

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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## **Latino Policy Forum Announces 2024 Multicultural Leadership Academy Cohort**

**“This cohort is a shining example of what we don’t always see but is certainly there: Black and Latino people eager to work together, to tear down barriers, and build mutual understanding, solidarity, and power.”**

**CHICAGO, IL** — Today, the Latino Policy Forum announced the 2024 cohort of the Multicultural Leadership Academy, a program that every year, brings together 24 Black and Latino community leaders who together work to build cross-cultural understanding and cooperation. This year’s group joins a vast network of committed leaders who continue to work together to make a positive impact in their communities and throughout Chicago.

The Forum is proud to announce the Multicultural Leadership Academy 2024 Cohort:

**Odalis Arcadio**  
*Obama Foundation*

**Martha Armenta – Robles**  
*Enlace Chicago*

**Yenny Avila Vazquez**  
*Highwood Library & Community Center*

**Keesha Brooks**  
*Metropolitan Family Services*

**Alees Edwards**  
*11<sup>th</sup> Police District Council*

**Jamie Enge**  
*The Collegiate Black Male Network*

**Juan Esquivel**  
*The Noble Network*

**Jessica Gonzales**  
*ScaleLIT*

**Paulina Guzman**  
*Hispanic Center of Excellence, UIC*

**Ashonti Jackson**  
*Birth to Five Illinois*

**Damien Martin**  
*Fellowship Chicago*

**Danny Mason**  
*OneGoal*

**Chris Naranjo**  
*Hope Chicago*

**Tiarra Owens**  
*Claretian Associates*

**Justeen Pelt**  
*Steans Family Foundation*

**David Quiroz**  
*Birth to Five Illinois*

**Gerson Ramirez**  
*Advance Illinois*

**Jarol Rendon Jimenez**  
*mHUB Chicago*

**Norma Rios Sierra**  
*Palenque LSNA*

**Susana Salgado Ortiz**  
*Centro Romero*

**Jay Simon**  
*The Lawndale Pop Up Spot*

**Diego Valdivia**  
*YWCA Northwestern Illinois*

**Rachel Watters**  
*Think Outside Da Block*

**Justus White**  
*Street Level/Urban Gateways*

Since 2009, the Latino Policy Forum has worked with more than 300 community leaders of color through the Multicultural Leadership Academy (MLA) and the Illinois Latino Nonprofit Leadership Academy, the precursor to MLA. Past cohorts take their experience in the program and apply it to their advocacy, work, and activism, and support one another. They work together to build bridges between their communities, have a positive impact, and inspire action and solidarity.

“I am very excited and proud of this year’s cohort,” said **MLA Manager at the Latino Policy Forum, NiCole Ward**. “This group is stepping into this program at a critical time. Right now, the biggest story we hear about Black and Latino communities in Chicago is dominated by division and animosity. However, this cohort is a shining example of what we don’t always see but is certainly there: Black and Latino people eager to work together, to tear down barriers, and build mutual understanding, solidarity, and power. This is *hard* work but every cohort comes to this program with open minds and open hearts, ready to be challenged.”

Every year, a panel of past cohort members choose approximately 24 Black and Latino community leaders to be a part of the eight-month program. Cohorts are comprised of established and emerging Black and Latino leaders who are actively involved in social change, policy impact, and/or community development. The Academy fosters a space where Black and Latino people can develop their skills as leaders and visionaries while enhancing their effectiveness as agents of social change, policy impact, and community improvement. Past participants have gone on to run for office, establish and lead social impact organizations, but also host solidarity walks, healing circles, and other community events.

The Multicultural Leadership Academy is made possible thanks to the generous support of The Chicago Community Trust, Archer Daniels Midland, The Walder Foundation, Grand Victoria Foundation, and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

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## **About the Latino Policy Forum**

The Latino Policy Forum is the only organization in the Chicago area that facilitates the involvement of Latinos at all levels of public decision-making. The Forum conducts analysis to inform, influence and lead. Its goals are to improve education outcomes, advocate for affordable housing, promote just immigration policies, and engage diverse sectors of the community, with an understanding that advancing Latinos advances a shared future. For more information, visit [www.latinopolicyforum.org](http://www.latinopolicyforum.org).