



AFRICAN AMERICAN LEGACY
AN INITIATIVE of



THE CHICAGO
COMMUNITY TRUST®
EQUITY • OPPORTUNITY • PROSPERITY

Requests for Proposals: African American Legacy Fund 2026

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| RFP Release Date: | March 23, 2026 |
| Information Session (Zoom): | April 2, 2026 at 9:30 AM Central Time Register here. |
| Full Application Deadline: | April 29, 2026 at 11:59 PM Central Time |
| Site Visits: | July 1 - July 29, 2026 |
| Funding Decisions: | September 2026 |

Background

African American Legacy (AAL), an initiative of The Chicago Community Trust, is a philanthropic and educational initiative led by Black civic and community leaders who share the common goal of improving the quality of life among Black people throughout metropolitan Chicago. AAL engages leaders in philanthropy, collectively and individually, and provides support to nonprofit organizations that work at the community level to educate and engage communities, and to provide neighborhood-based services and solutions to address community problems. Grounded in the philosophies of collective giving, community engagement, and grantmaking, AAL serves as a convener and catalyst to promote significant impact in Black communities through the organizations that it supports. The ultimate goal of AAL's grantmaking is to strategically assist organizations in their growth and development so they can leverage these funds to attract new, larger investments.

Priority strategies and activities

AAL will support community organizations who share the common goal of improving the quality of life among Black people throughout metropolitan Chicago working in the following areas:

1. **Community Wealth Building:** We seek to support organizations that build financial stability and well-being for underinvested or marginalized communities by focusing on the shared wealth (not the sum of wealth) of multiple households or whole communities, as connected groups of people. For this focus area, successful applicants approach economic development in a manner that promotes the local, democratic, and shared ownership and control of community assets. Eligible organizations may provide capacity-

building and/or technical assistance to the following organizations, OR are legally defined as one of following:

- a. Worker-Owned Cooperatives: Values-driven businesses that are collectively owned and democratically operated by their employees. Worker Cooperatives generate worker and community benefits.
 - b. Limited Equity Housing Cooperatives: Housing that is collectively owned and democratically managed by residents and that aims to maintain permanent affordability, accessibility, and stability.
 - c. Community Land Trusts: Community-based nonprofits that acquire and steward community land and assets for the explicit purpose of preserving affordability and mitigating displacement from residential and commercial properties.
 - d. Community Investment Vehicles (CIVs): Legal mechanisms for community investment in neighborhood assets based on shared values and development goals. In its ideal form, CIVs are designed, majority-owned, and majority-controlled by residents or local members.
2. **Community Mobilization**: We seek to support organizations working to build community power through advocacy, public policy, and community organizing to address systemic challenges such as voting rights/access, immigration reform, education inequity, and the erasure of Black people, Black history, and Black stories.
 3. **Community Care**: We seek to support organizations that actively respond to trauma on Black people and Black communities through the delivery of mental health and wellness services as their primary service.

Grantmaking Criteria

- **Black-Serving**. AAL is committed to supporting Black leadership and organizations that serve underinvested communities whose residents or constituents are predominantly Black. Black-serving means constituents are predominantly (51%) Black and/or from the African Diaspora (Africans brought primarily to the Americas as slaves who live around the globe—Brazil, Haiti, Dominican Republic, Europe, and Asia).
 - **Organizations that are older than five years will not be considered if the Executive Director and Board Chair are the same individual.**
- **Place-based**. Primarily located in the Chicago metropolitan region (which includes Cook, DuPage, Kane, McHenry and/or Will Counties, Illinois), and serving Black communities in this region.
- **People-driven**. Program direction and design are grounded in the needs of the constituency and the community served. Using an asset-based approach means that the organization's work is done not only for the people involved but also by them.

Successful requests will demonstrate how the organization's mission, strategies, and activities contribute to and advance one of the three priority strategies as defined in this request proposal.

Please review your budgets and attachments for accuracy and consistency before submitting your application. Incomplete and untimely applications will not be considered for review.

Grant Amounts Available and Grant Term

All 2026 AAL grants will be for general operating support or project-based support of organizations or programs that align with the defined focus areas.

Grants are for one year. An organization may only submit one request for funding per cycle. The AAL grant cycle is from October to September of the following year. An AAL grant awarded in the 2025 grant cycle does not prohibit an organization from applying for another AAL grant in 2026.

NOTICE: AAL grants are intended to serve as funding catalysts to support the incubation of grassroots/emerging organizations. AAL grants are not intended to be continuous funding sources but are avenues to other funders/resources, grass roots/startup funders, intended to help orgs begin to grow and scale, potentially exposing them to additional and/or larger funders. **Receipt of a previous AAL grant does not ensure renewal or ongoing annual support.**

Organizations awarded multiple grants over various grant cycles should anticipate a stair-step reduction in the grant amount compared to their requested funding amount per cycle. If your organization has received three or more grants from AAL, you are ineligible to apply for or receive another AAL grant.

Grants or grant requests made through The Chicago Community Trust are separate from those made through African American Legacy. Therefore, organizations can make grant requests to both AAL and the Trust at the same time. All grants made by AAL require that the online application be completed in its entirety.

Community Wealth Building Applicants Only: Grants under this priority area for 2026 will range in size between \$25,000 to \$75,000 based on the scope of the applicant's general operations or project-based needs. Please note that organizations that focus on technical assistance, capacity building, or research and development will likely be funded at the lower end of this range.

Community Mobilization and Community Care Applicants Only: Grants under these priority areas for 2026 will range in size between \$15,000 to \$25,000 based on the scope of the applicant's general operations or project-based needs.

Eligible Applicants

Eligible organizations are Black-serving, responsive and rooted in community, and focus their work on one of the three priority strategies outlined above.

You are ineligible to apply for or receive an AAL grant if your organization has received three or more past grants from AAL.

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; or
 - (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 the Chicago metropolitan region, including Cook, DuPage, Kane, Lake, McHenry and/or Will Counties, Illinois.

Community Wealth Building Applicants only: There is no operating budget limit under this priority area; however, we encourage your requested amount to be consistent with your budget.

Community Mobilization and Community Care applicants only: Eligible organizations must have current and prior year annual operating budgets that are not less than \$50,000 and not more than \$1,500,000.

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
- 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 to promote terrorism

Contact Information

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

For programmatic and application content questions, please email Carrie Goodale, Affinity Funds Specialist at cgoodale@cct.org.

Collection of Demographic Data

The Chicago Community Trust serves a wide variety of constituents and organizations. We do not consider demographic data when we make funding decisions and do 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/>. There are 2 funding programs for this RFP: [African American Legacy - September 2026 - COMMUNITY WEALTH BUILDING](#) and [Affinity Funds–African American Legacy Sept 2026 - COMMUNITY CARE & MOBILIZATION](#). Please be sure to complete the correct application. Only one application per organization please.

Community Wealth Building Applicants only: Community Wealth Building: We seek to support organizations that build financial stability and well-being for communities by focusing on the shared wealth (not the sum of wealth) of multiple households or whole communities, as connected groups of people. For this focus area, successful applicants approach economic development in a manner that promotes the local, democratic, and shared ownership and control of community assets. Eligible organizations may provide capacity-building and/or technical assistance to the following organizations OR are legally defined as one of following:

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- **Community Care:** We seek to support organizations that actively respond to trauma on Black people and Black communities through the delivery of mental health and wellness services as their primary service.

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.

Late or incomplete applications will not be considered for review. Applicants may receive a site visit (in person or virtual), telephone call, or other communication from foundation staff and AAL leadership as part of the application review process.

The Trust is a community foundation that is dedicated to ensuring opportunity and prosperity are within reach for everyone in our region. As a charitable community, we know that many of our communities have been historically under-resourced, including philanthropy. African American Legacy is a group of donors who seek opportunities to address those historic gaps, which will help strengthen the entire Chicago region. When our neighbors do better, we all do better.