



## **DESIGNING A BETTER CHICAGO ANNOUNCES 2022 GRANT RECIPIENT**

*Chicago Eco House*

**(Chicago, IL - June 1, 2022)** Designing a Better Chicago, a collaborative initiative organized and supported by NeoCon® and theMART, the Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events (DCASE), and the Design Museum of Chicago, is pleased to announce the 2022 winner of their Design Impact Grant Program: Chicago Eco House. This will mark the third year of the program, which was established to support individuals and organizations using design to directly address pressing issues within the Chicago community. It offers \$25,000 each year in project-specific grants.

Chicago Eco House is an agricultural organization that uses sustainability to alleviate inner city poverty through a network of urban flower farms and a flower shop. Founded in 2014, the social enterprise has transformed over ten acres of vacant land into solar-powered flower farms, diverting thousands of gallons of rainwater to agricultural use and creating dozens of meaningful jobs for young people. Today, Chicago Eco House operates four eco-friendly farms throughout Chicago and one in Detroit. Their brick-and-mortar flower shop, Southside Blooms, processes the flowers grown at Eco House farms and sells them as bouquets, facilitating long term employment for Chicago's youth and spurring economic development. Chicago Eco House will utilize the grant funding to expand its farmer-florist workforce development efforts in 2022 and engage more youth in the program.

"The monies from this grant will allow us to continue our work transforming the inner city into a solar-powered floral paradise, turning vacant lots into places of peace and prosperity for the black community," notes Quilen Blackwell, President and Co-Founder of Chicago Eco House and Southside Blooms. "We are in the process of opening up a new site near the Cook County Jail which will give us more access to youth involved in the justice system."

Tanner Woodford, Founder and Executive Director of the Design Museum of Chicago, comments, "We're thrilled to present this year's grant to Chicago Eco House in recognition of their transformative initiatives to change the narrative for the young folks they serve and bring substantial social and environmental value to our city. Now in its third year, our annual Design Impact Grant Program continues to recognize local leaders whose essential work supports civic life here in Chicago."

Quilen Blackwell will join 2021 grant winners (Tariyawn Knighten, The Tilden Pilot to Permanent Design Incubator and Emily Winter, The Weaving Mill), and the 2020 grant winners (Kathy Gregg, Friedman Place and Maya Bird-Murphy, Chicago Mobile Makers) for a panel discussion during this year's NeoCon. Tanner Woodford will moderate the session, which will take place in the NeoCon Presentation Studio on Wednesday, June 15, at 1:00 p.m. CDT and be streamed

live on the NeoCon Hub. Details on this panel and other programming is available at [neocon.com](https://neocon.com).

Launched in 2020, the Design Impact Grant program shines a light on Chicago's extraordinary design legacy—the local talent, assets, and community that have long supported civic good through design. The initiative showcases individuals and organizations, public art and programs across the city, inviting residents and visitors to consider the many ways design improves civic life. The Design Impact Grant monies are generously funded by NeoCon and theMART.

Additional information about the 2022 Grant Recipient and Designing a Better Chicago can be found at [designingabetterchicago.org](https://designingabetterchicago.org).

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**About NeoCon:** NeoCon is the world's leading platform and most important event for the commercial interiors industry, held each year at theMART in Chicago. Since launching in 1969, NeoCon has served as the annual gathering place for the commercial design world's manufacturers, dealers, architects, designers, end-users, design organizations and media. The three-day event showcases game-changing products and services from close to 500 leading and emerging companies—providing unparalleled access to the latest and most innovative solutions. A robust educational program of keynote presentations and CEU sessions offers world-class expertise and insight about today's most relevant topics as well as the future of commercial design. [www.neocon.com](https://www.neocon.com)

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**About theMART:** theMART (formerly The Merchandise Mart), located in the center of the sought-after River North submarket, is interwoven into the fabric of Chicago as an innovator in business, technology, culture, art, media and more. It is one of the world's leading commercial buildings, wholesale design centers and the preeminent international business location in

Chicago. Encompassing 4.2 million gross square feet, theMART spans two city blocks, rises 25 stories, and is visited by an average of 30,000 people each business day and nearly 10 million people annually. Offering continuous innovation and creativity from leading manufacturers and design forward showrooms, theMART serves as the home to Chicago's most creative and technologically innovative companies.

**About the Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events (DCASE):** The Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events is dedicated to enriching Chicago's artistic vitality and cultural vibrancy. This includes fostering the development of Chicago's non-profit arts sector, independent working artists and for-profit arts businesses; providing a framework to guide the City's future cultural and economic growth; marketing the City's cultural assets to a worldwide audience; and presenting high-quality, free and affordable cultural programs for residents and visitors.

**About Design Museum of Chicago:** A local, non-profit cultural institution with a gallery in the Loop, the Design Museum of Chicago strives to meet people where they are and make design accessible to everyone, facilitating conversations comprised of a variety of voices, backgrounds, and viewpoints. They believe that design is not just a single discipline or process, but rather a persistent element in our everyday experiences with the fundamental capacity to improve the human condition. Formerly the Chicago Design Museum, they create free and low-cost programming about a wide variety of topics, from architecture in Ireland to games in modern culture.