Requests for Proposals: Catalyzing Neighborhood Investment – Building The Foundation – Flexible Funding Program – Collaborative Fund

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<th><strong>RFP Release Date:</strong></th>
<th>June 7, 2021</th>
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<td><strong>Information Sessions:</strong></td>
<td>Wednesday, June 16, 1-2 p.m.; Monday, June 21, 3-4 p.m.; Tuesday, June 29, 10-11 a.m.</td>
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<td><strong>Application Deadline:</strong></td>
<td>Rolling* – See Table</td>
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<td><strong>Site Visits:</strong></td>
<td>Rolling, depends on submission date</td>
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<td><strong>Funding Decisions:</strong></td>
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<td>Rolling, depends on submission date</td>
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*Please keep in mind that it may take three to four months to receive funding if approved, timing is subject to change based on submission date and staff capacity.

**Background:**

The Chicago Community Trust is committed to closing the racial and ethnic wealth gap in the Chicago region. **Catalyzing Neighborhood Investment** is one of the strategies helping to achieve this goal. The strategy creates the enabling environment for communities to attract, retain and own capital investments.

In 2020, the Trust’s Catalyzing Neighborhood Investment team launched the **Flexible Funding Program**. The program supports and builds the capacity of organizations to engage with community partnerships, increase investment opportunities, and concentrate and coordinate community action to increase the amount and impact of investment that is more aligned to community priorities. The program provides three types of “flexible” dollars to help community-based organizations attract, retain and own the investment that happens in their communities: general operating dollars support the organization’s mission; capacity-building dollars support administrative and strategic needs of the organization; and collaborative dollars support the organization’s ability to partner with others.

**Need/Opportunity Statement:**

Collaboration across organizations, communities and sectors is often necessary to address complex challenges in our neighborhoods. Collaborations allow for more effective coordination of services and programs and can help to address the root causes of entrenched challenges such as neighborhood development, the racial wealth gap, displacement, and other factors impacting disinvested communities.

Currently, community-based organizations are being called into partnership at much greater frequency. Although the increase of collective efforts has great promise to drive more inclusive economies in communities, the Flexible Funding Program recognizes that organizations face fundamental barriers and limitations that inhibit their ability to participate in collaborative work that can lead to positive economic and community change.
Basically, it cost money to collaborate. For example, sitting at a collaborative table is time away from the office. Costs associated with participating in a collaborative effort might include staffing, travel, reporting and measuring the impact of the collaboration. For collaboration activities that are not attached to a funded program, the organization bears the cost. This is where the Flexible Funding Program’s *Collaborative Fund* fill a gap.

The Flexible Funding Program’s *Collaborative Fund* pay for the time it takes to partner with others on committees, working groups and other activities that advance neighborhood investment initiatives.

**Goals and Outcomes:**

Recipients of the Flexible Funding Program’s *Collaborative Fund* will participate in collaborative tables that advance a neighborhood investment agenda and strengthen our region's capacity to address urgent and longstanding problems.

The collaborations will meet the following criteria:

- **Align resources and knowledge** by engaging multiple entities – such as grassroots organizations, anchor institutions, citywide and regional agencies, the public and private sectors, and academia – to achieve more meaningful impact than can be accomplished by any organization alone.

- **Elevate a broad and diverse range of voices and perspectives** by connecting to the specific needs of a community and elevating voices and perspectives that are too often left out of the conversation, especially those from people of color.

- **Measure and manage impact** by demonstrating a commitment toward or an established practice in measuring, tracking, using and reporting performance metrics to inform goals and improve outcomes.

- **Address racial equity and systemic inequalities** by challenging systems that have historically excluded or limited the access of vulnerable populations to capital.

One of the Trust’s 10-year goals to close the racial and ethnic wealth gap is to increase financial investments in disinvested majority Black and Latinx communities. These outcomes and measures are applied specifically to the *Collaborative Fund* and collectively inform progress towards advancing community-driven investment efforts throughout the Chicago region:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>IMPACT</th>
<th>SHORT-TERM OUTCOME</th>
<th>MEASURES</th>
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<tr>
<td>Increased community-driven financial investment for development in disinvested communities</td>
<td>Increased multi-stakeholder and/or cross-sector partnerships aligned to driving</td>
<td># of collaboration hours and partners over the duration of the grant</td>
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community-driven investments | Total financial resources applied/secured for the project by organization

Given the Collaborative Fund focus on the expansion of networks and support of local neighborhood-led agendas, the final reporting will be done verbally to collect data on progress towards:

- **Increase Organization or Coalition Capacity:** Captures the change in organizational or coalition capacity.
- **Increase Coalition, Constituent and Organizational Power:** Details the change in constituent and/or organizational influence among key audiences.
- **Expand Partnerships Opportunities:** Tracks the organization's ability to engage and sustain partnerships with public and/or private organizations.

**Priority Strategies and Activities:**

The Catalyzing Neighborhood Investment strategy recognizes that organizations can participate simultaneously in many kinds of collaborative arrangements that are organized for an informal one-time purpose or be maintained as formalized continuing groups for a long period of time. With the Flexible Funding Program’s Collaborative Fund opportunity, the Trust will support the approach a group will take to achieve joint and aligned collaboration. The Collaborative Fund supports initiatives working together to accomplish: (a) coordination among different groups; (b) greater degree and effective collaboration, (c) enhanced sharing of data and knowledge within connected networks. These funds may be used to support organizations already engaged in local work or to add new voices and build new partnerships that align with the Catalyzing Neighborhood Investment strategy to attract, retain and own capital investments.

**Grantmaking Criteria:**

The Collaborative Fund will provide grants of $2,500 to $25,000. Actual grant amounts will depend on identified funding needs, as well as project scale, complexity, and overall local or regional impact. These funds will be made available to eligible organizations for their participation at collaborative tables that aim to deliver neighborhood investment solutions to communities.

The short form application for funding will request information on:

- Description of Community/Beneficiaries Served by Project/Collaborative
- Project/Collaborative Goals and Overview
Explain your organization’s alignment with the Catalyzing Neighborhood Investment (CNI) strategy. Note: Organizations with strong CNI agenda or work plan in improving the neighborhood through built environment solutions.

Describe your organization’s substantial partnership related to the project/collaborative's goals, objectives and activities with other entities.

Describe how the partnership is structured and mechanisms for managing the collaborative work, monitoring activities, and evaluating progress toward outcomes.

- # of local organizations represented within the partnership
- # of public sector partners involved with the project
- # of private sector partners involved with the project

Identify the need for grant funding, what is needed to continue with the partnership efforts, and what the grant will fund.

Identify organization’s main lead(s) in the partnership, role in the partnership, issue area expertise, and time your organization spends on participation.

Additional Documents (if applicable)
- Any research, analysis, or implementation efforts already undertaken by participating entities.

The following criteria will factor into proposal evaluation:

- Organizations with missions, strategies and programs that competitively align with the Catalyzing Neighborhood Investment strategy.
- Organizations led by and/or predominantly staffed by individuals representing communities most affected by structural racism, discrimination, or disinvestment.
- Organizations and community leaders with proven success in building strong, collaborative relationships.
- Organizations that demonstrate a community-led structure and engagement practice (i.e., recognize community needs and work is done with support of community members).
- Organizations that can articulate a clearly defined set of its community’s shared priorities.
- Organizations with sound financial health, leadership and governance.
- Organizations that help to advance the goals and leverage the resources of existing community/municipal planning processes and place-based initiatives such as Opportunity Zones, the Industrial Corridor Modernization Initiative, Neighborhood Opportunity Fund corridors, Chicago Prize initiatives, and the Invest South/West initiative. (This list is illustrative, not exhaustive.)

Grant Amounts Available and Grant Term:

The total pool of funding available for FY2021 is $250,000.
The Flexible Funding Program’s *Collaborative Fund* will award 12-month grants that range from $2,500 to $25,000 in restricted funds to support an organization’s collaboration needs.

The Chicago Community Trust will make up to 30 total grants under the Flexible Funding Program’s *Collaborative Fund* opportunity, per year.

Grant applications will be accepted at any time until all the funds are distributed and will be reviewed as received. The Trust reserves the right to stop accepting applications for the program, either temporarily or altogether, without prior notice.

*Note:* Grant recipients are eligible to apply for other available grant opportunities during this time. Grant recipients should not assume continued funding after the time period of grant.

**Eligible Applicants:**

The Catalyzing Neighborhood Investment team will consider applications from groups, agencies, and organizations with a valid 501(c)3 designation or that have a 501(c)3 fiscal sponsor.

Eligible applicants may include:

- Individual nonprofit organizations with operating budgets under $1 million, or
- Individual group working through a nonprofit fiscal agent.

To be eligible for a grant award, an applicant must be:

- A nonprofit organization with evidence that it (a) has been recognized by the Internal Revenue Service as an organization described in Section 501(c)(3) of the Code, (b) is fiscally sponsored by a Section 501(c)(3) organization, or (c) is a governmental unit within the meaning of Section 170(c)(1) of the Code;
- Described in Section 170(b)(1)(A) of the Code, other than a “disqualified supporting organization” within the meaning of Section 4966(d)(4) of the Code;
- Located within and/or primarily serving residents of Cook County, Illinois; and
- Have an operating budget under $1 million.

Sponsored organizations without 501(c)(3) status must identify their fiscal sponsor as soon as possible and ask them to complete and certify an organization profile in The Chicago Community Trust’s grants management system, GrantCentral, [https://cct.smartsimple.com](https://cct.smartsimple.com), prior to the sponsored organization’s application submission.

**Ineligible Uses:**

The following conditions make a proposal ineligible for this funding opportunity:
• Proposals that do not reflect the priority strategies and activities outlined above.
• Proposals that do not abide by the grantmaking criteria outlined above.
• Applicants that do not meet the eligible applicant requirements outlined above.
• Proposals for capital campaigns or endowments.

**Evaluation and Learning:**

Sharing successes or challenges in achieving measures of progress is critical to our collective learning, decision-making and impact.

The Trust is committed to achieving our long-term goals and outcomes. We are developing outcome measures both internally and with our partners that inform progress towards our shared mission. Your project outcomes should be informed by why you think the project or strategy will lead to the anticipated result or long-term change (i.e., your theory of change). After you identify those outcomes, we are asking grant applicants to develop specific, time-limited measures of progress. For shorter term grants (one-year), these outcomes may not be achieved during the duration of the project. Measures of Progress provide measurable and reportable evidence that a proposed project and/or organization has effectively achieved – or is on the path to achieving - its objectives. These are what can be measured during the term of the grant period and contribute to your longer-term outcomes and are aligned to the Trust’s strategic priorities. We also recognize there could be challenges to the implementation of any grant, many of which are not under the control of grant recipients, that may prevent you from achieving your targets. Learning with you about the progress made towards your outcomes and measures is part of the Trust’s evaluation and learning efforts.

For potential grant recipients for whom developing metrics or workplans is a new activity or for those individuals who would like to learn more about developing Measures of Progress, the Trust will be providing webinars, in-person sessions, and opportunities for ongoing peer learning.

**Collection of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Demographic Data:**

The Trust asks that grant seekers provide demographic data on board and staff as well as clients/beneficiaries of programs and services. The Trust believes the board and staff composition of grant recipients should be inclusive and reflect the diversity of the demographics of the region and the individuals they serve. Diversity for the Trust encompasses but is not limited to ethnicity, race, gender, sexual orientation and identification, age, economic circumstance, class, disability, geography and philosophy. For this reason, the Trust does take into consideration the demographic make-up of the board, staff and clients of a grant applicant as an important proposal evaluation criterion.

**Application Process:**
Applicants must complete their application via GrantCentral, The Chicago Community Trust’s online grants management system. To access an application, grant seekers must log into GrantCentral at https://cct.smartsimple.com.

Applicants must complete an Organization Profile, which is on the last tab within their GrantCentral account. If the Organization Profile was completed for a previous funding opportunity, it must be reviewed and, if needed, updated and certified prior to application submission.

Sponsored organizations without 501(c)(3) status must identify their fiscal sponsor as soon as possible and ask them to complete and certify an organization profile in The Chicago Community Trust’s grants management system, GrantCentral, https://cct.smartsimple.com, prior to the sponsored organization’s application submission.

*Note:* Incomplete applications will not be considered. Applicants may receive a site visit, telephone call, or other communication from Trust staff as part of the application review process.

**Submission Deadlines and Other Key Dates:**

Grant applications will be accepted at any time until all the funds are distributed and will be reviewed as received.

For the upcoming cycle: August 2021

- The application deadline is July 9, 2021
- Follow-ups will be conducted between June 16 and July 16, 2021
- Funding decisions will be made in early August 2021
- Applicants will be notified of awards from August 23-30. Those applicants who were not chosen for funding also will be notified at this time.

**Subsequent grantmaking cycles:**

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<td>October 22</td>
<td>January 7</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Site Visit (phone call, zoom</strong></td>
<td>August 23 –</td>
<td>October 4 –</td>
<td>December 13 –</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>session, or in-person meeting)</strong></td>
<td>September 17</td>
<td>October 29</td>
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<td><strong>Final Decision</strong></td>
<td>Mid-October</td>
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**Contact Information:**
For technical questions regarding GrantCentral, email grants@cct.org.

For programmatic and application content questions, email Sandra Aponte at saponte@cct.org.
FAQs:

What is the process of securing a grant from the Flexible Funding Program’s Collaborative Fund? An applicant completes an organizational profile and a short form application in GrantCentral, The Chicago Community Trust’s online grants management system. Please visit the RFP for additional details about the process.

What are the main considerations to be selected for this grant opportunity?

- Alignment with the Trust’s Catalyzing Neighborhood Investment strategy
- Commitment to the collaborative’s success (time, efforts and functions)
- Demonstrated commitment to equity and inclusion both within the applicant’s organization and the structure and governance of the collaborative

How often will grants be made under the Flexible Funding Program’s Collaborative Fund? This program takes applications on an ongoing, rolling basis. Grants generally will be made on a bi-monthly basis. The applicants should anticipate a minimum of three to four months between submission of an application and notification of grant decision.

May I submit more than one application per year for different collaboratives? We prefer for an organization to submit for one collaborative, once per year.

If my organization is part of multiple collaboratives and/or partnerships, should we only submit one application? Yes.

What is the duration of the grant? This is a one-year grant with an opportunity to renew for up to two years.

If my proposal is declined, will I be told why? You will receive a notice that your proposal doesn’t competitively align with the requirements of the RFP at the time of submission. Unfortunately, staff time limitation does not allow for individual discussions about proposal declines.

Can I talk with Trust staff about my application prior to submission? Yes, but tight calendars and staff bandwidth may prevent a timely or substantive response. The RFP, FAQ, and other information on the Flexible Funding Program webpages provide ample information on what constitutes a competitive application.

Does the Flexible Funding Program’s Collaborative Fund provide grant-writing assistance? No. Trust staff will assist only with application submission and questions about the RFP. For questions about application submission, contact cmarquez@cct.org. For questions about the RFP, contact saponte@cct.org.

Will grant recipients be able to sub-grant funding? We would prefer that organizations you would sub-grant to instead apply on their own. The Trust developed this grant opportunity to support various types of organizations and simplified the application process to encourage smaller organizations to apply individually.
Is it recommended that multiple organizations within a collaborative and/or partnership apply, or should we choose one or two organizations to apply? We encourage any organization that plays or could play a valuable role within a partnership to apply. We have worked to reduce the burden for most organizations. Applying directly, allows the Trust to connect to a broader set of organizations doing this work. This grant opportunity is for organizations with operating budgets of $1 million or less that fall under the category of community-driven investment organizations.

How does the Trust staff address that members of the same collaborative and/or partnership may feel they are competing against each other? We fully understand this as a sensitivity. We hope that by having individual organizations apply, we are limiting the collaboratives and/or partnerships’ burden to make decisions between organizations. Unfortunately, we do not have the resources to fund every member of a collaborative and/or partnership.

Can I apply to develop a new collaborative? No. This grant opportunity is for existing collaboratives and/or partnerships. Organizations applying must have already completed the necessary due diligence required for developing a plan to implement a collaborative effort, such as feasibility studies, and have already begun operating under a structure while working together on a shared agenda.

Do I need to be a current member of a collaborative? No. The Trust recognizes that organizations whose work and missions align with an existing collaborative effort have not been able to join collaborative table due to a lack of resources. The Trust’s review of applications will consider the roles and demonstrated contributions of existing members, as well as the desire and potential contributions of new members. We will ask that you have formally joined a collaborative for which you are applying by the time of the application deadline.

How does the Trust describe the fundamentals of a strong collaborative?

- Inclusive leadership
- Effective and ongoing engagement of the contributing partners towards the achievement of a broader set of outcomes
- Strong research capacity and/or contributing research partner that can provide supportive and disaggregated data by race and targeted geographies
- Collaboration across neighborhoods and other geographic boundaries
- Interdisciplinary teams/partners that leverage a broad range of skills and expertise and can clearly speak to the aspects of the neighborhoods/communities they want to change or improve

RESOURCES
GrantCentral FAQs (122.1KB)
GrantCentral Registration Instructions (356.1KB)
Sample Organization Profile (196.4KB)
Glossary:

Community of color areas - Geographies in which 70 percent of residents are non-white. A community of color is composed of residents identifying as one or more racial and ethnic identities (Black, Latinx, Arab, Asian, Native American).

Neighborhood investment – Strategic investment made by, for and with the community for the purposes of attracting and deploying socially driven financial capital.

Community-driven investment organization – Placed-based community-based organizations, community development corporations, chamber, network, or collaborative with defined approaches to comprehensive community and economic development. Specifically, an organization strengthening core assets such as housing, transportation, commercial corridors, infrastructure, and other land uses while building the capacity of people of color to drive, own and benefit from any real estate development catalyzed by those assets.

Social sector – Complex system consisting of foundations, individual philanthropists, nonprofits, social enterprises, policy, corporate responsibility and industry experts.

Ecosystem – The interplay of the actors (nonprofits and mission-oriented for-profit developers, providers of support to small businesses, community development corporations, community development financial institutions, foundations, public sector, residents, etc.) and functions that produces an environment for community investment.

Following the Urban Institute’s classification, the different types of collaborative initiatives fall into four models that offer different options or strategies for collaborating with each other:

Networks - In networks, partners will primarily exchange information for mutual benefit. These networks are most common at the earliest stages of ecosystem development, but they can also serve as valuable standalone activities at later stages. They focus on creating opportunities for learning and peer-to-peer exploration for economic and community development strategies. Networks can help partners build trust and develop a shared understanding of community issues to progress toward shared goals.

Consortia - Consortia involve more organizational involvement, time, and trust than networks (while yielding attendant benefits). Collaborators in a consortium have achieved a high degree of coordination and have established formal or informal arrangements to share information and collaborate on joint services (such as due diligence) to create efficiencies, enhance capacities, or reduce costs. Although coordination is facilitated by the joint services, community-driven investment decisions take place separately within each institution.

Alliances - Alliances require greater organizational commitments than networks or consortia and may require legal agreements. These efforts often combine functions or services to reduce costs
and give partners more capacity. For example, when groups deploy capital together through a fund or by pooling their resources to secure investments, they create an alliance.

**Platforms** - Anchored by a core group of complementary organizations that aim to scale projects, platforms are designed to connect different stakeholders from the community with financial investors and resources. Platform members are particularly willing to enhance each other’s capacity for mutual benefit.