Black & Brown Collective
for Community Solutions to Gun Violence

A Decade of Sustained Investment: Evaluating the *Chicago Fund*—an initiative of the Partnership for Safe and Peaceful Communities

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NOVEMBER 2026



THE CHICAGO FUND
FOR SAFE AND PEACEFUL
COMMUNITIES

PSPC PARTNERSHIP FOR SAFE
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Acknowledgments

This evaluation was generously funded by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Polk Bros. Foundation, Mars Snacking Foundation, Builders Initiative, and Pritzker Pucker Family Foundation. We thank them for their support and acknowledge that the findings and conclusions presented in this report are those of the authors alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of the funders.

We are deeply grateful to the grantees, program staff, advisors, and other stakeholders who participated in the evaluation and engaged with the research team. We extend our sincere thanks to Esther Franco-Payne of the Partnership for Safe and Peaceful Communities and Jaquanda "Jai" Jones of the Chicago Fund for Safe and Peaceful Communities for their thoughtful guidance and support throughout the project. Finally, we thank our colleagues Anamika Dwivedi and Marisa Palmer for their careful review of this final report. Any errors in this report are the authors' own.

Photographs of community events supported by the Chicago Fund are included throughout this report, used here with permission from the Chicago Fund.

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Executive Summary

Introduction

The Partnership for Safe and Peaceful Communities (PSPC) is a coalition of more than 50 private foundations and donors collaborating to support evidence-informed and community-led violence reduction strategies that the public sector can scale. PSPC established the Chicago Fund in 2016 to reduce gun violence in select neighborhoods in Chicago's South and West Sides by providing grants of up to $10,000 to community leaders and grassroots organizations with operating budgets no larger than $500,000 in the summer and early fall months. The Fund has provided resources for a range of grantee activities and services intended to strengthen community safety—such as providing prosocial activities for young people, supporting families, activating public spaces, and building connections between residents. Since 2016, the Fund has awarded more than $14 million to support more than 1,900 projects across 24 priority communities.

This report includes findings from an evaluation of the implementation, outcomes, and impact of the Fund's first ten years of sustained grantmaking. This evaluation was designed to understand experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of change rather than to establish causal relationships between the Fund investments and community-level outcomes. Drawing on the experiences and perceptions of current and former grant recipients and Fund stakeholders, the assessment includes findings on how the Fund was developed and its underlying theory of change, how the Fund evolved over time and key implementation milestones, how the Fund was associated with changes to violence prevention efforts, organizational capacity, and community conditions over time, and how the Fund could be strengthened. Through the assessment of ten years of grantmaking, the evaluation also includes a set of recommendations to guide the Fund's future directions.

Evaluation Methodology

The evaluation project began in early 2026 and included multiple data collection strategies and analytical methods to understand and assess the Chicago Fund's first ten years of grantmaking. The two guiding research questions for the evaluation are:

1. How do current and former grantees and stakeholders describe the Fund and their experiences with the funding?
2. How do current and former grantees and stakeholders describe the Fund's influence on grantees' violence prevention efforts and organizational capacity and community conditions over time?

To answer the research questions, the evaluation team reviewed existing programmatic materials and former evaluations, conducted community listening sessions with 87 former and current grantees, conducted 28 semi-structured stakeholder interviews, and surveyed 185 individuals at current and former grantee organizations. The evaluation team also conducted a scan of the literature to contextualize the Fund's theory of change. The use of multiple data sources allowed the research team to examine the Fund from different vantage points and to assess the extent to which findings were consistent across different sources of evidence.

Key Findings

Throughout listening sessions and interviews, several distinct themes emerged from the analysis of how grantees and stakeholders described their experiences with the Fund and the influence and impact of the Fund on violence prevention, organizational capacity, and community conditions over time.

Grantee surveys largely complement the qualitative themes from the listening sessions and interviews. Broadly, the evaluation demonstrates the following 5 overarching key themes:

1. The Fund provides support for a range of community-defined activities that strengthen the neighborhood conditions that produce safety.

2. The Fund is a model of equitable philanthropic practice that is a mechanism for community change.

3. The Fund has grown and evolved over time in response to grantee feedback and needs.

4. The Fund and its officers are accessible to grassroots organizations and provide legitimacy and credibility to grassroots organizations.

> *The Chicago Fund "serves as an early philanthropic stamp of credibility for emerging nonprofits."*

5. The prevention-related activities supported by the Fund contribute to safety, social cohesion, resident engagement, and community wellbeing.

> *"Doing community events, doing community together, like those block clubs are extremely helpful because people who don't necessarily know each other or might not know neighbors as people come in and move out, they're not really connected. So when you start those phone trees and activate those blocks, people know one another, they feel safer."*

Recommendations for Future Directions

This evaluation was undertaken to better understand what a decade of sustained investment through the Fund has contributed to grassroots organizations, neighborhood initiatives, perceptions of safety and wellbeing, and Chicago's broader violence prevention ecosystem. The findings suggest that the Fund's contribution was overwhelmingly positive and extends beyond the financial resources it provides. Across interviews, listening sessions, and survey responses, stakeholders consistently emphasized not only what the Fund supported and the impact on organizations and communities, but also how the support was delivered. The Fund demonstrates that the significance and impact of funding, to community organizations and community safety, should be assessed not solely by the number of grants distributed, but also by the infrastructure, relationships, and organizational capacity supported by grantmaking practices.
The evaluation points to several concrete recommendations that would support the next ten years of grantmaking having a greater impact, including:

- The Fund should continue to explore ways to reduce the administrative burden on grantees.
- The Fund should convene grantees and facilitate peer connections to provide opportunities for grantees to exchange ideas and learn from one another.
- The Fund should provide multi-year funding or maintain consistent funding amounts to support longer-term planning by grantees.
- The Fund should document the strategies and practices currently implemented by Fund staff to support institutionalization and longer-term sustainability.
- The Fund should continue to invest in learning and evaluation to assess influence and impact.

Section 1.
Introduction and Report Overview

This report describes the design, implementation, and outcomes associated with the Partnership for Safe and Peaceful Communities (PSPC) Chicago Fund, established in 2016 to reduce gun violence in select Chicago neighborhoods. This report includes findings from an independent assessment of the Fund's ten years of grantmaking, including information on how the Fund was developed and its underlying theory of change, how the Fund was impactful from the perspective of its developers, Chicago Fund grant recipients, and other stakeholders, as well as challenges associated with the investment strategy. The assessment explores the perceptions and experiences of grantees and stakeholders and provides a set of recommendations for PSPC's consideration for future grantmaking.

Rather than focusing primarily on grantmaking implementation or the outcomes of individual grant cycles, this assessment examines how sustained investment over ten years has influenced grantees, their partnerships and community relationships, and community safety. It explores how grantees, funders, partners, and other stakeholders understand the Fund's role within Chicago's broader violence prevention ecosystem and what they believe those investments have made possible over time. Many of the Fund's intended contributions were not expected to emerge within a single grant period since the organizational capacity, leadership development, community trust, cross-sector partnerships, and neighborhood networks it was intended to affect were expected to develop gradually.

Assessing the long-term influence of the Fund is inherently challenging. Over the past decade, as further detailed in this report, the Fund has supported hundreds of organizations implementing diverse activities across multiple neighborhoods alongside many other public and private investments. Because those efforts occur simultaneously and interact in ways that cannot be easily

Partnership for Safe and Peaceful Communities (PSPC):

- A coalition of more than 50 foundations and funders, working together to support community-led, evidence-based approaches to addressing gun violence
- Focuses on identifying programs the public sector can scale as part of a comprehensive gun violence reduction strategy
- Since its founding in 2016, PSPC has committed $140 million to violence reduction efforts in Chicago
- Continues to advance programs that show great promise for improving community safety

separated, this evaluation does not attempt to assess the causal impact of the Fund's investments on community violence or other population-level outcomes. Instead, it examines how stakeholders describe the Fund's influence, the organizational and community changes they associate with sustained investment, and the conditions they believe have supported or constrained those changes. To answer these questions, the research team used a community-engaged mixed-methods design that integrates document review, listening sessions with current and former grantees, semi-structured interviews with program developers and partners, and surveys of current and former grantees. Combining these data sources allowed us to describe the Fund and its evolution, examine patterns across the Fund's first ten years, and capture the experiences and perspectives of those most closely involved in its implementation. Ultimately, this assessment aims to provide a richer understanding of how sustained investment in grassroots organizations contributes to community safety and organizational capacity over time.

This report is organized into several sections. First, we discuss the research methodology used for understanding the Chicago Fund, its evolution, and perceived outcomes over ten years. Second, we provide details on the Chicago Fund goals and logic from the perspectives of a range of diverse stakeholders, including those who helped architect and develop the Fund, investors in the Fund, key advisors, capacity-building partners, former evaluators, and others who helped shape or observed the Fund's evolution. Then we describe how the Fund has evolved over time and highlight key milestones in that evolution. Then we demonstrate the Fund's influence on violence prevention, organizational capacity, and community conditions over time. Lastly, we summarize the findings and provide recommendations for the next stage of grantmaking.



Section 2. **Research Questions and Methodology**

Two research questions guided the evaluation:

1. How do current and former grantees and stakeholders describe the Fund and their experiences with the funding?
2. How do current and former grantees and stakeholders describe the Fund's influence on grantees' violence prevention efforts and organizational capacity and community conditions over time?

Data Sources

The evaluation included multiple data collection strategies and analytical methods to understand and assess the Chicago Fund's first ten years of grantmaking. Beginning in early 2026, the evaluation team used four data sources: document review, community listening sessions, semi-structured stakeholder interviews, and surveys of current and former grantees. We also conducted a literature scan to contextualize the Fund's theory of change. Combining these data sources allowed us to describe the Fund and its evolution, examine patterns across its first ten years, and capture the experiences and perspectives of those most closely involved in its implementation. See Appendix A for a full methodology.

- **Document Review:** The evaluation began with a review of existing materials on the Chicago Fund's history, structure, and prior assessment efforts. We paid particular attention to previous evaluations conducted on behalf of the Fund, to assess how the Fund responded to evaluation findings and recommendations over time. The document review informed the development of listening session guides, interview protocols, and survey instruments, and helped ensure the evaluation generated new insights rather than duplicating prior lines of inquiry.
- **Community Listening Sessions:** Six in-person listening sessions were conducted in February 2026 across Chicago's South and West Sides. Sessions were held in community-based spaces chosen for accessibility, familiarity, and proximity to grantee organizations. Each session lasted about 90 minutes and used a semi-structured discussion guide designed to elicit participant experiences while allowing conversations to develop organically. A total of 87 participants took part in the listening sessions, representing a diverse cross-section of community-based organizations, grassroots initiatives, block clubs, neighborhood leaders, community gardeners, youth-serving organizations, and nonprofit service providers.
- **Semi-Structured Stakeholder Interviews:** To deepen understanding of the Fund's development, implementation, and long-term influence, the research team conducted 28 semi-structured interviews in March and April 2026. The team conducted interviews virtually via Zoom, each lasting about 60 minutes. Participants were selected based on their roles in designing, implementing, or

informing the Fund's grantmaking strategy. They included current and former funders of the Fund, representatives from the "Kitchen Cabinet" (a group of key partners who help advise the Fund), community leaders, long-term grantees, former grantees, capacity-building partners, fiscal sponsors, and former evaluators. Interview questions explored participants' experiences with the Fund, perceptions of its strengths and challenges, observations of organizational and community change, the Fund's role within Chicago's broader violence prevention ecosystem, and recommendations for its future direction.

- **Grantee Survey:** To complement qualitative findings and to broaden participation in the evaluation beyond the listening sessions, the research team administered an online survey via SurveyMonkey to current and former Chicago Fund grantees. The survey was administered to the primary key contact of the grantee organizations from May 2026 to June 2026. It was designed to assess organizational experiences with the Fund, grant utilization, organizational capacity, sustainability, perceptions of community change, and recommendations for future grantmaking. The survey instrument included both closed-ended and open-ended questions and was designed to take approximately 12 minutes to complete. A total of 185 individuals at current and former grantee organizations completed the survey.[1]

Data Analysis

Qualitative and quantitative data were analyzed concurrently and integrated throughout the evaluation process. Major coding domains included organizational capacity, sustainability, community wellbeing, perceptions of safety, violence prevention, grantee experiences, Fund processes, partnership development, grassroots leadership, and opportunities for future growth. Survey data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to summarize participant responses and identify patterns in grantee experiences. Open-ended survey responses were incorporated into the broader qualitative analysis and used to contextualize quantitative findings. Key findings were developed through triangulation of quantitative survey data from grantees and the qualitative data from grantee listening sessions and stakeholder interviews. In many cases, themes were supported across data sources. In other instances, qualitative findings identified themes not reflected in the grantee survey but consistently raised across interviews and listening sessions; these themes are included because of their prominence and recurrence. Qualitative data also provide context and depth that help explain and interpret the survey findings.

This evaluation was designed to understand experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of change rather than to establish causal relationships between the Fund investments and community-level outcomes. Findings are therefore best interpreted as reflections of how stakeholders and participants understand and describe the Fund's influence over time, not as measures of causal impact. Participation in the interviews, listening sessions, and survey was voluntary, so some perspectives may be underrepresented. Organizations and individuals with stronger relationships to the Fund or greater and ongoing engagement may have been more likely to participate than those with more limited engagement. Similarly, because the evaluation sought to include grantees and stakeholders involved with the Fund over a ten-year period, the research team could not contact some former grantees due to organizational transitions, staff turnover, leadership changes, or inactive organizations.

Section 3.
Chicago Fund Goals and Logic

To understand the Chicago Fund's goals, logic, and development, it helps to situate the Fund within Chicago's history of shifts in public and private investments in community safety. Over roughly the last two decades, funding for community-led violence prevention has swung from public to private investment. During the early 2000s and into the following decade, city and state governments invested significant public resources in community-led approaches to violence prevention (for example, CeaseFire and the Neighborhood Recovery Initiative). These investments helped establish the infrastructure for the current community violence intervention (CVI) field in Chicago and reflected the recognition that community organizations and individuals with lived experience played an important role in promoting safety.

This period of public investment was also marked by significant challenges. Mixed or contested evaluation findings, political controversy, concerns regarding the management and distribution of funds, and highly publicized negative incidents involving programs and individual workers contributed to skepticism about publicly-funded community violence prevention approaches. These challenges weakened political confidence in community-led strategies, contributed to a contraction of public resources, and raised questions about whether community-based organizations could be trusted to steward significant public investments in safety.

PSPC emerged during this period of retrenchment. Creating a privately supported pool of resources represented more than an effort to fund individual organizations. It was an intervention in the community safety funding landscape itself. Private philanthropy assumed risk at a moment when government investment had receded, supporting community-based approaches while helping demonstrate that broader, more sustained investment in community safety was both possible and necessary. The long-term aspiration was not for philanthropy to be a permanent substitute for government; rather, private investment was intended to build and strengthen organizational capacity, develop evidence, and create conditions under which the public sector could return with substantially greater resources. In many respects, the transition back to the public sector has occurred. Chicago and municipalities across Illinois have recently experienced unprecedented public investment in community violence prevention and intervention through federal resources (e.g., American Rescue Plan Act funding) and substantial commitments from city, county, state, and business leaders. These investments both positioned community violence prevention and intervention as core to Chicago's public safety infrastructure and made them more institutionalized and publicly supported.

Established in 2016, PSPC launched the Chicago Fund ("the Fund") as one of its five investment strategies to reduce gun violence in neighborhoods on Chicago's West and South Sides. PSPC is a coalition of more than 50 private foundations and donors collaborating to support evidence-informed and community-led violence

reduction strategies that the public sector can scale. The Chicago Fund was established because PSPC increasingly recognized that neighborhood leaders and community organizations were engaged in activities intended to strengthen community safety—such as providing prosocial activities for young people, supporting families, activating public spaces, and building connections between residents—but had limited resources.

The Fund was created to help address that funding gap and to help resource grassroots organizations and community leaders to advance community safety. Through grants of up to $10,000 to organizations with operating budgets no larger than $500,000, the Fund has provided resources to grassroots organizations to implement activities and services in neighborhoods experiencing high rates of gun violence in the summer and early fall months.[2] Importantly, **the Chicago Fund's funding model was intentionally designed to be accessible to grassroots organizations and residents.** The Fund's designers sought to reach organizations that were deeply rooted and connected in their neighborhoods and historically often unable to access traditional funding streams due to their organizational size and limited administrative capacity.

The Fund has successfully funded organizations and residents operating with no budgets or small budgets, and staffed activities through volunteers, to address specific neighborhood concerns. Many of the activities supported through the Fund are not conventional violence prevention programs, such as mentoring programs or credible messenger programs. Rather, the **grants have been investments in social infrastructure** and have supported outdoor sports games, elder wellness checks, neighborhood festivals and cultural events, food distribution, arts activities, community gardens and other public space activation projects, peace marches, healing circles, mutual aid, and block club initiatives. Through these activities, the grants have supported collective problem-solving, conflict negotiation, reciprocity, and the relational conditions that support community safety over time.

The Fund has **an explicit theory of change.** The Fund operationalized that theory through Carl Bell's Seven Field Principles for changing at-risk behavior and cultivating resiliency. The grantee application used by the Fund strongly encouraged organizations to propose activities aligned with one or more of the principles, and the degree to which proposed activities followed the framework was considered in funding decisions. Grantees were also asked to explain in their final reports how their activities aligned with the principles. The framework therefore served not only as a general influence on the Fund, but also as a practical guide connecting the activities proposed by grassroots organizations to a broader violence prevention strategy.[3]

Aligned with Carl Bell's principles, the Fund's logic is that **community-defined activities can be protective factors and strengthen the neighborhood conditions that produce safety:** social cohesion, collective efficacy, trust, community care, local leadership, belonging, and opportunities for residents to shape their neighborhoods. The grants were intended to invest in the expertise of residents and grassroots organizations to identify local challenges and develop approaches responsive to neighborhood contexts. Rather than requiring organizations to adopt a single program model, the Fund used Bell's principles as a shared framework through which varied community-defined activities could contribute to preventing violence, building connection and cohesion among residents, and creating greater opportunity and safety.

This logic aligns with literature showing how neighborhood organizations and the social infrastructure they create can contribute to public safety.[4]

The Fund was also intended to demonstrate how **trust-based philanthropy can drive change.** The Fund's developers deliberately confronted histories of exclusion from philanthropy and actively cultivated community confidence, ownership, and power throughout the process. The Fund is an explicit contrast to traditional philanthropic investment strategies that require extensive documentation and vetting processes, technical expertise, and organizational infrastructure before funding can be accessed. The Fund developers were intentional in their efforts to demystify philanthropy for community, to diversify their review committees to ensure community perspectives were part of decision-making, and to create supportive spaces for both successful and unsuccessful applicants through feedback sessions.

Context for the Use of Microgrants to Support Grassroots Organizations to Advance Community Safety

Through the Chicago Fund, PSPC uses microgrants, or relatively small amounts of flexible funding, through streamlined application and reporting processes to provide grassroots organizations and residents access to resources that might otherwise be out of reach. Across the United States, similar approaches have supported neighborhood improvement efforts, youth engagement, community development, civic participation, public space activation, and violence prevention. Examples include municipal neighborhood grant programs, participatory budgeting initiatives, philanthropic community safety funds, and local violence prevention initiatives that prioritize community relationships and neighborhood leadership.[5]

While no single microgrant model is widely recognized as national best practice, effective microgrant approaches generally reduce funding barriers and strengthen community ownership. Common grantmaking practices include simplified application processes, flexible funding, proportionate reporting requirements, investment in trusted neighborhood organizations, and capacity-building support that extends beyond the grant itself.[6] By design, the Fund reflects many of these practices and is notable for its scale across places and sustained investment over ten years. The Fund also evolved to include funding for technical assistance, leadership development, peer learning, and neighborhood-based Hub organizations (as described in more detail below).

As discussed in the preceding section, the Fund complements these flexible grantmaking practices with Bell's Seven Field Principles,[7] which provide a shared framework for connecting community-defined activities to the Fund's violence prevention goals. The principles emphasize:

1. Rebuilding "the village" and reweaving the social fabric by bringing together residents, families, schools, faith communities, businesses, and community organizations to create networks of support, safety, and security;
2. Providing access to knowledge, models, tools, skills, and techniques that people can apply in their lives and communities;

3. Creating a sense of connectedness, attachment, and belonging to a larger group or shared purpose;
4. Providing opportunities to develop social and emotional skills, including communication, negotiation, empathy, self-regulation, and the ability to remain calm during crises;
5. Strengthening self-esteem and self-efficacy by creating opportunities for people, particularly young people, to exercise leadership, develop skills, understand their cultural identities, and positively influence their lives and communities;
6. Providing an "adult protective shield" through caring, dependable adult relationships that offer young people support, supervision, guidance, and a sense of safety; and
7. Minimizing trauma by strengthening safety, coping skills, self-efficacy, access to supportive services, and opportunities for healing.

Rather than prescribing a single intervention, the principles help explain how a wide range of locally designed activities can strengthen protective factors and fit within a coherent violence prevention strategy. This approach also aligns with a broader body of research showing how investments in people, relationships, community organizations, and neighborhood institutions contribute to safety.

While violence prevention has often been traditionally understood through the lens of law enforcement and criminal justice system responses or individual-level interventions, researchers have long explored the role of neighborhood conditions that prevent violence and respond to harm. Research on collective efficacy demonstrates that communities where residents know one another, trust one another, and are willing to act on behalf of the common good consistently experience lower levels of violence, even after accounting for neighborhood poverty and other measures of structural disadvantage.[8] The research shows that relationships are not simply a byproduct of healthy communities; they help communities respond to violence, solve problems collectively, and sustain safety over time.

Researchers have also examined how the physical environment contributes to neighborhood safety. Studies of vacant lot remediation, neighborhood greening, and community stewardship have found associations with reductions in violence, stronger neighborhood engagement, and improved perceptions of safety.[9] Public spaces are more than physical assets when they create opportunities for residents to interact, build trust, strengthen informal social ties, and reclaim neighborhood spaces that might otherwise contribute to disorder or isolation.

Organizations embedded in those neighborhoods are also critical. In a widely cited study, Sharkey and colleagues found that growth in community-based nonprofit organizations was associated with meaningful reductions in violent crime across U.S. cities.[10] Their findings suggest that neighborhood organizations contribute to public safety not only through the services they provide, but also through the relationships they cultivate, the leaders they develop, the resources they connect residents to, and the neighborhood institutions they help sustain. In this sense, nonprofit organizations function as part of a community's social infrastructure, creating networks of support that extend well beyond any single program or event.

The evidence reviewed does not suggest that any single grant, neighborhood event, or community project reduces violence on its own. Rather, it points to the importance of sustained investment in people, organizations, relationships, and neighborhood institutions that can collectively shape community safety over time. The Fund represents a long-term investment in the organizations and neighborhood networks that communities rely on to prevent violence, respond to local challenges, and create opportunities for connection and collective action. Understanding how grantees have experienced those investments and what they may have contributed to over the past decade is core to this evaluation.



Section 4.
Chicago Fund Grantmaking Reach and Evolution

The Fund has grown substantially over time—in the amount of funding administered, the number of grantees supported, and the number of community areas served. Since 2016, the Fund has awarded more than $14 million to support more than 1,900 projects across 24 priority communities on Chicago's South and West Sides. The priority communities were identified using the number and rate of shootings and homicides in collaboration with the University of Chicago Crime Lab and the Illinois Office of Firearm Violence Prevention. They are: Auburn Gresham, Austin, Burnside, Chatham, Chicago Lawn, Englewood, West Englewood, Fuller Park, Gage Park, East Garfield Park, West Garfield Park, Greater Grand Crossing, Humboldt Park, Lower West Side (Pilsen), New City (Back of the Yards), North Lawndale, South Lawndale (Little Village), Riverdale, Roseland, South Chicago, South Shore, Washington Park, West Pullman and/or Woodlawn.

Notably, **PSPC invested in evaluations early on and changed its grantmaking practices based on the findings.** Different consulting groups led previous evaluations that documented which activities the Fund supported, who participated, how grantees experienced the Fund, and how the funding model evolved.[11] Early findings shaped the Fund, and it introduced several philanthropic innovations throughout the decade in response to what grantees said they needed to impact community safety. The first evaluations found that many funded organizations operated with limited staffing and infrastructure. Grantees consistently identified needs beyond project funding, including support with fundraising, communicating their activities to external audiences, evaluating performance, building partnerships, developing leadership and staff, and managing organizational growth. At the start, the Chicago Fund partnered with fiscal sponsors to remove barriers to entry to philanthropy for grassroots and emerging organizations. Program developers shared that some innovative practices implemented over time are now considered standard in the field of philanthropy but were far less common when the Fund first adopted them. The timeline in Figure 1 provides some key implementation milestones across the ten years.

Beginning in 2019, the Fund partnered with the Goldin Institute to provide technical assistance and organizational support to grantees. By 2021, the Fund had invested $5.2 million in 824 projects across 21 communities. That year, 144 organizations received grants ranging from $1,000 to $10,000. The median operating budget among funded organizations was $49,000; 21 organizations reported annual operating budgets under $2,000; 63 percent had only one full-time staff member; and 60 percent relied on part-time staff to implement their work. Community members began to participate in the application review process in 2020. This shift was contextualized as a deliberate move away from a review committee composed primarily of philanthropic professionals

and consultants toward a more diverse reviewer pool spanning race, generation, professional position, and level of experience in philanthropy, so that applications would be considered through multiple perspectives. Individuals with diverse perspectives and lived experiences reviewed applications, creating a more equitable assessment process and bringing community voices fully into Fund decision-making.

In 2023, the Fund entered a new phase. In addition to increasing annual grantmaking, it invested in seven Hub organizations that recruited applicants, provided technical assistance, and strengthened neighborhood networks. These additions reflected a shift from funding individual projects alone toward investing in the broader infrastructure needed to support grassroots organizations over time. The Hub organizations were intended to support grantee organizations' long-term sustainability and impact by serving as a resource during and after their grant funding. A total of 253 organizations received $3.3 million in grants and reported reaching an estimated 119,833 community members in 2023. Given the Fund's resources and impact, some organizations are no longer eligible because their operating budgets have surpassed the $500,000 threshold.

While the Fund was never envisioned as a long-term philanthropic vehicle, its track record and consistency across Chicago communities have produced a decade of community-centric grantmaking. Over ten years, the Fund developers experimented with and helped normalize practices that challenged conventional philanthropic approaches (and informed public investment approaches): simplified applications and reporting, fiscal sponsorship as an entry point, direct investment in very small and informal organizations, community participation in grant review, increasingly diverse review structures, technical assistance, neighborhood Hubs, relationship-centered grantmaking, and efforts to create pathways into philanthropy for those that had historically been excluded. In this way, the Fund **models replicable equitable philanthropic practices** and serves as a mechanism for larger philanthropic organizations that lack the capacity to invest directly in small organizations. The rapid-cycle microgrant program is also intended to be replicable and scaled within the public sector (as happened during the pandemic when the City of Chicago's Office of the Mayor used the Fund as a model to fund hyper-local, community-based groups).



FIGURE 1: CHICAGO FUND TIMELINE[12]

2016
- Fund started
- Awarded $500,000 to 72 organizations

2017
- Awarded $850,000 to 120 organizations

2018
- Awarded $850,000 to 132 organizations
- Explicit focus on funding organizations with an operating budget of $500,000 or less

2019
- Awarded $1.1 million to 181 organizations
- Goldin Institute's Peace Fellows Program began; select grantees were chosen for the inaugural cohort[13]

2020
- Awarded $1 million to 175 organizations
- Community members began to participate in the review process

2020–2021 COVID-19 Pandemic Response

Grantees received:
- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) funding assistance
- Laptops and technology support
- Zoom and virtual programming transition support
- Support from the Goldin Institute and other partners

2021
- Awarded $1 million to 144 organizations

2022
- Awarded $1.5 million to 201 organizations
- Virtual Technical Assistance (TA) sessions implemented (including one evening session)
- Office Hours implemented
- End-of-year grantee survey implemented
- Community Hub organizations offered technical assistance and supported prospective grantees with their applications[14]

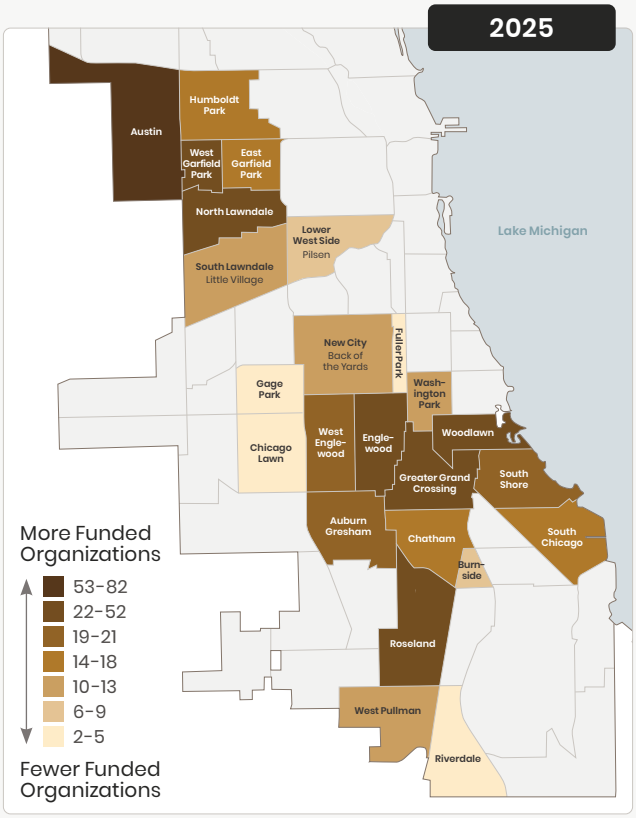
2023
- Awarded $3.3 million to 253 organizations

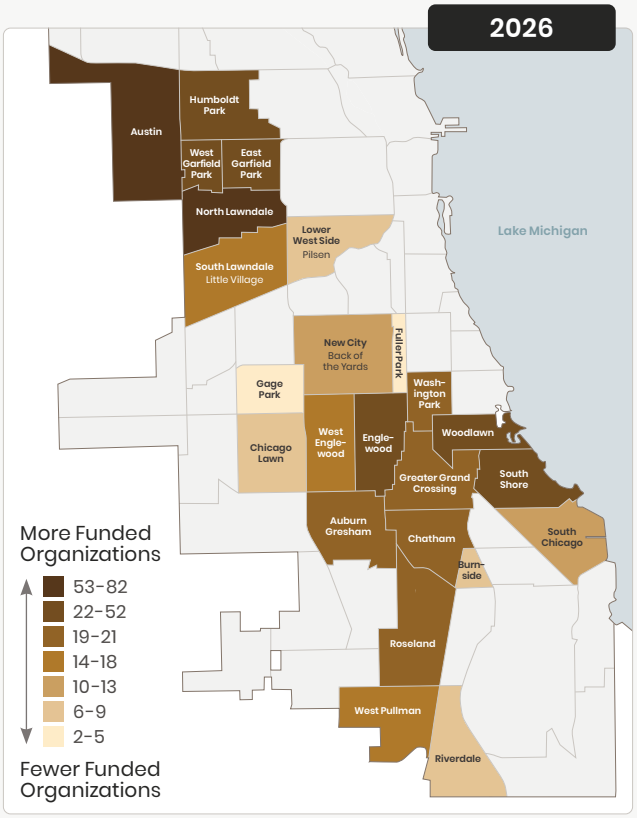
2024
- Awarded $1.9 million to 238 organizations
- First year the fund received over 400 applications

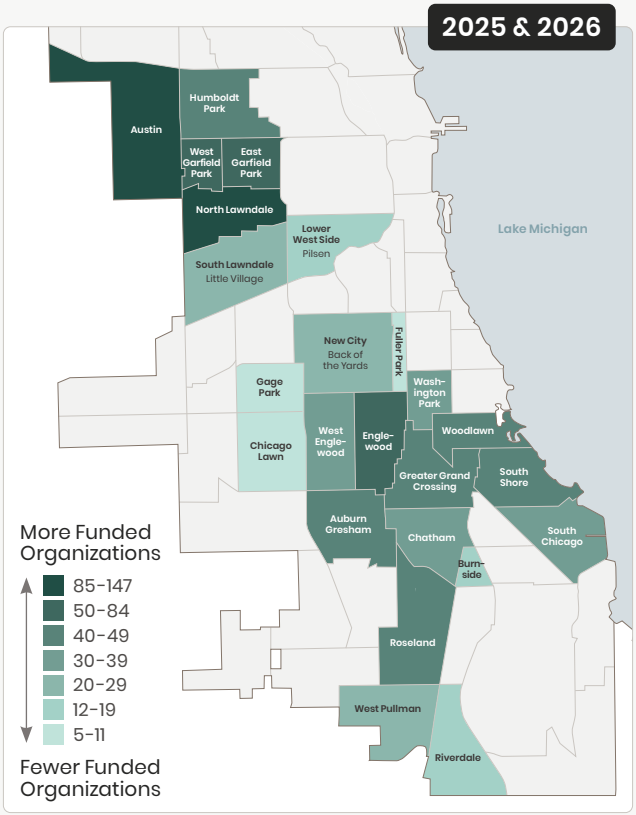
2025
- Awarded $1.3 million to 227 organizations
- Application available through the United Way portal
- In-person review roundtable restarted
- Formal scoring rubric

2026
- Awarded $1.3 million to 232 organizations

FIGURE 2: GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF FUNDED ORGANIZATIONS BY COMMUNITY AREA, 2025–2026[15]







Understanding the Maps

These maps illustrate the geographic distribution of funded organizations across 24 eligible Chicago community areas in 2025 and 2026. Grantees identified up to three primary community areas where their funded programming would take place. Each organization is counted once per community area per year, regardless of the number of activities planned, and may be counted in multiple community areas. Darker shades indicate higher numbers of funded organizations, while lighter shades indicate lower numbers.

The third map combines the annual counts for 2025 and 2026 to illustrate the cumulative geographic distribution of funded organizations across both grant cycles. Austin and North Lawndale had the highest counts, while Fuller Park and Gage Park had the lowest.

Section 5.
Chicago Fund Influence and Impact on Violence Prevention, Organizational Capacity, and Community Conditions Over Time

In general, grantees hold favorable perceptions of and associations with the Fund. Through thematic analyses of the grantee listening sessions and interviews and analyses of the grantee survey, grantees offer consistently positive responses to questions about the Fund's goals. Grantees have positive experiences with the Fund components and appreciate what the Fund has enabled their organizations to accomplish internally and in their communities. Notably, grantees' experiences and perceptions of the Fund align with the Fund developers' intentions and theory of change. The following sections detail the Fund's influence and impact from the perspective of current and former grantees and stakeholders, as revealed through the grantee survey, grantee listening sessions, and stakeholder interviews focused on violence prevention, organizational capacity, and community conditions. Qualitative themes, drawn specifically from the listening sessions and interviews, offer deeper context and nuance to the summary statistics derived from the survey analyses.



Descriptive Analyses of the Grantee Surveys

Over a one-month period, 185 respondents completed the evaluation survey. Topline findings include:

- Most respondents were executive directors or CEOs (75%).
- Respondents were primarily representatives from community-based organizations (41%) and nonprofit service providers (27%).
- Nearly half (49%) of respondents reported receiving funding for four or more years.
- The overwhelming majority (83%) of respondents have a "very positive" relationship with Fund staff.
- The overwhelming majority (88%) of respondents find the Fund's goals and priorities "very clear."
- The majority of respondents report a "very positive" experience with the Fund in terms of their application process (71%), grant selection process (57%), staff communication (69%), reporting requirements (63%), payment timeliness (71%), flexibility to adapt (63%), responsiveness to feedback (65%), and funding consistency (54%).

How would you rate your experience with the following aspects of the Chicago Fund?
(percentage of respondents)

	Very Positive	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Very Negative
Application process	71.1	22.8	5.6	0.6	0.0
Grant selection process	56.7	32.2	8.9	1.1	1.1
Communication with staff	69.4	18.9	11.1	0.6	0.0
Reporting requirements	63.3	31.1	4.4	1.1	0.0
Timeliness of payments	70.6	25.6	3.3	0.6	0.0
Flexibility to adapt activities	63.3	27.2	8.9	0.6	0.0
Responsiveness to feedback	65.0	21.1	13.3	0.6	0.0
Consistency of funding	54.4	23.3	16.1	4.4	1.7

- Most respondents (78%) conduct "community events and peace-building activities" with Fund support.
- Nearly half of respondents (46%) "always" report using resources more frequently for program development or expansion activities, while fewer report using the resources for staff training and leadership development (14%) or organizational infrastructure (15%).

- Nearly all surveyed respondents (91%) said funding has enhanced their capacity to plan and deliver community safety activities, and a majority (87%) said funding has helped them build and maintain key partnerships.
- Most respondents (76%) agree that the Fund has influenced their long-term sustainability.
- Most respondents (55%) report that youth engagement in community-based opportunities is "much better" than 10 years ago in their neighborhoods, while fewer report that perceptions of safety (30%) or trust between residents (39%) are "much better" than 10 years ago.

To what extent do you think Chicago Fund activities have contributed to changes in these areas? (percentage of respondents)

	A great deal	A lot	A moderate amount	A little	Not at all
Perceived safety (N=159)	37.7	34.6	20.1	5.0	2.5
Social cohesion or connectedness (N=159)	36.5	37.1	18.9	5.7	1.9
Community wellbeing (N=160)	35.6	43.8	15.6	3.8	1.3
Resident engagement in positive activities (N=161)	47.2	33.5	13.0	5.0	1.2

- Nearly half (47%) of respondents report that funded activities have increased resident engagement "a great deal" in positive activities.
- Most respondents (75%) believe that the grants are "very accessible" to smaller or emerging organizations.
- Most respondents "strongly agree" and "agree" that the CF's grant processes are transparent (88%) and fair (82%). They also "strongly agree" and "agree" that Fund staff listen to grantee feedback (87%), are responsive to community needs (88%), and respect community expertise (87%).

Thematic Analyses of Grantee and Stakeholder Descriptions of their Experiences with the Fund

Throughout listening sessions and interviews, the following six themes emerged from the analysis of how grantees and stakeholders described their experiences with the Fund over time:

1. The Fund and application process are described as accessible
2. There is a steep learning curve when grantees first apply for funding
3. Access to information about the Fund's processes and expectations varied
4. The project manager is trustworthy and responsive
5. Some worry the funding priority is innovation instead of program continuity
6. Concerns exist that violence prevention efforts are viewed as less important than violence intervention strategies

The Fund and application process are described as accessible

Many grantees noted a marked difference between the Chicago Fund and other philanthropic grant applications. One grantee noted that the Chicago Fund *"don't make us jump through 9,000, 10,000 hoops."* Similarly, another grantee shared: *"It was just a simple, simple application, questions like, what do you want to do? What's the money for? What's your budget?"*

The Fund is widely recognized as a microgrant mechanism that helps make funding accessible and lowers typical philanthropic barriers for grassroots and emerging organizations. Interviews with key stakeholders, such as Kitchen Cabinet members (i.e., a group of key partners who help advise the Fund), funders, and other partners, uniformly indicated that grassroots leaders understand the Fund's goals and priorities.

A stakeholder highlighted that the application is accessible not because of the *"light lift application,"* but because of the *"engagement of the community-based organizations who supported people to find out about the [Chicago Fund]."* Community-based organizations, such as the Community Hubs, supported prospective applicants with their grant applications–from helping draft narratives, preparing budgets, and navigating the online application portal. The stakeholder further emphasized:

> "I think that's a critical shift that happened over the years, because … philanthropy was putting this out into the ether, people still weren't gonna find out about it. It wasn't until their anchor community organizations were like, this grant opportunity is available, and we'll help you apply for it, that it truly became accessible."

However, several grantees shared in listening sessions and one-on-one interviews that the previous application process was cumbersome. Several grantees reported that the new (current) application portal is more user-friendly, which was significant considering that this was its first year of use. The Fund project manager facilitated several technical assistance (TA) sessions to guide applicants through the application process; however, these TA sessions had also been offered before the transition to the new portal.

There is a steep learning curve when grantees first apply for funding

Perceptions of accessibility varied by grantees' level of experience with the Fund. Repeat grantees – those who have received funding several years in a row – generally reported that the application and reporting process is straightforward and *"easy."* However, this sentiment was not shared by most first-time applicants. As one grantee shared, the applications *"weren't easy for people who are not used to doing it … for first timers."*

The perceived ease and simplicity of the application and reporting process reflect the familiarity the grantee has built over time, not the experience the grantee had when they first applied to the Fund. While the Fund's application process and reporting requirements are more accessible than those of larger funders, that perspective is not front of mind for first-time applicants. For many grassroots organizations, applying to the Fund is their first grant application experience.

First-time applicants described the experience of learning to write a grant application, create a budget, navigate a grant application portal, and write an end-of-year report, all at the same time. Several repeat grantees acknowledged that they faced a steep learning curve the first time they applied. As another grantee stated, *"the hardest part is always the first time."* Another repeat grantee, who received funding for several years, shared this perspective:

> "It's a very easy application, and, having this experience and this lens now, it's like … why are people complaining? Because it's so simple. But I also remember back then, and just being like, this money is so important, and there's not a whole lot of money that we have access to like this … that we don't want to mess up and lose it, and so, definitely understand the sentiment."

Access to information about the Fund's processes and expectations varied

Participants' understanding of application procedures and funding expectations varied, with clarity often gained through informal relationships and direct interactions with Fund staff rather than standardized channels. Those who built stronger relationships with Fund staff typically showed a better grasp of the processes and expectations.

This dynamic was evident during listening sessions, where grantees shared their experiences with the Fund and responded to each other. For instance, one grantee expressed confusion about why their funding amount decreased, and a fellow grantee explained that the reduction was due to a larger number of grant applicants that year.

Several grantees believed the Fund had lost funding, either because they received less than in prior years or because they heard the process was more competitive. Grantees gained clarity during peer conversations at the listening sessions rather than directly from the Fund. While formal communication from the Fund may have explained this change, the variance in understanding this shift was evident in this interaction. Information sharing among grantees occurred in all six listening sessions.

Grantees also described inconsistent access to information about Fund processes, decisions, and opportunities. Some applicants reported receiving constructive feedback and guidance on improving their applications for future funding cycles. However, most applicants stated they did not receive any explanation or feedback about why they did not receive funding. Many listening session participants expressed a desire for greater transparency regarding funding decisions. Several participants also stated that they do not understand how the end-of-year reports are used. In another example, while the Fund has offered leadership development opportunities through the Goldin Institute's Peace Fellows Program, grantees were not widely aware of them. Those who actively and consistently contacted Fund staff tended to gain more insight into processes, decisions, and opportunities compared to those who did not.

The project manager is trustworthy and responsive

A consistent theme across sessions and interviews is that the Fund is experienced as relational, not just transactional. Accessibility, trust, and responsiveness shaped how participants engaged with the Fund and how supported they felt throughout the application and award process. Grantees broadly perceive the Fund as responsive to community needs. At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, grantees were allowed to revise their funded proposals to align with new social distancing policies. For example, many grantees reallocated funds to support virtual programming tools such as Zoom subscriptions to host virtual programming. As of 2022, one technical assistance session is scheduled in the evening recognizing that several community members cannot attend daytime technical assistance sessions due to work obligations.

Participants highlighted the importance of relationship-building in making the Fund approachable, particularly for organizations navigating funding processes for the first time. In several cases, participants described the Fund as feeling distinct from other funding sources because of its responsiveness and the sense of being known and supported throughout the process. At the same time, some of these relational strengths appear to be carried through individual relationships rather than fully embedded in systems, raising questions about how to sustain and scale these practices as the Fund continues to evolve.

Several grantees and stakeholders referred to the project manager as the *"face of the Fund."* They shared that the project manager *"goes above and beyond"* by frequently attending community events, encouraging prospective applicants to apply to the Fund, and being readily available by phone and email. In listening sessions and open-ended survey responses, several grantees expressed unprompted gratitude for the program manager. As a result of these relational practices, several grantees report feeling connected to the Fund, especially if they have received funding more than once.

> "The most valuable support from [Fund] has honestly been the accessibility and relationship-building. Being able to connect directly with [the project manager] whenever challenges arose and having one-on-one office time provided guidance, encouragement, and strategic support that went beyond funding. Those conversations helped us navigate obstacles, think through organizational growth, and strengthen how we serve our community. Sometimes the most impactful support is simply having someone willing to listen, advise, and genuinely invest in the success of your mission."

Grantees described the project manager as a key connector across organizations and communities. They suggested that many of the practices that make the Fund successful, such as relationship-building, responsiveness to community needs, and effective communication, are embodied in the project manager's approach. Several comments implied that the project manager's ability to support grantees rests not only on formal responsibilities, but also on instinctive practices developed through experience and strong community relationships. This finding suggests that documenting the specific strategies and practices the current project manager uses may be important to ensuring the model can be replicated and sustained over time and connected to the Fund's approach to trust-based philanthropy. Capturing how these relational practices function could help institutionalize aspects of the Chicago Fund's success that currently depend heavily on individual leadership.

Several grantees identified areas where the Fund's practices feel misaligned with their accessibility goals. For example, several grantees advocated for greater diversification in both application and reporting formats. They also suggested that social media reporting, such as tracking a designated hashtag intended to document event programming throughout the grant term, would be preferable. Similarly, several grantees recommended the option to submit a brief video instead of a written application. These findings demonstrate that traditional philanthropic practices are a barrier for grassroots organizations. As one stakeholder noted:

> "Because historically, right, within philanthropy, everything's written. It's not like what you did, it's how you talked about what you did. And it's not about what you're going to do, it's how you talk about what you're going to do. I think that was the biggest, the most stressful thing for me when I first started in this field."

If the Chicago Fund's primary goal is to improve accessibility in grant application processes, then the application and reporting should not be tied to traditional requirements (e.g., formal grant deliverables and reporting metrics) alone. This tension is further shaped by uneven organizational capacity, where groups with stronger administrative or grant-writing experience may be better positioned to navigate the application process, even when smaller or more informal efforts are doing impactful work on the ground.

Some worry the funding priority is innovation instead of program continuity

Some participants described tension between innovation and continuity, noting that while funding often rewards new ideas, community members frequently value consistent, reliable programs and activities available year after year. Grantees reported feeling pressure to propose innovative and new activities each

year to maintain the level of funding they received the year before. However, grantees also shared that community members often value the consistency and continuation of trusted programming. Some grantees strongly perceive that sustained programming may be undervalued relative to new or innovative ideas. These views may reflect the recent rise in competition and reduction in award amounts. As one grantee described, they perceived their funding rejection as related to their lack of innovation:

> **"And last year, we didn't get any kind of funding for it. I guess maybe because we thought it ... might been because it was just a repeat of the same thing. But people were really disappointed. And [our programming] really brings the community together."**

Concerns exist that violence prevention efforts are viewed as less important than violence intervention strategies

Grantees and stakeholders noted a disproportionate allocation of funding going toward intervention work relative to prevention work. Additionally, a few stakeholders expressed hope for greater integration between community violence *prevention* efforts and community violence *intervention* efforts.

Several grantees also raised concerns about the perceived funding imbalance between the violence prevention efforts they lead and intervention efforts such as community violence intervention. A few grantees carefully framed the nuance around this perceived funding disparity. As one grantee described:

> "Not the kind of same attention and growth into the grassroots side of it, again, it's not either or. I don't want the money taken from that and put over there, but let's put some money towards growing the pot for some of these other things that are part of the ecosystem, too. I want to be very careful that I'm not criticizing that ... I'm a big believer in community violence intervention work. I'm not trying to take any of that pot, but I do think we need more for just everyday organizations that are holding stuff down."

Another grantee explained:

> "Neighboring is a big aspect of some of the work that I do ... I think it's a more powerful vehicle for violence prevention than just, like, a community violence intervention (CVI) scaling thing or something like that. I think those are great. I think they have their place. You know, I understand the whole idea of boots on the ground ... but when you live somewhere. And you have everyone else on the same page, it's a different, it's just, it's a different feel. And so, that's also infectious, like, you know, people see what you're doing on your block."

Thematic Analyses of Grantees and Stakeholders' Descriptions of the Fund's Influence on Violence Prevention Activities, Organizational Capacity, and Community Conditions

Throughout listening sessions and interviews, the following eight themes emerged from the analysis of how grantees and stakeholders described the influence and impact of the Fund on violence prevention, organizational capacity, and community conditions over time:

1. Grantees address community needs through proximity to the issues
2. Activated communities cultivate social cohesion and connectedness
3. Community engagement efforts are part of the community violence prevention ecosystem
4. The Fund provides legitimacy and credibility for grassroots and emerging organizations
5. The Fund reinforces the positive narratives grantees hold for their communities
6. There is limited opportunity to learn from fellow grantees
7. The lack of funding consistency and certainty limited their impact and ability to plan long-term
8. Grantees are affected by inflation and award amounts, which limits impact

Grantees address community needs through proximity to the issues

With Fund support, grantees primarily host community events and youth development activities. As one grantee described their work:

> **"I've been doing community work since I was … in high school … I've always been engaged with young people. I've always been doing youth work. And so it's always fun to me to be able to do these things and to create that type of space for other young people … I think that's some of the best feedback we can receive because once the young people enjoy it, then you get their buy-in, then that's when you can really, like, expand it and replicate the model."**

In many cases, grantees described piecing together funding for community events using personal funds or through door-to-door collections. As one grantee noted, *"because we don't have a lot of money does not mean we're not doing the work."* Several grantees shared that they first learned about the Fund, or were encouraged to apply, through peer community leaders already familiar with the Fund.

> **"Every Saturday, I would volunteer at my local library, helping young people from my neighborhood find jobs and just work on their resume. So I did that for six years for free just because I wanted to stay in my neighborhood. But then the fund opened up, and my mentors were like, 'Hey. You should apply for this funding so you can grow, and now you can maybe stipend some of the young people that you've helped to come and help you coach other young people.'"**

Several grantees mentioned experiencing burnout due to the demands of their time-intensive commitments and trauma-informed work. As one grantee described:

> **"Because this work is hard. And debriefing about the work or being in community with people who are doing very similar work to you is healing. Who's healing the healers?"**

Many grantees also expressed a sense of personal responsibility when they were unable to offer the same level of programming as in prior years – whether due to a funding rejection from the Fund or a reduction in the requested award amount. Notably, a few grantees directly attributed specific incidents of neighborhood violence to their inability to provide the same level of programming because of decreased funding.

Across grantees and stakeholders, there is a shared understanding that the Fund supports "grassroots superheroes"—community practitioners who are deeply committed to their community, often working under challenging or under-resourced conditions. Grassroots superheroes are seen as essential, central, or uniquely impactful in addressing community needs. From its inception, the Fund has upheld the idea that community members should be the first line of defense in providing programming and community engagement activities that serve as protective factors against violence. As one stakeholder shared:

> **"To reduce violence in your neighborhoods, you start with the actual people who are on the blocks ... The people ... who are most proximate to the issues are the ones that have the solutions to address those issues ... We occupy our own space, so it makes it safer."**

One stakeholder described grassroots superheroes as "relentlessly hopeful." Stakeholders expressed that the Fund created more opportunities for "the average community resident" to do this work, who often "would do this work even if the funding was not available, but the funding helps boost their efforts."

Activated communities cultivate social cohesion and connectedness

Grantees highlighted the importance of visible, community-facing activities and of activating public spaces as core strategies for strengthening neighborhood connectedness, wellbeing, and perceptions of safety. Grantees consistently emphasized that one of the Fund's most visible impacts has been strengthening trust and connection within neighborhoods. Participants described seeing more everyday interactions among neighbors, including greeting one another, knowing neighbors by name, inviting neighbors to share meals, and allowing children to play outside more freely. These small but meaningful behaviors were interpreted as indicators that residents feel safer and more connected to one another.

> "Doing community events, doing community together, like those block clubs are extremely helpful because people who don't necessarily know each other or might not know neighbors as people come in and move out, they're not really connected. So when you start those phone trees and activate those blocks, people know one another, they feel safer."

Grantees reported a noticeable increase in community activity and engagement in neighborhood spaces. Grantees cited a wide range of activities that bring residents together, including block parties, community events, family activities, safety walks, movie nights, public celebrations, and neighborhood runs such as local 5Ks or Peace Runner groups.

These activities were described as contributing to a sense that neighborhoods are more vibrant and socially active than in previous years. Many participants observed that summers now feel different because there are more programs, more visible activity, and more opportunities for residents to gather in positive ways. Grantees describe these Chicago Fund-supported activities as creating "third spaces" for community gathering, or, as one grantee put it, funding "joy." Another grantee described:

> "Block parties can create entry points for neighbors to meet, share meals, and build relationships ... Knowing neighbors can create a sense of safety and ownership in the neighborhood. Through these programs, community residents can set up informal communication networks like neighborhood group texts that enable community-based surveillance and mutual support rather than immediate police involvement."

Community engagement efforts are part of the community violence prevention ecosystem

Grantees and stakeholders describe the Fund as part of the ecosystem that contributed to the decline in community violence in Chicago. Grantees attributed community engagement and programming efforts as evidence of safety. One grantee described "the sound of peace" as "kids playing" outside. One grantee shared:

> "People aren't afraid of each other anymore. You know, on our block, they used to keep the curtains closed all the time. Now people are opening the windows, things like that. So it's changing. I think that helps."

Stakeholders described community programming to help communities "reclaim space." As one stakeholder explained:

> "It changes other people's perception of how they act towards the spaces. So it's just when people know that nobody cares about this block or aren't nobody checking for this house, like, it kind of creates, it gives them permission to do what they do. And then when they see people caring about it, they kind of, like, they fall back."

Stakeholders explained that these visible, community-facing activities instill a sense of accountability to the community and that accountability, in turn, prevents violence. As one stakeholder described it:

> "When people feel like they are part of a community ... they have accountability to the spaces as well, more than likely, they're not going to let garbage fill up when ... they feel accountable to the space."

Together, these findings suggest that participants viewed community engagement not as separate from violence prevention, but as one way communities build and sustain safety over time. Grantees explained that these visible, community-facing activities instill a sense of accountability to the community and that accountability, in turn, prevents violence.

The Fund provides legitimacy and credibility for grassroots and emerging organizations

For many grantees, the Fund provided their first grant, lending their organizations legitimacy in the eyes of other funders. As one stakeholder shared, the Chicago Fund "serves as an early philanthropic stamp of credibility for emerging nonprofits." A well-known barrier in the philanthropic landscape is that organizations cannot secure philanthropic funding if they have not received grant funding previously. The Fund grants are critical to helping grantees feel their work is valued, especially as a "small fish in a big pond," when organizations typically need funding to get additional funding.

Receiving a Fund award often catalyzes securing more funding. One stakeholder observed that once a grantee received a Fund grant, the grantee could approach local businesses and secure additional funding or support for community events.

> "They can say, 'You know what, we won the Chicago Fund, and this is what we're gonna do with our money, and can you help us extend that?' People love to hear that. 'Let me help you with that.' [It's] a springboard."

The Fund reinforces the positive narratives grantees hold for their communities

A theme that emerged across interviews was the importance of community pride. Stakeholders and grantees described organizations and neighborhoods not solely in terms of violence, disadvantage, or unmet need, but also through the people, relationships, histories, cultures, and possibilities that make their communities places they value. As one grantee noted:

> "Our community is our community, but, you know, it's maybe ... it's less than 1% that ... is rough, and then you have 99% that is families, workers ... finding out how to move to the future, how to grow. So that's what we focus on."

Several participants' perspectives suggest that community pride is connected to how they understand community safety. Relationships among neighbors, trusted community organizations, shared histories and traditions, and a sense of connection to place can contribute to the social infrastructure that supports community wellbeing and safety. One stakeholder shared:

> "I didn't know my community was unsafe or disinvested when I was growing up ... When I got older, I realized there was a narrative painted about my community ... When you create joy and opportunity to experience joy, it changes the way people experience their own communities."

These findings highlight an asset-based dimension of community safety that can be obscured when communities experiencing violence are described primarily through measures of violence, poverty, trauma, or other indicators of need. Participants' accounts demonstrate that structural inequity and violence can coexist with strong relationships, cultural identity, mutual care, history, joy, and belonging.

There is limited opportunity to learn from fellow grantees

Several participants expressed a strong interest in more opportunities for grantees to learn from one another, build relationships, share lessons learned, and explore collaboration across organizations. Grantees also shared an interest in regular opportunities to connect through in-person convenings. This sentiment was evident in grantees' organic exchange of contact information and resources at the conclusion of each listening session.

> "And so at any opportunity that you have to convene people like this ... be intentional about it, you know, four times a year ... I'm constantly saying, yes, we are doing a lot of things. And also, what we carry is heavy and we need a place to sit it down ... a healing environment. Give us opportunities to just talk to each other about, you know, the things that we do. And maybe we don't even want to talk about the work. Maybe we just want to talk about, 'Girl, how you doing? What's up?' ... that is a salve for all of the things."

Grantees also expressed interest in peer-learning opportunities. Grantees shared an interest in lessons-learned sessions with repeat grantees and organizations that have successfully grown over time. Many noted that stronger collaboration among grantees could reduce duplication and increase collective impact. Grantees observed that many fellow grantees share missions, strategies, and most importantly, a commitment to building community. As one grantee described:

> "I think you've got these ... little sparks that are waiting to be activated ... there's this collective power element that is sitting here with people who already are rowing in a similar direction ... a lot of us are doing [the] same stuff. And even if it's not the same stuff, the fact that we're supporting each other, no matter what would make a difference ... We're all off in our little corners of the world or the community, and we are doing what we can. All of us linked up? Can you imagine the power that is?"

The lack of funding consistency and certainty limited their impact and ability to plan long-term

Although grantees expressed overwhelmingly positive views of the Fund, they also identified opportunities for adjustments aligned with the Fund's goals. Grantees recommended that the Fund be extended beyond annual grant cycles to better reflect the realities of relationship-based community work. Grantees repeatedly emphasized that trust, social cohesion, and collective efficacy develop over years, not months. While most surveyed grantees reported consistent funding, several grantees in the listening sessions expressed uncertainty about whether they will receive funding or the full requested amounts. As one grantee expressed:

> "Once you [get] a grant from them, then you're not knowing if you're to get it next year or the year after or whatever, so it's hard to sustain your program. So if you know that you're going to do that and they're willing to commit to that, I think that would be helpful in terms of you trying to plan for that future."

Several grantees noted the lack of available funding throughout the year. A recurring theme across grantee interviews and listening sessions was the need to expand funding beyond the summer months. Many grantees described the difficulty of prioritizing organizational sustainability with a small

grant that is not guaranteed the next year. As one grantee shared, *"a single year of funding is rarely about long-term sustainability."*

Grantees were clear that neither their community work nor community violence stops at the end of summer. As one grantee recommended, *"If you really want to be effective, it has to be all the time rather than just summer months."* Another grantee recommended that the Chicago Fund *"extend funding beyond summer months to at least once-monthly programming year-round, since youth issues occur throughout the year, not just summer."*

In reality, many of these community organizations run programming year-round, regardless of the funding term. As one stakeholder described it, *"no matter what, they go year-round."* For example, another stakeholder noted that community gardens need work and support throughout the year.

> **"If you want garlic, you need to be planting that garlic at the end of November or the beginning of December. There's so many things you need to plant for the next season to come up. All your balls, everything has to keep going. And then people look to you for the wintertime hot chocolate festivals."**

This example illustrates not only the need for year-round efforts to plant seeds in the winter for harvest in the summer, but also how community leaders and community members stay engaged beyond the funding term. Similarly, many grantees stated that planning for summer programming begins long before the grant cycle even opens.

> **"I think that we try to stretch our dollars as far as possible … we would love it if there were similar funding for the fall. Because everybody doesn't get After School Matters …**

> **[After the summer programming ends], they're like, 'Well, what's next? What's next?' … they go back to school and … the energy level comes down because they're not getting the same thing."**

Several grantees also expressed a need for multi-year funding. Across listening sessions and interviews, grantees stated that they have consistently implemented their funded activities year after year and that the Fund should *"trust"* them to continue their work without an annual reapplication. When asked to reflect on challenges and feedback related to the design and implementation of the Chicago Fund, the most consistent theme was the need to add opportunities beyond the rapid-cycle summer-focused funding mechanism.

Grantees also emphasized the importance of consistent, predictable funding from year to year, noting that changes in award amounts can significantly affect small, community-based organizations' ability to maintain programming. This finding has implications for the Fund's grant review process: one consideration for the future is incorporating an organization's prior funding history into review and allocation decisions to reduce unintended disruptions to established programming.

Grantees are affected by inflation and award amounts, which limits impact

Grantees reported that rising costs due to inflation have affected their ability to provide the same programming with the same funding levels they received in years past. They recommended raising the maximum grant amount to account for inflation and increased programming costs.

Because of the increased number of applicants, grantees broadly perceived more application rejections and lower award amounts. Grantees directly attribute the decreased award amounts to a *"decrease in the quality of programming."* Several grantees also noted that because the award notification period is *"too close to summer,"* they cannot pivot their programming plans in time. As a result, grantees report having to shut down entire programming efforts when they are not awarded the full requested funding amount. Grantees shared that community members often expressed disappointment when a programming effort was no longer offered due to funding constraints. This lack of continuity in programming contributes to concerns about organizational sustainability among grantees. Grantees further shared that receiving a rejection from the Fund has undermined their confidence, especially for first-time applicants, for whom this is their entry point into philanthropy.

Beyond inflation's direct impact on organizational programming, grantees also attribute rising inflation to shifts in community safety:

> **"But now with carjackings and, you know, robberies or whatever it might be because there's just such a desperation ... and the cost of living is steady on the rise and inflation is on the rise. I think a lot of teens and young adults are feeling desperate to do whatever."**

Participants identified a need for additional organizational capacity-building support, particularly in financial management, budgeting, cash flow, and other administrative functions that strengthen long-term sustainability. While not all organizations seek to grow in scale, they would also benefit from capacity-building efforts. Lateral capacity-building and peer-to-peer collaboration efforts also benefit organizations.

Stakeholders are aware of this challenge. As one stakeholder stated:

> **"Honestly, during a time when inflation is high ... it's hard to say no to a $2,500 project ... Everyone has an increased budget. They're either growing, which is a good thing ... They have the capacity or need the capacity ... And so they want to grow ... Every single applicant has asked for more money. And they should ... People are already dealing with scarcity and dealing with less funds, and so it's hard to ask people also to do more with less."**

Some application reviewers also requested access to prior funding amounts to ensure they do not contribute to feelings of scarcity among applicants. As one stakeholder put it:

> **"Because, as a funder, I always try to not be a destabilizing force ... So, if this project, org, party, whatever, was funded last year at $7,500, and then I recommend $3,500 ... it's not only a little destabilizing, it's also sending kind of a negative message."**

Section 6. **Summary**

This evaluation was undertaken to better understand what a decade of sustained investment through the Chicago Fund has contributed to grassroots organizations, neighborhood initiatives, perceptions of safety and wellbeing, and Chicago's broader violence prevention ecosystem. The findings suggest that the Fund's contribution extends beyond the financial resources it provides. Across interviews, listening sessions, and survey responses, stakeholders consistently emphasized not only what the Fund supported and the impact on organizations and communities, but also how the support was delivered. Accessible application processes, responsive communication, technical assistance, neighborhood partnerships, and sustained engagement were repeatedly identified as important aspects of the funding model. Rather than describing these as administrative features, participants frequently discussed them alongside the financial support itself, suggesting that the grantmaking approach shaped how organizations experienced the Fund. Participants described these practices as contributing to organizational confidence, philanthropic legitimacy, relationships with Fund staff, and, for some organizations, increased confidence in pursuing additional funding opportunities. These findings suggest that the experience of philanthropy may influence organizations in ways that extend beyond the financial resources provided.

The evaluation also indicates that the Fund has evolved considerably over its first decade. What began as a rapid-cycle microgrant program gradually expanded to include technical assistance, leadership development, neighborhood Hub organizations, and other forms of organizational support. Rather than reflecting a fixed program design, this evolution was shaped by learning and ongoing adaptation to grantee experiences and changing community needs. Stakeholders described technical assistance, neighborhood partnerships, peer learning, and ongoing engagement as integral components of the Fund rather than activities separate from grantmaking. At the same time, they identified opportunities to further strengthen the model through more consistent communication, expanded peer learning opportunities, additional reductions in administrative burden, and increased support for long-term organizational sustainability. These findings suggest that accessibility is not a fixed characteristic of a grant program, but an ongoing process that requires continued refinement as organizations, communities, and funding environments evolve.

Regarding community safety, the findings are best interpreted as evidence of contribution rather than attribution. The design of this evaluation, together with the complexity of community violence and the range of public, philanthropic, and community investments occurring across Chicago during the study period, does not permit conclusions about the Fund's independent influence on neighborhood-level violence. Rather, the findings suggest that the Chicago Fund invested in organizations whose work focused

on activating public spaces, strengthening neighborhood relationships, engaging residents, supporting local leadership, and building organizational capacity. Throughout the evaluation, stakeholders consistently described these activities as contributing to the conditions that support safer communities while recognizing that they represent one component of a broader violence prevention ecosystem. Within this context, the Chicago Fund is best understood as one contributor to that ecosystem.

The evaluation also highlights both the opportunities and the limits of philanthropic investment. Participants consistently emphasized that relatively small grants cannot, on their own, address the structural conditions that shape community violence. At the same time, they described the Fund as providing resources, legitimacy, and organizational support that helped grassroots organizations sustain their work, strengthen neighborhood relationships, and respond to locally identified priorities. Importantly, participants rarely defined success in terms of organizational growth alone. For many, success meant having sufficient resources to continue serving their communities in ways that reflected local priorities, whether that meant expanding programming or maintaining a trusted neighborhood presence. These perspectives suggest that the value of sustained philanthropic investment may lie not only in supporting organizational growth, but also in helping community organizations remain stable, responsive, and rooted in the neighborhoods they serve. Stakeholders consistently viewed the Fund as one source of support within a broader network of community organizations, violence intervention practitioners, public agencies, philanthropic partners, and neighborhood leaders working toward shared goals.

Beyond the Chicago Fund itself, this evaluation raises broader considerations for philanthropy. Throughout the study, stakeholders consistently discussed not only access to funding but also access to philanthropy. For many organizations, the application process, technical assistance, and ongoing relationships with Fund staff represented their first sustained interaction with philanthropy. The findings also suggest that reducing barriers to funding is an iterative process rather than a completed achievement. Although the Fund intentionally lowered many traditional barriers associated with grantmaking, first-time applicants continued to describe a learning curve, uneven access to information, and uncertainty surrounding funding decisions. These findings underscore the importance of examining how organizations with different levels of organizational capacity and prior experience with philanthropy experience grantmaking processes.

Several questions remain, and some fall beyond the scope of this evaluation. Most notably, the findings underscore the value of future impact evaluations and the need to build the data infrastructure to support them. As philanthropic initiatives mature, understanding their long-term contributions requires more than documenting grantmaking activities. It requires funders to intentionally collect and maintain the information needed to assess impact over time, including funding histories, organizational characteristics, implementation activities, and neighborhood-level investments. Without this foundation, even well-designed evaluations have limited ability to determine what changed, why it changed, and the contribution long-term philanthropic investments may have made.

Overall, this evaluation indicates that the Fund has evolved beyond a rapid-cycle microgrant program into a broader approach to supporting grassroots organizations. Over the past decade, the Fund has continued to refine both what it funds and how it delivers support in response to grantee feedback and changing community needs. Across stakeholder groups, the Fund was experienced not only as a source of financial support, but also as an accessible and increasingly relationship-centered approach to philanthropy. Although opportunities for continued refinement remain, this evaluation provides an empirical foundation to inform the Fund's next phase while contributing to broader discussions about how philanthropy can support community-based organizations and how sustained investment in those organizations can be better understood over time. Chicago's history demonstrates that the mechanisms through which money reaches communities can be just as consequential as the amount of money available. Who makes funding decisions, which organizations can successfully access resources, what administrative infrastructure is required, how organizations are supported to manage growth, what outcomes are used as evidence of success, and whether funding builds durable community institutions all shape the ultimate impact of investments.

Section 7. **Recommendations for Future Directions**

PSPC's experience with the Fund over the past ten years provides important lessons for future public and private community safety investments. The Fund demonstrates that the significance and impact of funding for community organizations and community safety should be assessed not solely by the number of grants distributed, but also by the infrastructure, relationships, and organizational capacity supported by grantmaking practices. Public resources have increased in Chicago, particularly for community violence intervention approaches that focus on those at highest risk for violence. PSPC has an opportunity to clarify the distinctive role philanthropy can play alongside government investment: supporting innovation and organizational development, assuming risks that public funding mechanisms often cannot, investing in smaller and emerging organizations, strengthening intermediary infrastructure, and ensuring that community voice remains central to decisions about how safety resources are allocated.

At the same time, PSPC can leverage the Fund over the next ten years to support violence prevention efforts that contribute to a comprehensive community safety ecosystem. The evaluation points to the following concrete recommendations to help the next ten years of grantmaking have greater impact.

- Continue exploring ways to **reduce administrative burden** for grantees based on grantee feedback on potential pain points in the application process.
- **Partner with a research organization** to plan and implement an outcome or impact evaluation to assess the influence of the grant activities and implement practices that support documentation of the grantees/neighborhoods that receive investments, their funding amounts, and activities.
- Convene grantees to create and facilitate **dedicated peer learning spaces** for collective reflection that supports community leaders learning from one another, processing challenges, developing professionally, and building shared strategies and resources.
- Provide **multi-year funding opportunities or maintain consistent year-to-year funding** amounts to support longer-term planning.
- Invest in **storytelling and narrative change strategies** to amplify grantees' implementation activities and success stories to a broader audience.
- **Equitably share information** about funding opportunities, capacity-building opportunities, and feedback on funding decisions.
- Document the **trust-based organizational approaches and practices** currently implemented by Fund staff to support institutionalization and longer-term sustainability beyond any one staff person.

- Create opportunities for **grantees to meet with alderpersons and other local officials** to discuss issues and to understand required government processes and approvals to further their activities and community impact.
- Develop **professional development opportunities for grantees** on topics such as grant writing, budgeting, fundraising, and other areas of interest.
- **Incorporate community pride, belonging, and asset-based approaches** into the funding philosophy, vetting framework, and communications to consider how investments strengthen what residents already value about their communities.

Most critically, the Chicago Fund should continue to invest in learning and evaluation that have positioned developers to understand and assess the Fund's influence and impact and inform future investment strategy and direction.

Appendices

Appendix A.
Full Methodology

This evaluation was designed as a community-engaged mixed methods study examining the first ten years of grantmaking by the Chicago Fund. The purpose of the evaluation was to understand how the Fund's investments have been experienced by grantee organizations, community stakeholders, funders, and partners, and how those investments have influenced organizational capacity, community relationships, neighborhood conditions, and broader efforts to strengthen safety and wellbeing across Chicago neighborhoods.

Previous evaluations of the Chicago Fund documented grantmaking activities, program implementation, participation, and grantee-reported outcomes. This evaluation was designed to complement those efforts by examining how stakeholders understand the Fund's role, influence, and contributions across its first decade of work. Particular attention was given to dimensions of the Fund that are often difficult to capture through traditional performance metrics, including relationship-building, social cohesion, grassroots leadership development, organizational growth, and community perceptions of safety and wellbeing.

The evaluation employed four complementary methods: document review, community listening sessions, semi-structured stakeholder interviews, and a survey of current and former grantees. Using multiple methods allowed the research team to examine the Fund from different vantage points and assess the extent to which findings were consistent across stakeholder groups and sources of evidence.

Document Review

The evaluation began with a review of existing materials related to the Chicago Fund's history, structure, and prior assessment efforts. Particular attention was given to previous evaluations conducted on behalf of the Fund to understand how findings, recommendations, and areas of inquiry had evolved over time. This review informed the development of listening session guides, interview protocols, and survey instruments while helping ensure that the evaluation generated new insights rather than duplicating prior lines of inquiry.

Additional materials reviewed included grant-related forms and reporting documents, publicly available grant announcements, historical records provided by Fund leadership, and archival materials documenting prior grant recipients. These materials were used to better understand the evolution of the Fund's grantmaking practices, identify prospective interview participants, and assess the geographic and organizational diversity of organizations supported over the past decade.

Community Listening Sessions

Six in-person listening sessions were conducted in February 2026 across Chicago's South and West Sides. Sessions were held in community-based spaces selected for accessibility, familiarity, and proximity to participating organizations (see Table below). Participants were offered multiple listening session options across locations and times and were invited to attend the session that was most convenient for them. Each session lasted approximately 90 minutes and was facilitated using a semi-structured discussion guide designed to elicit participant experiences while allowing flexibility for conversations to develop organically.

LISTENING SESSION LOCATIONS AND PARTICIPANT TOTALS

Location	Listening Session	Participant Total
BeeLove Cafe in North Lawndale	1	12
	2	26
Greater Auburn Gresham Development Corporation in Auburn Gresham	3	13
	4	11
Open Center for the Arts in Little Village	5	8
The Quarry in South Shore	6	17

A total of 87 participants took part in the listening sessions, representing a diverse cross-section of community-based organizations, grassroots initiatives, block clubs, neighborhood leaders, community gardeners, youth-serving organizations, and nonprofit service providers. Participants reflected a broad range of organizational structures and capacities, including informal volunteer-led efforts, emerging organizations, and more established nonprofit entities. In recognition of their time and expertise, participants received a $10 voucher to a local restaurant or cafe.

Listening sessions explored four primary areas aligned with the evaluation's research questions: experiences engaging with the Chicago Fund, the influence of funding on organizational capacity and programming, perceptions of community safety and wellbeing, and the Fund's role within Chicago's broader violence prevention and community development ecosystem.

Facilitators adapted session structures to accommodate group size and participation dynamics. In larger sessions, breakout discussions were used to ensure opportunities for broad participation, while smaller sessions allowed for deeper conversational engagement. Across all sessions, participants actively contributed to discussions, often building on one another's observations and reflections.

All listening sessions were audio recorded with participant consent, professionally transcribed using Transcription Hub, and imported into Dedoose, a qualitative analysis software. Following data collection, facilitators prepared field memos documenting contextual observations, group dynamics, emerging themes, and notable reflections that informed subsequent analysis.

Semi-Structured Stakeholder Interviews

To deepen understanding of the Fund's development, implementation, and long-term influence, the research team conducted 28 semi-structured interviews between mid-March and late April 2026. Interviews were conducted virtually via Zoom and were scheduled for approximately 60 minutes. Most interviews utilized the full allotted time. Interview participants received a $50 gift card and were given the option of receiving either a Visa or Amazon gift card based on their preference.

Interview participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure representation across the Chicago Fund ecosystem. Participants included current and former funders, Kitchen Cabinet members, community leaders, long-term grantees, former grantees, capacity-building partners, fiscal sponsors, former evaluators, and individuals who played significant roles in the Fund's development over time. Participant identification was informed by document review, historical grant records, recommendations from Fund leadership, and snowball sampling conducted throughout the interview process.

Interview questions explored participants' experiences with the Fund, perceptions of its strengths and challenges, observations of organizational and community change, the Fund's role within Chicago's violence prevention ecosystem, and recommendations for the next phase of grantmaking. While interview guides were tailored slightly based on participants' relationship to the Fund, all interviews examined common themes related to organizational capacity, community conditions, safety, wellbeing, and the Fund's evolution over time.

Interviews were recorded with participant consent and transcribed using Zoom transcription services. Interview transcripts were subsequently imported into Dedoose for analysis. At the conclusion of data collection, interview facilitators also prepared analytic memos documenting recurring themes, areas of convergence, and notable observations across interviews.

Grantee Survey

To complement qualitative findings and broaden participation in the evaluation, the research team administered an online survey via SurveyMonkey to current and former Chicago Fund grantees. The survey assessed organizational experiences with the Fund, grant utilization, organizational capacity, sustainability, perceptions of community change, and recommendations for future grantmaking. It included closed-ended and open-ended questions to capture quantitative trends and qualitative reflections, and took approximately 12 minutes to complete. The survey launched on May 7, 2026, and closed on June 8, 2026.

The invitation list was compiled from the Fund's awarded-grantee records for 2017–2024, 2025, and 2026. Invitations were sent to 353 unique email addresses. **These addresses were matched to an estimated 340 organizations** after reviewing duplicate entries and organization-name variations. Organizations with multiple contact addresses were counted once. Organizations sharing an address were counted separately unless the records established that they were the same organization.

The survey export contained 221 submissions. Thirty-six contained no answers after the consent screen and were excluded. The remaining 185 submissions included an organization name and at least one additional answer and were retained for descriptive analysis. Appendix B reports the number of answers available for each question. Sample sizes vary because partial responses were included. Therefore it must be noted that tables in Appendix B count submissions and may include multiple submissions from the same organization.

The response rate was calculated separately and counted each invited organization once. Responses were matched by organization, so the person completing the survey could be another staff member if not the original email recipient. Because the export did not include a completion-status field, a submission was counted as complete for this calculation if it answered all closed-ended questions. Answers to every open-ended question were not required. Among organizations matched to the invitation list, 106 provided at least one submission meeting this criterion.

Delivery failure records identified 18 organizations with recorded bounces at every listed invitation address and no matched survey response. Removing these organizations reduced the denominator from 340 to 322. **The estimated delivery-adjusted organization-level response rate was 32.9% (106 of 322).** Before adjustment, the rate was 31.2% (106 of 340). Both estimates depend on the available organization and delivery records.

An additional 47 submissions represented 41 grantee organizations that could not be linked to the initial invitation list through the available contact records. The data do not show how these respondents received the survey link or whether it was forwarded to them. Forty-six of these submissions reported that the organization had received Chicago Fund funding, and one reported being unsure. All 41 organizations, however, were also identified in the Fund's awarded-grantee records. Their responses were included in the descriptive results in Appendix B but excluded from the response-rate calculation because their invitation status could not be confirmed. Six further submissions contained five organization names that could not be matched with confidence. These responses were also retained in Appendix B and excluded from the rate.

Given that participation was voluntary, some grantee perspectives may be overrepresented while others are absent. Respondents may differ from nonrespondents in their experiences with the Fund, organizational capacity, or interest in providing feedback. The available data do not establish whether these differences affected the findings or in what direction. Survey percentages describe the responses received and should not be interpreted as estimates for all Chicago Fund grantees. Findings supported by interviews, listening sessions, or grant records strengthen the evaluation's conclusions, although agreement across sources does not establish how widespread those experiences are. Findings reported only in the survey remain relevant but should be interpreted within these limitations.

Data Analysis

Qualitative and quantitative data were analyzed concurrently and integrated throughout the evaluation process.

Qualitative analysis was conducted using Dedoose 2.0. Listening session transcripts, interview transcripts, field memos, open-ended survey responses, and document review materials were reviewed as part of an iterative thematic analysis process. A preliminary codebook was developed using the evaluation's research questions, listening session protocols, and interview guides as a foundation. Researchers then reviewed an initial set of transcripts to identify additional concepts emerging from participant narratives. Through this process, the codebook evolved to include both deductive codes reflecting the study's core research questions and inductive codes grounded in participant experiences and observations. The final codebook can be found in Appendix D.

Major coding domains included organizational capacity, sustainability, community wellbeing, perceptions of safety, violence prevention, grantee experiences, Fund processes, partnership development, grassroots leadership, and opportunities for future growth. The codebook was refined throughout the analytic process as researchers reviewed transcripts and discussed emerging themes.

Analysis was conducted collaboratively across the research team. In addition to transcript coding, the team drew upon field memos that documented contextual observations, participant interactions, group dynamics, and emerging insights from both listening sessions and interviews. These materials provided additional context for understanding how participants discussed their experiences and how themes emerged across settings and stakeholder groups.

Throughout the analysis process, members of the research team met regularly to review coded data, discuss emerging findings, refine thematic interpretations, and compare observations across data sources. Analytic memos were developed to document key insights, areas of agreement and disagreement, and relationships across themes.

Survey data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to summarize participant responses and identify patterns across grantee experiences. Open-ended survey responses were incorporated into the broader qualitative analysis and used to contextualize quantitative findings.

Findings presented in this report were not derived from a single source of data. Rather, themes were considered particularly salient when they appeared consistently across multiple stakeholder groups, data collection methods, or sources of evidence. This triangulation process strengthened confidence in the findings and helped ensure that conclusions reflected broader patterns rather than isolated perspectives.

Limitations

This evaluation was designed to understand stakeholder experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of change rather than establish causal relationships between Chicago Fund investments and community-level outcomes. Findings therefore reflect how participants understand and describe the Fund's influence over time rather than direct measures of impact.

Participation in interviews, listening sessions, and the survey was voluntary, meaning that some perspectives may be underrepresented. Organizations and individuals with stronger relationships to the Fund or greater levels of ongoing engagement may have been more likely to participate than those with more limited involvement. Similarly, because the evaluation examined a ten-year period, some former grantees and stakeholders were more difficult to identify or contact due to organizational transitions, staff turnover, changes in leadership, or organizations no longer being active.

The retrospective nature of the evaluation also required participants to reflect on experiences spanning multiple years, which may influence recall. In addition, many of the outcomes explored in this study, including organizational growth, community relationships, social cohesion, and perceptions of safety and wellbeing, are shaped by numerous factors beyond the Chicago Fund's investments. As a result, participants were often describing the Fund's contribution to broader changes rather than attributing those changes solely to Fund support.

To strengthen confidence in the findings, the evaluation incorporated multiple forms of data collection and triangulated evidence across stakeholder groups, methods, and data sources. Consistent themes that emerged across interviews, listening sessions, survey responses, field memos, and document review materials were given greater weight in the interpretation of findings.

Appendix B.
Survey Results

1. **Which of the following best describes your organization?** (percents) [N=185]

Community-based organization	41.08
Nonprofit service provider	26.49
Youth-serving group	18.38
Faith-based organization	6.49
Other	5.41
Advocacy or organizing group	2.16

2. **How many years has your organization received funding from the Chicago Fund?** (percents) [N=185]

1 year	9.73
2-3 years	39.46
4-6 years	30.81
7-10 years	18.38
Unsure	1.62

3. **Overall, how would you rate your organization's relationship with the Chicago Fund staff?** (percents) [N=180]

Very positive	83.33
Somewhat positive	8.89
Neutral	7.22
Somewhat negative	0.56
Very negative	0.00

4. **How clear are the Chicago Fund's goals and priorities?** (percents) [N=180]

Very clear	88.33
Somewhat clear	8.33
Neutral	2.78
Somewhat clear	0.56
Very unclear	0.00

5. How would you rate your experience with the following aspects of the Chicago Fund? (percents) [N=180]

	Very Positive	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Very Negative
Application process	71.11	22.78	5.56	0.56	0.00
Grant selection process	56.67	32.22	8.89	1.11	1.11
Communication with staff	69.44	18.89	11.11	0.56	0.00
Reporting requirements	63.33	31.11	4.44	1.11	0.00
Timeliness of payments	70.56	25.56	3.33	0.56	0.00
Flexibility to adapt activities	63.33	27.22	8.89	0.56	0.00
Responsiveness to feedback	65.00	21.11	13.33	0.56	0.00
Consistency of funding	54.44	23.33	16.11	4.44	1.67

6. What types of activities has your organization primarily carried out with Chicago Fund support? Select all that apply. (percents) [N=175]

Community events/peace-building activities	77.71
Youth development/mentoring	65.71
Violence prevention programming	59.43
Arts and culture activities/programming	45.71
Outreach and engagement	42.29
Leadership development/capacity building	25.71
Victim/survivor support services	6.29
Data collection/evaluation	5.14
Other	4.57

7. To what extent has funding from the Chicago Fund supported each of the following within your organization? (percents) [N=175]

	Very Positive	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Very Negative	Not Applicable
Hiring or retaining staff	17.71	17.71	19.43	9.71	9.71	25.71
Program development or expansion	45.71	29.71	14.29	4.00	0.57	5.71
Organizational infrastructure *(examples: technology or space)*	15.43	15.43	19.43	14.29	12.57	22.86
Partnership development or coalition work	29.71	21.71	26.86	4.57	5.14	12.00
Training and leadership development for staff	13.71	14.29	18.86	12.57	16.57	24.00
Training and leadership development for community members	16.00	19.43	21.14	7.43	15.43	20.57
Planning beyond a single year	21.14	14.29	21.14	12.57	17.14	13.71

8. As a result of funding from the Chicago Fund, to what extent do you agree with the following statements? (percents) [N=169]

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither disagree or agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Our organization has been better able to plan and deliver community safety activities.	60.36	31.36	5.92	1.78	0.59
Our organization has more capacity to respond to community needs.	47.34	36.09	12.43	4.14	0.00
Our organization has access to stable resources during challenging periods.	40.83	33.14	17.16	7.10	1.78
Our organization has been able to build and maintain key partnerships.	50.30	37.28	9.47	2.96	0.00
Our organization has been able to support the training of leaders within our organization.	24.85	31.95	32.54	7.69	2.96
Our organization has been able to support the development of leaders within our organization.	26.63	37.87	27.81	5.92	1.78

9. Has the Chicago Fund influenced your organization's long-term sustainability? (percents) [N=169]

Yes	76.33
No	23.67

10. Thinking about the neighborhood(s) where your Chicago Fund work takes place, how has each of the following changed over the past 10 years? (percents) [N=161]

	Much better	Somewhat better	About the same	Somewhat worse	Much worse	Not sure
Residents' perception of safety	29.81	47.83	16.15	3.11	0.00	3.11
Trust between residents	38.51	42.24	14.29	1.24	0.00	3.73
Youth engagement in community-based activities	55.28	34.78	8.70	0.62	0.00	0.62
Youth access to supportive services	42.24	40.99	9.94	1.24	0.00	5.59
Opportunities for youth	52.80	34.78	8.70	1.86	0.00	1.86

11. To what extent do you think Chicago Fund activities have contributed to changes in these areas? (percents)

	A great deal	A lot	A moderate amount	A little	Not at all
Perceived safety (N=159)	37.74	34.59	20.13	5.03	2.52
Social cohesion or connectedness (N=159)	36.48	37.11	18.87	5.66	1.89
Community wellbeing (N=160)	35.63	43.75	15.63	3.75	1.25
Resident engagement in positive activities (N=161)	47.20	33.54	13.04	4.97	1.24

12. How accessible do you feel the Chicago Fund's grants are to smaller or emerging organizations? (percents) [N=159]

Very accessible	71.70
Somewhat accessible	21.38
Neutral	5.03
Somewhat inaccessible	0.63
Very inaccessible	1.26

13. To what extent do you agree with the following statements? (percents) [N=156]

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither disagree or agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree*
The Chicago Fund's grant processes are transparent.	57.69	30.77	9.62	1.28	0.64
The Chicago Fund's grant processes are fair.	52.56	29.49	15.38	2.56	0.00
The staff at the Chicago Fund listen to grantee feedback.	53.85	32.69	13.46	0.00	0.00
The staff at the Chicago Fund are responsive to community needs.	57.69	30.77	8.97	2.56	0.00
The staff at the Chicago Fund respects community expertise.	62.18	24.36	12.82	0.64	0.00
Reporting requirements are reasonable.	68.59	25.64	5.13	0.64	0.00

*Note: This response option was mislabeled as "strongly agree" in the survey instrument. However, since the sequence of answer options remained unchanged from other similar questions, the data will still be interpreted with the intended scale ("strongly agree" to "strongly disagree").

14. What is your role in the organization? (percents) [N=156]

Executive Director/CEO	75.00
Other	12.82
Program Director/Senior Leadership	8.33
Program Manager	1.92
Board Member	1.28
Staff Member	0.64

15. How many years have you been involved with Chicago Fund–supported work? [N=155]

Less than 1 year	3.23
1-3 years	42.58
4-6 years	28.39
7 or more years	25.81

16. Provide a specific example of how support from the Chicago Fund has affected your community. Open-ended. (N=161)

Finding	Additional categories (if applicable)
Grantees shared that the Fund has provided access to programming for community members.	• Arts • Music • Sports • Competitions • College readiness • Community meals • Community gardens • Block parties • Wellness events (opportunities to talk about grief and emotional wellness)
Grantees shared that the funded programming has helped with a sense of increased safety and trust.	
Grantees shared that the funded programming has helped with a sense of stability in the community.	
Grantees shared that the Fund has allowed for increased food and resource access.	• School supplies
Grantees shared that the Fund has allowed community members the opportunity to know one another and increase the sense of connectedness.	• Intergenerational gatherings *(including seniors)* • Mentorship • Meet local community leaders
Grantees shared that the Fund has supported economic and workforce development.	• Paid opportunities for youth
Grantees shared that the Fund has allowed them to build long-term relationships with other organizations.	

17. What types of support from the Chicago Fund have been most valuable for your organization? Open-ended. (N=157)

Categories	Subcategories (if applicable)
Grantees shared that the project manager's support and encouragement has been valuable.	• Quick response to emails and phone calls • Sharing other funding opportunities
Grantees shared that the technical assistance support has been valuable.	• Communication overall • Pre-application calls • Office hours • Zoom Pro account
Grantees shared that the funding has been valuable because it allows:	• Opportunity to do community work • Flexibility • Consistency
Grantees shared that the Fund listens to grantee feedback.	• Exit survey
Grantees shared that networking opportunities have been valuable.	• Connect with one another • Storytelling and Media Relations Experience • Safe & Peaceful Communities Capacity Building Workshops
Grantees shared that the fiscal sponsorship is valuable.	
Grantees shared that the Equitable Access & Capacity Initiative is valuable.	

18. What changes or improvements would you recommend for the Chicago Fund's next phase of grantmaking (please consider grant size, duration, application process, reporting, and types of activities funded)? Open-ended. (N=156)

Categories
Grantees recommended: • Matching the grant award to the funding amount requested • Increasing the grant maximum and increasing the maximum every year to keep in line with inflation • That funding is extended during the Fall and/or Winter • Supporting organizations expand • That activities be allowed to go through December • Multi-year funding opportunities • That the dissemination of award checks be more flexible • In-person opportunities to connect with funders • Mentorship opportunities (e.g., first time grantee/newer organization with multi-year grantee/more established organization) • Increased opportunities for grantees to learn from one another and connect with each other • Networking mixer with previous awardees • Simplified applications, additional technical assistance, and having reporting templates • Reporting requirements that are simply an interview or video upload rather than written requirements • Having an earlier award timing (i.e., organization-wide decisions need to be made before award notification date) • Providing technical assistance, grant workshops, or one-on-one support during the application process • Sending more communication about the grant deadline • Providing feedback or a scored rubric when the determination has been made

19. Are there communities, organizations, or types of work that you think the Chicago Fund should prioritize in the future? Open-ended. (N=156)

Categories	Subcategories (if applicable)
Prioritize funding organizations that work with:	• Youth-centered work • Rapid response groups • Healing-centered work • Juneteenth programming • Urban farming • Violence prevention • Returned residents that were incarcerated • Seniors or caregivers • Collaborative projects
Continue to prioritize funding grassroots organizations.	
Provide additional funding.	• Year-round support • Funding during the Winter
Support organizations that need assistance with applying to the Fund.	
Acquire physical spaces where grantees can host programming.	
Continue to provide opportunities for grantees to learn from one another.	• Connect grantees

20. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience with the Chicago Fund? Open-ended. (N=112)

Categories	Example Quotes
Grantees took this opportunity to express gratitude for the Chicago Fund.	• "Knowing that there's a relationship/partnership you're involved in that not only cares but are approachable and dependable means the world. Thank you so much." • "We have been able to bring so much to our community, that would not be possible with out this funding. We have seen so much improvement and togetherness in our community." • "What can we (organizations) do to assist the Chicago Fund in keeping this great program going?" • "I finally got to meet Jai who has been so instrumental in helping us feel connected and accepted by an organization that for us for many years didn't have a face." • "I always enjoy the check pick-up day!" • "You get to hear so many great ideas from fellow Grant Recipients that you can implement in your future projects." • "We also want to recognize and thank Jai Jones for her leadership and support year after year. Her responsiveness, consistency, and genuine care for the organizations doing this work have made a meaningful difference. It is clear she deeply values community-led efforts, and we truly appreciate the role she plays in helping make these investments possible across the city." • "The Chicago Fund saved the lives of at least 13 kids I know were going down the wrong path." • "I would just like to thank you to everyone at the Chicago Fund because without you it would not be no us."
Grantees shared that funding rejections have had various impacts.	• "Some of the youth involved in the recent teen takeovers in the downtown Chicago and Hyde Park areas were young people who had previously participated in our program but drifted away due to a lack of consistent engagement opportunities."

Appendix C.
Geographic Distribution of Funded Organizations by Community Area, 2025–2026

Number of times each community area was identified as a primary location for Chicago Fund-funded programming.

	2025	2026	Combined
Auburn Gresham	19	21	40
Austin	65	82	147
Burnside	6	6	12
Chatham	15	19	34
Chicago Lawn	4	6	10
East Garfield Park	14	40	54
Englewood	38	46	84
Fuller Park	3	2	5
Gage Park	4	5	9
Greater Grand Crossing	27	19	46
Humboldt Park	27	19	46
Lower West Side (Pilsen)	8	9	17
New City (Back of the Yards)	10	10	20
North Lawndale	46	60	106
Riverdale	5	7	12
Roseland	23	21	44
South Chicago	17	13	30
South Lawndale (Little Village)	12	15	27
South Shore	21	28	49
Washington Park	12	21	33
West Englewood	20	18	38
West Garfield Park	26	43	69
West Pullman	10	14	24
Woodlawn	23	24	47

Note: Counts represent the frequency with which each community area was identified by grantees as a primary location for Chicago Fund-funded programming. Grantees could identify up to three community areas per year. The combined 2025–2026 column represents the sum of the annual counts.

Appendix D. **Codebook**

Root Code	Capacity	Capacity	Capacity
Sub Codes		*Funding/resource constraints*	*Scaling*
Definition	References to an organization's ability to effectively carry out its work, including staffing, infrastructure, systems, and available resources. This includes both existing capacity and efforts to build or strengthen that capacity	Limitations in financial or material resources that restrict an organization's ability to operate, maintain, or expand its work	Efforts, opportunities, or challenges related to expanding the size, reach, or scope of a program or organization
When to Use	• When participants describe limitations in staffing, time, or organizational infrastructure • When funding or support is discussed as a way to expand or stabilize operations • When there is an explicit need for additional resources (staff, stipends, systems, space, etc.) • When capacity building efforts are named (training, technical assistance, organizational development)	• When participants describe insufficient funding, unstable funding, or gaps in resources • When lack of funding is directly tied to staffing, programming, or service delivery limits • When material needs are named (space, supplies, stipends, equipment) • When organizations describe tradeoffs due to limited resources	• When participants discuss growing to serve more people, neighborhoods, or regions • When expansion is tied to increased staffing, funding, or infrastructure needs • When barriers to scaling are identified • When replication or adaptation of a model in new settings is discussed
When NOT to Use	• General descriptions of program success or impact without reference to underlying capacity • Mentions of funding that do not connect to organizational ability or sustainability • Broader system-level challenges (e.g., policy barriers) that are not about internal organizational capacity • One-off logistical issues that don't reflect sustained capacity constraints	• Mentions of funding that are neutral or positive without indicating constraint • Discussions of grant processes or application experiences (code under grantee experience instead) • High-level funding landscape commentary that is not tied to a specific organization's capacity	• General program success without reference to growth or expansion • Early-stage capacity building that is not tied to expansion • Sustainability concerns that focus on maintaining current operations rather than growing
Example Quotes	"Another thing that is needed is that organizations need help with people coming in. People are not volunteering to help them so they need monies that will fund stipends."	"I think just meeting the demands. The youth come two days out of the week when they want to come every day, and we can't afford to have them, you know, be there every day."	"Organizations are doing so much more than what they originally started off with. They might have started off with a block club."

Root Code	Capacity	Capacity	CF background
Sub Codes	*Sustainability*	*Successful collaboration*	
Definition	The ability of an organization or program to maintain its work over time, including stability of funding, staffing, and infrastructure	Examples of effective partnerships or coordinated efforts that strengthen an organization's ability to do its work	Descriptive information about the origins, design, structure, and early development of the Chicago Fund. This includes how and why the Fund was created, its intended purpose, and key elements of its initial approach
When to Use	• When participants discuss long-term viability or continuity of programs • When concerns about funding cycles, burnout, or turnover threaten ongoing work • When stability, consistency, or institutionalization of efforts is emphasized • When participants describe strategies to sustain work beyond initial funding	• When participants describe partnerships that improve reach, coordination, or service delivery • When collaboration leads to increased capacity, shared resources, or stronger outcomes • When trust, alignment, or mutual support between organizations is highlighted • When cross-sector or cross-organization efforts are described as working well	• When participants describe how the Chicago Fund was established or came into being • When the Fund's original goals, vision, or theory of change are discussed • When structural or design elements are explained (e.g., funding model, decision-making approach, target communities) • When historical context is provided to explain the Fund's development over time
When NOT to Use	• Short-term capacity challenges that do not relate to long-term continuity • One-time funding needs without reference to ongoing viability • Expansion or growth conversations (code under Scaling instead)	• General mentions of collaboration without indication of effectiveness • Challenges or tensions in partnerships (code under grantee experiences/ challenges or growth opportunities for CF) • Broad ecosystem descriptions without a clear link to organizational capacity	• Personal experiences interacting with the Fund (code under Internal Experience with CF) • Evaluations, opinions, or judgments about how the Fund is performing • Descriptions of outcomes or impacts of the Fund's work • Current processes (e.g., application, reporting) unless explicitly tied to original design
Example Quotes	"I got everything planned out for the year. But still, you know, it's like, okay, I know what I'm not going to do this year. I'm not going to burn myself up."	"So, like, all these different people came to do things … So everybody was a part of this. So it wasn't just adults. It was youth. It was everyone."	"In the first year, we funded 6 Hub organizations for 2 years at $25,000 each and this was very much so a pilot program."

Root Code	**CF background**	**CF background**	**CF goals/successes**
Sub Codes	*Process*	*Challenges/feedback received*	
Definition	Descriptions of how the Chicago Fund was designed to operate, including its structures, procedures, and approaches to grantmaking and decision-making	Reflections on challenges, critiques, or feedback related to the design or implementation of the Chicago Fund, particularly as they inform its development over time	Statements describing the intended objectives of the Chicago Fund and/or examples of how the Fund has achieved meaningful outcomes, supported organizations, or contributed to positive change
When to Use	• When participants describe how the Fund works by design (e.g., application process, selection approach, funding structure) • When procedural elements are explained in a descriptive, factual way • When the mechanics of how decisions are made or funds are distributed are outlined • When participants reference intended processes tied to the Fund's original model	• When participants describe difficulties, gaps, or frustrations with the Fund • When feedback is shared about how the Fund could improve • When tensions or tradeoffs in the Fund's design or execution are discussed • When participants reflect on lessons learned or areas for growth	• When participants describe the Fund's goals, vision, or intended impact • When success stories or concrete examples of positive outcomes are shared • When participants reflect on what the Fund has done well • When progress toward goals is described (even if partial or evolving) • When benefits to organizations, communities, or the broader ecosystem are highlighted
When NOT to Use	• Personal experiences navigating the process (code under Internal Experience with CF) • Feedback, critiques, or challenges related to the process (code under Challenges/Feedback Received) • Outcomes or impacts of the process • One-off logistical issues that are not reflective of the broader process	• Neutral or purely descriptive explanations of the Fund's structure (code under Process) • General complaints unrelated to the Fund itself • Broader systemic challenges not tied to the Fund's design or implementation • Personal experiences unless they clearly illustrate a broader pattern or critique	• General descriptions of the Fund without reference to goals or outcomes (code under CF Background) • Personal experiences interacting with the Fund that do not speak to outcomes (code under Internal Experience with CF) • Challenges, critiques, or unmet goals (code under Challenges/Feedback Received) • Vague positive statements without clear indication of impact or purpose
Example Quotes	"So we incorporated office hours, where each programming, each grant-making year, we have an open-door policy … we're just on the Zoom link, folks can come in, they can ask questions."	"It's not like you didn't have a good idea or a great project. It's just that it was so many and they only had a certain amount of spots to deal with and a lot of people that I know that did receive them got way less than what they received in the past."	"So when I think about the broader ecosystem, there's a lot of investment that's around CVI and … curbing and stopping violence, but there's also a very tactical and real thing that the Chicago Fund grantees do … That work needs to be lifted up … It changes the way they see their communities."

Root Code	**Community as violence prevention**	**Community wellbeing**	**Grantee experiences**
Sub Codes			
Definition	Statements that explicitly or implicitly link community-building efforts, social cohesion, or collective care to reductions in violence, increased safety, or improved community wellbeing	References to the overall social, emotional, and environmental conditions that shape quality of life in a community, including experiences of trauma, stress, stability, and access to basic needs	Descriptions of grantees' direct interactions with and experiences of the Chicago Fund, including how they engaged with funding, processes, relationships, and support
When to Use	• When participants describe community connection, trust, or relationships as contributing to safety • When programs or activities (e.g., youth engagement, events, outreach) are framed as preventing violence • When participants connect social cohesion, belonging, or collective efficacy to reductions in harm • When community-led or grassroots efforts are positioned as alternatives to punitive approaches to safety • When participants describe changes in safety that are attributed to stronger community dynamics	• When participants describe trauma, grief, or ongoing exposure to violence in the community • When social conditions are discussed (e.g., poverty, housing instability, lack of resources, community disinvestment) • When participants speak about quality of life, wellbeing, or day-to-day conditions in a neighborhood • When emotional or psychological impacts of living in certain environments are described • When structural or environmental factors affecting community health and stability are name	• When participants describe their firsthand experience receiving or interacting with the Fund • When grantees reflect on how the Fund operates in practice (e.g., application, reporting, communication) • When relational dynamics are discussed (e.g., trust, accessibility, responsiveness) • When participants describe how the Fund shows up in their day-to-day work
When NOT to Use	• General mentions of community building without a clear link to violence prevention or safety • Descriptions of programs or activities that do not reference safety, violence, or harm reduction • Broad statements about community conditions that are not tied to prevention or outcomes • Individual-level interventions that are not connected to broader community dynamics	• Descriptions of programs, interventions, or services (unless the focus is on the underlying conditions they respond to) • Statements about violence prevention strategies (code under Community as Violence Prevention) • Organizational or program-level capacity issues • Individual experiences that are not connected to broader community conditions	• General descriptions of the Fund's structure or design (code under CF Background) • High-level commentary not tied to direct experience • Broader outcomes or impacts unless clearly rooted in the grantee's experience • Sector-wide observations that are not specific to the Fund
Example Quotes	"We do safety walks in the community … just around the neighborhood to let the neighbors say, we there. We okay. We together."	"I know what it is to be traumatized and where it comes from and seeing our children, my own children, being traumatized by the neighborhood."	"But they [the funds] are really flexible, and they're not like, overly prescriptive. And so you can really say, like, this is what we're doing, and here's how these dollars support that, and that's really, really helpful if people don't understand how much, $5,000 can completely change a program."

Root Code	**Grantee experiences**	**Grantee experiences**	**Grassroots superheroes**
Sub Codes	*Challenges*	*Positives*	
Definition	Difficulties, frustrations, or barriers experienced by grantees in their interactions with the Chicago Fund	Positive experiences or aspects of grantees' interactions with the Chicago Fund, including strengths in processes, relationships, flexibility, or support	References that highlight the significance, intensity, or impact of grassroots practitioners' work, particularly when it emphasizes their critical role in supporting communities, often under challenging or under-resourced conditions
When to Use	• When participants describe challenges navigating processes (application, reporting, communication) • When gaps, inconsistencies, or unmet needs are identified • When participants express frustration, confusion, or dissatisfaction • When relational tensions or breakdowns are described	• When participants describe what worked well in their experience with the Fund • When ease, flexibility, trust, or responsiveness are highlighted • When participants express appreciation for how the Fund operates • When positive relational dynamics (e.g., respect, accessibility) are emphasized	• When participants describe grassroots organizations/ practitioners as essential, central, or uniquely impactful in addressing community needs • When the depth, difficulty, or emotional weight of their work is emphasized • When participants highlight the level of responsibility grassroots practitioners carry in supporting individuals or communities • When recognition is given to the skill, commitment, or lived experience that grassroots workers bring to the work
When NOT to Use	• Broad critiques of the Fund not grounded in direct experience but rather staff observation (code under Challenges/Feedback Received) • Structural or design issues discussed abstractly • One-off issues that do not reflect a meaningful challenge	• General praise that is not tied to a specific experience or interaction • Broader success stories about outcomes from CF staff perspective (code under CF Goals/Successes) • Neutral descriptions of processes without evaluative language	• General mentions of grassroots organizations without emphasis on the significance of their work • Descriptions of programs or services that do not center the role of the people doing the work • Neutral or purely descriptive statements about organizations • Overly vague praise that does not clearly point to impact, responsibility, or effort
Example Quotes	"It's not hard to communicate, it's just that it's hard for the people because it's so competitive."	"The support is just easy. So like, if you can't and you don't understand, even if you want to, like if you email, you're gonna get a response."	

Root Code	Recommendations	Historical context	Kitchen cabinet context
Sub Codes			
Definition	Suggestions, ideas, or reflections that point to ways the Chicago Fund (or funders) could evolve, strengthen, or expand its approach, based on participant insight or experience	References to past events, long-standing patterns, or historical conditions that shape present-day experiences of community safety, violence, and structural inequity in Chicago communities	Background information, perspectives, and contextual insights shared by Kitchen Cabinet members about their organizations, work in Chicago, and related efforts, particularly as they intersect with or inform the Chicago Fund
When to Use	• When participants offer recommendations for improving the Fund • When ideas are shared about how the Fund could better support grantees or communities • When participants identify opportunities to expand, deepen, or refine the Fund's approach • When reflections move beyond critique into constructive or forward-looking thinking • When participants describe what they would like to see the Fund do differently in the future	• When participants describe historical patterns of violence, disinvestment, or inequality • When past policies, systems, or decisions are referenced as shaping current conditions • When generational or long-term community dynamics are discussed • When participants situate current challenges within a broader historical timeline • When shifts over time (e.g., "it used to be … now it's …") are described	• When Kitchen Cabinet members describe their organization's mission, role, or work in Chicago • When broader context is provided about initiatives, partnerships, or strategies connected to community safety • When participants explain how their work aligns with, complements, or informs the Chicago Fund • When decision-makers offer perspective that helps situate the Fund within a larger ecosystem • When high-level context is shared from a leadership or funder vantage point
When NOT to Use	• Descriptions of challenges or frustrations without a forward-looking suggestion (code under Challenges/ Feedback Received) • General praise or descriptions of what is already working well • High-level critiques that do not include an implied or explicit opportunity for growth	• Descriptions of current community conditions without reference to the past (code under Community Wellbeing) • Background information specifically about the Chicago Fund (code under CF Background) • General statements about communities that are not tied to history or change over time • Individual experiences that are not framed within broader historical patterns	• Detailed descriptions of the Chicago Fund's design or structure (code under CF Background) • Observations or evaluations of grantee work (code under Perceptions of Grantees) • Personal experiences interacting with the Fund (code under Grantee Experiences or relevant CF codes) • General commentary that is not tied to the speaker's organizational role or perspective
Example Quotes	"I can see it's just not been as user friendly as it has been before and before it wasn't that great or user friendly, so I think they need to look into technology as well to make it where people can answer questions and not be confused and frustrated."	"I've seen the numbers, and I've seen the numbers in certain different areas, and I've seen the strategic plan that they have for each different area where there has been violence and issues of safety. And so I've seen those numbers decrease within the last five years tremendously."	"We don't work on public safety, really. I do a lot more economic development and community development."

Root Code	**Kitchen cabinet context**	**Local politics**	**Neighborhood safety**
Sub Codes	*Internal experience with CF*		
Definition	Direct reflections from Kitchen Cabinet members or other Chicago Fund–connected stakeholders on their personal experiences engaging with, shaping, or participating in the Chicago Fund	References to local political dynamics, decision-making processes, and relationships that influence community safety, funding, and the implementation of programs in Chicago. This includes elected officials, city agencies, and informal power structures	References to objective indicators of safety in a neighborhood, including crime rates, violence trends, and other measurable or observable conditions related to public safety
When to Use	• When Kitchen Cabinet members describe their firsthand involvement with the Fund • When participants reflect on their role in decision-making, strategy, or implementation • When experiences of collaboration, communication, or internal processes are discussed • When participants describe how it feels to be part of the Fund (e.g., dynamics, relationships, level of engagement) • When insights are based on direct participation rather than observation	• When participants discuss the role of local elected officials (e.g., alderpersons, mayor's office) • When city agencies or departments are described as shaping decisions or outcomes • When political relationships, influence, or power dynamics are referenced • When funding decisions or program support are tied to local political priorities • When participants describe how navigating local politics affects their work	• When participants reference crime statistics, trends, or rates (e.g., shootings, homicides, arrests) • When changes in violence levels over time are described (increases or decreases) • When specific incidents or patterns of violence are discussed as indicators of safety conditions • When participants describe observable conditions related to safety (e.g., frequency of violence, geographic concentration of harm) • When data, reports, or formal measures of safety are referenced
When NOT to Use	• General descriptions of the Fund's design or structure (code under CF Background) • Broad organizational context about their work outside the Fund (code under Kitchen Cabinet Context) • Observations about grantees (code under Perceptions of Grantees) • High-level critiques or recommendations not grounded in personal experience (code under Challenges/Feedback Received or Growth Opportunities for CF)	• General mentions of policy or legislation without a local political component • Broad systemic or structural issues not tied to local governance or decision-making • Internal organizational dynamics that are not connected to political actors • National or state-level politics unless directly connected to local implementation	• Perceptions or feelings of safety (code under Community Wellbeing or a separate perception-based code if you have one) • General descriptions of community conditions without reference to measurable safety indicators • Programmatic responses to violence (code under Community as Violence Prevention) • Broad discussions of structural factors unless tied directly to safety outcomes
Example Quotes	"Some of our capacity building programs kind of have not sunsetted, but we just haven't had the full steam to do them."	"I went to my alderman and said 'I have free music programs … What can we do? You don't have to pay anything.'… My biggest barrier has been politicians."	"… just gang violence on this side and on this side, depending on where you live, you can't go over on this side. You know, and vice versa."

Root Code	Perception of grantees	Perceptions of safety
Sub Codes		
Definition	Observations, interpretations, or assessments of grantee organizations and their work, as described by individuals connected to the Chicago Fund from the funding or intermediary side	Participants' feelings, perceptions, or subjective assessments of safety in their communities, particularly as influenced by Chicago Fund-supported programs or efforts
When to Use	• When funders or stakeholders describe what they see in grantee organizations or programs • When strengths, challenges, or characteristics of grantee work are discussed from an external perspective • When participants reflect on how grantees operate, engage communities, or deliver services • When observations are based on site visits, reports, relationships, or general exposure to the work	• When participants describe how safe or unsafe they feel in their community • When shifts in perceived safety are discussed (e.g., "it feels safer now") • When participants link changes in safety to CF-funded programs or community efforts • When emotional or experiential aspects of safety (comfort, trust, presence, visibility) are highlighted • When participants describe how others in the community perceive safety
When NOT to Use	• Firsthand accounts from grantees about their own experiences (code under Grantee Experiences) • General descriptions of the Fund itself • High-level commentary about the field that is not tied to specific observations of grantees • Purely speculative or abstract statements without a basis in observed work	• References to crime rates, statistics, or measurable trends (code under Neighborhood Safety) • General community conditions without a clear connection to safety • Descriptions of programs without reference to how they affect feelings of safety • Structural or historical explanations of violence unless tied to perception
Example Quotes	"Every single applicant has asked for more money, and they should. That's their goal."	"It helped me to understand that we feel safety from the inside out, meaning that our experiences shape how we feel."

Root Code	Reflections on program impact	Service challenges
Sub Codes		
Definition	Observations or reflections from grantees or Chicago Fund–connected stakeholders about the effects of programs on individuals, communities, or systems, based on direct experience or credible secondhand accounts	Barriers or difficulties that grantees encounter in delivering, operating, or sustaining their programs and services
When to Use	• When participants describe changes they have observed in the community as a result of programs • When impact is discussed based on firsthand experience (e.g., "we've seen …") • When participants share what they've heard from others about program effects (e.g., community members, participants) • When shifts in behavior, relationships, or community dynamics are attributed to program efforts • When participants reflect on outcomes that are not necessarily quantified but are clearly observed	• When participants describe obstacles to running programs (e.g., staffing shortages, participant engagement issues, logistical constraints) • When challenges arise in day-to-day service delivery (e.g., outreach, retention, coordination) • When external factors disrupt program operations (e.g., community conditions, safety concerns, system barriers) • When limitations affect the quality, consistency, or reach of services • When participants describe tradeoffs or adaptations due to operational constraints
When NOT to Use	• General statements about what programs are intended to do (code under CF Goals/Successes) • Feelings of safety without reference to observed change (code under Perceptions of Safety) • Objective data or statistics about violence or crime (code under Neighborhood Safety) • Vague positive statements that do not describe a specific impact or change	• General organizational capacity issues not tied to service delivery (code under Capacity) • Funding challenges unless they are directly impacting program operations (may double-code with Funding/ Resource Constraints) • High-level critiques of the Fund or system (code under Challenges/Feedback Received) • Broader community conditions unless explicitly linked to service delivery challenges
Example Quotes	"I survived the West Side of Chicago, but you know what was going to kill me? Them babies going to kill me during COVID. They keep hugging me. I thought that's what was going to kill me, but you know what? We couldn't shut down during COVID because they didn't have nowhere to eat."	"The work is a lot of work and there's not enough folks to do this work."

Appendix E.
All Recommendations Raised by Participants During Listening Sessions and One-on-One Interviews

The recommendations are categorized into main themes below. Bolded recommendations were named several times and represent salient recommendations shared by participants.

Funding:

- **Multi-year funds**
- **Extend the funding term (instead of just the summer months)**
- Increase frequency of funding, different points in the year (May to October, November to April)
- Layer other funding opportunities
  - Ladder up (e.g., after 2 years on consecutive funding, offer 2 years of consistent funding)
  - If they've received funding for more than a certain number of years, set them up to get another grant or more funding
- Increase funding pool to keep the funding rate high
- Create an endowment
- Stop reducing funding
- Decentralizing the fund
- Community Hubs have a larger role in grant review and decision making (power shifting)
- Prioritize funding programming that happens outside
- Improve fiscal stewardship application process
- Accelerator opportunity for organizations that want to grow
- Get a credential if they have been funded a certain number of times in a row
  - Support when applying to larger grants
- Increase personnel cost limit from 10%
- Help nonprofits with the first few months of funds, no capital to use (working advance)
- Support with paying for insurance for events (certificate needed)
- Create an expansion trajectory/advancement path/accelerator pathway for organizations that want to grow in partnership with government partners and other city, state, and federal funders
- An on ramp to a more traditional grant (or connect to another group that does that work)
- Another pot of money for small groups to collaborate and work together

Opportunities for Grantees:

- Awards and recognition for community leaders
- Professional development opportunities for awardees
- A buddy system – pair a smaller organization with a larger organization
- Trainings
- Grant writing 101
  - Help with reporting
  - How to get from A to Z and the steps in between
  - New nonprofits
  - Vendors
  - How to get a 501(c)(3) status
  - Offer honorariums to go to trainings
  - Social media and traditional media training, communications training
  - Budgeting
  - Strategic planning
  - Fundraising
  - Board development
  - Best practices
  - Programmatic design
  - From people who have graduated out of the fund
    - How did you acquire in-kind donations and corporate sponsorships?
- Continue investing in capacity building opportunities (like the Goldin Institute)
- Heal the healers

Programmatic:

- **Direct deposit option instead of just checks**
- **Feedback on ways to improve application when not awarded**
  - Debrief after to talk about the process
    - Trends in why people weren't awarded
  - Invite people to talk about their successful grants
  - Share a list of the awardees and their projects (transparency)
- **Opportunities for grantees to connect with one another and learn from one another**
  - Mission orientation, strategic orientation, care about the same things and can be in relationship with one another
    - Exchange phone numbers, learn from one another
  - Shop talk – monthly zoom opportunity opened based on what people need help with
  - Opportunities to learn lessons and best practices from one another
  - Convene people 4-5 times a year
  - Convenings to talk about experiences unrelated to research

  - Incentive for collaborating with other grantees
  - Creating space where they don't feel like they're in competition
  - Easy reference list for grantees
  - All Executive Directors on an email thread – Gmail, where people can ask questions and respond if interested
  - Collective reflection
  - Collaboration, combine events and impact (e.g., share the organizations that specialize in different things and send that in an email)
  - Centers of excellence, best practices, learn from each other
- **Opportunities to meet funders**
  - Meet the Funders event
  - Bring funders to see the events
  - Connect to sponsors
  - Connect grantees to larger funders
  - How do I get funders to notice me?
- **Creating a calendar of events together**
  - Getting all the grantees together and letting each other know what they plan on doing with the funding, co-creating a calendar, support one another
- **Financial partner that supports with complicated financial documentation and application reporting on behalf of CBOs or block clubs**
  - Nonprofit investing, audits, cash flow projections, QuickBooks–how to set up
- **Better communicate success stories**
  - Get grantees featured on the local TV shows or stations (like unsung hero segments)
  - Make the general public aware of the opportunities that exist in the neighborhoods including local events so people can inform others about the opportunities (e.g., you let your grandfather who lives in the area about an event flyer you saw online)
  - Storytelling from community members
  - Elevate stories about organizations that have been funded a long time
  - Amplify the work happening
    - Share the success stories more publicly and widely
- **Reestablishing Community Hubs**
  - Real-time support and input on planning for administering the fund
  - Maintain funding for Community Hubs
  - Help desk function during application process, peers that are funded to provide support, have designated individuals (trained by Jai) to ask in community
  - Technical assistance and capacity building that carries over throughout the year
  - Community Hubs sharing strategies like how to increase youth engagement
- Project management partner that supports with developing skill sets
- Support the activation of relationships between grantees
  - Block Clubs and CBOs to acquire additional supports and services and other material wins for neighborhoods
- Better coordination with CVI organization and activities, let them know what is going on in timeframe, awareness, presence, build relationship

- Create opportunities to support Block Clubs from development to partnership to expansion
  - Find alignment between intervention and prevention work
  - Have sessions where people can talk about their partnership with police
  - Invite the Office of Violence to amplify the resources they have
  - Create opportunities for the grantees/community leaders to share learnings, ideas, and strategies to broader ecosystem of violence prevention work
- Engage with business community
  - Meetings with businesses and community leaders
- How to work with alderpeople to ensure necessary licenses
  - Police and alderpeople have shut down funded events
- Physical space for programming
- Drop-in center with active referrals being made, even crisis intervention
  - A hub where you can get answers to questions, or pointed in a direction
  - Community navigators
- Communication channels between the fund grantees and CP4P organizations that work in their neighborhoods

Application:

- Spanish language application
- One pager or visual on how to submit application
- In-person session at a computer lab to help people work on the application
- Simpler wording on application
- More visibility into application process
- Three information sessions
- Video application
- Weigh applications heavier if they are going to activate public spaces (prioritize)
- Able to apply with multiple projects for the grant instead of individually

Reviewing Applications:

- Feedback that carries over year from year
- Can see what that applicant has successfully funded prior year instead of Jai just anecdotally sharing
- Ability to see:
  - At what level were they funded before (to ensure not a destabilizing force)
  - Reviewers do not know what the prior year funding was
  - Flagging some grantees if there were concerns from year before

Reporting:

- End of year report summary or explain what it does
- Social media, if they post over grant period, that is used for the report
- Upload pictures on social media
- Look up the hashtag

Funders:

- Understand why issues continue and perpetuate
- Understand how policing works against some of the efforts being funded
- Educate the funders on grassroots
- Understand that investment in Chicago is having a national and international impact
- Inform other philanthropists about best practices learned through Chicago Fund
- Build the research and literature on this work, particularly the activation of public spaces and the impact that it has on community building and community violence
- Fund community violence intervention and community grassroots work more equally
- Get into systems level change and support grantees that do that, policy change
- Think about innovations around fundraising

[1] Further details regarding the sample size can be found in Appendix A.

[2] Partnership for Safe and Peaceful Communities founding documents; Chicago Fund program materials.

[3] Id.

[4] Patrick Sharkey, Gerard Torrats-Espinosa, and Delaram Takyar, "Community and the Crime Decline: The Causal Effect of Local Nonprofits on Violent Crime," *American Sociological Review 82*, no. 6 (2017): 1214–1240; Patrick Sharkey, *Uneasy Peace: The Great Crime Decline, the Renewal of City Life, and the Next War on Violence* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2018).

[5] Examples include the City of Philadelphia Office of Violence Prevention's Targeted Community Investment Grant Program and the Everytown Community Safety Fund; National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, *Power Moves: Your Essential Philanthropy Assessment Guide for Equity and Justice* (2019); Trust-Based Philanthropy Project, "The Six Practices of Trust-Based Philanthropy."

[6] Trust-Based Philanthropy Project, *An Overview of the Trust-Based Philanthropy Approach*; National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, *Power Moves: Your Essential Philanthropy Assessment Guide for Equity and Justice.*

[7] Carl C. Bell, "Dr. Carl Bell's Keys to Reducing Violence and Re-Engaging Youth to Society," describing the Seven Principles for Changing At-Risk Behavior and Cultivating Resiliency Among Youth.

[8] Robert J. Sampson, Stephen W. Raudenbush, and Felton Earls, "Neighborhoods and Violent Crime: A Multilevel Study of Collective Efficacy," *Science 277,* no. 5328 (1997): 918–924; Robert J. Sampson, *Great American City: Chicago and the Enduring Neighborhood Effect* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

[9] Charles C. Branas et al., "Citywide Cluster Randomized Trial to Restore Blighted Vacant Land and Its Effects on Violence, Crime, and Fear," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 115, no. 12 (2018): 2946–2951; Michelle C. Kondo et al., "Effects of Greening and Community Reuse of Vacant Lots on Crime," *Urban Studies* 53, no. 15 (2016): 3279–3295.

[10] Patrick Sharkey, Gerard Torrats-Espinosa, and Delaram Takyar, "Community and the Crime Decline: The Causal Effect of Local Nonprofits on Violent Crime," *American Sociological Review* 82, no. 6 (2017): 1214–1240; Patrick Sharkey, *Uneasy Peace: The Great Crime Decline, the Renewal of City Life, and the Next War on Violence* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2018).

[11] Chicago Fund Evaluation Report (2016). Chicago Fund Evaluation Report (2018). Chicago Fund Evaluation Report (2019). Chicago Fund Evaluation Report (2020). Chicago Fund Evaluation Report (2021). Chicago Fund Evaluation Report (2022). Chicago Fund Evaluation Report (2023).

[12] These activities were noted as significant milestones based on interviews with key stakeholders, information from previous evaluation reports, and administrative records.

[13] The Goldin Institute's Peace Fellows Program is still ongoing, and a new cohort has started each year since its inception in 2019.

[14] The Community Hubs pilot programming started in 2022 and ended in 2024. The Hubs received 2 years of funding for $25,000 each year; it was funded by unspent COVID-19 response dollars from the Chicago Community Trust.

[15] The heat maps reflect only two years of community-level data. Historically, grantees could identify multiple community areas—sometimes as many as seven—where their programming took place, making it difficult to determine primary programming locations. In 2025, the application was revised to limit grantees to identifying one to three primary community areas where their funded programming would take place, providing a more consistent measure of reported geographic reach.

Black & Brown Collective
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