

CHA Explores Innovative Solutions

The **Chicago Housing Authority (CHA)** partnership has found novel ways to leverage the talent of local college students, assist low-income families and provide municipal and electrical distribution services. The CHA is aiming to achieve a maximum benefit at minimum cost for the nation's second-largest public housing authority. The CHA provides 40,000 units of housing for 110,000 residents.

The CHA teamed up with Auburn University's Industrial Design Department and challenged students to come up with an innovative, vandal-resistant lighting fixture. Several concepts have been submitted and one will be chosen, patented and produced for commercial application. This effort has brought local college students and community needs together, resulting in a product that will benefit the community.

Next, the CHA evaluated its own municipal services and energy consumption characteristics and came to the conclusion that it was essentially "a city within a city" and capable of maintaining and distributing electrical power, natural gas, water and sewer systems. The CHA has divested its gas distribution systems to the local utility, and become the first public housing authority in the country to publicly seek wholesale power service. It is also investigating an opportunity to provide a 5-year prepayment of water and sewer charges to the Chicago Department of Water, in return for a special rate over the prepayment term. Under the agreement, 50 percent of any resulting savings could be retained by the CHA.

Chicago Students

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Savings such as these allow the CHA to address other pressing needs in the community.

Lastly, the CHA entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the U.S.

Department of Energy in April 1996 to establish a resident-owned business, Home Energy

Savings Corporation (HESC). HESC provides weatherization services to the greater Chicago low-income families. HESC is made up of 33 residents who successfully completed an intensive 16-week training and certification course in energy theory and applications with assistance from DOE. As part of the group's "apprenticeship," close to 300 townhouses at the CHA's Cabrini Rowhouse development received

weatherization services. The success of HESC, "brought tears to my eyes" says **David Anderson**, a Certified Energy Manager with the CHA. Through its successes, HESC has obtained contracts to provide services under the State of Illinois low-income weatherization assistance program.

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