

## **Elevating Culture Near Transit, RFP**



RFP Release Date:	September 3, 2025
Information Session:	August 27, 2025
Full Application Deadline:	October 6, 2025
Funding Decisions:	November 2025
Announcements:	December 2025

### ***RFP Background:***

Elevated Chicago is a multi-sector collaborative advancing **equitable transit-oriented development (ETOD)** by transforming the half-mile radius around public transit hubs <sup>1</sup> into vibrant, walkable cultural and economic centers.

Equitable Transit-Oriented Development (ETOD) is community-driven development that enables more people from all neighborhoods and backgrounds to experience the benefits of dense, mixed-use, pedestrian-oriented development near transit.

Examples of what ETOD looks like in a neighborhood include community centers; locally-owned small businesses; services and amenities; grocery stores; health services; community play and gathering spaces; murals, sculpture and public art; cultural venues; green infrastructure; and safe, walkable sidewalks and bikeable streets, among many other community-driven assets and amenities all within walking distance of transit.

In our work, Elevated centers:

**People:** We support neighborhood residents, business owners, aspiring developers, and artists, who live and work within the ½-mile radius of CTA, Pace and Metra public transit assets

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<sup>1</sup> The City of Chicago defines ETOD zones as ½-mile radius around CTA and Metra train stations, and ¼-mile radius around CTA and Pace busses that run at high-frequency (every 15-min or less during lunchtime)

**Place:** We transform the built environment in the ½-mile radius around CTA, Pace and Metra public transit assets

**Process:** We push public, private, and civic organizations to create processes that are more accountable, transparent, and inclusive

In 2025, Elevated launched its new **Arts & Culture Strategy**—a cultural protection framework that amplifies community voice, embeds culture into development processes, and increases access to resources and economic opportunities for local creatives. We are building bridges between artists (of all disciplines) and decision-makers, ensuring culture is both protected and positioned as a driver of equity, healing, and transformation in Chicago’s neighborhoods.

We believe that arts and culture are not afterthoughts to development—they are central to equity, identity, and survival. They also do not have to be signifiers of gentrification and displacement, but intentional placekeeping strategies. We exist to build a future where development is rooted in justice, where investment and development reflect community priorities, and where cultural identity is seen as infrastructure.

With support from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation<sup>2</sup>, Elevated Chicago is excited to launch the Elevating Culture Near Transit RFP, an invitation to Chicago area organizations to submit proposals that utilize arts and culture as transformative tools to shape place, spark investment, reflect community identity, and engage residents from vision to implementation. Selected projects will advance community vitality and equity through creative, collaborative, and culturally rooted approaches that reflect local ownership and encourage broader connectivity.

We seek to support collaborative projects that:

- center and authentically engage community members and longtime residents, and are deeply rooted in community culture;
- create inclusive spaces for all community stakeholders to gather, increasing activity within the community – more foot-traffic on major corridors, more consistent activation and engagement of public spaces, increased stewardship of public spaces, etc.;

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<sup>2</sup> Support from the MacArthur Foundation is to The Chicago Community Foundation. Elevated Chicago is an initiative of The Chicago Community Trust/Foundation

- enhance community corridors and public spaces in ways that strengthen community networks, and that connect residents and visitors to community assets, amenities, and each other; and
- create economic benefit for and within the community through local partnerships between community artists and other community organizations, entities, businesses, residents and other stakeholders; and through community enhancements

***Need/Opportunity Statement:***

Disinvestment and displacement of legacy residents continue to affect communities across Chicago—limiting not only creative expression but also local economic opportunity. The loss of cultural anchors weakens neighborhood identity, reduces walkability and foot traffic, restricts community-based investment, and diminishes opportunities for social cohesion, local spending, and regional engagement. These losses affect both residents and the broader potential for external connection and economic growth.

This funding opportunity—led by Elevated Chicago with support from the MacArthur Foundation—aims to reverse these patterns by supporting **collaborative arts and culture-based projects** that activate **publicly accessible spaces within ½-mile of any CTA or Metra train stations, and within ¼-mile of any CTA or Pace bus corridors**. The goal is to integrate community culture directly into the built environment in ways that are inclusive, economically generative, and grounded in the lived experiences of local stakeholders.

We seek proposals that utilize **arts and culture as transformative tools**—to shape place, spark investment, reflect community identity, and engage residents at every stage from vision to implementation. Selected projects will advance community vitality and equity through creative, collaborative, and culturally rooted approaches that encourage both local ownership and broader connectivity.

The *Elevating Culture Near Transit RFP* seeks proposals for projects that utilize arts and culture as the primary lens through which to influence, shape, and impact the built environment in a community. The program strives to directly reflect the culture of the community, ensuring that community stakeholders are centered in the process and engaged at every stage, from dreaming to design to implementation. Arts and culture are essential tools that create economic opportunity, spur investment, and drive local and

visitor activity through processes that are collaborative, authentic, inspiring, engaging, and empowering for community stakeholders.

***Priority strategies and activities:***

This RFP is intended for **small- to medium-scale projects (budgeted approximately between \$10,000 - \$150,000)** that are in various stages of planning but have lead artist(s) and other collaborative partners in place. Projects with budgets exceeding the requested grant amount must demonstrate that they have secured all funds that are needed to ensure full completion.

***Criteria: The project:***

- Is a collaborative effort and partnership of community stakeholders that (a) engages local artists and/or entrepreneurs and small businesses based in the community in which the project is occurring and (b) provides economic benefit and opportunity to artists and small businesses within the community.
- Activates publicly accessible spaces through art, creative documentation and storytelling, community branding, or other cultural demonstrations that foster community cohesion, encourage increased foot-traffic, and/or attract outside visitors.
- Authentically engages community stakeholders—especially legacy residents—in concept design and implementation, while fostering collaboration between local artists, residents, community partners, and drivers of local commerce (e.g., entrepreneurs, small businesses, neighborhood chambers of commerce, commercial entities, or developers).
- Promotes inclusive, healing-centered, and/or culturally grounded practices that are strength based, advance a collective view of healing, and centers community and culture as central features in well-being.
- Increases community connectivity and amplifies, celebrates, shares, documents, and/or demonstrates community culture.
- Connects to and encourages use of public transit, other forms of active transportation, and walkability.
- Is located along or near a commercial corridor, within ½-mile of CTA or Metra train stations, and within ¼-mile of CTA or Pace bus stops.
- Is located within the City of Chicago.

Additionally,

- Submissions that demonstrate alignment with an existing, active, and community-driven quality-of-life or other community plan are encouraged.
- Funding is available for projects citywide, but the RFP prioritizes projects in communities that are historically underinvested or are experiencing the displacement of long-time residents.

Elevated seeks proposal from organizations that can demonstrate strong community relationships, and a history of collaboration and established partnerships with artists, small businesses, neighborhood chambers of commerce, commercial businesses, and/or residential developers including:

- **Artist Collectives or Collaboratives:** Creative partnerships and organizations that involve different organizations, groups, or individuals working together on arts-based or culturally specific projects.
- **Community Cultural Institutions and Arts Organizations:** Community-based cultural institutions that engage with local artists and community stakeholders to promote community culture and enhance community vitality.
- **Community-based Organizations:** Organizations that work directly with community members, and have established networks, relationships, and collaborations with local artists, small businesses or other community stakeholders, and have a strong history of collaborative efforts and deep community engagement within the community.
- **Community Development Corporations and Planning Councils:** Organizations that promote and support community-driven, community-centered community development and promote and engage in authentic community engagement, and have established relationships with local artists.
- **Community Business Associations and Chambers of Commerce:** Organizations that work directly with, support and advocate for local and small businesses within their communities and can demonstrate active collaboration with stakeholders throughout the community.
- **Locally-owned Small Businesses and Community-based For-profit Entities:** Organizations and entities that are locally-owned, and/or serve the community in which they are located, and can demonstrate collaboration with a range of community stakeholders and an interest in addressing community needs, deepening community relationships, and supporting community development.

**Please note:** Applicants without 501(c)(3) status must identify a fiscal sponsor before applying. Applicants with 501(c)(6) status (which includes trade organizations, business leagues, and professional organizations) may apply directly; please be aware that all grants

must be consistent with the charitable purposes of The Chicago Community Trust/Foundation.

### **Goals & Outcomes**

The Elevating Culture Near Transit RFP aims to support projects that activate spaces in Chicago's neighborhoods for public use and benefit. The goals are to (a) preserve and amplify community culture; (b) engage a range of residents and other community stakeholders in ideation, design and implementation (where possible) to empower residents to shape their built environment and the decisions that affect their community; and (c) support the conditions that increase economic vitality and opportunity for small businesses, artists, entrepreneurs and commercial corridors.

### **Measures of Progress**

Measures of Progress (MoPs) provide clear, reportable evidence that grant-supported projects are progressing toward their goals and contributing to the longer-term outcomes of this RFP. Each grant applicant must select and report on how it has effectively achieved or is on the path towards achieving its objectives.

**Applicants are not required to respond to every outcome. Please select at least two outcomes and at least one measure of progress per outcome selected.**

1. Outcome: Increased cultural activation and resiliency
  - Increased presence of local landmarks, symbols, cultural spaces, and public art in the community
  - Improved perceptions of community cultural presence and cohesion (qualitative)
2. Outcome: Improved resident advocacy and participation in built environment decision-making
  - Community members are engaged as equal partners at planning and decision-making tables
  - People from across the community participate and outcomes reflect their perspectives
  - Community members hold improved perceptions of community collaboration, cohesion, or ownership (qualitative)
3. Outcome: Increased opportunity for and participation in cultural programming
  - Number of participants in placekeeping projects

- Increased presence of local landmarks, symbols, cultural spaces, and public art in the community
  - Community members hold improved perceptions of community cultural presence and cohesion (qualitative)
4. Outcome: Improve economic outcomes in underinvested communities and neighborhoods experiencing displacement of residents
- Economic benefit for local artists (i.e. income generation, increased professional connections and network, increased social media presence and engagement, etc.)
  - Economic benefit for local small businesses and entrepreneurs (i.e. improved or increased community presence, investment or improvements in physical space, increased professional connections and network, increased engagement on social media, increased number of patrons, etc.)
  - Increased engagement with local assets and small businesses
  - Improved walkability of commercial corridors

### ***Grant Amounts Available & Term***

The *Elevating Culture Near Transit RFP* is a project-based funding opportunity with a 12-month grant term. The total grant pool for 2025 is \$350,000.

### **Grant Amounts:**

Depending on how many applications are submitted and in alignment with program goals, we anticipate allocating the 2025 grant pool in the following ways:

- 4 - 6 grants of up to \$10,000 (for projects with budgets up to \$25,000)
- 5 – 8 grants of \$25,000 - \$50,000

We envision these smaller grants also supporting projects by new or emerging artists, artists just beginning to engage in community-driven, place-based work. If that applies to you or a project that you know of and you would like to discuss the application process further, please let us know. We do have limited assistance available to support these artists in the application process and understanding the requirements for application.

Projects with budgets exceeding the requested grant amount must demonstrate that they have secured all funds that are needed to ensure full completion.

**Grant Term:**

- 12 months
- Understanding the potential complexity of placekeeping and placemaking projects, grant terms can be extended for six additional months, for a maximum 18 months total grant term.

Additionally, as part of the broader Elevated Chicago Arts & Culture strategy and with support from the MacArthur Foundation, grant recipients and artists will have access to technical assistance and be invited to engage in the Creatives Table. The Creatives Table offers a space for artists, creatives, developers, community historians and storytellers, to learn, share, problem-solve, and build community with like-minded artists and professionals interested in the power of culture as a driver of community engagement, community development, and the built environment.

Please visit <https://elevatedchicago.org/> for more information about Elevated Chicago, the Arts & Culture strategy and Creatives Table.

***Eligible Applicants***

Elevated Chicago is an initiative of The Chicago Community Trust. All grant funds from Elevated Chicago will be distributed by The Chicago Community Trust and must adhere to the requirements and guidelines of the Trust.

**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) has been recognized by the Internal Revenue Service as an organization described in Section 501(c)(6); (c) is fiscally sponsored by a Section 501(c)(3) organization; (d) or is a governmental unit within the meaning of Section 170(c)(1) of the Code;
- Located within or primarily serving residents of Chicago.

Applicants without 501(c)(3) or 501(c)(6) 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, political activities or lobbying
- 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
- Programs or activities that violate antidiscrimination laws
- For any programs or activities that violate any applicable federal, state, or local laws, including, but not limited to any programs or activities that violate antidiscrimination laws
- Promoting or supporting terrorist activities or to promote terrorism or to provide support
- Any purpose which is not consistent with the charitable purposes of The Chicago Community Trust/Foundation.

### ***Contact Information***

For technical questions regarding GrantCentral, please email our Grants team at [grants@cct.org](mailto:grants@cct.org). Email Marly Schott at [marly@elevatedchicago.org](mailto:marly@elevatedchicago.org) for programmatic and application content questions.

### ***Evaluation and Learning***

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 (RFP). 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 Elevated’s priorities. 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 convenings and reporting, we will use this information to inform our collective understanding of progress and challenges to inform next steps.

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](mailto: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.

Late applications will not be accepted. 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.

### **Tentative Grant Schedule:**

**Application Opens: Wednesday, September 3<sup>rd</sup>**

**Application Closes: Monday, October 6<sup>th</sup> at 11:59 pm, CT**