

RESILIENT CHICAGO FUND

Supporting innovation for basic needs

Resilient Chicago Fund 2026 Open Call Review & Decision-Making Process

RCF is committed to a review process that is fair, rigorous and transparent. Given the number of applications we expect and the limited number of awards we'll make (10-15 design and testing grants), this process is designed to apply consistent criteria, incorporate multiple perspectives, and support clear, well-informed funding decisions.

What Applicants Should Expect

- A highly competitive process with more applications than available awards
- A multi-stage review designed to ensure fairness and rigor
- Communication about review status as we advance some applicants to the review panel (see step 3 below), and as final funding decisions are made
- Decisions on design and testing awards by mid-June
- For selected organizations: participation in a structured design and testing phase, with the possibility, but not guarantee, of future implementation funding

Overview of the Review Process

Step 1: Eligibility Screening (RCF staff + Sylver Consulting)

Following the Friday, April 17 submission deadline, RCF staff and Sylver Consulting will review all applications to confirm eligibility and basic fit.

This includes alignment with key requirements from the RFP and self-assessment, such as:

- The proposal addresses a **system-level challenge** in food, shelter, healthcare, or safety and is responding to recent federal funding or policy change.
- The applicant has **meaningful experience in safety net delivery or public systems**.
- The organization has the **capacity to manage complex, multi-year work**.
- The proposal reflects a **credible pathway to implementation and sustainability** beyond a single philanthropic source.

Lead applicants must be nonprofit organizations based in or primarily serving Cook County, with strong proposals typically demonstrating deep system knowledge and credibility with partners, including government.

Applications that do not meet these criteria will not move forward.

Step 2: Initial Review (RCF staff + Sylver Consulting)

RCF staff and Sylver Consulting will review eligible applications using a structured rubric:

- alignment with RCF requirements and priorities (as captured above in step one),
- effectiveness and desirability of the innovation,
- technical feasibility amongst partners,
- financial viability beyond a single philanthropic source, and
- readiness for implementation.

Applications will then be categorized to support a balanced review across focus areas, intervention types, development stages, and overall fit.

Step 3: Review Panel (External Reviewers)

Advancing proposals will be shared with an external review panel made up of funders, practitioners, academics, and former government and nonprofit leaders.

Reviewers will use the same rubric as in step 2 to further assess proposals.

Reviewers will also surface key diligence questions and provide input on credibility, strengths, risks and readiness.

Reviewer input is advisory and helps strengthen the overall process. Final decisions will not be made at this stage.

Step 4: Interviews & Additional Diligence (RCF staff)

RCF staff will conduct deeper diligence on a smaller group of proposals, which may include:

- interviews with applicants,
- consultation with additional experts, and
- further assessment of partnerships, feasibility, and implementation pathways.

Step 5: Synthesis & Recommendations (RCF staff)

RCF staff will synthesize:

- application materials,
- rubric-based assessments,
- external reviewer input, and
- additional diligence findings.

This will result in a set of recommended proposals for funding consideration.

Step 6: Final Grant Recommendations (RCF Steering Committee)

Final grant recommendations will be made by the Resilient Chicago Fund Steering Committee. The Steering Committee will consider:

- Review input,
- Diligence,
- RCF staff recommendations, and
- strength of proposals relative to RCF goals

Final funding decisions are expected by mid-June.

Given the number of applications we expect and the limited number of awards, not all highly rated proposals will be funded.

Step 7: Additional Diligence for Implementation Awards

RCF expects to issue a small number of multi-year implementation grants.

- Most implementation awards will come from the design and testing phase.
- Some implementation-ready proposals may be identified directly through the open call.

For implementation-ready proposals coming directly from the open call, additional diligence will be required, including deeper assessment of:

- evidence of testing,
- lessons learned,
- demonstrated effectiveness,
- operational readiness, and
- financial sustainability.

Implementation-ready awards will require more diligence, taking longer to review; decisions on implementation-ready awards are expected closer to fall 2026.