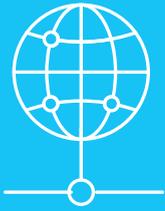




2024 Annual Report

www.worldchicago.org





Building Bridges Through Citizen Diplomacy

About Us

WorldChicago is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to the belief that global understanding begins at the local level. Through professional and youth exchange programs, we bring the world to Chicago—and share the best of Chicago with the world.

Our work is rooted in citizen diplomacy, the powerful idea that everyday people, not just government officials, can foster mutual respect and international cooperation. Whether it's a business roundtable in Bronzeville or a homestay in Humboldt Park, these personal connections spark lasting global partnerships and meaningful local impact.



OUR MISSION

To promote citizen diplomacy through programs that connect the Chicago community with the world. Through these efforts, WorldChicago helps advance national security, economic development, and social justice.

OUR VISION

To facilitate professional and personal interactions for international professional and youth leaders during official visits to Chicago through professional exchange programs; enhance respect and communication through international exchanges and alliances; and promote the City of Chicago and the State of Illinois as important centers of business and culture.

OUR VALUE

WorldChicago is a builder of global bridges that provide exchanges of ideas, perspectives, and programs that help make the world and Chicago—a better place.



“The nicest surprise that awaits you in Chicago are the people. The people are openminded, ready to share their knowledge and give you a hand to help you with your goals. WorldChicago is a program that can give you access to top level knowledge, respite friendships and best fun the city of Chicago can offer.”

- Marko, Founder, ML Ventures (Slovenia)

Message from our Executive Director

As we reflect on the achievements of 2024, I am deeply inspired by the extraordinary impact WorldChicago continues to make in advancing global understanding and elevating Chicago's role on the world stage. This past year, our programs have powerfully reinforced our mission: to promote citizen diplomacy by connecting the people of Chicago with global communities. Through these efforts, we contribute to national security, drive economic development, and advance social justice. Our enduring value—as builders of global bridges that foster the exchange of ideas, cultures, and perspectives—has never been more relevant.

Our unique vision is to facilitate meaningful professional and personal interactions for international professionals and emerging youth leaders during official visits to Chicago. We aim to enhance global respect and communication through vibrant exchanges and enduring alliances, while showcasing the City of Chicago and the State of Illinois as dynamic centers of business, innovation, and culture.

Through cornerstone initiatives like the International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP), the Young Transatlantic Innovation Leadership Initiative (YTILI), the Young Leaders of the Americas Initiative (YLA), and our Youth Diplomats program, WorldChicago has cultivated platforms for global dialogue, collaboration, and innovation. These programs have connected rising leaders from around the world with Chicago's civic, academic, and entrepreneurial ecosystems—while also sharing the rich diversity, values, and energy that make our city so distinctive.

The impact of this work is visible in the long-lasting relationships formed and the meaningful knowledge shared. By welcoming international visitors and integrating them into our local institutions and communities, we not only enrich their personal and professional growth—we also gain fresh insights and opportunities right here at home. This reciprocal exchange strengthens Chicago’s identity as a forward-thinking, inclusive, and globally engaged city.

This progress would not be possible without our citizen diplomats: the corporate partners, community organizations, dedicated volunteers, and generous donors who power our mission. Your commitment to international engagement and your willingness to say “yes” to meaningful connection are the fuel for our continued success. Together, we demonstrate how Chicago leads by example, building a more collaborative and compassionate world.



As we look toward the future, I am inspired by the possibilities and energized by the opportunities ahead. WorldChicago will continue to champion citizen diplomacy, support emerging global leaders, and amplify Chicago’s voice as a beacon of international partnership.

Thank you for being part of this journey.

With gratitude,

Jennifer Dixon
Executive Director, WorldChicago



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Program Coordinator



Jo Scaletty
NUPIP Fellow

Program Impact by the numbers

176

Organizations that have served as Citizen Diplomats by hosting Fellows, Professional Meetings, and/or Site Visits

14

Total Programs

423

Total Visitors/Participants

97

Countries Represented

9

Homestay Hosts

289

Total Nights Spent in Chicago

Thank you to our Supporters

- 1871
- 77 Flavors of Chicago
- Access Living
- ACLU of Illinois
- Adrienne Irmer
- Adroc
- Alliance Française de Chicago
- American Library Association
- Apparel Industry Board
- Argonne National Laboratory
- Ashburn Elementary School
- Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, Celeste Wallander
- AuraSense
- Better Government Association
- Bill Jarvis Migratory Bird Sanctuary
- Block Club Chicago
- Bronzeville Winery
- C2ST
- Carolyn's Krisps
- Casa de Cultura
- CASEL
- Che Rhymefest
- Chi Women Vote
- Chicago Area Accreditors Group
- Chicago Biomedical Consortium
- Chicago Council on Global Affairs
- Chicago Council on Science and Technology
- Chicago Cultural Center
- Chicago Event Management
- Chicago Furniture Bank
- Chicago Hearing Society, Anixter Center
- Chicago Mahogany Tours
- Chicago Mercantile Exchange (CME Group)
- Chicago Police Department
- Chicago Urban League
- Chicago Votes
- City Bureau
- City of Chicago
- City of Evanston
- Civilian Office of Police Accountability
- Coleman Center for Entrepreneurship
- College of DuPage
- Colonel Robert Hamilton
- Columbia College Chicago
- Commodities Futures Trading Commission
- Cook County Black Chamber of Commerce
- Cook County Commission on Human Rights
- Cradles to Crayons
- DC Central Kitchen
- Deeply Rooted Dance Theater
- DePaul University
- Economic Awareness Council (EAC)
- Educational Perspectives
- El Fuego del Sol
- Embassy of Bangladesh
- EMOS1
- Evergreen Climate Innovations
- Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory (Fermilab)
- Field Museum
- Financial Health Network
- Ford County Chronicle
- Forefront
- Future Founders
- George Washington University
- Georgian Militaries
- Georgian National Guard Best Warrior Competition
- Global Ties US
- Heartland Alliance International

- HIRE 360
- Honeycomb Project
- Illinois Housing Development Authority
- Illinois Institute of Technology
- Illinois International Port District (IIPD)
- Illinois Science and Technology Coalition
- Injustice Watch
- Innovare
- Institute for Policy and Civic Engagement, University of Illinois Chicago
- inTerract Consulting - Terra Winston
- Invisible Institute
- Japanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Chicago
- JETRO
- Kingdom Branding
- Kurthe Lampe Worldwide
- Learning Dimensions
- Legacy Express Trucking
- Livestock Exporter Association
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- Loyola University Chicago
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- Rosario Tech Law
- SEL Chicago
- Self Help Credit Union
- Senn High School
- Simmons Center for Global Chicago
- Simon Wiesenthal Center
- St. Augustine at Lewis University
- State of Illinois Human Rights Commission
- Stephanie Skora
- Success Junkie - Serita Love
- Susan Yates, ADR expert
- Teamsters Joint Local 25
- The Gray Matter Experience
- The Hatchery
- The Silver Room
- Transform Capital
- Transit Tees
- U.S. Attorney's Office, Northern District of Illinois
- U.S. Department of Justice Midwest Regional Office
- U.S. Georgia National Guard
- University of Illinois at Chicago
- United States Department of Agriculture
- University of Chicago
- Urban Gateways
- Urban Rivers
- US Department of State: Office of International Visitors
- WGN-TV
- Yollocalli
- Yonty Friesem, Columbia College Chicago

Program Impact on Chicago communities

“Fundamentally, this experience does what all one-on-one experiences with those different than ourselves do -- they break down stereotypes, decrease ignorance, and add to knowledge. Mark Twain said it better: “travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow mindedness.” Hosting is travel in reverse and works the same way!!...I also get to see the USA through fresh eyes.”

Kristin

Fellowship Host

*“We use the cultural competences we learn from interactions with our Fellows **to be better at serving the different communities in Chicago.**”*

Alexandra

Fellowship Host

*“Meeting folks from different nations, on a fairly unscripted and casual level, **allows for interchanges of views on all sorts of topics**, not just narrowly focused on one’s work. This is how we get to know folks who come from very different cultures and learn to appreciate their perspectives.”*

Robert Rosner

Site Visit/Content Expert/Presenter



“My involvement with WorldChicago has profoundly deepened my appreciation and understanding of other cultures. Through hosting fellows, participating in international panels, and traveling as a delegate, I’ve had the unique opportunity to engage with entrepreneurs and changemakers from around the world.

These experiences have helped me move beyond cultural stereotypes and gain a more nuanced, human-centered perspective on global challenges and opportunities.

I’ve learned that while our backgrounds may differ, our values often align. This has shaped how I approach collaboration, community-building, and problem-solving, both locally and globally.

This work matters because it demonstrates that diplomacy doesn’t just occur at the highest levels of government, but also takes place around dinner tables, in boardrooms, and through personal connections between individuals.”

Kristina Schneider
Fellowship Host

Professional Programming

AUSTRIA TO AMERICA



WorldChicago hosted the **Austria to America 8.0 Exchange Program (A2A 8.0)**, the U.S. Embassy Vienna's premier exchange program for young leaders. Between September 8-21 this year, 23 participants traveled to Chicago, IL, Columbus, OH, and Washington, D.C. to learn about all aspects of civil society, media as it relates to the political arena, and the U.S. political process.

Prior to their arrival, the participants engaged with local Chicago resources in virtual meetings where they were introduced to the U.S. political system and media advertising for political campaigns.

Kevin Lampe (Kurth Lampe Worldwide) and **Adrienne Irmer** (Illinois Institute of Technology) organized these virtual sessions and also acted as Subject Matter Experts for the Program.

At the end of the program, WorldChicago's Executive Director **Jennifer Dixon** and Program Officer **Julia Sosnivka** traveled to Vienna, Austria with **Stevie Valles** (Chicago Votes) and **Adrienne Irmer** to attend the A2A 8.0 Summit and close the program.



SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL)

Chicago is uniquely situated to cover the topic of **social and emotional learning (SEL)** with several higher education institutions leading research on SEL, as well the **Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)**, a leader in SEL in the United States. Programs like this are a strong match for the priorities of the City of Chicago as well as WorldChicago as it aligns with our Equity Policy.

The program in Chicago exposed participants to a diverse set of voices across neighborhoods throughout the city. Though many of the meetings took place in or near downtown, participants visited K-12 schools and universities in several neighborhoods around the city. Cultural activities gave participants in-depth perspectives on the histories of communities and their current successes and challenges.

In addition to the wealth of resources on the topic of SEL, participants enjoyed the walkability of Chicago and the wide range of cultural activities and parks near the hotel.



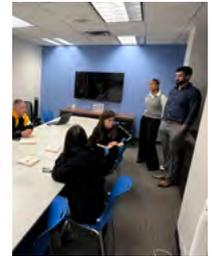
“This program reaffirmed our belief that when we exchange ideas and experiences, we strengthen not only our own work but the broader ecosystem we’re part of.”

Cecilia, Fellowship Host

Professional Programming

UKRAINIAN BUSINESS LEADERS (UBL PIE)

Ukrainian Business Leaders Promoting Innovation and Entrepreneurship (UBL PIE) is a three-week fellowship program through the U.S. Embassy in Ukraine for entrepreneurs. In March of 2024, WorldChicago welcomed four fellows that worked in areas of polyethylene packaging, coffee shops, retail distribution of appliances, and AR/VR software in educational spaces. While in Chicago, the fellows stayed with our homestay hosts, **Mary Carol Flynn** and **Bill Waddell**. Thank you to our homestay hosts and fellowship hosts at **mHub**, **Momentum Coffee**, **Fuego del Sol**, and the **Illinois Institute of Technology** for supporting the UBL PIE Program.



UZBEKISTAN BUSINESS LEADERS (UBL)

The **Uzbekistan Business Leaders (UBL)** professional exchange program is a U.S. Embassy in Uzbekistan program for emerging business persons, entrepreneurs and innovation leaders from Uzbekistan who are committed to driving economic development through leadership and sound business practices. In summer 2024, WorldChicago welcomed Uzbekistan Business Leader, **Sitora Rakhmonova**. We are thankful to fellowship host **Kingdom Branding**, **DePaul University – Coleman Entrepreneurship Center**, **Kevin Lampe – mHub**, **Roll Cut Studios** and homestay host **Janet Austin** for making the fellowship a success.



YOUNG LEADERS OF THE AMERICAS INITIATIVE (YLAI)



In March 2024, WorldChicago welcomed 14 entrepreneurs from 12 countries through the **Young Leaders of the Americas Initiative (YLAI)**. YLAI was established in 2015 by the Obama Administration under the Y-Initiatives, welcoming over 280 entrepreneurs from the Western Hemisphere to participate in a 4-week fellowship. This year, the fellows came from Argentina, Barbados, Bolivia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Trinidad and Tobago, and Venezuela.

These entrepreneurs represented business sectors of arts and culture, energy and environment, community development, data analysis and IT, education, electronics and technology, artisan products, business services, food and beverage, and fashion.

“

“If Chicago wants to be a player on a global scale, WorldChicago programs expose people from all over the world to what a great city this is. The Midwest isn’t just “flyover country” in our visitors’ eyes. They see Chicago as vibrant and cultural, and many have told me it’s their favorite stop during their US visit.”

Mike, Site Visit/Content Expert/Presenter

Professional Programming

INTERNATIONAL VISITOR LEADERSHIP PROGRAM (IVLP)

WorldChicago hosts a significant portion of visitors through the U.S. Department of State's International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP), which brings professional exchange participants from around the world to the U.S. to build relationships and share best practices. Through IVLP, WorldChicago connects these visitors with local nonprofit, business, and civic leaders to foster meaningful collaboration and cross-cultural dialogue. In 2024, the IVLP program included:

25

Total Number
of Projects

141

Total Number
of Participants

43

Total Number
of Countries





IVLP PROJECT HIGHLIGHT:

“HIDDEN NO MORE” - EMPOWERING WOMEN LEADERS IN STEM

In 2022, WorldChicago hosted the final city program for the U.S. Department of State’s IVLP initiative, *Hidden No More: Empowering Women Leaders in STEM*. Inspired by the film *Hidden Figures*, this initiative, launched in 2017, brought together international women leaders in STEM to overcome barriers to their advancement and establish a global network of professional support.

WorldChicago welcomed 22 participants from 22 countries. Throughout their visit, participants engaged with local experts, institutions such as Northwestern University and Fermilab, and community organizations, exploring ways to advance women and girls in STEM education and careers. The program emphasized storytelling, cross-cultural collaboration, and practical approaches to gender equity in science and technology, culminating in a closing event in partnership with the Chicago Council on Science and Technology (C2ST).

Professional Programming

YOUNG TRANSATLANTIC INNOVATION LEADERSHIP (YTILI)

This year marked the successful culmination of the **Young Transatlantic Innovation Leadership Initiative (YTILI) Fellowship program**, a transformative three-year grant that WorldChicago proudly implemented with the steadfast support of our organizational peers across the United States. Through this initiative, we welcomed 60 dynamic entrepreneurs from 45 countries to the U.S. each year, fostering cross-cultural exchange and empowering the next generation of global business leaders.

The YTILI program would not have been possible without the invaluable contributions of our partners. We extend our deepest appreciation to the **DePaul University Coleman Entrepreneurship Center**, who graciously served as our opening program host each year, setting the stage for a meaningful and impactful experience. We are equally grateful to George Washington University for hosting the closing ceremonies, providing a fitting conclusion to each cohort's journey.

We also wish to recognize the **Citizen Diplomat Fellowship** hosts across eight cities—including Chicago—whose commitment and mentorship were instrumental in supporting our entrepreneurs during their professional fellowships. Their dedication ensured that each participant gained not only practical business insights but also lasting connections within the American entrepreneurial ecosystem.

As we reflect on the past three years, we celebrate the collective achievements and enduring partnerships that have made this program a resounding success. Thank you to everyone who contributed to this remarkable journey.



Youth Diplomats

In 2024, WorldChicago selected 38 students from Chicago and the Chicagoland area for the **Youth Diplomats Program**, an 8-month experiential learning program focused on citizen diplomacy, international affairs, and leadership skills development. From January to August, the Youth Diplomats explored international cooperation through museum exhibits, learned about careers in international affairs, participated in volunteering, and discovered more of what Chicago has to offer. During the program, 10 students were selected to travel on the diplomacy trip to Washington, D.C. to learn about foreign affairs through the Department of State, foreign embassies, state representative offices, and nonprofits. The 10 participants even practiced their diplomacy skills through the National Museum of American Diplomacy's diplomacy simulation.

Through cornerstone initiatives like the **International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP)**, the **Young Transatlantic Innovation Leadership Initiative (YTILI)**, the **Young Leaders of the Americas Initiative (YLAI)**, and our **Youth Diplomats** program, WorldChicago has cultivated platforms for global dialogue, collaboration, and innovation. These programs have connected rising leaders from around the world with Chicago's civic, academic, and entrepreneurial ecosystems—while also sharing the rich diversity, values, and energy that make our city so distinctive.





What is Citizen Diplomacy?

The practice of Citizen Diplomacy encourages everyday citizens to shape the world of foreign affairs through their daily interactions with one another. Be it through engaging in conversations around international relations, setting a place at the dinner table for an exchange participant, or even just chatting about your lived experiences (and hearing others share their own), everyone can be a Citizen Diplomat. WorldChicago is proud to support Citizen Diplomacy through a variety of professional and personal exchanges, in addition to our youth programming, that bring Chicago closer to the rest of the world - one handshake at a time.

We are all contributors to a global community and each of us has the power to make a positive impact on the world. Every connection we have, every bit of knowledge we share, every moment of embracing community - that is what makes us all Citizen Diplomats, working to make the world a better place.





Spring Diplomacy Luncheon

The 2024 Spring Diplomacy Luncheon featured keynote speaker **Monica Eng** and her new book, “**Made in Chicago: Stories Behind 30 Great Hometown Bites.**” Attendees engaged in a conversation that took them on a journey behind Chicago’s iconic culinary creations as Axios reporter Monica Eng delved into her enlightening book. Everyone delighted in the fusion of food and diplomacy, where cultural connections flourish and conversations bloom at the dinner table (or in this case, lunch table). The event was truly a flavorful exploration of Chicago’s rich food history and gathering tales to share with newfound friends.

FUNDRAISING CONTRIBUTIONS SUPPORTED

WorldChicago’s Youth Diplomats Program: Youth Diplomats empowers students across Chicago to see their global identity, local impact, and potential career paths through engaging in civic-minded and international affairs workshops.

Local Community Partnerships: By providing support for small businesses and minority-owned businesses that may not otherwise have the capacity to partner with programs with international delegates, WorldChicago can engage locally and help the world

Frameworks, Foundations, and Outreach: By engaging in systemically disinvested communities to serve as cultural ambassadors regardless of their socio-economic status; funds will also provide general operating support needed to organize a wide variety of community events and workshops, enhance educational tools and resources to engage all of Chicago through meaningful programming that increases mutual understanding locally and globally.

Year End Giving Campaign

“Expanding Horizons, Empowering Youth”

As we look to 2025 and beyond, WorldChicago has a mission to connect Chicagoans to global perspectives through cultural exchanges, leadership programs, and youth initiatives. **Through these efforts, WorldChicago helps advance national security, economic development, and social justice.**

This year, we aimed to make our programs accessible to all 77 of Chicago’s neighborhoods with a goal to raise \$77,000 by year-end.

WorldChicago is proud to work with local community leaders, schools, and organizations to bring our programs to every neighborhood. With a special focus on out-of-school time youth programming, we are creating meaningful international connections for Chicago’s youth, helping them develop leadership skills and broadening their global understanding.

Thanks to your support and generosity, we have been able to collaborate with more Chicago Public Schools than ever before, helping to bring our vision to reality and expanding our impact throughout all of our Chicago communities.



How to Help

SUPPORT WORLDCHICAGO

Your unrestricted gift helps WorldChicago continue to be a builder of global bridges that provide exchanges of ideas, perspectives, and programs that help make the world, and Chicago, a better place. Visit WorldChicago.org or contact us to make a contribution.

Get Involved

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Have an idea for a program, event, or other initiative? Get involved!

WorldChicago is always looking for new volunteers, hosts, and program partners.

Contact info@worldchicago.org to see how we might work together.

CONNECT WITH US



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