974 to oversee local transportation providers across the six counties in the Chicago region. The RTA is responsible for funding and planning transit for the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA), Metra and Pace Suburban Bus service.

Rent Control- Most major US cities have laws that place some restraints on landlords' ability to set rents, such as setting market-based caps on the amount by which a landlord can raise rent annually or bans on no-cause evictions to prevent landlords from evicting tenants simply because they want to increase the rent. Chicago can't pass laws like this because the state currently bans any city from enacting any rent regulation.

School Funding Formula- Across Chicago's 644 schools, funding is set based on the number of students enrolled, plus basic costs for school administration at each school. But at the state level, the school funding formula is based on equity, assigning additional dollars to districts that have a large number of low-income students, students learning English as a second language, and students with disabilities. These additional dollars are intended to support additional resources, based on research about best practices for different student groups. Based on this research, Chicago Public Schools currently only has 63% of the funds required to adequately meet students' needs.

Single Room Occupancy Hotels (SROs)- A multi-unit housing building that contains units for occupancy by one person. A unit typically consists of a single room. The SRO building usually contains a shared bath, and may also include a shared kitchen and common activity area. SROs are important resources for people who are or at risk of experiencing homelessness. In Chicago, many SRO buildings have been converted, decreasing availability.

Tax-Increment Financing (TIF)- Used as a tool to promote investment in various neighborhoods. Currently, Chicago is set up into 146 TIF districts, where the taxes collected on the homes and businesses in that community are split into two pots of funds. One part goes to the entire city, which includes schools, policing, transit, and other citywide issues. The second part goes to fund only new development in that community. Supporters believe this helps our city bring development, usually by giving these dollars to private developers to invite them to build on vacant land, address road repairs, or fix up older buildings. Opponents argue that this system keeps tax dollars stuck in specific areas that may not need additional investment. Others argue that with one in every five properties in Chicago is in a TIF district, we're keeping too many tax dollars out of our full citywide budget. Lastly, there are also concerns about how TIFs allow the mayor unchecked power to move money to developers.

Term Limit- There is no limit on the number of terms a Mayor can serve in Chicago. Of the 10 biggest cities in the U.S., all but Chicago have some form of term limits.

Universal Trauma Screening- Assesses all students for signs of trauma. This helps connect students to appropriate services, avoid re-traumatization, and support healing.

Zoning Advisory Councils- Aldermen set up formal or informal Zoning Advisory Committees (ZACs) at their discretion. ZACs review and advise aldermen on issues relating to residential and commercial development, and in some wards ZACs create ward-level development proposal processes and impose additional conditions to their approval of projects. ZACs possess tremendous power in their abilities to influence aldermen, and in many instances make final decisions related to affordable housing development, effectively shutting down proposals before the City's Department of Planning and Development's own required consideration of a proposal.

Zoning- Ordinances that dictate what types of buildings and land uses are permitted in different areas. For example, zoning ordinances can be used to keep dangerous or dirty factories away from homes. These laws also dictate the size and design of buildings in different zones. Zoning is controlled in Chicago by the City Council, who, through the Zoning Board, reviews all proposed changes and votes to change the ordinance. Zoning can also be exclusionary or discriminatory. For example, in most residential areas in Chicago, only single-family homes are allowed to be built. It is important that citizens and elected officials are aware of zoning trends and changes that either promote displacement or encourage dangerous land uses near vulnerable populations.