



Leaders for a
New Chicago

A collaboration between
the Field Foundation &
the MacArthur Foundation

2026 Program

Leaders for a New Chicago Award

Recognizing leaders who are
redefining civic leadership and
reimagining our city's future



About the Award

The Leaders for a New Chicago Award recognizes eight individuals annually for their work driving transformational change in Chicago. Each leader receives a **\$50,000 no-strings-attached award** to spend as they see fit.

Leaders also receive a **\$25,000 general operating grant** for their affiliated nonprofit organizations.

Origin & Evolution

2018

The Field & MacArthur Foundations began a series of discussions to address the need to support community-based, grassroots leaders in Chicago

Inaugural
Leaders for a New Chicago
cohort is announced

2019

2025

Leaders for a New Chicago
awards double from \$25,000
to \$50,000
for individual leaders

Leaders for a New Chicago
celebrates its eighth year

2026

A Growing Network of Leaders

73

Leaders doing community-based work, including:

- Artists
- Community Developers
- Educators
- Journalists & Storytellers
- Organizers

7

Cohorts representing a broad array of Chicagoans:

- Selected from outside the city's traditional power structure.
- Bringing new voices, creativity & innovation into the systems that shape Chicago

Eligibility: Organizations & Leaders

Organization Criteria (meet one)

- Field Foundation core grant recipient working in the following areas: Arts & Culture, Journalism & Storytelling, or Justice & Community Power Building (last 2 years)
- MacArthur Foundation Chicago Commitment or Journalism & Media grant recipient (current or X grant in last 3 years)

Leaders Criteria (at the time of nomination)

- Live in Chicago, Cook County or the five collar counties (DuPage, McHenry, Lake, Kane, Will)
- Work in the Field Foundation's funding areas: Arts & Culture, Journalism & Storytelling, Justice & Community Power Building
- Have a strong relationship with affiliated nonprofit for at least one year

Selection Process

- A selection committee, facilitated by the Field and MacArthur Foundations' staff, manages the selection process using a rubric to review nominations.
- The committee will recommend 8 leaders to the Field Foundation Board of Directors for approval.
- The **2026 Leaders for a New Chicago Awardees** will be announced in the summer timeframe.

Evaluation Rubric

Using the criteria below, evaluate the nominee based on their demonstrated leadership abilities and transformative impact. We define "transformative impact" as leaders who have made significant contributions to their communities. Scoring is 1 to 5 with 1 being lowest, 5 being highest.

- Commitment.** Has deep roots and a commitment to working in community-based or nonprofits serving Chicago's South and West Sides.
- Connectedness.** Possesses extensive knowledge of the community and connections to residents.
- Communication.** Creates narratives that accurately reflect community and resident needs. Communicates diverse perspectives to create empathy and mutual respect. Amplifies the voices and impact of community.
- Expertise.** Has profound understanding of current events and the sociopolitical climate. Understands and analyzes evolving local issues, politics, and history.
- Innovation.** Pursues new and compelling ways to improve operations, build capacity, and sustain the organization through programs and other initiatives.
- Advocacy.** Champions local issues and advances policy.
- Engagement.** Inspires civic dialogue and participation around community-defined issues. Leads the community to action.
- Adaptability.** Aligns the organization's mission and operations based on community needs.
- Collaboration.** Develops partnerships and fosters growth within and across communities.
- Stewardship.** Demonstrates a commitment to long-term problem solving through community-driven solutions. Helps build the capacity of others. Supports a pipeline of new leaders.

Timeline

- **February 18:** Nomination Portal opens
- **March 20:** Nomination Portal closes
- **March & April:** Selection Committee reviews nominations
- **May:** Nominations submitted to the Field Foundation Board of Directors for review and approval.
- **Summer timeframe:** 2026 Leaders for a New Chicago announcement

Nomination Resources

Visit the Leaders for a New Chicago page at fieldfoundation.org where you can:

- Download our rubric
- Read our Frequently Asked Questions
- Send us your questions
- Nominate a Leader

Questions & Contact

For questions or assistance, contact:

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