



CITY OF CHICAGO • OFFICE OF THE MAYOR



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**MAYOR LIGHTFOOT JOINS MICROSOFT LEADERSHIP TO ANNOUNCE ACCELERATE CHICAGO AIMED AT TACKLING UNEMPLOYMENT IN THE CITY WITH NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR UNDERSERVED COMMUNITIES**

*Coalition of public and private partnerships to address Chicago's needs for economic growth and jobs through digital skilling.*

**CHICAGO** –Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot and Microsoft Corp., in collaboration with corporate, learning and community partners, today announced the launch of Accelerate Chicago. The program aims to reach 300,000 Chicago residents to provide a pathway from skilling to employment for community members to bridge the digital skills divide and route people to diverse and equitable hiring and re-employment opportunities. Job seekers in Chicago can start their journey toward their career reinvigoration today, with programs, events, and opportunities available now at [microsoft.com/accelerateskills](https://microsoft.com/accelerateskills).

"As Chicago builds its economy back in the wake of COVID-19," said Deb Cupp, President of Microsoft U.S. "the Accelerate program expands economic opportunity and provides the skills needed to support an inclusive, equitable recovery. We're proud to work with our civic, learning, and corporate partners to bring this program to Chicago."

"Especially given the socioeconomic fallout of this crisis, we have been laser-focused on identifying and pursuing initiatives that will uplift our residents and ensure our city's equitable post-pandemic recovery," said Chicago Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot. "Bridging the digital divide and creating good-paying, sustainable jobs for people to take advantage of are necessary steps we must complete in order to fulfill this obligation. Accelerate Chicago will help do this and more, and I am grateful to Microsoft and its partners for investing in the future success of our residents, their communities and our entire city."

As digital capabilities rapidly progress, digital skills across local communities must keep pace. The Accelerate program brings together a unique set of public and private partnerships specific to Chicago to unlock new economic opportunities and create a local pipeline that empowers individuals both to learn skills for high-demand jobs and support connection to hiring opportunities. Accelerate is fundamentally different from other



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skilling initiatives as the model is based on an ecosystem partnership that provides upskilling, re-skilling, and cross-skilling for in-demand jobs and a path to employment that supports their careers long term. Together, we are establishing a sustainable system that generates economic and community impact, targeted to community members susceptible to job displacement and unemployment:

- Community partners, including Chicago Westside NAACP, Metro Edge, MxD, P33, Quilt Corp, World Business Chicago, and Zimney will help mobilize the community with the deep understanding of the local needs and connecting those who can benefit most from increased digital equity and opportunities to get back to work.
- Learning partners, including Dream Hustle Code, General Assembly, Goodwill Industries International, i.c.stars, Per Scholas, Springboard, Upwardly Global, Year Up, will help deliver the curriculum and drive delivery and execution of the skilling and credentials programs to provide tailored digital training that empowers job seekers for the next step in their career.
- Microsoft is providing resources for mobilization globally, free courses across Microsoft Learn and LinkedIn aligned to the top 10 most in demand jobs and working to help 250,000 companies make a skills-based hire this year with LinkedIn.

The initiative supports the needs of Chicago residents impacted by the global pandemic and racial inequities in access to education. Chicago, like other cities, faces an increased unemployment rate, and has a large population tied to COVID-19-impacted industries such as manufacturing, financial services, transportation, and professional services in the region. Expanding access to digital skills is a critical first step in improving employability to help build local economic recovery, especially for the people hardest hit by job losses. The Accelerate Chicago program is designed to benefit those students and service workers with low digital skills, in addition to those with moderate or high digital skills (the existing digitally fluent population) who could benefit from upskilling and cross-skilling. The result is a broad offering that works to address the needs of people who require digital skills to stay competitive and empower them to seize the employment opportunities of the future. Accelerate Chicago is the latest U.S. implementation of Microsoft's global skills initiative, an ambitious plan to help people worldwide acquire new digital skills and furthers recent commitments from Microsoft and LinkedIn to help 250,000 companies make a skills-based hire in 2021. More information can be found [here](#).

### **Perspectives From Accelerate Chicago Member Organizations**

“While digital transformation in business has been well underway for years, the pandemic accelerated this growth towards digital-first solutions and platforms,” said Michael Fassnacht, President and Chief Executive Officer of World Business Chicago and Chief Marketing Officer for the City of Chicago. “The digital divide for many of our residents has



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been exacerbated especially over the last 18 months. This is why it's so exciting that Microsoft's Accelerate Chicago program will help close the digital skills gap in communities often left behind by technological progress."

### Learning Partners

"There is a clear and growing need for digital skills in today's workforce, but the supply and demand that we're seeing in the labor market is simply not matching up," said Lisa Lewin, chief executive officer at General Assembly. "Despite the fact that nearly 10 million Americans are still out of work, companies everywhere are scrambling to find the talent they need — oftentimes because there aren't enough skilled workers to fill in the gaps. To jumpstart our economic recovery, it's more important than ever that we come together as educators, businesses, policymakers and community leaders to address this head on. General Assembly could not be more excited to collaborate with Microsoft and its partners in Chicago to make that possible through our training."

"Digital skills are the price of entry for many jobs, and employers are increasingly demanding them. When all people have access to digital training, opportunities open up and our society becomes more equitable. Today, this need for access is particularly acute as the pandemic has had an outsized impact on people of color, people without a college degree and people with lower levels of income," said Steven C. Preston, president and CEO of Goodwill Industries International. "Microsoft understands the impact of empowering people with essential skills. The employer partnerships created by Accelerate will help individuals turn the promise of newly acquired skills into the reality of a brighter future."

"Through Accelerate Chicago, Microsoft's support is helping i.c.stars reach more deeply into underserved communities and provide a pathway for a tech career," said i.c.stars president and co-founder Sandee Kastrul

"Upwardly Global is thrilled to partner with Microsoft in Accelerate Chicago. Now more than ever, we must work to uplift and train a diverse and inclusive workforce to ensure they're meeting the needs of the current labor market," said Jina Krause-Vilmar, President & CEO of Upwardly Global. "It's no secret that workers from underrepresented groups offer skills and resilience to our workforce—all assets needed to catalyze our economic rebound. Our hope is that Accelerate Chicago becomes a model for digital workforce training—and one that gives jobseekers the skills needed to thrive."

### Community Partners

"MxD is proud to support Accelerate Chicago through its manufacturing workforce initiatives and longstanding partnership with Microsoft," said Chandra Brown, CEO of MxD, the nation's digital manufacturing and cybersecurity institute. "From middle and high



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school curricula through apprenticeships and targeted trainings, MxD helps build a resilient, post-pandemic digital manufacturing workforce across the United States, with an emphasis on creating opportunities for underserved populations such as veterans, inner-city and rural communities, and people with disabilities.”

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**About Microsoft**

Microsoft (Nasdaq “MSFT” @microsoft) enables digital transformation for the era of an intelligent cloud and an intelligent edge. Its mission is to empower every person and every organization on the planet to achieve more.

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