TECH EQUITY NETWORK

FORMING A COUNCIL TO CREATE AND AMPLIFY OPPORTUNITIES FOR A MORE INCLUSIVE TECH INDUSTRY

GET CITIES

WHAT IS THE
TECH EQUITY NETWORK (TEN)?

The Tech Equity Network (TEN), created by GET Cities Chicago, is a council of Chicago-based organizations that create and amplify city-wide opportunities to set a course towards a more inclusive tech workforce, with a focus on gender and race. The network's purpose is to better align Chicago's tech ecosystem with the goal of sharing learnings, best practices, and resources in order to accelerate diversity, equity, and inclusion in the industry.

Before TEN, many organizations supporting historically excluded individuals and groups in Chicago's tech ecosystem operated in silos, unaware of each other's work. TEN solved this issue by convening these organizations to operate as a more effective and collaborative collective.

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

WHY REPLICATE THE TEN?

1 **Address Inequities on a Systemic Level**

The tech industry as a whole often fails to equitably hire, promote, and retain historically excluded individuals and groups. Replicating TEN can help address these disparities more holistically by fostering collaboration and resource-sharing among a variety of tech-focused organizations across a target location.

2 **Build Community**

TEN acts as a city-wide "employee resource group," providing a community space for marginalized tech professionals beyond what is offered at their company.

3 **Accelerate Impact**

By bringing together various stakeholders, TEN accelerates collective action to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in the tech workforce.

HOW TO CREATE YOUR OWN TEN

PHASE 1: DEFINE PROBLEM AND OBJECTIVES

Determine the specific DEI-related challenges in your unique tech ecosystem. For TEN, the challenge that the group is working to address is the lack of equitable hiring and retention for marginalized genders and BIPOC technologists in Chicago's tech industry.

Establish objectives such as increasing diversity in hiring, improving retention, and fostering a supportive community. TEN, for example, focused on hiring, career journeys and improving the effectiveness of support programs for marginalized tech professionals.

Determine participation criteria and research different organizations who are helping solve these challenges and would be a good fit for the working group.

Ensure that participating organizations are committed to DEI, willing to share resources and data, and are based in the target location.

Invite suitable organizations to join the network.

PHASE 2: CONVENE ECOSYSTEM PARTNERS

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

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

PHASE 3: DEVELOP NETWORK INFRASTRUCTURE

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

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

Set regular meetings: Create a timeline for the year and schedule consistent meeting times to maintain solid engagement. TEN, for instance, met monthly on the first Thursday.

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

PHASE 4: PLAN AND EXECUTE MEETINGS

Prepare Meeting Agendas: Schedule pre-meeting internal planning sessions to develop relevant and engaging meeting agendas and materials.

Community Announcements: Dedicate time at each meeting for members to share updates, upcoming events, and opportunities.

Post-Meeting Follow-Ups: Send follow-up emails summarizing action items and sharing community announcements and other materials.

Feedback and Improvement: Create a safe space for individuals to share experiences and suggestions and regularly solicit feedback through surveys and one-on-one debriefs to continuously improve the network.

PHASE 5: FACILITATE COLLABORATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Host Events: Organize events to address specific inequities and bring the community together in person. For example, our TEN hosted GET Exploration Day, a flagship workforce event designed to support early-career technologists from historically excluded communities. This half-day conference helped to better equip and inform marginalized technologists to enter and be competitive in hiring pipelines through themed discussions, games, networking, and connection to a growing and vibrant community of peers, organizations, companies, affinity groups and supporters.

Encourage Partnerships: Foster opportunities for members to independently collaborate on projects and initiatives among themselves. For example, the Mentorship Learning Lab (MLL) is a collaborative initiative designed to bring together different mentorship organizations in Chicago's tech industry to learn from one another, strengthen their understanding of tech mentorship programs for historically excluded individuals and groups, identify challenges, and develop a funded initiative to improve these programs that each member will work on during their time in the lab.

MEASURING SUCCESS

1 TEN has grown into a 24 participant group with 15 member organizations.

2 TEN has hosted three GET Exploration Day events with its inaugural virtual event in 2021 that engaged 51 students and early career technologists. In 2022 and 2023, the event expanded to an in-person half day unconference style event with 158 students and early career technologists (representing 51 unique companies), and 12 Chicago-based workforce partners from TEN organizations in 2022 and 99 participants and 18 individuals from TEN organizations in 2023.

3 TEN has conducted six Site Visits with corporate partners with the goal of connecting companies and diverse technologists through an on-site experience at a corporate office. These Site Visits allow for candid conversations where participants learn about potential employment opportunities and how different companies work to ensure diverse technologists are supported and included.

CONCLUSION

Replicating the **Tech Equity Network** can significantly enhance DEI efforts in your unique tech ecosystem. TEN members attest that the network has afforded greater opportunities for connection, collaboration, and resource-sharing, creating a sense of community over competition and tangibly moving the needle toward equity in tech.

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