

CONNECTING MIDWEST & GERMAN STARTUP ECOSYSTEMS

Draft Agenda

November 30 to December 5, Chicago and Denver

Sunday, November 30, 2025

Time	Program
All day	Individual Transfer to Chicago, IL (& Hotel Check-in) Chicago has emerged as a significant global innovation hub, boasting the second highest number of Fortune 500 company headquarters and ranking #4 in the US for STEM talent, supported by over 100 higher education institutions. The city is home to twenty-four corporate innovation centers and has seen substantial investment, with tech companies raising over \$7 billion in venture capital in 2021 alone. Chicago's diverse economy and strategic location enhance its appeal for startups, allowing firms to source more of their supply chain regionally while benefiting from competitive labor costs. With over 145,000 graduates entering the workforce annually, Chicago offers a robust talent pipeline, making it an attractive environment for innovation and growth in hardtech, cleantech, and manufacturing. <i>Hotel: Chicago (tbd)</i>
2.30 PM	Optional: Blackhawks Ice Hockey Game (Self-payer) <i>Location: United Center in Chicago, IL</i>
6.00 PM	Welcome Dinner at Thattu, Chicago's West Side & one of New York Times' Top 50 Best New Restaurants <i>Location: Thattu, 2601 W Fletcher St, Chicago, IL 60618</i>

Monday, December 1, 2025

Time	Program
AM	Transatlantic Exchange: Policies, Programs & Partners Exemplary Agenda & Talking Points • Welcome & Introduction • Chicago, Illinois isn't Silicon Valley and that's a Good Thing • Meet the Ecosystem: State and City Initiatives Supporting Innovation in Germany and the US ○ Policies, incentives, and strategic goals ○ Overview of Illinois / Germany's Startup ecosystem landscape ○ Funding opportunities & public-private partnerships • Spotlight on Collaboration with International Startups • Networking Opportunity over Lunch

	Chicago, Illinois isn't Silicon Valley and that's a Good Thing This in-depth exchange offers a comprehensive overview of the state's diverse economic landscape — from manufacturing to clean energy, sustainable mobility to carbon capture and grid innovation. Learn how the state of Illinois and the City of Chicago foster innovation through strategic state initiatives, access to funding, and collaboration with international startups. As Abin Kuriakose, Chief Innovation & Strategy Officer, World Business Chicago shared at the opening panel at SET Tech Festival Berlin 2025: <i>“Chicago, Illinois, and the Midwest is open for business when it comes to science-driven innovation and the big opportunities in energy transformation. If you are working on climate technology, we invite you to collaborate with us. Chicago is open for our European partners and remains dedicated to building global partnerships.”</i> This spirit of openness and international collaboration makes Chicago a strategic gateway for European cleantech startups exploring US opportunities. Meet the Ecosystem: • Who We Are & Mission – Briefly introduce the organization, its role, and its mission in supporting startups. • Focus Areas & Initiatives – Highlight key industries, flagship programs, and notable collaborations. • Opportunities for Collaboration – Explain how the organization partners with other support networks (joint programs, funding access, market entry support). Potential Participants include: • World Business Chicago • Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) • Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT) • 1871 • Industrial Council of Nearwest Chicago (ICNC) • Techstars • Northwestern University Innovation and New Ventures Office • University of Chicago • Northwestern University • Gener8tor • University of Illinois <i>Location: GACC Office, Chicago</i>
PM	Transfer
PM	Intercultural Pitch Workshop: Navigating Startup Ecosystems Across Borders (tbc) This pitch workshop is designed to equip you with the tools and strategies needed to confidently present your ventures and build meaningful connections in the US market. Tailored specifically for non-US cleantech organizations and startups, this session highlights key differences in storytelling, expectations, and communication style. You will gain practical insights into how to craft a compelling value proposition, navigate US networking environments, and position themselves for success in a competitive transatlantic market.

	From Pitch to Partnership: Unlocking Investment Potential Across the Atlantic (tbc) Interactive workshop hosted by Chicago-based venture capital firm TechNexus Venture Collaborative, focused on investing in relationships between leading corporations and ambitious entrepreneurs. A first-of-its-kind Venture Collaborative, TechNexus follows a relationship-driven approach to scouting, investing, incubating, and collaborating alongside ventures and industry-leading partners. To date, TechNexus has unlocked and activated hundreds of revenue-generating outcomes between some of the most matured corporations and early-stage companies to create new business models, revenue streams, and products. <i>Location: TechNexus Venture Collaborative, Chicago (tbc)</i>
5.00 - 8.00 PM	Networking at Chicago's Christkindlmarkt To kick-off our expert delegation trip, we'll come together at the largest Christkindlmarkt in the U.S., organized by the German American Chamber of Commerce of the Midwest. This festive evening celebrates the strong American enthusiasm for German culture — and, of course, for a glass of hot mulled wine! <i>Location: Daley Plaza, 50 W Washington St, Chicago, IL 60602</i>

Tuesday, December 2, 2025

Time	Program
AM	From Lab to Launch: A Transatlantic Dialogue on Startup Support (tbc) Join us at the University of Chicago's Polsky Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation for a roundtable exploring how startups move from research to real-world impact. This transatlantic conversation will bring together experts, entrepreneurs, and innovation leaders from both sides of the Atlantic to exchange expertise on supporting early-stage ventures, with a particular focus on university spin-offs and fostering strong partnerships between academia and industry. <i>Location: University of Chicago (tbc)</i>
PM	Transfer
PM	Site Visit and Tour of the U.S.'s largest hardtech innovation center - mHub (tbc) Hard Tech x Climate Tech: A US-Germany Exchange on Scaling Physical Solutions for a Sustainable Future During this session, you will explore how Chicago's ecosystem enables cleantech founders to access state-of-the-art mentorship, venture funding, and strategic industry partnerships. The workshop includes a deep dive into the supportive structures for early-stage ventures, followed by an insightful site visit. Network with local startups and explore collaboration opportunities between the German and US climate tech ecosystems. <i>Location: mHub Chicago (tbc)</i>
PM	Transfer

6.00 – 8.30 PM	Windy City Climate Ecosystem Meet-Up: Year-End Edition (Self-payer) To wrap up an insightful first half of our expert delegation trip as well as a challenging year full of learnings and resilient collaborations, we'll come together at Uncommon Ground, a unique location in Lake View, Chicago to celebrate the year-end reception of the Chicago Climate Connect network. Connect with founders, investors, accelerators, and public sector leaders driving climate innovation in the Midwest, and explore opportunities for transatlantic collaboration in a relaxed, engaging atmosphere. <i>Location: Uncommon Ground, 3800 N Clark St. Chicago, IL 60613</i>
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Wednesday, December 3, 2025

Time	Program
AM	Hotel Breakfast <i>Location: Chicago</i>
AM	Transfer from Chicago to Denver, CO (& Hotel Check-in) Denver's startup ecosystem demonstrated remarkable strength in 2022, raising \$5.7 billion through 597 venture deals, with cleantech emerging as one of the highest-funded industries alongside B2B SaaS and biotech. Notable cleantech success stories include Crusoe Energy Systems and Uplight (a unicorn company), which exemplify Denver's ability to nurture innovative clean technology companies. Denver's appeal for cleantech startups is further enhanced by its recognition as the city with the lowest startup costs in the US, its ranking as the 4th best mid-size city globally for startup ecosystems, and Colorado's position as the 6th most innovative state, creating an ideal environment for cleantech innovation and growth. <i>Hotel: Denver (tbd)</i>
PM	Interactive Workshop: Navigating Startup Ecosystems Across Borders A comprehensive exchange of startup landscapes in Germany and Colorado, highlighting key trends, transatlantic collaboration ship opportunities, and policies aimed at fostering innovation, entrepreneurship, and transatlantic collaboration and addressing the challenges and opportunities within the startup ecosystems in Colorado and Germany. Topics include scaling up, internationalization strategies, and enhancing global competitiveness in an increasingly dynamic market. Exemplary Agenda & Talking Points • Welcome & Introduction • State and City Initiatives Supporting Innovation in Germany and the US • Policies, incentives, and strategic goals • Overview of Colorado's / Germany's cleantech landscape • Funding opportunities & public-private partnerships • Accelerators for international startups, such as Denver Global Landing Pad (GLP) • Spotlight on Collaboration with International Startups • Networking over Lunch

	Meet the Ecosystem: • Who We Are & Mission – Briefly introduce the organization, its role, and its mission in supporting startups. • Focus Areas & Initiatives – Highlight key industries, flagship programs, and notable collaborations. • Opportunities for Collaboration – Explain how the organization partners with other support networks (joint programs, funding access, market entry support). Potential Participants include: • Denver Economic Development & Opportunity (DEDO), City and County of Denver • Office of Economic Development & International Trade (OEDIT), State of Colorado • Colorado Cleantech Industries Association • Colorado Smart City Alliance • Colorado Solar and Storage Association (COSSA) <i>Location: German American Treffpunkt, Denver</i>
PM	Transfer to Boulder
PM	Cleantech Ecosystem Celebration (date tbc) We will visit Colorado’s Cleantech Ecosystem Celebration, an annual networking event hosted by the Colorado Cleantech Industries Association bringing together the diverse players in the Colorado cleantech ecosystem. <i>Location: Boulder</i>

Thursday, December 4, 2025

Time	Program
AM	Hotel Breakfast <i>Location: Denver</i>
AM	Transfer
AM	Site Visit & Exchange at the Rocky Mountain Institute with Third Derivative (D3) (tbc) Third Derivative (D3) is a global startup accelerator founded by the Rocky Mountain Institute (RMI) and New Energy Nexus to rapidly scale high-impact climate solutions. Supported by RMI’s deep expertise in energy systems, D3 connects startups with investors and corporate partners to accelerate the commercialization of breakthrough technologies across key emissions sectors. Market Entry Workshop: Go to Market Strategy (tbc) In this interactive workshop, participants will collaboratively develop go-to-market strategies for entering the U.S. market. The session combines expert insights, best practices, and hands-on exercises tailored to the unique challenges and opportunities in the U.S. ecosystem. <i>Location: Rocky Mountain Institute (tbc)</i>

PM	Lunch & Transfer
PM	Half-Day Immersion in the daily operations of Start-Up Ecosystem Players Take a deep dive into one of our clean tech ecosystem players in the Denver region. Spend half a day at their location, meet the team and learn about the collaboration between emerging companies, investors, and innovation hubs. You'll discover operational initiatives and strategies driving success in the German market, build valuable connections, and gain inspiration for your own projects. Depending on the focus, you'll either have a personalized immersion experience tailored to your interests or join a small group for a collaborative deep dive. Possible stakeholders include but are not limited to: Colorado Energy Office (tbc) The Colorado Energy Office leads the state's clean energy transition by developing policies, supporting innovation, and fostering partnerships. Its focus lies on decarbonization, transportation electrification, and ensuring equitable access to the benefits of a sustainable energy economy. Colorado School of Mines (tbc) The Colorado School of Mines is a globally recognized institution for energy and resource innovation. With state-of-the-art facilities and research programs, it focuses on sustainable energy technologies, mining engineering, and driving solutions for the global energy transition. Colorado Miniforge Site (tbc) The Colorado Miniforge serves as an innovation hub for cleantech startups and researchers. It provides access to prototyping tools, shared labs, and collaborative workspaces designed to accelerate the development of clean energy solutions. Electra (tbc) Electra is a cleantech pioneer transforming steel production through low-temperature electrochemical processes. By dramatically reducing carbon emissions, Electra is redefining sustainable manufacturing and scaling climate-positive industrial solutions. <i>Location: Denver Region</i>
PM	Transfer
4.30 PM	International Night at the Denver's Christkindlmarket Join us for a casual networking evening at the Denver Christkindlmarket, bringing together the international business community in a festive holiday atmosphere. This event typically gathers 60–80 participants and offers the opportunity to connect, exchange ideas, and strengthen transatlantic relationships while experiencing one of Denver's most popular seasonal traditions. <i>Location: Denver Christkindlmarket 1000 Larimer St. Denver, CO 80204</i>

Friday, December 5, 2025

Time	Program
AM	Hotel Breakfast <i>Locatio: Denver</i>
AM	Transfer
AM	Site Visit and Tour of the National Renewable Energy Laboratory & Global Energy Park (GloPark) (tbc) Innovation in Action: US–German Exchange on Cleantech R&D Partnerships As the U.S.'s only national laboratory dedicated exclusively to renewable energy, the National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL) offers German climate tech startups unparalleled insight into cutting-edge innovation and public-private collaboration. NREL supports startups primarily to accelerate the commercialization of clean energy technologies and foster public-private innovation partnerships. Their main goals in working with startups include: • Bridging the gap between early-stage research and market deployment of renewable energy solutions. • Providing access to world-class research facilities, technical expertise, and validation resources. • Connecting startups with federal programs, investors, and corporate partners to scale impactful technologies. • Driving innovation ecosystems through initiatives like the Innovation and Entrepreneurship Center (IEC) and programs such as the Wells Fargo Innovation Incubator (IN²) and Shell GameChanger Accelerator. The visit also includes GloPark, NREL's newly launched Global Energy Park designed to foster international collaboration, co-location, and cross-sector innovation. GloPark serves as a hub for startups, researchers, and industry leaders to work side by side on the development and deployment of transformative clean energy solutions on a global scale. <i>Location: 15013 Denver West Parkway Golden, CO (tbc)</i>
PM	Debriefing <i>Location: Denver</i>
PM	Individual Departure (Recommendation: Enjoy your weekend at the Rocky Mountain National Park!)

**This agenda represents a draft program. Kindly be aware that the program is subject to modifications based on factors such as the availability of participating organizations, logistical considerations, and other relevant factors. The program organizer reserves the right to make adjustments to the content and schedule of the agenda with short notice.*

The participation fee is 695 EUR (covers organization of all agenda points including site visits and networking events; accommodation throughout the official trip dates; ground transportation within the US; and select meals. Participants pay remaining costs, including international and local flights, transport to and from airports, and accommodation outside the scope of the trip dates.) Please find more information on the registration on our [website](#).

Please don't hesitate to reach out if you have any questions!



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This initiative is part of the European Recovery Program (ERP), funded by the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy (BMWE) and aims to strengthen transatlantic collaboration between the cleantech startup ecosystems in the US and Germany, fostering innovation and partnerships. The upcoming delegation trip and the accompanying webinar are designed to enhance bilateral cooperation and contribute to innovation and the global growth of the cleantech sector. It is a return visit to the successful delegation trip to Berlin and Leipzig in March 2025.



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