



# CREATING ECONOMIC EQUITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE IN LITTLE VILLAGE

**Centro de Solidaridad Mi Villita: A collaborative of environmental justice and community organizations working to increase economic empowerment, racial equity, and food access in Little Village—impacting (hundreds of) thousands of Chicagoans.**

Our collaborative of environmental justice and community organizations seeks to increase economic empowerment in Little Village through a vibrant community hub focused on creating a solidarity economy. Through a robust partnership between the Little Village Environmental Justice Organization (LVEJO) and Delta Institute (Delta), our initiative will create a new community hub, called the **Centro de Solidaridad Mi Villita**, at 2358 S. Whipple that will provide the local neighborhood with the means to create a robust local economy based on solidarity and self-determination.

Our belief is that solidarity economies must emerge and focus on inclusive democracy, with alignment between municipal planners and policymakers with Environmental Justice (EJ) communities to address environmental hazards and resulting economic and health disparities in communities of color. Marginalized communities must have resources and culturally relevant opportunities to participate in policy and revitalization processes that reverse environmental degradation, wealth inequity, and resident displacement. Our programmatic approach

builds on these visions to create a solidarity economy that keeps dollars local and displacement at bay.

## **Our Approach and Proposed Services**

The Whipple site—currently a deteriorating former Chicago Fire Department engine house—will transform into a multi-use community hub to create a solidarity economy through three programmatic pillars: **La COMIDA (Food)**, **EI CLIMA (Climate)**, and **La CULTURA (Culture)**.

Our “Audacious Goals” (beyond 2030) within our three programmatic pillars entail:

Within La COMIDA, we seek to create a closed loop sustainable food economy in Little Village supporting all parts of the food chain which ties into existing programs and elevates opportunities for local food businesses—thus breaking cyclical poverty through stabilized and increased household revenue and improving health outcomes as more locally produced and health-some food is more readily available.

Within EI CLIMA, we seek to increase the employment rate and average income of Little Village through the



creation of a bilingual Workforce Development Agency to anchor Little Village energy democracy, while expanding energy independence and renewable energy generated throughout the neighborhood.

Within La CULTURA, the preservation and enhancement of local artists through multi-faceted support and educational programming to amplify a thriving neighborhood identity, with a unified voice that creates policies to improve the health and vitality of residents and offer communal self-determination through arts and environmental justice activism.

**Partnership between LVEJO and Delta Institute will offer more than 100,000 Chicagoans an inclusive/democratic economy. We seek equitable upward mobility in a community beset by environmental racism and systemic injustice—while reinforcing community voice through cultural solidarity.**

### **Community Need**

47% of Little Village's population is estimated to be foreign-born. Little Village is also one of the densest Chicago communities, with 17,000 people living per square mile. Statistics from the US Census Bureau tracking between 2011-2015 showed increasing poverty in Little Village, with 13.3% of residents living at 50% below the federal poverty line, 36.5% of residents living at 100% below the poverty line, and 33.9% of residents living at 100-199% below the poverty line. The City of Chicago's Health and Human Services data reports a 96th percentile ranking for South Lawndale on the economic Hardship Index, indicating that South Lawndale (including Little

Village) experiences economic hardship worse than 96% of Chicago's other community areas. Little Village is also an environmental justice community that is overburdened by toxic pollution, located adjacent to the third largest industrial corridor in Chicago. The neighborhood is a prime example of how traditional urban planning and economic development practices have been harmful to communities of color, who far too often bear disproportionate pollution burden and lower local economic investment while being excluded from planning.

### **Our Partnership History and Capacity**

With the goal of promoting economic development, revitalization and environmental justice in the community, Delta and LVEJO initiated a two-year partnership in 2013 to create the Little Village Vacant Property and Brownfield Redevelopment Strategy for redevelopment of brownfields—which directly leads and informs our partnership to revitalize 2358 S. Whipple. Learn more about our organizations by visiting our websites:

**Our efforts to create a solidarity economy in Little Village—while investing in hundreds of local entrepreneurs—is a finalist for the inaugural Chicago Prize, an initiative of the Pritzker-Traubert Foundation.**

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