

The Chicago Community Trust
Strategic Plan Q&A
Updated: January 25, 2016

GENERAL QUESTIONS

How was the Trust's new strategic plan created? By whom?

The Chicago Community Trust's Executive Committee developed this plan over the past 18 months with input from our community, nonprofit leaders and our donors. The insights we gained through our [On the Table](#) civic engagement initiatives in 2014 and 2015 helped us determine how we can and should serve this region in the most relevant and meaningful ways.

What sparked this strategic shift in the Trust's work and grant making?

Leadership at The Chicago Community Trust and its Executive Committee felt that as we celebrated our Centennial, it was vital to reimagine our future so that the Trust remains a worthy partner for donors and nonprofits for years to come. We want to be poised to respond to the most pressing challenges and opportunities facing our region.

What is the focus of the Trust's new strategic direction?

Our vision is for metropolitan Chicago to be the most philanthropic region in the nation. To accomplish this, The Chicago Community Trust's grants and initiatives over the next five years will focus on:

- *Inspiring philanthropy* in all its forms: time, talent and treasure;
- *Engaging residents* to work with one another for the common good; and
- *Leading change* to solve the most pressing issues and responding to the big opportunities within our communities: education, economic development, sustainable communities and community vitality.
- Becoming a *highly efficient, service-oriented organization* that people want to work with and for.

What are the geographic boundaries of the giving opportunities at the Trust?

The Chicago Community Trust awards grants throughout the six-county Chicago region, which includes: Cook, DuPage, Kane, Lake, McHenry and Will.

How organizations new to the Trust (or who have not recently worked with the Trust) get connected with or learn about grant making opportunities?

We encourage all organizations seeking to explore funding opportunities through the Trust to register with us on [GrantCentral](#), the Trust's online grant management system. This system is where all of our grant-making communication occurs. All opportunities for funding are listed on

Grant Central, which also allows you to research current grants that have already been dispersed.

With the Trust’s aim of inspiring philanthropy – is there a way to obtain volunteers from the Trust?

While the Trust does not have a formal volunteer program, there are a number of organizations that might be able to help (e.g., [Chicago Cares](#), [WomenOnCall](#), [Taproot](#), [Catchafire](#)).

How has the role of the Trust’s program officers changed under this new strategic direction?

The role of program officer at the Trust continues to evolve. In addition to supporting the grant making functions of the Trust, individuals in this role will work in service to our community in myriad ways:

1. Serving nonprofit organizations by being a Trust partner who helps to optimize overall performance;
2. Facilitating connections in the nonprofit sector to foster greater learning and collaboration;
3. Supporting donor engagement by offering best-in-class analysis of critical community issues;
4. Partnering with community stakeholders to build and execute strategy to advance progress in solving the most complex challenges facing the region.

If my previous contact is no longer with the Trust, what steps should I take to request a meeting for my organization?

Call the Trust at 312-616-8000 and ask whom is taking calls for your previous contact. Your call will be forwarded to someone who will assist you.

GRANT MAKING QUESTIONS

How are the Trust’s grant dollars distributed?

Approximately \$40,000,000 in grant awards are directed by the Trust staff and approved by the Trust Executive Committee each year. This \$40,000,000 is distributed through our GO Grants program, Innovation Fund and other programs. In addition, approximately \$130,000,000 of grant awards come from our Donor Advised Funds (DAFs) annually. However, these grants are donor-directed.

How does coinvestment play a role moving forward?

Our hope is that through coinvestment, we can create programs and products that are aligned with community need, and encourage donors and their donor advised funds (DAFs) to join the Trust in supporting these types of projects.

How will we know when grant making opportunities exist at the Trust?

We encourage all organizations seeking to explore funding opportunities through the Trust to register with us on [GrantCentral](#), the Trust's online grant management system. This system is where all of our grant-making communication occurs. All opportunities for funding are listed on Grant Central, which also allows you to research current grants that have already been dispersed.

How do Donor Advised Funds work?

A donor works with the Trust to manage their philanthropic investments. While the owners of these funds may ask for research or counsel, donors manage their own funds.

How do you apply for Donor Advised Funds?

In most cases, there is no application process or RFP for Donor Advised Funds, as these funds are awarded at the specific director of each donor. Our hope is that through coinvestment, we can create programs and products that are aligned with community need, and encourage donors and their Donor Advised Funds (DAFs) to join the Trust in supporting these types of projects.

Can organizations apply for and receive both GO Grants and Innovation Funds?

Yes.

Do I have to be a GO Grant recipient to apply for Innovation Funds?

No.

Will the grant making work of the Trust's affinity groups change?

No. The Chicago Community Trust's affinity groups will continue to operate their grant funds in the way that they see fit.

There used to be grants available for nonprofits to partner/merge with each other or restructure to gain new lines of revenue or eliminate costs for long-term sustainability. Will that still exist?

This program will continue, please contact your program officer with specific questions.

Do you worry about creating competition between organizations for funding?

It is our hope that The Chicago Community Trust's new grant making structure will lead for even more collaboration and partnership between area nonprofits with similar or complementary services. For example, we hope to create forums in which our GO (General Operating) Grants recipients can come together as learning cohorts to share best practices. Similarly, our

Innovation Fund will be designed to facilitate ways that organizations can come together to test ideas that could help our region leap forward.

What is the budget size of organizations you fund? There seems to be bias toward larger, more established organizations.

The budget size of the organizations that the Trust funds varies greatly, from small arts and other community organizations to larger, more established organizations.

GO GRANTS

Why are GO Grants invitation-only?

This is a new initiative for the Trust, and we made a decision to start it with a two-year pilot – working with organizations that we know well. Following this pilot period, the Trust plans on making adjustments as needed and potentially opening it up to additional nonprofits, based on the amount of grant funds available at that time.

Will all current Trust grantees be invited to apply for GO Grants?

No. Our focus with the GO Grants program is to support organizations that are meeting critical community needs. There will be other funding opportunities for organizations who might not fall into this category.

Will there still be a formal application process for GO Grants?

Yes, although the application will be shorter and more streamlined than RFPs you may have seen from the Trust in the past. Our nonprofit partners have told us that our grant making process should be less time-consuming and burdensome for applicants and the GO Grant application process will reflect that.

Who decides who receives the GO Grant pilot funding, and when will that decision be made?

The Trust programming team and Trust leadership reviewed a list of grant recipients from the last three years with an eye for organizations playing key role in delivering essential services. The first round of pilot period invitations for the January funding cycle went out in November for the same categories the Trust previously funded in January. Organizations will be contacted in March/April for May funding and in July/August for September funding.

What types of organizations will GO Grants fund?

We are focused on organizations delivering essential services for thriving communities, particularly those addressing basic human needs (e.g., hunger, homelessness, social services, health care). GO Grants will also be used to fund a variety of organizations – ranging from arts and education to community development programs.

What is the criteria for organizations to participate in GO Grants? What is the minimum budget for organizations to qualify for GO Grants?

Nonprofit organizations in good standing that provide essential services and foster thriving communities in the region are eligible for GO Grants. There is no minimum budget requirement.

If an organization has previously been awarded a grant from one of the Trust’s affinity funds, does that qualify you for a GO Grant?

Not necessarily. These are separate grant making initiatives with different goals and criteria – although some organizations may receive multiple types of funding from the Trust.

What will be the role of the GO Grant learning cohorts?

Learning cohorts within the GO Grants program will be designed to foster collaboration between organizations, optimizing the collective impact of organizations serving our region. The learning cohorts also inform the broad system reform agenda. Simply put, the Trust wants to learn from organizations on the frontline in the fight to stabilize and strengthen our communities.

What opportunities do non-funded agencies have to participate in GO Grant learning cohorts?

While the learning GO Grant learning cohorts are specific to those grant recipients, the Trust regularly convenes subject matter stakeholders for learning, solving a pressing and immediate issue, and other types of engagement. Those opportunities are open to all.

If we have not received a grant from the Trust in a few years, will we be invited to submit under this new GO Grant strategy?

During the pilot phase, unfortunately, no. The GO Grant pilot phase consists of organizations already involved in the Trust’s grants, and it will last two years.

How will the reporting requirements under GO Grants be different from the Trust’s previous focus on outcome-based metrics?

The Trust will continue to measure and report grant making outcomes. Since GO Grants are not project-based, we expect to focus on collective outcomes by cohort.

INNOVATION FUNDING

Why has the Trust decided to create an Innovation Fund?

The Trust concluded that it needs the ability to respond to modern challenges that require bold and rapid response – free of the timing and constraints of the historical RFP process. We want to fund breakthrough ideas that spur growth/vitality in communities.

What is the timing around the launch of the Trust’s Innovation Fund? Where do I submit ideas?

This spring, the Trust will announce more details on the Innovation Fund – what the Trust is looking for and how organizations can submit ideas.

Will the Trust’s new Innovation Fund operate through an RFP process or do organizations just send you ideas?

It could be a little bit of both – the Trust will announce more details in the spring on how the process will work. Our main goal with this program is to be flexible – providing rapid response assistance, or putting out a call for organizations to come together and collaborate to solve a pressing issue.

What types of projects are you looking to fund through the Innovation Fund?

We are open to projects that advance new approaches and ideas around cultivating social entrepreneurship, inspiring philanthropy and growing civic engagement. We are willing to take on some risk to identify new ideas and approaches that will yield significant benefit to our community. This may include opportunities for the Trust to work with organizations and collaborations who have untested or emerging ideas that have not generated significant public awareness.

Who decides which projects will receive support through the Trust’s Innovation Fund, and when will that decision be made?

The programming team at the Trust will select proposals to take to the Executive Committee for approval.

What is the amount of Innovation grants?

We anticipate that Innovation Fund grants will range from \$5,000 to \$75,000. These grants will be awarded to help organizations test solutions to specific issues.

How can successful, innovative programs be sustainable with no long-term commitment under this funding structure?

It is our hope that successful projects and programs developed or launched through our Innovation Fund will spark additional support from other donors, investors and philanthropies.

LEADING CHANGE PORTFOLIO

What are the Trust’s Leading Change priorities?

We’ve focused on four pressing issues facing our communities: supporting equitable access to post-secondary education, apprenticeships and job training; stimulating regional competitiveness and local economic vitality; advancing the growth and resilience of the most

disadvantaged communities; and addressing the impact of racial segregation and inequity in our region to ensure its continued vitality. In addition to targeted funding, we'll drive change by leveraging and maximizing our collective influence and impact through partnerships with all Trust stakeholders.

Is there a distinction between GO Grants, the Innovation Fund and Leading Change?

Yes, they are distinct channels but all are aligned to the Trust's overall commitment to address the region's most pressing issues. Our Leading Change portfolio is more than grant making; it's a chance for the Trust to build coalitions to tackle the toughest and most challenging issues facing our community. There will be many opportunities for organizations with complementary goals and missions to participate and benefit through funding, influence and impact.

The policy/advocacy community across sectors has deep experience and relationships, as well as an understanding of the structural obstacles to change. Will you involve this community and others who have specific insights or perspectives on the areas identified in the Trust's Leading Change portfolio?

Yes. We are committed to listening for new voices that can spark community change, and to convening groups of individuals and organizations who can support these areas of focus. That said, we will not be using think tanks to design and push out large programs; instead, we will be focusing on creating coalitions to drive our strategy in these areas.

Does the Trust's focus on post-secondary education and college and career readiness as part of its Leading Change portfolio preclude future grant making in support of early childhood education, literacy, STEM and other areas?

Under GO Grants and potentially when co-investment opportunities arise, the Trust will continue to consider grant making in support of other needs along the education continuum from early childhood through post-secondary.