



*connecting women for collective impact*

# Grant Applicant Information Session

September 9, 2026

# Agenda

- Introductions
  - Jackie Lutz, Nonprofit Relations Director
  - Lara Shayne, Grant Review Director
- Overview of Impact Grants Chicago process and calendar
  - A note about AI
- Tips to craft your strongest application for an Impact Grant
- Q&A

A video recording of this meeting and the deck will be available on the Impact Grants Chicago website in a few days.

Due to privacy concerns, we do not allow use of external or 3rd party note-taking apps during our Zoom meetings.



# Introduction to Impact Grants Chicago

## Impact Grants Chicago (IGC):

- Women's collective giving organization
  - Our 10th grant cycle
  - Awarded more than \$4.4 million in grants
- Awards unrestricted grants
- Completely volunteer-run organization
- Operates on the one-woman, one-vote model
  - Decisions about grants are made by our membership

# 2026-2027 Grant Cycle Process + Calendar

## 2026

Sept – Oct: Grant cycle opens with Letter of Inquiry (LOI)

Approximately **150+ LOIs**

December: Applicants notified of eligibility

Approximately **130 eligible LOIs**

## 2027

January: Grant Review Committees (8 GRCs) review LOIs

Late January: 40 organizations invited to submit Full Grant Application (FGA)

Mid February: Full Grant applications due

**All eligible LOIs reviewed**

**40 Full Grant Applications**

Mid March: 24 applicants invited to host Insightful Visits

Mid April: Virtual Site Visits conducted

**24 Virtual Site Visits**

Early May: Grant finalists notified; Finalist info session

**8 finalists**

Late May: Grant Awards Celebration. Finalists present; IGC membership votes for Impact and Merit Grant winners

**\$100,000 Impact Grants  
Merit Grants**

# Eligibility Requirements

*Ensure you meet all of the eligibility requirements.*

- Be classified as a “Public Charity” with tax-exempt status under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code for a minimum of 36 months prior to applying for the grant.
- Operate in, and provide majority of services in, the City of Chicago.
- Independently file an IRS Form 990 (unless exempt by federal law).
- Report total revenue on most recent IRS Form 990 between \$1 million and \$8 million. If exempt from filing an IRS Form 990, must meet this revenue requirement using most recent audit report.
- Be independently and separately audited. If your nonprofit is part of a consolidated organization, the consolidated audited financial statements must include consolidating statements (statement of activities and balance sheet) for the applicant, or must reflect the financial results presented in the IRS Form 990.
- Use the full amount of the grant within 24 months.

*New for 2026: Incomplete and late applications will be considered ineligible.*

# What Impact Grants Chicago Does Not Fund

- Capital projects to property that are:
  - not owned by the applicant as of the Full Grant Application due date;
  - under a lease not in effect as of the Full Grant Application due date; or
  - under a lease with less than five years remaining on the lease as of June 1 of the Impact Grants Award year.
- Projects involving acquisition of real estate
- Debt reduction
- Pass-through grants to other organizations
- Interim or bridge funding
- Fundraising activities or events
- Endowments
- Private Foundations
- Partisan, legislative or political activities
- Fraternal, sectarian, religious and other organizations where the grant is intended for the principal benefit of the organization's own members or adherents.
- Programs involving inherently religious activities, or any program where participation in religious activities is required in order to receive services.

# Use of AI for 2026-2027

- Board of Directors exploring AI to improve grant application review process
  - Identify specific processes within application review
  - Processes that are manual, repetitive, and/or require access to multiple elements within applications
- Pilot specific AI tools during the 2026-2027 grant cycle
- Goals include:
  - Understand technology and how to use it to improve the efficiency and equity of our application review process
  - Compare AI results to our existing processes

# Use of AI for 2026-2027: Disclosure

When you open the application in SlideRoom (our grant application platform), you will see the following disclosure:

In an effort to improve the efficiency and equity of our grant application review process, Impact Grants Chicago is planning to pilot the use of AI tools. By submitting your Letter of Inquiry and the required documents, you consent to the uploading and use of the information contained in these documents into the AI tools. *Any non-public information provided by applicants will be used only with AI tools whose terms provide, or for which we have been advised that, uploaded data will be protected and excluded from generative model training. This consent will apply to all stages of our grant cycle, including the contents and documentation for the Full Grant Application.*

# The IGC grant process includes 2 applications. First is the Letter of Inquiry (LOI)

**Introduce your organization to a team of volunteer reviewers with your mission and an overview of the work you do and the people you serve.**

- Describe your organization and the work you do.
- Describe how you measure the effectiveness of your services.
- Identify your organization's current top three strategic priorities.
- Tell us a success story about a client/participant who has benefited from your services.

# The second step is the Full Grant Application (FGA)

- Expand your story. Tell us more about your organization and your services.
  - What are your spending priorities? Would an Impact Grant change these priorities?
  - Changes to the organization since the LOI
- Details about your organization
  - Staff
  - Board Members
  - Volunteers
  - Donors

# Organization and Financial Documents

## LOI:

- IRS 501(c)3 determination letter
- 2024 or 2025 IRS Form 990, unless exempt
- FY 2025 or FY 2026 Audit Report
  - If you are a consolidated entity, look closely at the relevant eligibility requirements on our website.

## Full Grant:

- Updated IRS Form 990 and Audit Reports
- Internally prepared financial statements for Calendar Year 2026
- Budget for FY 2027



# Writing Your Letter of Inquiry and Full Grant Application

# Impact

***Impact Grants Chicago is interested in providing funds that will have an impact on our community – it is in our name!***

- In your application, we would like to hear how this grant will impact your target population and the community you are serving.
- We ask you to tell a "story" about someone your organization served. This is a helpful way for our reviewers to understand your impact.
- Tell us about the community need for your services.

# Clear and Concise Narrative

- Impact Grants Chicago (IGC) is an all-volunteer organization. We do not have professional grant-making staff. Answer all the questions as if you are talking with a donor, not a peer.
- Do not use jargon or acronyms.
- Don't leave us wondering or guessing. Our review process does not allow for follow-up contact with applicants.

# Measuring Outcomes

***Share how you define and measure impact.***

- We ask you to describe your organization's outcomes and how you measure them. Clear explanations of the data supporting your outcomes and how you chose those data points is very helpful to the reviewers.
- Bring your outcomes to life - if possible, give us an example of how you adjusted your service(s) or program(s) based on outcomes.

# Writing Applications

***Keep in mind that our Grant Review and Financial Review Committees (20 - 30 people) will be reading and discussing your application.***

- Take advantage of the narrative questions to make compelling statements. Tell us your story.
- We include character limits for responses in our forms.
  - Each application includes a question that allows you to add additional documents or information if necessary.

# Grant Resources

***The following resources are available on the Impact Grants Chicago website,  
[www.impactgrantschicago.org](http://www.impactgrantschicago.org)***

- ✓ Eligibility and Requirements
- ✓ What Impact Grants Chicago does not fund
- ✓ Letter of Inquiry questions, in PDF format
- ✓ Full Grant Application questions, in PDF format
- ✓ Grant FAQs

Jackie Lutz, Nonprofit Relations Director

[grants@impactgrantschicago.org](mailto:grants@impactgrantschicago.org)



# Questions?

