

THE CHICAGO
POETRY CENTER

3--YEAR


REVIEW

FY 22 / 23 / 24

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LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Community,

What a three years to review!

On the eve of our 50th anniversary, we reflect on all CPC has supported over our last three years:

- Over 40,000 Students with programming across Chicago
- Over 164 featured poets and over 500 Open Mic performers
- More than 3,000 Audience Members

In these three years we've built core values as a community, enshrined greater commitments to equity and inclusion at every level of our work, and ensured access at all of our events. We've successfully completed our first strategic plan, produced a web series, and expanded our programmatic and public offerings. We've created a culture of Open Board Calls and transparent planning. In short: our work behind the scenes has been just as energizing as our public facing offerings.

I'm honored to gather and steward this community, every year, and especially as we walk towards our 50th anniversary. Founded on literary censorship and the foundational idea of always making a "bigger table," this organization has met the call to expand the table and add more seats in every decade of its life. What changes with each decade is CPC's responsiveness to its times, as it finds ways to support poetry and community, and poetry in community.

We hope you'll join us at our exhibit this summer, and at all of our 50th anniversary events over the next year. A Bigger Table: 50 Years of the Chicago Poetry Center will look back and look forward with a variety of programs from our retrospective exhibit and documentary to a free learning series for writers and discussions on censored poets.

We wish for this 50th year to be an offering in deep gratitude to our community: more programs, more support for poets, more access for the public, and many opportunities to connect. See you there—

Warmly,
B. Metzger Sampson
Executive Director

THE CHICAGO POETRY CENTER

OUR MISSION

The Chicago Poetry Center connects people and poetry, equitably engages poets with communities, and advances creative literacy in the city and beyond.

OUR VISION

We envision and work to create a fair and verdant world rooted in artistic expression, human connection, and boundless imagination.

OUR CORE VALUES

INTEGRITY: We strive for excellence, holding ourselves to high organizational standards of fairness, openness, respect, and honesty.

CREATIVITY: We believe in the intrinsic value of artistic expression and are committed to fostering exploration, joy, and wonder in our work, ourselves, and others.

HUMILITY: We are curious, collaborative, open to change, and act in full recognition that we don't hold all the answers.

EQUITY: We work to create meaningful and genuine access to opportunities and resources, actively working to combat racism, heterocentrism, ableism, sexism, and all other systems that perpetuate disparities.

INCLUSIVITY: We prioritize the safety of those historically and systemically marginalized, acknowledge structural power imbalances, honor all people's humanity, and endeavor to create spaces of full belonging.

OUR CORE BELIEF

We believe that poetry illuminates our individual and shared humanity, fueling thriving lives and healthy communities.



LITERARY LIFE

Poets need platforms, and CPC is proud to bring poetry to the public on stages across the city of Chicago and even more broadly across the internet.

BLUE HOUR

In 2021, CPC launched Blue Hour, the latest iteration of CPC's longstanding reading series.

The first Blue Hour season, which also offered a generative writing workshop, took place online and featured established and emerging pairs of poets from across the city and the country. The free monthly reading series and workshop moved with us to our new home at Haymarket House in 2022, allowing us to build community both in person at the House and online through livestreaming and our digital archive all the way through May of 2024.

POETRY @ THE GREEN

In the summer of 2022, CPC launched a weekly open mic and featured reader series in the West Loop.

Poetry @ The Green at 320 is a free weekly open mic and featured reader series bringing poetry outdoors in the West Loop. Summer 2024 marks the third season of this community offering curated for its first two years by Poets in Residence Tarnynon Onumonu and Timothy David Rey; this coming season, Timothy's co-curator is Joy Young.

SUMMER POETRY PARTY

Summer Poetry Party 2022 welcomed *Poetry* magazine's brand new editor Adrian Matejka to town as our headlining poet, and our **Poetry Party 2023** headliner was brilliant poet and memoirist Jane Wong. Both festivities included showcases of our incredible Poets in Residence, and drew packed houses of writers and poetry fans from across the city and beyond.

POETRY EVERYWHERE

CPC poets graced stages around the city these past three years, kicking off corporate gatherings for companies like West Monroe Partners, celebrating with institutions like the Chicago History Museum, and engaging audiences at venues as distinct as Printers Row Lit Fest and 21c Museum.

164

featured poets

MORE THAN 2,300

audience members reached



SNEAK PEEK:

We're 50! In July 2024, CPC will launch our anniversary with an exhibit at the Poetry Foundation, and each Blue Hour this season will include a series alum and a poet who's never read for us before.

CRITICAL CONVERSATIONS @ WORK

Drawing on CPC's decades of workshop facilitation, Critical Conversations use poetry as a springboard to increase belonging and inclusion in the workplace.

POETRY AS LAUNCH POINT

By centering the dialogue on lived experiences reflected in poems, the **Critical Conversations** process launches transformative discussions without requiring those most violently and directly affected by racism to tell or retell their stories of trauma and resilience.

Both for-profit and nonprofit organizations brought Critical Conversations to their staff and volunteers over these three years, including the Poetry Foundation, The Cradle, Weber Shandwick, WITS, and others.



CONTINUING PRACTICE

In 2023, with funding from Illinois Humanities, we developed and launched the **Critical Conversations Continuing Practice Guide**, a step-by-step set of directions and workbooks that allow individuals who have participated in at least one Critical Conversations: Anti-Racism session to continue the work at their own pace in self-guided pairs or small groups.

EQUITY AT EVERY LEVEL

As part of our commitment to equity in all of our operations, the poets whose work is utilized in these sessions receive a royalty payment each time their session occurs.

THANK YOU FOR THIS SERIES! I LEARNED SO MUCH ABOUT MY COWORKERS AND MYSELF. THE HEARTWORK COMBINED WITH ANTIRACISM WORK IS SO POWERFUL.

-- Critical Conversations session participant



SNEAK PEEK:

Building on the success of Critical Conversations @ Work: Anti-Racism, CPC is developing a variation focused on issues of gender and sexuality in the workplace.

ARTS EDUCATION

Every young person, regardless of the challenges faced by their family, neighborhood, and school due to long-standing systemic inequities linked to race and class, deserves access to high quality arts education.

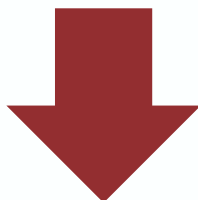
Over the past three years, CPC has simultaneously expanded the reach and increased the depth of our creative literacy programs for young people, focusing particularly on Chicago Public School students in economically marginalized communities.

RESIDENCIES

Highly interactive, multi-week poetry residencies support students in grades K through 12 as they pursue their academic, artistic, and social-emotional goals.

Residencies are led by professional teaching artists (CPC Poets in Residence) trained in CPC's pedagogy and residency curriculum.

Support from Innovation 80 allowed us to develop and pilot an **Early Readers Curriculum**, expanding our reach from second grade down to kindergarten and building in support for early grade students struggling with literacy skills. Through support from the Ralla Klepak Foundation for Education in the Performing Arts, we developed a **performance poetry component** to our longstanding residency curriculum.



ALL SCHOOLS READING

The **All Schools Reading** provides students from every residency classroom the chance to share their original work for an audience of their peers, family members, and guests. In 2024, we **expanded from a single year-end event** to one mid-year event held in January and two year-end events in May, and added food and a travel stipend for family members attending to support their student.



POP-UPS

Through Pop-Up Performances, students at schools citywide witness and participate in assemblies featuring Chicago-based performance poets.

Each assembly includes original performances and covers of legacy works by other poets, an educational component on Chicago's legacy as the birthplace of slam, and the "InstaPoem" where one of the three performers interviews a student live from the audience, and the other two poets write furiously on the spot to compose impromptu poems for the student. Each poet then performs their impromptu poem live and the student audience votes on which performing poet "won" the InstaPoem competition.

QUEEN ZEE

In 2022 CPC created, produced, and launched the **free streaming poetry classroom on demand series *Queen Zee's Poetic Adventures***. Available for free to anyone working with children in 2nd to 5th grade -- from teachers and librarians to homeschooling parents and babysitting family members -- Queen Zee takes viewers to a magical world of joyful, engaging poetry lessons for kids that are ELA and SEL-focused, aligned with Common Core standards, and a whole lot of fun.

POETRY OUT LOUD

Each year, CPC collaborates with Illinois Arts Council as the Chicagoland Regional Host of **Poetry Out Loud**.

Through this annual competition, students in the city and suburbs of Chicago explore and share poetry by established writers, building their public speaking skills and self-confidence while aiming to win a chance to advance to the national competition in Washington DC and win \$20,000.

The 2022 competition was held remotely, and in 2023 and 2024 we were able to return to in-person performances at schools throughout Chicagoland.



73%

increase in students
reached by residencies
from 2021 to 2024

41,799 STUDENTS

served by CPC programs in FY22, 23, and 24



SNEAK PEEK:

One of our native Spanish speaking Poets in Residence is developing a version of our residency curriculum that features poems originally written in Spanish, rather than translations of English poems into Spanish. This curriculum offering will launch in fall 2024.



The Chicago Poetry Center is dedicated to diversity, equity, inclusion, and access in all of our operations, and to becoming ever more intentionally and overtly anti-racist as an organization.

We are engaged in a constant process of assessment and growth in all of these areas. A few of our efforts are described below.

BOARD WORK

The CPC Board of Director's standing **Anti-Racism Committee** led a series of efforts over the past three years.

In 2021-22 and 2022-23, CPC sent its Board President to participate in a national cohort, year-long antiracism training led by Art Equity.

In 2022-2023, Board members met throughout the year to complete "Do the Work!: An Antiracist Activity Book" by W. Kamau Bell and Kate Schatz.

In 2023-2024, the Board engaged in CPC's own Critical Conversations: Anti-Racism program, both in facilitated circles and using the Continuing Practice Guide for paired work.

CPC continues to live out our commitment to equity and transparency by providing two **stipended positions for Poets in Residence on the Board** with full voting rights and responsibilities.

EQUITY & ACCESS

All poets who perform in or curate events for CPC, along with anyone whose work is used in CPC curricula, receive public acknowledgement and equitable financial compensation.

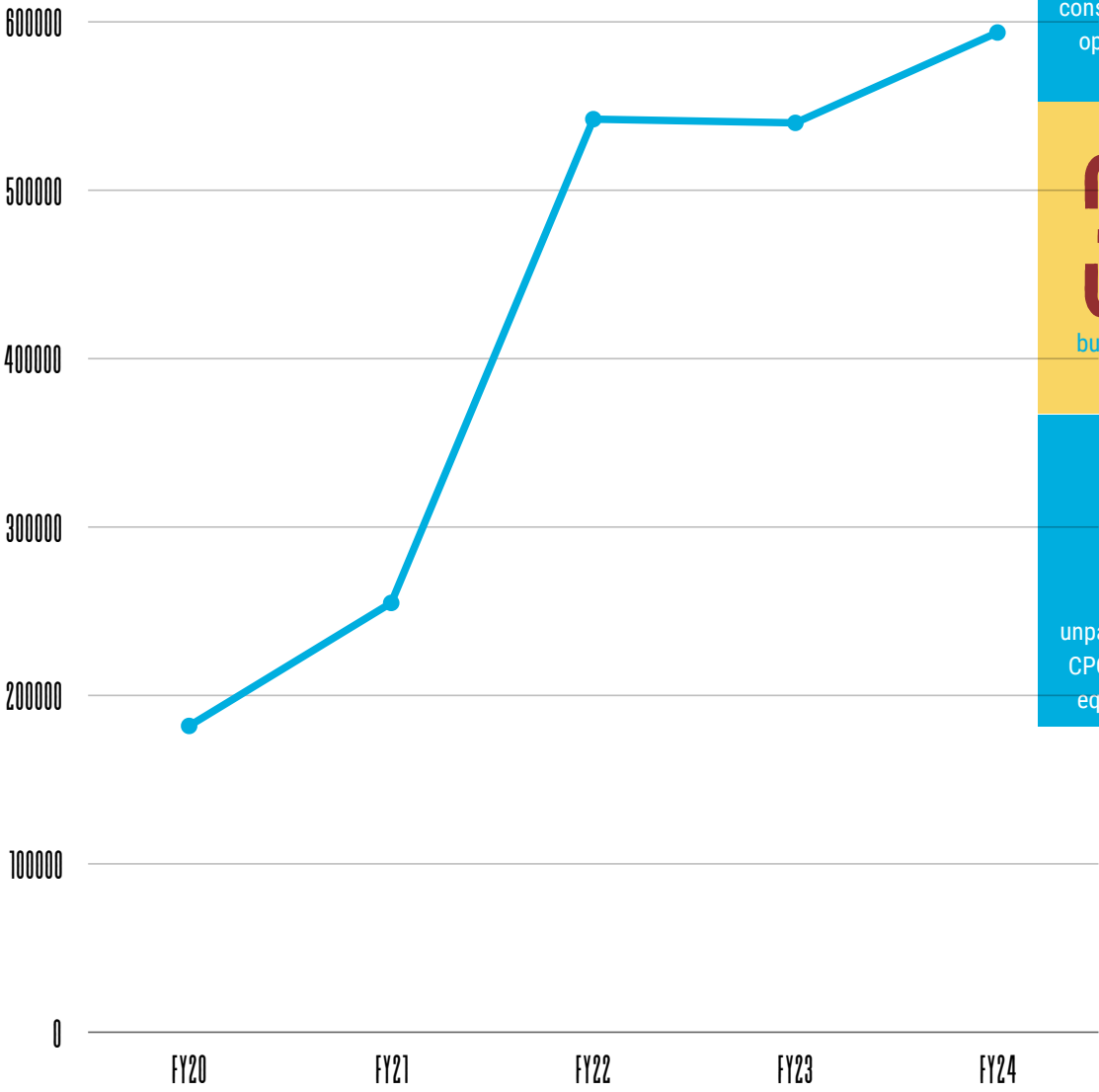
The Blue Hour reading series offers professional ASL interpretation, and interpretation is available on request for the Poetry @ the Green series. All Literary Life events take place in ADA compliant, wheelchair-accessible spaces

LEADERSHIP & GROWTH

Since 2023, through the support of the Arts Work Fund, CPC launched the **Pathways to Leadership** program through which Poets in Residence interested in taking exploring the administrative side of work with CPC are hired to carry out crucial aspects of program work including classroom observation, curriculum materials development, facilitating portions of the annual fall Poets in Residence training, and more.

The Chicago Poetry Center is dedicated to financial sustainability as part of our commitment to ensuring that we can engage in liberatory artistic practice and support artists for years to come. We continue to pursue new avenues of financial support, diversify our funding base, and engage in community-centric fundraising that honors our core values while supporting our bottom line.

ANNUAL BUDGET GROWTH FY20-24



8
consecutive years CPC has operated with a budget surplus

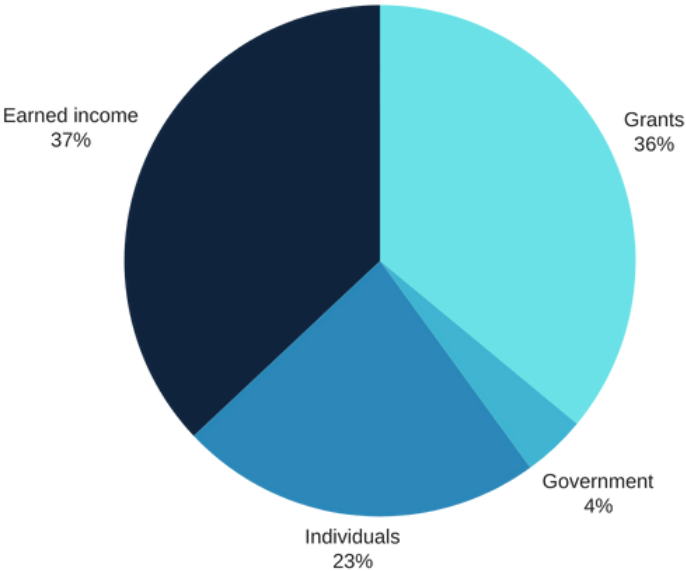
333%
budget growth between FY20 and FY24

0
unpaid staff members -- all CPC staff and interns are equitably compensated

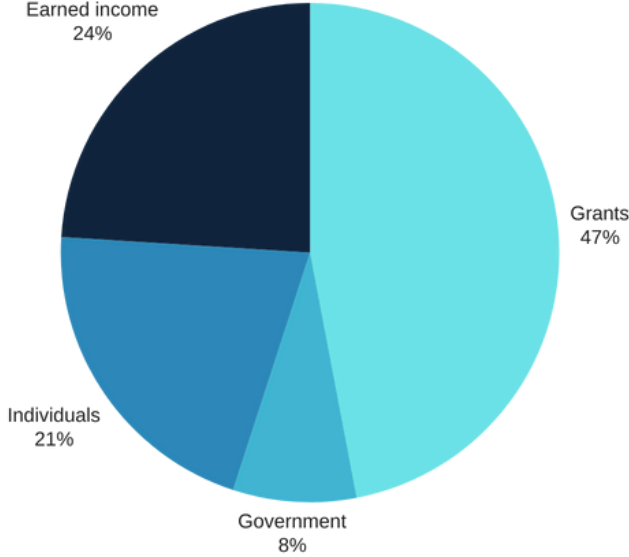
INCOME

FY22, 23, 24

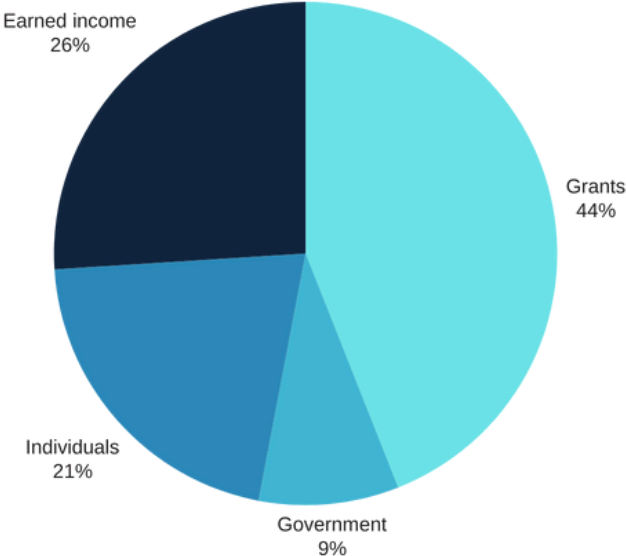
FY22 Income



FY23 Income



FY24 Income*



*budgeted

OUR FUNDERS

FY22, 23, 24

We are grateful for the generous support of the following organizations that have provided grants to the Chicago Poetry Center over the past three years.

Albert Pick Jr. Fund

Arts Work Fund

Bader Philanthropies

Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events (DCASE)

Elizabeth Morse Charitable Trust

Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelly Foundation

Illinois Arts Council

Illinois Humanities

Innovation 80

JCCC Foundation

Literary Arts Emergency Fund

Lloyd A. Fry Foundation

National Endowment for the Arts (NEA)

Poetry Foundation

Poets & Writers

Polk Bros Foundation

Ralla Klepak Foundation for Education in the Performing Arts

The Seabury Foundation

Springboard Foundation

The Saints

We also deeply appreciate the generous support of the hundreds of individuals who contribute financially to making all of CPC's programming possible. We couldn't do it without you!

Oliver D.
Olive Tree

I wonder why they named me Oliver
they say its because of my grandparents
I believe them

I like my name
it is short
it is simple

It means olive tree
It means to grow out your roots

to be scared at first
but over time
become strong

STUDENT POEMS

Ms. Lyons's 4th Grade
Cento Poem

Poetry is a place to express yourself and do anything.
Poetry makes me feel happy.
Poetry makes me feel like I'm in the air.
Poetry is like a rollercoaster of feelings.
Poetry makes me feel calm, it calms my body down.
Poetry makes me feel happy and different. It makes me feel comfy.
Poetry makes me feel happy.

Arantza P.
I Am Proud

I am Mexican and Proud
I wonder how trees help you survive
I hear God telling me "you got this"
I see my dad's eyes saying "I love you"
I want the world to be peaceful
I am Mexican and Proud
I pretend that I am a professional rollerskater
I feel Mary's sheet covering me
I touch my mom's hand before going to school
I worry the world will become just war
I cry because Joynielys moved to Puerto Rico
I am Mexican and Proud
I understand that everybody is equal and perfect
I say to my friend Camilla "you are beautiful"
I dream I'm the best teacher when I grow up
I try to be nice all the time
I hope everybody's dreams come true
I am Mexican and Proud

POETRY RESIDENCY PROGRAM
STUDENT POEMS



POETRY RESIDENCY PROGRAM
STUDENT POEMS



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work is only possible in community and with community. The Chicago Poetry Center is deeply thankful to our board members, staff, teaching artists, grantors, and donors, past and present.

Board Presidents

Paula Belnap (FY22-23)

Kevin Rooney (FY24)

Meet our full current board at: www.poetrycenter.org/board-members/

Staff

B. Metzger Sampson, Executive Director

Helene Achanzar, Director of Programs

Marty McConnell, Director of Strategy and Operations

Rinnah Shaw, Operations & Resource Coordinator (FY24)

Kristina Kim, Operations & Resource Coordinator (FY23)

Esther Ikoro, Content Strategist (FY24)

Meet our Interns & read full bios at www.poetrycenter.org/staff/

Poets in Residence

Meet the team at www.poetrycenter.org/poets-in-residence/

Supporters

Meet our grantors and donors and explore more at poetrycenter.org

Chicago Poetry Center

Chicago Poetry Center

1448 E. 52nd St, #256

Chicago, IL 60615

info@poetrycenter.org

poetrycenter.org/contact

The Chicago Poetry Center is a registered 501(c)3 non-profit organization.

FEIN: 23-7400515

WE THANK YOU
FOR YOUR CONTINUED SUPPORT OF
OUR PROGRAMS



WWW.POETRYCENTER.ORG