



 echo

Inaugural Impact Report

Empowerment  
through Entrepreneurship



# Better Together

**At echo, we believe no one should have to figure out entrepreneurship on their own.**

We know that starting a business can be isolating and challenging, so we're on a mission to help founders of all ages, stages, and backgrounds bring their dreams to life.

In 2022, Audacity Labs and Helius merged to become echo. Why? Because we knew that we could serve entrepreneurs better together.

This is the recap of our first year as **echo** and how our community-led collective has empowered hundreds of Durham founders through education, collaboration, and resources.





## OUR MISSION

echo is a non-profit organization  
**transforming lives through entrepreneurship**





# Our Approach



## COMMUNITY-LED

Our community's needs are at the center of everything we do. We design our programs and marketing around the input and feedback from our community to ensure we address the exact needs of founders.



## CIRCULAR

Our “build, succeed, repeat” model transforms graduates into mentors and teachers. The result is a flywheel of support within our community as alumni return to coach other founders in echo.



## COLLABORATIVE

We work with mission-aligned partners to maximize our collective impact. By sharing our spaces, networks, resources, and programs, we produce better outcomes, connections, and exposure for founders.



Program Spotlight

# Community Advisory Board

Practicing what we teach our entrepreneurs, we implement user-centered design and empower our members in the decision-making process. This model fosters opportunities for formal and informal collaboration, allowing community members to design flexible programs that better meet the immediate and long-term needs of entrepreneurs.



## YOUTH ADVISORY COUNCIL

This paid-internship gives teens and undergraduate students a voice and active role in how echo serves youth. They assist with echoReverb programming and marketing decisions while receiving near-peer mentorship from local university students. The council played an instrumental part in the design of our community center.



## ENTREPRENEURS-IN-RESIDENCE

Composed of echoSystem training program graduates, our EIR's give valuable insights on opportunities and obstacles they've encountered in their entrepreneurial journey. Echo leadership uses this input to determine future program offerings and to address gaps in resources in order to better serve the needs of founders.



# Who We Are

## OUR COMMITMENT

To provide in-house programs, services, resources, and support for entrepreneurs at any stage. As a community-led center, we take our cues from the voices of everyday builders and dreamers in our home of Durham, NC.

## OUR VISION

To build a collective of individuals, businesses, and resources pooled together for a common goal: ***upward mobility through entrepreneurship.***

## OUR VALUES

- ☞ Bold, direct action
- ☞ Holistic support for entrepreneurs
- ☞ Enhance social mobility
- ☞ Transparency



# echo's First Year Impact at a Glance

36

Funded Programs

229

Empowered Entrepreneurs

## The Breakdown

### ECHOREVERB

**150 next-generation entrepreneurs** served, including middle school, high school, and college-age students

### ECHOSYSTEM

**79 Durham adults** new to entrepreneurship or whose businesses need additional support to provide a fair living wage

### ECHOCHAMBER

**28 graduates of echoSystem** engaging in a one-year fellowship of coaching, community, and resources.



Your Future, Amplified

# echoReverb

echoReverb is designed for middle and high school students to amplify their potential and ignite their dreams.

Through year-round programming recommended by the Youth Advisory Council, echoReverb creates a supportive, risk-free environment for youth to explore and experience entrepreneurship. echoReverb also equips youth with the entrepreneurial mindset and skills to navigate their future career path.

The result is an empowered community of next-generation entrepreneurs bringing their ideas and dreams to life.

# 150

Engaged Youth

# 31

Youth Venture Ideas

echoReverb helped me find others like me who want to change the world through innovation. I learned so much about community and owning my own path.”

- JOSH K.



echoReverb

# Youth Programs

## INNOVATION SPRINTS

These startup experience events turn ideas into businesses in a weekend. With the help of workshops, team-building activities, and mentors, youth get a taste of startup life while solving challenges affecting them and their community.

## YOUTH BUSINESS LAUNCH COHORTS

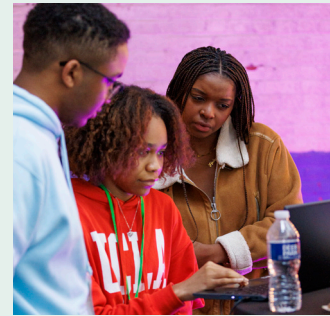
Teens are introduced to entrepreneurship and design thinking in a 10-week program with classes and coaching. The program culminates in a showcase where they present their business ideas to entrepreneurs and leaders in the region.

## SUMMER CAMPS

In partnership with Durham Public Schools and the city of Durham, we held five summer camps where teens heard from local founders, visited nearby startups, and pitched business ideas that addressed personal or local challenges.

## SHIBOKA MAGAZINE

This student-led magazine amplifies the voices and talents of youth artists in Durham. The team of local teen artists and writers released their second edition in August 2023.



“I felt like I was finally given an opportunity to share my voice and see my ideas listened to and encouraged.”

- ALLISON D.





echoReverb Spotlight

## Andrew Bekheit



Inspired by his father's restaurant and a personal interest in technology, Andrew Bekheit embarked on his own journey of entrepreneurship and joined echoReverb (formerly Audacity Labs) as just a sophomore in high school.

Over the past three years, Andrew has been able to work with peers on startup venture ideas, learn about human-centered design, and build an entrepreneurial mindset.

Through these experiences, he has found the confidence to pursue his dream of starting his own technology repair shop.

“I’ve grown from that shy little person in the back of the class, to the person that can make a pitch or talk in public with confidence.”



After engaging in several echoReverb programs, Andrew served on our Student Advisory Board. As his leadership skills developed, he earned the role of Student Director where he led discussions on what was needed in after-school programs and planned echoReverb events.

“I would recommend the program not only for the valuable skills I have learned, but for the entrepreneurial mindset that they teach us.

**It’s extraordinary!”**

Andrew has since graduated high school and is enrolled in NC State University’s engineering program. He and five other graduates remain engaged with echo through our first echoReverb alumni cohort.





79

Adult Participants



82

Hours of Workshops



97%

Minority Founders

Prosperity, Now.

## echoSystem

The echoSystem program offers education and resources for individuals new to entrepreneurship or whose businesses are currently making a less-than-fair living wage in and around our home city of Durham.

Programs are offered in a variety of formats, time-commitment levels, and scheduling options to support the different needs of founders who may have family or work commitments.

Through community, education, and resources, we support the holistic needs of the entrepreneur and increase their prosperity.

“**echo** is a gathering of new entrepreneurs from all walks of life... listening to guidance from an experienced entrepreneur who pushes, nudges, and cajoles them as they collectively stumble and wrestle with their aspirations.”

- DONALD F.



echoSystem

# Adult Programs

## BUSINESS LAUNCH COHORTS

These 4-week cohorts are designed to meet entrepreneurs where they are and give them the skills, support, and community they need to get to the next stage for growth and sustainability.

### 101 - FOR DREAMERS

It all starts with an idea and our 101 class helps founders develop and formalize these back-of-the napkin concepts into viable business opportunities.

### 301 - FOR GROWTH

Students of the 301 class learn the crucial aspects of marketing, sales, finance, and strategic planning resulting in a growth strategy for their business.

### 201 - FOR BUILDERS

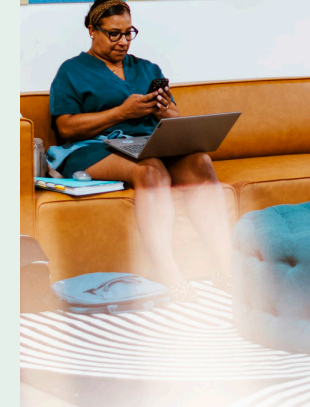
Our 201 classes help entrepreneurs craft their business plan and determine what their next critical step should be to actualize their idea.

### 401 MASTERMINDS

These highly tactical group sessions help founders address specific business challenges through peer feedback and guidance from a local expert.

“The most helpful aspect of the course was developing my business’ identity and generating some ideas for how to market and win customers.”

**TASHA C.**





echoSystem Entrepreneur Spotlight

# Lynn Woods

Lynn Woods, artist and owner of Back to the South Bling, faced a common problem of early-stage founders - brand recognition. “Even if you have the best product,” she notes, “If no one knows you exist, it won’t matter.” After sharing her struggle, she took the advice of a friend enrolled in an echo cohort and joined our echoSystem program.

Back to the South Bling is a gift shop for women who like to stand out from the crowd. For the last three years, Lynn has offered fun bling gifts, including clothing, wine glasses, and jewelry — plus Bling Parties for groups.

Through echo’s programs, she learned invaluable lessons. “The most important thing I learned was to know your numbers,” Lynn emphasizes. “Data tells a story in your business — a very important story.” This story revealed insights into customer preferences, product profitability, and more. Looking ahead, Lynn aims to introduce her products to new markets and forge meaningful business collaborations.



“Being a part of the echo community has been a big change for my business. Learning how to run a business and having the resources to help is priceless!

I am so thankful for this community!”

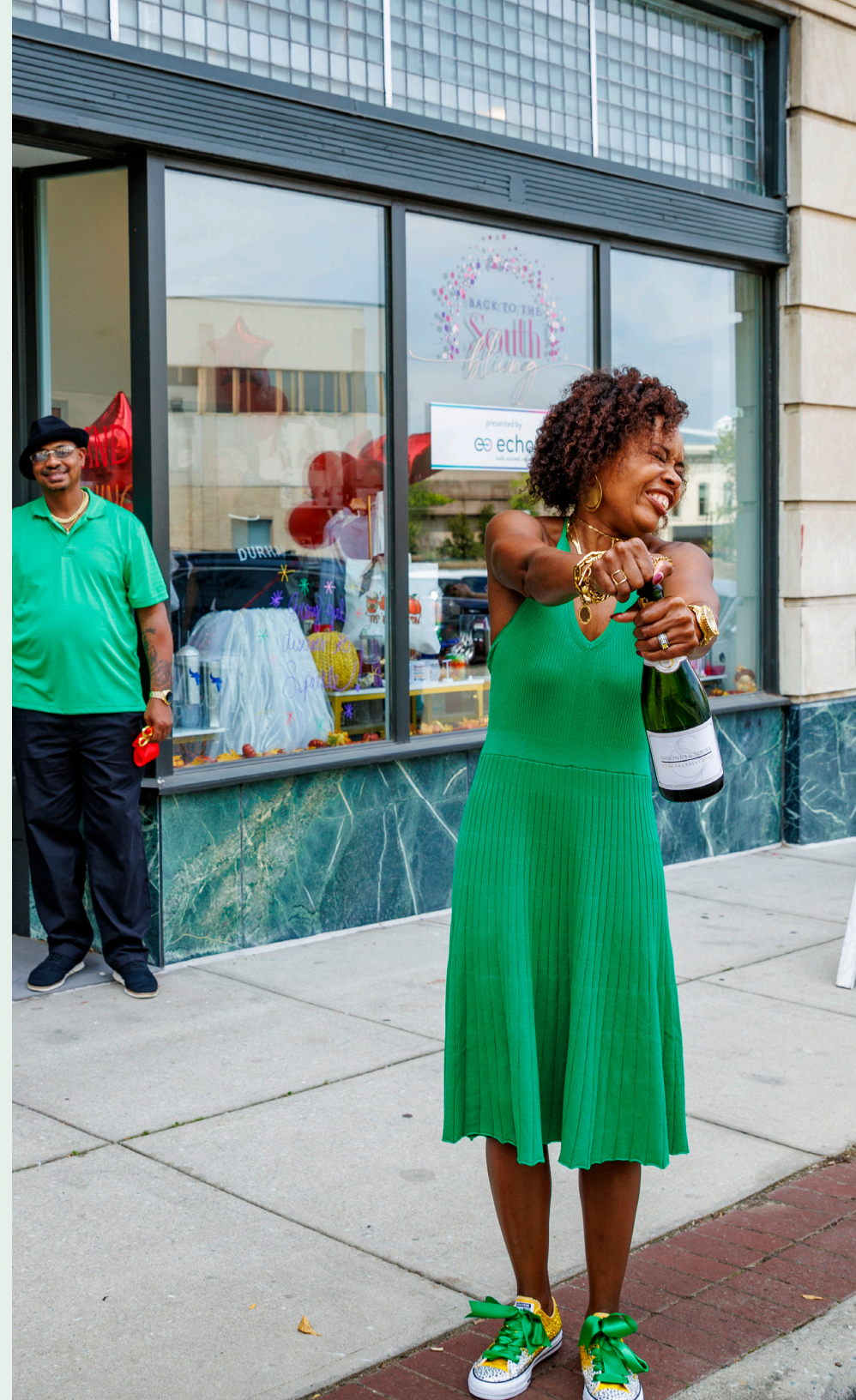


## FROM ONLINE TO MAIN STREET

Having sold most of her products online, at pop-ups, or at partner locations, Lynn was eager to get a space of her own. However, making the transition to a physical store can come with quite a few obstacles - finding a good location, navigating lease agreements, and increased overhead.

Through a new partnership between echo and Downtown Durham Inc. (DDI), Lynn was able to bring this dream to life without the traditional weight and risk of brick-and-mortars. Nicole Thompson, President & CEO at DDI, and her team have graciously offered the storefront to echo entrepreneurs who can test and experience what it's like to run a traditional retail store.

Lynn says “Having a storefront in downtown Durham has been an invaluable experience!” She’s been able to meet new customers from near and far, build her email list, and successfully grow her brand recognition.







Building a 'We'

# echoChamber

Upon graduating echoSystem, participants are invited to join the echoChamber and our Entrepreneurs-in-Residence program, a one-year fellowship connecting founders to other graduates and ongoing support.

In this program, founders are paired with a dedicated mentor who supports them through coaching and connections with other experts who can address the obstacles they encounter as they scale their business.

By having a single point of contact that works on their behalf, EIRs can stay focused on their business instead of searching for help, programs, and resources.

Our EIR's also give input to leadership on programming, advocate on behalf of echo in the community, and mentor earlier stage founders in echo.

28

Entrepreneurs-in-Residence

100

Hours of 1:1 Coaching



echoChamber

# Supporting Alumni

Graduates engaged in the echoChamber get exclusive access to a wide-array of resources and community support:

- ∞ Coaching
- ∞ Expert Office Hours
- ∞ Collaborative Events
- ∞ Discounted Event Space Rental
- ∞ Networking Events
- ∞ Community Newsletter
- ∞ Workshops & Speakers
- ∞ Discounted Coworking Space

“I realized how important it was for me to be able to take my time and follow the steps... It has been a great experience for me and I recommend all entrepreneurs to group with others.”

- HELEN M.







## Our Team

With three full-time and 16 part-time staff, echo's team works diligently to connect with and listen to our community's needs. Along with the support of our volunteers, we're able to make an exponential impact on Durham's youth and adult entrepreneurs.

### LEADERSHIP STAFF

Anjanette Miller, *CEO*

Diana M. Ramirez, *Director of Programs*

Itzel Castro-Santibanez, *Operations Manager*

### YOUTH ADVISORY COUNCIL

Michelle R., *High School Co-Student Director*

Sebastian M., *High School Co-Student Director*

Sonali Sanjay, *Undergraduate Co-Student Director*

Matthew O'Stricker, *Undergraduate Co-Student Director*

Van Adamson-Thompson, *Alumni Lead*





# Our Board

echo’s board, primarily made up of entrepreneurs and rotating seats of echo graduates, is intentionally designed to support the community they serve.

Their guidance is focused on maximizing the growth and sustainability of not only the organization, but also its community of dreamers, partners, and stakeholders.



## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- |                 |                    |
|-----------------|--------------------|
| Melissa Carrier | Austin Lopesilvero |
| Reed Frankel    | Steven McClelland  |
| Kenyetta Hall   | Morgan McVane      |
| Quinci King     | Dr. Terrance Ruth  |
| Larry Long, Jr. | Mitchell Sava      |

## OFFICERS OF THE BOARD

- Mitchell Sava, *Board Chair*
- Melissa Carrier, *Vice-Chair*
- Morgan McVane, *Treasurer*





In our first year as echo, we secured a foundational **\$1,285,000** of funding, empowered **229 entrepreneurs**, and **built our community center for entrepreneurs.**







Our New Home

# echo Community Center for Entrepreneurs

With an investment from the City of Durham of \$1,000,000 over the next three years, echo's Community Center for Entrepreneurship is our next step to exponentially impact the future of Durham's youth and adult entrepreneurs.

Our new home is over 1,660 sq/ft of collaborative space designed by our Youth Advisory Council in collaboration with Lavish - a local woman-owned design firm.

In 2024, the space will pilot our *For Youth, By Youth Teen Center for Entrepreneurial and Economic Opportunities* with the mission of collaborating with other youth-serving organizations to reach and impact more youth with a robust network of services and mentors to further their founder journey and career path.

Thanks to the city's investment, other local organizations needing space for events, workshops, or programming can utilize the space at little to no cost. We're excited to see how the space is used and the impact of these collaborations on our community.







## Looking Ahead

# The Future of echo

In the second year, we aim to deepen our impact on entrepreneurs and broaden our supportive community. We're looking forward to seeing how founders and partners utilize our new space and the positive effects an accessible entrepreneur center will have on our city. Here's a sneak peek at our 2024 initiatives:

## ENTREPRENEURIAL PROGRAMMING & RESOURCES

- 🌀 **Serve more entrepreneurs by increasing class capacity, frequency, & promotion**
- 🌀 **Add programs for Spanish-speaking founders** in our region
- 🌀 **Offer hybrid and virtual classes** to make programs more accessible
- 🌀 **Pilot "For Youth, By Youth,"** a teen center for entrepreneurship and economic opportunities uniting resources and programs of youth-serving organizations.

## COMMUNITY GROWTH & COLLABORATIONS

- 🌀 **Grow our support network** of mentors, advisors, & subject matter experts
- 🌀 **Add niche-focused communities** within our entrepreneurs-in-residence program
- 🌀 **Inviting more organizations to utilize our space** and partner on events
- 🌀 **Create an entrepreneurial community collaboration lab** where entrepreneurial support organizations can meet and collectively address the needs of founders



Get Involved

# Support echo Entrepreneurs

Thanks to our community's generosity, we've impacted 229 entrepreneurs just in our first year! Your donations and shared resources are turning dreams into realities. Looking ahead, we know thousands more are building and dreaming on their own. Join us in reaching these founders and supporting their journey because no one should have to build a business alone.

## DONATE FINANCIALLY

Become a monthly or one-time financial donor to help us reach, support, and empower more youth and adult entrepreneurs in our region.

## CONTRIBUTE RESOURCES

Ensure our entrepreneurs have what they need to launch and grow their business like computers, tablets, office supplies, or business books

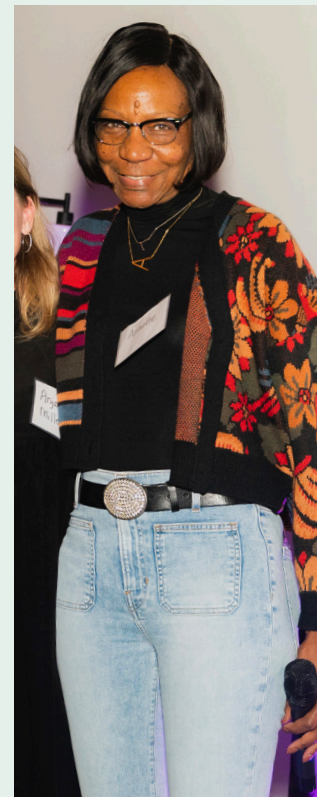
## JOIN THE COMMUNITY

Share your time, talents, and life lessons with founders needing your expertise by joining our network of mentors, advisors, and subject matter experts.

## SHARE WITH YOUR NETWORK

Help us spread the word about echo programs, mentor, and fundraising opportunities so we can reach more entrepreneurs in need.

Get involved today by scanning the QR code or visiting [echo-nc.org/support](https://echo-nc.org/support)



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[echo-nc.org](http://echo-nc.org)