

NEWS RELEASE
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Nedra Sims Fears Awarded 2024 Leaders for a New Chicago By the Field and MacArthur Foundations

June 13, 2024 CHICAGO, IL – The Leaders for a New Chicago Award celebrates its sixth year in 2024 and has announced Nedra Sims Fears, Executive Director, Greater Chatham Initiative as one of the honorees. This unique, no-strings-attached \$50,000 award is given to 10 individuals each year, promoting a range of leaders whose influence will inform decision making across the city of Chicago.

The Field and MacArthur Foundations intend these awards to acknowledge past accomplishments and to invest in the promise of individuals to shape a new Chicago. Their goal is to recognize these leaders for their contributions to Chicago, to learn from them, and to incorporate insights about their experiences to better understand and support future leaders.

Bio

Nedra Sims Fears enjoyed a corporate career in cities across the country. She participated in providing \$1 billion in affordable mortgages for Fannie Mae, Community Investment Corporation, the City of Chicago, and others. Inspired by her idyllic childhood in the Chatham community, Nedra returned home. As a self-described “Daughter of Chatham,” she recently purchased and rehabbed Cubs legend Ernie Banks’ former home just blocks from her childhood home. Ms. Fears is a Harvard University Loeb Fellow, and holds a BS in Interior Architecture from Cornell University and an MBA in Finance from the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University.

Fears leads Greater Chatham Initiative (GCI), a place-based community development organization serving Auburn Gresham, Avalon Park, Chatham, and Greater Grand Crossing Black Chicago Southside neighborhoods.

Fears’ leadership has guided Greater Chatham Initiative’s commitment to all residents, both renters and owners, business owners and landlords, to build community together. The rich histories and stories of black communities are a force for creating a healthy and abundant future. Thriving and sustainable urban neighborhoods are possible and real by centering creative placemaking.

Greater Chatham Initiative Highlights

- **Mahalia's Mile**, a State-Designated Cultural District on 79th Street between State Street and Cottage Grove Avenue. She completed an architectural design plan and is executing the repositioning of Mahalia's Mile as both a walkable and economically viable corridor for its 16,700 residents and 500,000 tourists and bus riders.
- **Mahalia Jackson Court**, at 1 E 79th Street, portal to Mahalia's Mile, launched in 2020, located at 79th/State, with outdoor space for respite, recreation, and community events.
- **Artists onthe9**, 735 E 79th, arts incubator with studios and retail space, renovated and launched in 2022.
- **Mahalia's**, 735 E 79th, in-person and online store, <https://mahalias.com/> showcases Black artists and makers, launched in 2024.
- **FoodLab Chicago**, culinary education series, created in 2020, to support Greater South Side food businesses.
- **Food Incubator**, launched Spring 2024, serves restaurants and culinary businesses located in Chicago's South and West sides.