

### ***Arts & Culture for Community Wealth Request for Proposals (RFP)***

<b>RFP and LOI Release Date:</b>	May 15, 2025
<b>Information Session:</b>	May 29, 2025
<b>LOI Deadline</b>	June 12, 2025
<b>Organizations Invited to Submit Full Application</b>	July 17, 2025
<b>Full Application Deadline:</b>	August 14, 2025
<b>Funding Decisions:</b>	October 2025
<b>Announcements:</b>	November 2025

#### ***RFP Background:***

For more than 100 years, The Chicago Community Trust has convened, supported, funded, and accelerated the work of community members and changemakers committed to strengthening the Chicago region. From spearheading our response to the Great Depression and Great Recession to building up our civic infrastructure to the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Trust has brought our community together to face pressing challenges and seize our greatest opportunities. Today, that means creating pathways that build wealth and well-being for all Chicagoans.

As a community foundation, the Trust is committed to addressing challenges that stand in the way of a thriving Chicago region. As part of that mission, the Trust will always support meeting people's critical needs such as secure housing and healthy food, public safety, and regional response to crises. We also know our region's racial and ethnic wealth gap is a major contributing factor to issues including health disparities, gun violence, and uneven economic growth. We are committed to reducing this gap so that our region and its residents can meet their potential.

At the Trust, we believe people are our region's greatest asset. Our region will thrive when everyone contributes to and benefits from our economy. To achieve this, we are focused on:

- [\*\*Household Wealth\*\*](#) to build economic security now and in the future through increased homeownership and home equity, and increased income and financial assets.
- [\*\*Community Wealth\*\*](#) to transform underinvested communities by funding place-based, community-led initiatives, preserving residents' stakes in gentrifying areas, and ensuring residents share in the economic gains.
- [\*\*Collective Power\*\*](#) to ensure marginalized voices have a say in decisions affecting them by supporting movement building, arts, culture and narrative change, and leadership development.
- [\*\*Policy Change\*\*](#) to reform policies and practices that have limited wealth-building opportunities over generations by supporting resident leaders, policy organizations, and advocacy coalitions.

As the region's community foundation, we also maintain our commitment to:

- **[Addressing critical needs](#)** to help Chicagoans meet their basic needs to achieve economic stability and security, and respond to crises facing our region in partnership with community and civic leaders.
- **[Connecting philanthropy to impact](#)** to ensure charitable giving is doing the greatest good for our region and beyond.

***Need/Opportunity Statement:***

The *Arts and Culture for Community Wealth* RFP, led by the Trust's Collective Power team, seeks proposals for innovative and emerging projects that leverage arts and culture as catalysts to build individual and community wealth. In the work to increase neighborhood investment and build community wealth, arts and culture are essential tools that drive economic prosperity while engaging community residents. Yet, on the South and West sides, where communities are predominantly Black and Latine, there is a disparity in access to resources for arts and culture.

While research shows that “access to local arts and culture boosts connection to community, both in feeling and in action,”<sup>1</sup> nearly half of the city's population feels arts and culture activities are unavailable in their neighborhoods.<sup>2</sup> This disparity represents not only cultural inequity but also a missed economic opportunity for these communities. A recent study shows that neighborhoods with accessible arts programming see 23 percent higher foot traffic for local businesses on event days,<sup>3</sup> thus driving economic growth and contributing to the local economy. Due to a lack of resources for local arts and culture on the South and West sides, too many of our communities are missing out on this benefit and losing the economic gains that come with it. Investing in these vital cultural assets will revitalize these neighborhoods and enrich the entire region's cultural fabric and economic strength.

Arts funding at the federal, regional and local levels is limited and at risk of being further reduced. Now, more than ever, communities need resources to create art that reflects their residents' local values, identities and aspirations.

This funding opportunity seeks to address this need by supporting projects that integrate arts and culture into public spaces and drive economic growth in underinvested communities and those experiencing displacement of longtime residents. By focusing our funding in commercial and cultural corridors with other economic development and community investment efforts underway, this project-based grant opportunity aims to

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<sup>1</sup> “Landmark Study Reveals Value of the Arts in Communities Nationwide.” *Knight Foundation*, [knightfoundation.org/press/releases/landmark-study-reveals-value-of-the-arts-in-communities-nationwide/](https://knightfoundation.org/press/releases/landmark-study-reveals-value-of-the-arts-in-communities-nationwide/). Accessed 31 Mar. 2025.

<sup>2</sup> “Chicagoans Value the Arts - but Which Neighborhoods Get Access?” *The Chicago Community Trust*, 27 Aug. 2014, [www.cct.org/stories/chicagoans-value-the-arts-but-which-neighborhoods-get-access/](http://www.cct.org/stories/chicagoans-value-the-arts-but-which-neighborhoods-get-access/).

<sup>3</sup> “Cultural Tourism in Chicago: Economic Impact Analysis.” Choose Chicago, 2022.

leverage the arts to engage residents, strengthen community connections, and attract economic growth.

For the purposes of this RFP, arts and culture are defined as creative expressions and activities that engage and reflect our communities' diverse identities, traditions and values. Projects supported by this funding program will:

- **Activate public spaces as hubs for community engagement** through captivating and accessible art forms such as murals, art installations, pop-up marketplaces, cultural festivals, and performances that invite broad community participation and reflection.
- **Drive economic opportunity in underserved communities** by fostering growth for small businesses, increasing visitors, and creating employment opportunities for local artists and entrepreneurs.
- **Amplify community voices** by empowering neighborhood residents to engage in the creative planning process, collaborate with community developers, and ensure that proposed projects reflect their communities' rich culture and identities.

***Priority strategies and activities:***

Through this funding opportunity, the Trust combines our long history of supporting the region's arts and culture sector with our commitment to well-being, cohesion and prosperity for communities that are underinvested or experiencing displacement of longtime residents. We know that arts and culture have the unique ability to bridge divides, raise awareness, and inspire collective action. As such, we seek to support projects that preserve our communities' rich and historic cultures while driving community investment that minimizes displacement.

In pursuit of this goal, the *Arts and Culture for Community Wealth* funding program will prioritize community-driven projects in communities that are historically underinvested or experiencing displacement of longtime residents that are also in proximity to public transit, community hubs, cultural or commercial corridors, or other physical spaces that promote economic activities.

This RFP is best suited for projects that are in the late planning stage, with fully formed ideas and established partnerships, but require additional resources to complete. Projects featuring the following activities will also be prioritized:

- **Community Engagement:** Projects must actively engage residents – with a particular focus on long-term residents – at all stages of the process, including design, planning, implementation, and execution. As such, projects should also reflect the unique aspirations or cultural identity of their neighborhood's residents. Submissions that can demonstrate alignment with an existing community or quality-of-life plan or include a community engagement plan that indicates how community members participated in the design and development of the project are encouraged.

- **Public Space Activation:** Projects that utilize or transform public spaces such as parks, plazas, streetscapes, and other shared environments into canvases for artistic expression and community interaction are encouraged. Successful submissions will be able to demonstrate how their project reflects the community's identity, inspires cultural pride, and fosters social cohesion. Examples include but are not limited to murals, art installations, pop-up marketplaces, cultural festivals, film screenings, and theatrical or dance performances.
- **Economic Opportunity:** Successful submissions will demonstrate how their project contributes to the economic vitality of the host community or neighborhood. Example activities may include creating potential employment and/or fostering career pathways for local artists, stimulating local commerce by increasing visitation, and fostering growth for small businesses by increasing foot traffic or awareness. Applications that include partnerships or collaborations between local artists, small businesses, neighborhood chambers of commerce, commercial businesses, or residential developers are encouraged.

We are specifically seeking organizations with established experience in collaboration and fostering community partnerships. While applications from other types of organizations may be considered, preference will be given to those that share the following characteristics:

- **Cultural institutions:** Community-based museums, local theaters, and other cultural institutions that leverage their resources and expertise to engage communities and promote cultural awareness while encouraging neighborhood investment.
- **Public art organizations:** Organizations that specialize in creating and executing public art or cultural activities and have a known history of fostering economic growth, elevating local artists, and building social cohesion through said activities.
- **Art collaboratives:** Creative partnerships that involve different organizations, groups, or individuals working together on arts-based or culturally specific projects and have demonstrated partnerships with small businesses, neighborhood chambers of commerce, commercial businesses, or residential developers.
- **Community Development Corporations (CDCs):** Organizations that promote and support community development and have established partnerships with local artists in the communities they serve.

### **Goals and Outcomes:**

The Chicago Community Trust believes in the collective power of community engagement and the stabilizing power of community wealth. Over a two-year grant term, the *Arts and Culture for Wealth Building RFP* aims to support projects that both empower residents and drive economic growth through the creative transformation of public spaces, cultural programming, and hyper-local engagements.

This funding opportunity is a pilot that will help us to understand better how project-based support for community-driven arts and culture initiatives contributes to resident

engagement, economic growth, and neighborhood investment. The intended outcomes for this RFP are to:

- **Increase resident engagement and empowerment:** Tracks the project's inclusion of community voice and changes in residents' attitudes towards their community
- **Expand opportunities for collaboration:** Captures the project's ability to engage and sustain partnerships between community residents and organizations, small businesses, residential developers, etc.
- **Increase income and economic opportunities for residents:** Describes changes in economic opportunities for local artists, entrepreneurs, business owners, etc.

### Measures of Progress

Measures of Progress (MoPs) provide clear, reportable evidence that grant-supported projects are progressing toward their goals and contributing to the longer-term outcomes of this RFP. Grant recipients must select and report on how the applying organization or collaborative has effectively achieved or is on the path towards achieving its objectives. Grant recipients will report on progress over the course of the two-year initiative.

#### **1. Outcome: Increased engagement of community residents in arts initiatives**

- a. MOP: Increase in the number of partnerships formed and/or strengthened
  - i. Number of new partners engaged in initiative
  - ii. Number of different sector partners engaged in initiative (e.g., small business, nonprofit organizations, chamber of commerce, school partner, foundations and corporate partners, residents)
  - iii. Number of outreach activities (e.g., convening, collaborative design)

#### **2. Outcome: Increased capacity to achieve arts initiative**

- a. MOP: Increase organizational capacity to implement arts initiative
  - i. Number of staff hired (full or part-time)
  - ii. Amount of capital raised for project
  - iii. Financial or non-monetary resources invested in residents and stakeholders engaged in initiative

#### **3. Outcome: Increased investment in local artists**

- a. MOP: Meaningful inclusion and support of local artists
  - i. Amount of income generated for local artists
  - ii. Number of media/social media posts to increase the visibility of local artists
  - iii. Number of local artists involved in the design and implementation of the initiative

### ***Grantmaking Criteria***

This funding opportunity is designed for projects that harness the power of arts and culture to build social cohesion, strengthen community agency, and stimulate economic development. To be considered, interested applicants must submit a Letter of Inquiry (LOI) that addresses this supplemental question:

*How does your project utilize arts and culture to drive community wealth and empower communities? Please include the following details in your response:*

- *In what community or neighborhood your proposed project is located.*
- *How your proposed project is a collaboration between community residents, local artists, and drivers of local commerce (e.g., small businesses, neighborhood chambers of commerce, commercial businesses, or residential developers).*
- *The economic target area for your proposed project (e.g., public transit, a community hub, cultural or commercial corridor, repurposed vacant lot or building, or other physical spaces that promote economic activities).*
- *How the project contributes to the economic vitality of the community or neighborhood.*

Successful LOIs will also be able to clearly demonstrate how the applying organization or collaborative is distinctly qualified to implement the proposed project with fidelity. Organizations invited to submit full applications will be notified on July 17, 2025, and will be asked to provide additional details and narrative about the project, including a timeline for the proposed project and evidence of established partnerships (e.g., MOUs, contracts, etc.). Due to the anticipated high volume of applications, feedback on why an LOI or full application was denied will not be provided.

### ***Grant Amounts Available & Term***

The *Arts and Culture for Community Wealth* RFP is a project-based funding opportunity with a two-year grant term. Approximately 15-20 projects will be awarded from a total grant budget of \$3.9 million. As an extension of the funding program, grant recipients will receive technical assistance and engage in peer learning opportunities.

### **Grant Term**

Projects awarded under this grant opportunity are encouraged to align with the following timeline:

- **Year 1: Planning** – Projects have already completed the design stage, are in the planning stage, and require additional resources to reach completion.
- **Year 2: Execution** – Projects are on track to be executed, erected, presented, or launched within the grant year.

### **Peer Learning**

Peer-to-peer learning sessions will be offered semi-regularly and provide opportunities for grant recipients to collaborate, build connections, and increase their organization's capacity. Sessions will be held in person throughout the grant term. Regular attendance at the peer-learning sessions is expected.

### **External Evaluation**

A key component of this initiative is the evaluation process. It is designed to deepen our understanding of how arts and culture contribute to building thriving communities and driving economic growth. A learning agenda will guide the evaluation to generate insights

that can inform future initiatives. What we learn throughout this process will help shape how we structure and implement future projects.

The Trust will hire an external evaluator who will actively engage with grant recipients throughout the two-year grant term to gather feedback, track progress, and assess the impact of the project efforts. This ongoing evaluation will contribute to this pilot's success and provide valuable lessons for future endeavors.

### **Eligible Applicants**

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; (c) or 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; and
- Located within or primarily serving residents of Chicago or Cook County.

Applicants without 501(c)(3) status must identify a fiscal sponsor before applying and ask that sponsor to complete and certify an organization profile in The Chicago Community Trust's grants management system, GrantCentral, at <https://community-cct.force.com/grantcentral/s/>.

### **Ineligible Uses**

Grant funds shall not be used for:

- Electioneering or political activities
- Contributions to any candidate for public office or political committee
- Campaigning on behalf of or in opposition to any candidate for public office
- Grants to individuals

### **Contact Information**

For technical questions regarding GrantCentral, please email our Grants team at [grants@cct.org](mailto:grants@cct.org). Email Adrianna Parker-Lang and Marcus Samuel at [collectivepower@cct.org](mailto:collectivepower@cct.org) for programmatic and application content questions.

### **Evaluation and Learning**

The Trust is committed to achieving our long-term goals and outcomes in collaboration with stakeholders and partners. We are developing outcome measures that inform progress toward our collective mission to strengthen the Chicago region. Specifically, the outcomes track progress towards the Trust's strategic goal of increasing household and community wealth in underinvested communities. The specific outcomes you select should be based on why you think the project or strategy will lead to the anticipated result or long-term change outlined in the request for proposal (i.e., your theory of change). After you identify the aligned outcomes, you will select specific, time-limited measures of

progress. These provide measurable and reportable evidence that a proposed project or organization has effectively achieved – or is on the path to achieving - its objectives. They can be measured during the grant period, contribute to your longer-term outcomes, and align with the Trust’s strategic priorities. For shorter-term grants (one year), these outcomes may not be achieved during the project’s duration. For each measure of progress, you will identify your baseline, target, data collection approach, and the type of data (qualitative and quantitative). If awarded a grant, you will update the information with actuals to describe progress toward your target. In addition to what you share through site visits, convenings and reporting, we will use this information to inform our collective understanding of progress and challenges to inform next steps.

We encourage grant applicants to select at least one indicator for each outcome and related MOP.

Sharing successes or challenges in achieving measures of progress is critical to our collective learning, decision-making and impact. We recognize there could be challenges to implementing any grant, many of which are not under your control and may prevent you from achieving your targets. However, learning from these challenges and successes is integral to the Trust’s learning and impact aims.

Potential grant recipients who are new to developing metrics or work plans, or want to learn more about developing measures of progress, can contact [learning@cct.org](mailto:learning@cct.org).

### **Collection of Demographic Data**

The Chicago Community Trust serves a wide variety of constituents and organizations. As such, we collect organizational demographic data and semi-regularly review the data to inform our outreach and representation of our funding to ensure we contribute to our mission of a thriving, equitable and connected Chicago region. We also ask that you share the demographics of your organization’s board, leadership and staff. The data collected are not criteria used for funding. The demographic composition of the Trust’s staff and board is available on our website [here](#).

### **Application Process**

Applicants complete their application via GrantCentral, The Chicago Community Trust’s online grants management system, at <https://community-cct.force.com/grantcentral/s/login/>.

Applicants must complete and certify an Organization Profile before applying. If the Profile was completed for a previous funding opportunity, it must be reviewed, updated and certified before submitting a new application. If applicable, fiscal sponsors must also complete and certify an organization profile in GrantCentral before the grant seeker submits an application.



The Trust will not consider late or incomplete letters of intent (LOIs) or full applications. Applicants may receive a site visit (in person or virtual), telephone call, or other communication from foundation staff as part of the application review process.

**Information Session**

We invite all interested applicants to attend a virtual information session to learn more about this funding opportunity, ask questions, and gain clarity about the application process.

**Date:** May 29, 2025

**Time:** 3:30-4:30 p.m.

**Meeting Link:**

<https://chicagocommunitytrust.zoom.us/j/88271819609?pwd=xZONUycibAnw2YZnwhjAtDAbNM9v6l.1&from=addon>