

## **ADA 25 Chicago Launches by Unveiling Extensive Partner Commitments**

***Regional initiative will commemorate 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Americans with Disabilities Act by challenging leaders and organizations to improve access, equality and opportunity***

**CHICAGO—April 17, 2015—**This year marks the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) – a civil rights milestone being celebrated in cities nationwide. On Friday, elected officials, civic leaders, business executives and disability organizations gathered at Motorola Mobility’s headquarters for the official launch of ADA 25 Chicago – a network of public and private partners who are not just commemorating, but also leveraging the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ADA to improve access, equality and opportunity for people with disabilities throughout Metropolitan Chicago.

“The ADA recognizes disability as a natural part of the human experience, as people with disabilities are our family, neighbors, teachers, lawyers and public officials,” said Terry Mazany, president and CEO of The Chicago Community Trust and Steering Committee member of ADA 25 Chicago. “Despite 25 years of progress, people with disabilities still have poorer educational outcomes, fewer employment opportunities and higher poverty rates than those without disabilities. This is the year to change the game with powerful new ideas and actions that significantly increase both opportunities and inclusion to benefit all of us. We are greater together.”

On Friday, ADA 25 Chicago announced that close to 150 partner organizations from throughout the Chicago region have already agreed to create substantive programs and initiatives this year in the critical areas of education, employment, community inclusion and technology. Steering Committee Co-Chairs Marca Bristo of Access Living and Steve Pemberton of Walgreens challenged even more organizations to step up and take action during the anniversary year. ADA 25 Chicago will report back in the fall with a two-day summit on legacy projects that will drive momentum for the next twenty-five years.

Public officials participating in the launch included Senator Dick Durbin, Congresswoman Tammy Duckworth, Lieutenant Governor Evelyn Sanguinetti, Attorney General Lisa Madigan and City of Chicago Commissioner Karen Tamley.

"I've done a lot of work with ADA 25 Chicago recently, and one thing is clear – this organization has the same dedication and resolve as the great champions for civil rights. It's inspiring to see such great work getting started in the Chicagoland area," said Congresswoman Tammy Duckworth.

One of the emerging legacy projects already in development is The Leadership Institute for People with Disabilities, with seed funding from Exelon. The vision for the Leadership Institute is to create a pipeline of people with disabilities who are prepared to serve on boards and commissions, secure appointed leadership positions and advance professionally in the nonprofit, government, and private sectors.

“Because Exelon benefits from a diverse workforce, we work to foster an environment that is inclusive of all, including people with disabilities,” said Exelon’s Steve Solomon, vice president Corporate Relations. “In addition to developing programs of our own that create career opportunities for people with disabilities, we fund programs like this one that deliver on our key values of diversity and inclusion and support a changing workforce for years to come.”

Also announced today were partner programs and initiatives underway region-wide including:

- **The Chicagoland Business Leadership Network**, an affiliate of the US Business Leadership Network that looks to advance the employment of individuals with disabilities, being launched under the auspices of the Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce Foundation.
- **Motorola Mobility** is hosting a Hackathon Competition to challenge entrepreneurs and developers to collaborate and create a software solution that makes Chicago more accessible to people with disabilities.
- Twenty-two cultural partner organizations have already signed up for **The 25 for 25 Cultural Access Project** – committed to increasing accessible programs and services in 2015, learning about best practices and announcing future accessibility plans.
- **The Metropolitan Mayors Caucus ADA 25 Task Force** is surveying all 273 cities, towns and villages in the region to identify best practices as well as needs for increasing inclusion, which will serve as the foundation for a major upcoming project.
- **Rush University Health Systems** is re-assessing all of its programs and facilities to see what they need to do beyond compliance to promote inclusion for patients and employment – and encouraging other major medical centers to do the same.
- Speakers on the topics of employment, education and inclusion of people with disabilities will be reaching audiences through Chicago's top civic venues including: **The Economic Club of Chicago, City Club of Chicago, Chicago Humanities Festival, Leadership Greater Chicago and The Chicago Network.**
- **Polk Bros. Park at Navy Pier Inc.** has committed to a new accessibility master plan that goes beyond compliance and toward universal design.
- **Shedd Aquarium** is collaborating with **The Chicago Lighthouse** to improve access to exhibits for people who are blind or have low vision and **Audubon Chicago Region** will create birding experiences through "birding by ear" programs, wheelchair hikes, and other innovative ways to access the outdoors.
- **United Way of Metropolitan Chicago, the Donors Forum and The Chicago Community Trust** will be collaborating with experts like the **Great Lakes ADA Center** to provide training to help the non-profits with whom they partner better meet the needs of the people they serve.
- **The City of Chicago Department of Events and Cultural Affairs** has integrated well-known performers with disabilities into the line-ups of the Chicago Blues Festival and the Chicago Jazz Festival and is working to improve the accessibility of all of its festivals.
- Among many more! Visit [ADA25Chicago.org/partners](http://ADA25Chicago.org/partners) to view the full list of commitments to date.

In addition to substantive partner projects, ADA 25 Chicago, in conjunction with its Partner Network, has lined up numerous activities to commemorate the anniversary of the ADA, including conferences, tours, exhibits and school programs celebrating diversity, emphasizing disability rights and increasing inclusion. Arts, music, film and other cultural events featuring artists with disabilities will also be taking place throughout the region. To view a developing calendar of events, visit: [ADA25Chicago.com/calendar](http://ADA25Chicago.com/calendar).

**Join the Movement:** ADA 25 Chicago seeks government, business, nonprofit, educational and other partners to join its growing network of leading organizations who have committed to making Metropolitan Chicago the most inclusive region in the nation. To sign on, visit [ADA25Chicago.org/partners](http://ADA25Chicago.org/partners).

Connect with ADA 25 Chicago on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) using #ADA25Chicago.

*The Chicago Community Trust is the lead sponsor of ADA 25 Chicago with a grant of \$1 million. Anniversary sponsors include Exelon and Walgreens. Motorola Mobility is a Program Sponsor and special thanks for support to ManpowerGroup.*

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