

Wealth Our Way (W.O.W.) Capital Grant Program

Question & Answers

July 2, 2025

Outlined below is the first wave of questions from the WOW Informational Session on June 24, 2025 and additional questions submitted to wow@communitydeskchicago.org. The next wave of questions will be answered on July 17, 2025.

1. *Can you provide any guidance for how to define the geographic boundaries for a "community"? Does it need to be a specific neighborhood or can a broader area (e.g. the South Side) qualify?*
 - There were two references to community during the informational session. One reference relates to the "community" surrounding the real estate project. The second reference was related to "Community Investment Vehicle (CIV)". Community surrounding the real estate project is a direct reference to the residents living in and around the project site. It could be the entire community area or targeted blocks within that community area. The City of Chicago has [22 community areas](#). The application should clearly articulate the community area or targeted blocks impacted by the project. This requirement is applicable for both CIV and Worker Co-Ops.
 - Community related to Community Investment Vehicle is a reference to the individuals participating in the shared ownership model. The application should clearly define the "community" allowed to invest or participate in the CIV. It can be both residents and other parts of the City.
 - WOW funding will prioritize communities that uplift members of historically under-resourced communities or those that are facing pressures of gentrification.
2. *Can WOW funding be combined with other City of Chicago funds?*
 - Yes, WOW funds can be combined with other City of Chicago funding programs.

3. *Is there a minimum number of workers for a worker co-op to be considered for WOW funds?*
 - At minimum, a worker co-op should include two members and the business's governance structure should articulate its cooperative ownership and decision-making model. Applications will be evaluated based on the impact that worker co-op will have on the community and its members.
4. *Can a building with an owner interested in transitioning from a non-CIV to a CIV be considered for WOW funds?*
 - Yes, the project will be evaluated based proposed concept of the newly formed CIV.
5. *Would the acquisition of an existing business with the goal of converting it to a worker-owned co-op qualify? Can it be a business relocating from outside of Chicago?*
 - Yes, a business converting to a worker-owned co-op does qualify. However, WOW funds are limited to acquisition and improvements to the real estate owned or leased by the new worker-owned co-op. It cannot be used to acquire the business itself.
 - Yes, a business relocating to the Chicago does qualify if it is designed for Chicago residents.
6. *Can a lead organization and/or CIV apply for more than one grant? Can it receive more than one grant award?*
 - Yes, an organization can apply for more than one grant. However, given the number of grants awarded, we strongly encourage applicants to submit their strongest application.
 - Applicants applying for more than one location must send an email to wow@communitydeskchicago.org to advise the WOW team in advance of multiple projects.
7. *Are mortgage payments an allowed use of WOW funds?*
 - No, mortgage payments are not an eligible use of WOW funds.

8. *Are projects under construction at the time of application eligible?*

- No, funding cannot be used for construction that has started. However, the program will consider a second phase of work that has not started and is separate and distinct from current construction project (e.g., build-out of an additional storefront).

9. *Can WOW fund be used to pay bridge/construction loan debt?*

- No, WOW funds cannot be used to pay debt service on bridge or construction loans.

10. *Are costs incurred prior to the grant award eligible expenses for WOW funds?*

- Soft costs that were incurred up to six months prior to being named a potential grantee for WOW funds are eligible for reimbursement. Grantee status is not finalized until the project has cleared all City of Chicago eligibility requirements.
- Acquisition costs that were incurred up to six months prior to being named a potential grantee are eligible; up to 25% of the grant can be used for acquisition costs.

11. *Can a project that is finished with construction use WOW funds to pay down outstanding debt?*

- No, WOW funds cannot be used to reimburse for previous construction.

12. *Do CIV models need to have commercial tenants secured in advance?*

- No, formal leases in advance are not required. However, applicants are encouraged to identify potential tenants to help confirm long-term financial feasibility.

13. *Will funding be available before Q1 2026 if the project is ready to start before then?*

- Yes, funding can be made available prior to Q1 2026, subject to submission of required documentation for approval.

14. *Is there a preferred CIV structure?*

- No, there is no preferred CIV structure. CIVs can be structured in a variety of ways based on the specific goals and needs of a given community.

15. *Our current funding model does not allow real estate to be held in a trust. Would this impact our eligibility for WOW fund?*

- No, the legal structure of the CIV is not a determining factor. Applicants will be evaluated on the overall CIV concept and its connection to community wealth-building.

16. *Due to requirements imposed by committed financing sources, our development is structured such that direct governance of an asset will transition over a 7-year period. Would this type of model be eligible for WOW funding?*

- Yes, such a model would be eligible. The applicant should clearly articulate how the community is connected to the project and any transitions of long-term ownership.

17. *Is site control required before completing the initial questionnaire?*

- Yes, applicants will need to provide proof of site control as part of the application process.

18. *Is there a limit to the number of awards in any given neighborhood?*

- No, projects will be evaluated based on the application and overall application pool.

19. *For worker co-ops, are there legal status requirements for workers? Are worker co-ops with a mixture of citizens and non-citizens eligible for WOW funding?*

- There is no legal status requirement related to the mix of members. However, a member(s) will be required to sign legal documents and should be able to do so. Further, all business owners will be required to complete the Economic Disclosure Statement and Affidavit through the City of Chicago.

20. Can a worker co-op use WOW funds to purchase a building it currently leases and renovate it?

- Yes, WOW funds can be used for acquisition and rehab of a building by a worker co-op; up to 25% of a WOW grant can be used for acquisition.

21. Does a healthcare facility qualify as a potential commercial tenant for a building owned by a CIV?

- Yes, a healthcare facility would qualify; ineligible uses are identified in the detailed [grant opportunity](#).

22. Would a project over 10,000 square feet and/or \$10 million in development qualify for a WOW grant?

- Yes, the reference to 10,000 SF and \$10 million was explaining Community Desk Chicago's primary focus area. It does not directly relate to the WOW grant.

23. Our organization is interested in the WOW program but may not be able to have all the project elements in place in time for the grant application. Do you anticipate future rounds for WOW funds?

- While future funding is not yet confirmed, it is our goal to provide additional funding opportunities beyond the current WOW grant round.

24. Can WOW funds support a lease-to-own structure for eventual real estate ownership?

- Worker Co-ops have the option to lease or purchase their project site. However, a CIV must own their site. CIV applicants will need to provide the necessary document to clearly articulate when ownership will occur.

25. Are projects in the process of acquiring land from the Cook County Land Bank (CCLB) eligible?

- Yes, CCLB sites are eligible.

26. *Our organization is interested in pursuing a CIV but would need a lot of hands-on coaching. Are we a good fit for the WOW program?*

- No, the WOW program is designed for projects with a clearly defined model and are moving their project site into construction. Community Desk Chicago plans to host future learning sessions for groups interested in exploring a CIV.

27. *Is a letter of intent a sufficient form of site control?*

- Yes, but acquired sites will make a stronger application.

28. *I am working to bring a food co-op to the south side which is community-owned and operated. However, the acquisition of property doesn't happen until the community is in support. Because of this, can a project of this kind help an emerging food co-op?*

- Yes, a food co-op would be considered under the worker co-op category; worker co-ops have the option of using WOW funds for the build out of commercial spaces that will be leased.

29. *When you say owned by the community--if ownership is transitioning to a community-based nonprofit over time would that qualify?*

- It depends. If the project is being designed to operate long-term as a traditional nonprofit structure, the answer is no. However, if the properties are being held in a nonprofit structure but controlled by a community board, yes. The nonprofit must also have a "wealth-building" mission.

30. *If you are looking at later stage development projects, how will acquisition costs work?*

- Up to 25% of a WOW grant can be used for acquisition costs. WOW funds can reimburse acquisition costs that were incurred up to six months prior to being named a potential grantee.

31. CIVs are becoming more popular, however many community groups and nonprofits are still learning about the legal structure. Can you talk more about the eligibility for a project that has intentions to be a CIV but does not have that legal structure, and instead has cooperative governance and a nonprofit structure with community members on its board?

- Nonprofit structures are eligible for the WOW program. However, they cannot appear as a traditional nonprofit structure. The applicant will need to clearly articulate the relationship to community including the wealth-building components and community control.

32. Is preservation and allowing residents to build wealth in gentrifying areas part of the goals of the program?

- Yes, the WOW program is designed to support local ownership and control. WOW funding will prioritize communities that uplift members of historically under-resourced communities or those that are facing pressures of gentrification

33. Does an existing building that wants to make a CIV component qualify or is it only for new construction/renovation?

- Yes, existing buildings can be converted to CIVs. However, WOW funds cannot be used solely for acquisition. Up to 25% of the grant amount can be used for acquisition costs.

34. We have a 5,000 square-foot commercial space that is currently under lease, the current owner supports our acquisition in the space. We have entrepreneurs that would be members with ownership and rent a third of the space for business programs along with the rear, about 2,000 square ft transformed into a food and beverage incubator training facility. The current estimate of the total budget is about \$1.8 Million. Would this model be a strong candidate?

- Yes, if the project has a shared ownership component. We encourage applicants to complete the WOW questionnaire to determine qualifications.

35. *Can an existing Retail Coop purchase the building they currently rent, as a CIV and renovate it?*

- Yes, members of a retail co-op could create a CIV for shared ownership of real estate.

36. *We provide technical assistance for coop conversions of existing businesses. But we do not have loans available for real estate. Could our coop clients apply for the real estate portion of the deal if they are in Chicago? It would likely be in the \$1-2M range for real estate.*

- The WOW program provides funding for acquisition and renovation. We encourage applicants to complete the questionnaire to confirm their eligibility.

37. *What if you were leasing the property but wanted to purchase the building, can you use some of the money as a down payment?*

- Yes, 25% of the grant amount can be used for acquisition costs.

38. *If the funding is for initial development costs, the timeline seems a bit difficult to meet and complete construction in 2026, 12-month timeline.*

- While some acquisition and soft costs are eligible, the WOW program is not designed for early-stage projects. Applicants must be prepared to start construction in the first quarter of 2026.

39. *Are there any budget limitations on the program? Meaning, if you have unrestricted funding that you intend to use to cover operation and programming costs (\$500k+), are you still eligible?*

- Projects will be evaluated based on the proposed development budget and funding sources to cover those expenses. The program is not considering funding used for operations and programming.

40. *Can a charter school or its nonprofit partner serve as the lead agency for a CIV?*

- Yes, a nonprofit can serve as the lead agency for a CIV.