



Requests for Proposals: We Rise Together – Advancing Youth Workforce Development in Chicago’s Communities

RFP Release Date:	January 30, 2025
Information Session:	February 5, 2025 at 11am
Full Application Deadline:	March 13, 2025
Site Visits/Interviews (Zoom):	April 28 – May 16 2025 (possible extension to May 30)
Funding Decisions:	August 21, 2025
Grant Period	12 Months
Anticipated Number of Awards	4-10
Award Range \$	\$75,000 - \$200,000
Estimated We Rise Funding Total \$	\$800,000

Background

We Rise Together: For an Equitable & Just Recovery is a coalition of public and private funders and communities accelerating equity in the Chicago region’s economic recovery so everyone who lives here can reach their full potential. To catalyze an equitable economic recovery in our region from the COVID recession, We Rise Together focuses on grantmaking and engagement in communities hardest hit by COVID and those that are a majority Black and Latine because they are the places and people disproportionately affected by the pandemic.

Definitions

- **Youth:** For the purposes of this RFP, "youth" refers to individuals between the ages of 14 and 24 who are at critical stages of personal and professional development. This population often includes young people in school and transitioning out of high school, seeking their first employment opportunities, or navigating post-secondary education or training.

Special consideration is given to youth who:

- Are disengaged from traditional education systems and seeking alternative pathways to employment.

- Face challenges such as economic hardship, lack of family support, or barriers related to housing, temporary living situations, or mental health that are a barrier to employment.
- Who encounter barriers to fully accessing and participating in employment opportunities due to disabilities, learning differences, or challenges related to cognitive processing, communication, physical abilities, or social-emotional regulation.
- Are interested in pursuing certifications, apprenticeships, or entrepreneurship but lack access to the necessary resources and networks.
- Are historically hard to reach, including those who have interacted with the criminal legal system or identify as LGBTQ, and who face unique barriers to accessing opportunities and support systems.

Need / Opportunity

Youth unemployment remains a critical challenge across Chicago's economically disenfranchised communities. Many young individuals face obstacles such as limited access to competency-building programs, inadequate training opportunities, and systemic barriers that prevent entry into sustainable employment. This issue is compounded by gaps in wraparound services, such as childcare, transportation, and mentorship, which are critical to successful workforce development.

There is a significant opportunity to invest in solutions that equip young people with the competencies, resources, and connections needed to secure meaningful employment. While this RFP invites existing youth-focused strategies and organizations that serve young people, We Rise Together also values innovation and encourages applicants to propose bold, novel approaches to addressing youth workforce needs in transformative and impactful ways.

Goals and Outcomes

While this is a one-year grant, the activities supported through this funding should be designed to contribute to the broader, long-term goals of improving youth workforce development and creating sustainable organizations that serve youth. Work completed during the grant period should build a strong foundation for continued progress toward the following goals:

- Increase youth access to competency-building opportunities, including certifications, apprenticeships, and quality job placements that lead to a livable wage.
- Enhance youth financial independence through job retention, soft skill development (e.g., communication, teamwork, problem-solving), and readiness for employment.
- Reduce barriers to employment by addressing systemic challenges such as transportation, childcare, housing support, and digital access.
- Foster economic resilience by creating pathways for long-term career growth and strengthening partnerships with local businesses, educational institutions, and community organizations.
- Improve stakeholder engagement to build stronger community relationships and increase retention of youth in programming.

- Strengthen the financial resilience of youth-serving organizations by diversifying funding streams, collecting impact data, and demonstrating measurable outcomes.
- Cultivate supportive organizational cultures by investing in staff retention, leadership development, and competitive compensation.
- Use data and feedback to inform program improvements, track impact, and secure future funding opportunities.

Measures of Progress (MOPs)

Outcomes and Measures of Progress (MOPs) are specific, time-limited, and measurable indicators used to demonstrate progress toward achieving a project's objectives. They provide clear, reportable evidence that a grant recipient is effectively advancing its goals within the grant period and contributing to longer-term outcomes aligned with We Rise Together's goals and outcomes. Grant recipients are expected to define outcomes measurable during the grant term, ensuring alignment with the following:

Outcomes *(Select up to 3 Outcomes)*

1. Strengthen the Organizational Infrastructure to Provide Services
2. Strengthen Workforce
3. Expand economic opportunities for Black and Latinx Chicagoans to access careers
4. Expand Partnerships Opportunities
5. Increase Organizational Effectiveness

Measures of Progress (MOPs) *(Select up to 5 MOPs) (see number of outcome that is associated with MoP)*

- Required
 - Increase in participation of Black and Latinx individuals in programs (3)
 - Changes in service delivery methods to address evolving community needs (1)
- Optional
 - Changes in the number of workers placed in full-time jobs (2)
 - Increase in participants obtaining quality employment (3)
 - Increase in partnerships with employers, 2-year, and/or 4-year institutions (3)
 - Changes in relationships that result in service provided for economic growth (4)
 - Develop staff skills and capacities to effectively provide services (5)

Applicants should identify up to 3 Outcomes and up to 5 MOPs that will be tracked during the grant period, contributing to the long-term outcomes of the initiative.

Priority Strategies and Activities

We Rise Together seeks to support initiatives that address the following priority strategies. We encourage applicants to propose innovative, actionable approaches aligned with these strategies to strengthen economic resilience in disenfranchised communities.

1. **Youth Workforce Development:** To create sustainable employment pathways for youth through competency-building, training, and wraparound support. Activities may include:

- Facilitating paid, short-term (<15 weeks) training program designed to transition youth into careers in high-demand fields such as healthcare, technology, and skilled trades.
 - Providing paid, on-the-job training opportunities, including apprenticeships, to support skill development and career advancement.
 - Building general career readiness through goal-setting, mentorship, digital literacy, financial literacy, entrepreneurship programming, leadership development, or interpersonal skills.
 - Providing industry-recognized certifications (e.g., logistics, advanced technology, or trade-specific competencies) aligned with current labor market demands.
 - Developing strong partnerships between youth-serving organizations and workforce development programs to offer career-focused programming, dual-enrollment opportunities, and tailored training.
 - Addressing barriers to participation, such as income constraints, lack of transportation, childcare needs, or mental health challenges, to ensure successful program engagement and completion.
2. **Organizational Sustainability:** To create sustainability at organizations that serve youth and develop workforce opportunities. Activities may include:
- Fostering partnerships with local businesses and government entities to secure multi-year funding commitments.
 - Investing in leadership development and staff training to improve management skills and program delivery.
 - Enhancing technology infrastructure to streamline operations, improve data collection, and track outcomes.
 - Engaging with local stakeholders, including community leaders, parents, and youth, to co-design programs that address critical workforce needs.
 - Launching fee-for-service or social enterprise models that align with the organization's mission and provide sustainable revenue.

Proposals should clearly demonstrate how the proposed project contributes to the overall mission of equitable economic recovery.

Grantmaking Criteria

This grant is intended to support projects that will yield measurable impact within a 12-month period. Applications should clearly address the following criteria:

1. Demonstrated experience in workforce development programming and the ability to implement proposed activities within the grant period.
2. Evidence of long-term trusted relationships with hard-to-reach youth and other stakeholders to ensure alignment with local workforce needs.
3. Established relationships with local training programs, employers, or other partners.
4. A clear plan for achieving measurable outcomes and addressing barriers to youth employment.

5. Creativity in addressing workforce development challenges, including activities beyond those explicitly outlined in this RFP.
6. The design and delivery of the program that centers youth voice and uses a trauma-informed approach.

Guidance for Applicants

Please make sure that your responses **provide sufficient context and detail** to demonstrate alignment with the evaluation criteria outlined in this RFP. Reviewers will assess applications based on these criteria, and responses should clearly demonstrate how the proposed work meets the priorities and goals of this grant opportunity.

Additional Documents

With your application, please include your budget for the work and any MOUs you have with partners identified in the proposal.

Grant Amounts Available and Grant Term

The funding structure includes two tiers to ensure both local organizations with strong connections to hard-to-reach youth and more established organizations with evidence-based youth workforce development programs have the opportunity to participate in the grant opportunity:

- For organizations with operating budgets under \$1,000,000: Grants of up to \$75,000 are available to support smaller, community-based organizations that are deeply embedded within the communities they serve and have strong relationships with youth who are often hard to reach. Partnership grants are encouraged and eligible for the larger grant award amount.
- For organizations with operating budgets over \$1,000,000: Grants of up to \$200,000 are available to support larger, established organizations with proven track records of delivering evidence-based workforce development programs for youth.

This tiered approach aims to balance equitable access to resources while recognizing the diverse needs and capacities of organizations working to empower youth in workforce development. Applicants are encouraged to seek out partnerships with locally based organizations that have trusted and established relationships with hard-to-reach youth in their communities to enhance program impact and reach.

Eligible Applicants

To be eligible for a grant award, an applicant must:

- Represent that it is, and shall remain through the Grant Period, (i) an organization in good standing, (ii) either a governmental unit or an organization described in Section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code of 1986, as amended (the “Code”), (iii) not

a “private foundation” within the meaning of Section 509(a) of the Code, (iv) an organization exempt from taxes under 501(c) of the Code; or for purposes of this grant (v) is fiscally sponsored by a Section 501(c)(3) organization*.

- Ensure the grant does not benefit any private person or entity in violation of Section 501(c)(3) of the Code.
- Be located within and/or primarily serving residents of Cook County, Illinois.

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

Application Process

Applicants must complete their application via GrantCentral, The Chicago Community Trust’s online grants management system. To access an application, grant seekers must log into GrantCentral at <https://community-cct.force.com/grantcentral/s/login/>

Applicants must complete an Organization Profile, which is on the last tab within their GrantCentral account. If the Organization Profile was completed for a previous funding opportunity, it must be reviewed and, if needed, updated and certified prior to application submission.

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.

Applications are due March 13th, 2025. Virtual site visits/interviews will be during April 28 - May 16th, 2025 (and possibly extended to the last week of May). Final decisions are August 21, 2025.

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 wealth through building income and individual and community assets 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 (3-5 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.

Collection of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Demographic Data

The Chicago Community Trust serves a wide variety of constituents and organizations. As such, we collect organizational demographic data to assist in informing us about the diverse, representative, and inclusive staffing practices of our potential and current grant recipients. This data helps us ensure that the organizations we fund are representative of the communities we serve. Therefore, we kindly request completion of the following data on your organization's board, leadership, staff, and volunteers to ensure the inclusion of diverse perspectives as we work to achieve our mission of a thriving, equitable and connected Chicago region.

Contact Information

For questions regarding this RFP, please contact:

Maryah Phillips
We Rise Together: For an Equitable & Just Recovery
Email: mphillips@cct.org

Christen Wiggins
We Rise Together: For an Equitable & Just Recovery & Community Wealth Team
Email: cwiggins@cct.org

Information Session

We invite all interested applicants to attend an **Information Session** to learn more about the RFP, ask questions, and gain clarity about the application process.

Date: February 5, 2025

Time: 11:00 AM CST

Location: Zoom

Zoom Link:

<https://chicagocommunitytrust.zoom.us/j/87094729378?pwd=NEbJNb0FNCw1uCxOoe8JgkMottlYpa.1>

Meeting ID: 870 9472 9378

Password: 753278

Participation in the information session is encouraged but not required. A recording of the session will be made available upon request.