

4th Annual Latin@ Economic Summit

“Our Economy, Our Future - Nuestra
Economía, Nuestro Futuro”

Thursday, July 23, 2026

East Aurora High School
Aurora, IL

9:30 AM - 1:00 PM



**Illinois
Department of Commerce**
& Economic Opportunity
OFFICE OF ECONOMIC EQUITY & EMPOWERMENT



**Southland
Development Authority**
Driving Growth in Greater Chicago



Metaphrasis



LLSC

Pursuit



GREATER SOUTHWEST
DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION



ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF
Human Rights



**Aurora Regional Hispanic
Chamber of Commerce**

CHICAGO LATINA™
AUDIENCE. CULTURE. IMPACT.



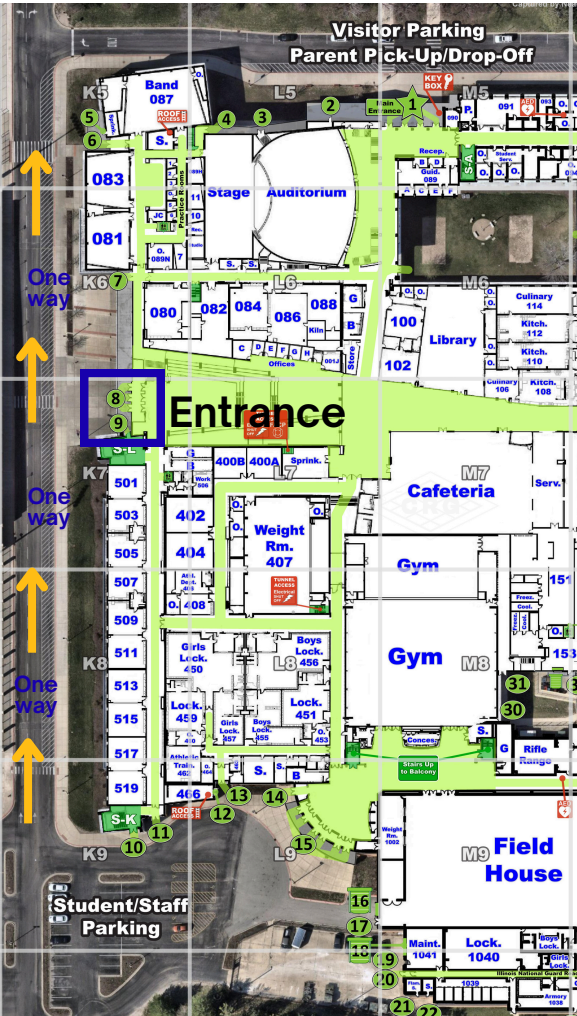
Agenda

10:00 - 10:10 AM Welcome Remarks	Auditorium
10:10 - 10:15 AM Exciting Éxito ▪ Maria and Adrian Chaparro, La Criolla	Auditorium
10:15 - 10:30 AM Fireside Chat ▪ <u>Moderator</u>: Jennifer Franco, Fempreneur Poder Hub ▪ Danny Palacios, Danny's Roofing Xteriors	Auditorium
10:30 - 11:15 AM Creative Strategies to Drive Foot Traffic and Boost Revenue ▪ <u>Moderator</u>: Jeremy Riegler, Center for Changing Lives ▪ Patricia Aguilar, FourStar Branding ▪ Jaime Groth Searle, The Southwest Collective ▪ Luis Leon, Promise Pixel	Auditorium
11:15 - 11:30 AM Break	
11:30 AM - 12:10 PM Breakout Session #1	
"AI for Beginners: The Business Owner's Guide to AI" ▪ <u>Moderator</u>: Letty Velez, Velez Global Enterprises & IC Clean Energy ▪ Juan Francisco Martinez Lara, Sunshine Enterprises ▪ Martina Matthews, Miss ChatGPT101	Auditorium
"Contracts 101: Know What You Sign & Legal Resources for Business Owners (Spanish)" ▪ <u>Moderator</u>: Gabriela Montaigne, SBDC at McLean County ▪ Mauricio Ortiz, Dreyer, Foote, Streit, Furgason and Slocum, P.A. ▪ Noeli Serna, Serna Legal Services	Room 81
"Fund it Differently – Alternative Lending Solutions" ▪ <u>Moderator</u>: Noelia Ruiz, SBDC at Waubensee Community College ▪ Ramiro J. Atristain-Carrión, Atristain Financial Advisors ▪ Alex Felton, Pursuit ▪ Cynthia Valle, Self-Help Federal Credit Union	Room 87
"Business Best Practices in an Uncertain Economy" ▪ <u>Moderator</u>: Diana Viveros, City of Joliet ▪ Chef Ambrocio González, La Catedral Café & Restaurant ▪ Berenice Tenorio, Nuestra Cocina ▪ Isabel C. Vélez Diez, DCEO	Room 83
12:10 - 12:20 PM Break	
12:20 - 01:00 PM Breakout Session #2	
"Contracts 101: Know What You Sign & Legal Resources for Business Owners (English)" ▪ <u>Moderator</u>: Beth Kregor, IJ Clinic on Entrepreneurship at the University of Chicago Law School ▪ Rhonda Coleman, RCW Strategies LLC ▪ Mauricio Ortiz, Dreyer, Foote, Streit, Furgason and Slocum, P.A.	Room 81
"From Newcomer to Business Owner: Entrepreneurship & Rights for Immigrants (Spanish)" ▪ <u>Moderator</u>: Xamanek Carrasco, Foundation of Little Village ▪ Netza Hualcoyotl Roldan, Binational Institute of Human Development ▪ Laura Resendiz, Aori Botanicals ▪ Leticia Sagaon, Very Bonita, Inc	Room 83
"How to Build Powerful Business Credit and Protect Your Personal Finances" ▪ <u>Moderator</u>: Frances Williams, Mercado on Fifth ▪ Vicky Arroyo, Alero Financial ▪ Laura Lopez, Chase Bank ▪ George Santiago, Elgin State Bank, a Wintrust Community Bank	Auditorium
"Built to Last Beyond You" ▪ <u>Moderator</u>: Roberto Escalante, Pueblo Consulting ▪ Marcos Carbajal, Carnitas Uruapan ▪ Christina Gonzalez, Los Comales ▪ Adriana Osorio, Osorio Metals	Room 87
1:00 - 1:30 PM Wrap-Up: Feel Free to Eat, Mingle, and Network	

Parking



Layout



List of Exhibitors

1. [Allies for Community Business](#)
2. [Aurora Regional Hispanic Chamber of Commerce](#)
3. [Binational Institute of Human Development \(BIHD\)](#)
4. [BMO Bank](#)
5. [Foundation of Little Village](#)
6. [Founders First Community Development Corporation](#)
7. [Hispanic American Construction Industry Association \(HACIA\)](#)
8. [Huntington Bank](#)
9. [Illinois Commission on Equity and Inclusion](#)
10. [Illinois Department of Human Rights](#)
11. [Illinois Department of Human Services - OSET](#)
12. [Illinois Department of Revenue](#)
13. [Illinois Hispanic Chamber of Commerce](#)
14. [Illinois Office of the Comptroller](#)
15. [Illinois Secretary of State](#)
16. [Illinois State Treasurer's Office](#)
17. [JP Morgan Chase](#)
18. [LISC](#)
19. [Little Village Chamber of Commerce](#)
20. [New Life Centers](#)
21. [Northwest Side Community Development Corporation](#)
22. [Old National Bank](#)
23. [Proviso-Leyden Council for Community Action \(PLCCA\)](#)
24. [PNC Bank](#)
25. [Pursuit](#)
26. [Self-Help Federal Credit Union](#)
27. [Southland Development Authority](#)
28. [The Southwest Collective](#)
29. [Waterman Bank](#) (Montgomery Branch)
30. [Wintrust](#)

Planning Committee



Marisa Alcantar is a Business Advisor for the Cook County Small Business Source Program at the Illinois Hispanic Chamber of Commerce (IHCC). In her role, she supports small businesses across Cook County by providing guidance on access to capital, business registration with the State of Illinois, and obtaining an Employer Identification Number (EIN). Marisa also oversees IHCC's partnerships with credit unions and serves as the Director of the IHCC Western Metro-Area Office, where she works to expand resources and opportunities for local entrepreneurs.



Diana Alfaro is the Latinx Business Development Manager for the Illinois Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity – Office of Economic Equity & Empowerment (OE3). She is equity-driven and has spent her time supporting and empowering underserved communities, minorities, women, persons with disabilities, veterans, Arab/MENA, and LGBTQIA+, focusing on Latinx/o/a and Hispanic-owned businesses. Diana supports small businesses, as they are vital to building a strong economy, by creating intentional outreach removing systemic barriers.



Sergio Anariba serves as the Business Education Manager and Program Manager for the Economic Empowerment Center (EEC) at the Southland Development Authority. In this dual role, he oversees the development, implementation, and continuous improvement of SDA's business education portfolio while leading the EEC's efforts to expand financial empowerment, compliance readiness, and entrepreneurial capacity across the region. With over a decade of experience, he has worked with startups and small businesses through advising, cohort programs, and resource navigation, including managing microgrants, launching accelerator-style programs.



Mayra Avila is a Chief Experience Officer. She has over 16 years of experience as a marketing and business development professional. Mayra comes from a financial background working for credit unions in Illinois and Indiana, most recently at Vicinity Credit Union. At the Southwest Collective, she brings her passion for building relationships and helping small businesses.



Xamanek Carrasco is the Director of Programs in the Foundation of Little Village. She leads initiatives that empower entrepreneurs and strengthen small businesses. In recent years, she has deepened her focus on supporting small and minority-owned businesses through cultural relevant classes for entrepreneurs, business planning, and access to capital. Xamanek holds a degree in Marketing and an MBA from Monterrey Institute of Technology and Higher Education (ITESM). Beyond her professional work, she appreciates graphic arts and photography, and enjoys reading historical fiction.

Also serves as a moderator in the From Newcomer to Business Owner: Entrepreneurship & Rights for Immigrants (Spanish)



Araceli Carrillo is a nonprofit professional and a community-driven event organizer in her free time. For the past 10 years, she has specialized in creating successful Latin American mercaditos that are now replicated across different communities. These mercaditos uplift local handmade vendors (including women entrepreneurs) and celebrate culture, creativity, and small businesses. Araceli loves creating welcoming spaces that bring people together, where artisans, culture, and community can connect, grow, and thrive.



Erik Castelan is a public policy professional with experience spanning across tourism, community engagement, local economic development, philanthropy, and small business advocacy. He currently lives in Central Illinois and serves as the Latino Business Development Specialist for OE3 at the State of IL DCEO, where he strategizes to improve the Latino business ecosystem, conducts outreach, and provides state resource support to Latino businesses across Central and Southern Illinois. As a first-generation Mexican American and Chicago native, he finds joy in bringing diverse communities together and advancing community wealth by building vibrant commercial corridors and supporting the growth of local businesses. Erik earned his Master of Public Policy from the University of Chicago and his bachelor's degree in public policy from the University of Illinois, Chicago.



Alan Castro is the Market President for Waterman Bank. He is an experienced mortgage professional who's been helping his clients reach their homeownership goals for over 20 years. In that time, he's developed a reputation for integrity and professionalism. He's also trusted to provide tailored loan solutions that fit his clients' unique situations.



Elizabeth Colón is a trailblazing entrepreneur and philanthropist, serving as the President and Founder of Metaphrasis Language & Cultural Solutions, LLC, a renowned interpreting and translation services company she started in 2007 with only \$500 dollars. She broke barriers as the first Latina President of the National Association of Women Business Owners (NAWBO) Chicago Chapter, where she championed opportunities for women in business. To remain competitive, adaptable, and committed to both personal and professional growth, Elizabeth is a lifelong learner who continuously invests in her development. She is a proud graduate of the prestigious Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Businesses Program and holds certificates in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion from both Northwestern University and Cornell University.



Linda Del Bosque is the Founder and Editor in Chief of Chicago Latina Magazine, a publication focusing on exceptional Latinas within the Chicagoland area, closing the gap of resources, access to information, and building generational wealth. Del Bosque is a pre-law student at Northwestern University, with a 2027 graduation date from Pritzker Law School.



Alex Felton serves as Vice President and Senior Business Development Officer for Pursuit. Pursuit is a mission-based (CDFI) Community Development Financial Institution within the Chicagoland footprint. Alex has always been passionate and intentional about community; his personal mission is to serve and empower underserved and low-to-moderate businesses within their respective communities through loan capacity. He is mindful of greater business development Planning when engaging the community and reminds all entrepreneurs that succession planning is always essential to driving a better community.

Also serves as a speaker in the Fund it Differently – Alternative Lending Solutions



Letticia Flores Poole is a Market President for Small Business Officers. Under her leadership, the team delivers tailored financial solutions that empower entrepreneurs to thrive, reinforcing BMO's commitment to boldly grow the good in business and life. Letty serves as National Co-chair of BMO's Latino Alliance employee resource group, advancing diversity and inclusion across the U.S. A proud Cubana and Chicagoan, Letty brings authenticity and purpose to every role she undertakes. When she is not breaking barriers for small businesses, she enjoys cycling new bike trails with her husband and cherishing time with her three grandchildren.



Jennifer Franco, M.A., is the Founder & CEO of Fempreneur Poder Hub, a nonprofit dedicated to empowering women of color to build sustainable businesses through accessible education, financial literacy, and community-driven support. She is currently a doctoral candidate in the Higher Education program at Loyola University Chicago, where her research explores belonging, identity, and anti-Blackness. Jennifer's work uniquely bridges academia and practice, positioning storytelling as a critical tool for economic development. As a speaker and ecosystem builder, she is advancing a vision for community-rooted capital, including the development of a future CDFI, to better serve historically under-resourced entrepreneurs.

Also serves as a moderator in the Fireside Chat.



Karina Y. García Alanis is the First Female President & CEO of the International Progressive Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. Mrs. Garcia is owner of three local businesses, she is the President of A&A Transportation 1 Inc. a growing transportation business in the construction industry, business partner of LuxeView a company that works with realtors, contractor servicing window cleaning, garters, and power wash, business owner of Alma Cafe a coffee shop where people come together to enjoy each other's company, partner of and business partner of CBG Renovators, LLC, a real estate rehab corporation dedicated to purchasing and rehabilitation of real estate.



Erika Q. Gonzalez is the Executive Director of 36Squared Business Incubator, where she leads with both strategy and heart to support entrepreneurs of all abilities. Originally from Mexico City, her journey as a small business owner shaped her deep understanding of the challenges entrepreneurs face and her passion for creating pathways to success. She has launched impactful programs like the GSDC Business Academy and the Women's Business Luncheon at 36Squared, building spaces for learning, connection, and growth. Erika also expanded the Boost Awards to include caregivers of individuals with disabilities—championing a more inclusive vision of entrepreneurship that creates real opportunities for financial independence.



Tulio Juarez is a dedicated Business Advisor with Greater Southwest Development Corporation, serving small businesses & entrepreneurs throughout Cook County. With a strong presence on the Southwest Side of Chicago, he strengthens local economies by helping businesses start, grow, and scale by providing strategic guidance through key business support programs such as the Cook County Source & the City of Chicago's NBDC- Neighborhood Business Development Center Program. He assists with Procurement/WBE MBE Certification & applying for funding/Grant opportunities. He's committed to Economic Development and empowering local communities by guiding clients through sustainable growth strategies, providing vital resources & that drive neighborhood revitalization.



Anggi Lewis is the Marketing Data Specialist at the Office of Economic Equity & Empowerment (OE3). She leads OE3's marketing targeting diverse demographics and communities. Her previous employment includes Southern Illinois University Carbondale, where she focused on online and nontraditional students at military bases and community colleges across the US. She has a master's in Television Management from Drexel University.



Irma Lopez is the President and Owner of ICL Consulting, LLC, with over 20 years of experience in economic development, government outreach, and small business advocacy. She currently serves as a Community Engagement Consultant with the Illinois Department of Human Rights, leading outreach on the Illinois Human Rights Act and available state programs. Previously, Irma coordinated the Illinois Coronavirus Response & Relief Business Center at the Chicago Minority Supplier Development Council, supporting minority-owned businesses during the pandemic. She has also contracted with the Illinois Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, offering technical assistance through the PTAC program.



Amor Montes de Oca is the Strategic Initiatives Program Manager at mHUB, where she designs and executes strategic initiatives with a focus on manufacturing readiness for hardtech startups, product innovation, and commercialization pathways. She helps entrepreneurs and small businesses build capacity, access resources, and scale their ventures through hands-on support and cross-sector collaboration. Previously, Amor served as the Executive Director of Illinois Women in Cannabis. Amor is also a co-founder and former Director of Strategic Initiatives at 2112—Chicago's first incubator for creative industries.



Jacqueline Montoya is the Founder and CEO of A&M Financial Services LLC. With over ten years of experience in the tax and accounting industry, she is passionate about helping individuals and small businesses with tax preparation, bookkeeping, payroll, and business consulting. Based in Illinois and serving clients nationwide, her mission is to educate, empower, and simplify finances so her clients can focus on growing their businesses and achieving their goals.



Diego Murillo is the Chief of Staff for the Foundation of Little Village. His position involves overseeing daily operations, managing staff, and coordinating between different departments to streamline communication and foster collaboration. He helps shape and execute initiatives that drive economic growth and community empowerment, often working closely with stakeholders, ensuring that the programs and policies effectively address the needs of local entrepreneurs and contribute to long-term economic sustainability. He is a graduate of the University of Illinois Chicago School of Art and Design with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Studio Arts.



Sindi Palomino is the Administrative Assistant and Fiscal Liaison in the Office of Economic Equity & Empowerment (OE3) at DCEO. She has been serving Chicago for over 15 years working in not-for-profit, education, and IL state agencies. She joined the Illinois Department of Human Services in 2019 and provided critical Medicaid, CASH and SNAP services during the pandemic. Sindi has seen the importance and impact of education, financial literacy, and small businesses supporting IL families and communities.



Vanessa Rodriguez Aguirre is a Senior Small Business Program Officer at LISC; a national CDFI dedicated to advancing economic opportunity. In her role, she works directly with entrepreneurs to provide them flexible capital and the support they need to thrive. She also played a key role in deploying LISC's Entrepreneur Opportunity & Community Fund, which partnered with 23 CDFIs in 10 markets across the country to increase access to capital for small businesses. With an MBA in Finance and 20 years of lending experience, Vanessa combines technical expertise with a deep passion for economic development. A proud Aurora native, she is committed to strengthening and uplifting her community and yours.



Eddie Soto is the CEO/Founder of New Norm Biz Inc, a Corporate Advisory and Entrepreneurial Consultancy Agency (2001), serving Illinois and Wisconsin small businesses, students, startups, inventors, and corporations. Eddie was a founding member of GWDC Org (2011) and the Executive Director of LCTHub Org (2014-2025). He also spent 11 years with the College of Lake County (CLC) as a Small Business Development Center Sr. Advisor, with offices in Grayslake and Vernon Hills, and helped open the Waukegan SBDC office. Fluent in Spanish, Eddie also owns ES Online Enterprises, Inc., a global branding and communications agency founded in 2005. He brings 21 years as a small business owner and 24 years of corporate business management experience.



Cynthia Valle is the Senior Business Development Officer for the Commercial Lending Team at Self-Help Federal Credit Union. With over 18 years of extensive experience in commercial lending, she has built a diverse career spanning both the nonprofit Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) sector and the traditional banking industry. Cynthia is fluent in Spanish and holds a Bachelor of Science in Finance and Spanish from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Also serves as a speaker in the Fund it Differently – Alternative Lending Solutions.



Letty Velez is CEO of Velez Global Enterprises & IC Clean Energy, Velez works on revenue growth, amplifying brands, and access to capital with a focus on grants, and IC is a clean energy company focused on solar & EVs. She is known as a “Community Navigator” by creating value for her Clients/Community Partners. Letty is also the Founder of IC U/Latinas, an entrepreneur learning cohort (that’s like a mini MBA on steroids) with over 275 Latinas nationwide.

Also serves as a moderator for AI for Beginners: The Business Owner’s Guide to AI

Assisted by:



Victoria Haley holds a BA in English from the University of Maryland and a BA in Psychology from Washington State University. She was born and raised in Seattle, WA, and is currently pursuing a master’s degree in Human Development Counseling at the University of Illinois Springfield. With over three years of experience in research and evaluation, Victoria brings a strong analytical foundation to work centered on human behavior and personal growth. Outside of academics and professional interests, Victoria enjoys reading, hiking, and playing video games.



Audrey Jayne is a summer intern with the Office of Economic Equity & Empowerment (OE3) at DCEO. In this role, she has reviewed grant applications, compiled data to promote minority-owned businesses, and updated small business resource guides. Audrey is going into her third year at Illinois State University (ISU), where she is studying economics and anthropology. She is the president of ISU’s chapter of Undergraduate Women in Economics, a student researcher, and a teaching assistant for the economics department.



Kayla Jones-Craan is a junior at DePaul University studying Business Economics. She is a D&I Intern for the Office of Economic Equity and Empowerment, where she has been updating business resources for minority and women populations across Illinois, and streamlining processes where needs arise. Her background includes customer facing roles, completion of the Corporate Venture Capital & Business Analytics externship with HP Tech Ventures, as well as a passion for entrepreneurship, and community building.

AMBASSADOR



Roberto Arista is Vice President and Business Development Officer at Wintrust Financial with more than 26 years of banking experience. In his role, he works across multiple Wintrust bank charters, partnering with business owners, contractors, and corporations to deliver customized financial solutions that support growth and long-term success.



Diana Beltran is a dynamic and multi-passionate entrepreneur making a significant impact in various industries. As the founder of Latina Boss Babes International, a thriving Latina-based networking group, she empowers and uplifts aspiring businesswomen. Alongside her successful venture, Diana is also the proud owner of Beltran Cleaning Service, a reputable residential and commercial cleaning business serving Chicago's Northwest Suburbs.



Jaime Figueroa brings a wealth of knowledge and dedication to his role as Banking Center Manager at Old National Bank in Chicago Uptown. Known for his empathetic leadership style, Jaime strives to eliminate the intimidation often associated with banking. He fosters genuine relationships, ensuring financial services are accessible, personalized, and easy to understand. His holistic approach reflects a core belief: that true service begins with listening, understanding, and building trust.



Antonio R Guillen is SVP of Business Development for Wintrust Bank Pilsen/Little Village & Logan Square. Antonio's expertise is business banking, specifically lending to small to medium size businesses and commercial real estate financing and development. Antonio also serves as the President of the Hispanic Bankers Association (HBA) and currently serves on several other boards including Little Village Chamber of Commerce (LVCC), Humboldt Park Health (HPH), Chicago Latino Theater Alliance (CLATA), Alivio Medical Center, Bernie Mac Foundation (BMF), and is a Member of the Latino Advisory Council (LAC) for Catholic Charities. Antonio is a Chicago native and married with five children, he joined Wintrust in July of 2010.



David Hernández is a Chicago Real Estate Broker and Realtor® affiliated with Coldwell Banker Realty; he is also the author of *Leo's Big Dream*, a book about real estate and financial literacy. David empowers first-time buyers and investors alike to build long-term wealth by focusing on cash-flowing properties and strategies to live without paying out of pocket while renting out the other units.



"**Placita Market**" is a platform that organizes craft markets in different areas of Illinois, celebrating and spreading the richness of Latino culture in the United States.



Sofia Paloma is a Mexican-American photographer and entrepreneur based in Chicago. She is the founder of Fotografía by Sofia, LLC, specializing in professional photography for events, headshots, family sessions, and branding. Her work focuses on authentic, people-centered storytelling that highlights confidence, connection, and individuality. She also collaborates with Chicago community and mentorship programs, using photography as a tool for self-expression and empowerment.



Sunshine Enterprises drives transformative community change by investing in business owners as much as the businesses they lead. With community hubs on Chicago's South Side, West Side, and North Side, Sunshine Enterprises supports high-potential entrepreneurs in under-resourced neighborhoods with the tools, relationships, and confidence needed to grow sustainable, profitable businesses. Sunshine Enterprises helps build economic stability, vibrant local economies, and generational wealth within the communities where business owners live and work.



Yaneth Medina serves as the President for Elgin State Bank, a Wintrust Community Bank. With over 25 years of leadership experience in banking, she holds a multifaceted role, contributing to business development, compliance, and employee recognition. Her passion lies in elevating others, extending beyond business to assist individuals in achieving their personal and financial goals. Moreover, she has a particular focus on helping minority businesses accelerate at all levels.

Master of Ceremony



Rocío Villalva Salgado is a Chicago-based content creator and founder of Chido Chicago, a digital platform dedicated to showcasing the city's restaurants, events, and local experiences. As a Latina content creator and DACA recipient, she connects Chicago's Latino community with local businesses, culture, and community resources. She has collaborated with major brands, Choose Chicago, local businesses, and community organizations, and has been featured in various media outlets. Her mission is to uplift and celebrate the voices, stories, and culture of Latinos in Chicago.

Exciting Éxito



Maria L. Torres-Chaparro is the Co-Owner and Vice President of La Criolla, Inc., a spice and seasoning manufacturing company founded in 1957 by the Maldonado family. In 2016, Maria and her husband, Jose Chaparro, acquired the company, recognizing its growth potential and strong Latin American heritage. In 2018, they relocated La Criolla from its original West Loop location to a significantly larger manufacturing and distribution facility in Alsip, Illinois, to support future expansion. Under their leadership, the company has expanded its foodservice, private-label, and co-packing operations while investing in modern manufacturing processes and food safety programs. In 2024, La Criolla achieved Safe Quality Food Certification, reflecting the company's ongoing commitment to quality, safety, and continuous improvement.



Adrian Chaparro is a Business Development Associate at La Criolla, Inc., where he represents the third generation helping shape the company's future. Growing up in the family business, Adrian has gained hands-on experience across production, packaging, warehousing, and daily operations, giving him a comprehensive understanding of the manufacturing process. Today, he supports business development, operations management, and marketing initiatives, helping improve efficiency, strengthen customer relationships, and grow the La Criolla brand. Adrian is dedicated to carrying forward La Criolla's legacy while helping drive its continued growth and innovation.

Fireside Chat

Moderator:



Jennifer Franco, M.A., is the Founder & CEO of Fempreneur Poder Hub, a nonprofit dedicated to empowering women of color to build sustainable businesses through accessible education, financial literacy, and community-driven support. She is currently a doctoral candidate in the Higher Education program at Loyola University Chicago, where her research explores belonging, identity, and anti-Blackness. Jennifer's work uniquely bridges academia and practice, positioning storytelling as a critical tool for economic development. As a speaker and ecosystem builder, she is advancing a vision for community-rooted capital, including the development of a future CDFI, to better serve historically under-resourced entrepreneurs.

Also serves on the planning committee for this event.

Speaker Bio:



Danny Palacios is the owner of Danny's Roofing Xteriors, a family-owned business providing honest, high-quality roofing and exterior services to homeowners and businesses. Danny takes pride in the craftsmanship, attention to detail, and dedication to customer satisfaction. Whether it's a roof repair, replacement, or exterior project, their goal is to provide reliable and long-lasting solutions that you can trust.

Creative Strategies to Drive Foot Traffic and Boost Revenue

Moderator:



Jeremy Riegler is a Latino economic development leader dedicated to building opportunity for underrepresented entrepreneurs. As Director of one of the State of Illinois Economic Empowerment Center's at the Center for Changing Lives, he oversees small business development, access to capital, and ecosystem-building programs. In the spirit of relationship building, he also serves on the Associate Boards of Latino Union of Chicago and WorldChicago, as well as Co-Chair of the South Chicago Quality of Life Plan's Economic Development Steering Committee.

Speaker Bios:



Patricia Aguilar is the President and Founder of FourStar Branding, a Chicago-based branding agency dedicated to helping small businesses, nonprofits, and community-rooted organizations strengthen their visibility, credibility, and growth potential. She is the creator of El Poder de la Marca® | The Power of the Brand®, an economic infrastructure program that provides minority-owned small businesses and nonprofits with access to pro bono brand strategy, creative assets, digital tools, website development, and implementation support.



Luis Leon is the founder of Promise Pixel, a web design and branding agency dedicated to helping small business owners grow through world class design and exceptional customer service. With over a decade of experience and more than 400 projects completed, he has partnered with small businesses, startups, service providers, and e commerce brands to create impactful digital experiences. Luis is passionate about helping entrepreneurs build strong brands that inspire trust and support long term growth. His relationship driven approach combines creativity, strategy, and personalized service to deliver solutions tailored to each client's goals. Through Promise Pixel, Luis is committed to empowering business owners with the tools and confidence they need to succeed in today's digital landscape.



Jaime Groth Searle spent decades working for some of Chicago's most prestigious and successful advertising agencies before deciding to dedicate her vision, creativity, and entrepreneurial spirit to the place she calls home: the vibrant, but often neglected neighborhoods on the southwest side of Chicago.

AI for Beginners: The Business Owner's Guide to AI

Moderator:



Letty Velez is CEO of Velez Global Enterprises & IC Clean Energy, Velez works on revenue growth, amplifying brands, and access to capital with a focus on grants, and IC is a clean energy company focused on solar & EVs. She is known as a “Community Navigator” by creating value for her Clients/Community Partners. Letty is also the Founder of IC U/Latinas, an entrepreneur learning cohort (that’s like a mini MBA on steroids) with over 275 Latinas nationwide.

Also serves on the planning committee for this event

Speaker Bios:



Juan Francisco Martinez Lara is the Business Acceleration Services (BAS) Project Manager at Sunshine Enterprises, where he supports entrepreneurs through coaching, business development services, and access to capital opportunities. He works with hundreds of small business owners each year, helping them strengthen and grow their businesses. Prior to joining Sunshine, Juan spent nearly six years at the Consulate General of Mexico in Chicago supporting economic development initiatives. Juan is passionate about helping entrepreneurs leverage technology and AI to increase efficiency and drive business growth.



Martina Matthews is the founder of Miss ChatGPT101, an AI literacy company helping people confidently navigate the future of work. A technology leader with more than 20 years of startup experience, she was part of the founding team at Chegg and now serves as Chicago Chapter Lead for “The AI Collective.” Through workshops, keynotes, and community initiatives, she helps individuals and organizations turn curiosity into action. Her mission is to make AI accessible, useful, and empowering for everyone.

Contracts 101: Know What You Sign & Legal Resources for Business Owners (Spanish)

Moderator:



Gabriela Montaigne is the Deputy Director and Business Advisor for the Hispanic Community at the Illinois Small Business Development Center (SBDC) of McLean County. For the past six years, she has worked supporting entrepreneurs and small business owners in the creation, development, and expansion of their businesses. Her experience includes business planning, access to capital, government contracting, licensing and permits, as well as the development of sustainable growth strategies. Throughout her career, she has advised hundreds of entrepreneurs across various industries, helping them strengthen their operations and achieve their business goals. Gabriela is committed to strengthening the business ecosystem and promoting the economic empowerment of the Hispanic community through education, access to resources, and the development of business opportunities.

Speaker Bios:



Mauricio Ortiz is an attorney at Dreyer, Foote, Streit, Furgason and Slocum, P.A. Mauricio is a bilingual attorney dedicated to providing legal representation to individuals, families, and businesses throughout the surrounding communities. He earned his Juris Doctor from Northern Illinois University College of Law and has developed a practice focused on real estate law, business formation and representation, estate planning, and civil litigation. Fluent in both English and Spanish, he is committed to making quality legal services accessible and ensuring clients clearly understand their legal options.



Noeli Serna is the Founding Attorney of Serna Legal Services, a corporate law firm that offers Illinois businesses and entrepreneurs corporate legal services in English and Spanish. Noeli represents clients in business purchases and sales, corporate governance, comprehensive contract services and trademark assessment and filings. A former Big Law finance attorney turned in-house corporate counsel, she brings that expertise to clients at accessible rates. As the daughter of an entrepreneurial Latine family who grew up in the family restaurant business, she is focused on helping business owners protect and expand their enterprises.

Fund it Differently – Alternative Lending Solutions

Moderator:



Noelia Ruiz is the Manager of the Illinois Small Business Development Center (SBDC) at Waubensee Community College in Aurora, where she helps entrepreneurs and small business owners start, grow, and strengthen their businesses through advising, training programs, and strategic partnerships. She is passionate about fostering economic development and empowering individuals to achieve their entrepreneurial goals. In addition to her role at the SBDC, Noelia is the founder and owner of La Garrafa, an artisan ice cream and crepe café established in 2022 that celebrates creativity, culture, and community. Noelia is dedicated to inspiring others, sharing practical knowledge, and helping transform innovative ideas into successful ventures.

Speaker Bios:



Alex Felton serves as Vice President and Senior Business Development Officer for Pursuit. Pursuit is a mission-based (CDFI) Community Development Financial Institution within the Chicagoland footprint. Alex has always been passionate and intentional about community; his personal mission is to serve and empower underserved and low-to-moderate businesses within their respective communities through loan capacity. He is mindful of greater business development Planning when engaging the community and reminds all entrepreneurs that succession planning is always essential to driving a better community.

Also serves on the planning committee for this event



Ramiro J. Atristain-Carrión is Managing Director of Atristain Financial Advisors, LLC, where he serves as a fractional CFO, advising founders, executives, and boards on financial strategy, growth, capital, governance, and long-term sustainability. He is co-founder of CLESF, a nonprofit delivering life-changing medical missions for children across Latin America, and an Adjunct Professor of Finance at Dominican University. He is also the author of *El dinero en tu vida*, a book that promotes financial literacy. Ramiro holds an MBA from the Illinois Institute of Technology and a bachelor's degree in Economics from Dominican University.



Cynthia Valle is the Senior Business Development Officer for the Commercial Lending Team at Self-Help Federal Credit Union. With over 18 years of extensive experience in commercial lending, she has built a diverse career spanning both the nonprofit Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) sector and the traditional banking industry. Cynthia is fluent in Spanish and holds a Bachelor of Science in Finance and Spanish from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Also serves on the planning committee for this event

Business Best Practices in an Uncertain Economy

Moderator:



Diana Viveros is an Economic Development Specialist with the City of Joliet. Previously, as Director of Programs at the Joliet Latino Economic Development Association (LEDA), she led bilingual business assistance, grant development, and community initiatives that expanded the organization's impact. Her experience also includes bilingual communications for Joliet Township High School District 204 and managing international projects for Fortune 500 companies as a Project Manager at SpotMe. Diana earned a Bachelor of Business Administration in Marketing and Business Management from the University of St. Francis.

Speaker Bios:



Chef Ambrocio González is the founder and owner of La Catedral Café & Restaurant in Chicago. Born in Guadalajara, Mexico, he came to the United States with a dream of creating opportunities through hard work, hospitality, and a passion for authentic Mexican cuisine. What began as a single neighborhood restaurant has grown into multiple locations that serve thousands of guests each week and provide employment to dozens of people, all while celebrating and preserving Mexican culture and traditions.



Berenice Tenorio is a trailblazer in the Hispanic food industry. Her commitment to excellence is reflected in the development of premium food products that are sustainably produced and rigorously manufactured under strict quality controls. In 2013, Berenice founded Nuestra Cocina, where she has served as President ever since. Celebrated for her entrepreneurial vision and leadership, she received the Global Brand Builder Award at the Latina Expo and was named among the Latin Leaders 500 by Hispanic Executive Magazine. Beyond business, Berenice is deeply committed to empowering women and expanding educational access through scholarship programs that support students from underserved communities.



Isabel C. Vélez Díez serves as Deputy Director of Policy Development Planning, and Research at the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO), where she leads program and policy design in support of Illinois' Economic Growth Plan, a statewide strategy that focuses on business attraction, workforce development, and inclusive regional growth. Her career spans municipal government, nonprofit lending, and state agency work, including roles at the City of Chicago's Department of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection and Allies for Community Business, where she worked with small businesses navigation access to capital and recovery from economic hardship. She holds a Master's in Urban Affairs from Loyola University Chicago and a Bachelor's in Architecture from the Polytechnic University of Puerto Rico.

Contracts 101: Know What You Sign & Legal Resources for Business Owners (English)

Moderator:



Beth Kregor is the director of the IJ Clinic on Entrepreneurship at the University of Chicago Law School. Beth leads teams of law students to provide wrap-around legal advice to lower-income entrepreneurs, on everything from complex regulatory questions to vital plans and contracts. She works to craft solutions when the law and bureaucracy create barriers for low-income entrepreneurs, and she has become a prominent spokesperson for reform in City Hall, Springfield and beyond. Prior to joining the Institute for Justice, Beth was an attorney at Sidley Austin.

Speaker Bios:



Rhonda Coleman is a commercial attorney, business advisor, and founder of RCW Strategies LLC, a fractional general counsel and strategic advisory firm serving women founders, growth-stage companies, and mid-market clients. Her corporate career spans Fortune 50 and globally recognized enterprises including Google, Accenture, Fox, and Aon, where she led complex, multi-million to billion-dollar transactions and served as a technology go-to-market strategist. She is also the creator and host of She Thrives with Rhonda Coleman Wandel, a podcast and community platform celebrating women entrepreneurs through honest conversation, bold leadership, and practical insight. Passionate about access and equity, she mentors startups, women and minority-owned businesses, and emerging legal talent. Rhonda is based in Chicago.



Mauricio Ortiz is an attorney at Dreyer, Foote, Streit, Furgason and Slocum, P.A. Mauricio is a bilingual attorney dedicated to providing legal representation to individuals, families, and businesses throughout the surrounding communities. He earned his Juris Doctor from Northern Illinois University College of Law and has developed a practice focused on real estate law, business formation and representation, estate planning, and civil litigation. Fluent in both English and Spanish, he is committed to making quality legal services accessible and ensuring clients clearly understand their legal options.

From Newcomer to Business Owner: Entrepreneurship & Rights for Immigrants (Spanish)

Moderator:



Xamanek Carrasco is the Director of Programs in the Foundation of Little Village. She leads initiatives that empower entrepreneurs and strengthen small businesses. In recent years, she has deepened her focus on supporting small and minority-owned businesses through cultural relevant classes for entrepreneurs, business planning, and access to capital. Xamanek holds a degree in Marketing and an MBA from Monterrey Institute of Technology and Higher Education (ITESM). Beyond her professional work, she appreciates graphic arts and photography, and enjoys reading historical fiction.

Also serves on the planning committee for this event.

Speaker Bios:



Netza Hualcoyotl Roldan is currently the CEO of the Binational Institute of Human Development, a non-profit (501c-3) organization, and leads their programs, Legal & Immigration Center Casa México USA, Casa Guatemala and the Small Business Development Institute, which were established to structure, develop and implement programs to assist the immigrant community and other disenfranchised communities, to integrate effectively and efficiently into the American society. Netza has also been the President of his own consulting company for more than 25 years. Impormex USA Marketing Group, an integrated consulting firm specializing in International Market Development, Public Relations and Image Development.



Laura Reséndiz is the founder of Aori Botanical, an artisanal skin and hair care brand based in Chicago, Illinois. Originally from Querétaro, Mexico, Laura built her business from the ground up after searching for safe and effective solutions for her son Darío's skin issues. What began as a personal need soon became a vocation. Specializing in botanical formulation, she creates products with carefully selected ingredients for all skin types, with special attention to sensitive and mature skin. Her business has a presence at local markets, festivals, and online, serving a bilingual and bicultural community. As a Latina entrepreneur in Illinois, Laura blends science, tradition, and purpose to demonstrate that entrepreneurship can be personal, cultural, and economically transformative.



Leticia Sagaon, founder and director of Very Bonita, Inc., is an entrepreneurial professional and leader dedicated to female empowerment and community development. She currently serves as Executive Director of 'Women Entrepreneurs in Chicago,' where she promotes women's personal and professional growth through strategic training, mentoring, sales, and networking programs. With a strong background in business consulting and leadership, her great passion is providing the resources and support women entrepreneurs need to reach their full potential and succeed in the business world.

How to Build Powerful Business Credit and Protect Your Personal Finances

Moderator:



Frances Williams is Executive Director of Mercado on Fifth and a bilingual business and community leader dedicated to advancing economic opportunity for Latino entrepreneurs. With more than two decades of experience spanning entrepreneurship, wealth preservation, financial services, and nonprofit leadership, she previously led Colorado's only SBA Women's Business Center at Mi Casa Resource Center, supporting small businesses and workforce development initiatives statewide. Of Colombian descent and fluent in Spanish, Frances has built and operated multiple businesses while championing equitable access to resources that strengthen families and communities. Her expertise in business growth, financial empowerment, and community development makes her a passionate advocate for building sustainable economic futures.

Speaker Bios:



Vicky Arroyo is a seasoned financial services executive and community leader with over 30 years of experience advancing economic opportunity through commercial lending and community development. She currently serves as Market President at Alero Financial, a credit union, where she leads commercial lending and community impact efforts focused on expanding access to capital and accelerating small business growth across diverse communities. In this role, she is helping drive Alero's continued growth while deepening its commitment to the communities it serves. Her work centers on building inclusive economic pathways by strengthening relationships, supporting entrepreneurs, and directing investment where it is needed most.



Laura E. Lopez, MBA, is a Vice President and Community Manager for Chase Bank focused on helping entrepreneurs and community members strengthen financial health through education, workshops, and programs designed to support diverse populations. With 20+ years of experience in finance, she collaborates with nonprofits, small businesses, and local leaders to deliver practical resources and guidance. Laura leads JPMorganChase financial education efforts with the City Treasurer's Office, and in 2024 she was recognized as a Notable Latino Leader by Crain's Chicago Business. She holds an MBA from the Forbes School of Business at Arizona University and is a certified Financial Coach.



George Santiago serves as Vice President for Elgin State Bank, a Wintrust Community Bank. George is a seasoned commercial banker with more than 30 years in Commercial Lending, SBA, and Portfolio Management. As a banker, George works with small to mid-sized business owners and advisors to solve problems. In his capacity at Wintrust, he coaches and mentors young employees. George also dedicates his time to volunteering in the community and has served on various boards. He is currently a board member of Elgin Area Chamber of Commerce.

Built to Last Beyond You

Moderator:



Roberto Escalante is the Founder and President of Pueblo Consulting, Inc. He has over 40 years of business experience working from start-ups to Fortune 500 companies. As a small business expert, he has spent the last 20 years showing individuals how to build, protect and transfer wealth via their small businesses. Roberto received his Bachelor of Business in Marketing with a concentration in International Business from Western Illinois University and an MBA with a concentration in Finance from Keller Graduate School of Management. In his free time, he enjoys international travel, golf, bicycling, sailing and spending time with his family and friends.

Speaker Bios:



Marcos Carbajal is the owner of Carnitas Uruapan. Founded in 1975 by Inocencio Carbajal aka “El Guero”, Carnitas Uruapan is the legendary destination for those whose palates crave authentic Carnitas from Michoacan, Mexico. Carnitas Uruapan has created a successful brand story, featured in a variety of media outlets, including Netflix’s Taco Chronicles, The Food Network, VICE, The Cooking Channel, and PBS. After a successful career of almost 8 years in finance, and after having completed a master’s in business administration (MBA) from the Kellogg School of Business, Marcos returned to the family business with the vision of growing the brand. After a successful expansion into a second location in Gage Park in 2019, the expansion continues with a new flagship location in Little Village in 2025.



Christina Gonzalez is a Co-Owner of Los Comales. Having stepped into the business at age of 14, Christina began from the ground up, working every position in the family owned business that first opened it’s doors in 1973. Joined by her brother, and her Father, they initiated their Franchising Group and have grown to 19 locations. In 2026, Christina was honored as the "Restaurateur of the Year" by the Illinois Restaurant Association in recognition of her unwavering commitment to her employees, community, and the restaurant industry. As a second-generation restaurateur, she continues to instill the same values of service, advocacy, and neighborly commitment that defined her father before her, helping ensure the family's legacy extends far beyond their restaurants.



Adriana Osorio is the Chief Operating Officer of Osorio Metals Supply Inc., a second-generation, family-owned steel distribution and fabrication company based in Chicago. Since joining the business in 2015, she has led the company's financial and operational strategy, overseeing finance, business development, marketing, technology, and organizational growth. As a graduate of DePaul University with a degree in Business Administration and Entrepreneurship, Adriana has also completed executive education through the Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Businesses program and the Stanford Latino Entrepreneurship Initiative Scaling Program. She is passionate about helping family businesses build sustainable systems, strengthen leadership, and prepare for successful generational transitions.

IN-KIND CONTRIBUTION

Thank you to these organizations for their in-kind contribution to this Summit:

<i>Organization</i>	<i>In-kind Contribution</i>
Aurora Regional Hispanic Chamber of Commerce	Coffee from Alma's Cafe
BMO	Coffee from Atzimba Catering and Events
Chicago Latina Business Foundation	Professional Headshot from Jesus Santos Photography
Fempreneur Poder Hub	Miniature cheesecake Photographer & Videographer Security
IC U Latinas	Dessert pretzels, cookies, and granola bars
Self Help Federal Credit Union	Tamales from Gordo's Tamale
Wintrust Financial	Soda/pop