



Designing a Better Chicago Announces 2026 Grant Recipients

Recognizing Three Visionary Local Projects Driving Impact, Youth Empowerment & Sustainable Urban Development

(CHICAGO, IL – July 7, 2026) [Designing a Better Chicago](#), a prominent citywide initiative organized and supported by [NeoCon](#), [The Mart](#), the [Richard H. Driehaus Foundation](#), and the [Design Museum of Chicago](#), is proud to announce its 2026 grant recipients. This year's cohort celebrates three trailblazing organizations—[Project Osmosis](#), [Englewood Arts Collective](#), and [Bubbly Dynamics](#)—chosen for their community-centered work across youth empowerment, public space transformation, and sustainable urban development.

Since 2020, in collaboration with [Chicago's Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events](#) (DCASE), the program has recognized and funded grassroots projects using art and design to address civic challenges across Chicago's 77 neighborhoods. Honoring the city's rich design legacy, Designing a Better Chicago champions design's vital role in serving the public good—from enhancing shared spaces and fostering belonging to advancing more vibrant, sustainable neighborhoods. The notable 2026 honorees each embody these values through innovative, community-centered work shaping a more inclusive and environmentally conscious future.

“Design is one of the most powerful tools for strengthening communities,” says Olivia Kosciusko Tritschler, Development Manager at Design Museum of Chicago. “This year's grantees are creating lasting impact and models for collaboration, inclusivity, and stewardship. We're proud to uplift their work and invest in ideas that will continue defining and designing a better Chicago.”

2026 Award Recipients

NeoCon Design Impact Award: Project Osmosis

Project Osmosis empowers Chicago youth to design solutions to community challenges through immersive design education, mentorship, and applied arts programming that promotes peace, safety, and opportunity in underserved neighborhoods. By equipping young people with creative problem-solving skills and meaningful mentorship, the organization cultivates the next generation of civic leaders and changemakers.

Richard H. Driehaus Foundation Built Environment Award: Englewood Arts Collective

Englewood Arts Collective (EAC), the artist-led creative placemaking arm of Folded Map Project NFP, uses artist-led activations, public art, and creative collaborations to transform underutilized spaces into vibrant, community-rooted hubs of joy, visibility, and economic opportunity, while advancing a stronger sense of belonging and access for all Chicagoans.

Led by EAC, the Arts Village Sculpture Park is a creative placemaking initiative, transforming three vacant lots at 63rd and May Street into a publicly accessible cultural destination in Greater Englewood. Building on EAC's successful Arts Village model, the project will establish a multi-year public home for public art incubation, humanities programming, and artist-led commerce while celebrating local creatives and strengthening the positive identity of the area overall.

"This support is helping us move ideas into action, while proving that 'good' design is design that does good," comments Janell Nelson, Founder of the award-winning graphic design firm JNJ Creative and Co-Founder/Director of Englewood Arts Collective. "It's very encouraging to have institutions recognize the creativity, leadership, and innovation that comes from and thrives in neighborhoods like where we grew up."

Richard H. Driehaus Foundation Built Environment Award: Bubbly Dynamics

Bubbly Dynamics, a leader in the sustainable redevelopment of Chicago's industrial landscape, is transforming long-vacant warehouses and factories into vibrant communal business ecosystems. With support from Designing a Better Chicago, the organization will complete its Visualization + Energy Recovery and Distribution System (VERDs) project at [The Plant](#), transforming invisible waste heat into a tracked and managed energy resource. The project advances environmental innovation while strengthening the resilience and sustainability of this collaborative business community.

Special Recognition

Additional special recognition was extended to the Collective Learning Lab, Anthony Bartley, Urban Rivers, Fresh Supply, Territory, Duo Development, and the Chicago Graphic Design Club (CGDC) projects that further reflect Chicago's civic-minded design leadership.

Each of the honorees were selected by a multidisciplinary advisory committee representing design, arts, architecture, planning, and civic leadership. Committee members include Jessica Davis, Global Garden Refugee Training Farm; Bridgette Gimpert, Gilbane Building Company; Sarah Haque, Recon Analytics; Meg Leary, Arts First; Vasia Rigou, NewCity; Lydia Ross, Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events; Ben Schulman, a5 Branding & Digital; Eva Silverman, Chicago Architecture Biennial; and Eugene Varnado II, YoojDesign.

For more information about the grantees and the Designing a Better Chicago initiative, visit 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 The Mart 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 four-day event showcases game-changing products and services from more than 400 leading

and emerging companies—providing unparalleled access to the latest and most innovative solutions. A robust educational program of keynote presentations, CEU sessions, workshops, and tours offers world-class expertise and insight into today's most relevant topics as well as the future of commercial design. www.neocon.com

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About The Mart: The Mart is the largest privately held commercial building in the United States: It encompasses 4.2 million gross square feet, spans two city blocks, rises 25 stories, and is visited by an average of 30,000 people each business day (or nearly 10 million people annually).

The Mart serves as the home to Chicago's most creative and technologically innovative companies, including Motorola Mobility, PayPal, Avant, and MATTER, as well as Fortune 500 companies Conagra Brands, Allstate, Medline Industries, Beam Suntory, IPG, and Grainger. It is also the largest and most important center for design in North America, with more than 250 premier design showrooms offering the latest resources for both residential and commercial markets.

About The Richard H. Driehaus Foundation: The Richard H. Driehaus Foundation is committed to enriching the lives of all Chicagoans by improving the built environment, cultivating a robust and diverse arts and culture ecosystem, and supporting investigative journalism that fosters transparency, accountability, and effective government. driehausfoundation.org

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. Through free, short-term exhibitions, engaging public programming, and robust partnerships with other arts, academic, and non-profit organizations, the Design Museum inspires, educates, and fosters innovation through design. designchicago.org

About the Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events: The City of Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events (DCASE) supports artists and cultural organizations, invests in the creative economy, and expands access and participation in the arts throughout Chicago's 77 neighborhoods. As a collaborative cultural presenter, arts funder, and advocate for creative workers, our programs and events serve Chicagoans and visitors of all ages and backgrounds, downtown and in diverse communities across our city – to strengthen and celebrate Chicago. DCASE produces some of the city's most iconic festivals, markets, events, and exhibitions at the Chicago Cultural Center, Millennium Park, and in communities across the city – serving a local and global audience of 25 million people. The Department offers cultural grants and resources, manages public art, supports TV and film production and other

creative industries, and permits special events throughout Chicago. For further details, visit [Chicago.gov/DCASE](https://chicago.gov/DCASE) and [stay connected via newsletters and social media](#).

Media Kit:

Access the full press kit [here](#).

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