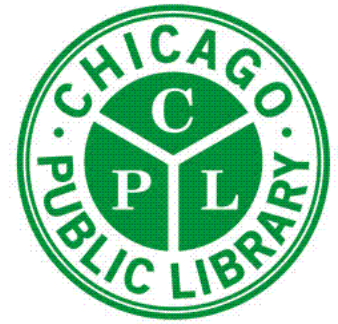***Chicago, IL***

<u>Leaders in Digital Inclusion Best Practices, Innovation</u>

Chicago Public Library and Peer 2 Peer University (P2PU) partnered to create Learning Circles, a program that engages adults in online learning by creating face-to-face study groups at public libraries. To be a successful online learner, patrons must have strong digital literacy, self-motivation, and perseverance in an environment lacking social support and contextualized course content. Libraries are well positioned to mitigate barriers, offering trained staff, digital access and resources, strong community ties, and a culture of lifelong learning that can transform online courses into engaging and empowering learning experiences for millions of Americans who are currently digitally excluded. All Learning Circles have taken place in branch libraries across the city, have been facilitated and supported by librarians, and are offered as services to nurture learning for adults.

<u>Population targeted</u>

Learning Circles services target seniors, unemployed individuals, female heads of households, low-income households, non-English speaking households, and adults with no college degree.

<u>Key metrics</u>

- 225 people have been served since the beginning of the project
- 40% of learners had never even heard of free online courses before they set foot in the library to participate in a Learning Circle. Another 25% had heard of them, but never taken one before.
- Program saw a 45-55% retention rate over the 6-8 week courses, and 90% of the learners were interested in taking another Learning Circle.

<u>City's role</u>

Chicago Public Library is a department of the City of Chicago. The 80 locations in all of Chicago's diverse neighborhoods provide service, technologies and tools for all Chicagoans. P2PU is a non-profit that facilitates learning outside of institutional walls. institutions.They train librarians and community members to organize and facilitate learning circles, build the underlying open source software that supports the program, and develop and curate open educational resources.

<u>Advice to other cities</u>

Following the Learning Circles proof of pilot concept, P2PU released an open source learning circle toolkit designed to support librarians start learning circle programs. All components of the toolkit are, and will remain, available to librarians and community organizers around the world under MIT Open Software and Creative Commons BY-SA 4.0. As the program grows, there is a clear opportunity to use learning circles as a way to serve as pipelines within and between community organizations, including community colleges and nonprofit organizations.