

Title: SEA-Chicago and the Illinois Task Force on Social Innovation, Entrepreneurship, and Enterprise: A Strategic Partnership

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When Illinois Governor Pat Quinn signed the State's L3C bill into law late in 2009, the leadership of Social Enterprise Alliance's new Chicago chapter -- SEA's first chapter -- seized the opportunity to unite and energize the Chicago area's leading nonprofits, entrepreneurs, socially conscious individuals, foundations, thought leaders and impact investors. The message couldn't have been timelier: the Great Recession was already taking its tragic toll on the neediest among us, yet many of the State's charities, suffering cuts in grants and subsidies, saw no obvious alternative but to curb services. Yet, social enterprise advocates knew that the Low-profit Limited Liability Company, a new business form intended to facilitate foundations' program-related investments for charitable or educational purposes, might help rescue the social sector by empowering it to diversify revenue sources, tap into market efficiencies and achieve scale. So SEA-Chicago made it its mission to educate agents of change about the new opportunities social enterprises present. From that fortuitous beginning, the chapter continues to grow, inform and foster collaboration.

But the L3C also proved to be a catalyst in another way. The bill had been unanimously approved by both houses of the Illinois General Assembly. Democrats recognized that the L3C would contribute to the social safety net while Republicans applauded the structure as a private-sector response to social problems.

Now that the Governor and all the legislators were on record as supporting social enterprises, the strategic question became: how do we build on the L3C's policy success? The answer came in the form of a new State agency, the Illinois Task Force on Social Innovation, Entrepreneurship, and Enterprise. The Task Force is the Governor's multi-sectoral think tank, charged with the responsibility of developing actionable and innovative policy recommendations to sustainably address the State's most vexing social challenges.

SEA-Chicago's role in the Task Force cannot be overstated. Brian Rowland, the CEO of A Safe Haven, LLC, and Eric Weinheimer, the President of The Cara Program, both SEA-Chicago Board members, chair the Task Force's Business Opportunities and Capital Formation Committees, respectively. I am

privileged to chair both the chapter's Board and the Task Force. Many other members of SEA-Chicago who contribute their time and talent to the Task Force's work deserve a large share of the credit for its early successes.

Those successes are already worth noting and worth replicating elsewhere. An amendment to the state's L3C law, allowing L3Cs to be organized for scientific or religious purposes, has been unanimously passed by the Senate and will soon be considered by the House. A Benefit LLC bill has been introduced in the Senate. A state-wide survey of mission-driven ventures has been launched, the first step in fostering the growth of a social enterprise supply chain. The State's antiquated cooperative law is being revamped to support worker-owned co-ops in economically disadvantaged areas of the State. With the financial support and technical assistance of the Harvard Kennedy School, the Rockefeller Foundation and the Dunham Fund, a Social Impact Bond initiative is underway. Yet, for the Task Force and for SEA-Chicago, partners in empowerment, the best is yet to come.



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