

NEIGHBORHOOD ACCESS PROGRAM

2025 Program Guidelines

Please direct all inquiries to:

CulturalGrantMaking@cityofchicago.org



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City of Chicago Land Acknowledgment

The City of Chicago is located on land that is and has long been a center for Native peoples. The area is the traditional homelands of the Anishinaabe, or the Council of the Three Fires: the Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi Nations. Many other Nations consider this area their traditional homeland, including the Myaamia, Ho-Chunk, Menominee, Sac and Fox, Peoria, Kaskaskia, Wea, Kickapoo, and Mascouten. The City specifically acknowledges the contributions of Kitihawa of the Potawatomi in fostering the community that has become Chicago. We acknowledge all Native peoples who came before us and who continue to contribute to our City. We are committed to promoting Native cultural heritage.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The City of Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events (DCASE) is currently accepting Idea Submissions for its **Neighborhood Access Program** (NAP).

The goal of this program is to support the cultural vitality of every neighborhood via grant programs and partnerships designed to be responsive to the complex needs of individual communities. This program will offer direct grants for all types of place-based arts and culture activities.

DCASE is committed to directing significant funding to Chicago's neighborhoods, and prioritizing areas that have suffered from a history of disinvestment. We know that these neighborhoods are vibrant and densely populated with artists, yet they remain under-resourced by our grant programs.

This program was created to support arts and culture activities in all neighborhoods with a focus on those that have traditionally not received significant funding through DCASE Cultural Grants programs, and to collaborate with other City departments to make a collective impact on neighborhoods identified through other City initiatives.

This program seeks to increase access to DCASE funding with expanded eligibility criteria and a two-part application process.

KEY POINTS

Grant Period: If awarded, all 2025 grant funds must be expended by the grantee between **October 1, 2025 and December 31, 2026**. Grantees can use funds to pay or reimburse for eligible expenses that occur throughout the grant period.

Grant Amount*: Grant requests can range from \$5,000 - \$50,000.

Grant Payment: Grantees will receive funds as a single payment following the completion of their grant agreement.

Number of Grants: An estimated 20 – 40 grants will be awarded through the 2025 Neighborhood Access Program.

Consecutive Funding: Artists and organizations can receive funding through the Neighborhood Access program for up to **two consecutive** years before being required to take one year off from applying.

*For the Neighborhood Access Program, individual applicants with a grant award of \$15,000 or higher will need to use a nonprofit fiscal sponsor organization. The fiscal sponsor does not need to be identified at the time of idea submission but will be required prior to funds awarded. Contact DCASE if you have questions about fiscal sponsorship.

2025 PROGRAM CALENDAR

All dates are subject to change.

Please visit ChicagoCulturalGrants.org for the most up to date information.

Event	Dates	Description
Idea Submission portal opens	May 2025	Neighborhood Access Program (NAP) Ideas are open in CyberGrants.
Application assistance	May 2025	NAP info sessions will be hosted on Zoom. Advance registration is required. Register at ChicagoCulturalGrants.org .
Application deadline	May 30, 2025 at noon CT	<u>No Extensions will be Granted.</u> Applications should be submitted at least one week before the deadline to avoid technical issues. Any technical issues reported within the week prior to the deadline might not be resolved in time for you to successfully submit your application.
Notification of Finalists	August 2025	All applicants will be notified via e-mail sent to the address on file in the CyberGrants system.
Finalists Proposals Deadline	September 5, 2025	Finalists gather supporting documents for a full proposal submission. No extensions will be granted.
Award notifications	October 31, 2025	All finalists will be notified via e-mail sent to the address on file in the CyberGrants system.
Payments disbursed	December 2025 or March 2026	Grants will be made in a single, one-time payment. Timeframe is subject to change.
Reports due	January 31, 2026	Reports to be completed electronically.
Grant Period	October 1, 2025 to December 31, 2026	This is the time during which the grant funds must be spent.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

To be eligible to apply for a Neighborhood Access Program (NAP) grant, the lead applicant must meet the following criteria:

- Be an organization leading the project or the lead artist, producer or curator for the project.
- Must reside/be located in the city of Chicago with a valid street address (no P.O. Boxes)
- Must reside/be located in the neighborhood-where the project will take place.
- Must be able to complete a grant contract with the City of Chicago.
- If applying as an individual, must be at least 18 years of age and able to receive grant funds as taxable income.

The following entities can apply for a NAP grant:

- Any nonprofit organization, Special Service Area (SSA) or Chamber of Commerce with 501(c)(3) or 501(c)(6) status, including religious institutions that provide significant services to the community that are non-religious in nature.
- National nonprofit organizations with a Chicago branch.
- Individual artists, cultural producers, or curators.
- Individuals/collectives applying with a nonprofit fiscal sponsor with 501(c)(3) or 501(c)(6) status.
- Low-profit limited liability companies (L3Cs).

Organizations and individuals located outside of the neighborhood where their project will take place are welcome to apply as a partner with an eligible individual or organization.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

The following entities cannot be listed as the lead applicant on a proposal. However, collaborations with these entities are welcome.

- For-profit businesses that are not incorporated as an L3C.
- Municipal departments and their affiliate 501(c)(3)s, including libraries, parks, transit, and family services agencies.
- City of Chicago employees.
- Recipients of DCASE Cultural Grants whose projects are still active with the City of Chicago, such as current grantees of the Individual Artists Program (IAP), Healing Arts Chicago recipients, or Together We Heal Creative Place Program or Chicago Arts Recovery Program grantees that have received project extensions.-CityArts general operating grantees remain eligible for funding.
- Organizations and individuals receiving other forms of DCASE support remain eligible to apply; however, priority will be given to those not receiving other DCASE support.
- Artists and organizations can receive funding through the Neighborhood Access program for up to **two consecutive** years before being required to take one year off from applying. If awarded in 2023 **and** 2024, you may not apply for the 2025 cycle.
- Past NAP grantees that have not completed the required Final Report for their funded project or that did not execute a previously funded project.
- Past NAP grantees that did not complete their grant contracting paperwork within the allowable timeline.

PROJECT REQUIREMENTS

DCASE can only consider one idea submission per applicant.

Projects must have these elements:

- Must involve arts or cultural activities.
- Must have a primary goal to serve residents of a specific neighborhood or community. (not citywide or Chicago in general)
- Must take place in the same neighborhood where lead applicant's current primary residence/address is located.
- Projects must engage neighborhood residents as participants or audiences between October 1, 2025 and December 31, 2026.

FUNDING RESTRICTIONS

Funds cannot be used to support:

- Capital improvements.
- The purchase of a single, permanent, depreciable equipment item valued at more than \$5,000.
- Fundraising events, religious ceremonies or events, or campaigning for a candidate or a ballot issue.
- Vehicle rental of any kind.
- Travel expenses.

NOTE: DCASE is unable to pay grant funds to any organization with outstanding, existing debt with the City of Chicago.

Please set up payment plans or pay off any existing debt (parking tickets, utility bills, etc.) with the Department of Finance: www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/fin.html

FUNDING CONSIDERATIONS

Recipients of Other DCASE Support: DCASE supports local arts and culture organizations in a variety of ways including residencies, performance opportunities, exhibitions, subsidized space/venue rental, etc. Organizations receiving other forms of DCASE support remain eligible to apply; however, priority will be given to those not receiving other DCASE support.

Demographics and Geographic Dispersion of Grantees: DCASE's Cultural Grants Programs strive for an equitable distribution of artistic services across the city. Grant reviewers will be instructed to take geographic access into account during the review process, taking note of organizations specifically serving residents of Wards which have been historically under-resourced.

PRIORITY NEIGHBORHOODS

This is a citywide program, open to applicants located in any Chicago neighborhood.

We will prioritize funding applicants and projects located in the following neighborhoods:

Armour Square, Auburn Gresham, Austin, Belmont Cragin, Brighton Park, Bronzeville (Douglas, Oakland, Kenwood, Grand Boulevard), Burnside, Chicago Lawn, East and West Garfield Park, Fuller Park, Gage Park, Greater Englewood (Englewood, West Englewood), Greater Grand Crossing, Greater Roseland (Roseland, Pullman, West Pullman), Humboldt Park, New City, North Lawndale, Riverdale, South Deering, South Lawndale, South Shore, West Elsdon.

Priority neighborhoods include:

- Community areas identified through the [People's Plan for Community Safety](#) and [My CHI My Future](#) initiatives.
- Additional LMI (Low and Moderate Income) areas that received the lowest number of grant awards in the prior two years of DCASE Cultural Grants programs.

OVERVIEW OF PROJECT IDEAS

Project ideas can range from a physical artwork to a series of workshops/classes to a performance, happening or cultural event. Projects can include activities focused on any artistic discipline including architecture, culinary arts, curatorial arts, dance, design, film, literary arts, media arts, music, performance art, photography, public art, social practice, theater, or visual arts.

We welcome projects that:

- Are ongoing or new.
- Are first-time collaborations between individuals or organizations.
- Are one-time activations or events – projects do not need to be permanent.

We strongly encourage:

- Projects that are broadly accessible.
- Cross-industry collaborations.
- Artist-led projects that activate Chicago communities and institutions to address broader social issues, opportunities, and challenges.
- Projects that use art to inspire community organizing, civic engagement and participation.
- Projects that activate vacant or underutilized spaces.
- Projects that seek to celebrate and preserve the cultural traditions of underrepresented or historically marginalized groups.
- Projects that connect youth to arts programming.
- Projects that address public safety, equity, and access through art.
- Projects that recognize and illuminate the character defining attributes of Chicago's neighborhoods.
- Projects that increase dialogue, civic discourse, and exchange around Chicago's unique social issues.

REVIEW PROCESS

Eligibility Screening

The DCASE Cultural Grants team will review all submitted applications to ensure they have met the minimal eligibility criteria. Those which do not meet the minimal eligibility criteria will not move forward in the review process.

Peer Panel Grant Review

All idea submissions will be reviewed by an external grant review panel including residents of priority neighborhoods and multi-disciplinary arts experts.

Consideration is given to creating review panels reflective of the city as a whole, including artistic expertise, race, gender, geographic knowledge of the city, and cultural understanding. A majority of the grant review panel will be BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color).

Panelists review eligible proposals, provide comments on each submission, and assign numerical scores using the program review criteria. Reviewers consider applications in relation to DCASE Cultural Grants Program goals and NAP review criteria, ultimately recommending finalists that submit full proposals and making final funding recommendations to DCASE.

REVIEW CRITERIA

Proposals will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- **Strength of proposed project:** The proposed project possesses artistic merit and vision alongside quality, meaningful opportunities to engage neighborhood residents in arts and culture activities. Proposed project seems feasible based on applicant experience and description.
- **Increasing Access:** Project expands the scope of projects funded by the Cultural Grants Program by taking place within a priority neighborhood, activating vacant or underutilized spaces, and/or supporting historically disinvested neighborhoods and populations.
- **Benefit to communities:** The project's potential to benefit Chicago residents and impact communities through cultural programming. We value both projects that have a wide and expansive reach and those that provide deep, enriching experiences for participants.
- **Community experience:** The applicant demonstrates a depth of experience, relationships and engagement with artists and partners in identified neighborhoods. The applicant and its partners demonstrate experience working in, on behalf of, and leading communities; including outreach, strong listening skills and attention to detail.

HOW TO APPLY

The link to submit your idea to the 2025 Neighborhood Access Program is posted on our website at ChicagoCulturalGrants.org.

All applicants must apply using our online CyberGrants application platform by May 30, 2025 at noon CT.

We want to know:

- **Why** you want to do this project
- **What** you hope to accomplish
- **Who** will be involved
- **When** and **where** it might take place

Late or incomplete submissions will not be accepted or reviewed. Plan to submit early to address any issues that arise.

DCASE can only consider one idea submission per applicant. Please do not submit multiple ideas from the same lead applicant or multiple applications for the same idea.

HOW TO APPLY

Choose ONE of three ways to share your idea with us:

- 1) Narrative: Provide a brief written description of your idea.
- 2) Recording: Provide a 5-minute video or audio recording describing your idea. (Video does not need to be highly edited. Phone videos are fine!)
- 3) PDF/JPEG file upload: Provide a presentation deck with images and text describing your idea.

IMPORTANT: File Type Updates

Due to changes in the CyberGrants platform, fewer types of files are allowed to be directly uploaded your online application. Refer to the below list of files that are allowable to upload for the Neighborhood Access program.

- jpeg/jpg/png/tif/tiff
- pdf
- mp3

Please note some questions will also specify a required file format for that section of the application. Any video files submitted for review must be provided as a link.

Please note that links to account-based file sharing websites like Dropbox or Google Drive cannot be accepted.

If we cannot access your idea, it will not be reviewed and your application may be considered incomplete.

Reach out to CulturalGrantMaking@cityofchicago.org for questions about allowable file types and sites.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

- Applicants will be notified via email if their idea was selected as a program finalist. All applicants will be notified, regardless if selected to advance. We anticipate finalist notifications in August 2025.
- Finalists must submit a full proposal with materials that will outline the details of the project. Application assistance will be offered to all finalists, including support to first-time grant applicants.
- All finalists will be notified via email about funding decisions, anticipated by October 31, 2025. Timing is subject to change.
- Those selected to receive a grant will receive an email with contracting materials and instructions. The contracting process takes an average of 12 weeks after paperwork is returned to DCASE.
- Once this process is completed, a single one-time payment will be issued.

CONTACT US

Please direct all inquiries to:

CulturalGrantMaking@cityofchicago.org

Cultural Grants Staff

- **Melanie Wang**, Program Director
- **Julie Partynski**, Grants Administrator
- **Carol Crosby**, Grants Coordinator

Division Staff

- **Meida McNeal**, Deputy Commissioner
- **Ebony Johnson**, Staff Assistant

The Cultural Grants staff are always available to answer questions regarding any part of the grant process. Please do not hesitate to reach out to us at the contact information above.

Due to the high volume of inquiries, please allow 48 hours for a response.

ChicagoCulturalGrants.org