

# TECH EQUITY LAB

**COLLABORATING TO  
STRENGTHEN TECH  
MENTORSHIP PROGRAMS  
FOR A MORE INCLUSIVE  
TECH INDUSTRY**

**GET**  
CITIES



# WHAT IS THE MENTORSHIP LEARNING LAB (MLL)?

The Mentorship Learning Lab (MLL) is a collaborative initiative designed to bring together different mentorship organizations in Chicago's tech industry to learn from one another, strengthen their understanding of tech mentorship programs for historically excluded individuals and groups, identify challenges, and develop a funded initiative to improve these programs that each member will work on during their time in the lab.

Mentorship is key to promote and retain historically excluded technologists in tech. The MLL model emphasizes collaboration, shared learning, and collective problem-solving - making it a powerful tool for addressing systemic inequities in the tech industry.

## WHY REPLICATE THE MLL?

### 1 Address Inequities on a Systemic Level

The tech industry suffers from significant gender and racial disparities. By fostering collaboration among mentorship organizations, MLL helps create more inclusive and supportive environments for historically excluded individuals and groups.

### 2 Enhance Program Effectiveness

Organizations can learn from each other's strengths and weaknesses, leading to more effective and comprehensive mentorship programs. By having a group of different organizations within one learning lab, the participants can provide advice and feedback on one another's program and initiatives. This group model allows for collaboration that is not available in other types of programs. For example, an area of strength for one organization may be an area of weakness for another; therefore, they have the opportunity to learn from one another in this group setting.

### 3 Foster Innovation

The collaborative nature of MLL encourages the development of innovative solutions to common challenges faced by mentorship programs. For this model to work, the participants must be in the same space but cannot be direct competitors. The three MLL participants all had mentorship programs but focused on different clients (LGBTQIA+ community, Latina women, and all women). These differences between the three organizations helped avoid potential competition and instead spurred innovation and fostered a safe and open environment.

# HOW TO CREATE YOUR OWN MLL

## PRE-PROGRAM WORK

**Conduct a Literature Review:** Gather background information on mentorship programs within a specific geographic location or ecosystem and identify gaps in current offerings.

**Set Objectives and Goals:** Define the objectives and goals for the learning lab.

**Create Participation Criteria:** Determine participation criteria and research different organizations who would be a good fit for the learning lab.

**Select Participants:** Reach out and invite organizations that would benefit from a learning lab, ensuring participants focus on different client groups to avoid competition. Gather detailed information to understand their current mentorship programs and needs.

**Construct a Timeline:** Develop a detailed timeline outlining key milestones and activities for each month.

**Schedule Meetings:** Decide on the frequency, timing, and format (virtual, in-person, or hybrid) of the meetings.

**Finalize Contracts and Goals:** Sign contracts with participants, discuss goal-setting, and confirm learning lab objectives.

## PHASE 1: COLLECTIVE LEARNING (6 MONTHS)

**Monthly Meetings:** Hold monthly meetings to discuss participants' programs, identify strengths and weaknesses, and build relationships. These meetings should cover specific topics related to the learning lab's focus, such as mentor recruitment or mentee experiences.

**Identify Intervention Areas:** In later meetings, focus on identifying potential areas for program interventions. Provide feedback to ensure interventions are feasible and aligned with available funding.

**Funding Applications:** Have participants apply for funding by outlining their proposed initiatives and how they plan to use the funds.

## PHASE 2: PROGRAM INITIATIVES AND FUNDING (12 MONTHS)

**Develop and Implement Initiatives:** Participants work on their initiatives, ensuring that funding is appropriately allocated.

**Monthly Meetings:** Continue monthly meetings for updates and feedback from participants on how their initiatives are going. Include focus group discussions with clients and share-out sessions with stakeholder groups.

**Additional Programming:** Offer supplementary events such as panels or job fairs related to the learning lab topic.

**Final Deliverables:** At the end of the program, lab participants should produce a final deliverable summarizing their initiatives and outcomes.

## PHASE 3: POST-PROGRAM IMPACT COLLECTION

**Conduct check-ins at 6, 12, and 18 months** after the program ends to gather updates on the progress, funding usage, and long-term impact of the initiatives.



Learn more about GET Cities' Mentorship Learning Lab, including the specific initiatives led by each member, in the following [interview with MLL participants.](#)

# MEASURING SUCCESS



## SUCCESS AS A FACILITATOR

**The Creation of an Intimate Setting:** With a small group of program participants, we were able to create an intimate setting for program participants to discuss their projects and learn from one another. A small group also helped us provide 1:1 support with each program participant.

**Collaboration rather than Competition:** Given that each mentorship program focused on different audiences, they were not competing over the same clients. This helped foster collaboration rather than competition.

**Hybrid Meeting Model:** Our hybrid monthly meeting model allowed participants to see each other frequently without taking too much time from their other commitments. A hybrid model also allowed for ease of meetings with mostly virtual meetings, but in-person opportunities strengthened connections. In addition, a hybrid model allowed one of the program participants to participate from out of state.

**Use of Focus Groups:** It was helpful to have outside contacts join some of the MLL meetings to act as advisory feedback groups. Since MLL was focused on mentorship, the outside contacts were mostly mentors and mentees for each participant's mentorship program. These contacts acted as a focus group for MLL members who were able to talk directly to their clients and gather feedback to help strengthen their initiatives.

## SUCCESS AS A PARTICIPANT

The success of each lab participant is measured by their specific lab initiative. The three MLL members successfully implemented the following initiatives.

- 1 Out in Tech:** Out in Tech worked to automate their matching process through the creation of our new app — OIT Connect - with the goal of removing the tedious and manual work of the matching mentors and mentees by hand.
- 2 Latinas in Tech:** Latinas in Tech worked to increase corporate partnerships as a way to recruit more mentors in the engineering, product, and UX/UI fields. Due to this lab initiative, Latinas in Tech saw a 40% growth in mentors with engineering, project/product management, and UX/UI design backgrounds. In addition, part of their initiative was to establish dedicated resources, such as onboarding workshops, best practices for communication, and feedback, in order to ensure new mentors were well-prepared to meet the unique needs of Latina mentees.
- 3 Chicago Innovation:** To improve their data collection process, Chicago Innovation's initiative centered around updating their pre-program surveys and check-ins methods to be more frequent and accessible to participants, and to target the check-in questions to gain better insights into participant demographics, needs, and where Chicago Innovation could intervene if needed. They also created a one-year post-program survey to track alumni successes and stories.

# CONCLUSION

By following this guide, organizations in the tech industry can replicate the Mentorship Learning Lab initiative to enhance the impact and effectiveness of existing mentorship programs, foster collaboration among like-minded companies, and drive systemic change toward greater equity and inclusion of historically excluded individuals and groups in the tech industry.

*Remember that this guide and accompanying resources are designed to support your efforts in creating your own Mentorship Learning Lab. Adapting them to your specific ecosystem's needs and culture will yield the best results.*



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