

**ULI Chicago 9th Annual Vision Awards
September 11, 2024**



Frontrunner Winner:

SANA SYED

*Chief Growth & Strategy Director
Inner-City Muslim Action Network*

As an architect by training, Sana has always harbored a passion for the convergence of land use, community voice, people-centered economics, and public welfare. However, traditional architecture alone couldn't fulfill the expansive impact she envisioned. Thus, she delved into what she terms social architecture, championing a broader vision of transformative change from within IMAN, alongside partner organizations and the community itself. Throughout this journey, she's pushed the boundaries of conventional nonprofit work, embarking on larger-scale development projects and innovative ventures. From launching food retail businesses to combat food apartheid to revitalizing a vacant and vandalized Chicago Public School into a thriving community hub to spearheading significant transit investments and advocating for the reopening of a closed Racine Green Line station, their endeavors have been bold and multifaceted.

These initiatives have sparked a wave of revitalization in Englewood, igniting momentum among local stakeholders and yielding positive outcomes across various impact areas, including housing, economic opportunity/wealth building, social cohesion/infrastructure, and public safety. Most significantly, they've underscored the transformative power of grassroots community-led development, offering hope to marginalized neighborhoods nationwide. In 2020-21, Sana had the privilege of sharing their journey at ULI panels, connecting with communities across the nation, and their Go Green on Racine initiative was prominently featured in the July 2021 ULI Chicago Resilience Initiative Report.

Her leadership in projects like Go Green on Racine has not only delivered tangible successes but has also laid the groundwork for scaling their impact across broader geographies. It has propelled them from block-by-block victories to long-range planning and envisioning the revitalization of entire corridors, beginning with 63rd street. It has shifted their focus from mere service provision to addressing systemic inequities ingrained in Chicago's history of segregation, red-lining and the deliberate erosion of opportunities from black and brown communities. Most recently, it has emboldened them to set their vision to confront and narrow the city's alarming 30-year life expectancy gap.

Recognizing the transformative potential of physical spaces in shaping community well-being, Sana's goal is to continue driving bold and visionary initiatives that challenge the status quo and uplift marginalized communities. She firmly believes in the power of collective action and takes pride in organizing data, people, and resources toward their shared goals. Despite the challenges of accessing capital, she's secured \$50 million in investments to date.

This achievement wasn't merely due to individual or institutional benevolence; it stemmed from compelling research, successfully aligning mutual interests, fostering collective responsibility, and demonstrating tangible impact on building sustainable and resilient local markets. Most of all, she has thoroughly enjoyed the bringing together of diverse people and sectors, engaging in urban diplomacy and creating portals of entry for everyone towards a greater good.

Looking ahead, she aspires channeling upwards of half a billion dollars and many more partnerships towards projects that not only revitalize assets and neighborhoods but also address historical injustices perpetuated by systemic racism. Grounded in a commitment to strategic, equitable, and regenerative land development, community collaboration, and people-centered, life-giving economic growth, she is deeply aligned with ULI's values. She eagerly anticipates furthering their shared mission of building vibrant, resilient communities together.