

# TECH EQUITY WORKING GROUP

**FORMING AN ALLIANCE TO ADDRESS  
GENDER AND RACIAL INEQUITIES  
AFFECTING HISTORICALLY  
EXCLUDED TECH FOUNDERS**

**GET**  
CITIES



# WHAT IS THE TECH EQUITY WORKING GROUP (TEWG)?

The **Tech Equity Working Group** (TEWG), created by GET Cities Chicago, is an alliance of 24 accelerators, incubators, funds, and mission-aligned ecosystem supporters designing city-wide solutions and collective infrastructure to address gender and racial inequities for historically excluded tech founders in Chicago.

Before TEWG's inception, organizations working to build a more inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem in Chicago were working in silos. TEWG brought these organizations together to foster collaboration toward a common goal of changing the traditional funding systems that limit access to capital and resources for historically excluded founders.

TEWG has focused on building and testing pilot interventions designed to foster inclusive and equitable opportunities for Chicago-based tech founders, distributing nearly \$2M to such interventions to date. After testing, adapting, and expanding these pilots over the past several years, TEWG has gained valuable insights into best practices and policy recommendations to drive meaningful change both in Chicago's unique tech industry and more broadly.

This guide is designed to help tech industry professionals and organizations replicate TEWG in their own cities and tech ecosystems.

## WHY REPLICATE THE TEWG?

### 1 Address Inequities on a Systemic Level

It's no secret that the tech industry often lacks diversity, particularly in venture capital and entrepreneurship. While there are many organizations singularly dedicated to addressing this issue, TEWG acts as a collective launchpad for experimentation and validation of city-wide interventions, rather than small-scale siloed approaches.

### 2 Accelerate Impact

A collective approach pools more funding and resources together to tackle challenges, accelerating our ability to find and adapt viable solutions and make a positive impact.

### 3 Drive Innovation and Economic Growth

Supporting diverse founders promotes innovation, boosts economic growth, and creates future opportunities for underrepresented groups.

# HOW TO CREATE YOUR OWN TEWG

## PHASE 1: DEFINE THE PROBLEM AND OBJECTIVES

**Determine what problem you are trying to solve** and how bringing together ecosystem partners can help solve this problem. For TEWG, the focus was on the lack of diversity within venture capital and the broader tech industry. This diversity gap leads to a gap in funding for historically excluded founders. In addition, barriers to entry faced by these founders stifles innovation, limits opportunity for economic growth, and perpetuates a system that hinders women, trans, and nonbinary entrepreneurs from growing their businesses.

**Determine participation criteria and research different organizations** who are helping solve this problem and would be a good fit for the working group. For example, TEWG's participation criteria include the following:

- Must have an organizational commitment to serving underrepresented founders and cultivating an inclusive environment, including willingness to:
  - Leverage resources and networks that the organization has access to for the benefit of underrepresented Chicago-based founders
  - Share best practices, opportunities, and resources for founders and/or tech entrepreneurship resources and expertise with fellow members
  - Share available data on the demographics and industries of the founders they serve
- Be Chicago-based and fit at least one of the following organization categories:
  - Tech incubators
  - Tech accelerators
  - University-supported tech programming
  - Venture capital firms or alternative capital resources
  - Non-profit organizations (tech or entrepreneurship capacity-building)
  - Invite suitable organizations to join.

## PHASE 2: CONVENE ECOSYSTEM PARTNERS

**Choose an impartial third party** to facilitate initial meetings and build trust among participants.

**Organize a groundwork-laying event or retreat** where potential working group members can sit down together and share their missions, goals, and challenges, identify overlaps, and brainstorm collaborative strategies.



## PHASE 3: DEVELOP NETWORK INFRASTRUCTURE

**Foundational Documents:** Develop a handbook and onboarding materials to guide new members.

**Onboard Members:** Collect detailed information from new members, including bios, headshots, organization descriptions, demographics, and why they decided to join the network.

**Set Regular Meetings:** Create a timeline for the year and schedule consistent meeting times to maintain solid engagement. TEWG, for instance, met monthly on the first Thursday.

**Create and Prioritize In-Person Opportunities:** It is important to have in-person meetings and/or events throughout the year (if possible), in addition to virtual meetings, to build and maintain a sense of community.

## PHASE 4: PILOT MODEL AND IMPLEMENTATION

**Identify Gaps and Interventions:** As a group, identify ecosystem gaps and potential interventions to address these gaps.

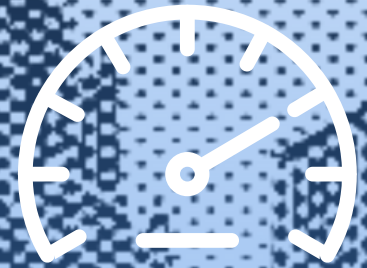
**Design and Prototype Pilots:** Divide into groups to design and prototype pilot interventions. Pitch these interventions and select those to pursue.

**Test, Adapt, and Scale Pilots:** Work on selected pilot projects and involve users of these interventions as co-designers.

**Secure Funding and Pursue a Long-Term Strategy:** Provide funding to incentivize working relationships and kickstart pilots, with the goal of eventually scaling successful pilots by sourcing additional funders or permanent owners of pilot projects. Access to funding is a key component of TEWG, as it provides consistent access to capital for members to continue effective programs and initiatives.



# MEASURING SUCCESS



## TEWG'S SUCCESS IS MEASURED BY THE FOLLOWING:

- 1** The creation of a group of 38 individuals from 24 member organizations that have the unique opportunity for collective problem solving, thought partnership, knowledge sharing, and supporting different Chicago tech initiatives.
- 2** The ability for member organizations to come together and use funding to create and launch different pilot projects. The formalized funding process allows organizations to experiment and innovate at a small scale, something that would not have been possible without funding and collaboration with ecosystem partners.
- 3** The scaling of nine pilot programs, focused on increasing gender equity in Chicago's entrepreneurship ecosystem, that began in TEWG and now reside at different member organizations.
- 4** **Chicago Venture Fellowship:** This pilot helped aspiring venture capital professionals from historically excluded backgrounds break into the industry. From offering top-tier tech education to 1:1 mentorship, participants were provided hands-on experience to help establish themselves in the field, practice deal flow, and secure work in VC. This intervention was initially incubated in the Tech Equity Working Group and is now hosted at our partner organization Chicago:Blend. Today, it is on its fifth cohort and thriving. We have enough data to show that early career women venture capitalists had portfolios of companies where 54% were founded by other women (compared to 19% nationally). This proves that aligning groups around shared goals, empowering leaders to act more equitably, and supporting historically excluded people themselves to hold power are all reliable ways to move the needle in an ecosystem.

# CONCLUSION

By following this guide, tech industry professionals and organizations can create a collaborative and supportive environment that addresses systemic inequities, fosters innovation, and drives economic growth. Since its inception in 2020, more than two-thirds of TEWG members have changed or built gender-focused programming opportunities inside their own organizations, changing cultures and creating ripple effects across the ecosystem.

Collaboration with esteemed partners accelerates impact and showcases the importance of unified action in fostering inclusivity and opportunity. Through strategic alliances and shared visions, TEWG is creating a more equitable tech industry where every entrepreneur has access to the support and resources they need to succeed.

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

