



2025 IMPACT REPORT



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OUR MISSION

To educate, connect and celebrate all innovators across the expanding Chicago innovation ecosystem.

OUR VISION

To lead a movement that ensures innovation is for everyone.

A LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT & CEO

As we reflect on this milestone year, we are also proud to celebrate the 25th anniversary of Chicago Innovation Foundation and the impact we have built together across Chicago's innovation ecosystem.

For 25 years, our work has been guided by a simple belief: innovation is for everyone. What began as an effort to elevate innovative ideas has grown into a regional platform that connects, educates, and celebrates innovators at critical moments in their journeys.

Each year, our awards and events bring together leaders, entrepreneurs, and organizations to recognize the ideas transforming industries and improving lives, while inspiring the next generation of innovators.

In 2025, we continued expanding access to opportunity through our programs and partnerships. Entrepreneurs advanced their businesses, professionals strengthened their leadership pathways, and innovators from diverse backgrounds built relationships that spark collaboration and growth in our mentoring programs. We also invested in the next generation through the Illinois Student Invention Convention, supported emerging climate solutions, and equipped leaders to drive innovation through Chicago Innovation Fellows.

As we look ahead, we remain focused on expanding access to networks, resources, and recognition so that bold ideas and the people behind them can thrive. Together, we are building a stronger, more inclusive innovation ecosystem for Chicago and beyond.

Luke Tanen

President & CEO



BOARD OF ADVISORS

Business Leaders



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Vedder Price | Chair of the Intellectual Property Group



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impact.c3 | Founder & CEO



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UL Research Institutes | VP, Head of Communications & Public Affairs



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Tope Sadiku
McDonald's | Global Director Organization Effectiveness Design

Entrepreneurs



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Divcon | CEO



Pete Kadens
Kadens Family Foundation | Chairman



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tastytrade & U3 Coffee | Co-Founder



Mike Rothman
SMS Assist | Founder



Jai Shekhawat
Fieldglass | Founder



Luke Saunders
Farmer's Fridge | Founder & CEO



Dev Singh
AiRo Digital Labs | Founder & CEO

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Continued

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EBarry Group |
Principal



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Chicago Innovation & Kuczmarski Innovation |
Co-Founder & President



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Market Strategy Group | Co-Founder



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Town of New Buffalo |
Trustee



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Kellogg School of Management | Adjunct
Professor of Social Impact



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Leadership Greater Chicago | Former CEO



Andrea Zopp
Cleveland Avenue |
Managing Partner



Dorri McWhorter
Executives' Club of Chicago | CEO

Venture Capitalists



Bret Maxwell
MK Capital | Managing
General Partner



Kevin Willer
Chicago Ventures |
Co-Founder & Partner

Academic Leaders



Dipak Jain
China Europe International Business School | President
(European)



Richard Rodriguez
Acero Schools | CEO



Mohan Sawhney
Kellogg School of Management | McCormick
Tribune Professor of
Technology

Media Experts



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The Harris Poll |
Director of
Communications



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Boyer Media |
President

Non-Profit



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Tremonia Partners |
Co-Founder



Sandee Kastrul
i.c.stars | Co-Founder

ASSOCIATES BOARD



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Executives' Club of Chicago | Chief Insights & Information Officer



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Nolan Mims
Boston Consulting Group | Senior Manager



Alex Balestrieri
New Moon Chicago | Principal, Creative



Craig Hamil
Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning | Chief Data Officer



Aneta Pietraszek
Social Impact and Engagement Executive



Qin (Zheng) Coe
Transformational Coach & Facilitator



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The Hazzard Group | Managing Director



Tope Sadiku
McDonald's | Global Director Organization Effectiveness Design



Kathy Cohen
Inspire11 | Principal



Dan Brown Jr.
inQuestAI | Founder



Tim Sanders
Silent Donor | Founder & CEO



Lynette Correa-Velez
Pagame Project | AI Tech Founder/CEO



Ashley Kegan Sikich | Principal



Dakota Shultz
Hawthorne Race Course | Head of Marketing & Communications



Nora Darvirris
Chime | Senior Technical Platform Manager



Paul Kitti
Chicago Innovation | Vice President Marketing & Events



Sean Thorndike
Sean Thorndike Ltd | Connector + Hotel Contracts & Sourcing



Larry Deutsch
dvk marketing | CEO & Co-Founder



Alex Klein
Team Human & DeepNeed | Founder



Emily Whelchel
The Economic Club of Chicago | Vice President, Membership



Mario Gonzalez
Perspectives Charter Schools | Director of Operations, Events, and Partnerships



Inna Larson
Technology Executive



Jahred Zmolek
Killerspin | CFO

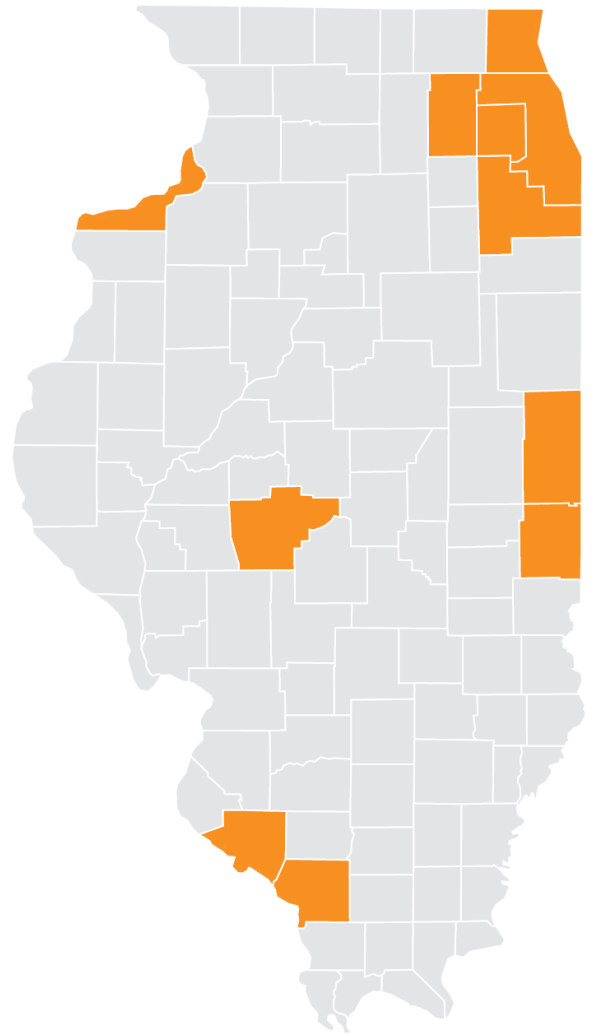


Josh Grant
Vedder Price | Associate

KEY IMPACT HIGHLIGHTS

REGION & REACH

Participants and partner companies span the Chicago region—across neighborhoods throughout the city and suburban communities in **Cook, DuPage, Lake, Kane, and Will** counties. In addition to the statewide work being done through the Illinois Student Invention Convention, impact spans across the state, including **Rock Island, Sangamon, Jackson, Randolph, Vermilion, Edgar**, demonstrating the broad geographic reach of our innovation ecosystem.



PEOPLE IMPACTED

12,700+

people impacted

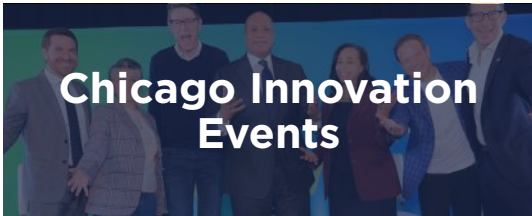
From innovators recognized through our awards to professionals engaged in mentoring and leadership programs, community members attending events, and students participating in the Illinois Student Invention Convention, more than 12,700 individuals engaged with Chicago Innovation in 2025.

HOW WE REACH INNOVATORS

Chicago Innovation connects and supports innovators across industries, communities.



Recognizing groundbreaking products, services, and organizations driving innovation forward across the Chicago region.



Convening leaders, entrepreneurs, and community members to spark ideas, collaboration, and opportunity.



Supporting professionals and entrepreneurs through structured mentorship, resources, and community.



Prepares emerging leaders to drive innovation within their organizations.



Introduces K-8 students to the invention process and showcases their ideas in the state's largest student invention competition.



Highlighting and supporting innovators developing solutions to pressing climate challenges.

★ CHICAGO INNOVATION AWARDS

315

total nominees
in 2025

\$4.2B

total revenue generated
from 2025 nominated
products/services/
processes since launch

2,300

new jobs created by
2025 nominees as a
result of their
innovations

\$2.5B

total capital raised

Nominees Industry Breakdown

Business Services

21%

Technology

16.7%

Non-Profit

12.3%

Healthcare

12%

Civic & Education

12%

Consumer Products

9%

Food & Entertainment

9%

Consumer Services

4.7%

Financial

3.3%

Industrial & Energy

2.3%

2025 Chicago Innovation Award Winners



CHICAGO INNOVATION EVENTS

2025 Events Calendar

February



26TH AI+IQ

March



19TH Innovating Chicago: A New Vision for Our City's Future

April



30TH Chicago Innovation Award Winners Tell It All

May



20TH The Taste of Innovation

June



18TH Chicago Innovation Climate Summit

July



16TH Celebrating Women in Innovation

August



7TH The In-Gala

September



9TH The Nominee Celebration

October



8TH The Complete Innovator

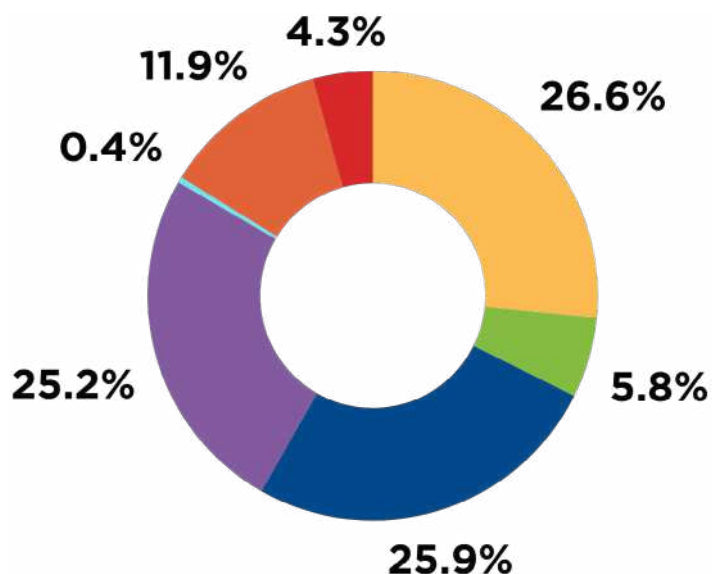
14TH The Practical Innovator

November



13TH The 24th Annual Chicago Innovation Awards

Event Audience Breakdown



60% are C-Suite, Executives, Founders and/or Directors

- C-Suite/Executives
- Founders
- Directors
- Individual Contributors
(Consultants, Analysts, Engineers, Account Executives)
- Students/Interns
- Others
- Managers

WOMEN'S MENTORING CO-OP

1,300

women have participated since program launched

119

total mentees in 2025

34%

of participants were aspiring or established founders

66%

joined with a career advancement/ leadership development focus

97%

of respondents reported being closer to their goals than when the 6 months started

Primary Areas of Impact for Mentees



Career Advancement



Leadership Development



Entrepreneurial Growth



Network Expansion

FOUNDERS PATHWAY

83%

achieved a tangible business milestone outside of core skill development

- Startup launch • First client acquisition
- Retail expansion • Business rebrand
- Product launch readiness

CAREER & LEADERSHIP PATHWAY

90%

expanded their professional background

- New jobs • Contract renewals
- Promotions/expanded leadership roles
- Graduate school acceptance
- Final-round interviews • Career pivots

HONORABLE ADDITION

In partnership with The Chicago Network and RRF Foundation for Aging, the brand new **Women Reinventors Program** welcomed **34 women** over 55 to build meaningful connections, share experiences, and create space for women to continue thriving and advancing in their careers.

AGELESS INNOVATORS



490

Intergenerational innovators have participated since program launched

62

total co-mentors in 2025

95%

of respondents reported being closer to their goals than when the 6 months started

90%

of respondents reported expanding their professional networks

73%

of respondents reported an increased understanding of generational workforce dynamics and the power of intergenerational collaboration

Examples of Milestones Reported



Securing New Business and Engagements



Refining Brand Positioning and Messaging



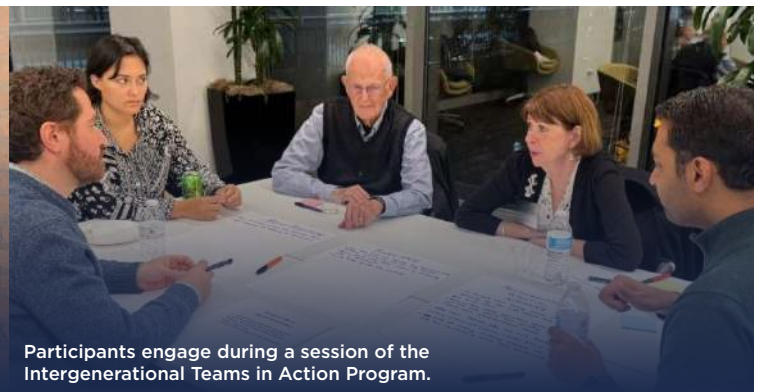
Ongoing Co-Mentor and Peer Relationships Beyond the Cohort



Increasing AI and Technical Literacy



Ageless Innovators program participants at the Chicago Innovation Foundation's 2025 In-Gala.



Participants engage during a session of the Intergenerational Teams in Action Program.

HONORABLE ADDITION

Launched in 2025 in partnership with The Village Chicago and RRF Foundation for Aging, the **Intergenerational Teams in Action Program** highlights the power of cross generational collaboration, demonstrating how organizations can leverage diverse perspectives and experience as a strategic asset to strengthen innovation, teamwork, and long term success.



400

Black and Latine professionals have participated since program launched

45

total mentees in 2025

40%

of participants were aspiring or established founders

60%

joined with a career advancement/ leadership development focus

100%

of respondents reported being closer to their goals than when the 6 months started

Primary Areas of Impact for Mentees



Expanded Networks and Social Capital



Leadership Advancement



Entrepreneurial Growth



Refined Career Path

FOUNDERS PATHWAY

- Clearer business models and strategic direction
- Greater understanding of investment and funding opportunities
- Expanded professional networks and entrepreneurial resources

ADVANCEMENT & LEADERSHIP PATHWAY

- Internships, promotions and new job opportunities
- Stronger career trajectory
- Increased access to executive networks

ADVISORY BOARD

The Ladder Advisory board was established in 2025 to drive impact and support participants through curated programming that fosters community and inclusion. Our board is made up of current and former mentors, mentees, and community partners.



Shannon Claiborne
Chicago Youth Centers; Strong Community Collective LLC | Sr. Director of Strategic Initiatives; Founder



Mario Gonzalez
Perspectives Charter Schools | Director of Operations, Events, and Partnerships



Robert Hazzard Jr.
The Hazzard Group | Managing Director



Brian Sykes
ISPro Academy | Co-Founder

CHICAGO INNOVATION FELLOWS



21

total Fellows across two cohorts in 2025

Examples of Industries Represented



Government



Non-profit



Entertainment



Healthcare



Retail



Food



Science



Industrial



Finance



Venture
Capital



Legal



Architecture

Testimonials

“What I’ve learned will benefit everyone on my team because I can bring new insights to all the people I work with at my company.”

– Program Participant,
2025 Cohort



“Chicago Innovation gave us access to all the key players in Chicago’s innovation ecosystem, and Kellogg provided us with the latest research and thinking about innovation.”

– Program Participant,
2025 Cohort



Chicago Innovation Fellows attending a session on Innovation Best Practices led by Tom Kuczmariski.



Chicago Innovation Fellows celebrating program completion.



ILLINOIS STUDENT INVENTION CONVENTION

41,500

student inventors have participated since program launched

6,015

total student inventors in 2025

29

student inventors qualified for the U.S. Nationals

14

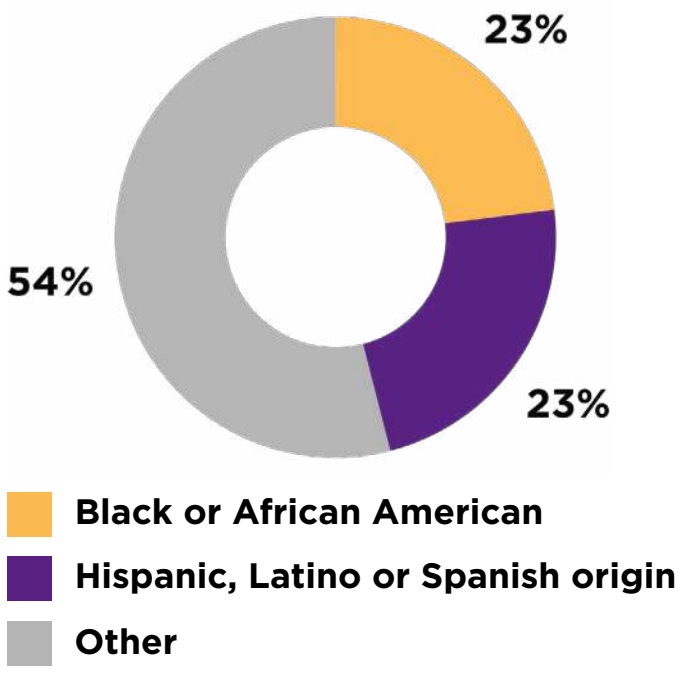
patents issued or filed since 2018

92%

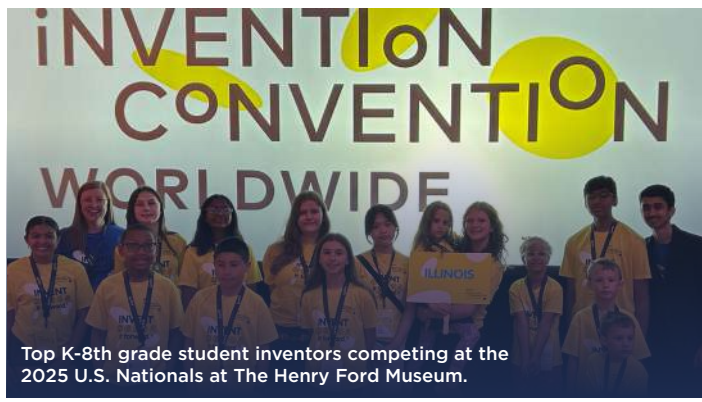
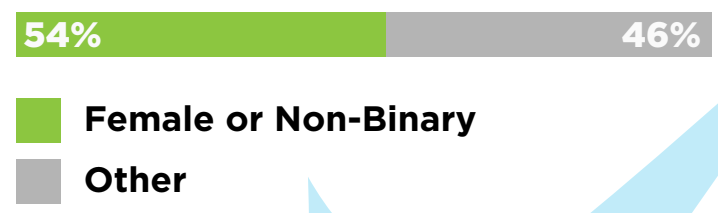
reported increased interest in STEM, invention and entrepreneurship

Student Diversity

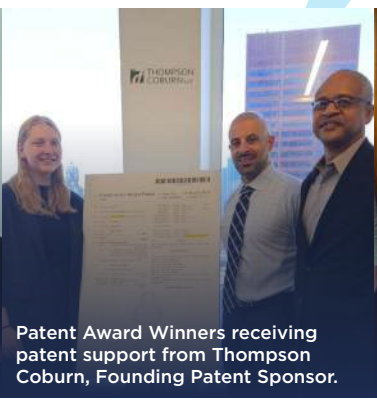
RACE/ETHNICITY



GENDER



Top K-8th grade student inventors competing at the 2025 U.S. Nationals at The Henry Ford Museum.



Patent Award Winners receiving patent support from Thompson Coburn, Founding Patent Sponsor.



Patent Award Winners receiving patent support from Vedder.

★ Climate Innovators

1,500

climate innovators
convened since
program launched

343

total registrants for
the 2025 Climate
Innovation Summit

20

speakers across
4 sessions/topics

2

Climate
Champion
Award winners
in 2025

Top Impact Achieved



Elevated Climate Change Issues



Promoted Climate Change Solutions



Built Community of Climate Change Innovators

2025 Climate Champion Award Winners



Sarah Elizabeth Ippel, Founder & CEO of Cultivate Collective, receiving the Climate Champion Award at the Chicago Innovation Awards in 2025.

Erika Allen, Founder & CEO of Urban Growers Collective, receiving the Climate Champion Award at the Chicago Innovation Awards in 2025.

PARTNERSHIPS & ECOSYSTEM

2025 SPONSORS

Diamond



Gold



Silver



Bronze



Media Partners



Major Contributing Sponsors



Founding Sponsor



2025 PROGRAM SPONSORS

Women's Mentoring Co-Op

COLEMAN
FOUNDATION

 **RRF** | Foundation
for Aging

 **SIKICH**®

Lincoln | Road



MCCANNPARTNERS



FIRST WOMEN'S BANK



BOLHOUS FOUNDATION
FOR WOMEN & GIRLS

The Ladder


accenture

 **Origin**
Ventures

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THE KADENS
FAMILY FOUNDATION

Ageless Innovators

 **RRF** | Foundation
for Aging

Ruth Ann Watkins

Illinois Student Invention Convention

molex

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WBBM
NEWSRADIO
105.9FM



SHEKHAWAT
TRUST

Climate Innovators

Reven Fellars

Bess Celio

Benjamin Lumpkin

Joanna Bratt



LANZAJET

The Lumpkin Family Foundation

COMMUNITY COLLABORATORS



THE CHICAGO NETWORK



FOUNDATIONS THAT FUND CHICAGO INNOVATION FOUNDATION PROGRAMS



LOOKING AHEAD

As Chicago Innovation embarks on its 25th anniversary year, we will continue expanding opportunities that help innovators grow, lead and create impact.

We'll be doubling down on our role as a unifying force across the region—bringing together corporations, startups, universities, nonprofits, and civic leaders to advance innovators forward. We are evolving our programs to be more inclusive, accessible, and action-oriented, ensuring that innovation becomes a shared engine of opportunity across

the Chicago region. By expanding pathways for underrepresented founders, investing in workforce development, and creating more platforms for cross-sector collaboration, we aim to unlock the full potential of Chicago's diverse talent and ideas.

Our focus is clear: to strengthen Chicago's position as a global hub of innovation while ensuring that the benefits of that progress are felt by everyone.





**Join the movement with
Chicago Innovation in ensuring
that innovation is accessible to all.**

**Together, we can expand mentorship, education,
networks and recognition opportunities that
help innovators across Chicago thrive.**

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