

**ULI Chicago 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Vision Awards  
July 11, 2024**



**Program Finalist:** Climate Action Museum

**Team:**

Climate Action Museum Co-Founders:

- Linda Sanchez, Green Chicago Real Estate
- Doug Farr, Farr Associates

**Program Description:** The Climate Action Museum (CAM) is the

world's eighth climate museum and the only one dedicated to climate

action. It is the very model of a scrappy startup, of how a big idea championed by a small group of people can change the world, of the leanest way to build out an exhibit, of the role of trust in transactions, and how bringing people together is the only way to solve society's greatest challenges. CAM was founded to promote face-to-face conversations on the biggest challenge facing the world (and the development industry): what do I have to change to do my part on climate? CAM grew out of a prior exhibit—The Energy Revolution at the Chicago Architecture Foundation that attracted 34,000 between April 2022 and January 2023—as a strategy to keep that content from being tossed in a landfill. Requests to store the Energy Revolution artifacts were politely declined until the problem was reframed—the search for a place to store artifacts indefinitely shifted to founding a museum—and the project had instant momentum. The great retail “hollowing out” that occurred during Covid created an opportunity for our pre-startup museum to secure the use of prime real estate at de minimis cost. The CAM team created a reverse broker flyer (tenant seeking free space in a high-visibility downtown location) and worked closely with BOMA Chicago to find buildings with opportune vacancies. CAM was able to secure a one-year license to occupy the space with no bank account and no credit history. But beyond a weak retail market, CAM's founding story will always include the essential role that the generosity of the owners of 300 S. Riverside Plaza played in CAM's very existence. Formidable physical and legal constraints informed CAM's layout and design. While we had faith that Ownership would not exercise its option to kick CAM out, our license allowed eviction after just three-months. This meant that all of our improvements needed to be temporary and, if necessary, sacrificial. But by making everything temporary we were able to avoid securing permits. The exhibit walls are free standing and not permanently attached to anything. No conduit was installed. All lighting and AV equipment are powered using extension chords. To avoid environmentally-unfriendly vinyl graphics, all the content was printed on recyclable Falconboard—essentially a fancy corrugated cardboard. Finally, by angling the exhibit walls to provide clear site lines from the building's main security desk into the Museum, building ownership allowed us to leave the space unlocked and unattended, by far our greatest cost savings. A CAM visit is a unique, possibly life-changing, experience. It empowers guests to see the world through a climate lens, and to understand the agency that each of us has to reduce our greenhouse gas impacts. As word spreads and visits increase CAM's impact will only grow over time, allowing us to meet our goal of hosting 10% of the population of Metro Chicago.