

Woods Fund of Chicago

Grantmaking Guidelines and Letter of Inquiry Form

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The Woods Fund Mission

Woods Fund of Chicago is a grantmaking foundation whose goal is to increase opportunities for less-advantaged people and communities in the metropolitan area, including the opportunity to shape decisions affecting them. The foundation works primarily as a funding partner with nonprofit organizations. Woods Fund supports nonprofits in their important roles of engaging people in civic life, addressing the causes of poverty and other challenges facing the region, promoting more effective public policies, reducing racism and other barriers to equal opportunity, and building a sense of community and common ground.

Core Principles

The Woods Fund has a strong belief in the need for and effectiveness of including the less advantaged in the entire process of addressing issues that affect them. To this end, the Woods Fund encourages and supports organizations and initiatives that promote “participatory policy making” by reaching out to their less-advantaged constituencies. Such efforts should involve the less advantaged in identifying and defining the issues that face them, and in forming effective solutions to these problems.

The Woods Fund believes that encouraging a close, learning-based partnership with its grantees can further the causes of Chicago’s less-advantaged residents and communities. **All grantees of the Woods Fund are expected to engage in a learning partnership.** Through this partnership, the Woods Fund expects that grantees will share best practices and successes with the Woods Fund and fellow grantees, as well as those challenges that impede effective implementation. This powerful collaboration has the potential both to inform the Woods Fund’s grantmaking process and to educate the nonprofit community and others about ideas and strategies that they may successfully adopt.

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Overview of Grant Programs

The Woods Fund is particularly interested in supporting those organizations and initiatives that focus on enabling work and reducing poverty within Chicago's less-advantaged communities. Grants are given exclusively to organizations with agendas that benefit metropolitan Chicago and are concentrated in three program areas: Community Organizing, Public Policy and the Intersection of Community Organizing and Public Policy. In addition, a limited number of grants are awarded in the Arts and Culture program area.

The successful grant seeker will assess its proposed needs in relation to the Woods Fund's mission and core principles. Specifically, an applicant organization should determine whether the organization, or its project, embraces any of the following objectives within its mission statement:

- Increasing opportunities for less-advantaged individuals and communities
- Enabling less-advantaged people and communities to shape decisions that affect them
- Helping to engage residents in civic life
- Addressing the root causes of poverty
- Promoting more effective public policies
- Reducing racism and other barriers to equal opportunity
- Promoting employment opportunities
- Building a sense of community and common ground

Program Area: Community Organizing

Community organizing enables democracy at the grassroots level and beyond. It is a process that brings together into an influential group people who, individually, may lack sufficient power to improve their opportunities and their communities. Once organized into an effective organization, individuals gain a vehicle for articulating their concerns and goals, proposing ideas and solutions, demanding accountability from influential forces, and shaping the relevant public policies. Successful organizing “builds power for effective action in the public arena”. It also generates hope, fosters leadership as well as intentional communities of interest, and strengthens institutions in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods. As a structure, community organizing is largely comprised of dedicated volunteers, assisted by professional or volunteer leaders.

The Woods Fund aims to support community organizing that:

- Develops independent, community-controlled organizations that elect their own leaders and determine their own “grassroots” issues
- Demonstrates a willingness to develop, or already possesses experience in developing, relationships with similar organizations and broad-based coalitions to achieve greater impact both within and beyond the Chicago metropolitan area

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- Seeks to shape public policies through strategies that provide participatory and leadership opportunities for the residents of economically disadvantaged communities
- Continually reflects on, improves and documents practices to increase effectiveness of both operations and outreach (particularly developing new leaders, members, and strategies to engage less- advantaged residents)
- Shares best practices and learning experiences with other grantees and stakeholders

Organizations wishing to apply for a Woods Fund Community Organizing Grant should follow the instructions in the Application Package at the end of these Guidelines.

Program Area: Public Policy

The Public Policy program area primarily supports policy and constituency-building work that helps low-income individuals and families to attain higher standards of living. It encourages links between workforce development policies, income security, and supportive programs, which address issues of poverty among low-wage workers as well as unskilled potential workers. **Although employment, workforce development, and income security issues are a principal interest, the Woods Fund also will consider proposals addressing affordable housing, public school reform, governmental accountability, and other issues deemed important by Chicago's less-advantaged people.**

With respect to the emphasis on employment related issues, the Woods Fund prefers to support policy efforts that are designed to: (1) reduce structural barriers to job opportunities, job retention, and job advancement; and (2) enable the working poor to meet their family's basic needs.

Of those who face significant barriers to employment, three particular groups are of special concern, those who:

- Encounter discrimination, exploitation, and other barriers to job opportunity, job retention, and job advancement based on race, immigration status, and gender
- Have prison records or felony convictions that make it difficult for them to enter the workforce. "Get tough" policies for youth and adults and mandatory sentencing guidelines have produced significant numbers of formerly incarcerated individuals who return to their communities and find that their penal history is a serious barrier to securing gainful employment.
- Lack basic skills and job readiness training that would allow them to enter and advance in the labor market. While most job-ready people find employment, those left behind need "hard skills" to perform jobs and "soft skills" to get and retain jobs.

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What Is a “Policy” Proposal?

Policy proposals seek to improve the effectiveness of public laws and regulations, inform the use of public funds, and address private sector employment practices that impact upon people’s ability to work and live above the poverty line. Policy proposals may also seek to improve the *process* by which public policy is made, by making it more inclusive, more collaborative, and more responsive to ordinary citizens’ interests.

Policy change activities may include:

- Constituency building to engage more people, particularly the less-advantaged people, in issue awareness and solutions-based participation
- Research and information gathering, including learning more about an issue and its effect upon people, evaluating programs or policies, and identifying best practices
- Networking and coalition building to bring groups together in a coordinated strategy to win effective solutions to policy barriers
- Providing technical information to public officials and administrators
- Media and communications strategies that raise awareness and educate the public and policy makers about low-wage workers’ most common concerns, as well as viable policy solutions to those concerns
- Demonstration projects that inform policy where an experience or idea vacuum exists. Demonstration proposals must explain why a demonstration is needed to inform policy and provide specific plans for impacting policy based on the results of the demonstration.

Organizations wishing to apply for a Woods Fund Public Policy Grant should follow the instructions in the Application Package at the end of these Guidelines.

Program Area: Intersection of Community Organizing and Public Policy

The Woods Fund seeks to enable policy and social justice organizations to better understand that the political realities for system change are grounded in the context of the affected community, so that they might develop effective change strategies rooted in these understandings and increase their skills in translating local issues into systemic solutions. Further, believing that project outcomes for grantees in both Community Organizing and Public Policy program areas can be strengthened through an integrated approach, the Woods Fund particularly welcomes proposals that weave successfully the voices of less-advantaged individuals into the public policy arena and expands local organizing efforts to a broader geography.

More specifically the Woods Fund looks for:

- Strategies that build the capacity of community organizers and community organizing efforts to move beyond local issues and more purposefully address system and policy change at the city, region and state level.

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- Public policy organizations' intentional involvement of affected communities and individuals in the identification of pertinent issues, the formulation of policy campaigns, engagement of elected officials and education of the public about these issues and legislative or administrative wins resulting from these campaigns.

The Woods Fund recognizes that community organizations and coalitions are at various stages of development and may need to build their capacities to achieve these objectives. To this end, the Woods Fund welcomes proposals from new and emerging, as well as established, community-based organizations and from temporary or permanent coalitions.

Organizations wishing to apply for a Woods Fund Intersection of Community Organizing and Public Policy Grant should follow the instructions in the Application Package at the end of these Guidelines.

Program Area: Arts and Culture

Chicago is a city rich in excellent arts and culture organizations and programs. Woods Fund of Chicago recognizes the important role that a full, vibrant spectrum of the arts and culture plays in enhancing the quality of life. To that end, **the Woods Fund is interested in supporting high-quality arts and cultural programming that naturally aligns with the Woods Fund's overall grantmaking mission.**

Specifically, the Woods Fund is interested in arts and cultural organizations and initiatives that actively explore the role of the arts and culture in engaging people in civic life. A suitable project for consideration in this program area would ideally combine artistic pursuits with community building or organizing. An organization applying for a Woods Fund Arts and Culture Grant will be asked to describe how its program goals align with the Woods Fund's goals. Possible examples include:

- Increasing opportunities for people and communities that have limited access to cultural resources
- Bridging cultural and racial divides
- Building common ground and developing a sense of community
- Developing employment and economic opportunities for lower-income people
- Exploring community issues

Special consideration will be given to organizations or projects that strive to:

- Build participation in civic affairs
- Develop community leadership
- Connect their project to facilitate and/or highlight community issue analysis or policy development

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THE WOODS FUND AWARDS TWO TYPES OF ARTS AND CULTURE GRANTS:

MULTIYEAR GENERAL OPERATING SUPPORT FOR MID-SIZED ARTS AND CULTURE ORGANIZATIONS

In these times of shrinking funding for arts and cultural organizations, paying staff and turning on the lights are major challenges. The Woods Fund seeks to support mid-sized arts and cultural organizations through multiyear general operating grants. Applying organizations must possess current 501(c)3 nonprofit status, demonstrate a primarily cultural focus, and have an annual operating budget between \$200,000 and \$1 million as demonstrated by financial statements for the prior year, as well as budgets for the current fiscal year and year for which the grant is requested. Grants may be awarded for periods of up to three years, and are generally awarded in the \$10,000 to \$15,000 range per year.

COMMUNITY BUILDING AND/OR POLICY-BASED ARTS AND CULTURAL PROJECTS

The Woods Fund is also interested in community-building, community-based, or policy-based arts and cultural projects or initiatives. Grants will generally range from \$10,000 to \$25,000 per year, though in special instances, smaller grants will be considered for small organizations or projects. New or experimental initiatives, special one-time projects, and proposals for technical assistance are also welcome. This type of grant may also be provided for multiyear projects, but all projects must have demonstrated timelines with stated completion dates. *Ongoing projects will not be considered for this grant.*

Organizations receiving multiyear support for either type of Woods Fund Arts and Culture Grants must submit annual update reports at the end of Year 1. The Woods Fund will continue funding for future years if the report receives a favorable review by staff.

The Woods Fund asks organizations that have received multiyear support for three consecutive years to wait at least one year after the completion of prior grants before reapplying for support.

Organizations wishing to apply for a Woods Fund Arts and Culture Grant should follow the instructions in the Application Package at the end of these Guidelines. Potential applicants should be aware that Woods Fund Arts and Culture Grants are awarded annually in June.

Other Projects

Over the years, the Woods Fund has invested in a range of projects aimed at improving the quality of life of the area's less-advantaged residents. While the Woods Fund focuses primarily upon the Community Organizing and Public Policy program areas, it will continue to consider other innovative proposals that may benefit the Chicago area's less-advantaged residents and communities.

Grant seekers who believe they have such a proposal may submit the Inquiry Form that is included in the Application Package at the end of these Guidelines.

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Funding Limitations and Restrictions

While the Woods Fund supports many types of organizations and activities, the following areas are not eligible for grant review:

- Business or economic development projects
- Capital campaigns, capital projects, and capital acquisitions
- Endowments
- Fundraising benefits or program advertising
- Health care institutions
- Housing construction or rehabilitation
- Individual needs
- Medical and scientific research
- Programs in and for individual public and private schools
- Religious or ecumenical programs
- Residential care, rehabilitation, counseling, clinics, and recreation programs
- Scholarships and fellowships
- Social and welfare services, except special projects with a clear public policy strategy

Generally, applicants should be organizations as described in Section 501(c)3 of the Internal Revenue Code. They should also have a written ruling from the IRS that they are an organization as described under Section 509(a)(1), (2), or (3) of the Code.

Multiyear Funding

The Woods Fund is open to receiving requests for multiyear funding from organizations that have performed consistently and effectively in the past, and can communicate carefully considered visions for their future. Grant seekers who apply for multiyear funding should be aware that multiyear funding is not automatically granted to successful applicants. The decision to award a multiyear grant will depend on a number of factors, including a clear and well-organized plan that includes methods used to evaluate progress, the number of organizations seeking multiyear funding, and the amount of Woods Fund funding available for long-term commitments. Thus, applicants for multiyear funding may, even if accepted, receive funding only for one year.

Renewed Funding

The Woods Fund is open to receiving requests for renewed support from successful grantees. Renewed support is not automatically guaranteed. An invitation to submit an application for renewed support will depend on a number of factors including continued alignment of proposed activities with the Woods Fund mission and core values; demonstrated impact of previously funded proposals; successful adherence to requirements outlined in the grant agreement; and availability of Woods Fund grantmaking dollars to support the request.

Organizations seeking renewed funding must first submit an Inquiry Form as outlined in numbers 1, 2 and 3 of the Application Process on pages 10-11.

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Organizational Profile

The Woods Fund is interested in learning more about grant seekers with respect to the composition of their board, staff, membership and the individuals/communities they actively engage. This information will help the Woods Fund better understand what constituencies are likely to benefit from Woods Fund resources. Although some of the categories require self-disclosure, please complete the profile as fully as possible with information that is known at the time of the application submission. Although it may be easier to provide percentages, they should not be used.

The following definitions are offered for clarification purposes only:

Beneficiaries:	Recipients of an action, policy or performance
Low-income:	An individual earning less than \$32,812 a year
Very low-income:	An individual earning less than \$20,808 a year

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Inquiry Form Instructions

The Woods Fund requires that prospective grantees first submit a completed Inquiry Form. If the Woods Fund responds positively, applicants will be asked to submit a full application. Before beginning this process, please consider carefully the Woods Fund's Guidelines to determine whether your request is appropriate for the types of grants that the Woods Fund dispenses.

As you prepare your Inquiry Form and proposal, please check to make sure that they:

- Reflect clear thinking and responsible program management
- Fit with Woods Fund program priorities and values as set out in the Fund's mission statement and core principles
- Leave the reader with a clear understanding (logical flow) of how your organization/project proposes to address a Woods Fund priority program issue in a way that involves the less advantaged in project design and implementation activities

1. The Woods Fund awards grants in June and December. **Please note that Woods Fund Arts and Culture Grants are awarded only in June.** Applicants must complete the application process three months before the Woods Fund Board meets to award grants.

APPLICATION AND AWARD TIMETABLE				
PROGRAM AREAS	INQUIRY FORM SUBMISSION DATE	INQUIRY FORM RESPONSE	FULL APPLICATION SUBMISSION DATE	BOARD DECISIONS
Community Organizing Public Policy Arts and Culture	January 2 through Last business day in January	Third Friday in February	February 18 - March 17	June
Community Organizing Public Policy	July 1 through Last business day in July	Third Friday in August	August 18 - September 18	December

2. All prospective grantees should submit an Inquiry Form according to the schedule above. The purpose of the Inquiry Form is to assess, succinctly, how well the proposed request matches the Woods Fund's priorities. The Inquiry Form asks for information on the grant seeker's plans, capabilities, budget, and expected outcomes. Please use the Inquiry Form found in this Guideline package or on the Woods Fund's web site (www.woodsfund.org). **The Woods Fund requires that this form be submitted in electronic format, as an e-mail word processing attachment, no later than midnight on the due date. Forms should be sent to application@woodsfund.org.**

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3. Those submitting Inquiry Forms will receive a response from the Woods Fund staff at least one month prior to the submission date for full applications. The Woods Fund's response to Inquiry Forms will be one of the following:
 - A request to submit a full proposal without suggested amendments (*note that this is not a guarantee of funding, but rather an indication that the Woods Fund considers the project or organization worthy of consideration*)
 - A request to submit a full proposal with suggested amendments that may include budgetary, methodological, or other changes
 - A decision that the proposed project does not meet guidelines or current priorities (*such decision may or may not include suggestions for changes that an applicant might use in later grant cycle applications*)

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Inquiry Form

1. Applicant Organization's Information

Organization's Name:

Address:

City:

State:

Zip Code:

Telephone number:

Fax number:

Website:

Executive Director's name:

Executive Director's E-mail:

Executive Director's telephone number:

Ext.:

Contact person for this grant request:

Contact person's title:

Contact person's telephone number:

Ext.:

Contact person's E-mail address:

Date organization began operations:

Number of employees: _____ full-time ____ part-time

What was your organization's annual income for the last completed fiscal year?

What were your organization's annual expenses for the last completed fiscal year?

Do you have an IRS exempt status determination letter? Yes: No:

If no, do you have a fiscal agent with IRS exempt status? Yes: No:

What is the name of your fiscal agent?

Please note that if your organization does not have 501(c)3 status and does not have a fiscal agent, your organization is NOT eligible for a grant from the Woods Fund.

2. What specific geographic area is the primary focus of your organization?

- _____ Chicago suburbs/metropolitan Chicago
- _____ City of Chicago (entire city)
- _____ Specific areas or neighborhoods within Chicago
- _____ Statewide
- _____ National
- _____ Other, specify:

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3. Please indicate the program area for which you are applying. (Please select only one choice.)

- Arts and Culture
- Community Organizing
- Intersection of Community Organizing and Public Policy
- Public Policy

4. For those applying for an Arts and Culture Grant, indicate the type of grant for which you are applying.

- Community building and/or policy-based cultural projects
- General operating support for mid-size arts and culture organizations

5. For those applying for a Community Organizing, Public Policy or Intersection of Public Policy/Community Organizing Grant, please indicate the type of support you are seeking? (Please check all that apply)

- Capacity building
- General operating
- Project
- Other (please describe):

6. Amount and duration of support you are seeking.

How much, in total support, is your organization requesting? \$

How many years of support is your organization seeking?

If multiple years, how much per year? \$

7. Has your organization ever received support from the Woods Fund?

Yes No

If yes, when was the last grant awarded? _____

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Narrative Questions

1. Describe, in three hundred words or less, your organization's history, work, and goals. What is your organization's relationship to less-advantaged individuals or communities in metropolitan Chicago?
2. Summarize, in two hundred words or less, the most significant results of your organization's work in the last two years.
3. Describe, in two hundred words or less, your organization's plans during the period for which you seek funding. How does this work align with the Woods Fund's priorities?
4. Please answer the following in three hundred words or less. If your organization seeks funding for a specific project, please describe the project and how it relates to the organization's work and mission. How long is the project expected to continue and what percentage of the project's cost are you expecting the Woods Fund grant to cover?
5. In one hundred words or less, how will your organization's work address the Woods Fund's mission of enabling work and/or reducing poverty? **Arts and Culture grant seekers need not answer this question.**
6. Describe, in two hundred words or less, any partnerships, collaborations, and other external networks that you leverage in your work.