



THE LGBTQ COMMUNITY FUND
AN INITIATIVE of



THE CHICAGO
COMMUNITY TRUST®
EQUITY • OPPORTUNITY • PROSPERITY

WE ARE EACH OTHER'S NEIGHBORS **LGBTQ COMMUNITY FUND STAKEHOLDER CONVERSATIONS**



2025
REPORT

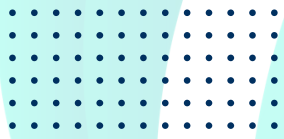
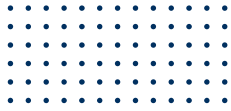


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MESSAGE FROM THE LGBTQ COMMUNITY FUND

As we consider how to partner with The Chicago Community Trust to be responsible stewards of the funds we raise, as well as the funds contributed by the Trust, we rely on community voice to guide our grant recommendations. This approach has been central to our work since the Fund was established in 2010.

Over time, we have gathered this input through community needs assessments. We conducted assessments in 2012 and again in 2019, engaging stakeholders across the community to better understand local priorities, challenges, and opportunities. These efforts were led by the Morten Group and the findings have been extremely valuable in shaping our work.

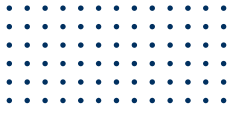
We continue to use the insights from these assessments to inform how we set funding priorities. At present, it is our understanding—based on feedback from many of you—that the primary themes identified in the 2019 community needs assessment remain largely consistent. However, the landscape has changed substantially, influenced mainly by the COVID-19 pandemic and shifting federal priorities.

The conversations captured in this report are intended to help the LGBTQ Community Fund better understand the extent to which conditions remain the same, where they may have changed, and whether our approach to funding should evolve in response.



Dr. Raymond Crossman, LGBTQ Community Fund Steering Committee Member





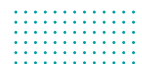
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The LGBTQ Community Fund—an affinity fund of The Chicago Community Trust—undertook this process to refresh its understanding of current community needs. To do so, the Fund convened an in-person Town Hall in October 2025, offered a six-week online survey, and hosted a virtual listening session in December 2025 with a small group of executive directors from LGBTQ+-serving organizations.

These stakeholder conversations were designed to:

- Revisit the 2019 LGBTQ Community Fund Needs Assessment, conducted by the Morten Group, to determine whether the key themes identified at that time still reflect current realities and to surface any new or emerging issues.
- Better understand the current political and economic climate and how it is affecting LGBTQ+-serving nonprofits, service providers, and the communities they support.
- Identify timely opportunities for action so the Fund can respond thoughtfully and effectively to the current moment through its grantmaking and partnerships.

The seven key themes outlined in the 2019 assessment remain as salient and relevant to the LGBTQ+ community in 2025 as they were six years ago. At the same time, several important nuances related to Themes 1 through 6 were raised during the October 2025 Town Hall and through the online survey. Across engagement formats, the Town Halls brought forward four key highlights, while the virtual listening session produced six themes that helped frame the recommendations section. A synthesis of those observations is summarized in the accompanying chart.



2019 THEMES ~ 2025 NUANCES

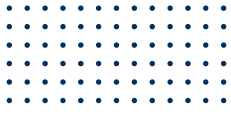
Needs Assessment Key Themes (2019)	Townhall Meeting (2025)	Online Survey Results (2025)
<p>THEME 1: HIGH-QUALITY, AFFORDABLE, CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE AND COMPREHENSIVE HEALTH CARE</p> <p>Including insurance, sexual/reproductive health (including PrEP/HIV information and medications), gender reassignment support, substance abuse support and harm reduction, socio-emotional support groups, and health navigators. Stakeholders also called for more health services on the West and South sides of the city.</p>	<p>Stakeholders shared that attacks on healthcare access have increased the need for equitable care. Restrictions on gender-affirming care for youth and fear among undocumented immigrants due to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) presence were lifted as urgent crises.</p>	<p>Respondents identified restrictive insurance practices, limited provider networks, and the heightened vulnerability of LGBTQ seniors, whose access to affirming physicians and inclusive care settings is particularly constrained.</p>
<p>THEME 2: EMPLOYMENT/UNDEREMPLOYMENT AND EQUITY IN THE JOB MARKET</p> <p>Disparities within the community around income, livable wage and employment status mean that employment programs building hard and soft skills, workforce development opportunities, and LGBTQ-specific workforce development are needed.</p>	<p>Stakeholders shared that the current political and cultural climate has eroded workplace protections for the LGBTQ community, expanding feelings of uncertainty and discomfort related to job security. They noted that institutions' anticipatory compliance with anti-DEI federal guidelines has made LGBTQ workers feel unsafe and vulnerable.</p>	<p>Respondents embraced the framework of "community wealth building" emphasizing employment pathways for trans youth and calling for greater investment in small business development, social enterprises, and worker cooperatives.</p>
<p>THEME 3: SUPPORT ACCESSING QUALITY SERVICES</p> <p>Comprehensive and intersectionally-responsive services for LGBTQ+ community members aged 25-50 are needed. South and West side communities continue to face a dearth of resources; the few services that exist for underserved LGBTQ folks are north. Key groups within the community do not feel comfortable or knowledgeable enough to access basic government human services.</p>	<p>Stakeholders shared that the creation of anti-DEI federal guidelines and the elimination of federal grant programs have negatively impacted LGBTQ+-serving organizations. Many expressed fears that these shifts could lead to organizational closures. Stakeholders also highlighted the need to expand and formalize mutual aid funding structures.</p>	<p>Respondents expressed deep concern about the politicization of government services and growing fear of accessing services due to surveillance and targeting, particularly related to identity documentation.</p>
<p>THEME 4: SAFETY AND VIOLENCE PREVENTION FOR ALL</p> <p>Serious safety concerns were shared by stakeholders across demographic groups, particularly regarding travel to services and safety on CTA/public transit. Transgender non-conforming (TGNC) people and people of color reported safety issues with police and limited access to police services when needed. LGBTQ+ people experience disproportionate harassment, threats, and physical violence.</p>	<p>Stakeholders reported that the current cultural and political climate has emboldened attacks against queer people in public spaces. In addition to concerns about Chicago police, the presence of ICE and the U.S. Border Patrol has heightened fear of violence and deportation. Increased scrutiny of and limitations on gender-affirming care have intensified fears among TGNC people, particularly within healthcare settings.</p>	<p><i>No significant findings</i></p>



2019 THEMES ~ 2025 NUANCES

Needs Assessment Key Themes (2019)	Townhall Meeting (2025)	Online Survey Results (2025)
<p>THEME 5: AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND GENTRIFICATION</p> <p>Affordable housing was identified as a core issue across demographic groups. Key concerns included housing for seniors, transitioning youth experiencing homelessness, adults aging out of youth services, and displacement due to gentrification.</p>	<p>Stakeholders shared increased fear of homelessness driven by job insecurity, particularly for nonprofit workers and those dependent on federal funding. Barriers faced by undocumented LGBTQ+ individuals in accessing Chicago Housing Authority resources and nonprofit housing programs were emphasized.</p>	<p>Respondents expressed deep concern about escalating housing costs and displacement in neighborhoods including Washington Park, Pilsen, Boystown, and Andersonville, noting that gentrification has pushed many LGBTQ+ residents out of the city entirely.</p>
<p>THEME 6: SIMILARITIES AND STARK DIFFERENCES WITHIN THE LGBTQ+ POPULATION</p> <p>There are key differences between the cisgender/white population and others in the community that should be explored further. This includes deeper equity issues experienced by people with disabilities, people of color and TGNC individuals</p>	<p>Stakeholders shared that differences within the LGBTQ+ population have grown exponentially over the past year and are expected to continue widening current political climate continues to unfold.</p>	<p><i>No significant findings</i></p>
<p>THEME 7: RESILIENCY AND CAPACITY OF A PARTICIPATORY, INTERSECTIONAL LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY</p> <p>There are valuable, grassroots, and innovative resources embedded within diverse LGBTQ+ communities of color, identity, and ability. These intersectional communities represent untapped assets.</p>	<p>Stakeholders expressed concern that this theme can appear contradictory to Theme 6, noting that a lack of intersectional understanding within the LGBTQ+ community continues to reproduce systems of power and oppression. Participants highlighted inequitable funding patterns that favor North Halsted-based organizations while neighborhood-based organizations in working-class Black and Latine communities remain underfunded. They warned that continued DEI rollbacks may lead to the closure of these essential services.</p>	<p><i>No significant findings</i></p>





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Recommendations

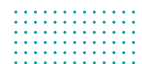
National policies and practices have had a profound impact across the country and, for the purposes of this report, on the LGBTQ+ community in the Chicago metropolitan region specifically. Many of these policies are reflected in the report's 2025 Headlines section.

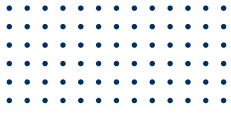
Against this backdrop, it is important to acknowledge that certain members of our community have been disproportionately affected by recent national policy and economic decisions. Transgender and gender nonconforming people, documented and undocumented immigrants, Latine and other people of color, people who are medically vulnerable—including those living with HIV who are uninsured or underinsured—as well as young people and those living in poverty, have borne an unfair and unnecessary share of these burdens.

This moment in our collective history has directly shaped the recommendations being put forward to the LGBTQ Community Fund.

Recommendations

1. **Continue to Prioritize General Operating Support** - General operating support allows organizations the flexibility to pivot and respond to emerging needs.
2. **Invest in LGBTQ+ History and Archiving** - Dedicate resources to organizations preserving and archiving LGBTQ+ stories, leadership, and movements—with a strong emphasis on intersectionality.
3. **Deepen Investment in Vulnerable Youth** - Intentionally recruit Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC), transgender, immigrant, and under-30 leaders into active roles within the Fund to ensure lived experience informs strategy.
4. **Integrate Alternative Funding Approaches** - Consider multi-year and infrastructure support to strengthen grant partner sustainability and effectiveness over time.

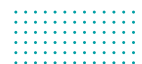




EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Recommendations

5. **Support Mental Health and Wellness**- Consider carving out dedicated funding over the next three to five years to support mental health and wellness initiatives.
6. **Sustain Investment in Advocacy and Civil Rights**- Increase support for community organizing, advocacy, journalism, legal aid, and civil rights law.
7. **Assess the Feasibility of Sponsorships**- Explore whether the Fund could use a portion of its marketing budget to underwrite grant partner events.
8. **Incentivize and Model Collaboration**- Re-introduce the practice of intentionally funding collaborative proposals; add collaboration as a grant review criterion; and convene a funders table to align local, national, and corporate funders around defined LGBTQ+ priorities.
9. **Address Medical Access, Food and Housing Instability**- Target more investments to mitigate hunger, food insecurity, medical access, and housing instability.
10. **Strengthen Future Assessments**- Ensure future community assessments aim to reflect the racial demographics of the city, provide a more nuanced breakdown within the “Latine” category by national origin, and include legal status as a demographic variable to better understand the experiences of immigrants, asylum seekers, and refugees in the LGBTQ+ community.



2025 HEADLINES

UNDERSTANDING THE CURRENT CULTURAL AND POLITICAL MOMENT

Shifting federal policies and recent court rulings have deeply affected the LGBTQ+ community. The following articles and developments contextualize the current moment:

- **Gender-Affirming Care:** The Supreme Court upheld Tennessee’s ban on gender-affirming care for minors.
- **Marriage Equality:** The Supreme Court rejected a challenge to Obergefell v. Hodges, affirming nationwide same-sex marriage.
- **Federal Funding:** More than \$800 million in research into the health of sexual and gender minority groups was canceled in 2025. More than half of the National Institutes of Health grants scrapped through early May involved studies of cancers and viruses that disproportionately affect LGBTQ people.
- **Military Benefits:** The U.S. Air Force announced that transgender service members who have served between 15 and 18 years would be denied early retirement and instead separated from the military without benefits. Transgender troops were given the option of accepting a lump-sum payout offered to junior service members or being removed from service. In February, the Pentagon said it would draft and submit procedures to identify transgender service members and begin discharging them from the military within 30 days.

(Source: Washington Blade, December 31, 2025)



LGBTQ+ NATIONAL GIVING

NATIONALLY, ONLY

\$0.20

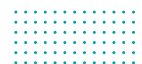
OUT OF EVERY \$100 AWARDED

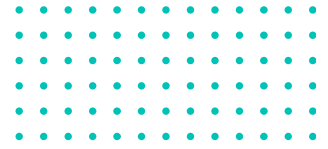
GOES TO SUPPORT LGBTQ COMMUNITIES

“The findings are sobering. U.S. foundation funding for LGBTQ communities totaled \$209.4 million in 2023, representing a 19 percent decrease from the previous year. Adjusted for inflation, that drop reaches 22 percent, meaning that for every \$100 awarded by U.S. foundations, only 20 cents supported LGBTQ communities.

Funding for transgender, gender nonconforming, and nonbinary communities fell from \$48.2 million in 2022 to \$36.4 million in 2023, a decline of 24 percent. Similarly, funding for Black LGBTQ communities decreased by 41 percent, following record highs the year before.”

Source: Funders for LGBTQ Issues. 2023 Resource Tracking Report: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Grantmaking by U.S. Foundations (2025).





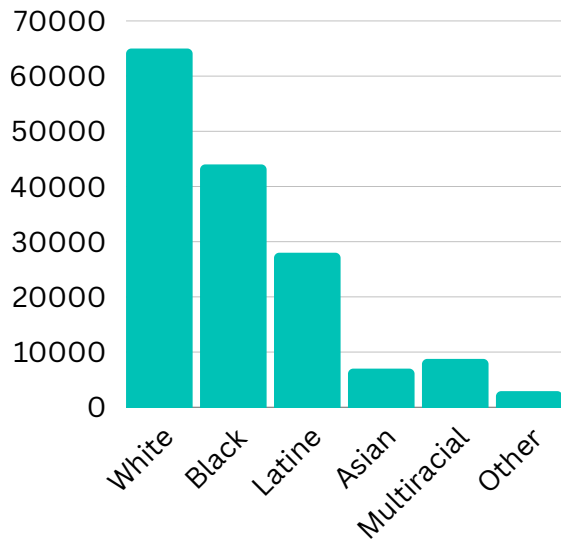
DEMOGRAPHICS

Given the scope of the work captured in this report, participant demographic data was not captured. In the absence of this information, the most recent demographic data available about the LGBTQ community is being provided.

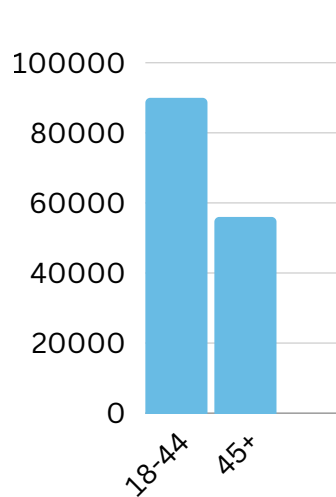
As of 2020, an estimated 290,000 to 310,000 LGBTQ+ adults live in the Chicago metropolitan region, with between 146,000 and 150,000 residing in the City of Chicago. According to City of Chicago estimates, approximately 7.1% of adults identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual, and an additional 0.5% identify as transgender.

Drawing on data* from the Chicago Department of Public Health and the Williams Institute at UCLA, the racial and ethnic composition of LGBTQ+ adults in the Chicago area is estimated as follows:

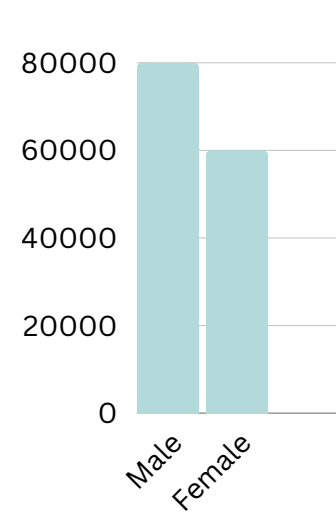
RACE/ETHNICITY



AGE



GENDER



SOURCES: *Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Health: Healthy Chicago Databook ~ Chicago Department of Health, 2018; Racial Differences Among LGBT Adults in the US, Bianca D.M. Wilson, Lauren J.A. Bouton, & Christy Mallory, Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law (2023)*

Other Key Demographic Insights

~**Intersectionality:** Approximately 42% to 47% of LGBTQ+ adults in Chicago identify as people of color.

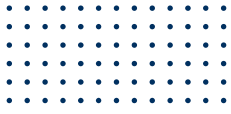
~**Economic Disparities:** LGBTQ+ people of color experience higher levels of economic insecurity. An estimated 47% live in low-income households, compared to 36% of white LGBTQ+ adults.

Together, these data points underscore both the size and the diversity of the LGBTQ+ population in Chicago, as well as the persistent racial and economic inequities that shape community needs.

***NOTE:** Chicago-specific estimates may be conservative. A 2025 Gallup study finds that 9% of U.S. adults identify as LGBTQ; in urban areas this can reach 10.9%, and among adults under 30 as high as 23%, including about 3% who identify as transgender.

Source: [LGBTQ+ Identification Holds at 9% in U.S.](#)





PROJECT SCOPE

The LGBTQ Community Fund at The Chicago Community Trust works toward a vision of a region where Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer people can live openly and safely, enjoy the same freedoms and quality of life as everyone else, and have equal opportunity to help make our communities stronger. The Fund's mission is to support the Chicago region's LGBTQ community through research, connection, and focused grantmaking.

The Fund recently completed a strategic planning process and, as part of that work, decided to refresh its understanding of current community needs. Rather than conducting a large-scale research study, as in the past, the Steering Committee chose to partner with organizations and leaders who are closely connected to LGBTQ communities to gather timely and grounded feedback.

GOALS

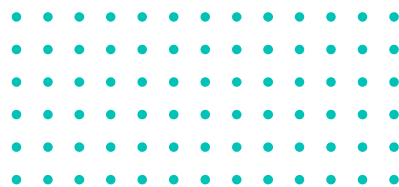
2025 COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDER CONVERSATIONS



- Revisit the 2019 LGBTQ Community Fund Needs Assessment to understand whether the key themes identified then continue to reflect today's realities and to surface any new or emerging issues.
- Understand the current political and economic climate and how it is affecting LGBTQ-serving nonprofits, service providers, and the communities they support.
- Identify timely opportunities for action so the Fund can respond thoughtfully and effectively to the current moment through its grantmaking and partnerships.



METHODOLOGY



The following qualitative and quantitative research methods were used for the project:

- **Town Hall Community Conversation:** To gather feedback from LGBTQ Community Fund stakeholders including members of the LGBTQ community, members of the general public, former and current grant partners, and former and current donors.
- **Online Survey:** To gather feedback from the community at large, including individuals unable to attend the in-person town hall or who did not meet criteria for the virtual focus group.
- **Virtual Executive Leadership Listening Session:** To gather feedback from executive leadership of LGBTQ+-serving nonprofit organizations on how they are being impacted by the current political and economic climate.
- **Final Report:** To share a summary and findings from the town hall, survey, and listening session, and offer recommendations reflective of the community feedback gathered.



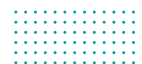


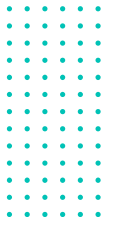
2025 LGBTQ COMMUNITY FUND STAKEHOLDER CONVERSATIONS

2019 THEMES ~ 2025 NUANCES

The comparison of findings from the 2025 town hall and online survey was grounded in an assessment of continued alignment with the seven key themes identified in the 2019 Community Needs Assessment conducted by the Morten Group. Overall, there was strong agreement that these seven themes remain very relevant to the LGBTQ+ community in 2025. However, shifting policy and economic conditions have brought new dimensions to several of these areas/issues that were not fully captured or emphasized in the 2019 assessment.

The issues that follow emerged in 2025 and merit additional attention. The highlights outline seven key themes, beginning with their original 2019 assessment definitions and followed by concerns that became more pronounced in 2025.

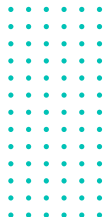


2019 **THEME 1:****HIGH-QUALITY, AFFORDABLE, CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE AND COMPREHENSIVE HEALTH CARE**

Including insurance, sexual/reproductive health (including PrEP/HIV information and medications), gender reassignment support, substance abuse support and harm reduction, socio-emotional support groups, and health navigators. Stakeholders also called for more health services on the West and South sides of the city.

Town Hall (2025): Stakeholders shared that attacks on healthcare access have increased the need for equitable care. Restrictions on gender-affirming care for youth and fear among undocumented immigrants due to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) presence were lifted as urgent crises.

Survey (2025): Respondents highlighted restrictive insurance trends, limited provider choice, and increased vulnerability of LGBTQ seniors.

2019 **THEME 2:****EMPLOYMENT/UNDEREMPLOYMENT AND EQUITY IN THE JOB MARKET****2019 Definition:**

Disparities within the community around income, livable wage and employment status mean that employment programs building hard and soft skills, workforce development opportunities, and LGBTQ-specific workforce development are needed.

Town Hall (2025):

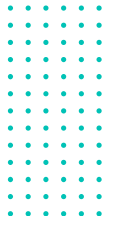
Stakeholders shared that the current political and cultural climate has eroded workplace protections for the LGBTQ community, expanding feelings of uncertainty and discomfort related to job security. They noted that institutions' anticipatory compliance with anti-DEI federal guidelines has made LGBTQ workers feel unsafe and vulnerable.

Online Survey (2025):

Respondents embraced the framework of "community wealth building" emphasizing employment pathways for trans youth and calling for greater investment in small business development, social enterprises, and worker cooperatives.



2019 **THEME 3:** **SUPPORT ACCESSING QUALITY SERVICES**



2019 Definition:

Comprehensive and intersectionally responsive services for LGBTQ+ community members aged 25–50 are needed. South and West Side communities continue to face a dearth of resources. Key groups within the community do not feel comfortable or knowledgeable enough to access basic government human services.

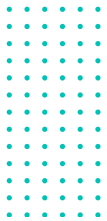
Town Hall (2025):

Stakeholders shared that the current political and cultural climate has eroded workplace protections for the LGBTQ community, expanding feelings of uncertainty and discomfort related to job security. They noted that institutions' anticipatory compliance with anti-DEI federal guidelines has made LGBTQ workers feel unsafe and vulnerable.

Online Survey (2025):

Respondents expressed deep concern about the politicization of government services and growing fear of accessing services due to surveillance and targeting, particularly related to identity documentation.

2019 **THEME 4:** **SAFETY AND VIOLENCE PREVENTION FOR ALL**



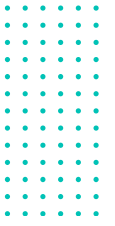
2019 Definition:

Serious safety concerns were shared by stakeholders across demographic groups, particularly regarding travel to services and safety on CTA/public transit. TGNC people and people of color reported safety issues with police and limited access to police services when needed. LGBTQ+ people experience disproportionate harassment, threats, and physical violence.

Town Hall (2025):

Stakeholders reported that the current cultural and political climate has emboldened attacks against queer people in public spaces. In addition to concerns about Chicago police, the presence of ICE and the U.S. Border Patrol has heightened fear of violence and deportation. Increased scrutiny of and limitations on gender-affirming care has intensified fears for Trans, Non-Binary, and Gender Non-Conforming people, particularly within healthcare settings.



2019 **THEME 5:****AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND GENTRIFICATION****2019 Definition:**

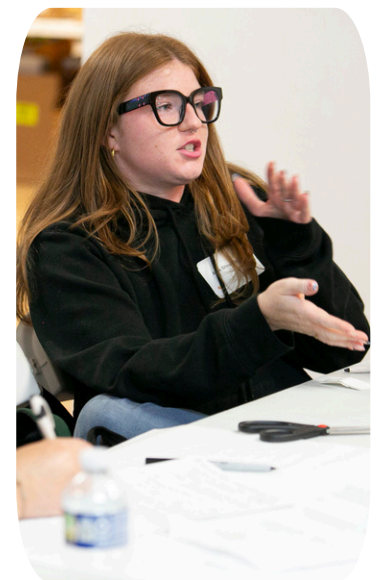
Affordable housing was identified as a core issue across demographic groups. Key concerns included housing for seniors, transitioning youth experiencing homelessness, adults aging out of youth services, and displacement due to gentrification.

Town Hall (2025):

Stakeholders shared increased fear of homelessness driven by job insecurity, particularly for nonprofit workers and those dependent on federal funding. Barriers faced by undocumented LGBTQ+ individuals in accessing Chicago Housing Authority resources and nonprofit housing programs were emphasized.

Online Survey (2025):

Respondents expressed deep concern about escalating housing costs and displacement in neighborhoods including Washington Park, Pilsen, Boystown, and Andersonville, noting that gentrification has pushed many LGBTQ+ residents out of the city entirely.



2019 **THEME 6:****SIMILARITIES AND STARK DIFFERENCES WITHIN THE LGBTQ+ POPULATION****2019 Definition:**

There are key differences between cisgender/white populations and others in the LGBTQ+ community that require deeper exploration, including disparities experienced by people with disabilities, people of color, and TGNC individuals.

Town Hall (2025):

Stakeholders shared that differences within the LGBTQ+ population have grown exponentially over the past year and are expected to continue widening as the current political climate unfolds over the next three years.

Online Survey (2025):

While a majority of survey responses related to the trans community were positive, a small number of comments were described as unsettling and indicative of ongoing internal tensions.

2019 **THEME 7:****RESILIENCY AND CAPACITY OF A PARTICIPATORY, INTERSECTIONAL LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY****2019 Definition:**

There are valuable, grassroots, and innovative resources embedded within diverse LGBTQ+ communities of color, identity, and ability. These intersectional communities represent untapped assets.

Town Hall (2025):

Stakeholders expressed concern that this theme can appear contradictory to Theme 6, noting that a lack of intersectional understanding within the LGBTQ+ community continues to reproduce systems of power and oppression. Participants highlighted inequitable funding patterns that favor North Halsted-based organizations while neighborhood-based organizations in working-class Black and Latine communities remain underfunded. They warned that continued DEI rollbacks may lead to the closure of these essential services.



LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY TOWNHALL

PROCESS

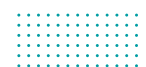
On October 21, 2025, the LGBTQ Community Fund invited stakeholder organizations and community members to share their perspectives about the current needs, issues, strengths, and resources of the Chicago region's LGBTQ+ community. Forty individuals, representing 29 organizations, were in attendance. The purpose of the Townhall was to gather input that will help inform the grantmaking priorities for the Fund in the coming years. To ensure all voices were heard, there were three elements of the Townhall: small group table discussions, group report outs, and a large group discussion. Participants were divided into 6 groups and tasked to review the seven community themes identified in the **2019 Chicago LGBTQ Community Needs Assessment** conducted by the Morten Group, LLC.

Each group discussed the importance of the themes in relation to the current political landscape and wrote down pressing questions. After the discussion, participants were asked to rank the themes in order of most important to least important to the LGBTQ Community utilizing a large post-it to outline their rankings. A member of each group shared the ranking logic with everyone in attendance.

“

Just in terms of representation in the room, I do want to mention that I doubt that there's folks in the room that are really representing the folks affected right now by the ICE raids, and there is folks, but there's also privilege, in that. So I'm Latine, I don't represent someone who is currently I would say scared to be detained, so I would consider just having those conversations with the community most affected.

”



TOWNHALL HIGHLIGHT 1

IMMIGRATION STATUS AS A CRITICAL BARRIER

“

When we talk about safety, even the language, it's not accessible for them either if they speak Spanish. Housing they don't -- they can't even apply for that. Insurance. Can't apply for that. Employment. You can't work anywhere, if you're undocumented. Public benefits don't qualify, but they do invest billions of dollars every single year, so I think that's a big issue.

”



- Stakeholders emphasized that the presence of ICE in Chicago has heightened fear among undocumented LGBTQ+ residents.
- Participants noted that immigration status was not explicitly addressed in the 2019 themes, despite being a major barrier to safety, housing, employment, insurance, and public benefits. Undocumented transgender participants shared that while some LGBTQ+-specific resources exist, there are far fewer supports tailored to people who are both undocumented and transgender.
- Language access—particularly for Spanish speakers—was also identified as a significant obstacle.

“

As an undocumented transgender woman, I don't have access to a lot of federal stuff, and I'm not able to apply to those. I receive a lot of the resources through therapy, through nonprofit organizations, and it's actually crazy because there's a lack of resources for trans and undocumented people. But I received more resources as a trans person rather than as an undocumented person.

”



TOWNHALL HIGHLIGHT 2

FUNDING EQUITY AND RESOURCE DISTRIBUTION



- Participants raised concerns that funding trends often prioritize large, long-established institutions, leaving smaller grassroots organizations—particularly those serving divested neighborhoods outside of North Halsted—under-resourced.
- Stakeholders called for a more equitable distribution of funds to ensure community-based organizations have the capacity to meet local needs.



“

Instead of giving a million dollars to the same organizations you always give to, distribute the wealth across nonprofits and don't keep focusing on the large ones that constantly receive it.

”



TOWNHALL HIGHLIGHT 3

NEED FOR ONGOING COLLABORATION SPACES

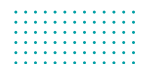


- Many participants expressed a desire for consistent opportunities to convene, build relationships, and develop cross-institutional partnerships.
- Participants noted that stronger collaboration could reduce silos, increase shared capacity, and enable more coordinated responses to complex community challenges.

“

I met five people at my table that I think my organization should have a formalized partnership with, and I think that we need to have more spaces in which we are meeting one another and creating cross collaborative partnerships and systems so that we can systematically address a lot of these issues, and not work in silos.

”



TOWNHALL HIGHLIGHT 4

FLEXIBLE AND ACCESSIBLE GRANTMAKING



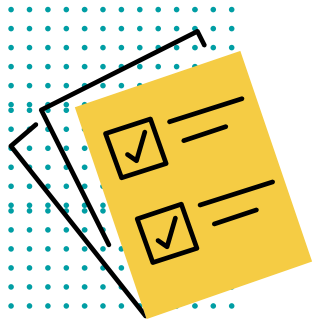
- Stakeholders advocated for fewer restrictions on grant funds and a more streamlined application process.
- They emphasized the importance of flexibility to cover immediate and unconventional needs—such as purchasing essential items for clients—that are common in community-based work but not always supported by traditional funding structures.

“

And so understanding even down to the funding organizations being able to get cash for participants because we understand sometimes we need to buy, you know, a sleeping bag for our clients or different things like that, that might seem unconventional, but it's so common in our communities.

”





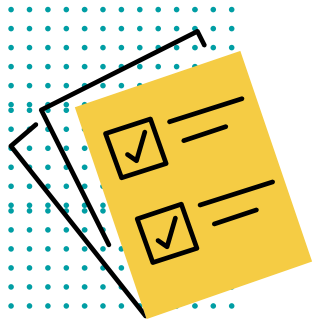
ONLINE SURVEY PROCESS

In November 2025, the LGBTQ Community Fund Online Survey was sent to the Fund's networks and was advertised on the Windy City Times website. The survey closed on December 15, 2025 and provided insight from a sample size of 44 participants.

The survey asked participants to:

- Gauge the importance of the seven community themes identified by the 2019 Chicago LGBTQ Community Needs Assessment conducted by the Morten Group.
- Share any important issues to them that were not found within seven community themes.
- Share information regarding organizations participants felt were doing a good job supporting LGBTQ+ communities.
- Share their ideas on how LGBTQ+ serving organizations can continue to exist in the Chicago Metropolitan Region.
- Share any ideas they would like to share with the Fund.
- Share how they identify.
- Share any institutional affiliation.





ONLINE SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS

- When respondents were asked to identify needs not reflected in the seven themes, many highlighted growing concerns about access to resources and protections for immigrants, asylum seekers, and refugees within the LGBTQ+ community. Participants emphasized that immigration status significantly shapes access to safety, housing, employment, public benefits, and culturally responsive services, and warrants more explicit attention in future funding priorities.
- Respondents also identified needs not fully reflected in the seven themes, particularly the need for grantmaking to be more inclusive and supportive of LGBTQ+ arts and culture organizations. They emphasized the vital role these organizations play in community building, healing, and visibility.
- Respondents also highlighted the urgent need for accessible legal counsel to address a range of issues, including immigration matters and access to gender-affirming care, noting that legal support is increasingly critical to the safety and stability of LGBTQ+ community members.



Navigating marriage for my partner who is an immigrant and trying to move to this country in this moment of intense government crackdown on immigration (especially for specific marginalized communities).





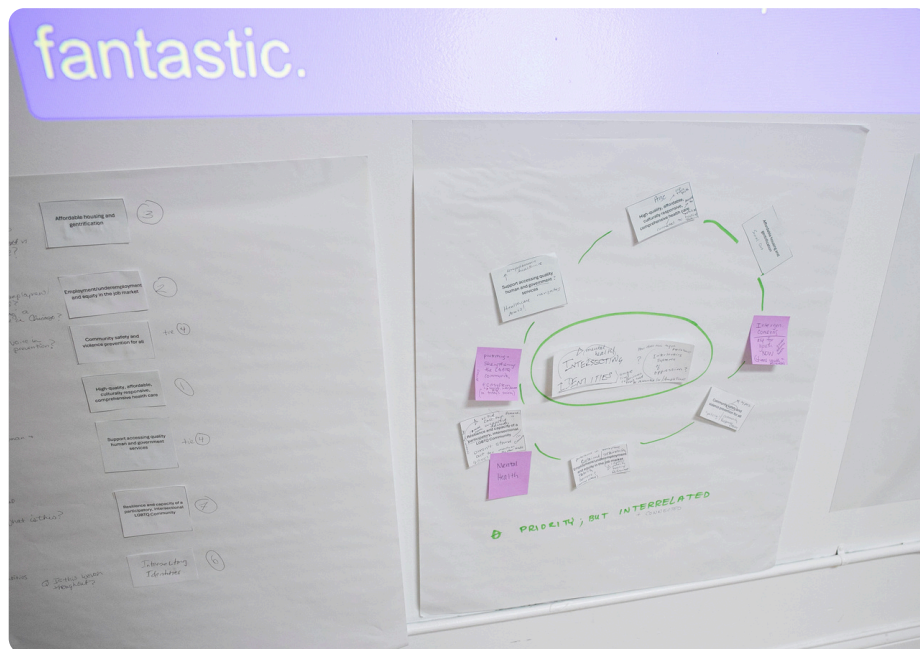
VIRTUAL LISTENING SESSION

PROCESS

On December 8, 2025, 18 executive directors and/or senior staff members of LGBTQ+-serving organizations participated in a ninety minute virtual listening session. The participants were identified from a list of organizations that received a grant from the LGBTQ Community Fund in the past three years (2023-2025). The purpose of the session was to focus on how the current political and economic climate was affecting organizations serving LGBTQ+ communities across the Chicago metropolitan area.

Participants were asked to share their thoughts on the following questions:

- *How is your organization experiencing this current political/economic climate?*
- *Has your organization had to change its service delivery in the last year or so? If so, how has it changed?*
- *Has your organization considered mergers or new collaborations?*
- *What are you learning in this current political climate?*
- *How are you thinking about fundraising in this current climate?*
- *What do you need from the LGBTQ Community Fund and from each other during these rapidly changing times?*





VIRTUAL LISTENING SESSION HIGHLIGHTS

● **THEME 1** CURRENT POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CLIMATE IMPACT

- Organizations are experiencing increased attacks from conservative media outlets, resulting in heightened safety concerns for staff, participants, and community stakeholders. In response, many have had to adjust their internal communications to more directly address vulnerabilities and emerging risks—particularly those related to deportation, immigration enforcement, and unwanted public exposure.
- As a precaution, organizations are limiting the amount of publicly available information about staff and program participants. They are also being more deliberate about creating protected spaces for collective brainstorming and strategy sessions with trusted partners and local community residents, ensuring that safety, confidentiality, and shared decision-making remain central to their work.

“We’ve had to take our public phone number down and contact information for all of our staff because we were getting lots of homophobic and racist hate mail and phone calls from conservative media. That’s a new-ish thing this year.”

● **THEME 2** CHANGES IN PROGRAMMING AND SERVICES

- Some organizations have been forced to pause or scale back programs due to funding cuts and operational challenges. At the same time, there has been a noticeable increase in requests for advocacy and support from young people experiencing discrimination in schools, workplaces, and other community settings.
- In response to both safety concerns and shifting needs, organizations are expanding or exploring virtual programming options. Offering online workshops, support groups, and services allows participants—particularly those who may feel unsafe attending in-person events—to remain connected to resources and community while reducing potential risks.

“And when they [private philanthropy] ask, ‘How can we help?’ what I’ve been saying is, ‘We’re going to get through next year. We’re looking at two years from now. We would really welcome not just one year of general operating support, but two or three. If there was ever a moment, [this is it].’”





VIRTUAL LISTENING SESSION HIGHLIGHTS

● **THEME 3** FUNDRAISING IN CURRENT CLIMATE

- Organizations are reassessing their fundraising strategies amid ongoing uncertainty. Many are engaging in scenario planning but note that the current funding environment is increasingly competitive, making it harder to stand out. As a result, organizations are prioritizing deeper engagement with existing funders rather than expanding into new networks.
- To strengthen sustainability, some are reallocating time and resources toward fundraising efforts, including hiring part-time development staff. There is also a strong emphasis on protecting existing federal and state funding streams—particularly those tied to Medicaid and gender-affirming care.

“We have seen our earned income be impacted in schools and corporations not being able to or wanting to do professional education around LGBTQ+ inclusion. Seeing DEIA rollback many ERG/Affinity groups we are also seeing less support in those areas.”

● **THEME 4** COLLABORATIONS AND MERGER CONSIDERATIONS

- In response to mounting financial and political pressures, some organizations are exploring new collaborations, shared service models, and even potential mergers as strategies to strengthen their impact and long-term sustainability. At the same time, leaders emphasized the importance of preserving organizational autonomy and ensuring that any partnership or structural change does not dilute or compromise their core mission and values.
- There was broad recognition that strategic partnerships—grounded in trust, clarity, and shared purpose—will be essential to navigating the current challenges. By aligning resources, expertise, and advocacy efforts, organizations believe they can build collective resilience while remaining responsive to the communities they serve.

“We have got to focus more on what we can do to have a greater impact with this thing that we know we’re already gonna do... I’ve been talking a lot about anchors, you know, for us as a smaller organization. How are we anchoring ourselves in this time in solidarity models with other people? It also is allowing us to focus more on the impact piece. I’m probably involved in maybe 5 different conversations right now about strategic partnerships for different, various levels of the programming and output that we’re doing.”



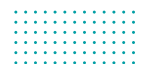


VIRTUAL LISTENING SESSION HIGHLIGHTS

● **THEME 5** ORGANIZATIONAL RESPONSES TO COMMUNITY NEEDS

- Organizations are adapting their services to respond to growing challenges within their communities. Participants reported rising rates of suicide, substance use, and domestic violence among youth, underscoring the urgent need to prioritize community safety and trauma-informed care. Leaders also stressed the importance of anticipating the long-term ripple effects that current policy and economic decisions may have on the LGBTQ+ community. Transparency about funding realities and organizational constraints was lifted up as essential to managing expectations and reducing community anxiety.
- The arts and culture sector is facing acute financial strain. Funding from the National Endowment for the Arts remains uncertain, and local arts funding has been significantly reduced, with many organizations losing city support. Smaller organizations are especially vulnerable, as they often depend on stable grant funding to sustain their core operations.

"We find ourselves, like, not knowing. Working with young people, they are just coming with new needs and at times we don't know exactly what to do and how to best support them. The board continues asking us for specific things, and we're just like, hold on, we are still figuring it out. For example, suicidal rates are coming up. Drug usage is just skyrocketing. Domestic violence relationships are moving to a whole different level."





VIRTUAL LISTENING SESSION HIGHLIGHTS

● **THEME 6** COMMUNITY NEEDS AND SUPPORT BEYOND FUNDING

- Participants emphasized the importance of advancing a shared advocacy agenda that positions Illinois as a national leader on LGBTQ+ issues. Ongoing communication across organizations was seen as critical to identifying shared needs, coordinating strategy, and exchanging timely information about funding opportunities.
- Peer learning and targeted convenings were highlighted as valuable tools for developing stronger, more coordinated responses to funding cuts and operational challenges. Participants also underscored the importance of investing in professional development opportunities for staff at all levels to build long-term organizational strength and leadership capacity.

“One of the things we’ve been really doing with funders is talking about not just a threat at the federal level, but the opportunity at the state level. So, as we’re working on addressing the drastic cuts to Medicaid, the tearing apart the Office of Civil Rights, or the cuts to gender-affirming care, we’re also saying what can we shore up in Illinois – [...] where we have good leadership and can protect our clients and communities. And so, it’s building out both a defensive [policy] agenda, but also an opportunity agenda in Illinois to be a leader at this time.”





COLLECTIVE HIGHLIGHTS

In 2025, significant policy, economic, and technological shifts shaped the landscape in which LGBTQ+ organizations operate. The LGBTQ Community Fund may wish to consider the following trends as it refines its future strategy:

Arts & Culture

Chicago has long maintained a vibrant LGBTQ+ arts and cultural ecosystem, reflected throughout this report and reinforced by the Fund's 2024 arts-focused grantmaking. However, a 15% reduction to the Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events FY2026 budget has introduced austerity measures. Notably, CityArts grant recipients will now be limited to two consecutive years of funding followed by a required one-year pause, creating instability for smaller and emerging arts organizations.

Information Technology and Social Media

Virtual access to services remains essential for LGBTQ+ immigrants, transgender youth, seniors, and people with disabilities. Social media continues to expand fundraising and outreach capacity. At the same time, organizations report rising incidents of cyberbullying, hate speech, harassment, and death threats across digital platforms—posing safety, staffing, and security challenges.

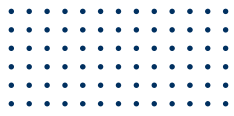
Escalating Transphobia

The number of anti-trans bills introduced nationally has increased dramatically—from 32 in 2019 to 1,022 in 2025, with 632 introduced thus far in 2026 (Trans Legislation Tracker). While Illinois is widely regarded as protective of transgender rights, sustained national attacks are likely to continue shaping local service demand, safety concerns, and advocacy needs.

Dismantling of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Efforts

The rollback of DEI initiatives nationally and locally has had a chilling effect on LGBTQ+ organizations in the Chicago metropolitan area. Many report significant declines in corporate sponsorships, affinity group engagement, volunteerism, and event-based fundraising—reducing even further unrestricted revenues sources.





COLLECTIVE HIGHLIGHTS (CONTINUED)

Funding Cuts and Policy Shifts

Federal policy changes have significantly disrupted nonprofit funding. According to the Urban Institute (October 2025), 21% of nonprofits reported losing government funding, 27% experienced freezes or delays, and 6% received stop-work orders in early 2025.

A May 2025 report from the Human Rights Campaign estimated that proposed and enacted cuts to LGBTQ-specific programs could exceed \$2.67 billion by the end of FY2026. Additional proposed changes include:

- A merger of the Housing Opportunities for Persons With AIDS (HOPWA) program with general homelessness funding, potentially resulting in a \$532 million reduction.
- Termination of over \$800 million in LGBTQ-related health research grants by the National Institutes of Health (NIH).
- Proposed \$74 million FY2026 cuts eliminating Part F of the Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program, ending national workforce development (AETCs) and innovation initiatives (SPNS).



There's been a lot of concern around community safety and government revenue. We've certainly seen a huge decrease in government revenue. We have done a lot of dancing with our partners, especially government entities/agencies around how we can continue or sustain certain funding. It's been an incredibly challenging year, and there is no reason for us to think that it's gonna get better.





CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

The townhall, online survey, and listening session affirmed that the LGBTQ Community Fund is responsive to community needs while also surfacing emerging challenges that should inform future requests for proposals and strategic direction. The following recommendations reflect stakeholder/respondent input and current policy and economic realities:

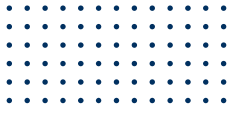
- 1. Prioritize General Operating Support** – Given the precarious policy and economic climate in Chicago, Illinois, and nationally, many LGBTQ+-serving organizations have had to modify, postpone, or eliminate programs—particularly those serving immigrants, transgender people, and youth. The Fund should continue to prioritize general operating support to allow organizations the flexibility to pivot and respond to emerging needs..
- 2. Invest in LGBTQ+ History and Archiving** – In response to the intentional erasure of LGBTQ+ histories and narratives at the federal level, the Fund should dedicate resources to organizations preserving and archiving LGBTQ+ stories, leadership, and movements—with a strong emphasis on intersectionality.
- 3. Deepen Investment in Vulnerable Youth** – Trans youth of color and immigrant youth were identified as particularly vulnerable populations. Building on the Fund’s 2025 focus on intergenerational engagement, there is an opportunity to more intentionally recruit BIPOC, transgender, immigrant, and under-30 leaders into active roles within the Fund to ensure lived experience informs strategy.
- 4. Explore Multi-Year and Infrastructure Funding** – Stakeholders overwhelmingly prefer multi-year funding, citing the limitations of one-year grants for meaningful planning. While the Fund relies on annual allocations from The Chicago Community Trust and individual donors—making long-term commitments challenging—it could pilot a smaller multi-year initiative (e.g., infrastructure, safety, or capacity-building) that limits its exposure to 10–20% of its historical grantmaking budget.
- 5. Support Mental Health and Wellness** – The ongoing climate of political hostility—particularly toward transgender people, immigrants, LGBTQ+ individuals, and people of color—has generated sustained trauma. The Fund should consider carving out dedicated funding over the next three-to-five years to support mental health and wellness initiatives. This may also present an opportunity for collaboration with other affinity funds to pursue joint or external funding.



CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

6. **Sustain Investment in Advocacy and Civil Rights** – As rights and protections are challenged through executive orders, court rulings, and legislation, there will be increasing need to support community organizing, advocacy, journalism, legal aid, and civil rights law.
7. **Assess the Feasibility of Sponsorships**– Explore whether the Fund could use a portion of its marketing budget to underwrite a very limited number of grant partner events. Additionally, consider notifying grant partner organizations when The Chicago Community Trust's application for sponsorships opens.
8. **Incentivize and Model Collaboration** – The Fund can strengthen ecosystem-wide impact by:
 - Re-introducing the practice of intentionally funding collaborative proposals;
 - Adding collaboration as a grant review criterion;
 - Convening a funder table—similar to pooled fund models such as the Illinois Immigrant Funders Collaborative (IFC) or the Chicago Racial Justice Pooled Fund—to align local, national, and corporate funders around defined LGBTQ+ priorities.
9. **Address Medical Access/Food and Housing Instability** – The erosion of the social safety net—including cuts to Medicaid, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and affordable housing—will likely disproportionately impact LGBTQ+ individuals. Targeted investments to mitigate hunger, food insecurity, inaccessible health care, and housing instability should be considered in the 2026 and 2027 grant cycles.
10. **Strengthen Future Assessments** – Future community assessments should aim to reflect the racial demographics of the city, provide a more nuanced breakdown within the “Latine” category by national origin, and include legal status as a demographic variable to better understand the experiences of immigrants, asylum seekers, and refugees in the LGBTQ+ community.

Together, these recommendations call for flexible, equity-centered, and forward-looking grantmaking that strengthens organizational resilience, protects vulnerable populations, and sustains the broader LGBTQ+ ecosystem in a period of uncertainty.

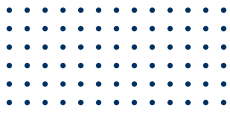


LGBTQ+ SERVING ORGANIZATIONS & INSTITUTIONS

In the online survey, respondents were asked to identify community organizations/service providers/institutions in the Chicago metropolitan region that they have accessed personally or that they have heard are doing a particularly effective job at meeting the needs of the LGBTQ+ community. What follows is a list of those organizations/institutions:

- About Face Theatre
- Affinity Community Services
- ALMA
- AIDS Foundation of Chicago
- Arcus Behavioral Health
- Assata's Daughters
- Artemis Singers
- Belong: Fox Valley
- Brave Space Alliance
- Broadway Youth Center
- Calor
- Center for Disability & Elder Law
- Center on Halsted
- Chicago House
- Chicago Black Gay Men's Caucus
- Chicago Gay Men's Chorus
- Chicago Metropolitan Sports Association
- Chicago Therapy Collective
- Ebenezer Lutheran Church
- Eli Tea Bar
- Equality Illinois
- Gays Against Groomers
- Gerber/Hart
- Hell in a Handbag
- Howard Brown Health
- Lakeside Pride Music Ensembles
- Lighthouse Foundation
- Life Is Work
- Nothing Without a Company
- Our Resilience
- PODER
- PFLAG
- Project Vida
- Pride Action Tank
- Pride in the Pews
- Puerto Rican Cultural Center
- QueerCare Chicago
- Reva and David Logan Foundation
- Taskforce Prevention and Community Services
- Tapestry 360
- The Night Ministry
- The Understudy Cafe
- TPAN / Vivent Health
- Trans UpFront Illinois
- Transformative Justice Law Project
- Will's Martini Lounge
- Windy City Times
- Youth Outlook
- Youth Services of Glenview/Northbrook





PROJECT TEAM



Consuella Brown (She/Her), Team Lead/Facilitator/Report Co-Writer: Consuella is a strategic thinker, connector, and problem solver with over 40 years of experience in the government, philanthropy, and nonprofit sectors. As a former Peace Corps Volunteer, she has been fortunate to serve as the Vice President for Strategy and Impact at All Chicago, Acting President and Program Director at Woods Fund Chicago, and Program Officer at Grand Victoria Foundation. She has served as co-chair of the Leadership in Philanthropy Committee, Affordable Housing Funders Group, and Grantmakers Concerned with Poverty. Consuella has also served as a Board of Director at Chicago Women in Philanthropy, the Eleanor Foundation, Action Now Institute, Ixchel, and Las Caras Lindas. She was also elected to the School Board at Calumet Public School District in 2021. Consuella earned a master's degree in political science, Illinois State University, certificate in advanced spirituality from the Institute on Spiritual Leadership. As a solopreneur, she specializes in board development, facilitation, strategic planning, executive coaching, foundation proposal review, program development, and interim staffing. She keeps her intellectual muscles strong in her role as an adjunct faculty member at Loyola University's School of Social Work and Dominican University's Masters in Conflict Resolution Program. Since 2014, she has taught several courses at the graduate and undergraduate level in community interventions, philanthropy and public policy, and community and interpersonal conflict resolution. brownconsuella@yahoo.com



Liliana Macias (She/They), Consultant/Facilitator/Report Co-Writer: Liliana is a cultural worker, educator, and PhD candidate in History at the University of Illinois Chicago. As a PhD candidate she is currently working on her dissertation where she is mapping the impact of queer Latines on broader Chicago histories. As a cultural worker she has over ten years of experience in museums and cultural institutions where she has developed and managed education initiatives, advised and led exhibition curation and design, and led public and community engagement program development and implementation. Liliana is an educator with over five years of formal teaching experience in higher education as a lecturer for the sociology and women's, gender and sexuality departments at Northeastern Illinois University, she's led the development of K-12 curriculums for cultural institutions, and professional development workshops for Chicago public school educators. She has served as a committee member for the preservation and creation of historical landmarks and grant review panelist for the Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs. Liliana is also an independent contractor in cultural work strategies for local non-profits and funders that includes strategic planning, assessments and evaluation, and research and implementation. Liliana is the proud co-founder of Raices Chicago Story Coalition, a capacity building non-profit that seeds and supports archival and storytelling projects by and about Latines in Chicago founded in 2024. At Raices she is helping develop the conservation and preservation best practices that center Latine communities as the cultural stewards of their own Chicago stories. lmacia7@uic.edu



Norma Seledon (Ella/She) – Visual Report Creator/Line Production. Norma is a longstanding activist within the women's, Latina, and LGBTQ communities through her professional affiliations with Equality Illinois, Chicago Public Schools, as well as Amigas Latinas, Mujeres Latinas en Acción, and the Lesbian Community Cancer Project. Norma has used her position in the Chicago Public Schools to support the advancement of LGBTQ+ youth advocacy related to sexual identity and expression to increase needed safe spaces, conversations, and programmatic changes to enhance the educational supports and lived experience of students within her charge. She brings extensive experience supporting LGBTQ+ leadership development and strengthening organizational health across nonprofit and community-based settings, with a deep commitment to elevating culturally relevant, asset-based methodologies that honor community wisdom and lived experience. normalseledon@gmail.com





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