

## **Big City Partnership-ChicagoFIRST**

### **Summary**

ChicagoFIRST is a non-profit association of private sector critical infrastructure firms in the Chicagoland area that collaborate with one another and with government at all levels on homeland security and emergency management issues to promote the resilience of its members and the Chicago business community.

### **Background**

Following the terrorist attacks of 9/11, Chicago's financial leaders began contemplating the need for a more formal approach to the mutual aid that firms had provided to one another during previous incidents, like the "Chicago flood of 1992." At the same time, the federal government, in the form of the U.S. Treasury Department, reached out to the Chicago financial community in 2002 with the same goal in mind.

With support at the federal level, ChicagoFIRST began as a coalition and announced its formation at a July 2003 joint press conference with the City of Chicago's Office of Emergency Management and Communications.

Within two years, the members decided to hire full-time staff in order to further engage the public sector and other key sectors, and to carry the organization's goals to fruition. With that decision, the organization incorporated as a 501(c)(6) and instituted a membership fee.

### **Goals and Objectives**

When ChicagoFIRST formed in 2003, its three major objectives were:

- Improved, reliable information streams -- day-to-day and during emergencies -- from local public safety entities);
- Development of local/regional/state access protocols after a disaster; and
- Collaboration regarding local/regional/state evacuation planning.

Since then, in addition to continuing these critical project streams, ChicagoFIRST activities have focused extensively on:

- Coordination with federal level entities and national level partnerships, as well as other regional partnerships, in order to promote regionalization and the importance of regional activities; and
- Developing and improving regional resilience through increased interaction with critical infrastructure entities and public safety agencies in the region.

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### **Description**

Recognizing that emergencies, natural disasters, and terrorist events have their greatest effects in the region in which they occur, several financial institutions in the Chicago area formed a coalition to promote resilience in 2003.

That coalition, ChicagoFIRST, is a non-profit association created to address homeland security, business continuity, and emergency management issues that require a coordinated approach among private firms and between those firms and all levels of government (in other words, a public/private partnership for resilience).

- ChicagoFIRST was the first of its kind and includes banks, exchanges, securities and futures firms, brokerages, and insurance companies throughout the region. In 2008, ChicagoFIRST opened its membership to all critical sectors.
- ChicagoFIRST has been identified as a national model—by local and federal officials—for regional, public-private partnerships.
- ChicagoFIRST collaborates with the City of Chicago, the State of Illinois, the U.S. Treasury Department, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, and other critical sectors on disaster preparedness and business continuity issues.

### **Structure**

Private sector firms constitute the membership of ChicagoFIRST, and the organization is funded entirely by membership dues. ChicagoFIRST is led by a nine-member board of directors, and is staffed by two full-time employees.

### **Strategic Partners**

One of ChicagoFIRST's most critical achievements is the establishment and maintenance of relationships between the membership and government at all levels.

ChicagoFIRST collaborates on a regular basis with the City of Chicago to enhance the regionalization of emergency preparedness and response, so that the collar counties, State of Illinois, and surrounding states coordinate better in the event of a crisis.

In 2010, ChicagoFIRST created and is now co-chairing the Chicago Critical Infrastructure Resilience Task Force with the Chicago Office of Emergency Management and Communications. Members also include representatives from the Chicago Police Department, the Chicago Fire Department, and the Office of the Mayor. This Task Force is designed (1) to create an ongoing and consistent forum for information sharing and collaborative planning among public sector agencies and critical infrastructure entities, and (2) to institutionalize these relationships.

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At the State level, initially formed and now ChicagoFIRST co-chairs the Illinois Terrorism Task Force Private Sector Committee. This organization's role focuses on encouraging relationships between the private and public sectors throughout the State.

In 2009, ChicagoFIRST drew upon its national relationships to improve the resilience of its members in Chicagoland by requesting and obtaining a vulnerability assessment of Chicago's financial district from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. In addition, ChicagoFIRST collaborated with House committee staff and the Government Accountability Office regarding a report about telecommuting and Internet congestion concerns. ChicagoFIRST is also collaborating with DHS on cyber tabletop exercises that may be replicated by other partnerships or their individual members.

### Activities

ChicagoFIRST formed around three issues: (1) Improved, reliable information streams (day-to-day and during emergencies); (2) Development of local/regional/state access protocols after a disaster; and (3) Collaboration regarding local/regional/state evacuation planning. Extensive progress has been made in all three areas.

Additional organizational activities include:

- Specialized working groups regarding information technology and physical security, public health emergencies, and business continuity meeting every two to four months.
- Quarterly meetings of members and ChicagoFIRST's public sector partners, including topical speakers, panels, and roundtable discussion.
- Periodic tabletop exercises and forums designed and facilitated by ChicagoFIRST staff that include relevant subject matter experts and critical public sector officials.

### Operations

Before, during, and after an emergency event, ChicagoFIRST serves as a critical liaison between its members, public officials, and first responder agencies in order to inform and assist each member's own response and recovery operations.

ChicagoFIRST acts as a conduit of information for its members and coordinates with government at all levels to provide these firms a means to address industry issues and gather information for their own crisis response.

In addition to extensive interaction with the public sector at all levels, ChicagoFIRST liaisons with all members in various additional ways to identify issues or obstacles they are encountering (and seek assistance from the public sector or from other firms, as appropriate) or benchmark industry actions or response measures. This may include one-on-one interaction, conference calls, or surveys.

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### **Regional & National Partnership Collaboration**

- **RPCfirst:** Because ChicagoFIRST a model that can be productively employed in other regions of the country and because ChicagoFIRST members believe in the importance of nationwide regional collaboration, this organization has worked to assist the formation of nearly two dozen other “FIRSTs” throughout the U.S. Also, in order to facilitate collaboration among these coalitions, ChicagoFIRST established the Regional Partnership Council (RPCfirst, [www.rpcfirst.org](http://www.rpcfirst.org)) in 2005. Through RPCfirst, the individual coalitions collaborate with one another through quarterly calls and annual meetings, and, as a group, with critical national level officials and agencies.
- **Regional Consortium Coordinating Council:** As part of its role with regard to partnerships, as defined in the National Infrastructure Protection Plan, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security established the Regional Consortium Coordinating Council (RCCC), and, in 2008, ChicagoFIRST became its initial Chair. The RCCC is designed to provide a national level forum through which effective regional coalitions can work together and can address critical infrastructure protection and resilience.
- Two ChicagoFIRST representatives are currently serving on the Executive Committee for the Financial Services Sector Coordinating Council (FSSCC). FSSCC is the committee on which the financial sector, on a nationwide basis, is represented at the national level. Its membership consists of financial associations, including ChicagoFIRST, and individual financial firms. As a committee, it interacts with the federal financial regulators, the U.S. Treasury Department, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, and the representatives of other sectors.

Through this position, ChicagoFIRST has worked on credentialing at the national level, promoting regional coalitions, and developing and implementing cyber tabletop exercises for regional coalitions.

### **Requirements for Success**

ChicagoFIRST believes that a sustainable structure is critical for a successful partnership. While grant money could be pursued for specific project support, this organization has thrived because its founding members ensured that it could fund itself through dues, rather than depending on fluctuating grant possibilities.

In addition, a successful partnership is one that is cognizant of member concerns and project needs, and that explores all avenues for addressing these concerns (i.e., addressing local response concerns by expanding collaboration with local and regional agencies, or addressing system-wide issues with national level experts).

Finally, the hiring of dedicated staff with local, state, and federal public sector experience has been pivotal for this organization. Executive Director Brian Tishuk, during his 20-year career at the U.S. Treasury Department, formed the national public/private

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partnership for the financial sector and established the federal effort to form regional partnerships like ChicagoFIRST. Deputy Director Sara Alexander served as the Assistant Director of Emergency Management for the City of Chicago. She has seven years of experience with the City.

### **Resources**

ChicagoFIRST has the following resources available through its partnership- A seat in the Emergency Operations Center; resources to help prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters; web resources; tools and templates; and critical public sector relationships (build/maintain), participation in local fusion center.

### **Training and Exercises**

ChicagoFIRST hosts and participates in joint training exercises with the private sectors.

### **Communication Tools**

ChicagoFIRST uses the following methods of communication with their public/private sectors; email alerts; text message; in-person meetings (quarterly and bi-weekly); weekly and monthly newsletter; teleconferences; website; media outreach; WebEX; NC4; and Send Word Now.

### **Links**

ChicagoFIRST's website: <http://www.chicagofirst.org/>

### **Contact Information**

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