

RETURNING WITH HOPE MICROGRANT OPPORTUNITY

The Mayor's Office of Reentry, in partnership with the Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH), will distribute \$540,000 in microgrants to community-based organizations providing direct services to the returning residents population in the city of Chicago. These funds are from the Cannabis Tax Revenue Fund, which is intended to reduce the likelihood of illegal cannabis sales by reducing reliance on alternative or illicit economies, including unregulated cannabis sales. This funding is one-time and non-renewable, and applicants should plan for sustainability beyond the grant period.

The Mayor's Office of Reentry is committed to **restorative reentry**, the power that comes from **collaboration**, and is dedicated to **mental health services**. In alignment with these values, this microgrant flex-fund program aims to support community-based service providers in providing services to returning residents, while also encouraging organizations to work together to drive their mission forward and invest in mental health programming. This program is designed to be flexible, accessible, and responsive to the urgent needs of this population.

United Way of Metro Chicago will serve as a partner to administer these grants, including hosting the grant application and distributing awards.

OPEN APPLICATION PROCESS

The Mayor's Office of Reentry, CDPH, and United Way are accepting grant proposals from established direct service providers **servicing returning residents/the reentry population/system impacted individuals in the City of Chicago**, either individually or as part of a collaborative. The total allocation of this grant is \$540,000. Only organizations providing services to returning residents will be considered. Award amounts will average \$10,000-\$20,000 for individual organizations and \$50,000-\$60,000 for collaboratives, with funding split among collaborating organizations.

In addition to funding, the Returning With Hope grant will be paired with the Reentry Summit, which will take place during Second Chance Month in April 2026. Hosted by the Mayor's Office of Reentry, this will be an opportunity for grantees to share lessons learned and progress made so far. It is intended to foster ongoing collaboration in the sector. More details about this gathering will be made available to grantees in the coming months. Attendance by grantees will be strongly encouraged.

The Returning With Hope working group will consider competitive proposals from any qualifying organization, but funding selections will be prioritized based on the focus areas and prioritizing factors described below.

FOCUS AREAS

- 1) **Mental Health & Wellness:** All mental health & wellness initiatives should have a measurable impact on the individuals served. Activities and purchases that may qualify could include purchasing materials for a healing circle run by an organization, paying to bring a licensed social worker to lead a cohort on trauma-informed care, or subsidizing a weekly yoga class for clients. However, it can also include anything that an organization deems as furthering mental health and wellness support or knowledge capacity.
- 2) **Other reentry supports:** Other direct services that support returning residents will also be considered. This may include, but is not limited to housing assistance, employment assistance, family reunification, peer mentorship, or legal aid.

PRIORITIZING FACTORS

- 1) **Small organizations.** Defined here as organizations with 25 or fewer employees, whether full-time, part-time, or employed on a contractual basis. Organizations fitting this description are highly encouraged to apply.

- 2) **Employing returning residents.** Organizations that are led by or employing system-impacted individuals are highly encouraged to apply. However, any organization meaningfully incorporating the voices and experiences of returning residents, whether through board positions, focus groups, strategic planning, or other methods, will still be considered.
- 3) **Collaboration.** Applicants may submit a collaborative application describing how two or more organizations will work together to implement their programming and better support returning residents. Collaboratives should be prepared to describe the structures that are or will be put in place to prevent duplication and ensure success, and to consider how they will continue to collaborate beyond the grant period.

COLLABORATIVE SPECIFICATIONS

To better serve returning residents, the Mayor's Office of Reentry believes in the power of collaboration among Chicago's community-based organizations. Collaboratives of two or more organizations are encouraged to apply. When doing so, collaboratives should plan to submit one application, identifying one partner as the primary agency. The primary agency will submit all information into United Way's e-Clmpact grants management system, including:

- Information about each agency and their history of serving the returning residents population
- Description of shared goals and services
- Description of the structure and plans for how organizations will work together, including proposals for working together beyond the grant period
- Preferred allocation of funding (expressed as percentages) among the organizations

Collaboratives may be pre-existing, or newly formed for the purposes of the grant, but the long-term goal remains improved coordination of services for Chicago's returning residents through collaboration.

FUNDING SPECIFICATIONS

The source of these grants is public funding, and as such, is restricted to supporting direct service expenses only. This can include materials, expenses such as housing and transportation for returning residents, or paying for trainers, social workers, or other professionals contracted for approved direct service delivery.

Up to 15% of award amounts may be used to support indirect expenses associated with the delivery of direct services. This can include staff salaries, rent, or other overhead. These expenses are not allowable beyond 15% of the total award.

TIMELINE: Application opens Monday, September 8 and closes Friday, September 26

- **September 2-5, 2025** – Application training and office hours for potential applicants.
- **Monday, September 8, 2025** – The application opens on the website that will link to United Way's e-Clmpact grants management system.
- **Friday, September 26, 2025** – The application closes at 5:00 pm; organizations that do not submit by this deadline will not be considered.
- **Week of November 24, 2025** (Expected) – Notification of grant awards/recipients.
- **Late December 2025** (Expected) – Funding distributed.
- **April 2026** – Reentry Summit event, hosted by the Mayor's Office of Reentry. Attendance by grantees will be strongly encouraged.
- **June 30, 2026** – Grant period concludes.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

To be considered for funding, organizations must meet the following criteria:

- Operate programs located in and intentionally serving the City of Chicago

- Hold 501c3 status or be fiscally sponsored by an eligible 501c3 organization
- Be in good financial standing, as demonstrated by a favorable audit opinion on the most recent audit
- Have a proven track record of success serving the returning residents population
- Demonstrate meaningful engagement with the communities served by your programming
- Ensure that awarded funding does not exceed 30% of your organization's annual operating budget

REPORTING

Selected applicants should expect to report back on how funding was spent and what metrics were achieved. Reporting will be input into United Way's e-CImpact grants management system. Reporting will aim to be light-touch and with low administrative burden. The following reporting/metrics will be requested at the conclusion of the grant period.

- A brief narrative report detailing use of funds
- Total number of individual returning residents served
- Description of services provided
- One anecdote or example demonstrating impact

The reporting period will be open for 2-3 weeks following the grant period, around July 2026.

CONTACT INFORMATION

For questions about the Returning With Hope microgrant opportunity, including questions about United Way's e-CImpact portal, please contact CommunityImpact@LIVEUNITEDchicago.org. Depending on the question, your message may be forwarded to the Mayor's Office of Reentry for a response.