

RESILIENT CHICAGO FUND

Supporting innovation for basic needs

Request for Proposals: *Resilient Chicago Fund Open call*

RFP release date	Tuesday, March 10, 2026
Information session	Friday, March 20, 2026
Full application deadline	Friday, April 17, 2026
Interviews	Monday, May 11 – Friday, May 15
Funding decisions	End of May

Purpose of the RFP

In Chicago and Cook County, organizations providing basic human needs—including food, shelter, healthcare and safety—are facing federal policy and funding uncertainty, rising demand for services, and increasingly complex rules. Nonprofit organizations and public agencies are doing heroic work to continue delivering essential benefits and services while adapting to a changing landscape.

Even before 2025, the region’s safety net was strained in ways that hindered effective, dignified, people-centered service delivery. Today’s changes have only heightened those pressures—and created an opening to rethink and redesign what the system could be. Nonprofits and public agencies bring deep expertise, trust, and understanding of how the system works. What they often lack is dedicated time and resources to step back, reimagine long-term solutions, and design and test new models that move beyond adapting old systems to new rules.

Resilient Chicago Fund is a collaborative philanthropic initiative created to support innovation for basic human needs. Co-chaired by The Chicago Community Trust and John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the fund is guided by a Steering Committee that includes Crown Family Philanthropies, Polk Bros. Foundation, Pritzker Traubert Foundation, Schreiber Philanthropy, Steans Family Foundation, RRF Foundation for Aging, and United Way of Metro Chicago. **The goal of this funding opportunity is to enable nonprofits and government partners to adapt, rethink and redesign how essential benefits and services are delivered within food, shelter, healthcare and safety systems amid federal funding and policy changes.**

This opportunity is designed for organizations or partnerships with significant experience in basic human needs systems and a clear understanding of how those systems operate. Collaborative proposals are strongly encouraged. Applicants should be prepared to commit time and leadership attention to exploring how benefits and services could function differently under new rules and changing conditions.

Resilient Chicago Fund will **support a small number of organizations with multi-year, multi-million-dollar grants** to pilot or implement redesigned service models.

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Most grant recipients will begin with a design and testing grant, which will generally range from **\$100,000 to \$300,000**, depending on the scope and timeline of the work. Selected organizations will work with a dedicated design coach (approximately 5 hours a week) to help gather insights, test ideas, and refine models that could be implemented in the future. The coaching process is designed to meet organizations where they are—whether developing an early concept or refining a plan that is further along. Grant funds may be used to support staff time needed for this designing and testing. Grant recipients will also participate in a learning community to share progress and challenges with peers.

At the conclusion of the design and testing phase, RCF will invite **a small number of organizations to submit proposals for pilot or implementation funding**. Selection for implementation funding will be based on readiness, evidence gathered, and alignment with RCF's goals. Participation in the testing phase does not guarantee an implementation grant.

Priority Strategies and Activities

This RFP is intended for organizations that want to rethink, redesign or test new ways of delivering essential benefits and services within food, shelter, healthcare or safety systems.

RCF is especially interested in proposals that go beyond small adjustments and explore how services are structured, financed and delivered in practice. Proposals should show a willingness to challenge long-standing assumptions and explore models that offer a better experience and better outcomes for the people who rely on these systems. RCF is looking for ideas that not only address current challenges but also point toward a stronger, more resilient system in the future.

Proposals may include efforts to:

- Simplify or remove steps that create delays or roadblocks for people seeking help
- Redesign how services are delivered or coordinated across organizations and sectors to improve effectiveness, efficiency or user experience
- Develop new operating or financing approaches that strengthen long-term sustainability
- Develop, test and/or implement policy that adapts to federal changes and strengthens access to benefits and services.

Partnership

Lead applicants must be nonprofit organizations based in Chicago or Cook County. Collaborative proposals are encouraged and may include government agencies, community partners, or private-sector organizations.

RCF prioritizes projects that demonstrate a clear understanding of the government and community partnerships necessary for long-term implementation.

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For proposals that seek to redesign or support the delivery of government-administered benefits (e.g., SNAP, Medicaid, housing assistance), RCF will give priority to applicants that co-design approaches with relevant local or state government agencies and demonstrate meaningful engagement with those partners. Applicants should describe the nature of this engagement and how government partners will be involved in testing, decision-making, or implementation.

What This RFP Will Not Fund

This RFP does not fund:

- General operating support unrelated to the proposed redesign and testing effort
- One-time events or projects, short-term studies, or stand-alone research without a feasible and financially sustainable pathway to redesigning services
- Advocacy efforts that are not directly connected to an implementation strategy to improve how services and benefits are delivered

Goals & Outcomes

The goal of this funding opportunity is to enable nonprofits and government partners to adapt, rethink, and redesign how essential benefits and services are delivered within food, shelter, healthcare and safety systems amid federal funding and policy changes.

By the end of the design and testing period, grant recipients should be able to demonstrate:

- A clearly defined safety net problem grounded in beneficiary and frontline experience
- A proposed redesign or new model that meaningfully improves how benefits and services are delivered
- A clear understanding of the government, cross-sector or community partnerships required for implementation, and evidence of engagement with those partners
- Evidence that key assumptions about service delivery, operations, financing or coordination were tested and refined
- A plausible financial and operating model to support pilot or early implementation, including a path toward long-term sustainability beyond philanthropic support

What happens after we submit an application?

RCF will review applications and select approximately **10–15 organizations** to participate in the design and testing opportunity.

Following selection, RCF will support each organization to develop a plan for exploring and refining their idea, including a scope, timeline and budget. Grant support will vary based on the readiness, length and complexity of the proposed effort.

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As recipients complete their testing, RCF will invite some to submit a proposal for pilot or early implementation funding. Participation in testing does not guarantee implementation funding. RCF will support **a small number of organizations with multi-year, multi-million-dollar grants.**

Self-Assessment: Is This the Right Fit for RCF?

Before applying, we encourage organizations to review the questions below. If you cannot check all the boxes below, then preparing for a different opportunity may be a better fit.

1. Alignment

- Our proposal addresses a system-level challenge within food, shelter, healthcare or safety that affects a substantial population in Chicago or Cook County.
- Our proposal seeks to meaningfully redesign how services are structured, delivered, financed or coordinated across the system.
- The challenge we are addressing is significantly shaped by current or imminent federal funding shifts, eligibility changes, or regulatory requirements. We can clearly explain how these changes affect beneficiaries.

2. System Experience and Capacity

- Our organization or partnership has demonstrated experience in public benefits administration, safety net delivery systems, or direct provision of basic human needs, and understands the operational, financing and regulatory realities of this work.
- Our organization or partnership has experience managing complex public or philanthropic funding (generally \$1M+ annually) and has successfully implemented multi-year initiatives that required cross-partner coordination, financial oversight, and operational change.

3. Readiness and Commitment

- We are prepared to engage in a design and testing process, with a timeline tailored to our scope of the work and designed in partnership with our dedicated design coach.
- Senior leaders and staff in my organization—and across our partners—are willing to dedicate ~5 hours a week to this work during the testing period. That time will be invested in activities such as stakeholder interviews and testing and learning to assess the feasibility of our idea and shape it for maximum impact.

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We are open to testing assumptions and potentially revising or abandoning elements of our idea based on evidence gathered during testing.

If testing is successful, we are prepared to pursue pilot implementation and long-term sustainability beyond the planning grant.

We will pursue a credible pathway to implementation that does not rely solely on continued philanthropic subsidy.

4. Partnerships

If the work requires cross-sector or government collaboration, we are actively engaging those partners in this application and have a clear strategy to engage them in the design and test phase of the work.

Not a Fit If...

This opportunity is likely not the right fit if:

- You are requesting funding to fill a short-term budget gap.
- You are seeking general operating support unrelated to adaptation, rethinking or redesigning benefits and service delivery in response to federal funding and policy changes
- Your organization does not have meaningful experience in safety net delivery, public benefits administration, or meeting basic human needs.
- Your organization does not currently have the capacity or leadership bandwidth to dedicate time and decision-making authority during the testing period.
- The proposal is primarily research, advocacy or convening without a clear pathway to operational implementation.

Application

Please submit responses using the template below.

1. Project Title

2. Brief Overview of Your Project

In a few sentences, describe: *(250 words or less)*

- The specific system problem you are addressing
- What you propose to redesign or change

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- Who will benefit
- The measurable result you aim to achieve if successful

3. Focus Area of Your Project (you may select up to two and/or write in your own response)

- Food
- Shelter
- Healthcare
- Safety
- Other, please describe: _____

What type of project best describes the focus of your proposal?

- Simplify or remove steps that create delays or roadblocks for people seeking help
- Redesign how services are delivered or coordinated across organizations and sectors to improve effectiveness, efficiency or user experience
- Develop new operating or financing approaches that strengthen long-term sustainability
- Develop, test and/or implement policy that adapts to federal changes and strengthens access to benefits and services.

4. The Problem You're Solving

- What current or anticipated federal funding changes, eligibility changes, or administrative requirements are creating pressure on the people you serve? Please describe. *(100 words or less)*
- Provide at least two to three data points that quantify the scale or severity of this problem in Chicago or Cook County. *(100 words or less)*

5. Your Proposed Solution

- What specific, innovative change to service delivery, operations, financing or coordination are you proposing? *(200 words or less)*
- In what ways does your proposed solution meaningfully depart from or improve upon current practice? What would be fundamentally different if your model were implemented at scale? *(100 words or less)*
- Why do you believe this change will improve effectiveness, efficiency, user experience or sustainability? *(100 words or less)*
- If successful, what measurable outcomes would improve (e.g., number of people served, cost per person, enrollment rates, processing time, health or safety outcomes)? *(50 words or less)*
- What potential financing approaches could support this model, and what questions would you still need to answer to determine long-term sustainability? *(100 words or less)*

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6. Organizational Capacity

- Please describe a past example of your organization's experience managing large-scale funding and implementing complex multi-million-dollar initiatives, including leadership oversight and financial controls. *(100 words or less)*
- In terms of cross-sector or government partnerships, what organizations will be involved in your proposal and what is your existing relationship with them? *(100 words or less)*
- Who will be involved from those organizations in your proposal? Please provide their roles and relevant experience. *(100 words or less)*

7. Current Stage of Development

The design and testing phase will take place for select applicants for up to 30 weeks between June to November 2026. Please provide the following information:

- What are the key activities necessary to deliver your solution? Please include general timeframes for each of the key activities. *(100 words or less)*
- Who are the key members of your team who will be involved? Please describe their role in each of the key activities. *(100 words or less)*
- Where is this effort currently in its development or testing journey? Please select the option that best describes your status and briefly explain.
 - Early concept: idea development, stakeholder conversations underway
 - Initial testing: small pilots or prototypes tested in limited settings
 - Advanced testing: multiple pilots completed, refinements made
 - Implementation-ready: model tested with evidence of feasibility and prepared for broader rollout
 - Other, please specify:
- What are the greatest risks to success (e.g., technical, financial, or political)? What strategies would you explore to mitigate them? *(150 words or less)*

>>>>Applicants who select EARLY CONCEPT or INITIAL TESTING phases<<<<<<

If given the opportunity to test, develop, and learn from your current proposal, what components of your idea would you test or investigate and why? Examples include stakeholder interviews, financial modeling, workflow redesign, or prototypes. *(150 words or less)*

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>>>>Applicants who select **ADVANCED TESTING** or **IMPLEMENTATION READY** phases<<<<<

Please describe how testing has shaped the development or modification of your initial idea into its present form. *(150 words or less)*

What metrics or evidence would be necessary for your team to measure success of the proposal after implementation? Please list these metrics and the resources needed to collect them. *(150 words or less)*

8. Financial Sustainability

- Where does this model “live” long-term? Describe whether this solution is intended to become a permanent part of a government agency’s operations, a self-sustaining social enterprise, or a permanent cross-sector collaboration. *(150 words or less)*
- What specific policy, regulatory or legislative changes are required to make this model the “new normal” rather than a workaround? Please identify the specific city, state or federal rules that would need to be modified to allow for long-term adoption. *(100 words or less)*
- Aside from philanthropic or one-time grants, what existing public or private funding streams (e.g., Medicaid reimbursement, tax levies, redirected departmental budgets) are most compatible with this model? What is your strategy for transitioning to these sources? *(100 words or less)*
- Once implemented, how would this model impact the broader system’s bottom line? (e.g., Does it reduce emergency room costs, decrease administrative overhead, or prevent more expensive downstream interventions?) Please provide any early projections on the “return on investment.” *(100 words or less)*

9. Applicant Details

- Organization name
- EIN (or fiscal sponsor information)
- Primary contact name
- Primary contact email
- Primary contact phone number

Submit application [HERE](#) by **Friday, April 17, 2026, 11:59 p.m. CT**

Application Evaluation Criteria

Applications will be assessed based on the following:

1. Alignment

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- The proposal addresses a meaningful challenge within food, shelter, healthcare or safety systems in Chicago or Cook County.
- The challenge is clearly connected to current policy, funding or operational realities (e.g., federal shifts, public benefits changes, fiscal pressures, workforce strain).

2. Clarity of the System Problem

- The problem is specific and grounded in beneficiaries' and frontline workers' experiences.

3. Adaptation, Innovation and Redesign

- The proposal seeks to redesign, restructure or meaningfully adapt how benefits and services are delivered in innovative ways.
- The proposed solution demonstrates potential for durability and sustainability beyond short-term funding.

4. Test-and-Learn Feasibility

- The proposal demonstrates a clear understanding of how the current system operates, where it breaks down for beneficiaries or frontline staff, and how the proposed adaptation or innovation addresses those breakdowns.
- There is a path to designing, pressure-testing or prototyping an idea within a realistic timeframe.
- The proposal demonstrates a credible path toward measurable impact and financial sustainability if implementation proceeds.

5. Leadership & Partnership Readiness

- Senior leadership is qualified and committed to dedicating time and decision-making authority.
- Relevant partners (including government agencies, community and private sector partners, where appropriate) are identified or actively engaged.

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.

Ineligible Uses

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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

Confidentiality

If your proposal contains proprietary, confidential, or otherwise sensitive information and you have concerns about how it may be handled during the review or coaching process, please contact rcf@cct.org prior to submission.

Questions

Email rcf@cct.org for programmatic and application content questions.

Attend a virtual information session on Friday, March 20, 12:30 to 1:30 p.m. CT, via Zoom:
<https://chicagocommunitytrust.zoom.us/j/82184462573?pwd=Iihj5poafCLiWi4LBBsPgx6HLwySgq.1>

Deadlines

Applications are due on **Friday, April 17, 2026, by 11:59 p.m. CT**. Submit applications [HERE](#).

Interviews will take place between **Monday, May 11, and Friday, May 15, 2026**.

Funding decisions will be made in late May.