



THE CHICAGO COMMUNITY TRUST
AND AFFILIATES

Our Great Rivers – Call for Community-led Projects

RFP release: April 30, 2018

Proposal deadline: June 3, 2018

Funding decision: September 25, 2018

Background

In 2014, The Chicago Community Trust met with rivers advocates to think through long-term approaches to restoring ecological integrity to the system. Out of those conversations came the recognition that creating and sustaining a healthy river system requires community ownership.

Introducing residents to their rivers through community and economic development, particularly in parts of the city in need of quality natural amenities, would unlock pent-up demand for the system. Access would then lead to regular interaction, surfacing new ideas about the rivers from both the market and the community. Over time new uses would depend on a system that is clean and healthy.

Fortunately, new ways to engage this former industrial workhorse had already begun. Ping Tom Park, the Chicago Riverwalk, and the boathouses are a clear demonstration of urban rivers as a post-industrial asset. Expanding that prosperity throughout the system to three very different rivers in different parts of the city with different uses, demographics, histories and needs, however, would require strategic, coordinated thinking. Thus, the City of Chicago was eager to bring broad-based, community-focused leadership to the idea of a system-wide vision.

In early 2015, the Trust and partners Joyce Foundation and ArcelorMittal would work with the City to select Metropolitan Planning Council as the principal administrator of a visioning process for the Chicago, Calumet, and Des Plaines rivers and tributaries within City of Chicago boundaries. Friends of the Chicago River and the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning would bring added capacity to the project. Over the course of 15 months and nearly 100 public events, the partners would synthesize the thoughts and ideas of more than 6,000 people into consensus parameters to guide the more prescriptive work of achieving the Our Great Rivers Vision.

In August 2016, Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel, the Trust, and other civic, government, and community leaders, publically launched the [Great Rivers Chicago](#), marking the beginning of an era of bold thinking for Chicago's river system and the 150+ miles of property that lines its banks.

After the public launch, the Trust issued its first call for proposals from communities with ideas for their stretch of the system. In September 2017, [10 ideas moved forward with funding support from the Trust](#).

Now, in its second year, Trust is again calling for community-led proposals that align with the [Our Great Rivers Vision](#).

Trust Support for the Our Great Rivers Vision

The Chicago Community Trust seeks out catalytic opportunities. A healthy, dynamic, and high-functioning river system in Chicago is one of our greatest opportunities—a catalyst for place-based action with a size and reach that create the possibility of expanding that action. Our Great Rivers is decidedly a vision; it is not a plan. Its fundamental job is to remind us of the asset hidden in our midst and awaken our latent desire to nurture it. As an important part of the City’s broader [Building on Burnham](#) strategy to invest in Chicago’s waterfronts, parks, and neighborhoods, Our Great Rivers has the potential to elevate this underleveraged asset to a level on par with The 606 and our prized lakefront.

Achieving the Our Great Rivers Vision will take decades and likely cost billions. A unified vision for the entirety of the system sets helpful parameters for context-sensitive investments in the neighborhoods. Still, realizing the vision’s themes of “inviting, productive, and living” in the rivers themselves and along more than 150 miles of river-adjacent land is a daunting proposition. Parts of the system that could be accessible to residents are not. We have yet to institutionalize creative approaches to integrating important industrial landscapes with nature and people. Forward-thinking commercial and manufacturing uses along the system are not commonplace. Habitat restoration is fragmented. Activating the system through recreation or cultural enhancements is nascent. Pollution remains ubiquitous. Taken together, these challenges translate into a negative perception of the system overall. In summary: Our great rivers fall short of their potential.

As the Trust moves in a bold new direction that calls for an economy defined by equity and sustainable communities across the region, it is essential to have vehicles to deliver these ideals. Our Great Rivers is just that – a vehicle to help communities, government, policy leaders, developers, and philanthropy reclaim the river system as a connector of people, neighborhoods, commerce, and nature.

Outcomes Sought

The Chicago Community Trust is calling for community-led proposals that incorporate elements of two or more Trust funding arenas in an integrated, innovative, powerful way. The arenas are sustainable development, economic development, public health, and arts and culture.

Definitions are as follows:

- *Sustainable Development*
Catalytic activities in the built and natural environments that improve the lives of people and habitats while contributing positively to the economy.
- *Economic Development*
High-impact economic initiatives that support local asset development, economic retention and repurposing, and sustainable business growth that is inclusive, particularly for low-wealth communities experiencing disinvestment.
- *Public Health*
Collaborative efforts that address environmental, physical and mental health, and build a culture of health through organized community efforts.
- *Arts and Culture*
Creative endeavors that improve the quality of life of people by diversifying cultural options and expanding access in under-resourced communities.

The bullets that follow are provided to demonstrate integration across the Trust's funding arenas. They are illustrative examples only, and are not suggestive in any way.

- Health impact assessment on the replacement of a concrete riverfront park with a sustainably designed functional recreational facility surrounded by native habitat and programmed with outdoor arts classes for young people who have experienced trauma (sustainable development, public health, arts and culture)
- Artists or arts organizations inform the design of programs and spaces that celebrate the industrial heritage of a riverfront corridor in a broader effort to garner community pride during a planning process to retool the local economy for entrepreneurs and makers (arts and culture, economic development).
- A campaign to revitalize a riverfront location with commercial uses that add value to the natural environment while growing the local economy (sustainable development, economic development).
- A new manufacturing facility with a site plan that includes public amenities that allow for easy access and meaningful engagement with the river (economic development, sustainable development).
- Riverfront storytelling for vulnerable or marginalized populations (arts and culture and public health).

- Kayaking tours that use a neighborhood lens to educate residents, students, and tourists on the complex history of Chicago's river ecosystems and its industrial maritime past (economic development, sustainable development).

Proposals with singularity of purpose (e.g., habitat restoration along the riverbank) are not competitive under this funding opportunity.

Proposals must also align with one or more themes of the Our Great Rivers Vision¹:

Theme 1: Inviting Rivers

Enhancements to infrastructure, information, and programming will make our rivers more intuitive, meaningful, and exciting places to be, drawing more people for recreation, work and relaxation.

Improved cleanliness, safety, and neighborhood linkages will lay the groundwork for creating more welcoming rivers and riverfronts. Better wayfinding and interpretative signage will convey the breadth of the rivers' role in shaping Chicago's past and future, while making the system easy to navigate. City, neighborhood and civic leaders will collaborate to design new access points, amenities, entertainment and activities for residents and tourists of all ages and abilities.

Theme 2: Productive Rivers

They have historically been and will continue to be working rivers that are transportation arteries, commercial corridors and tourism generators.

Where economic activity is the best use of riverfront land, we will work to retain existing businesses that rely on the water and attract new types of entrepreneurs and jobs, while preserving the integrity of the water and the culture of surrounding communities. We will enhance our rivers' transportation infrastructure to accommodate barges, tour boats, water taxis, and recreational watercraft. Together, business, community, government, and civic leaders will create innovative riverfront development that harmonizes the needs of people, businesses, and nature.

Theme 3: Living Rivers

From riverbeds to shorelines, plants, animals and people will co-exist in vibrant, healthy ecosystems.

Water quality management policies will proactively reduce pollution, restore the environment, create more habitats for fish and wildlife, and aggressively combat the spread of invasive species. Future riverfront development of all kinds will incorporate planned space for all forms of life, connecting people to nature.

¹ Our Great Rivers: A vision for the Chicago Calumet and Des Plaines rivers; published August 2016; Chicago.

Proposal Eligibility, Process, and Selection

Organizations that meet the eligibility requirements outlined in this section may submit proposals. Any stakeholder of the river system is encouraged to apply, particularly those in river-adjacent neighborhoods. Priority consideration will be given to proposals initiated by community-based organizations. This funding opportunity is open to most types of planning, programs, and projects. The funding is not available for capital expenditures beyond program-related supplies and equipment.

Prior to submitting a proposal, please ensure your organization's eligibility for this award by reviewing these requirements:

Eligibility

- Nonprofit organizations with evidence of tax-exempt status under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code or those using a 501(c)(3) fiscal agent.
- Local government entities.
- Organizations located within and/or primarily serving residents of Cook County.
- Organizations with a commitment to diversity and inclusion for their governance, staffing, and populations served; and explicit adherence to non-discriminatory practices in the hiring of staff or in providing services on the basis of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, national origin or disability.

Grant proposals will be evaluated using multiple criteria, including the following:

Proposal

- Ability to demonstrate alignment with the Our Great Rivers Vision.
- Ability to propose solutions that meaningfully integrate two or more Trust funding arenas, including sustainable development, economic development, public health, and arts and culture.
- Ability to demonstrate alignment with relevant neighborhood and citywide plans.
- Ability to complement and leverage existing or promised investments in and along the rivers.
- Clarity of project description.
- Alignment of project activities to achieve goals and outcomes.
- Achievability of the timetable as it corresponds to project activities.
- Ability to engage, respond to, and address the needs and vision of the community, including residents and communities of color.
- Likelihood of success, scale, replication, and sustained commitment.
- Ability to apply innovative approaches in community development, market-based solutions, or project execution generally.

Organization

- Organizational capacity to implement the project, including leadership, staffing, business operations and fiscal management.
- Ability to leverage financial, human, and technical resources leading to greater impact.

- Clear demonstration of collaboration and partnerships across organizations.
- Ability to collaborate with stakeholders in and across neighborhoods and communities.
- Demonstration of leadership representative of the community, including minority populations.
- Priority consideration will be given to proposals initiated by community-based organizations.

Geography

The geographic eligibility of this funding opportunity is the City of Chicago and suburban communities that share a land or river border with the City of Chicago and have a river or tributary identified in the Our Great Rivers Vision. Proposals must demonstrate a direct and proximate impact on the rivers. A map of eligible geographies can be found [here](#).

Diversity and Inclusion

The Trust requires all applicants to either adopt the Trust's Diversity Statement or have a similar policy adopted by their boards. The Trust believes that the diversity of our community is a fundamental strength of our region. Our mission to improve the quality of life for the residents of our region is best fulfilled when we embrace diversity as a value and a practice. We define diversity to include, but not limited to, age, disability status, economic circumstance, ethnicity, gender, race, religion and sexual orientation.

Additionally, the Trust asks that applicants provide demographic data on board and staff as well as clients/beneficiaries of the projects. The Trust believes that the board and staff composition of grantees should reflect the diversity and demographics of the clients/community being served, and include diversity among its leadership at the board and senior staff levels to ensure the diverse perspectives needed at the decision-making levels. For this reason, the Trust does take into consideration the demographic make-up of the board, staff and clients of a grant applicant as an important proposal evaluation criterion.

Funding Amount

The Chicago Community Trust will make up to 15 grants under this RFP. Grant amounts will range from \$25,000 to \$100,000. Grant recipients will be expected to meet the Trust's requirements for the submission of financial and narrative reports at the end of the annual grant cycle, including a final report.

Impact, Evaluation, and Learning

Evaluation of the Our Great Rivers projects will occur at two levels: 1) programmatically, which measures the activities of the project over the course of the one-year grant cycle, and 2) systemically, which measures the long-term impacts of the project using defensible metrics and indicators.

An external firm may be commissioned to evaluate the Trust's investments in Our Great Rivers, and this firm will track the systemic measures. Grant recipients may be expected to make their project processes and results available to the evaluators.

Project teams may take part in a learning cohort of rivers stakeholders that meet regularly for status updates and to share information, ideas, and best practices.

Submission

Applicants must complete their proposal via GrantCentral, the Trust's online grants management system. To access an application, grant seekers must log into GrantCentral at <https://cct.smartsimple.com>. Organization profiles must be reviewed and, if needed, updated prior to application submissions. Proposals are due by **midnight on June 3, 2018**. Late or incomplete proposals will not be considered. Previous applicants are eligible for renewal or application for a second phase of their existing projects. Applicants may receive a site visit, telephone call, or other communication from Trust staff as part of the proposal review process.

Information Session

There will be two information sessions about this funding opportunity.

Thursday, May 10

9 am – 11 am

Metropolitan Planning Council

140 S. Dearborn St., #1400 Chicago, IL 60603

Monday, May 14

6 pm – 8pm

Metropolitan Planning Council

140 S. Dearborn St., #1400 Chicago, IL 60603

RSVP to Angie Leyva at ALeyva@metroplanning.org, and please specify which date you are planning to attend.

Contact

For technical questions about GrantCentral and the proposal submission process please contact Nestor Avendano, Grants Coordinator, at navendano@cct.org. For questions about proposal content please contact Michael Davidson, Senior Program Officer, at mdavidson@cct.org.