UNITED WAY OF METRO CHICAGO
NEIGHBORHOOD NETWORK INITIATIVE




# AUSTIN NEIGHBORHOOD NETWORK

## OUR NEIGHBORHOOD

The Austin Neighborhood Network was formed in 2010 after a group of like-minded community leaders, identifying as Austin Coming Together (ACT), joined forces to discuss how to better coordinate efforts to create systemic change in their community. In 2019, in partnership with United Way, ACT released Austin Forward. Together., a community-led quality-of-life plan for creating a thriving Austin.

Austin was once considered a country village. By 1950, Austin had grown into a dense urban neighborhood—featuring an advanced streetcar system, architecturally significant churches, and the noted Columbus Park. Austin's demographic profile began shifting in the late 1960s. By the 1980s, Austin experienced housing disinvestment, vacancy, and demolition, as well as loss of jobs and commerce as its white population moved to the suburbs and to Chicago's Northwest Side.Today, Austin is a predominantly Black community whose residents are joining forces to promote safety and trust in their neighborhood.

### LEAD AGENCY

Austin Coming Together

AUSTIN COMING TOGETHER

AustinComingTogether.org

### COMMUNITY VISION

Create a thriving Austin community

### BUILDING STRONGER COMMUNITIES: A DUAL APPROACH IN AUSTIN

- Food
- Stable Housing
- Individual Health and Wellness




RESPONDING TO IMMEDIATE BASIC NEEDS OF Austin Residents

BUILDING NEIGHBORHOOD SYSTEMS STRONGER IN Austin



- Early Learning
- Safe Neighborhoods
- Living Wage Careers

# NEIGHBORHOOD NETWORK IN ACTION

Austin Forward. Together. is Austin's community-led quality-of-life plan, created to guide long-term change across seven issues:

***Community Narrative • Economic Development • Education • Housing • Public Safety • Youth Empowerment • Civic Engagement***

In 2024, ACT convened community leaders to identify where coordinated action could make progress across the quality-of-life plan issue areas. That process identified 10 community projects around which ACT is building community-led coalitions. Together, these projects form the Austin Forward. Together. Highlighted Agenda and now guide ACT's organizing work.

As Austin's backbone organization, ACT convenes leaders, coordinates partners, connects resources, and aligns organizations around community priorities. Through ACT's Hub team and its network of providers, ACT also helps residents navigate and access the services, programs, and opportunities created through this collective work.



## COLLECTIVE IMPACT IN AUSTIN

- **10 tangible projects** focused into the AFT Highlighted Agenda, identified and led by Austin residents.
- **45 community leaders** help guide the coalition's priorities and strategies.
- **100+ partner organizations** engaged in furthering the impact in Austin
- **$150 million+** in community investment has been attracted to Austin through the collective efforts of community leaders, partners, and supporters since 2019.

The 10 Highlighted Agenda projects are advancing work related to housing, education, food access and ecosystem, workforce development, neighborhood safety, mental health, commercial corridors, restorative justice, youth power, and authentic narrative.



## COALITIONS HIGHLIGHTS

**The Aspire Center for Workforce Development: A Community Asset Reclaimed**
Community organizing and cross-sector partnership transformed the closed Emmet School into the $45+ million Aspire Center for Workforce Innovation, supported by United Way's largest investment to date and a broad network of public, corporate, and philanthropic partners.

**Forty Acres: Creating a Stronger Food Ecosystem**
Through Austin Eats, ACT has helped strengthen the network of organizations, businesses, and community leaders working to improve Austin's food ecosystem. In 2025, that work reached a major milestone with the opening of Forty Acres Fresh Market, bringing a permanent, full-service, locally-owned grocery store to Austin.

> *"United Way's impact in Austin extends far beyond financial investment. Through supporting the community's plan and building genuine relationships with residents, non-profits, philanthropy, and corporations, United Way has been a critical partner moving Austin's shared vision forward.*



**DARNELL SHIELDS**
**Executive Director,**
Austin Coming Together

**JOIN US!** Together, we can build neighborhoods like Austin stronger. Direct your United Way gift to **"Neighborhood Networks"** to be a part of this critical strategy. Learn more at LIVEUNITEDchicago.org/neighborhood-networks

*Updated September 16, 2026*