

Our Great Rivers

Request for Proposals

Activity	Date
Request for Proposals release	January 13, 2023
Information session #1	January 25, 2023
Short application (i.e., LOI) due	February 10, 2023
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The Rivers and Neighborhood Investment

In 2019, The Chicago Community Trust set a [10-year goal](#) to close the racial and ethnic wealth gap. The vibrancy, livability, and equitable development of neighborhoods is a key measure of the goal advanced through the Trust’s [Catalyzing Neighborhood Investment strategy](#), which resources communities to use built and natural assets as catalysts for change. The river system is one of those catalysts.

Three major river systems – Des Plaines, Chicago, Calumet – traverse dozens of communities across the city, supplying Chicago with approximately 155 miles of public and private riverfront property – much of it still inaccessible, underutilized, vacant, and in need of remediation. But even in communities along the most challenged parts of the system, there are plans to engage it through recreation, habitation restoration, placemaking, and sustainable development.

Background on Great Rivers Chicago

In 2015, the City of Chicago, Metropolitan Planning Council, and other partners created [Great Rivers Chicago](#). This long-term initiative undertook as its inaugural task a visioning process for the Chicago, Calumet, and Des Plaines rivers and tributaries within city boundaries. After 15 months and nearly 100 public events, the partners synthesized the thoughts and ideas of more than 6,000 residents into the [Our Great Rivers vision](#), the city’s first-ever comprehensive vision for the entirety of its river system. The Vision aspires to a living, inviting, productive river system within 30 years.

Since the release of the Our Great Rivers vision, over [25 initiatives](#) supported through public, private, and philanthropic funding are bringing attention to forgotten places throughout the system. At last count, nearly 140 organizational and institutional partners were involved in these collaborations, making Great Rivers Chicago an exemplar for how a shared asset can bring ideas, people, and communities together.

Today, the [River Ecology and Governance Task Force](#) (Rivers Task Force) meets regularly to discuss projects, practices, and policies that impact the river system. The Rivers Task Force is an outgrowth of an implementation committee started in 2016 after the release of the Our Great Rivers vision. The group consists of local, state, and federal government agencies, civic and community organizations, and local institutions, and lends considerable support towards realizing the Our Great Rivers vision. The Rivers

Task Force is administered by the Chicago Department of Planning and Development with managerial support from Metropolitan Planning Council and Friends of the Chicago River. One of its key initiatives has been to work with Rivers-focused stakeholders to identify locations for future river-related enhancements. As part of a series of workshops hosted in 2021, 82 such “River Sites of Interest” have been identified with input from government stakeholders, Rivers Task Force, and community members. These are a set of potential locations for habitat restoration, stormwater mitigation, and recreation that have been identified through an in-process United States Army Corps of Engineers study. Many of these sites also represent opportunities for community development activities and river access improvements. For many sites, river-oriented economic and neighborhood development opportunities may be possible in areas proximate to the sites themselves, with the river as the “theme.”

To date, there have been four rounds of funding for projects aligning with the inviting, living, and productive themes of the Our Great Rivers vision. Collectively, the projects have helped shape a different narrative about the rivers beyond their value as an industrial asset and created literal and figurative pathways for riverfront access, restoration, and development in places long considered off limits. Building off the coordinated work that was started in the Rivers Task Force, this request for proposals for the fifth round of Our Great Rivers projects focuses on these “River Sites of Interest.”

To Qualify for this Funding Opportunity

Applicants may submit proposals for planning, placemaking, urban design, public access/wayfinding, public awareness/branding, research/studies/analyses, policy development, advocacy/organizing, economic development, and brick-and-mortar pre-development. To be competitive, the applications must meet these qualifications:

- Focus on/build capacity for a “River Site of Interest”, including the site itself or the immediately surrounding area as “gateway” to the site (selection of one of these sites is strongly preferred, but not required, see * below). River Sites of Interest mapped [here](#). Description of River Sites of interest [here](#).
- Advance the goals of the Living, Inviting or Productive themes of the Our Great Rivers vision (required).
- Position the rivers as catalysts for community-led neighborhood investment in disinvested communities of color and in communities blighted by pollution or lack of access to quality natural amenities. Majority Black and Latinx communities will receive priority (required).
- Collaborate across communities and sectors (i.e., public, private, nonprofit). Proposals without robust partnerships will not receive funding. Commitments from key partners, including elected officials and public agencies, must be confirmed through letters of support. Projects of similar topics or geographic overlap may be asked to combine efforts (required).
- Promote co-benefits across topic areas (e.g., a built environment initiative that creates public health benefits, a river solution that promotes walkable neighborhoods).
- Prepare communities to transition land to sustainable uses.
- Advance the goals and leverage the resources of existing community/municipal planning processes and place-based initiatives other than Our Great Rivers, such as neighborhood Quality of Life planning, INVEST South/West, Neighborhood Opportunity Fund, Chicago Prize submissions, We Will Chicago, and others.

- Address systemic barriers through policy change, engagement with public officials and agency leaders, partnerships with the private sector, pioneering research, or the creation of innovative and replicable processes, approaches, or structures.

* IMPORTANT: Our Great Rivers projects that are not focused on “Rivers Sites of Interest”, including previously funded projects and projects not previously funded, are eligible for funding, pending approval of Trust staff and the degree to which they competitively meet the qualifications of this RFP.

Geographic Focus

- Primarily “Rivers Sites of Interest” identified during Rivers Task Force workshops in 2021. A table listing sites and addresses is also included as part of the RFP materials. River Sites of Interest mapped [here](#). Description of River Sites of interest [here](#).
- Using Google Maps, applicants are required to include a link to the location and geographic boundary of the project in their application.

501(c)(3) requirements

- Applicants must be nonprofit organizations with evidence that the organization (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.
- Applicants must be nonprofit organizations 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.
- Mission-driven for-profit entities encouraged to apply. Organizations without 501(c)(3) status must identify a nonprofit fiscal sponsor as soon as possible and ask them to complete an organization profile in The Chicago Community Trust’s grants management system, [GrantCentral](#), prior to the sponsored organization’s application submission.

Disqualifying Projects and Initiatives

The following conditions make a proposal ineligible for this funding opportunity:

- Proposals that do not reflect the project and geographic qualifications outlined above.
- Recreational programs (e.g., rowing, sailing clubs).
- Social and human services programs (e.g., youth, students, seniors, special needs populations).
- Flora and fauna purchases. Our Great Rivers funding should build capacity for habitat restoration from other funding sources (e.g., [Chi-Cal Rivers Fund](#), government funding).
- Large capital expenses (e.g., motorized vehicles, infrastructure). Equipment and supplies are normal expense items for most projects and are permitted under this funding opportunity.

Grant Amounts and Term

Grant awards for this funding opportunity will range between \$50,000 and \$500,000. Applicants are encouraged to submit for an amount that matches the true scale of the project rather than the funding maximum under this RFP.

IMPORTANT: Submissions over \$250,000 will receive extra due diligence at the full proposal stage, and final approval of the grant will likely take longer. Only a small number of submissions over \$250,000 will be invited to full proposal.

Grant recipients will be expected to meet the Trust's requirements for the submission of financial and narrative reports at the end of the annual grant cycle, including a final report.

Evaluation and Learning

If invited to submit a full proposal, applicants will be required to select from a set of outcomes and measures of progress that align with the Trust's Catalyzing Neighborhood Investment strategy. Learning with you about the progress made towards your outcomes and measures is part of the Trust's evaluation and learning efforts.

Also, Metropolitan Planning Council (MPC) is working to evaluate Our Great Rivers projects' short-term successes and long-term impacts by tracking outcomes across the various policy, planning, and programming efforts. The types of measures MPC is tracking with the project teams include media coverage and public awareness, activity and usage of river areas, economic impact in the surrounding area, relationships formed and leveraged, additional funding leveraged, and organizational capacity building. MPC will provide advisory support, a quarterly newsletter, and coordination and advocacy support to project teams as necessary.

Collection of 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 region's demographics 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

Submissions happen in two steps: a short application ("letter of inquiry" or LOI) and a full application. Pending LOI reviews by the Trust, the most competitive LOI submissions will be invited to submit the full application. Both steps happen in GrantCentral, The Chicago Community Trust's online grants management system, and require the completion of an Organizational Profile. Sponsored organizations without 501(c)(3) status must identify their fiscal sponsor as soon as possible and ask them to complete an organization profile in GrantCentral prior to the sponsored organization's application submission. Late or incomplete LOIs or full applications will not be considered. Applicants be asked for a site visit, meeting, or other communication from Trust staff as part of the application review process.

To get started on an LOI and Organizational Profile, click [here](#).

Submission Deadlines and Other Dates

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For technical questions about GrantCentral, email grants@cct.org. For questions about this request for proposals and funding opportunity, contact Hector Estrada at hestrada@cct.org.

The Our Great Rivers Fund at The Chicago Community Trust

In September 2019, the Executive Committee of The Chicago Community Trust approved a bold strategic plan to create a thriving, equitable, and connected Chicago region. A key aspect of that strategic vision is the ability of the Trust to connect donors to opportunities to create impact through their philanthropy. An early and exciting example of this goal to Connect Philanthropy to Impact is the Our Great Rivers Fund. The Trust established the Our Great Rivers Fund to promote and advance Great Rivers Chicago and, more specifically, to inspire and engage donors and stakeholders in this work. The Our Great Rivers Fund connects donors who care deeply about the relationship between healthy river systems and thriving communities to opportunities to pool charitable investments for greater impact through grantmaking. To date, donors have contributed more than \$2 million to the Our Great Rivers Fund to support and advance this important work.