

20 24

ANNUAL
REPORT



STRENGTH IN HERITAGE. POWER IN GROWTH.



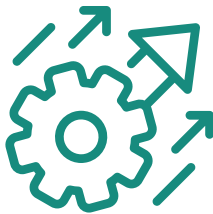
WHO WE ARE

The Foundation of Little Village provides culturally appropriate programming, bilingual resources, workforce training, and access to capital for current and emerging entrepreneurs who invest in our community.



MISSION

The Foundation of Little Village supports and encourages business growth through entrepreneurial opportunities impacting the economic wellness of our community.



VISION

To be the catalyst for economic equality, prosperity, and advancement of Little Village.

CORE VALUES

Inspiration

We believe in making dreams come true by energizing the spirit and potential of our entrepreneurial community.

Innovation

We are committed to developing a culture of innovation that creates enduring value for our community.

Respect

We celebrate the diversity of visions, perspectives, and culture of our entrepreneurs, stakeholders, and community.

Courage

With courage and vision, we challenge the status quo to create a culturally relevant business environment.

Integrity

We believe that maintaining the highest ethical standards, transparency, and collaboration are key elements to paving the way to change.

LETTER FROM BOARD PRESIDENT & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

June 2025

Dear Friends,

At the Foundation of Little Village, our mission is to uplift the entrepreneurial spirit of Little Village—a vibrant, predominantly Latino community—and its surrounding neighborhoods. Like our symbol, the Mexicana butterfly, we are catalysts for transformation, equipping aspiring entrepreneurs with the tools, resources, and support they need to thrive in business.

We are dedicated to fostering business growth through strategic partnerships with local leaders, supporters, and—most importantly — the residents who call Little Village home. In addition, we connect current and emerging entrepreneurs to a wide range of solution-driven services — including mentorship, entrepreneurial cohorts, micro-grant financing, business development, technical assistance, and more. Together, we create an energized, thriving community.

By empowering aspiring and bold entrepreneurs, we not only celebrate their milestones but also witness transformative stories that generate community wealth, preserve cultural heritage, and revitalize the Little Village corridor. Their journeys—rooted in culture and resilience—are the heartbeat of our mission, a living testament to the creativity and spirit that fuel everything we do.

In this annual report, we're proud to share a few of those stories—real lives impacted by the programs, services, and opportunities we've helped make possible. We also highlight the key achievements, areas of growth, and milestones that laid the groundwork for these successes.

COMMUNITY WEALTH BUILDING

- 379 attendees joined a one-time Entrepreneurial Workshop
- 117 participants joined one of our multi-week Juntos Entrepreneurial Classes
- 101 entrepreneurs received one-on-one business advising
- \$22,000 in micro-grants awarded to twelve Juntos Avanzamos graduates

CULTURAL PRESERVATION

- On behalf of Little Village, the Foundation was awarded the prestigious 10-year designation of the Little Village Cultural District

CORRIDOR REVITALIZATION

- The Xquina Incubator & Café reached a 60% construction completion milestone! We proudly announce that 45% of contractors were certified Minority Business Enterprises and 5% were Women Business Enterprises

With the support of our generous funders, dedicated community leaders, and invaluable partners, we work every day to celebrate the journeys of our entrepreneurs—honoring their milestones and drawing inspiration from the transformations that drive prosperity across Little Village.

Thank you for being part of this journey. Together, we are creating a more vibrant, resilient, and thriving Little Village.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dan Arce".

Dan Arce
Board President
Foundation of Little Village



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kim Close".

Kim Close
Executive Director
Foundation of Little Village

COMMUNITY WEALTH BUILDING

By The Numbers

In 2024, the Foundation broke records in every area:



117

The most Juntos Entrepreneurial Class participants in any year



70%

Graduation rate, an increase of 10% from 2023



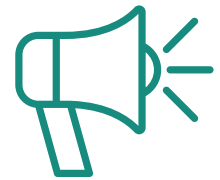
170

Mentorship hours clocked



99%

Participant satisfaction rate for programs and services



81%

Participants say their participation in Juntos strengthened their business

12

Micro-grants awarded to qualifying Juntos Avanzamos graduates totaling **\$22,000** towards their businesses

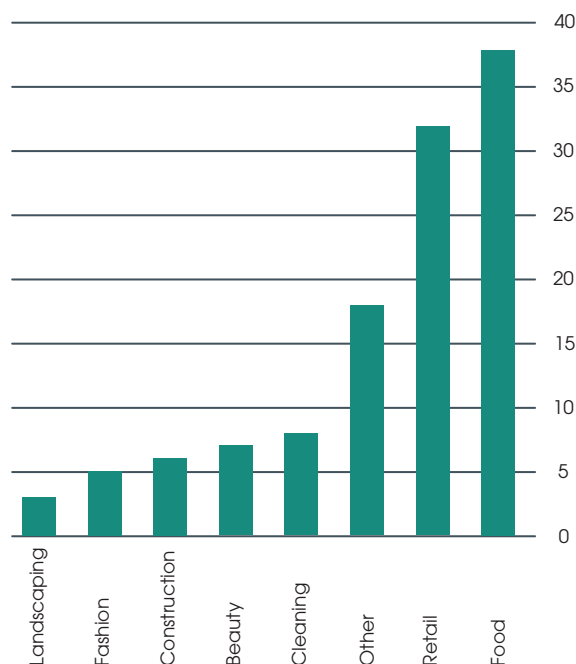
101

Launching a brand new service area, this is the number of people who received 1-on-1 business advising

21

Total workshops and webinars, a significant increase than in any prior year with a combined total attendance of 379

Business Sectors Served



Juntos Entrepreneurial Programs

Category	2023	2024	Growth
Total participants	88	117	33%
Lanzamos (SPA)			
Participants	45	40	-11%
Graduates	17	27	59%
Mentorship Hours	24	38	58%
Lanzamos (ENG)			
Participants	15	23	53%
Graduates	12	13	8%
Mentorship Hours	7	17	143%
Emprendemos			
Participants	27	31	15%
Graduates	20	20	0%
Mentorship Hours	36.5	49	34%
Avanzamos			
Participants	7	24	243%
Graduates	7	23	228%
Mentorship Hours	13	49	408%
Total Mentorship Hours	80.5	170	111%
Total Graduates	56	83	48%

Across the Foundation of Little Village History:



Over **1,100** local entrepreneurs have been served across all program and service areas



\$799,090 in micro-grants have been distributed to 283 small businesses



Over **330** entrepreneurs have participated in at least one Juntos Entrepreneurial Classes



25 individual cohorts have taken place since programming began

COMMUNITY WEALTH BUILDING

Expanding Services, Enhancing Impact

With unprecedented growth in 2024, the Foundation expanded current programming and created brand new service areas. Our Community Wealth Building pillar provides culturally relevant education and bilingual resources tailored to current and emerging entrepreneurs who are committed to the Little Village community.

All of our services are provided at **no cost** to participants and offered in Spanish or bilingual English/Spanish.



New Services!

Economic Empowerment Center

Offering one-on-one business advising sessions, technical support, and referrals to local business ecosystem partners

Business Finance Resources

Making access to capital easier for small businesses through financial literacy coaching, loan application assistance, and tailored support

Expanded Services!

Juntos Entrepreneurial Classes

Three multi-week class series focused on comprehensive business training, technical assistance, and personalized one-on-one coaching, all designed to meet the unique needs of our entrepreneurs

Participation was increased by **33%**

Entrepreneurial Workshops & Webinars

A series of in-person workshops or online webinars focused on specific areas of entrepreneurship such as branding and marketing, banking and financing, business development and strategies, plus more

Total attendance skyrocketed to **379**

Fiscal Sponsor Services

Making it easier for small businesses to access grants, the Foundation broadened its ability to serve as fiscal sponsor and manage grant funds on behalf of Little Village entrepreneurs



Starting a business is a challenging and often lonely journey. The Foundation of Little Village has been instrumental in providing me with the tools, guidance, and resources to better manage and grow my business. Their support has made a real difference.



Jackie De Leon | Founder, Branding Pro

COMMUNITY WEALTH BUILDING

Growing The Xquina Business Ecosystem

The Xquina Business Ecosystem connects current and emerging entrepreneurs to a wide range of solution driven services—including mentorship, entrepreneurial cohorts, micro-grants, business development, technical assistance, and more—through a network of strategic alliances and partnerships. Within this dynamic ecosystem, entrepreneurs thrive by accessing culturally responsive, industry-specific resources tailored to their unique business needs.

Our partners are vital to the success of the Xquina Business Ecosystem. They provide essential community support, business programs, and technical services. Among these key contributors is the Fund for Equitable Business Growth, which has made many of these collaborations possible by convening local business service providers to deliver culturally relevant resources to entrepreneurs.



Little Village Economic Empowerment Center: Path to Growth

The Foundation launched the Little Village Economic Empowerment Center following a generous contribution by the State of Illinois Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity. This funding enabled us to accelerate the growth of the Xquina Business Ecosystem with the following key milestones and service offerings:



Increased Staff: We hired two new key staff members, a Program Director and Client Services Manager, to support the program initiatives and expand client services



One-on-One Business Support: Entrepreneurs can now receive technical support and guidance from our small business experts



Ecosystem Referrals: Entrepreneurs are connected with an array of referrals – both internal and external – based on their individual small business needs



Advisory Group: The Economic Empowerment Center is guided by an advisory group of local community business experts

Business Finance Resources: Expanding Access to Capital

With the help of dedicated funders like the Chicago Community Trust's We Rise Together initiative, we expanded our service offerings to include more business financial support. More opportunities for financial literacy, individual support, and an increase in capital investment are frequently requested by our constituents. This year, we expanded our services!

- **Increased Staff:** We contracted an Access to Capital Manager to develop, deliver, and support the Micro Lending program
- **One-on-One Financial Support:** Entrepreneurs can now receive business finance-related support and guidance, including assistance with translation services and loan applications
- **Coaching:** Our staff work with small businesses to get them ready for capital investment
- In 2025, we will further expand into offering **micro-loans!**

COMMUNITY WEALTH BUILDING

Elevating Juntos Entrepreneurial Classes

JUNTOS™

Juntos Entrepreneurial Classes, our flagship program, has been the foundation of our services since we opened our doors in 2018. In our second year of offering English classes in addition to Spanish-led instruction, the Foundation reaffirms its commitment to inclusivity and accessibility. This bilingual approach ensures that all entrepreneurs—regardless of language preference—can engage with meaningful, culturally relevant resources and receive the support they need to succeed.



LANZAMOS™

- Introductory level class for new and emerging entrepreneurs
- Participants move from concept to reality including assistance with business licensing and registration
- Instruction includes learning the fundamentals of financial literacy and “pitching your business” – part one

EMPRENDEMOS™

- Intermediate level class for established businesses ready for growth
- Participants take the next step in their entrepreneurship to grow their business
- Instruction builds upon Juntos Lanzamos learnings to include marketing, social media, financial literacy, and part two of “pitching your business”

AVANZAMOS™

- Advanced level class for small businesses seeking capital investment
- Participants boost their financial literacy skills and ready their business for financial capital
- Instruction focuses on cash flow analysis and business viability

THE ECONOMIC IMPACT

Atalia World LLC: From Mentee To Mentor

Marileenny Figuera

Foundation Services Rendered:

Juntos Lanzamos, Juntos Emprendemos, Juntos Avanzamos, Micro-Grant Recipient

Atalia World LLC is a shining example of resilience, growth, and the transformative power of community. Led by Marileenny Figuera—a determined and passionate entrepreneur—Atalia World reflects a journey fueled by love, purpose, and supported by Juntos Programs.

A Venezuelan immigrant who arrived in the U.S. just five years ago, Marileenny founded Atalia World with a deeply personal mission: to help cover her mother's breast cancer treatment. What began as a heartfelt endeavor has since grown into a thriving business specializing in personalized products like cups, stickers, and tote bags. Every item is crafted with intention, carrying messages of mental health, self-worth, and motivation. Through her creations, Marileenny hopes to remind women of their strength and inspire them to embrace their value.

Marileenny is a proud alumna of the Foundation's suite of entrepreneurial programs—Juntos Lanzamos, Juntos Emprendemos, and Juntos Avanzamos—which support-

ed her development from aspiring business owner to established entrepreneur. Earlier this year, Atalia World was awarded a \$2,000 micro-grant, which allowed Marileenny to invest in new resources, such as her website, and expand her reach.

Her growth didn't stop there. Recognizing her talent and dedication, the Foundation of Little Village invited her to lead a webinar on holiday marketing strategies—an opportunity for Marileenny to give back by sharing her knowledge with fellow entrepreneurs. Soon after, she was selected to serve on the newly launched Xquina Advisory Board, composed of alumni from the Juntos programs. As a founding member, she now plays a key role in guiding and mentoring the next generation of entrepreneurs.

Marileenny's journey from mentee to mentor is a powerful testament to the strength of education, community, and purpose. She is an immigrant, a caregiver, a mother, a business owner—and now, a mentor and leader. Through Atalia World LLC, she continues to uplift others, proving that with determination and support, transformation is possible.

Economic Impact:



Transformed what began as a personal hobby into a fully registered business



Built a strong social media presence, growing their Instagram following to over 12.5K @ataliaworld



Led the Holiday Marketing workshop in collaboration with the Foundation of Little Village (November 2024)



Has become an active member of the Xquina Business Ecosystem by contributing to the marketing efforts of other entrepreneurs



THE ECONOMIC IMPACT

Viva La Horchata: Growth Through Every Pour

Maria Alvarez

Foundation Services Rendered:
Juntos Emprendemos, Advising

In 2024, Maria Alvarez stood behind her horchata cart at the Little Village farmers market, facing yet another day of unsold product. Her traditional recipe—rooted in her hometown of Guerrero, Mexico—carried the warmth of home and family. Yet despite her passion, Maria struggled to turn her dream into a sustainable business.

“I would cry every time I had to throw away my horchata,” she recalls. “It felt like I was pouring away a piece of myself.”

Everything changed the day she was introduced to the Foundation of Little Village’s Juntos Emprendemos program.

Through this culturally responsive entrepreneurship initiative, Maria gained the tools and confidence she needed to transform her passion into a thriving business. She learned how to market her product, engage with customers, and refine her brand. Most importantly,

she found a community that believed in her.

On October 9, 2024, Maria graduated from Juntos Emprendemos. As part of her capstone presentation, she shared her journey—honestly, emotionally, and without pretense. Her heartfelt story and entrepreneurial growth earned her first place among her cohort.

Today, Viva La Horchata is no longer just a dream—it’s a growing business. Maria continues to share the flavors of her heritage with the community, one cup at a time.

“I’m so grateful to the Foundation of Little Village,” Maria says. “Because of Juntos Emprendemos, I found my voice, my strength, and a path forward for my business.”

Maria’s story is one of more than 100 entrepreneurs supported in 2024 through our small business programming. Her success reflects the core of our mission: to uplift community talent and create pathways for economic self-determination.

Economic Impact:



Has seen remarkable growth, evolving from selling once a week at a local farmer’s market to operating seven days a week across multiple markets citywide



Their daily sales have increased from an average of \$30 to over \$300 per day



CULTURAL PRESERVATION

State Of Illinois Cultural District Designation



On behalf of the Little Village community, the Foundation of Little Village applied to – and was awarded – the Little Village Cultural District designation by the State of Illinois. The community will hold this historic designation for 10 years, which the Foundation will serve as the managing entity.



The Little Village Cultural District Designation will:

- Promote a distinct historic and cultural community
- Provide a focal point for celebrating and strengthening the unique cultural identity of the community
- Foster local cultural development and education
- Encourage the preservation and development of historic and culturally significant structures, traditions, and languages
- Encourage economic development and support entrepreneurship in the community
- Promote growth and opportunity without generating displacement or expanding inequality

Little Village Cultural District Council

To guide the vision, planning, and activation of the State-designated Little Village Cultural District, the Little Village Cultural District Council was established.

This council brings together a diverse group of respected and committed community stakeholders, united in their dedication to preserving, celebrating, and elevating the cultural and economic vitality of Little Village.

The Council is composed of:



Elected Officials who advocate for policies and funding that uplift the district and reflect the community's voice.



Local Businesses and Entrepreneurs who represent the vibrant commercial identity of Little Village and are essential to driving equitable economic development.



Community-Based Organizations that bring deep-rooted experience in education, arts, youth development, public safety, and civic engagement.

CORRIDOR REVITALIZATION

Xquina Incubator & Café

The Xquina Incubator & Café, a key component of the Xquina Business Ecosystem, is a 13,000-square-foot facility that will feature a business incubator, co-working space, café, and shared commercial kitchen. Originally built in the 1880s, the building is being restored, modernized and reintroduced as a spacious business incubator and inclusive community hub, which will honor its past by preserving the original façade and maintaining its place in the history of the community.

Key 2024 Milestones:



60%
COMPLETED

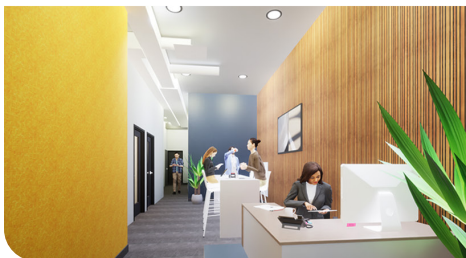
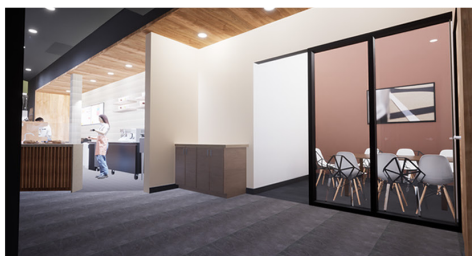


45%
MBE



5%
WBE

- Achieved 60% overall construction completion
- Replaced the building's steel infrastructure
- Construction officially begins following significant permitting delays



Haciendo Sueños Una Realidad: 1st Annual Fundraiser

On May 16, 2024, the Foundation of Little Village hosted its first fundraiser in support of the Xquina Incubator & Café. With over 90 attendees, the event brought together partners, prospective funders, board members, invited guests, and staff—creating a vibrant space for connection, collaboration, and shared commitment to the project's success.

This is just the beginning—many more exciting fundraising events to come!



CONCLUDING REMARKS

As we close this year’s chapter, we extend our heartfelt gratitude to our generous funders, dedicated community leaders, and the entire Little Village community. Your unwavering support fuels our mission and sustains the work we do every day.

This year, we proudly celebrate the inspiring journeys of our emerging entrepreneurs—visionaries whose resilience and ambition continue to light the way forward. Their trust in us to help turn their dreams into thriving businesses is both humbling and energizing.

Thank you for joining us on this mission. Together, we are building community wealth, preserving our vibrant culture, and revitalizing our corridor. With renewed purpose and collective strength, we look ahead to another year of growth, impact, and shared success in Little Village.

We invite you to become a partner and support our work.

2024 CORPORATE AND FOUNDATION GRANT PARTNERS:

- Builders Initiative
- CIBC
- City of Chicago, Business Affairs and Consumer Protection
- City of Chicago, Neighborhood Opportunity Fund
- City of Chicago, Department of Cultural Affairs & Special Events
- Old National Bank
- State of Illinois, Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity
- The Chicago Community Trust Fund for Equitable Business Growth We Rise Together
- The Coleman Foundation
- The Robert R. McCormick Foundation

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Neli Vazquez Rowland | Board Treasurer, President GOLZ, LLC.
Arabel Alva Rosales | President and CEO, AAR Tech
Jason Roberts | President, Advantage Chevy Bridgeview
Dolores Muñoz | Senior Vice President, Loop Capital Markets
Ambrocio González | Owner, La Catedral Café

TEAM MEMBERS



Kim Close
Executive Director



Diego Murillo
Chief of Staff



Greg Gutierrez
Program Director



Janet Lagunas
Program Manager



Paul Callejas
Client Service Manager



Gaston Linan
Access to Capital Manager



Ramiro J. Atristan-Carrión
Instructor



Roxana Delgado
Marketing Manager



Lisandra Martinez
Instructor

In 2024, the Foundation of Little Village was proud to welcome several new, talented individuals whose expertise and passion have helped drive our continued growth and impact. We extend our deepest gratitude to our entire staff for their exceptional dedication, tireless efforts, and unwavering commitment to our mission. Thanks to their hard work, we continue to uplift lives, strengthen our community, and inspire a brighter, more equitable future for Little Village and beyond.

PHOTO GALLERY





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