

Local Tech Company Launches First Harlem Cryptocurrency
By Alana Galloway
Publication [Link](#)

[Silicon Harlem](#), which aims to help transform its namesake neighborhood into a technology hub, has created a new cryptocurrency, [Harlem Coin](#).

Silicon Harlem will award coins, dubbed “social impact tokens,” to residents to recognize their social service efforts for the neighborhood’s benefit. The currency will have exchangeable value at Harlem businesses.

“We’re trying to do something to lift the community,” said Clayton Banks, Silicon Harlem’s chief executive officer. “It’s time, in history, to do stuff like this.” Though the coin is still in its pilot phase, he said the community is responding positively.

While most cryptocurrencies, like Bitcoin and Ethereum, are investments accrued through mining and trading, Harlem Coin is backed by an award system. Silicon Harlem, at West 148th Street and Frederick Douglass Boulevard, currently has \$20,000 loaded into the Harlem Coin system, digitally distributable as set-value tokens.

Following its public launch on Oct. 21, Silicon Harlem will present opportunities to earn tokens for such community service as work on sanitation, environmental and transportation projects, or philanthropic efforts for neighborhood improvement.

“We believe that the more that we build up the actual transactions, we’ll also see an improvement in the community,” Banks said.

Silicon Harlem will hold a meetup online tomorrow from 6 to 7 p.m. to discuss the coin and its introduction at the company’s Next Gen Tech conference on Oct. 21. Banks said there will likely be several opportunities to earn tokens at the event, including a writing competition, in which participants will submit essays about how they see the neighborhood’s future.

Meanwhile, Silicon Harlem is spreading the word among consumers and merchants about the token and its potential. “We have to make sure everyone understands how this works,” Banks said. “We want to make sure we set the right expectations.”

Once consumers earn coins in their digital wallets, they will gain entrance to the Harlem Coin marketplace, accessible from cellular devices. There, token-holders can locate local merchants who accept the currency, offering discounts of at least 10% for goods or services in exchange. Merchants can redistribute the tokens as they see fit.

The goal is to benefit consumers while giving a boost to merchants and, in turn, to employment. Banks would not disclose which merchants will accept Harlem Coin.

Though no one has Harlem Coin tokens in their digital wallets yet, multiple vendors voiced excitement over the concept.

Mo Aziz, barista and store manager at MATTO on West 143rd Street at Broadway, said his café and other local businesses can use Harlem Coin. “Most people use credit cards or Apple Pay instead of cash, so it seems pretty easy to shift,” he said.

One potential obstacle is the lack of digital literacy, especially among elderly residents. “Older people are less OK with technology,” Aziz said. “But if there’s good instruction it sounds pretty easy.”

“It’s good,” said Moe Naji, an employee at Golden Deli on West 136th Street at Broadway. “It helps circulate wealth through Harlem, so it could help bring jobs.”

Harlem Coin, like all cryptocurrencies, is a way to digitize money. However, because the tokens can only be used for transactions within the neighborhood, the capital will circulate through Harlem. Banks said this could aid the local economy.

The Central Harlem economy has historically fluctuated. According to data collected by the [NYU Furman Center](#), the median household income in Harlem increased from \$42,880 in 2010 to \$57,720 in 2019. In 2020, however, the [U.S. Census Bureau](#) found a decrease in HHI to \$54,106. In the same year, the most recent data available, the Bureau reported that 23% of the Harlem population was living in poverty.

“We think this will make a huge difference in the community. That’s our objective,” Banks said.