

GET CITIES

SECOND MUSE
FOUNDATION

BUILDING INCLUSIVE LOCAL ECOSYSTEMS TO

ACCELERATE GENDER EQUITY IN TECH



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INTRODUCTION TO THE INITIATIVE

The GET Cities journey contains powerful lessons for philanthropy and social impact initiatives. What began as an idea led to a national movement that has left a lasting impact on the gender equity landscape in the tech industry across Chicago, Washington, D.C. and Miami.

Why GET Cities?

Tech is one of the most economically powerful industries, dictating trends, globally moving the needle across industry sectors, and helping more people access sustainable, fiscally beneficial work. Yet, it's also more inaccessible than most industries. The current systems of power in tech deliberately exclude most of the population and exacerbate existing inequities in society. We're currently **100 years away from gender parity in the tech industry.**

Women are underrepresented in the US technology sector, comprising only 26% of jobs in the computing workforce ("By the Numbers," National Center for Women & Information Technology, 2019). Women are vastly underrepresented throughout the entire ecosystem: as computer science graduates, young tech professionals, tech startup founders, venture capitalists, and leaders in the tech industry. And while research shows that more diverse companies are more innovative and more profitable, the representation of women in tech has remained flat for more than a decade.

With 3.5 million computing-related job openings anticipated by 2026¹ and a downward trend in the percentage of women receiving computing degrees, the gap only stands to increase without collective, focused action dedicated to increasing the participation of women in tech. The gender and diversity gap in the tech sector (which comprised a rapidly growing 5.2% share of GDP in 2015), affects not only the career prospects of young women in the US but also our overall global economic competitiveness.

And while there is some acknowledgement of the problem within the tech industry, efforts to address it have not historically delivered. Diversity programs are not always coordinated and do not share common goals and metrics, even within a single company (McKinsey & Company, 2018). Tech companies struggle to navigate research on which programs have the most impact, which made it clear there was a need to collaborate across the ecosystem on best practices and impact reporting. GET Cities intended to bring a unified front to this problem by coordinating communities of stakeholders within specific cities to align on goals, metrics and interventions, thus building diversity in tech from the ground floor. We set out to create actionable solutions to bring change to local communities while catalyzing a national movement.

We brought communities of practice together, creating a specific focus on gender equity as a priority, with a data-driven approach to co-create solutions to test and scale in three American cities. In an environment where the oppressed are regularly asked to rebuild the oppressive systems in which they sit, we stood shoulder to shoulder, shared tools, lessons learned and moved our collective ambition forward in real and measurable ways.

Fellows, GET Champions, mentors, seed founders, VCs, angels, community partners, leaders, investors and influencers were all touched by this work and now move through the world differently and with the goal to reduce the time to gender parity.

BY THE NUMBERS

204

events hosted/co-hosted across our three cities

37

interventions and pilots run

More than

3,600

total stakeholders engaged since 2021

3,451

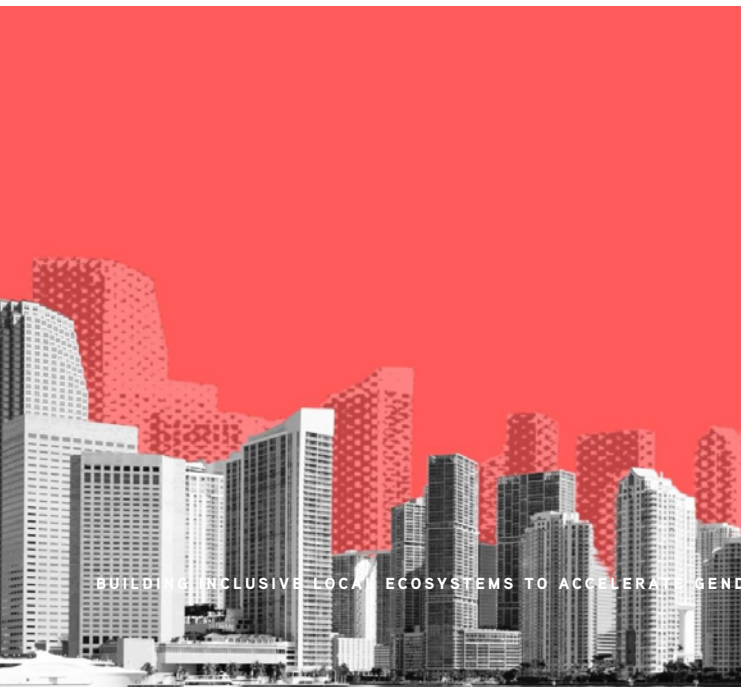
media mentions

\$22M+

raised by founders across our three cities while part of a GET intervention between 2022-2023

\$3.2M

deployed to local and national organizations to support equity in tech



How we chose our cities

Since our model was based on making local change before scaling nationally, we launched the intervention in three initial cities: **Chicago, Washington, D.C. and Miami**. We selected each city based on the ways they were already excelling in tech equity work and the areas where we saw opportunities for growth and improvement. We required cities to have at least one university that graduated 200 or more computer science degrees annually, a robust employment landscape in tech roles to satisfy recent graduates, and access to consistent funding, especially for women founders.

Then, we spoke with stakeholders in each city, such as peer practitioners, ecosystem players, local equity experts and technologists, asking questions such as: What is the energy in each city around gender equity? How are gender equity initiatives received? Who are the people we'll be interacting with and are they open to new conversations?

These conversations helped us understand each city's points of acceleration — where there was already energy toward equity and building the local ecosystem in an inclusive way — the hurdles to overcome, and where our work fit in. It also laid the groundwork for recruiting local directors and partners. We recommend doing this evaluation for any future work in other cities.

Why Chicago, Washington, D.C. and Miami

CHICAGO

The tech ecosystem was collaborative, humble, hardworking, and already had a higher percentage of women founders. We also noticed Big Tech companies were expanding there and the community and government leaders were willing to engage with us.

WASHINGTON, D.C.

The city is close to the federal government, diverse, has access to many universities, and has some of the best pay equity in the country. We noticed it already had a lot of momentum for creating equitable environments, but lacked connectivity and cohesion — which GET cities could provide.

MIAMI

The tech ecosystem was still in the building phase, but had clear energy toward tech equity. Many local ecosystem players were firmly invested in building a specific Miami tech ecosystem that was inclusive and equitable, providing an opportunity for GET Cities to help support this work at the beginning.

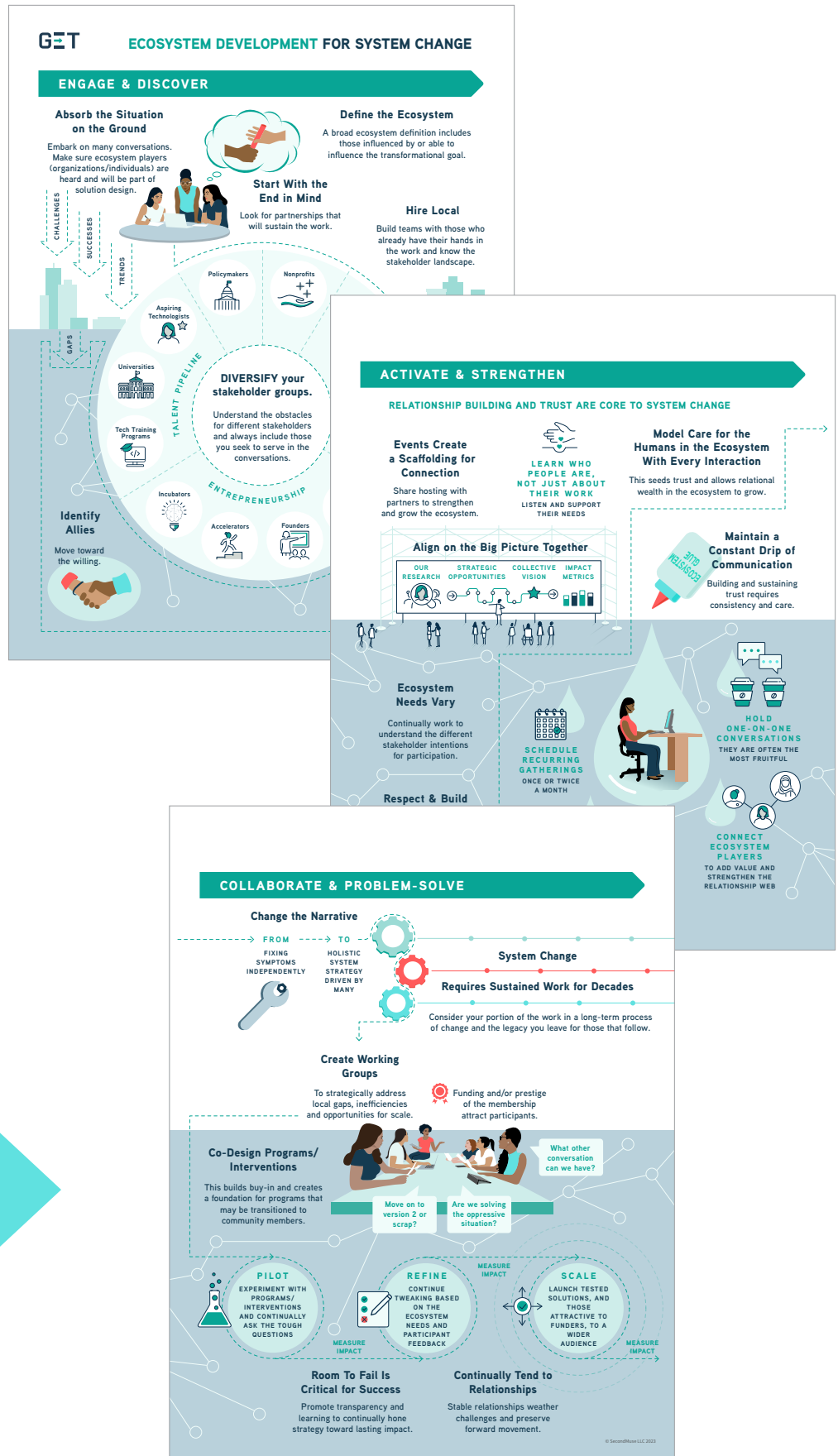
Our Process & Success

We built a collaborative, human-centered, opportunity-unlocking model in three cities with women, trans and nonbinary technologists driving every intervention. We brought an intersectional gender lens to economic development strategies in each city and launched national conversations about the policy frameworks and environments necessary to achieve the just and inclusive economies we seek to build.

We built a model that ensured more members of historically excluded populations would access the education, training and degrees necessary to move toward a career in tech. We built bridges and skills for those humans as they sought to persist in those roles. We connected dozens of founders to millions of dollars and continue to deepen their networks across the country as they break down barriers previously seen as unbreakable.

We summarized our process in three steps.

Click arrow to learn more



Moving this work forward

Our journey is evolving, yet continues and is fueled by the belief that a just and inclusive tech industry is not only possible, but necessary. Equality is merely the first step on the path to justice and belonging, and the work ahead demands our unwavering commitment. Time, resources, and the nurturing of deep relationships are the essential elements of change in systems resistant to transformation. Furthermore, alignment among partners is paramount, ensuring that our goals are harmonized as we navigate the complexities of dismantling unjust systems.

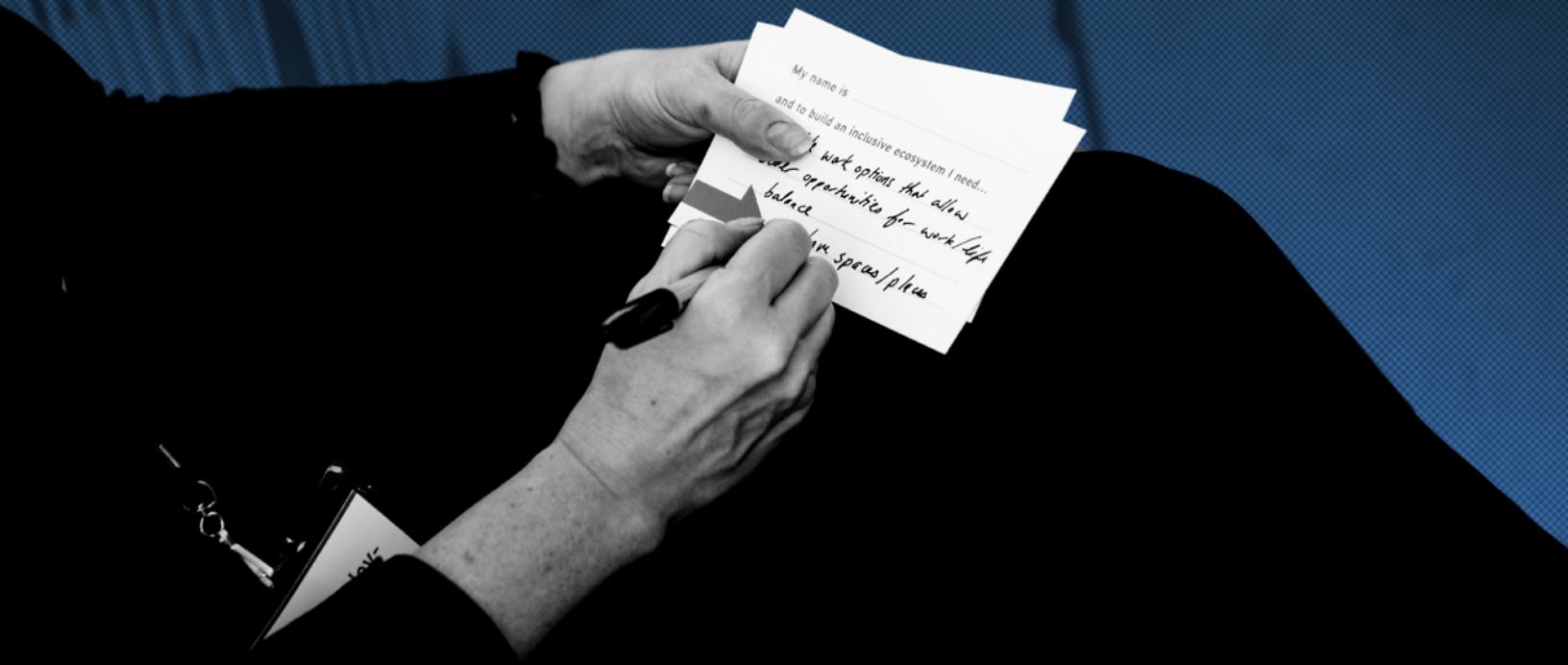
This work was built on the backs of experience and experimentation in the field with amazing technologists and partners. I'm extremely grateful to those strong local and national partners who have agreed to carry this work forward with sustainability and resilience ensuring that the plight of women, trans and non-binary humans in tech continues to get the focus, attention and resources necessary to bring them into their full power, influence and joy.

Most of all I'm grateful for the ways our work at GET Cities has shown us that together, with humility, empathy, and an unshakable commitment to progress, we can create a brighter, more equitable future for all. So, let us forge ahead, armed with the lessons of our past, as we work toward a world where everyone—regardless of gender—can thrive and achieve their full potential.

Leslie Lynn Smith

Senior Strategic Advisor & Former
National Executive Director of GET Cities





GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- ONE** *Build with partners who are aligned in the work*
- TWO** *For ecosystem work, teams should consist of people within the ecosystems*
- THREE** *Expert practitioners and the target population must be centered in the design of interventions and metrics*
- FOUR** *Room to experiment and fail is critical*
- FIVE** *Gender is a social construct*

ONE

Build with partners who are aligned in the work

Partner organizations and people have been at the core of our work since day one. Our ability to impact ecosystems and long-held practices would be greatly diminished without the support, buy-in and expertise of those who have been doing similar work long before GET Cities arrived. Collaborating with partners is crucial to resource sharing, social exchange and legitimization in the ecosystem.⁸ Thus, finding the right partners who share our sensibilities and beliefs is important.

In each of our cities, we have hinged our work on one or two major partners. These are often the organizations that have been building up a city's tech

ecosystem, with a consideration of equitable practices along the way. As we launched each GET City, we considered it our responsibility to expand their work, with an eye specifically toward broadening gender equality with an intersectional lens. We also worked to connect ecosystem actors across a shared set of sensibilities to increase everyone's ability to further a collective mission.⁹ From these organizations, we learned about the challenges, needs and assets of each of our cities. We've built every piece of our portfolio by working alongside these partners.

The work of partnering with organizations over shared sensibilities and mission is an ongoing process. Long-term systems change is centered in relationships that prioritize trust, allowing us to face challenges together. This trust is not necessarily a prerequisite

to collaborations, but something that is intentionally built from the partnering process.¹⁰ Being intentional about these relationships is one of our biggest investments in equity work.

Finally, as we evolved through our funding, our partners are our biggest strength from which to carry on this work. Not only have we built a collaborative ecosystem based on shared goals and desired outcomes, but these partners will also keep the work of GET Cities alive. Because we've imagined, designed and run nearly all of our work with partners, they are the best people with whom this work can and will live on.¹¹ Though it no longer will be under the umbrella of GET Cities, our partners will continue to put forth the same effort and have the same impact because we've built our work with a community sensibility in mind.



TWO

For ecosystem work, teams should consist of people within the ecosystems

Local teams are essential for local ecosystem work. Rather than coming in as outsiders with solutions, it's critical to have team members with a deep history and understanding of the city in which they're working. That's why we hired local team members to lead our work in each city. They're able to build trusting relationships and get the work off the ground faster. They also have a better understanding of the nuanced problems in each city — often having lived through them — and are more invested in finding the right solutions.

It's also important to consider how the local team leads will be impacted by this work. They use their relationships to build momentum, which means they are personally and professionally impacted when challenges arise, such as funding or connections that fell through. When placing importance on hiring local team members, it's critical to consider the personal implications on their professional standing in their city and an organization's ability to negatively affect their future.



THREE

Expert practitioners and the target population must be centered in the design of interventions and metrics

Centering our work in partnership with expert practitioners was an early and important lesson for GET Cities. As a new organization within each of our three cities, we relied on experts and those who were already established in the work in two major ways: first, as advisors to the work we were building and second, as allies to accomplishing the work.

Experts know what's needed and necessary We repeat often that partners are necessary for our work. This is true for centering ourselves within city ecosystems and gaining traction and trust to get our work done. We're also comfortable acknowledging that while our focus is on gender equity, we don't believe we singularly hold the best answer for how to accomplish this. We also view part of our responsibility to include making each of our city ecosystems more and better connected. In our cities, we centered ecosystem experts — those who knew the city in terms of the tech workforce, the funding space and/or support for founders — as well as equity practitioners — those who were experts on how to create inclusive space and practices. This was particularly helpful when designing complex interventions, to center the experience and perspective of those who could ensure the intervention would affect the issue before it was executed.¹² These two groups helped us design and build toward better connected and more equitable cities.

Experts are motivated to help make the work happen Just as expert practitioners provided the insights and experience that supported the development of our work, they also helped to promote and support it. As people and organizations who have been doing some version of this work for years, they provided the buy-in to make our work go further than we could have on our own by rallying their networks, recommending our work to others and helping make connections where we had none.¹³ In turn, as we became active and known participants in each local ecosystem, we worked to expand connections and efforts of others as well.

FOUR

Room to experiment and fail is critical

Innovation and experimentation was an important part of how we built interventions and supports within each city. Peer practitioners, economic developers, systems change experts and tech gurus — among many others — helped educate us on what was needed in each of our cities. Yet, knowing what the actual solution to each problem was and how to build it inclusively was rarely clear. Giving ourselves permission, time and money to experiment was an important step to carving out space to try things, evaluate how they worked and reiterate as needed.¹⁴

Dedication to experimentation opened the door for evaluation and learning

Taking an experimental approach to what we built was largely about giving ourselves permission to fail, with an eye to evaluating everything we did using data and experience. By assuming every intervention was a pilot, rather than a

final product, we were easily able to iterate and alter early interventions, without feeling a commitment to carrying on as-is or positioning our initial work as fully complete. This also made space for local ecosystems to dive into projects with the opportunity to play, rather than with the expectation of reaching the final and perfect conclusion immediately.

Experimentation can be leveraged across all cities

Working within three cities, we also found that experimentation in one city ultimately benefited all the cities. Because our cities had similar needs, what we learned in any given city could be passed on. In some instances, this looked like best practices for launching conversations in a city and in others it was an idea for an entirely new intervention that didn't yet exist anywhere. By working at the ecosystem and city level, rather than the national level, we were able to be more nimble with our ideas — launching them in one city, while honing them in another, similar to how product-focused companies beta test before a full launch.

Failure is necessary across programmatic reporting

Failure was especially important for us as it related to reporting on and discussing the work. While creating space for failure often makes sense in the design and implementation stage, it can become precarious when it comes time to report outcomes that were less than successful.¹⁵ These failures and moments of learning will be covered in our intervention-specific case studies. Having a clear trajectory toward learning, being honest about findings and continuing to iterate toward something with newfound confidence and information is ultimately a win for the organization and toward ecosystem-wide equity. However, this is an important lesson we lacked in the design of our intervention, and it made reporting to our funder tenuous at times. Failure, in this way, should be a recognized and celebrated part of the process.¹⁶ Otherwise, we run the risk of encouraging interventions such as GET Cities to hide failures. Instead, we should distribute these findings around the ecosystem and grow toward greater equity from them.



FIVE

Gender is a social construct


While we were initially approached to help more women access tech opportunities, we soon made a shift to gender more broadly. This was intentional—GET Cities wanted to be inclusive about gender in an expansive way. We became aware of our unconscious biases in how we were thinking about gender in a cis-centered way and that required us to acknowledge what we knew (very little), commit to learning, and use our platform and voice to listen, gather data and lift the stories and dreams of trans and nonbinary technologists into the conversation.

We shifted our approach to make it clear that GET Cities' **intended population includes people who are women, trans and nonbinary**. This is an attempt to subvert the erasure of genders historically excluded from representation. As we have built interventions, sought out partnerships and attempted to build more inclusive ecosystems in our cities, we have also learned that gender should be considered at the intersection of other identity categories as well, such as race and ethnicity, education, income, disability, socioeconomic status, and parent status.



THE WORK IN ACTION

We tested 37 pilots and interventions. The following are a selection of case studies that showcase some of GET Cities' strengths, learnings and aspirations for the future of this work.


 A black and white photograph of three people in conversation. On the left, a man with a beard and a light-colored button-down shirt. In the center, a woman with long dark hair wearing a dark jacket and a patterned scarf. On the right, a woman with short dark hair wearing a patterned scarf and a dark jacket. They are standing in front of a blue background with a grid pattern.

LAYING THE GROUNDWORK & CONVENING WITH ECOSYSTEM RESEARCH

THE FIRST STEP IN STARTING THIS WORK

Before we designed our interventions, we aimed to establish a deep understanding of the current landscape of gender and equity in tech broadly and in each of our target cities. Our process is community centered and draws from best practices, data and knowledge from across the globe.

We launched a “Big Think” — a convening of stakeholders modeled after SecondMuse’s* **structure** — in Chicago, which is home to some of the best tech talent in the nation, according to **2018 CBRE data**. Our goals were to understand the general mindset around gender equity in tech in Chicago, learn about existing initiatives and collectively identify the gaps GET Cities or others could fill. We also wanted to introduce GET Cities to various stakeholders and begin building relationships with potential partners.

THE PROCESS

Historically excluded people in the tech ecosystem understand their needs best. We knew hearing directly from them was the best place to start.

While our initial messaging focused on women, we expanded this to be inclusive of transgender and nonbinary individuals, as well as those with other historically excluded identities like Black, Latino/a, and Indigenous people, people with disabilities, and especially those who live at the intersections of multiple identities.

Leading up to the Big Think, we conducted a landscape analysis and interviewed more than **250 people and organizations** in the tech ecosystem across Chicago and the U.S. to understand tech equity from an economic, sociological and geographic perspective nationally, while also identifying Chicago’s specific needs and challenges. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we conducted all interviews via Zoom.

THE RESEARCH FOCUSED ON THREE AREAS:

1. From Campus to Corporate
2. Funders and Entrepreneurs
3. From Mid Management to C-Suite

We confirmed that there were limited women investors and founders, discovered that the pandemic had exacerbated challenges that minority students were already facing, and learned Chicago wasn't seen as a tech hub, despite having numerous tech roles embedded throughout companies in the city, among other findings. We presented these findings at three in-person "Little Thinks" to gather feedback from around 40 stakeholders, including leaders from local universities, startups and representatives from companies, including Google, Accenture and Verizon. During these sessions, we asked stakeholders about their work in these spaces and brainstormed how we could collaborate and fill any gaps.

LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR GET CITIES' IMPACT

The Big Think convened virtually on June 30, 2020, gathering more than 80 tech organizations, thought leaders, entrepreneurs and funders. For most, this was their first time being in the same space with others doing similar work. We used the Big Think to introduce a diverse network of stakeholders to GET Cities, spotlight the various problems and challenges we found, and show we were serious about the work. We also discovered what problems people were facing in real-time. During breakout sessions, we had a trained facilitator lead discussions about potential solutions. Our team walked away feeling **optimistic and inspired, and full of ideas** for next steps.

“

It was so important to already have a body of research before we kicked off in Chicago. It helped us understand the ecosystem and who all was already doing work in this space. Getting everyone together to share their real insights and pain points started to expose the gaps where it made sense to work together, and that was really our starting point.”

Elle Ramel,
GET Chicago Director



GET DC Big Think Recap



Event Highlight

Beginning with opening remarks by Penny Pritzker, we moderated an interview with Melinda French Gates who spoke with three women from Chicago: Hilda Mendoza, a student from University of Chicago-Illinois; Renata Ghisloti, a data analyst from GrubHub; and Riana Lynn, founder and CEO of Journey Foods. The trio represented the journey through tech as a student, mid-level professional and entrepreneur, respectively.

BIG THINK IN WASHINGTON, DC METRO AREA

Alongside the launch of our second city in 2021, we launched a Big Think in Washington, DC the following year. Our team conducted a similar landscape analysis and series of interviews before gathering in person with key stakeholders to share our findings and discuss opportunities through a fireside chat and breakout sessions.

SOME OF THE BIGGEST PAIN POINTS WE IDENTIFIED IN DC WERE THE NEED FOR MORE

- Women tech mentors
- Women tech recruiters
- Recruiters of color
- Support for women entrepreneurs
- Connection for women to cybersecurity jobs

We used the Big Think to validate whether the problems we found in our research matched the needs of those working in the ecosystem, expressing to the community that we wanted to work with them, not for them. The event secured many community relationships and partnerships that have carried on throughout our time in DC. Participants felt seen and heard — realizing they weren't alone in their challenges — and trusted we were there as partners in creating solutions. This event set the tone for our work for years to come.



GET DC Big Think - Fireside Chat



“

In this space, it's not necessarily that you choose who comes with you, but we're all moving together. Even when we don't realize that, [we're] like magnets. If you have the same purpose, mission, belief and faith, and you start to congregate and move collectively, you'll feel it. You'll feel the orbit ... and all this energy and this pulse come together.”

Buki Catherine Froelke,
Founder, Share Amplify Now, and
fireside chat speaker at the DC Big Think

KEY TAKEAWAYS

The Big Thinks helped us gain an understanding of gender equity in the tech ecosystems in Chicago and DC and established us as an organization ready to move this work forward. We gathered insight into what organizations were already doing to advance tech equity and the challenges they faced, which gave us traction on where to start and who to collaborate with. An important takeaway that helped to reflect the sentiment of the Big Think was to do our research and continue listening to partners while we build community.

ADVICE FOR LAUNCHING THIS WORK IN ANOTHER CITY

In Chicago

- **Reverse the order.** In Chicago, we would start with a Big Think to get people excited and involved, and then switch to Little Thinks for more focused brainstorming and problem-solving.

In DC

- **Assign roles.** Identify people to lead initiatives early on and follow up with them.
- **Obtain funding & resources.** In Washington, DC, the Big Think was a great kickoff for our work, but we needed more funding and resources to keep the momentum going.
- **Establish strategic relationships.** Strong government relationships in particular were needed to keep decision-makers aware of what was going on.

Overall

- **Ask & listen.** We often found what we discovered in our data as the biggest pain points were different from what we learned when speaking to those impacted, as their problems were rapidly changing.

The Big Think was the foundation that helped us build a network of partners and plant the seeds for the following interventions.





SUPPORTING AND COLLABORATING WITH TECH FOUNDERS FROM HISTORICALLY EXCLUDED COMMUNITIES IN CHICAGO

BRINGING TECH ADVOCATES TOGETHER

One of the biggest challenges in achieving gender equity in tech in Chicago, and globally, is a lack of venture capital diversity — or funding for historically excluded populations — which leads to a gap in funding for women. For trans and nonbinary founders, little to no data is available to understand to what degree they're impacted by uneven funding opportunities. These gaps create an uneven playing field that limits their networks and access to mentors and economic growth; and they advance a system that prevents them from growing their businesses.

In 2022, only 2.1% of the \$330 billion in venture capital went to founders who are women, and only 0.41% went to Black women founders, 0.44% Latino/a, 0.71% Asian, and 0.0004% Indigenous.

We also noticed many of the organizations trying to build a more inclusive tech and entrepreneurial ecosystem in Chicago worked in silos. We created the **Tech Equity Working Group** in 2020 to bring these organizations together.

The Tech Equity Working Group (TEWG)

is an alliance of around 20 Chicago accelerators, incubators and funds creating city-wide solutions to systemic inequities in Chicago's tech entrepreneurship ecosystem.

THE PROCESS

We identified the gaps we wanted the Tech Equity Working Group to fill by surveying existing ecosystem stakeholders. We then created a set of criteria for potential members and researched organizations already doing this work that could partner with us. We created a handbook and onboarding materials for members and scheduled meetings for the year to align the ecosystem to share learnings and best practices and to accelerate impact together through designing and piloting city-wide solutions and collective infrastructure to address gender and racial inequities for Chicago-based tech founders.

TEWG MEMBERS

include mission-aligned organizations that support entrepreneurial development, such as tech incubators, accelerators, institutions and nonprofit organizations. Membership is free and by invitation only.

Our goals were threefold:

1. **Convene citywide partners** around issues facing women, trans, nonbinary, Black, Latino/a, Indigenous and other founders of color in tech, which laid a strong groundwork for gathering support for the interventions later on.
2. **Leverage networks and expertise** to support founders and share opportunities.
3. **Pitch, pilot and scale collaborative interventions** to close the gaps between incubators, accelerators and venture capital and to strengthen the networks for support overall.

Members divided into small groups to collaboratively design pilot interventions before pitching them to the larger group. Collectively, we chose which interventions to pursue and members worked on them for six months, with an opportunity to scale the intervention after the pilot period ended.

While we provided the initial pilot funding, partner organizations steered the funding and the target outcomes. Collaboration at the pilot stage made scaling these efforts to partner organizations a smooth transition.



INITIAL PILOTS

2021

The first year of pilot work was open to TEWG members' ideas and agnostic with regard to a central theme or focus, as long as the work had a direct impact on historically excluded entrepreneurs in Chicago. As a result, three of the four pilots scaled into these different, still operational opportunity areas:

Chicago Venture Fellows offers aspiring venture capitalists from historically excluded communities a chance to build a track record of sourcing and analyzing deals and build diverse deal flow for venture capital around Chicago. The pilot was scaled by the organization **Chicago:Blend**. To date, **37 fellows have participated across three cohorts, and 81% of fellows who actively applied to VC roles have landed a job.**

TechRise is a project run by Chicago-based tech organization **P33** that invites select historically excluded founders to participate in a series of pitch competitions judged by local tech and business leaders. TEWG piloted gender-focused aspects of TechRise's pitch competition. Each week, five founders receive pitch coaching and deliver a pitch to venture capital judges; the winner receives \$25,000 in non-dilutive funding. The TechRise finale sees six of these founders in competition for the top prize of \$100,000 in non-dilutive funding. A total of \$271,624 has been distributed in prizes in these competitions.

Tech Equity Desk was originally launched in partnership with **DePaul Women in Entrepreneurship Institute** and **Gumbo Media**. It provides women, trans and nonbinary small business owners from the South and West sides of Chicago with resources, tools and grants between \$2,000 and \$5,000 to grow their businesses and reach new markets through tech enablement. The pilot is now in its fourth iteration and scaled through the University of Chicago's Polsky Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation. With additional support from Verizon, this year's initiative consists of two parts: the E-Commerce Learning Lab, which brings e-commerce training and fulfillment support to 20 products-based businesses through **37 Oaks**, and the Web Dev Shop, which supplies 12 businesses with a grant for upgraded web services, web design and digital storytelling through contracts with tech ventures from historically excluded communities themselves.



2022

In its second year of pilot work, TEWG collected data identifying gaps in funding specifically at the seed founder level. A cohort of nine seed founders was invited to co-design and participate in 2022's pilot initiatives. All TEWG pilots from this year focused on the theme of supporting seed founders to reach their next funding stage and on addressing systemic gender and racial inequities in fundraising at this level. Two of the three pilots scaled into these different opportunity areas:

“

The Seed Founder Cohort took so much time and intention to take our feedback into perspective. The goal was to make things easier for us, and I could see the genuine care and thought that went into the programming.”

Seed Founder Cohort Member

Executive Founder Series began as an intimate dinner series that matched founders with executives to discuss business goals and assist founders in establishing relationships with clients, investors and corporate connections that are typically difficult to source. It has since scaled to become the Venture Engine Executive Founders Series run by the [Illinois Science and Technology Coalition \(ISTC\)](#) and is a series of themed networking opportunities to help founders develop meaningful connections to corporate executives. To date, the series has matched 15 historically excluded founders to premiere events and networking opportunities.

Travel Funding and Entrepreneur Exchange started as a “founder roadshow” that sought to provide founders with access to coastal investors and customers while networking with other founders and the tech startup ecosystem outside Chicago. The initial pilot took founders to the Bay area and created a series of curated networking opportunities with investors around the [2022 FounderCon Conference](#). This pilot scaled at [World Business Chicago](#), the current host of a series of entrepreneurship exchanges that utilize a network of international sister city relationships and domestic business partnerships to plan impactful trips during scheduled conferences for historically excluded founders. To date, the travel fund has impacted 24 Chicago women and nonbinary founders, 83% identifying as Black, Latino/a Indigenous and/or people of color, across four conference delegations to [Miami \(E-Merge Americas\)](#), [Toronto \(Collision\)](#), [Indianapolis \(Rally\)](#), a return to San Francisco in partnership with [Wefunder \(AllRaise\)](#), and [SXSW in Austin](#).

2023

Diverse General Partners (GPs) and Limited Partners (LPs). Through the interviewing conducted as part of this pilot, we learned that underrepresented fund managers in the VC landscape held the common pain point of a lack of support for their back-office operations. This pilot focused on understanding the needs among GPs to help facilitate connections to LPs and provide a platform for knowledge sharing to promote the success of underrepresented fund managers in the Midwest region. The pilot work has since scaled to two organizations: BLCK VC will support operations and source interns for emerging Black GPs, and P33's Velocity Initiative will catalyze inclusive capital at the Pre-Seed and Seed stages in Illinois by investing in emerging, overlooked fund managers with anchor checks that allow them to accelerate to first close.

Investor in Residence (IIR). Led by **1871**, **MATTER** and **mHUB**, this intervention tested the idea of investing in high-quality and paid shared resources to strengthen the connective tissue between ecosystem organizations in support of founders & funder connections through recruiting. The pilot hired a shared IIR that supported

the collective community with unbiased guidance as entrepreneurs raise funds and navigate ecosystem resources for their community of entrepreneurs, innovators and early-stage startups in hardtech, healthcare tech and software. This initiative has since scaled to all three organizations to maintain the original IIR position, as well as hire additional affinity-based touring Executives and Entrepreneurs in Residence at all three organizations.

Start-up Talent. As one of the 2023 TEWG pilots, we launched an intervention to engage with women and Black, Latino/a, Indigenous and other people of color tech talent for project-based work in the fall and winter of 2023. We called the participants "TechTalent" and in addition to their work, they were matched with mentors and offered workshops to grow their skills at startups like Arvist and Reach Pathways. This pilot has scaled to Kaplan Institute at the Illinois Institute of Technology where it has developed programming to best prepare student talent for the startup hiring process and will continue to facilitate subsidized opportunities for tech talent, fostering collaboration on project-based endeavors with Chicago-based tech startups.

“

If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together! Partner Wherever Possible is a core principle at GET Cities. This is proof it works for the benefit of the underestimated people we collectively seek to serve in the just economy we are all committed to build.”

Leslie Lynn Smith,
former Executive Director and current
Senior Strategic Advisor of GET Cities

THE STRENGTHS OF TEWG

- ➔ **Focused specifically on the issues** that impact historically excluded individuals, including women, non-binary and trans people, in obtaining funding, mentorship and support in tech.
- ➔ **Brought organizations together** who had never collaborated in this capacity before. Members were grateful for a space to share their ideas, build relationships and problem solve with people they wouldn't have worked with otherwise. They felt like they were part of something impactful and bigger than themselves.

In a survey of 18 members, 88% said TEWG improved their organization's ability to support founders from historically excluded communities.

- **Provided a clear and narrow scope** and formalized process for collaboration by creating a continual and dedicated space for networking and connecting with different organizations doing similar work.
- **Kept organizations in the loop** and created a community for ecosystem partners to be aware of local events and activities they can share with their networks and contribute to one another's successes.
- **Funded and elevated current ecosystem work** and aimed to improve current work being done in this space through pilots.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Be realistic about the timeline since many members are volunteers. Much of the pilot work and responsibility falls on pilot leads since it's difficult for some members to allocate time toward a pilot if it doesn't closely align with their organization's work.
- After launching in 2021, we realized we needed to bring entrepreneurs and founders into the room to help design the interventions meant to serve them. We implemented this in early 2022, and it led to collaboration among TEWG members and founders themselves.
- Organizations need to make sure they're tracking and analyzing their data from the pilot work. Many organizations were not collecting data — or those who were, weren't analyzing the data correctly — and that made it difficult to determine if they were meeting their diversity goals.



ADVANCING EQUITY IN TECH HIRING IN CHICAGO

THE CHALLENGE

Tech organizations also were not hiring equitably for historically excluded tech workers in Chicago. As we noticed with the TEWG, organizations working to support historically excluded students and professionals were not convening for a system-wide approach to supporting each other's work and amplifying efforts.

We created the **Tech Equity Network (TEN)** in 2022 to bring together different organizations to increase diversity, equity and inclusion among Chicago's tech workforce and directly support historically excluded, early-career tech workers, job switchers and graduates. Our first iteration focused on mentorship, then shifted to hiring, and finally, a training-to-career pipeline work. We wanted to create a tech ecosystem in Chicago where a historically excluded tech worker could move to the city and immediately get connected to a community, mentors and resources and feel like they belong.

The Tech Equity Network (TEN) is a council of Chicago-based organizations that create and amplify city-wide opportunities to set a course toward a more inclusive tech workforce, with a focus on gender and race. Its purpose is to align Chicago's tech ecosystem with the goal of sharing learnings and best practices.

THE PROCESS

TEN gathered different organizations together in the same room — many for the first time — with a shared vision: to build a successful Chicago tech workforce representative of their city. Before launching the intervention, we gathered internally to finalize goals, develop participation criteria and research potential partner organizations. Once we established TEN, we held monthly meetings where topics varied based on the month's priorities. We also designed an annual public-facing showcase, called GET Exploration Day, to spotlight TEN members' work directly with the technologists they serve.

Participants included 15-20 members from Chicago-based incubators, accelerators, bootcamps, university-supported tech programs and nonprofit organizations. The second iteration of TEN also invited companies and employee resource groups (ERGs) as guests to network with members. Like the TEWG, membership was free and invitation only.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

- 1. Improve the effectiveness and alignment of Chicago's tech workforce ecosystem to support historically excluded job seekers.** We did this by hosting monthly meetings with an average attendance of 17 members from tech partners around Chicago.
- 2. Better equip and inform historically excluded tech workers to enter and be competitive in hiring pipelines.** We did this by creating the bi-monthly "Download Newsletter" featuring resources for historically excluded tech workers distributed to ecosystem leaders, and through the flagship event GET Exploration Day.

GET Exploration Day. Launched in 2021 in partnership with **ThinkChicago** and **Verizon**, the intervention is an event for Chicago tech students and those early in their careers to help connect steps on their tech professional journey and build the TEN community. The event was highly dynamic and interactive, featuring themed discussions, games, networking and connection to a growing and vibrant community of peers, organizations, companies and supporters. The first event was a four-hour virtual experience led by **Crux Collaborative**, which 45 participants joined. We engaged 22 leaders in the Chicago tech ecosystem, including three structured workshop hosts, four social room facilitators and our keynote speaker, former CIO of Chicago and CEO of City Tech Collaborative Brenna Berman. We launched additional in-person iterations in 2022, with 88 attendees, and 2023, with 99 attendees. Both in-person events were held at **TeamWorking by TechNexus** and featured speakers Elena Valentine, CEO of **SkillScout**; Jasmine Shells, CEO of **Five to Nine**; Dr. Adia Gooden, Clinical Psychologist and TEDx Speaker; and Alejandra Rubalcava, Product Leader at **Expedia Group**. TEN members led dynamic sessions on speed networking, a live podcast, a STEM escape room, as well as more conventional panels on pathways into tech careers.



GET Exploration 2023 – Get Cities Chicago**The Impact of GET Exploration**

- ➔ **2021:** Attendees increased their knowledge of where to go for help with professional development, increased their feelings of being part of the Chicago tech community and made new connections.
- ➔ **2022:** Attendees noted they learned new steps to take in their tech career, made two or more network connections and left with skills they didn't have before.
- ➔ **2023:** Attendees made connections and took steps to follow up with someone they met and felt the event was even more inclusive than previous iterations.

Better understand and increase workforce inclusion and retention for women, trans and nonbinary people, which we carried out through the Mentorship Learning Lab.

“

It was great to meet so many attendees from different backgrounds and at different parts of their tech journey! GET Cities truly fostered a space and environment where others could meet each other and share about their experiences in a safe and inclusive way.”

Alexandra DeLuca,
P33, 2023





Mentorship Learning Lab. Launched in fall 2022, the Mentorship Learning Lab was a 12-month engagement with Chicago partners to help better understand and collaboratively strengthen the mentorship opportunities for historically excluded tech workers. By having a group of different organizations spend the first six months in discussions, the participants provided advice and feedback on one another's programming and initiatives. The learning lab was also an opportunity in the latter six months to understand what needed to be made better within these programs and to develop ways to pilot these improvements.

Solutions included:

- **Out in Tech:** Developed an app that streamlines the mentor/mentee application process to help expedite matching.
- **Latinas in Tech:** Created mentorship cohorts based on the targeted background needs of mentees in specific fields like UX and piloted corporate sponsor mentee cohorts.
- **Chicago Innovation:** Built out a series of check-ins to better capture and assess program efficacy through designated milestones.

The Impact of the Mentorship Learning Lab

- **Creating an intimate setting.** Since each group was small, participants were truly able to discuss their projects and learn from one another. We were also able to provide 1:1 support and check-in with participants on program updates.
- **Fostering collaboration, not competition.** Since each pilot was focused on a different audience, participants were not competing and could easily collaborate.
- **Meeting cadence.** We held monthly virtual meetings, which allowed people to join from out-of-state and balance other commitments, but also connect more deeply if they wanted to.
- **Focused initiatives.** Each participant chose one initiative to focus on during the lab, which helped them narrow their goals and avoid getting overwhelmed.

Advisory feedback groups. Since the lab was focused on mentorship, having active or alumni mentors and mentees come in and talk with Lab members and gather feedback strengthened their initiatives.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Raise awareness about TEN interventions.** Some TEN members were not aware of all the offerings available to them, since not all members joined every meeting. In the future, we will need to ensure all members are aware of every opportunity through out-of-cycle points of engagement.
- **Set up a flexible funding schedule to evolve with the pilot.** For the Mentorship Learning Lab, there was no requirement at the onset for participants to present a plan for how to spend their funds, since the pilot work arose after six months of learning and conversation. We recommend funding in tranches so that the funds can match the needs of the pilots as they emerge.
- **Provide baseline training for cross-functional initiatives that reach a diverse audience.** When working with multiple organizations, some may have extensive experience supporting women, trans or nonbinary participants, while other organizations may not be as versed in best practices for supporting historically excluded technologists. Future TEN iterations should provide training opportunities for facilitators and leaders in events and programs to best equip them to work with trans and nonbinary individuals in particular.

TEN'S PROGRAM STRENGTHS

1. **Connecting Chicago's tech community.**
The Tech Equity Network helped the tech community build new relationships with different stakeholders, alumni and students, and learn what other members in the community are doing.

In a follow-up survey, more than half of members loved the ability to connect with the community and be more aware of activities.

2. **Creating opportunities for collaboration.**
By bringing different organizations together, TEN helped members partner with one another and combine their resources to reach a common goal.
3. **Building a supportive space for members.**
Even if members were technically competitors, TEN created a space for them to collaborate vs. compete. It allowed them to share the similar challenges they face and support each other to find solutions.





EQUIPPING LEADERS TO CHANGE THE TECH ECOSYSTEM IN DC METRO AREA AND MIAMI

THE SPARK THAT IGNITED GET CHAMPIONS

After the Big Think gathered a network of advocates and identified the greatest needs in the DC Metro Area, our first goal was to increase the number of women, trans and nonbinary people employed in the tech industry in the DC, Maryland and Virginia region.

The turnover rate for women in tech is 45% higher than men.²

We quickly noticed a problem as we began this work. Too often, historically excluded populations — those who suffer the most from systemic inequities in the tech industry — are the ones tasked to lead efforts to change the very systems that oppress them, often without being paid for their labor. It's exhausting and an unfair burden to place on them. Instead, we knew we needed to equip those currently holding the power (predominately white, cisgender men) to own and lead these efforts. We sought to answer: How could we help those in power fill open roles with candidates from historically excluded backgrounds? How could we help historically excluded populations survive — and thrive — as employees in the tech industry?

GET Champion's objective: Disrupt the culture of systemic discrimination and exclusion in the tech industry by guiding and supporting forward-thinking tech leaders to build more inclusive, diverse and supportive work environments for women, trans and nonbinary people and people of color.

THE PROCESS

Since it's difficult to change an entire company, we set out to create equity in small areas that could make a big impact. We launched a 10-month pilot of GET Champions in DC in February 2022. Initially, we planned to recruit a cohort of 20 decision-makers and managers who were men and who would commit to hiring women, trans and nonbinary employees. We required leaders with 10+ years of tech experience who led a team of 100 or more employees and were in charge of hiring decisions. We would equip and train them to focus their power and thought leadership to hire, sustain and retain women, trans and nonbinary employees.

We shifted as we found it was difficult to recruit 20 participants to fill the cohort. We ended up allowing women to apply and had more tech founders than employees at large companies. Our final cohort was 13 people — 11 men and two women.

In each cohort, we faced difficulty recruiting men who would commit their time and efforts to this work. It was not a failure of our recruitment strategy; rather, research repeatedly shows it's difficult to engage white, cis-men in equity work. Social systems that uphold white domination are derived from racial³ and gendered⁴ ignorance, as well as repeated disengagement from white, cis-men. The workforce is built around an organizational structure that is not gender neutral, and instead favors men and masculinity.⁵ Thus, those in charge, typically men, are those with the greatest ability to bring forth change.⁶ Yet research repeatedly shows that men tend to shirk this responsibility and check out when conversations and challenges around equity arise.⁷

GET Champion's Goals

- Increase men's awareness and knowledge of the current state of equity in tech.
- Increase men's likelihood to act proactively and equitably in the workplace.
- Increase workplace participation, both new and long-term, by women, trans and nonbinary people.
- Increase equity in workplaces.

THE INITIAL DESIGN

Champions filled out an initial survey so we could compare their learnings at the end of the intervention. We created the pilot with three core parts, all conducted via Zoom:

1. **Six facilitated 90-minute cohort sessions** with a review of readings, guest speakers from the region's largest companies and open discussions to support leadership development.
2. **Six executive 1:1 coaching sessions** to gain guidance from experts.
3. **Quarterly invitation-only hiring events** managed by **Last Mile Education Fund** to open Champions to a wider talent pool for hiring.

We covered topics such as strengthening leadership and reputation through allyship, framing and setting metrics for their organization, and retaining diverse, high-performance teams.



OUR COACH

The cohort was coached by [Loki Mulholland](#), an Emmy-winning filmmaker, author and activist with ties to the Civil Rights Movement and extensive experience facilitating difficult conversations to help people understand why they need to be equity advocates.

PIVOTING WHEN CHALLENGES AROSE

Many Champions did not attend all cohort sessions or utilize the 1:1 coaching. After the first hiring event, we also realized we needed to invest more in growing the talent pool.

So, we pivoted in DC. We found equipping corporations wasn't the best approach, so we shifted our efforts to arm individuals to navigate the system themselves. Once we switched our focus, our sessions included tech and federal resume workshops and advice on how to secure federal funding to support historically excluded individuals entering the workforce.

TAKEAWAYS FROM THE DC GET CHAMPIONS INTERVENTION

- A more intense, shorter program may increase cohort participation.
- Engaging virtually made it more difficult to connect and establish cohesion among participants.
- It is important to ensure participants agree to data and evaluation requirements.
- Coaching sessions should be integrated into cohort programming.
- Champion recruitment should be driven by program outcomes.
- There's tension between building the candidate pipeline and changing the employees and workforce in the tech ecosystem.





GET Champions Miami Talent Connect 2023



LAUNCHING GET CHAMPIONS IN MIAMI

We launched GET Champions in Miami in 2023 because of the growing need and opportunity we saw there. The main challenges in Miami were diversity was only thought of as race – not gender – and there were still gender-based cultural stigmas, such as the belief that women shouldn't be as career oriented, that made it more difficult for women, trans and nonbinary people to enter the workforce and thrive in the industry. Also, many companies were not recruiting talent locally in Miami, based on the misconception that there was no local talent to choose from and they needed to recruit from traditional tech universities. GET Champions set out to address these issues.

THE PROCESS

Based on the lessons learned in DC and the unique needs of Miami, we shifted several aspects of the intervention, such as:

- ➔ Matching each Champion to an individual coach.
- ➔ Holding three in-person events to check in with cohort members and foster a sense of community.
- ➔ Including a specific conversation about trans people, led by **TransSOCIAL**, an organization promoting unity within the transgender community and increasing trans visibility and understanding.
- ➔ Partnering with **FutureMap** to connect Champions directly with a local and diverse talent pool and to offer virtual trainings.
- ➔ Adding an “equity checklist” focused on leadership, assessment, feedback gathering, action planning and other specific areas of intervention and improvement for Champions to use as a guidebook for continuing their equity journeys in the workplace.
- ➔ Hosting a talent connect—a hiring event to help close the pipeline gap for historically excluded talent in the Miami tech industry.

GET CHAMPIONS IN ACTION

The intervention was well received in Miami and companies were highly engaged. We shortened the program from 11 to four months with a mix of virtual and in-person meetings that addressed how to build and retain an inclusive team. We partnered with [Radical Partners](#) to power the initiative, which worked well because they were already involved in the local ecosystem, allowing us to focus our efforts on other interventions. We launched with 14 participants: three men and 11 women, including employees from Mastercard, Paramount and Oracle. We faced similar difficulties recruiting men in Miami.

TYPES OF CANDIDATES RECRUITED IN MIAMI

1. Corporate changemakers,
2. Ecosystem builders (such as [Iron Hack](#))
3. Tech Innovators (entrepreneurs)
4. Tech companies (such as [Oracle](#))

The intervention included four group workshops facilitated by topic experts, three 1:1 coaching sessions with a matched coach, one mentorship session from a woman working in tech and group meetings to build relationships and trust. We also held four “Talent Connect” events, where we set up job interviews between Champions and local talent from historically excluded communities.



Four Workshop Topics

1. Making a business case for change.
2. Learning how to lead by being an ally.
3. Identifying and measuring the impact of DEIB (diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging) issues in a company
4. Understanding policies and practices to support and retain historically excluded employees in the tech workforce.

GET CHAMPIONS' IMPACT IN MIAMI

Based on three-month post surveys from our Miami Champions, we received five responses and learned they:

- Shared what they learned from the program with other members in their workplace and/or network.
- Felt more confident in their ability to lead and grow equity for women, trans and nonbinary tech professionals in their companies.
- Felt more confident creating inclusive and equitable spaces and practices than they previously did.
- Felt more confident in their ability to hire and retain historically excluded talent.
- Started hosting roundtables at their companies, having conversations with higher education professionals and holding DEI conversations to keep the conversations alive and evolving.

Champions rated the 1:1 coaching as the best aspect of the program.



QUICK DATA POINTS

Three months after the intervention, of the five respondents:

- One Champion hired more than 150 people, with 60% being women.
- Women made up 50% or more of the teams of all respondents.
- One Champion hired four new employees during the intervention, with half being women and one being a nonbinary person.
- Three respondents noted they worked to standardize the hiring processes and target experience and aptitude over resume details.

WHERE WOULD WE BE WITHOUT GET CHAMPIONS?

While we learned a lot from the challenges and successes of GET Champions, we are most proud that every Champion was equipped with the tools to move away from talking about diversity, equity and inclusion to actually doing something about it. Our Champions learned what it's like to navigate the tech ecosystem as a historically excluded person and how to build an inclusive and equitable team as tech leaders. Where would we be without this intervention? Without it, hiring managers would still be underestimating their power to make significant change, and individuals in the ecosystem wouldn't have a supportive network.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR LAUNCHING ANOTHER ITERATION OF GET CHAMPIONS

- If launching in a new city, it's important to identify the greatest pain points before starting this work. Because each region's needs vary, GET Champions will look different in every city.
- Gathering personal success stories from the intervention is critical for gaining support for future iterations of GET Champions.
- When gathering support and recruits, share more data about the current state of women, trans and nonbinary people in the tech industry to create more urgency for people to participate.
- Build a stronger community among participants so they feel connected and engaged in the intervention.

GET HIRED: LINKEDIN AND RESUME TRAININGS

THE CHALLENGE

Through our research, it became clear that barriers to employment for women, trans and nonbinary tech workers often originated during the hiring process. We also found LinkedIn was where many workers went to find opportunities and build their networks.

In DC and Chicago in 2022, we launched **GET Hired**, a series of **LinkedIn trainings** and **resume workshops**, to help historically excluded tech workers build their brands, stand out in the industry and, ultimately, access employment.

GET HIRED IN DC

The GET Cities teams compiled our best resources and mentors to develop a two-hour virtual workshop to guide participants through building a LinkedIn profile, focused on people who had a brand concept or goal in mind but were unsure how to get there. We gathered questions from participants ahead of time to target the workshop to their needs. **The goals:**

- Create a profile that stood out.
- Dedicate time and attention to their personal brands.
- Create content they are proud of.
- Develop the compelling story that tied together their experience.

THE PROCESS

Based on the lessons learned in DC and the unique needs of Miami, we shifted several aspects of the intervention, such as:

- Matching each Champion to an individual coach.
- Holding three in-person events to check in with cohort members and foster a sense of community.
- Including a specific conversation about trans people, led by TransSOCIAL, an organization promoting unity within the transgender community and increasing trans visibility and understanding.
- Partnering with FutureMap to connect Champions directly with a local and diverse talent pool and to offer virtual trainings.
- Adding an “equity checklist” focused on leadership, assessment, feedback gathering, action planning and other specific areas of intervention and improvement for Champions to use as a guidebook for continuing their equity journeys in the workplace.
- Hosting a talent connect—a hiring event to help close the pipeline gap for historically historically excluded talent in the Miami tech industry.

THE IMPACT

Participants responded positively to the workshop and noted it increased their confidence and ability to showcase their skills on LinkedIn. In a followup survey, we found participants:

- Better understood the expectations others have about their LinkedIn profile.
- Learned how to make their LinkedIn profile compelling for other audiences.
- Could clearly communicate their career story on LinkedIn.
- Knew where to go for more information for help with their LinkedIn profile.

RESUME WORKSHOPS

We also launched two resume workshops based on some of the greatest hiring challenges we noticed in DC — crafting resumes for the federal government and identifying the common barriers historically excluded tech workers face when applying for jobs.

The Federal Resume Masterclass provided insights and tips on how to navigate the nuanced federal hiring process and the unique requirements for a federal government resume.

Mythbusting Tech Pathways provided a safe space for historically excluded tech workers. Here, they could openly share the challenges and barriers they face when applying to roles in the tech industry, and learn the tips and characteristics to help them stand out.



THE IMPACT

After attending the workshops, participants shared that they:

- Better understood the expectations others have about their resume when they're applying for jobs in tech.
- Learned how to make their resume reflect the value they bring to a tech position.
- Understood how to clearly communicate their career story.
- Felt confident in finding additional help if needed.
- Made two or more new connections.
- Knew the next steps to take in their career tech journey.
- Felt motivated to continue participating in the GET Cities tech community.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Where applicable, we recommend advertising virtual workshops across cities and nationally to increase attendance.
- While the event feedback was positive, attendance was lower than anticipated and we saw challenges in scaling this without a nonprofit partner and/or additional funding.

GET Hired in Chicago

- **LinkedIn Workshop.** Hosted virtually in Chicago, the workshop had 16 attendees. Nearly 70% of attendees filled out pre- and post-surveys to help us understand how the LinkedIn workshop impacted their comfort, knowledge and understanding of how to employ a LinkedIn profile in their job search. We saw an increase across the board in all categories.
- **Resume Workshop.** Based on pre- and post-surveys from the 29 attendees, we saw positive change toward education and understanding about how to position resumes to prepare for a job in tech, as well as increased knowledge about where to go for more information or help.



INTERSECTIONAL INCLUSION: INCREASING ROLES FOR DEAF TECH WORKERS

THE CHALLENGE

While our work focuses on helping women, trans and nonbinary tech workers advance in the industry, we also strive to open up opportunities for tech workers with disabilities. In Washington, DC, we launched [DEAF CYBERCON](#), in partnership with Angela Dingle, in 2023 to increase the number and proportion of deaf women of color hired into in-demand cybersecurity roles.

Although women make up 51% of the U.S. population, only 25% of cybersecurity roles are held by women and only 50.5% of deaf women are in the workforce at all.

Biases, misperceptions and a lack of role models have created barriers for deaf women obtaining jobs in cybersecurity.

THE PROCESS

Angela Dingle, president and CEO of [Ex Nihilo](#), designed the intervention and hosted a four-part series of webinars for hiring managers, people who are deaf, thought leaders in cybersecurity and research partners to understand the barriers deaf women face in the tech ecosystem and help connect them to more opportunities.

Originally the webinar was five parts, but the last session on matching deaf workers with companies and mentors was canceled due to lack of employer participation.

Topics included:

1. **Untapped potential.** Discussed the growing national security threat in the U.S. and how deaf people can help fill the gap in cybersecurity positions.
2. **Barriers to entry.** Panel of deaf and hard of hearing women discussed the various barriers they face in cybersecurity, such as wages, mentors and interview preparation.
3. **Crucial conversations.** Moderated discussions covered FAQs, culture, myths, costs and accommodations that should be considered when hiring deaf and hard of hearing women in cybersecurity.
4. **Making first impressions count.** Reviewed techniques, tools and resources to help deaf people with interview skills and preparation, and negotiation.

Intervention Goals:

- ➔ Hire five deaf women as interns or employees.
- ➔ Connect and set up meetings for deaf participants with a hiring manager, role model or mentor.
- ➔ Recruit 10 partners to commit to an ongoing partnership with DEAFICYBERCON.

We also sent a survey to all participants after the webinar to gather impact data.

THE IMPACT

The webinar reached more than 10,169 people through social media impressions and engaged directly with 71 people through programming. Overall, companies gained a better understanding of how to hire and support deaf people in cybersecurity, and deaf participants learned how to excel in the industry. The intervention also solidified partnerships with several companies, universities and organizations. The webinar was so successful, Dingle turned DEAFICYBERCON into a nonprofit to continue the work.

As a result of the webinar:

- ➔ Two deaf women were hired for full time jobs.
- ➔ One deaf woman was hired as an intern.
- ➔ Nearly 96% of survey respondents increased their understanding of the current hiring landscape and need for cybersecurity careers for deaf women.
- ➔ One hundred percent of respondents gained an awareness of the barriers to entry and the biases deaf people face in cybersecurity.
- ➔ Eighty-six percent of respondents had a greater understanding of what's needed to support hiring a deaf employee.

“

Learning about DEAFICYBERCON and what you do has been enlightening. I hope to use my new knowledge to become a better ally to my deaf peers.

Webinar participant

EXPANDING DEAFICYBERCON IN THE FUTURE

Following GET Cities' initial support, Dingle is now working in partnership with Mastercard to hire interns and launch a DEAFICYBERCON school in 2024. Looking forward, DEAFICYBERCON aims to expand its target audience to show the need for career opportunities for deaf women in cybersecurity, obtain funding to continue building the ecosystem of career opportunities and resources, and increase partnerships to ultimately increase the number of part- and full-time job hires for deaf women in cybersecurity.



BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS TO NON-DILUTIVE FUNDING FOR HISTORICALLY EXCLUDED ENTREPRENEURS

THE CHALLENGE

Since the Big Think and throughout our work in DC, historically excluded founders have faced barriers to growing and accessing non-dilutive grant funding — a type of funding that doesn't require business owners to give up equity or ownership to grow their businesses. This kind of funding is a great way to get their ideas off the ground while retaining copyrights to their work.

The **Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) grant** — the combined effort of 11 federal agencies to provide grants to small businesses — and the **Small Business Technology grant** are two of the most competitive non-dilutive grant funding in the country. The applications require extreme attention to detail, thorough research and exceptional storytelling.

Yet the grants are known to open doors for early entrepreneurs, often getting the attention of investors. We launched a free **SBIR Grant Masterclass** in 2023 to help historically excluded founders navigate the grant application process.

THE PROCESS

GET Cities partnered with Amanda Faye, an SBIR grant expert with more than 20 years of experience writing grants, to lead a four-part masterclass for women, trans and nonbinary founders to hone their applications and grant proposals.

GET Cities launched the masterclass in January 2023 with 13 consistent attendees. Throughout the sessions, entrepreneurs learned how to apply, focus their writing, find opportunities and stay organized throughout the process.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR WORKSHOPS

- **Pre-workshop preparation.** To help with recruitment and engagement, we suggest hosting information sessions two to four weeks prior. If not enough interest is garnered, wait to launch the intervention.
- **Live engagement.** To help foster more momentum among participants, we suggest asking participants to join a live chat during the sessions. We would also recommend sharing more on social media to highlight the program.
- **Post-event surveys.** To collect insights and feedback from participants, we suggest following up with them a week after the event.

THE IMPACT

The masterclass gave entrepreneurs an opportunity to ask questions specific to their proposals and gain a deeper understanding of the grants. The workshops also helped participants understand whether they were ready to apply for an SBIR grant or if it wasn't the right fit for them, saving them valuable time and effort.

The TEWG Executive-Founder series and Entrepreneurship Exchange are two pilots which also focused on getting funding to historically excluded tech founders.





CELEBRATING HISTORICALLY EXCLUDED TECH WORKERS IN DC

UPLIFTING HISTORICALLY EXCLUDED VOICES

Washington is home to some of the most brilliant tech innovators, disruptors and impact-driven influencers in the US. We wanted to showcase the innovations built by women, trans and nonbinary people in 2022, and honor the advocates and supporters who uplifted them along the way through investment, sponsorship and advocacy.

On December 15, 2022, we hosted the **GET Cities Innovator's Bash** to celebrate some of the top innovations and advancements by historically excluded tech innovators of the year, featuring an evening of live music, art, tech exhibitions, demos and awards. We also hoped the event would ignite energy and collaboration for the future of GET Cities' work.

THE PROCESS

Our work in DC was most impactful because of the connections we made over the years, so we were intentional in our planning to ensure we brought our ecosystem together and acknowledged their hard work.

Recruiting and Advertising: Using our personal networks and GET Cities' DC newsletter lists, we sent personal invitations to more than 1,000 people, since DC responds well to exclusive events. We also announced the event and awardees across social media.

We had approximately 200 attendees. After the event, we conducted surveys with our awardees, art exhibitors and innovators to gather feedback.

THE IMPACT

We accomplished our goal of highlighting our innovators by awarding 18 individuals and three organizations. Our exhibits also featured 15 innovators and eight artists.

During the event, we captured attendees' commitments toward equity in tech by having them write on two different paintings. Some of our tech exhibitors noted they made crucial connections that helped them advance their work. Ultimately, we found when we create a space for different partners to connect, they find ways to work together.

“

On behalf of myself and my team, we can't thank you enough for putting on this incredible event. The people, the food and the conversations were top notch! We made at least three incredibly important connections for the future of our business, so we thank you for the opportunity to get our name out there and build awareness in the community.”

Kathryn Briesch,
GoPursue



OUR FINAL PUSH: HACKING THE SYSTEM TO CREATE CHANGE

CREATING AN EXCLUSIVE SPACE FOR COLLABORATION

In DC we kept hearing, “There’s a lot of talk, but not a lot of action.” We wanted to change that. How could we “hack the system” to address the most pressing challenges in DC? We wanted tech workers in DC to be able to connect with one another, identify solutions and ultimately carry on this work without us.

We created the **Hack for Impact Dinner Series**, which invited thought leaders, philanthropists, investors, founders, wellness experts and more to convene in person to collaborate and solve problems that impact women, trans and nonbinary people in tech in the DC Metro Area.

The Goal: Each dinner would result in a plan of action, including financial and resource commitments from each of the participants, to address issues faced by women, trans and nonbinary people in the tech industry.

Ultimately, we wanted to help historically excluded tech workers in DC navigate the tech ecosystem with tools, resources and support and let them know we’re listening and they’re not alone on their journeys.

GET Cities Hack For Impact Innovator's Bash 2023



THE PROCESS

From past experiences in DC, we knew that in order to recruit participants and achieve success in our interventions, we needed to make the event intimate and exclusive. We invited people based on the relationships built from the Big Think and our personal networks.

Launching in February 2023, we hosted six total monthly dinners, focusing half on entrepreneurship and half on workforce. Each dinner began with a reception where people were matched with a stranger to strike up a conversation and build connections. During the meal, each table was presented with a problem to solve in 90 minutes. We provided the space and facilitators to guide the conversations, with the goal of coming up with solutions that could be carried on after the dinners.

EACH DINNER HAD PARTICIPANTS ANSWER THREE QUESTIONS:

- What's the challenge?
- Who has the power?
- What did we learn from that?

We chose the topics based on the pain points identified in the Big Think. Topics included:

- Angel investing.
- Mental health and burnout for founders.
- Motivating shifts in employer hiring.
- Accessibility awareness.
- Bridging the gap between startup founders and tech developers who support them.
- Access to capital for historically excluded founders (with a focus on founders who are deaf).

The Hack for Impact dinner series culminated with a final two-day event where we brought together all participants to celebrate and reflect, with featured speakers, workshops and vendor demonstrations.

THE IMPACT

Ultimately, these events were a success in the moment. They created energy around specific topics while also continuing to connect the ecosystem. People noted they **felt inspired** by the opportunity to collaborate on solutions and **built relationships** that have carried on beyond the dinners. Participants let us know they've since won grant money and at least one received a raise based on what they learned at the dinners.

The dinners also **helped show the range of tech leaders from historically excluded communities and affirm people as thought leaders** — even if they don't see themselves as one. Participants needed that encouragement and empowerment to begin viewing themselves as we see them.





KEY TAKEAWAYS

From Hack for Impact

- ➔ **Once people leave the room, it's hard to re-engage them.** We sent out surveys and follow-ups to measure impact, but not many participants filled them out.
- ➔ **Authenticity is important.** Once participants saw we truly cared about the person behind the business, the human connection led to vulnerability about the challenges participants were really facing.

When Implementing in a New City

- ➔ **Plan and prepare.** To make the most of the dinners, make sure everyone knows the theme coming in, and the facilitators and panelists know what they're talking about.
- ➔ **Hire an event-curating team.** Having event curators run the event allows the people in the room to be present and activate their greatness.
- ➔ **A leading organization is needed.** Many of the commitments and follow-through were hard to sustain without an organization to keep the momentum going after the dinner.



LESSONS LEARNED

We look forward to seeing this work continue on after GET Cities, and hope these lessons learned will help guide the next iteration of our work.



ON THE GROUND INSIGHTS

ONE

*American cities are similar,
but ecosystems are different*

We learned that while American cities were unique in many ways, they faced similar inequalities across the tech workforce. Our goal was to identify and leverage the similarities, and pay attention and adjust for the differences. While our work focused at the city level, we had a hypothesis that the specific needs identified in each city would help inform equity at the national level.

In each city, individuals wanted the same things — a level playing field, support and community, connection to capital and childcare support, among others. How our work diverged was in how those needs were met, and it's also where we centered ourselves in the work. Rather than building and organizing around unique city needs, it was around these commonly known areas of support where we found the specific gaps GET Cities could fill. We learned the shared support needs across cities bolstered our efforts when we collaborated with the existing organizations in each city's ecosystem

TWO

For multi-site initiatives, launch at the same time for accelerated impact

We initially believed launching GET Cities at different times would benefit each city by taking our learnings and applying it to the next — and this was true in many ways. However, building relationships and learning the ecosystem nuances in each city took about a year, and ultimately, the challenges in each were fairly similar. Launching later in D.C. and Miami led to shorter time for progress and more pressure to perform quickly. A rolling timeline with staggered start and end dates would have provided a more equitable chance in each ecosystem.

Additionally, since Chicago was launched first, it had more time to experiment, fail, redesign and excel at interventions, which didn't give cities with shorter timelines a fair chance. All our cities learned from and worked together. For future multi-city initiatives, we believe there is more benefit to building a strategy, team and plan around the full national scope from the beginning.

THREE

Create neutral spaces for organizations to connect when doing ecosystem-level work

GET Cities was built to be an ecosystem-connecting organization. In our work, we have often seen ourselves as the “weavers” in our ecosystems. With multiple other actors in each of our cities who have been doing this work for a long time, GET Cities sought to connect these other efforts and convene those who needed connection to these efforts. We also created spaces and opportunities to learn together, co-design and align goals and resources for more effectiveness and efficiency toward equity. Nonprofits and other service organizations are so often underfunded and under-resourced,¹⁷ which leaves little time to connect with their peers and combine their efforts. While many of our peers were creating programming and interventions that focused on supporting individuals, GET would instead create programming and interventions that helped to connect our peers, as well as those who most needed the resources they provided. Whom we aligned ourselves with in the work, and how we selected role models in this process, required thoughtful consideration as an organization focused on business and organizational actors, rather than individual people.

Organizations need connection to their peers for resource alignment. Many of our peers aim their efforts at serving individuals. This may look like scholarships, training programs, networking events or other opportunities to connect individuals or pass resources along to them. The model for this version of the work is well-defined. At GET, we instead sought to connect at the organizational level, ultimately serving organizations to be more aware of what their peers were doing and building, and making sure they each had what they needed and wanted to get the job of expanded equity done. Building this model

taught us that, while we needed to take the time to build relationships in our cities, these deep relationships were in service of making each of our ecosystems better connected and resourced. GET Cities didn’t need to land in a city and enter the competition for scarce resources in the same way as our peers. Instead, we focused our planning on learning where deficits and overflows lay in each city, and making sure they were connected to fill shortfalls, co-design solutions and collaborate on programming and funding proposals. While this work focused on relationships at the organizational level, it was ultimately in service of individuals in each city.

Individuals are still the focus of organizational level connections. So often larger organizations take a shot in the dark to build something in support of actors in an ecosystem. Yet there are experts of all varieties who have taken time to understand the individual and specific needs of people in their ecosystems. In some cases these experts are building the solutions that are needed. In other cases they are holders of this information and are trying to convince ecosystem players to build, or help them build, the resources that are needed. Helping to connect those with knowledge and information to those who have the resources to make it happen requires connectivity, deep relationships and the willingness to set aside ego in service of the greater good.¹⁸ In doing this work, we found there is often a disconnection between higher-level organizations (for instance, the government or corporations) and the people they serve in local communities. GET Cities sought to be the connection between those who needed these deep insights and those who held these deep insights.





LESSONS LEARNED

THE HARD WAY

ONE

Sub-granting dollars are crucial to accelerating ecosystem work

A significant part of our time kicking off in each city was spent learning the local ecosystems and building sustainable relationships. The trust needed for these relationships hinged largely on a new organization's ability to follow through on commitments. It is perhaps easy to show up, but more work to stay and prove yourself over the long haul. Part of proving ourselves was putting our skin in the game via allocated subgranting investment dollars to align with our ambitious goals.

At the city and national level, subgranting funds help assure faster inclusion Building relationships and introducing ourselves into each city ecosystem took research and legwork. Part of proving you're an organization that will stick around is simply having the patience and tenacity to actually stick around. However, financial investment into the work and into an ecosystem reduced the time it took for us to be taken seriously in one of our ecosystems — Chicago, the only of our

cities to receive subgranting money. Financial capital is crucial, as it obtains and expands the resources needed to succeed.¹⁹ Investment dollars are often the connective tissue that make it possible for us to expand collaborative work within our cities, while simultaneously amplifying the commitments we are making along with a promise of sustainability.

Subgranting dollars show commitment to the work, while removing competition Since we didn't show up to the table with dollars to invest in the work in D.C. and Miami in the same way, it undermined our commitment and forced us to rely on others to get the work done. It also made us competitors with partner organizations within the fundraising landscape, as many of our peer practitioners and the development organizations in our cities compete for investment dollars to maintain ongoing work and to upstart future ideas. Investment dollars expand the level of resources available in the ecosystem and promote the genesis of new, similar organizations.²⁰ Since we weren't always able to show up with investment dollars of our own, most of the work we have been able to build has been possible largely because of the relationships our team has built that kept us in the game.

TWO

Center relationships in the work and measure community agreements toward equity

We've repeated, across these lessons, the importance of sincere relationships in this work. It's not only difficult to conduct our everyday work without them, but relationships are the fuel of this movement and work. Without connectivity and agreement across each of our ecosystems, there is no movement toward lasting change.²¹ This is an important consideration for designing equity work and figuring out how to measure and make sense of that work.

Relationships are at the core of any and every movement building Building agreement and connectivity across each of our three cities is the only way we've been able to build the buy-in and agreement we have. If we're to change the way people and organizations are

conducting themselves, the only way to do that is to first start with those people and organizations. Movements toward equity are built upon changing the beliefs, actions and motivations of the power holders, decision-makers and support organizations within an ecosystem. Without relationships with power holders, we would have been limited to offering support to women, trans and nonbinary people in tech, but without any change in the tech space. It's partners and our relationships with them that lead to the impact GET Cities strives for.²²

Because this is part of the work, it should be measured It took us longer than it should have to begin measuring our efforts toward building relationships, our relationships themselves and the

community agreements we built together. Meeting people and having deep conversations about equity and the work it would take to get there seemed more like a bonus and less like the crux of our position in each ecosystem. Community agreements don't happen without relationships. It became apparent that the time we spent deepening relationships, gaining traction with people and groups, and watching the buy-in across our cities needed to be measured as part of the work, as well as our shared progress toward commitments and goals. At the point at which GET Cities is no longer on the ground doing this work in each of our three cities, the momentum that remains without us will be due to these relationships alone.²³ Without them, the momentum would cease along with us.



THREE

When working at the systems level, prepare for change to take time

A constant point of reflection during our collective and individual time at GET Cities has been around the time it takes to bring about widespread, systematic change. The capitalist structures and social norms that we operate within are designed to serve a select portion of the population, while continuing to marginalize others. Transforming this into more equitable processes requires consistent effort over a significant length of time, since progress on a change agenda causes new challenges to surface and requires successive changes.²⁴ In a future installment of this series, we'll explore the need for experimentation and failure, which contributes here as well, but in this particular piece we will focus on the aspect of time specifically.

Movements must be designed for the long haul Work designed without systems-level change in mind, which may lead to some changed hearts and minds of those in power — albeit often temporarily — ultimately serves to fix issues, rather than systems. Systems-level needfinding, relationship building, program design, experimentation, impact measurement and iteration all take many, many years to really take hold. Taking on some individual pieces of this work in

the short-term can feel good in the moment, but it doesn't ensure justice for all over time. Thus, building in expectations and a collaborative agreement how to build toward long-term success and the capturing of systems-level change — in both the short and long-term — must be designed from the beginning.

Long-term funding plans should be built in from day one GET Cities was set up to coordinate partners across the tech ecosystem to focus on key catalytic factors that have the greatest potential to drive real change. While this is a clear objective, more is needed to achieve real change. In the future, this work will need a 20-year collective funding commitment in order to move beyond addressing symptoms of the problem of inequitable and biased hiring, and instead move to change the systems themselves. This work is complex — but crucial — and we must continue moving it forward with our long-term goals in mind. We've made great progress in our five years, but the work must carry on after us. It's the only chance we have at creating deep systems change in the tech ecosystem and supporting women, trans and nonbinary people in achieving their full power.



While this marks the end of this phase of the initiative, it is just the beginning of this work. We are extremely proud of the strides we've made in each city and nationally to make the tech ecosystem more equitable for women, trans and nonbinary people.

But we still have a long way to go to create deep systemic change and achieve equity. We're hopeful that these interventions and lessons learned can serve as a guide for everyone in the ecosystem working toward our shared goals to move this work forward. Let's not lose sight of these goals, because together we can create a more equitable future for all. And every person in the tech industry's ecosystem — no matter their race, ethnicity, gender or background — deserves to reach their full potential.



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TEAM MEMBERS

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CARRIE FREEMAN,
Chair, SecondMuse Group

DORIAN SPEARS,
Director of Strategy & Partnerships,
GET Cities

LUGH JONAH,
Sr. Associate, Research & Impact,
GET Cities

CHRISTINA GLANCY,
DC Sr. Program Manager, GET Cities

LESLIE SMITH,
Sr. Strategic Advisor & Former
National Director, GET Cities

CARLEY MOSTAR,
Director of Marketing &
Communications, GET Cities

ELLE RAMEL,
Chicago Program Director,
GET Cities

VICTORIA SANTAMARINA,
Miami Program Director, GET Cities

CASEY KOPPELSON,
Director of Program Operations,
GET Cities

SARAH OUTLAND,
Director of Research, GET Cities

ALLISON JAMES,
Chicago Sr. Program Manager,
GET Cities

VICTORIA FERRARI,
Miami Program Manager, GET Cities

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