

WOODS  
FUND  
CHICAGO

# STRATEGIC PLAN

*Executive Summary*

Woods Fund Chicago, 2022 – 2024

Liberty

;


Justice

for

ALL!

Photo by Logan Weaver | @LGNWVR

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# THE CURRENT & FUTURE STATE OF WOODS FUND CHICAGO

From the very beginning, the Woods family firmly believed that foundations should use their wealth to counter the entrenched interests in government and other established institutions.

Photo by [Sarah-Ji](#)



Woods Charitable Fund was first incorporated in 1941 by the family of Frank and Nelle Woods in Nebraska. From the very beginning, the Woods family firmly believed that foundations should use their wealth to counter the entrenched interests in government and other established institutions. Woods Fund Chicago adopted an influential role in philanthropy early on by being one of the first foundations to publish an annual report and by encouraging greater transparency in the field at large. In 1993, Woods Charitable Fund was restructured into Woods Fund Chicago (Woods Fund or WFC) and the Woods Charitable Fund in Lincoln, NE.

***Woods Fund Chicago's support of organizations and initiatives that promote community-driven solutions could not be more relevant and necessary.***

Over the past two years, amidst the backdrop of an unprecedented global pandemic that only further exposed and exacerbated existing racial inequities, the city of Chicago, the nation, and the world have witnessed a dramatic increase in the general population's awareness of racial, economic, and social injustices, sparked by the undeniably cruel successive murders of Black people throughout the country captured on video and spread virally over social media. Individuals, organizations across sectors, and politicians who had never heard the words "racial justice" suddenly began co-opting this language in everything from marches and protests to corporate press releases and policy proposals. While it remains to be seen whether these statements of solidarity and outward signs of support will translate to substantial and lasting change, it is clear that the individuals and communities which have been the most marginalized will

continue to bear the brunt of this ongoing "dual pandemic" of COVID and structural racism. They must be centered as active participants in addressing the issues that affect them most.

***This new moment will require WFC to be innovative and resilient while continuing on the path toward real, systemic change.***

Now is the time for Woods Fund to reflect on how far it has come and to imagine a bold and radically just future for the city of Chicago. Woods Fund has prioritized and codified this necessary visioning by crafting a new strategic plan to provide a road map for the next few years (and beyond) as the foundation, region, and philanthropic field at large navigate significant challenges and strive towards collective solutions, greater impact, racial equity, and social justice.



## CORE PRINCIPLES

Woods Fund Chicago strongly believes in the need for — and effectiveness of — including communities that are most impacted by poverty and structural racism in the entire process of addressing issues that affect them. To this end, Woods Fund Chicago encourages and supports organizations and initiatives that promote community-driven solutions.

Photo by [Duncan Shaffer](#)





**If history teaches us anything, it is that in these times, we must go deeper and strengthen our position in helping bring about a more just society. Despite being amid an ongoing pandemic, the Woods Fund staff and Board of Directors were determined to set our next course forward.**

— L. Anton Seals Jr., Chairman,  
*Board of Directors, Woods Fund Chicago*

Photo by [Malu Laker](#)

## **WE BELIEVE**

Structural racism is a root cause of many challenges facing communities and is a significant barrier to eradicating poverty. Dismantling structural racism in society is a means to correct social and economic injustices.

Community organizing and public policy advocacy efforts lead to comprehensive, authentic, relevant, and sustainable solutions.

***Systemic change is the only way to eradicate poverty and structural racism*** and the people most affected by poverty and racial inequity should be the leaders and participants in addressing issues that impact them.

Communities have greater strength, authority, and power through collaborative practice and collective voice.

## **WE COMMIT TO**

Being an active partner and catalyst with organizations that share our mission and values.

# WOODS FUND CHICAGO VALUES

As a grantmaker, Woods Fund Chicago acts courageously, creatively, and without apology to boldly lead the philanthropic sector beyond racial equity and toward racial justice.



The following organizational values are at the root of the foundation's strategic planning and priorities, deeply informing the plan's goals and objectives as well as the mission and work of the foundation overall.



## JUSTICE

Woods Fund Chicago approaches all facets of our work through the lens of racial justice and is committed to centering BIPOC voices, leadership, and organizing. Woods Fund is devoted to disrupting white supremacy culture, confronting power, redistributing resources, and creating systemic transformation for real change.

## TRUST-BASED PHILANTHROPY

Woods Fund Chicago recognizes the long history of the inequitable power dynamic between funder and grantee. As a grantmaker, Woods Funds shifts power back into communities, actively listens to needs, and intentionally fosters collaboration. Woods Fund believes those impacted most are best suited to lead the process of defining and solving problems. WFC connects deeply as a supportive and empowering partner in their journey towards justice.

## RISK-TAKING

Woods Fund Chicago challenges the traditional models and systems of grantmaking, working to eradicate its roots in white supremacy culture. Woods Fund understands the vital importance of advocacy and organizing in social change and therefore utilizes both its corpus and endowment to support innovative community organizing and public policy advocacy to confront systemic poverty and racism.

## BOLDNESS

As a grantmaker, Woods Fund Chicago acts courageously, creatively, and without apology to boldly lead the philanthropic sector beyond racial equity and toward racial justice. We recognize the locus of power as residing with community groups and grassroots organizations that often challenge governing systems. Woods Fund supports them as they work to hold the government accountable to the public good while disrupting the common philanthropic practice of directly funding or subsidizing government entities.



## DEFINITIONS

The following definitions of key terms in the strategic plan's goals and objectives are offered for clarity and shared understanding.



Photo by [Sarah-Ji](#)

## POWER

Although power is often conceptualized as *power over* other individuals or groups, other variations are *power with* (in the context of building collective strength) and *power within* (which references an individual's internal strength). Learning to “see” and understand power relations is vital to organizing for progressive social change. Power is unequally distributed globally and in U.S. society; some individuals or groups wield greater power than others, thereby allowing them greater access and control over resources. Wealth, whiteness, citizenship, patriarchy, heterosexism, and education are a few key social mechanisms through which power operates. Woods Fund invests in collective power.

## PRIVILEGE

A “system of advantage” that gives people from more powerful social groups access to resources and opportunities that are denied to others (and usually gained at their expense) simply because of the groups to which they belong.

## RACISM

We are using the term “racism” specifically to refer to individual, cultural, institutional, and systemic ways by which differential consequences are created: Groups historically or currently defined as white are advantaged, and groups historically or currently defined as non-white (African, Asian, Latinx, Native American, etc.) are disadvantaged. That idea aligns with those who define racism as prejudice plus power, a common phrase in the field. Combining the concepts of prejudice and power points out

the mechanisms by which racism leads to different consequences for different groups. The relationship and behavior of these interdependent elements have allowed racism to recreate itself generation after generation. Systems that perpetuate racial inequity no longer need racist actors or to explicitly promote racial differences in opportunities, outcomes, and consequences to maintain those differences.

## INTERNALIZED RACISM

Internalized racism is what occurs in a racist system when a racial group oppressed by racism supports the supremacy and dominance of the dominating group by maintaining or participating in the set of attitudes, behaviors, social structures, and ideologies that undergird the dominating group's power.

## INTERPERSONAL RACISM

Interpersonal racism occurs between individuals. Once we bring our private beliefs into our interaction with others, racism is now in the interpersonal realm.

*Examples: public expressions of racial prejudice, hate, bias, and bigotry between individuals, etc.*

## INSTITUTIONAL RACISM

Institutional racism refers specifically to how institutional policies and practices create different outcomes for different racial groups. The institutional policies may never mention any racial group. However, their effect is to create advantages for whites and oppression and disadvantage for people from groups classified as people of color.

**Examples:**

- **Government policies that explicitly restricted the ability of people to get loans to buy or improve their homes in neighborhoods with high concentrations of African Americans (also known as “red-lining”).**
- **City sanitation department policies that concentrate trash transfer stations and other environmental hazards disproportionately in communities of color.**

## **STRUCTURAL RACISM**

The normalization and legitimization of an array of historical, cultural, institutional, and interpersonal dynamics routinely advantage whites while producing cumulative and chronic adverse outcomes for people of color. Structural racism encompasses the entire system of white domination,

diffused, and infused in all aspects of society, including its history, culture, politics, economics, and entire social fabric. Structural racism is more difficult to locate in a particular institution. It involves reinforcing reproduced and newly produced forms of racism from multiple institutions and cultural norms, past and present. Structural racism is the most profound and pervasive form of racism — all other forms of racism emerge from structural racism.

## **RACIAL JUSTICE**

1. The systematic fair treatment of people of all races, resulting in equitable opportunities and outcomes for all. Racial justice — or racial equity — goes beyond “anti-racism.” It is not just the absence of discrimination and inequities but also the presence of deliberate systems and supports to achieve and sustain racial equity through proactive and preventative measures.

2. Operationalizing racial justice means reimagining and co-creating a just and liberated world. This includes:

- Understanding the history of racism and the system of white supremacy and addressing past harms,
- Working in right relationship and accountability in an ecosystem (an issue, sector, or community ecosystem) for collective change,
- Implementing interventions that use an intersectional analysis and that impact multiple systems,
- Centering Blackness and building community, cultural, economic, and political power of Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color (BIPOC), and
- Applying the practice of love along with disruption and resistance to the status quo.

## **MOVEMENT BUILDING**

Movement building is the effort of social change agents to engage power holders and the broader society in addressing a systemic problem or injustice while promoting an alternative vision or solution. Movement building requires a range of intersecting approaches through distinct stages over a long-term period of time.

Through movement building, organizers can:

- Propose solutions to the root causes of social problems.
- Enable people to exercise their collective power.
- Humanize groups that have been denied basic human rights and improve conditions for the groups affected.
- Create structural change by building something larger than a particular organization or campaign.

- Promote visions and values for society based on fairness, justice, and democracy.

***“Movement building means working on the collective processes and infrastructure that create shared vision, strategy, and action across different areas of social, economic, and ecological justice. It is an umbrella under which other issues reside, and organizations rely on each other to move a shared platform forward.... Movement building creates an opportunity for community organizers to dream instead of respond, build and deepen relationships instead of compete, to share leadership and to fortify solidarity work.”***

— Woods Fund Chicago

## **SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMUNITY**

Individuals, organizations, and institutions that align with the idea that all people should have equal access to wealth, health, well-being, justice, privileges, and opportunity regardless of their legal, political, economic, or other circumstances.

## **SOCIAL IMPACT INVESTING**

Impact investments are investments made with the intention to generate positive, measurable social and environmental impact alongside a financial return. Woods Fund Chicago intends to put its endowment to work, ensuring it invests in opportunities to increase wealth for communities in Chicago that have long been denied the means of wealth-building.

## **BIPOC**

Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. A term used to describe communities of color, while centering Black and Indigenous issues and experiences. While no means perfect, for us it reminds us to center Black and Indigenous issues and experiences across all communities, including non-Black and non-Indigenous communities. It reminds us that even in communities of color, Black and Indigenous peoples are marginalized and invisibilized.

## THE PLAN

The strategic plan for the upcoming years will capitalize on the organization's current assets to position Woods Fund Chicago as a bold innovator and leader in the philanthropic field.

Photo by [Redrecords](#)




As part of WFC's strategic planning process, the Morten Group conducted a comprehensive, two-month-long assessment of the organization. The assessment's review and discussions of background materials, stakeholder surveys, individual interviews, and environmental scans provide a vision of an organization that holds a unique and vital position in the funding community of Chicago — especially considering its relatively small size compared to other local foundations. WFC is highly regarded by both internal and external stakeholders, looked to as a model of living and enacting its values, bold and innovative, and a leader in the philanthropic sector.

Recalling Woods Fund's history as a trailblazer, unafraid to challenge

the status quo in its internal and external practices and tapping into WFC's historical memory of innovating — from promoting transparency among funders to uplifting the communities most impacted by structural racism and economic injustice to define and design solutions to their own problems — were essential considerations in formulating and developing the strategic plan.

The strategic plan for the upcoming years will capitalize on the organization's current assets to position Woods Fund Chicago as a bold innovator and leader in the philanthropic field and strengthen internal systems to achieve racial equity, transparency, and accountability.



**Recalling Woods Fund's history as a trailblazer, unafraid to challenge the status quo in its internal and external practices and tapping into WFC's historical memory of innovating were essential considerations in formulating and developing the strategic plan.**

Photo by [Tim Mossholder](#)

# GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

## FOR 2022 – 2024

This plan for WFC's future requires a deep commitment on the part of the Board, staff, and leadership of the organization, as well as strong engagement with grantees, community members, and other stakeholders in the philanthropic, movement building, and social justice sectors.

Photo by [Clay Banks](#)



# LEADERSHIP — STAFF AND BOARD

1

**WFC Board of Directors will serve as allies and ambassadors who project a shared narrative around institutional racism, power, and privilege.**

- **Institutionalize** the foundation's organizational values, principles & commitment to racial equity (RE) and racial justice (RJ) to exist in longevity.
- **Engage** both WFC Board and staff in understanding the areas of racial justice, institutional racism, the power imbalance between funders and grantees, and harmful practices that continue in the philanthropic sector.
- **Develop** a shared narrative for the Board to communicate the mission and values, WFC's grantmaking, and how WFC is trying to undo harmful philanthropic practices.

2

**WFC Board and Staff will require an internal culture of accountability and responsibility within all levels and across all facets of the organization.**

- **Establish** clear cultural and operational practices and policies to ensure alignment of mission, vision, and values.
- **Develop and implement** a performance review process for the President that considers staff and grantee input.
- **Formalize** an annual Board assessment process to improve Board relations, Board productivity, and Board alignment with WFC's mission and vision.



# COMMUNITY ROLE

1

**WFC will develop a structure for external accountability that addresses racial and social justice communities and that is responsible, responsive, transparent, and nimble.**

- **Develop** a method/tool to solicit and incorporate feedback from the larger racial and social justice communities (non-grantee partners and potential future grantee partners) concerning the foundation's performance and impact on Chicago's social justice community.
- **Communicate** feedback and implementation to WFC stakeholders via website, social media, and public forum.

2

**WFC will deepen and expand its role in support of Chicago's organizing and advocacy ecosystem.**

- **Utilize** the foundation's convening power to bring organizations together to expand Chicago's movement building table.
- **Develop** an approach of advocacy within the philanthropic sector — both locally and nationally — that addresses the harmful practices and white supremacy that continues to exist in philanthropy.
- **Explore** the creation of a movement advisory committee.

# GRANTMAKING

1

**WFC's grantmaking will challenge the power dynamics between funder and grantees, demonstrating trust-based philanthropy.**

- **Continue** to streamline and simplify WFC grantmaking processes and paperwork.
- **Initiate** relationship building opportunities with prospective grantees.
- **Provide** responsive, adaptive, non-monetary support to bolster leadership, capacity, and organizational health.
- **Develop and implement** a method/tool to solicit and incorporate anonymous feedback and annual performance reviews (for the Foundation) from grantee partners to inform transparent grantmaking, capacity-building, and programming.

2

**WFC will center racial justice in our grantmaking.**

- **Shift** WFC's grantee portfolio to consist primarily of POC-led/POC-centered organizations while prioritizing intersectionality by focusing on the intersection of identities that have been marginalized.
- **Prioritize** POC-led/POC-centered organizations for larger grant sizes and multi-year funding. Focus on POC-led organizations with intersectional identities.
- **Institutionalize** the Movement Building Fund so that it is a permanent part of its overall grantmaking.

3

**WFC will reimagine what impact means in its work and for the philanthropic sector and society overall.**

- **Adopt** an annual evaluation framework that captures the work of movement building.
- **Evaluate** WFC's impact on the social justice community. The evaluation will be rooted in advancing racial justice in the movement-building ecosystem in Chicago and based on a determined set of criteria.

# FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

1

WFC will be a model for innovation, responsiveness, and transparency in utilizing its investments and capital in service of organizers, advocates, and communities that have been historically marginalized.

- **Reevaluate** options to utilize the full breadth of our assets in order to achieve our desired impact and accomplishments.
- **Secure** a new Outsourced Chief Investment Officer (OCIO) to provide personalized attention to the Foundation's investments.
- **Utilize** corpus beyond grantmaking in support of communities served and most impacted.

# TRACKING OUR PROGRESS

## This plan for WFC's future requires a deep commitment

on the part of the Board, staff, and leadership of the organization, as well as strong engagement with grantees, community members, and other stakeholders in the philanthropic, movement building, and social justice sectors. Measurements and accountability have been included for every strategy and task in the plan to ensure WFC has a guide within the plan for keeping progress on track. Through collaboration between WFC's President, staff, and Board, as well as outreach and responsiveness to grantee and community partners, all areas of the plan have been assigned lead personnel to ensure success, forward movement, and transparency.

Photo by [Sarah-Ji](#)



## CONCLUSION

While recent years and seismic events like the COVID-19 pandemic, the murder of George Floyd (and many others) at the hands of police, and the increasing visibility and interest in grassroots organizing have shone a brighter light on systemic racism, economic injustice, and other structural oppression, Woods Fund Chicago has been working to address these and related issues for decades. With a history of innovation, community organizing and empowerment, and leadership in the philanthropic sector, WFC recognizes the significance of this moment and the need for new and bold ideas to continue offering comprehensive and effective solutions.

Through its 2022-2024 strategic plan, Woods Fund will build on its rich history and continue its excellent work. The values, goals, and objectives outlined will guide the foundation in embedding principles of racial justice in its leadership, internal operations, and organizational

structures as much as it supports and advocates for them with grantees and other external stakeholders. In the coming years, Woods Fund will work towards rebalancing power in the relationships between grantmaking organizations and the communities served with an approach that truly engages, listens, responds to, and collaborates with those most directly impacted, and that empowers them to define their most pressing problems and effective solutions. Woods Fund will leverage its reputation as a model and convener in the field to further amplify its impact, while also examining what that impact looks like and how best to measure it. The foundation plans to remove obstacles to grantmaking and center accountability, transparency, and relationship in its grantmaking and investments. Lastly, Woods Fund will continue to innovate and take risks in exploring wide-reaching solutions to the

most pervasive and pressing systemic oppression facing communities that have been historically, and continue to be, marginalized.

*The vision driving this plan is an organization and broader social justice community of increased impact, bold innovation, inspirational modeling, disruption of existing power dynamics, commitment to racial justice, centering the voices, experiences, and ideas of those most directly impacted, and a strengthened and empowered community organizing and movement building ecosystem in Chicago and the region.*

Through this plan, Woods Fund Chicago strives to continue its legacy of leadership in these areas and in the philanthropic sector overall, inspiring others to collaborate in creating a better, more just world together.

## SOURCES

The definitions included in this document were created by Morten Group, LLC, drawn from [www.racialequitytools.org](http://www.racialequitytools.org), and/or adapted/adopted from the following sources:

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Photo by [Sarah-Ji](#)





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