



OCTOBER 2018

# COLLEGE POSSIBLE CHICAGO

ORGANIZATIONAL ASSESSMENT

# Overview

## ABOUT

College Possible provides intensive coaching and support to low-income students to help them get into and graduate from college. Its model employs AmeriCorps members to execute curriculum focused on supporting students to navigate the college application process, SAT preparation and financial aid during 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades of high school. Their support continues beyond high school by providing college transition coaching and intensive support for students through college graduation.

## WHY WE INVESTED

College Possible empowers low-income students to succeed in college by providing them with the resources and guidance needed to enroll in college, and ultimately earn a bachelor's degree. A 2013 Harvard randomized controlled trial found that College Possible increases participants' enrollment in four-year colleges by 15 percentage points. The organization's most recent national data shows that 33 percent of College Possible participants who graduate from high school go on to attain a bachelor's degree within six years. Nationally, this compares to a rate of 11 percent for low-income students with similar academic credentials. The organization currently serves 597 students in Chicago with plans for aggressive growth in coming years. As College Possible Chicago (CPC) continues to build its presence in the city, the national office will continue to provide robust programmatic, operational and financial support. This gives us confidence that CPC will maintain quality while pursuing growth.



## GRANTEE SINCE

**2015**

## INVESTMENT TO DATE

**\$527K**

## CURRENT NUMBER SERVED

**597**

## LEADERSHIP

**Christine Poorman**  
Executive Director

# Our Assessment



## PROGRAM

College Possible's model has a strong track record of enabling low-income students to apply to, enroll in and graduate from college. Low-income students often lack the resources necessary to enroll in college and ultimately earn a degree. This is evidenced by the fact that although 75 percent of CPS students aspire to attain a bachelor's degree, only 18 percent do. Independent evaluations of College Possible's program, including two randomized controlled trials conducted by Harvard Kennedy School (2011, 2013) and a study by ICF International (2013), have found that College Possible has a significant positive impact on four-year college enrollment, persistence and graduation rates for low-income students. The organization's most recent national data shows that 33 percent of College Possible participants who graduate from high school attain a bachelor's degree within six years. Nationally, this compares to a rate of 11 percent for low-income students with similar academic credentials. The local College Possible team is executing the organization's proven model with fidelity in Chicago – including 84 percent college enrollment of its high school graduates – giving us confidence it will see similar results with Chicago students.



## LEADERSHIP

In College Possible Chicago's (CPC) first years of operation, Executive Director Christine Poorman has well positioned the organization to increase its presence throughout the city. Poorman has built a strong board of directors to help establish the organization in the city. The board is on track to grow from 11 to 14 members by the end of 2019. CPC's management team is small but capable, including an addition of a program director in 2019 to manage strategic programmatic goals, as well as develop college partnerships. The Chicago team is supported by a visionary CEO at the national level, Jim McCorkell. McCorkell has led College Possible from its origins as a college admissions program serving 35 Minnesota students in 2000 to its current work as a college access and persistence program serving nearly 30,000 students across six cities. The combined track record of national and local leadership gives us confidence in CPC's ability to navigate growth and execute its model with fidelity in Chicago.

# Our Assessment



## OPERATIONS

College Possible Chicago (CPC) has taken strides forward in its development capacity with 160 percent revenue growth during its first three years in Chicago. Despite this success, establishing a strong fundraising presence in the Chicago market remains the organization's primary challenge. CPC has forecasted annual operating deficits in order to enable growth, which have been covered by the national organization. In 2018, the national organization supported a \$127K deficit, which is 10 percent of CPC's annual expenses. While the national organization is financially stable and able to support CPC as it builds philanthropic support in early years, this is not the long-term plan and CPC is working to meet its revenue targets in the years ahead. To support fundraising growth, CPC is launching a fundraising strategy project in 2019 that will outline a multi-year plan to accelerate the organization's revenue. Given the team's focus on developing a compelling multi-year fundraising strategy and additional capacity CPC has brought on in this area, we are optimistic that the organization will be able to raise all necessary funds locally in coming years.



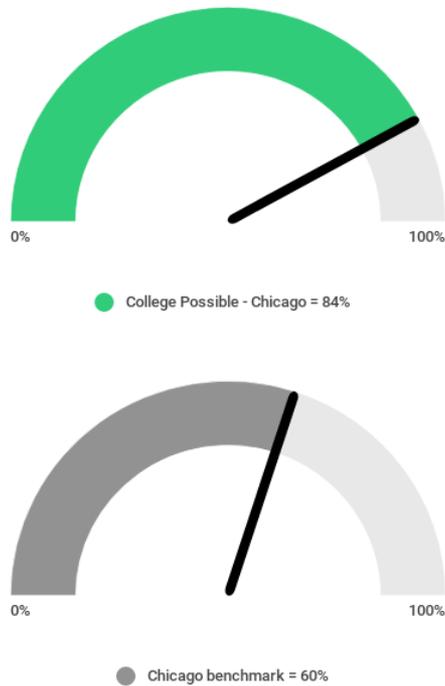
## SCALE

College Possible Chicago (CPC) has grown from serving 145 students when it launched in 2016 to serve nearly 600 students in 2018. While this is meaningful growth, progress has been slower than initially planned given challenges fundraising and establishing itself in a landscape with a number of other college access and success organizations. Last year, with the support of A Better Chicago, CPC engaged in a growth strategy to consider its targets, ideal cost model and potential ways to expand reach given its addressable market and school partnership model. With this plan, CPC is planning to grow its new student reach by 20 percent each year over the next three years, ultimately seeking to reach over 1,900 students by 2021. A Better Chicago is confident that CPC is on a path to achieve this growth given the plans to support additional cohorts of students at new school sites, along with the organization's strong programmatic results, large addressable market and positive feedback from school leaders.

# Grantee Performance

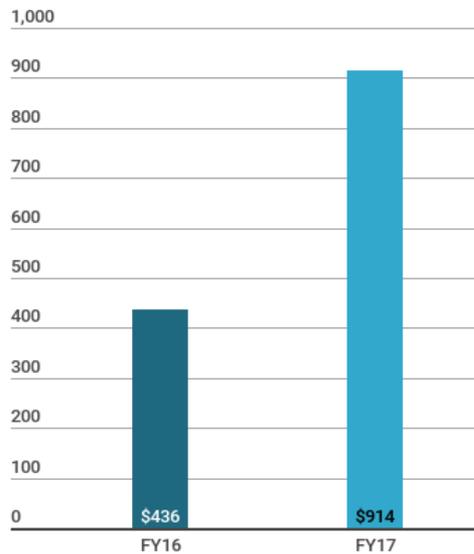
## KEY OUTCOME

College enrollment rate of high school graduates



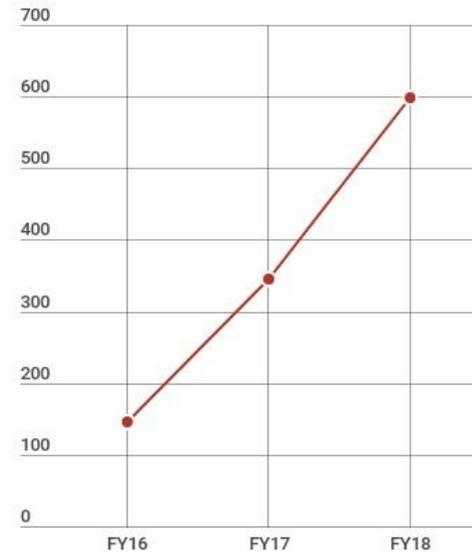
## REVENUE

In thousands



## SCALE

Students served

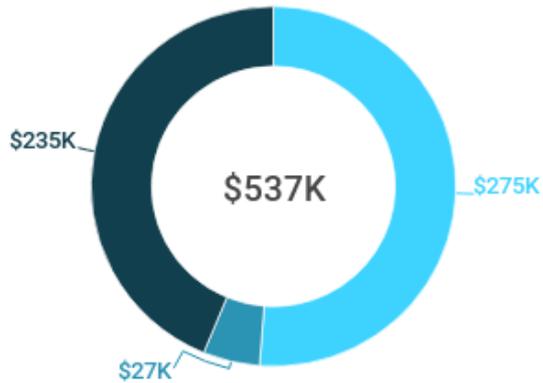


Note: Benchmark is based on Chicago data reflecting outcomes for students with academic credentials similar to CPC students

Sources: College Possible Chicago; College Possible financial statements; Chicago Public Schools

# Our Impact

## INVESTMENT TO DATE



● Monetary grants ● Management support ● Leveraged funding

## MANAGEMENT SUPPORT HIGHLIGHTS

**Strategic Planning:** College Possible Chicago (CPC) worked with a consultant in 2018 to support the development of its three-year growth plan. A Better Chicago supported CPC in finding a vetted consulting firm and covered 75 percent of the fees.

# Contact Us

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