

2025

Chicago's Co-Governance Framework



Acknowledgment

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Introduction

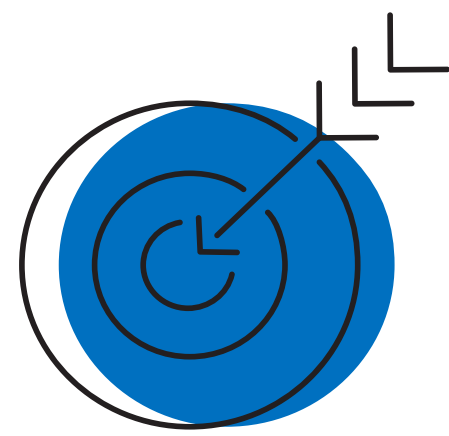
“The power of co-governance lies in the potential of bringing together the best of local knowledge, community wisdom, and government action, ensuring that every Chicagoan plays a role in shaping the future of the city. It emphasizes shared responsibility, where everyone, from those working within the bricks of City Hall to the folks living on the blocks of the neighborhoods, is accountable for driving meaningful, sustainable, and equitable progress.” - Mark Anthony Florido, Co-governance Steering Committee.

Vision

We envision a future where all Chicagoans are able to regularly and meaningfully help shape the decisions that impact their lives. This extends far beyond election cycles. We are committed to a model of governing that empowers all communities, especially those directly harmed by systemic inequities, to actively engage in policymaking and make decisions that impact their lives. Through power-sharing and increased civic knowledge, we aim to create a local democracy where everyone understands how the system works, believes their voice matters, and feels equipped to drive change. This is one step toward a future where community assemblies, dismantled outdated structures, and strengthened civic trust pave the way for a more equitable, responsive, and resilient city. Together, we are building a local participatory democracy that holds leaders accountable, reflects the diverse needs of Chicago, and fosters a just future that makes everyone's life better.



Our Goals



Near Term

Create and adopt a definition and framework of co-governance

Strengthen the conditions that would enable effective and equitable co-governance practices to take root

Test the impact of co-governance on important equity challenges

Long Term

Increase civic participation & engagement

Repair civic trauma & build civic trust

Encourage community power

Foster authentic accountability

Address systemic inequities

Definition

Co-governance is a problem-solving structure in which community members directly impacted by systemic racism and economic inequity work side-by-side with government representatives to share decision-making power and accountability for creating stronger policies, programs, and practices.



Values

To bring this definition to life, we must embody the following values and commitments.

Value

We commit to Unlearning...

We Commit to Embracing...

Power-Sharing

Imbalanced power dynamics where government members present predetermined solutions to communities.

Shared decision-making between government and community representatives who are accountable to communities directly impacted by the issues at hand.

One organization speaking for and representing all community members.

Communities as experts in their experiences and providing the resources to invest in their ability to organize and share that knowledge as a critical part of decision-making.

Civic Trust

Practices that contribute to civic trauma, where people disengage from government due to repeated experiences of exclusion, neglect, or unfulfilled commitments.

Strategies that rebuild civic trust by strengthening the systems that allow those most impacted by issues to shape solutions and publicly share progress.

Values

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Value

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**Mutual
Accountability**

Blaming communities for conditions caused and perpetuated by failed systems and disinvestment.

Collective responsibility for creating concrete, long-term strategies and implementation plans that address systemic racism and economic inequities.

Over-reliance on government alone to generate solutions to issues that communities are facing.

Holding each other accountable for the progress and outcomes we set out to achieve.

**Tangible
Outcomes**

A practice of one-directional engagement that leads to inaction, retrenchment, and lack of transparency.

Creating tangible outcomes that improve people's lives and fulfill our commitments.

Ongoing action that is not limited to a period of decision-making or an election.

Values

To bring this definition to life, we must embody the following values and commitments.

Value

Civic Education

We commit to Unlearning...

A culture of information scarcity that hinders effective engagement and solution-building.

We Commit to Embracing...

Our responsibility to educate each other:
Government representatives will educate community partners on city structures, processes, policies, and legal constraints so that people know how government works and can actively participate;

Communities will educate government members about their needs and the tools and resources that would have a meaningful impact.

Transparency and Broad Participation

Fears of sharing our challenges and constraints that block us from getting support and benefiting from collective wisdom and resources.

Going beyond engaging representatives of those most impacted.

Engaging directly with and providing clear, accessible updates to Chicagoans directly harmed by the issues we are addressing.

Equitable Pathways to Co-Governance

We believe that the following elements are needed to create an environment that is ripe for an equitable, collaborative governance process to take root.

Theme:

Accessible, neighborhood-centered initial engagement

Pathway

- Get proximate by locating decision-making opportunities in the neighborhoods/communities that are most impacted by the policy, program, or initiative, not just downtown.
- Ensure engagement opportunities are at relevant times of the day for the audience you seek to engage (e.g., after 5 pm for working adults) and held at accessible locations (e.g., ADA-compliant)
- Ensure there are dedicated spaces to gather for regular co-governance meetings. Provide resources to hold meetings and conversations in those spaces (e.g., materials, interpretation services, and technological support) to enable inclusive participation.
- Engage communities in ways that are relevant to their lives to increase interest and participation in activities, including, but not limited to newsletters, online updates, social media engagement, and block-by-block engagement.
- Use jargon-free language that is accessible to people who speak languages other than English and to people of all ages and education levels.

Equitable Pathways to Co-Governance

We believe that the following elements are needed to create an environment that is ripe for an equitable, collaborative governance process to take root.

Theme:

Establish Clear Expectations and Goals

◆ Pathway

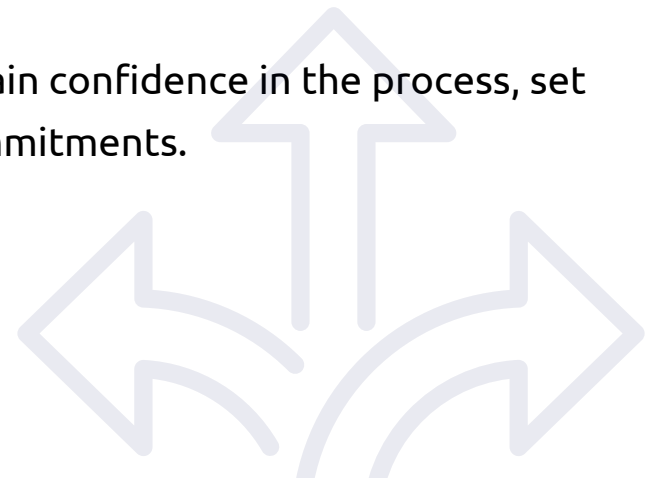
- Ensure that all parties understand the issues, processes, and goals at the outset.
- Provide education and resources to support informed participation.

Theme:

Ensure Timely Implementation and Follow-Ups

◆ Pathway

- Recognize that delays can frustrate and erode trust. To maintain confidence in the process, set clear timelines, provide regular updates, and follow up on commitments.



Equitable Pathways to Co-Governance

We believe that the following elements are needed to create an environment that is ripe for an equitable, collaborative governance process to take root.

Theme:

Transparency and accountability

Pathway

- Set clear agreements on who is responsible for making decisions and how those decisions will be made to promote transparency and accountability.
- Evaluate co-governance outcomes and processes by implementing practices for collective oversight, accountability, and reporting.
- Establish clear timelines and follow-ups while also preparing to be flexible in navigating delays and unexpected challenges that could undermine trust.



Closing

This framework is meant to be one tool of many that will emerge as we embark on a collective journey of building a Chicago where we all have power and can thrive.



