THE CHICAGO COMMUNITY TRUST®

EQUITY • OPPORTUNITY • PROSPERITY

Coalitions Advancing Economic Mobility – Policy Change

Background

The Chicago Community Trust's Policy Change strategy seeks to create a more equitable and prosperous Chicago region by advancing policies, systems and practices that expand economic opportunity and increase household and community well-being among financially vulnerable individuals and communities.

The Trust recognizes that many of the barriers to financial stability and economic mobility are rooted in public policies, institutional practices, and systems that have historically limited access to opportunity for certain communities. Because policy-driven inequities require policy-driven solutions, the Trust supports efforts to identify, advance and implement reforms that promote economic security, reduce disparities in access to opportunities, and foster inclusive neighborhood growth.

The Trust advances this work by supporting policy research, advocacy, coalition-building, civic engagement, leadership development, public education, and other charitable activities that inform decision-making and strengthen the capacity of residents, nonprofit organizations, and public institutions to address systemic challenges. The Trust also supports efforts to ensure that public policies are informed by research, resident experience, and the expertise of organizations working to improve conditions for Chicago-area residents.

This work serves the public interest by promoting effective and equitable public policies, reducing barriers to economic opportunity, strengthening civic participation, and improving government effectiveness through the development and advancement of solutions that improve community well-being. By supporting policy and system change efforts, the Trust seeks to create lasting benefits for individuals, families and communities throughout the Chicago region.

https://www.cct.org/our-work/household-wealth/https://www.cct.org/our-work/community-wealth/https://www.cct.org/our-work/collective-power/https://www.cct.org/our-work/policy-change/https://www.cct.org/our-work/addressing-critical-needs/https://www.cct.org/about/connecting-philanthropy-to-impact/

Need/Opportunity Statement

Since 2020, the Trust has supported organizations and coalitions engaging in advocacy and policy reform aimed at increasing economic opportunity, reducing poverty and increasing household financial stability, strengthening community development, and ensuring every individual and family in Chicago can meet their basic needs. Funding has enabled organizations to work in coalition to elevate community-led solutions, build public will and momentum toward a policy change, and advance systems-level reforms that improve economic well-being for all Chicagoans.

With Trust support, coalitions and organizations have achieved significant systemic reforms to overcome inequitable policies and support economic stability for lower-income individuals and families.

Advocacy efforts to expand Illinois' Earned Income Credit and establish a state Child Tax Credit have reduced tax burdens and enabled working families to retain more of their earned income. Organizations working together to pass the Predatory Loan Prevention Act and Illinois Community Reinvestment Act were able to foster more equitable lending policies, benefiting individuals, small businesses, and community development. Organizations working in coalition have also developed and advanced policies to improve Cook County's property tax sale system to enable homeowners to keep up with their property tax payments and pass legislation to create a more transparent and equitable system to bring long-time vacant and abandoned properties back to productive use.

By investing in the region's policy and advocacy landscape, the Trust supports and works alongside organizations advancing and defending policies and systems reforms that reduce poverty, promote economic mobility, and invest in long-underinvested communities.

Priority Strategies and Activities
Ultimately, we seek a Chicago region where more people have the opportunity to thrive, and neighborhoods are strong and resilient. To help achieve that vision, the Trust's strategy focuses on the following key issues areas where we believe we can have the greatest impact.

- Increase income and financial assets for low- and moderate-income Chicagoans
- Increase homeownership attainment and stability in underinvested communities
- Increase investments in underinvested communities while minimizing displacement
- Meet the critical needs of vulnerable Chicagoans'
- Strengthen small businesses in region

1. **Increase income and financial assets for low- and moderate- income Chicagoans**

Enabling individuals and households to increase their income promotes economic mobility. Savings and asset-building opportunities support long-term financial health and prosperity. The Trust will consider funding policy reform efforts that would:

- *Improve systems that strengthen employment outcomes, including workforce development programs and wraparound supports that enable participants to complete them, as well as successfully transition and advance in the workforce.*
- *Reduce barriers that hinder access to and attainment of postsecondary education and credentialing.*
- *Foster more employment opportunities that enable individuals and families to achieve financial stability and economic mobility.*
- *Strengthen the ability of individuals and families to save and invest to increase financial health and well-being*

2. **Increase and preserve homeownership in underinvested communities**

Achieving homeownership and building home equity play a critical role in setting families on a path toward economic mobility and maintaining vibrant, thriving communities. The Trust will consider funding organizations and coalitions advancing policies that:

- *Provide individuals with the support and counseling services that make homeownership more attainable and sustainable.*
- *Create and scale pathways toward affordable homeownership, including shared ownership models and increasing the supply of affordable housing for homeownership.*
- *Ensure existing homeowners can keep up with associated costs, including home repair and property taxes.*

3. **Increase investments in underinvested communities while minimizing displacement**

A neighborhood's condition and the amenities it offers can affect its residents' economic mobility and community vitality, from property values to quality jobs to public safety. The Trust will consider funding efforts to address the following:

- *Reducing systemic barriers that increase the cost, complexity, or timeline of neighborhood investment and development.*
- *Creating scalable pathways for the revitalization and productive reuse of vacant land and abandoned buildings.*
- *Facilitating the creation and expansion of shared, community, or public ownership models that promote community development while offering more opportunities for long-time residents to own and/or invest in their neighborhood.*
- *Strengthening the conditions for inclusive neighborhood growth, community wealth-building, and resident stability.*

4. **Meet the critical needs of vulnerable Chicagoans**

Social safety net programs and essential services are critical to ensuring vulnerable Chicagoans can meet their basic human needs, like housing, food, healthcare, and other human services. The Trust will consider funding organizations and coalitions working to:

- *Strengthen collaboration and partnerships between government and nonprofit human service providers to ensure the needs of low-income community members are met.*
- *Ensure all individuals and families and individuals have access to the public benefits for which they are eligible.*
- *Increase access to and supply of rental housing that is affordable to very-low and low-income residents.*
- *Develop or scale interventions that increase housing stability for vulnerable households.*

5. **Strengthen small businesses**

Neighborhood-based small businesses contribute to healthier, safer, and more economically resilient communities. They play an important role in creating and sustaining local employment and economies, revitalizing commercial corridors, expanding access to goods and services, and strengthening overall neighborhood stability and well-being. The Trust will consider funding advocacy efforts aimed at:

- Strengthening the presence of small businesses in thriving commercial corridors in historically underinvested communities.
- Enabling small businesses to access capital and revenue streams that allow them to grow and thrive.

Goals and Outcomes

The Trust is committed to supporting an organization's short- and long-term strategic goals and measuring progress toward achieving them. The following outcomes aim to measure the impact an organization and/or coalition has on achieving their policy and system reform goals. The grant applicant's outcomes should be informed by how the proposed project or strategy will lead to the anticipated result or long-term change (i.e., your theory of change). Grant applicants will be asked to select and report on the outcomes from the list below that are most relevant and related to their role and contribution to the coalition and policy efforts for which they are applying:

- **Increase Coalition, Constituent, and Organizational Power to Advance Policy Change/Implementation:** Aims to measure the coalition's infrastructure and capacity to engage in advocacy and advance policy reforms.
    a. MOP: Changes in organizational or constituent power
        i. Indicator: # of coalition members engaged in grassroots or direct lobbying [Lobbying]
        ii. Indicator: # of organizational hours spent engaging in coalition activities [Advocacy]
        iii. Indicator: # of coordinated mobilization or public educational activities [Advocacy]
- **Organize and Mobilize Stakeholders to Advance or Defend Policy Change:** Aims to measure the impact of the coalition activities on their policy goals.
    a. MOP: Changes in the level of actions taken by champions of an issue
        i. Indicator: # of legislative initiatives advanced, defended, or passed [Lobbying]
        ii. Indicator: # of champions, sponsors, or co-sponsors actively advancing coalition priorities [Lobbying]
        iii. Indicator: # of activities that elevate the impact of policy reforms [Advocacy]

Applicants will be provided with a specific set of indicators on which they will report their progress. These quantitative measurements will complement qualitative information and accounts captured during site visits and/or written reports throughout the grant term.

Grantmaking Criteria

Effectively advancing policy reforms and systems change requires an intentional combination of constituent organizing, communications, policy development, cross-sector and bipartisan legislative outreach, advocacy, research, and coalition building. Recognizing that all these components are critical to any successful policy reform effort, this funding opportunity is flexible to accommodate the specific roles of individual applicants, the needs of the coalitions in which they are engaged, and the policy environment.

The Trust will consider the following:

- Organization's contributions to the coalition's success
- Commitment of time and effort to advance policy change
- Contribution to critical functions, such as constituent and legislative outreach, research, and communication
- Engagement of those most impacted by the policy or systems to be reformed

The Trust recognizes that some organizations are engaged in multiple coalitions aligned with more than one of the priority strategies and activities listed above. Trust reviewers will consider this when scoring applications and determining funding levels.

Competitive applications will clearly describe the following:

- ***The proposed policy or structural change that the organization is pursuing.*** This entails demonstrating a firm understanding of the historical context of the policy environment, incorporating research that disaggregates data by demographics and relevant socioeconomic factors, engaging, building and earning trust, and co-developing policy approaches with those most directly impacted, centering their voices within advocacy efforts.
- ***The coalition(s) and/or collaborative landscape working on a given policy issue.*** This should include the name of the coalition(s) and a list of key coalition members. Applicants should also include their role in the coalition(s) and the key contributions they bring to advance the coalition's goals.
- ***The organization's and/or coalition's track record of advancing policy change.*** Include how long the organization and/or coalition has been working on the proposed policy or structural change identified in the proposal, listing the organization and/or coalition's achievements to date in advancing this policy, and describing what the organization and/or coalition would like to achieve during the grant year.
- ***The current and/or anticipated policy landscape.*** Describe what headwinds or tailwinds might impede or contribute to advancing this policy. Explain how the organization and/or coalition will navigate the policy landscape to achieve or make progress toward their goals.
- ***How the organization will measure progress toward achieving its policy goals.*** Competitive proposals will identify measures of progress that demonstrate the impact of activities conducted rather than simply demonstrating the activities described in the proposal took place, i.e., the number of participants that acted following an event, rather than the number of events held.

In summary, competitive applicants will clearly articulate their role in advancing policy or systems change independently or as part of a coalition, as well as the value they bring to the ecosystem of organizations, leaders and advocates working on the identified issue(s). The Trust will evaluate an organization's track record of working collaboratively, sustaining partnerships, and serving a clear and defined role within the coalition(s).

The FY2027 Coalitions Advancing Economic Mobility funding program is the seventh funding program following its establishment in 2020. While previous recipients of funding are encouraged to apply, please note previous funding does not guarantee continued support. Selection for funding this year does not guarantee funding in future years.

General Operating Support, Restricted Support, and Project-Specific Grants: General operating support, grants restricted support, and project-specific grants will all be available through this RFP. The type of grant proposal an organization will be invited to submit will be determined based on the work described in the LOI.

The Trust will have sole discretion whether to invite and award a general operating, restricted by purpose, or project-specific grant.

1. **General Operating Support:** General operating grants provide wide flexibility in how funds are used. Organizations may be awarded general operating support when the scope of their mission and work is in complete alignment with the priorities and objectives of the RFP.
2. **Restricted Support:** Restricted grants provide organizations with the flexibility to use funds as needed, as long as the use aligns with the specific charitable purpose for which the grant was made. Organizations may be awarded a restricted by purpose grant when only a portion of the organization's mission and work aligns with the priorities and objectives of the RFP.
3. **Project Specific Grants:** Project-specific grants may only be used for specific purposes and activities described in the proposal and project budget. Organizations requesting support for lobbying activity will only be eligible to receive project support.

Additional Documents

LOI Phase: The letter of inquiry consists of one question: *How does your organization meet the needs and opportunities defined in the RFP or as discussed with your program contact?*

Rather than responding to this question in narrative form, applicants should copy and paste the questions below into the LOI question and provide short responses to each question.

1. List the name(s) of the coalition(s) in which your organization participates and the role you play.
2. Briefly describe the policy your coalition(s) is working to advance.
3. Briefly describe how your organization has contributed to advance the policy(ies) listed to date.
4. Briefly describe how your organization anticipates contributing to advance the policy(ies) listed during the grant period.
5. Briefly describe how this policy aligns with the priority strategies listed in the RFP.
6. Do you anticipate requesting funding to support lobbying activities?

Proposal Phase: Applicants invited to submit full proposals will be asked to complete a spreadsheet that provides information about the coalitions in which your organization participates, your role, the amount of time dedicated to the coalition or collaborative advocacy, and a list of organizations you feel are critical to the coalition's success.

This spreadsheet will help the Trust understand the landscape of coalitions working to advance policy reforms, identify how we can better serve grant recipients throughout the grant term, and facilitate convenings among organizations engaged in advocacy.

Grant Amounts Available & Term

Grant terms will range from one to three years. Grant awards are anticipated to range between $50,000 and $150,000 per year. Final awards and terms will be determined by the Trust, based on the following considerations:

- Organization's role and contributions to the coalition's success
- The coalition/organization's short-and long-term goals and strategies to advance this issue
- Contribution to critical functions of advancing a policy reform
- Engagement of those most impacted by the policy or systems to be reformed

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; (c) or is a governmental unit within the meaning of Section 170(c)(1) of the Code;
- Described in Section 170(b)(1)(A) of the Code, other than a "disqualified supporting organization" within the meaning of Section 4966(d)(4) of the Code; and
- Located within or primarily serving residents of Chicago or Cook County.

Applicants without 501(c)(3) status must identify a fiscal sponsor before applying and ask that sponsor to complete and certify an organization profile in The Chicago Community Trust's grants management system, GrantCentral, at **https://community-cct.force.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

Contact Information

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

Email Jalen Preacely at jpreacely@cct.org for programmatic and application content questions.

Evaluation and Learning

The Trust is committed to achieving our long-term goals and outcomes in collaboration with stakeholders and partners. We are developing outcome measures that inform progress toward our collective mission to strengthen the Chicago region. Specifically, the outcomes track progress towards the Trust's strategic goal of increasing household and community well-being in underinvested communities. The specific outcomes you select should be based on why you think the project or strategy will lead to the anticipated result or long-term change outlined in the request for proposal (i.e., your theory of change). After you identify the aligned outcomes, you will select specific, time-limited measures of progress. These provide measurable and reportable evidence that a proposed project or organization has effectively achieved – or is on the path to achieving - its objectives. They can be measured during the grant period, contribute to your longer-term outcomes, and align with the Trust's strategic priorities. For shorter-term grants (one year), these outcomes may not be achieved during the project's duration. For each measure of progress, you will identify your baseline, target, data collection approach, and the type of data (qualitative and quantitative). If awarded a grant, you will update the information with actuals to describe progress toward your target. In addition to what you share through site visits, convenings and reporting, we will use this information to inform our collective understanding of progress and challenges to inform next steps.

We encourage grant applicants to identify a limited number of outcomes (1-2) and related measures of progress (1-2 across all outcomes) to those directly aligned with the RFP and your work.

Sharing successes or challenges in achieving measures of progress is critical to our collective learning, decision-making and impact. We recognize there could be challenges to implementing any grant, many of which are not under your control and may prevent you from achieving your targets. However, learning from these challenges and successes is integral to the Trust's learning and impact aims.

Potential grant recipients who are new to developing metrics or work plans or want to learn more about developing measures of progress can contact **learning@cct.org**.

Application Process
Applicants complete their application via GrantCentral, The Chicago Community Trust's online grants management system, at https://community-cct.force.com/grantcentral/s/login/.

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.

In addition to certifying the Organization Profile, organizations must also upload their most up-to-date financial documents, including:

- Financial Audit for the past three year
- 990 tax forms for the past three years
- Organization's Board List
- Organization's Leadership List and Biographies

The Trust will not consider late or incomplete letters of intent (LOIs) or full applications. Applicants may receive a site visit (in person or virtual), telephone call, or other communication from foundation staff as part of the application review process.

Submission Deadline and Other Key Dates

RFP Release Date:	Thursday, August 6, 2026
Information Session:	Wednesday, August 19, 2026
LOI Deadline:	Thursday, August 27, 2026
Invitation for Full Proposal:	September 16, 2026
Full Application Deadline:	October 9, 2026
Site Visits:	During Full Application Proposal Period, If Needed
Funding Decisions:	November 20, 2026
Announcements:	November 27, 2026