



Request for Proposals: *Community & Civic Leadership*

| | |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| RFP Release Date: | January 13, 2026 |
| Information Session: | January 28, 2026 |
| LOI Deadline: | February 12, 2026 |
| Full Application Invite: | February 26, 2026 |
| Full Application Deadline: | March 19, 2026 |
| Site Visits: | March 30 - April 1, 2026 |
| Funding Decisions: | April 30, 2026 |

Background

At The Chicago Community Trust, we believe that people are our region's greatest asset. Yet systemic policies and practices, fueled by the misconception that economic inequity is due solely to individual choices, have prevented many Chicago residents from accessing the tools to build economic mobility, family stability, and community vitality. To address the barriers limiting social and economic mobility in the region, we need community, public and private sector leaders who have the skills, tools and networks necessary to affect systemic change. This funding opportunity will support organizations and leadership programs that cultivate community and public sector leaders who are ready to advance efforts that build wealth and improve opportunities for all Chicagoans.

Need/Opportunity Statement

The Trust's Collective Power and Policy Change teams are seeking proposals for leadership development programs that advance the Trust's efforts to:

1. Activate and elevate voices of Chicagoans who are leading grassroots efforts that reflect our communities' priorities and make our region more equitable and inclusive.
2. Invest in leaders who are developing, advancing and implementing system-based solutions to increase economic mobility in the Chicago region's underinvested communities by increasing homeownership, incomes and assets, and neighborhood investment.

Leadership development programs grow social capital, increase individual agency, and inspire Chicagoans from all parts of the city and region to contribute to the civic health

and vitality of our communities. These programs strengthen connections across neighborhoods, sectors and experiences while expanding access to the resources and networks necessary to drive reforms and effectuate change that will create a thriving Chicago where opportunity and prosperity are within reach for all.

To achieve policy and system reforms that will address the Trust's strategic goals for Chicago's underinvested communities to increase residents' income and financial assets, increase residents' homeownership and home equity, and increase neighborhood investments while minimizing displacement, leaders from every sector, and all parts of the city, must work together.

The *Community & Civic Leadership* funding program will support leadership development programs that reduce silos, cultivate emerging and established leaders from all parts of the Chicago region, and foster greater engagement and civic participation.

Priority Strategies and Activities

The *Community and Civic Leadership* funding program continues The Chicago Community Trust's long-standing tradition of supporting leadership development in the region. Over our 110-year history, the Trust has played a key role in launching several of the leadership development programs that exist today. These programs have cultivated some of Chicago's most prominent leaders, including those who have gone on to lead community-based organizations, serve at all levels of government, and effect lasting change through civic institutions. Many of these leaders have been instrumental in developing and implementing programs, initiatives and policies that aim to make the Chicago region a place where all can thrive.

This funding opportunity will support organizations or programs that identify, train and promote leaders within all sectors---public, private and nonprofit --- at "grassroots" and "grassstops" levels. Organizations that receive grant support under this funding opportunity will train and support the following types of leaders:

- **Emerging community leaders** that include, but are not limited to, parents, young adults, low-wage workers, community organizers, and early career professionals.
- **Established leaders** working in nonprofit, civic, policy, or public-serving roles who are no longer considered early career professionals.
- **Leaders with lived experience** who represent communities most proximate to the issues or have experienced the systems in need of reform first-hand.

This funding opportunity is best suited for leadership development programs with an established history of cultivating leaders from and within the Chicago region. Programs supported by this opportunity will also share the following characteristics:

- An **established leadership curriculum** that trains participants to influence policy or effect change at the community or systems level and teaches key leadership skills such as strong communication, strategic thinking, and the ability to build relationships and engage with diverse audiences.
- **Impact measurement tools** that measure participants' growth from the beginning to the end of the program. While not a disqualifying characteristic, applicants that can demonstrate some level of alumni impact are especially desirable.
- A focus on **collaborative leadership** that encourages program participants to reduce silos, increase collaboration, and drive collective action towards shared goals.

As a project-based grant, funds from this award may be used to support qualified expenses of the project or program, including an indirect cost rate of up to 15 percent of the total grant budget.

Goals and Outcomes

The *Community and Civic Leadership* program will support programs that align with the Trust's goal to advance economic mobility for residents in the Chicago region's underinvested communities through policy change, cross-sector collaboration, and civic action. By investing in the leadership development of residents from all parts of the city, and across sectors, we can increase community-level efficacy and action, increase civic participation and representation, and help drive policy and system-based reforms that will lead to a thriving Chicago region for all residents.

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. The indicators below align with the Trust's learning goals for this funding program. Grant applicants invited to submit full proposals will select 2-3 related MoPs and 3-5 indicators that best capture how this grant will enable your organization to strengthen its leadership development program in alignment with the priority strategies and activities outlined in this RFP. Should the indicators provided not align with your specific program, please contact learning@cct.org for support.

1. Outcome: Increase Coalition, Constituent, and Organizational Power

- a. MOP: Increase in skills and knowledge to achieve leadership goals**
 - i. # of participants demonstrating increased leadership skills (data source: pre/post assessment; rubric)
 - ii. # of participants who complete an applied leadership development project (data source: program data – internal tracking)
- b. MOP: Expand opportunities to apply skills in civic action**
 - i. # of participants who expand their contribution to civic actions (e.g., leadership role, board participation, facilitation support, blog post) (data source: program data – internal tracking, participant self-report)
 - ii. # of community or civic-led initiatives, campaigns, or systems change efforts launched or advanced by participants (data source: program data – internal tracking, participant self-report)
- c. MOP: Expand or strengthen cross-sector relationships and networks**
 - i. # of participants who report forming new relationships with leaders across different sectors (data source: annual participant survey, participant self-report)
 - ii. # of participants who report leveraging new or strengthened relationships to advance a shared goal (data source: participant self-report)

Grantmaking Criteria

This funding program seeks to support organizations or programs that train grassroots, civic, and public sector leaders, as well as foster a pipeline of civic leaders who have the knowledge, tools, skills, and networks needed to advance programmatic or systems change efforts that will contribute to a thriving Chicago where opportunity and prosperity are within reach for all.. The Trust will consider proposals from organizations that offer leadership development programs for emerging and established leaders as described under the priority strategies and activities section. Proposals should address how the applicant approaches its program's curriculum development and recruitment to ensure participation of those with lived experiences and ensure participants attain the skills, resources and networks necessary to contribute to a city where everyone can build a secure future. Proposals will also be evaluated on how the program or organization engages its alumni network and advances the Trust's strategic goals for economic mobility.

Letter of Inquiry (LOI)

The Letter of Inquiry (LOI) for this funding program will be evaluated based on the level of alignment with the priority activities listed above and the Trust's strategic goals. To capture the information needed to evaluate submitted LOIs, **please provide a short response (max 300 words) that addresses all components of the supplemental questions listed below. The supplemental questions can be found at the end of the Application Summary section.**

How does your leadership development program train and cultivate leaders who are poised to advance efforts that increase economic mobility for residents in the Chicago region's underinvested communities? Please include the following details in your response:

- *Describe the structure of your leadership program. Include:*
 - *Average number of participants*
 - *Length of program*
 - *Program's target population e.g. established leaders, emerging leaders, workers, young adults etc.*
 - *Efforts to prioritize and recruit individuals with lived experience*
- *Describe the curriculum or learning goals in your leadership program.*
- *Describe how your organization measures or assesses current participants' growth and development through course of the program.*
- *Describe how your program or organization foster collaborative leadership and collective action towards shared goals among participants and/or alumni.*

Successful LOIs will be able to clearly demonstrate the organizations' alignment with the funding program's priority activities and the Trust's strategic goals. To learn more about the Trust's strategy, visit <https://www.cct.org/our-work/>.

Due to funding constraints, not every organization that submits a LOI will be invited to submit a full proposal. Organizations invited to submit full applications will be notified on or about **February 26, 2026**. Applicants invited to submit a full proposal will be asked to submit a project budget as part of the larger application. Submitted budgets should include all projected sources of project support within the requested grant term.

Due to the potential high volume of applications, feedback on why an LOI or full application was denied may not be provided.

Grant Amounts Available & Term

The *Civic & Community Leadership* RFP is open to organizations that provide leadership training and development to residents in the Chicago region. This funding program will provide project support to selected applicants.

Grant amounts will be awarded from a total grant budget of \$500,000. Applicants may request \$25,000 - \$75,000 per year for up to two years. The final award amount, as well as the grant term, will be determined by Trust staff and based on the size and scope of the proposal. Applicants should calibrate the requested amount to the actual cost and impact anticipated during the grant term.

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; or (c) is a governmental unit within the meaning of Section 170(c)(1) of the Code;
- 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://trust360.my.site.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
- For any programs or activities that violate any applicable federal, state, or local laws, including, but not limited to any programs or activities that violate antidiscrimination laws
- Promoting or supporting terrorist activities or political violence

Contact Information

For technical questions regarding GrantCentral, email grants@cct.org.

Email Adrianna Parker-Lang and Marcus Samuel at 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 identify a limited number of outcomes (1-2) and related measures of progress (3-5 across all outcomes) to those directly aligned with the RFP and your work.

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.

Collection of Demographic Data

The Chicago Community Trust serves a wide variety of constituents and organizations. As such, we collect organizational demographic data on a voluntary basis and in aggregate review the information semi-regularly to inform our outreach. We do not consider demographic data when we make funding decisions. The Trust does not discriminate based on race, gender, age, sexual orientation, or any other protected characteristics when making funding decisions. 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://trust360.my.site.com/grantcentral/s/>.

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.

Submission Deadlines and Other Key Dates

LOIs are due at 11:59 p.m. on February 12, 2026.

Full applications, if invited, are due at 11:59 p.m. on March 19, 2026.

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: January 28, 2026

Time: 2-3 p.m.

Meeting Link