



neighborhood ECONOMICS

repairing
local economies

Chicago, Illinois

September 29 - October 1, 2025

welcome

For centuries we've been warned: "*the love of money is the root of all evil.*" Look at today's headlines — staggering inequality, theft, and historic injustice — and it's easy to think greed determines the way things are. It's as though fear and scarcity are like economic gravity, an unchangeable natural law.

Money might be a terrible god, but it's also an indispensable tool.

At Neighborhood Economics, we believe in an alternative story about the purpose of capital and reparative economic growth — and we think we can prove it. The reason for this hope is probably sitting right next to you. You might meet them over cocktails or after a session, but our bet is you are surrounded by hundreds of bright spots shining against a dark national backdrop. We've seen this every time we host this conference. It's why we keep coming back.

We come from across the country with a common conviction that shapes every conversation we'll have in Chicago:

Repairing Local Economies.

If you believe those three words belong together — across neighborhoods and sectors, across capital, entrepreneurship, real estate, faith, and health — you're in the right place.

And Chicago is the perfect host. The "city of broad shoulders" is showing the nation what collaboration, courage, and neighbor-to-neighbor repair can look like. Despite all the false national narratives about this city, Chicagoans continue to say: Come and see for yourself.

Here is our hope: that in every session — and just as importantly, between sessions — you will join this movement to address our collective moral hunger. Meet new colleagues, discover new tools, spark new ideas to catalyze the work you are already doing. Together we will see that our mission to repair local economies is brighter and stronger than we imagined.

We are so glad you're here!

- **Tim Soerens** (on behalf of our entire team)

neighborhood economics team

Rosa Lee Harden • Tim Soerens • Kevin Jones •
Pam Creely • Jamie McGonnigal • Kyle Oliver

CONTENT SUPPORT

Jeremiah Robinson • Tiffani Hart • Gennie Gonzalez

MASTER OF CEREMONIES

Leroy Barber

WELCOME TEAM

Tammy Wilson • Rachel Creely

VISUAL NOTES

Coté Soerens

entrepreneurship

The Entrepreneurship track takes participants on a journey from identifying and overcoming the unseen barriers to building lasting wealth and community impact. Through sessions on real estate ownership, innovative capital solutions, ecosystem building, and business acquisition, attendees will gain practical tools and connections to grow their ventures and strengthen the neighborhoods they call home.

real estate

When the people in under-resourced neighborhoods own real estate they are at much less risk of displacement. These sessions explore ways to own commercial real estate collectively and ways innovative financing makes housing more deeply affordable than traditional affordable housing.

capital

Dive into catalytic funding models: recoverable grants, revenue-based finance, layered capital stacks, that move money in ways traditional finance won't. Meet funders aligning capital with values and long-term community outcomes.

faith

Discover how faith communities are leveraging their values, land, and trust capital to support economic justice, anchor development, and steward new ownership models.

health

See how health equity is being woven into economic development, from housing design to workforce strategies. Hear from leaders using cross-sector funding to address root causes of poor health and generational poverty.

session schedule tuesday, september 30

8:15 – Register on the first floor and join us for continental breakfast and caffeine on the second floor landing at Venue SIX10.

9:00

feinberg theater

Welcome to Chicago, one of the great cities in the world because of its diverse and distinctive neighborhoods. It's also a mirror of the American economy showcasing the opportunities and challenges we face together. *(Allison Clark, Heather Worthington, Mark Sampson, Sidney Williams, May Yu)*

11:00

feinberg theater

Finance Academy Offers Training to Equip Communities

This session introduces the Community Finance Academy (CFA), a new national training and consulting hub designed to equip communities, entrepreneurs, and organizers with the tools to leverage capital for liberation and growth. Built from lived experience and industry expertise, CFA aims to break cycles of disinvestment and open pathways for shared wealth building. *(Rebecca Melancon, Stephen Shaff, Bill Huston, Stephanie Swepson Twitty)*

room 313

Investing Your IRA with Your Neighbors

New legislation enables local investment clubs to invest their retirement accounts together to grow entrepreneurship and community wealth. Additionally, people are investing catalytic philanthropy from new donor advised fund platforms to inject catalytic early capital into communities. *(Tim Freundlich, Pierre Clark, Michael Shuman)*

room 314

Soft Capital to Make Owning a Home Affordable

A growing number of innovators are developing creative solutions to help people become homeowners, even when traditional affordable housing financing falls short. Soft capital models provide flexible capital that lowers barriers to ownership, enabling families to build equity from day one. By combining accessibility with long-term wealth creation, these approaches turn housing into a tool for financial stability and generational prosperity. *(Derek Peebles, Steve Wanta, Sam Centellas, Aisha Weeks)*

12:00 – Lunch - pick up your lunch on the second floor landing and enjoy Millenium Park or join a lively conversation around the tables at Venue SIX10.

1:00

feinberg theater

Weaving the Entrepreneurial Ecosystem

Entrepreneurial success doesn't happen in isolation, it grows from strong interconnected ecosystems. Explore how communities can cultivate those networks by aligning capital, mentorship, training, and local support to power small business growth. Panelists will share strategies for breaking down silos, building trust across sectors, and ensuring that overlooked founders have access to the tools and opportunities they need to thrive. *(Pamela Roussos, Jay Nwachu, Megan Christenson, Jahmal Cole)*

room 313

Drawing on Old Ideas to Put New Money into Neighborhoods

Savings circles and stock purchases are old and proven tools. Now, they are being deployed in new ways that enable asset creation at the extreme grass roots level. *(Leslie Payne, Steve Wanta, Olena Borova)*

room 314

Nonprofit's Path to Freedom

For many nonprofits, the loss of government funding can feel like a dead end, forcing them to chase short-term grants and compromise their focus. But a different path is possible. By building earned-income strategies, nonprofits can create reliable revenue streams that strengthen their financial foundation while keeping mission at the center. This shift moves organizations from dependency to resilience. *(Tim Soerens, Stephanie Swepson Twitty, Charlie Uihlein, Mia Solberg)*

2:00

feinberg theater

Repairing local economies will not happen overnight. Let's explore the breakthroughs and triumphs of steadfast work over decades. *(Chris Miller, Luke Lingle, Clark Harris, Jonathan Brooks, David Bank, Naloleon Wallace, Lyneir Richardson, Ghian Foreman, David Doig, Aaron Kuecker)*

3:30 – Take a quick break to make new connections before heading to the 4:00 session – light refreshments on the 2nd floor landing.

4:00

feinberg theater

Neighborhood Economics Tools to Take Home

Lyneir Richardson of Chicago TREND has developed a workbook for “buying back the block,” offering communities a roadmap to fight displacement through ownership. David Bank of Impact Alpha complements this with a playbook for economic justice, highlighting models that can be adapted and scaled nationwide. Together, their work turns proven strategies into practical tools, empowering communities everywhere to build wealth and resilience close to home. *(Lindsay Smalling, Lyneir Richardson, David Bank, Talib Graves-Mann)*

room 313

The Lawndale Miracle

North Lawndale offers a compelling case study in the intersection of faith-based institutions and community development for neighborhood revitalization. The session will trace how congregations and community development centers have leveraged assets, mobilized social capital, and built institutional partnerships to foster local entrepreneurship, affordable housing, and job creation, all creating community health in historically disinvested neighborhoods. *(Jonathan Brooks, Richard Townsell, Whittney Smith)*

room 314

Unfair Taxes Can Be Made Fair For Everyone

In most cities, poor neighborhoods subsidize more affluent neighborhoods due to unfair property tax assessments. In Chicago, innovative work to subvert the impacts of redlining by the county assessor has saved under-resourced homeowners, the bottom 70%, more than \$1.9 billion. It's one of the few places where this prevailing economic injustice has been almost completely reversed. It can be a model for cities across the country; taxation can be made fair where every homeowner pays their fair share. *(Heather Worthington, Fritz Kaegi, Chris Berry)*

5:00

feinberg theater

The Reclaiming Chicago Campaign: Building 2000 Homes for Working Families

Lawndale CDC has an ambitious plan to build 2000 homes in its neighborhood, partnering with the Steans Foundation using innovative ways to make housing more affordable than traditional affordable housing. (Leroy Barber, Richard Townsell, Patricia Ford)

room 313

Ideas for Pooling Resources to Invest in Your Neighborhood

Collective purchasing is becoming a local powerhouse, saving money in cities across the country. Add in a new replicable library of things in affordable housing, coupled with grassroots crowdfunding and something new and important may emerge. (Kevin Jones, Tom Llewellyn, Rebecca Dray, Bill Huston)

room 314

Investing to Accelerate Community Impact Through Adaptive Reuse of Sacred Space

Explore how communities can reimagine sacred spaces on the brink of closure. Through adaptive reuse, innovative partnerships, and venture philanthropy, they can become engines of local economic growth and community resilience and anchors for housing, small businesses, and cultural initiatives. (Peter Beeson, Luke Lingle, Emily Sajdak, Clark Harris)

6:00

Join us on the second floor landing for Wine Down. Enjoy light refreshments and share highlights of your day.

entrepreneurship

real estate

capital

faith

health

wednesday, october 1

9:00

feinberg theater

We will explore national patterns of persistent challenges and pair them with emerging financial innovation from neighborhoods across Chicago and well beyond. (Christen Wiggins, David Erickson, Allison Clark, Lyneir Richardson, Kevin Jones, Tim Freundlich, Doug Jutte, Stephanie Swepson Twitty, Jahmal Cole)

10:30 – Break

11:00

feinberg theater

Anchor Institutions and Community Investment: Driving Economic and Health Equity in Chicago's Westside

Rush's anchor mission commitment and its initiatives are aimed at decreasing the life-expectancy gap on Chicago's West Side. You'll hear from Rush employees who are leading initiatives in community health, sustainability, and community development and hear a history of West Side United, a non-profit coalition incubated at Rush. (Doug Jutte, Julia Bassett, Ian Hughes, Nathalie Rosado, Eve Shapiro, Ricardo Saucedo)

room 313

Finding the Capital for Early Stage Entrepreneurs

Too small for venture funding, too large for microloans, many businesses get stuck in the "missing middle" of capital. This conversation dives into innovative financing tools, non-extractive lending models, and relationship-based capital strategies designed to help entrepreneurs in this space scale sustainably. (Curt Lyon, B.J. Stewart, William W. Towns, Matthew Revere)

room 314

Buying Your Building: Raising the Missing Capital

Partners in Equity provides the down payment for under-resourced entrepreneurs to get a loan from a CDFI to buy their building and couple an appreciating asset with a growing business. It's an example of finding the right, targeted leverage point to break down a structural injustice in a system. (David Bank, Wilson Lester)

12:00 – Lunch - pick up your lunch on the second floor landing and enjoy Millenium Park or join a lively conversation around the tables at Venue SIX10.

1:00

feinberg theater

The Corridor Approach to Saving Neighborhoods

Across cities, innovative initiatives are showing how neighborhood-scale strategies can preserve local communities and stop displacement. In Chicago, focusing on corridors creates pathways for residents and businesses to build lasting assets, keeping wealth local and strengthening the social fabric. Similar efforts in Los Angeles and Baltimore demonstrate the potential of coordinated, place-based approaches to transform corridors into centers of dynamic change. *(Collete English Dixon, Ja'Net Defell, Uzma Noormohamed, Jay Nwachu, Damien Goodman)*

room 313

A Match Made in Heaven: Faith-Based Organizations and Employment Social Enterprises

For more than 25 years REDF has built the field of employment social enterprises (ESEs) — businesses that provide jobs, training, and support to people rebuilding their lives after experiences like incarceration or homelessness. Across its national network of 375+ ESEs, REDF has seen a strong trend of faith-based organizations supporting this work, whether by operating ESEs directly or by offering space, start-up capital, or wraparound services such as meals and emergency funding. Explore how and why churches and faith-based organizations can support — or even launch — their own ESEs. *(Debbie Chou, Katie Mulcahy, Laura Zumdah)*

room 314

Shared Ownership to Build Wealth

Dive into co-ops, community land trusts, and employee ownership as proven tools for broad-based prosperity. Explore how these models distribute decision-making, profits, and power more equitably, creating businesses and assets that remain rooted in their communities. This session highlights real-world examples from Chicago innovators, as well as national players, who are reimagining ownership to build wealth, strengthen neighborhoods, and ensure that success is shared by many, not just a few. *(Sidney Williams, Nneka Onwuzurike, Kristen Barker, Curt Lyon, Xochitl Espinosa, Whittney Smith)*

2:00

feinberg theater

Innovative Fund Model for Local Investment Takes Off

An innovative fund model that lets average-income people invest in their local economies is taking off in communities across the country. Based on real estate, the model lowers the risk to invest catalytic capital in local entrepreneurs. *(Michael Shuman, Chris Miller, Brent Forsberg, Derek Peebles)*

room 313

Entrepreneurship Through Acquisition

Buying a business can be a smarter, less risky route than starting from scratch. This session shows how acquisition fuels ownership and equity, and closes the racial wealth gap. *(Havell Rodrigues, Rashid Carter, Victor Mowatt)*

room 314

The Only Thing We Lack is Imagination

Communities of faith have much more to contribute than space and programming. Many are also becoming hubs of social entrepreneurship. For example, Just Like Family Home Care has grown into the largest social franchise in Canada because of eight people thinking creatively in a church basement. *(Carla Langhorst, Tim Soerens)*

3:00 – Break

3:30

feinberg theater

In this final plenary session we will explore tools and replicable solutions as we crowdsource new insights to repair local economies. Bring your insights from our time together as we plot our way forward. *(Michael Shuman, Tim Soerens, Rosa Lee Harden)*

5:30 – In what is becoming a Neighborhood Economics tradition, join us at a true Chicago landmark: Buddy Guy's Legends, just a quick four-minute walk from our venue. Buddy Guy's Legends has built a reputation as one of the nation's premier blues clubs. People visit from all over the world to find out what Chicago is all about. What better way to end our time together than with a toast at Buddy Guy's — and maybe even a chance to meet the legend himself?

partners

Funding Provided by the Searle Funds at The Chicago Community Trust



media partners



THE MAIN STREET JOURNAL

We are fortunate to have the support of so many remarkable partners, all of whom contribute to Neighborhood Economics in important ways. Among them, our two media partners stand out for the way they help share our stories and extend our reach to new audiences.

- Impact Alpha, the Wall Street Journal of Impact Investing, led by David Bank – Impact Alpha’s IA Daily has become the email that is opened every day by the knowledgeable players and those who want to know in the growing movement of investing for good world wide. You can subscribe at: ImpactAlpha.com
- Michael Shuman, the acknowledged expert on what’s happening in local investing in the United States, is the author of several important books in the field, notably *Put Your Money Where Your Life Is*. Shuman’s Main Street Journal is a comprehensive weekly guide to what’s new and notable in investing to create assets owned by ordinary people in local people around the country. You can watch Michael and Neighborhood Economics on our Community Capital bi-weekly videos. Find them at: themainstreetjournal.org

Both of these outstanding journalists have important stories to tell on the main stage here in Chicago and we can’t wait to hear from each of them.

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