



ANNUAL REPORT

2020 - 2021

OUR MISSION

The mission of the Chicago Poetry Center is to connect people with poetry, equitably engage poets with communities, and foster creativity and literacy in schools.

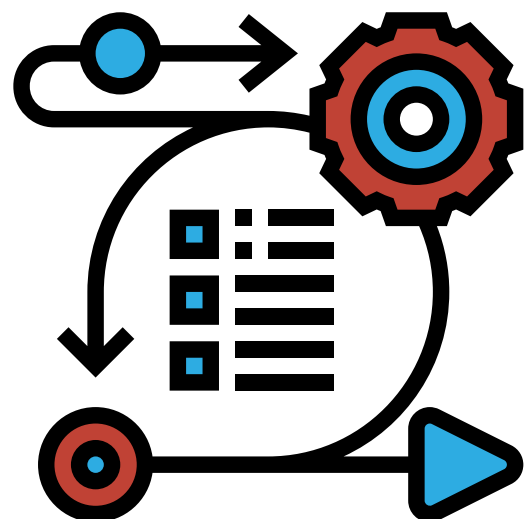


OUR VISION

We envision a world where poetry catalyzes reflection, connection, and change.

OUR PROGRAMS

Core programs include: education, with a focus on underserved Chicago Public Schools; performance, with a focus on bringing poetry to neighborhoods citywide; and critical conversations through poetry, with a focus on anti-racism in the workplace.



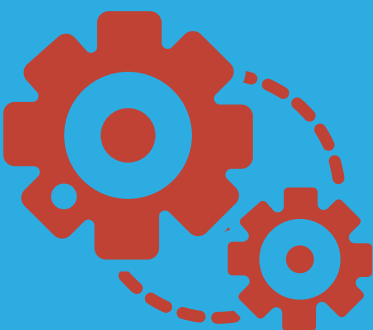
2020-2021: The **MAKE IT WORK** Year

What to say about a year like this one? We made it work!

A full year of virtual classrooms, virtual performances, staff working remotely, changes in funding streams, changes in the world -- we could not have predicted this year, and we couldn't be prouder of the staff, board, and supporters who made CPC's resilience and success possible over the course of it.

This annual report is an opportunity to look back on what we accomplished, the ways we were able to sustain and even grow during this unpredictable time. We know that poetry's ability to catalyze reflection, connection, and change in the world is needed now more than ever, and we are committed to advancing that work for many years to come.

Thank you for being part of the Chicago Poetry Center!



2020-2021 BY THE NUMBERS

7,500 CPS students reached through virtual classroom residencies and pop-up performances



3,000 people attended CPC online events

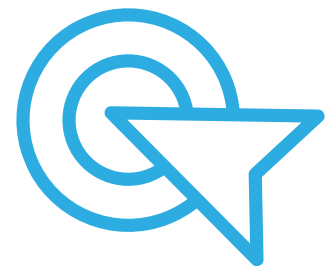
38

Chicago poets and writers paid by CPC for teaching and performing



46%

increase in CPC's annual budget over the past three years



ZERO

CPC jobs or teaching artist contracts lost during the pandemic



SCHOOL PROGRAMS

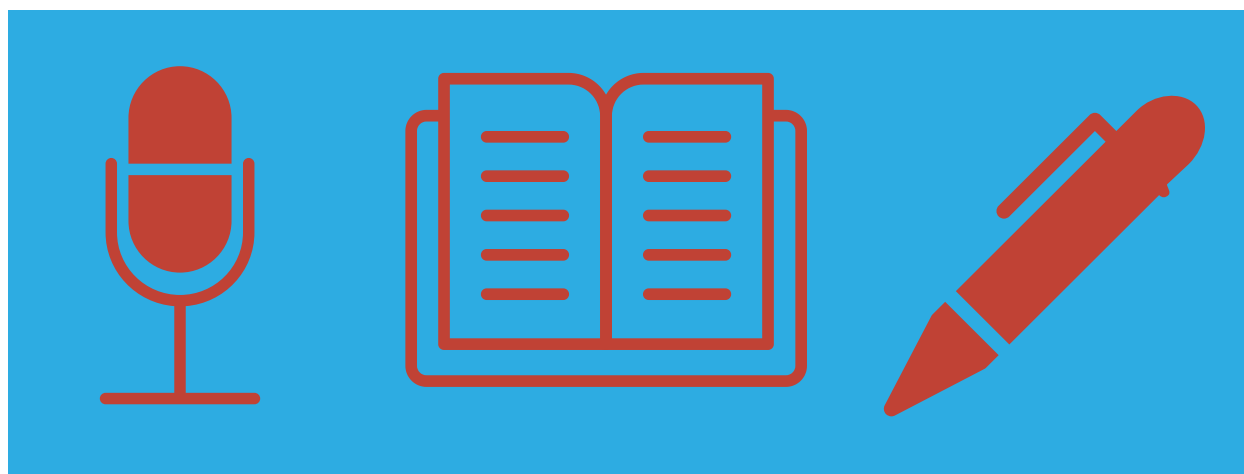
Pandemic or no pandemic, students need poetry!

We are proud to have been one of the very first arts partners able to deliver programs to Chicago Public School students learning at home. Our offerings crossed the digital divide, offering access to programming both over home internet connections and through packets for students without reliable internet access.

School year 2020-2021 poetry residencies connected via livestream with young poets all over the city. Our teaching artists worked in 10 schools with 41 virtual classrooms, reaching a total of 7,500 students through residency work and pop-up performances.

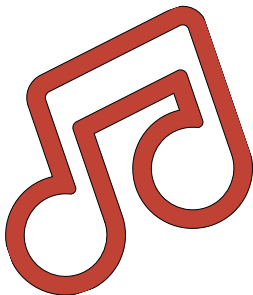
This year, we also launched a new type of residency. In partnership with local health and wellness organization Aunt Martha's, our teaching artists worked with court-involved youth through Evening Reporting Centers, offering the same level of engaging and exciting opportunities for self-expression, social-emotional skill development, and literacy learning as our regular in-school and afterschool poetry residencies.

Finding unique ways to support student engagement via at-home learning was a challenge, and the CPC team met it! Our dedicated team of teaching artists paired each of their live sessions with interactive workbooks, text, and recorded videos. These materials allowed us to support all learners with the opportunity to read, write, and listen to poems from their weekly lessons even outside of regular residency sessions.



SCHOOL PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Many teachers reported that their highest attendance during virtual classes last year was during poetry sessions. Students showed up for poetry because their Poets in Residence created sessions that mattered to them.



This fall, on the first day of programming in a classroom at Swift Elementary, Poet in Residence Leslie Reese asked her students to write wish poems. At the end of that first day, 2nd grader Sara sang her poem of wishes to the class.

CPC was thrilled to partner with Intrinsic Schools for a cross-campus community event in celebration of Black History Month. With support from the recording studio at GAP Community Center, CPC Poets performed original spoken word pieces alongside Intrinsic student poets. The event was filmed and presented as a virtual screening for the school's students, faculty, and families.



Two CPC Poets In Residence led residencies at schools they attended as students!



Then & Now
Back to School
at Shoesmith Elementary
Joy Young
2nd Grade Student Resident Poet

A graphic with a dark blue background. It features icons of papers, a pencil, and a laptop. Below the text are two circular portraits: a young girl on the left and a woman on the right.

Then & Now
Back to School
at Avondale Logandale
LUIS TUBENS
Student Resident Poet

A graphic with a light blue background. It features icons of papers, a pencil, and a laptop. Below the text are two circular portraits: a young boy on the left and a man on the right.

CRITICAL CONVERSATIONS @ WORK: ANTI-RACISM

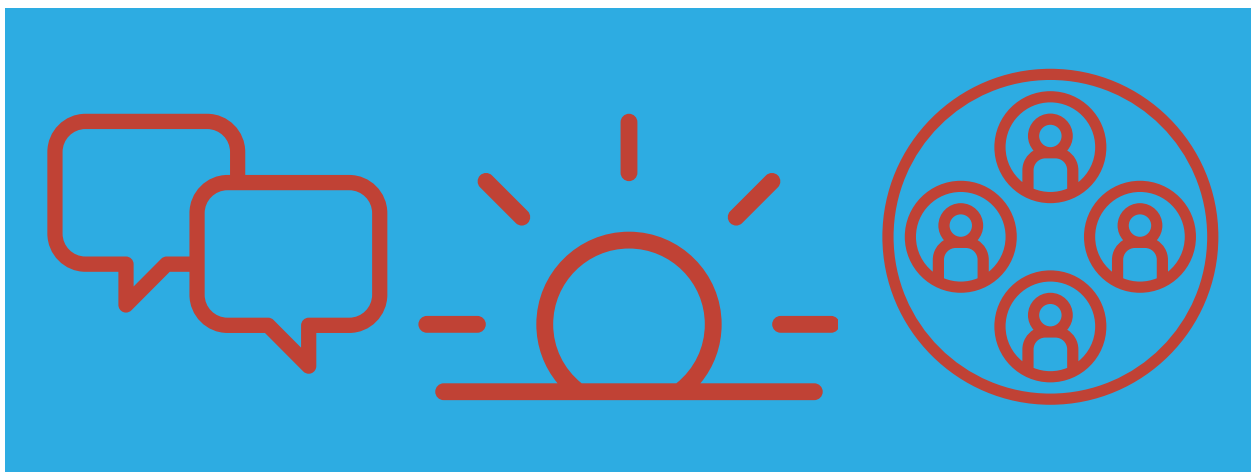
This year, we commissioned two poet-educators to design and pilot a curriculum that uses poetry to bring adults into critical conversations at work. Through the program, the written word provides a jumping-off point for conversations that uncover commonalities to generate connection and empathy, launching essential conversations about the many ways that race shapes our individual human experience and our interactions with each other.

Each session is led by two trained and racially diverse co-facilitators who guide participants through exploration of a theme related to racial justice through discussion of one or more contemporary poems, sharing of personal experiences, and guided writing practice. No prior poetry experience or education is needed, and sessions are conducted either virtually or in person.

Topics covered by the sessions include microaggressions, unspoken rules and biases, erasure, harm and healing, othering and belonging, and the necessity of hope for our shared survival.

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.

Sessions include a pre-session reading and concepts packet distributed to all participants, poems read live by facilitators or recording of authors reading their poems, time for guided individual reflection, peer sharing and group discussion, and follow-up resources for further reading and exploration.



CRITICAL CONVERSATIONS: WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING

"Great session! A small sampling of a lot that we need to talk about, done in an easier way because we're discussing an art piece, not a heavy event."



"Honestly a breath of fresh air. This truly was heart-centered work. I feel like I have gotten to know my close co-workers and the other members of the team who I don't work as closely with so much better and more authentically just in those two hours. I so appreciate the space for vulnerability, creativity, curiosity, genuine emotions, and just humanness. Thank you."

"Great prompts, built-in reflection time, moments of dialogue and facilitation. A renewing and rejuvenating way to open my week!"



"I was super happy that the facilitators were caring, responsive, and gentle with leading us through exercises that sometimes got deep and emotional. Also very happy that they opened the space to talking about poems, which is something that we don't get to do often!"

"Thank you for these incredible poems and putting together this workshop. It has helped me so much to dive into my own identity and experiences and to feel vulnerable and connected to others in my organization."



PERFORMANCE

CPC Reading Series

As we made our way through the pandemic and waited for opportunities to gather safely in person again, we translated the CPC Reading Series into digital form for delivery via social media and the electronic newsletter. Every month, we highlighted the work of one of our fantastic Chicago poetry community members, sharing a poem and a bit of their personal history and perspective.

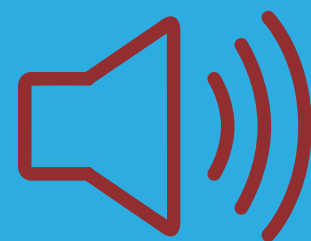
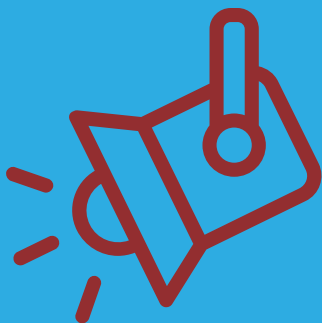
Chicago Poets Then & Now: Perspectives on Social Justice

To celebrate of National Poetry Month, CPC partnered with the Chicago History Museum to showcase exceptional Chicago poets and celebrate Chicago's rich poetic past with a free virtual performance the evening of April 29. The event, which featured Helene Achanzar, Maya Marshall, H. Melt, José Olivarez, and avery r. young, drew audience members from across the city and the country as well as a few international viewers.

Poetry Out Loud

For the fourth consecutive year, CPC hosted the annual Poetry Out Loud competition. Teens from Chicago-area city and suburban schools competed in the Chicagoland regionals for a spot at the statewide Poetry Out Loud poetry recitation competition and a chance to advance to the national competition in Washington DC to win \$20,000.

Despite the many challenges created by the pivot to a remote national contest, students were able to submit videos of their recitations to be judged by our panel, and judges conducted their work remotely. The first and second places from each region (city and suburbs) then progressed to the Illinois state competition level. Catherine Herrera (Taft High School, Chicago), became the 2021 Illinois State champion in the Poetry Out Loud: National Recitation Contest. We are especially proud that Catherine is also a CPC Poets in Residence program participant!



EQUITY EFFORTS

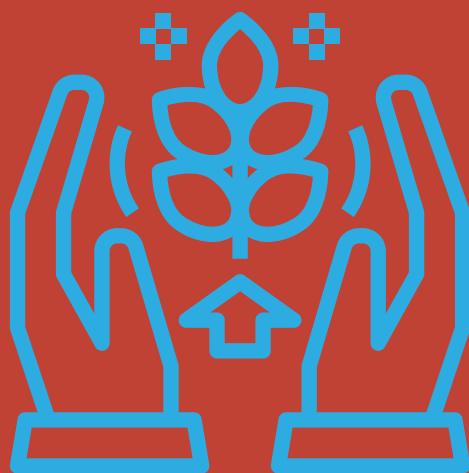
The Chicago Poetry Center is dedicated to diversity, equity, and inclusion in all of our operations, and to becoming ever more intentionally and overtly anti-racist as an organization. We are engaged in a constant process of analysis and growth in all of these areas, and a few of our efforts are described below.

At the board of directors level, we added two positions to the board that are filled by CPC teaching artists; these are two-year positions for which the teaching artists receive a monthly stipend.

In pursuit of ever greater transparency in our operations, we have also opened all board and committee meetings to any member of the staff, including interns and teaching artists, interested in attending. The board has also established a standing anti-racism subcommittee focused on exploring structural options for the board to promote ever greater equity in its functioning, and facilitating the continuous growth of board members in leveraging their privileges toward the advancement of equity.

Within our programs, we launched the Critical Conversations @ Work: Anti-Racism program and committed to compensating the poets of color whose work we feature in the program with royalties each time their poem is used.

At the staff level, we initiated a series of paid internships to replace key unpaid volunteer roles. We also conducted a review of teaching artist compensation across Chicagoland literacy organizations and raised our teaching artist pay by 20 to 25% across the board as well as increasing the amount of paid preparation time.



OUR SUPPORTERS

This year, we launched a program where a person or group of people can sponsor a classroom for a full-year poetry residency! Huge thanks to everyone who supported us in bringing poetry into schools citywide.

Windy City Bookclub

Jeanne Barr
Paula Belnap
Elizabeth Blinderman
Liz Brune
Krista Kauper
Farley Kern
Martha Pampel
Debra Ryan
Liz Willock
Jodi Wine

The Krueger Family Residency

Julie, Scott, Colin, Grant
& Andrew Krueger

CAA Sports Media Group

Marco Critelli
Michael Klein
David Koonan
Matt Kramer
Matt Olson
Alex Scheg
Tom Young

In Honor of Reggie Lerner

Elise Coleman
Jeff Coleman
Matt Kramer
Erika Kramer
Myla Lerner
Kendra Lerner
David Lerner

Kelly McGinnity + Friends & Family

Khusboo Agrawal-Beltran
Patti & Nebil Benaissa
Parul Desai
Dan & Mary McGinnity
Geri McGinnity & Tom Wroblewski
Jay & Karen McGinnity
Kathleen McGinnity & Bob Wake
Kelly McGinnity
Maureen McGinnity & Richard Ziervogel
Nancy McGinnity
Tom & Maggie McGinnity
Jordan McGinnity-Boswell
Lauren McGinnity-Boswell
August McGinnity-Wake
Nancy & David Schlack

In Honor of Robert Coleman

The Coleman Family

Suzette's SUPER

(Students Using Poetry to Excel in Reading)

Andrea Burlison
Kristen Castelloni
Vicky Free
Jeff & Jeni Frient
Joshua Gallindez-Webb
Andre Guichard
Thadderine Jones
Julian Lopez
Michael Press
Mike Robinson
Suzette & Jonathan Webb
Kay Whitchurch
Vincent & Carla Crawford

Honoring Sally Boniecki and her Love of Poetry

Elizabeth, David, Max &
Anna Blinderman

Henry Sampson

Henry Sampson

In Honor of Joan Schoofs

Eleanor Donnelly
Kathleen Ferguson
Allegra Giulietti-Schmitt
Maggie Miler & Dick Biggins
Allison Nelson
Emily & Ian Pfaff
Danielle Rios
Mary Beth Ryan
Janet & Richard Schmidt
Susan Schmidt
Elana Schwartzman
Michael Warren
Norah Webster

Paula Belnap Action: Poetry

Paula Belnap
Linda Berz
Judith Chandler-Zaslavsky
Jenifer Coletta
Maura Cullen
Dina Gallay
Lillie Grisko
Robyn Hall
Stacey Kaniewski
Karen Leone
Molly Newell
Elise Paschen
Rina Ranalli
Valerie Staublin

West Monroe

Lorenzo DeLeon
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Susan Stelter

Friends @ Google Chicago

Julie Krueger
Shannon Wasiolek
Jennifer Wesley

Oak Park River Forest Poetry Supporters

Jeffrey & Leanne Cribbs
Kent Dymak & Ted Foss
Sue & Dan Foran
Julie & Scott Krueger
Maura O'Hara & Bob Wielgos
Chandler & Steve Roskam
Jill & Steve Smith
Elizabeth Thompson
Lisa Morrow & Ben Weinberg
Connie & David Zyer

With Creative Literacy & Poetic Justice for All!

Jake Aronson
Barbara Blinderman
Steve Blinderman
Sally & Joseph Boniecki
Julie Boniecki
Nell Cobb
Christina Dickerson
David Egeland & Andrew Friedman
Maureen Fayen
Kelly Geary
Lisa Herold
Ted Motz
Quinetta Shelby
Margaret Suchan-Pickert
James Williams

Friends of Lonna

Lonna Braverman
Marianne Cordora
Donna Fathke
Jennifer & John Jasper
Ivy Lerner
Susan Schneider
Nancy Veatch
J Yip

Fremd High School Teachers & Alumni

Dwight Aukee
William Boyce
Kevin Brewner
Margaret Caruk
Rosemary Caruk
Paul Cleary
Karl Craddock
Jaci Devine
Gina Enk
Len Fiocca
Sabra Gerber
Corina Gonzalez
Alyse Liebovich
Kristy Loughlin-Vance
Antonette Minniti
Maria Mungai
Dennis Murawski
Lynn Ridge
Henry Sampson
Lisa Werner
Kurt Williams
George Yang

Quincy University Alumni

Michael Sennett
Henry Sampson
James Winter

Connection through Poetry

Andi Blumstein
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Julie Daraska
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Matt Gnabasik & Gina Latinovich
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Randie Wolfe

Friends of Literacy

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Elizabeth Brennan
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Don Chatham
Bob Chicoine
Amy Cordell
Jane Erlandson
David Fink
Anne Kelly
Francesco Levato
James Negley
Henry Sampson
Michael Sennett
James Swinerton



Friends of Beth & Helene

Kelsey Balk & Dan Herbert
Kathy & Bob Balk
Cynthia Besecker
Alison Broeren
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Maryrose Carroll
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Santi Khairassame
Allison Kilberg
Natasha Kohl
Keetje Kuipers
Chelsea Lavin
Joan & Clarence Moehl
Marissa Muller
Tim & Beth Murphy
Gabrielle Nelson
Joshua Nguyen
Ydalmi Noriega
Emily Osborn
Maya Pocock
Mike Puican
Fran Sampson & Ted Sowinski
Santiago Sanchez
Andy Sia
Danielle Susi
Marissa Trevisan & Nahiris Bahamón
Tony Trigilio
Ashley Trumbo
Kathleen VanDemark
Gwen & Jim Walski
Adina Welch

Spread Love. It's the Chicago Way!

Jane Bandyk
Tori Collins
LaToya Jones
Langston Peace
Carrie Peace
Mallari Peace
In Memory of Estela Reyes
Tiffany Scott-Horton
Henry Taylor
Theressa Wilkins



INDIVIDUAL DONORS

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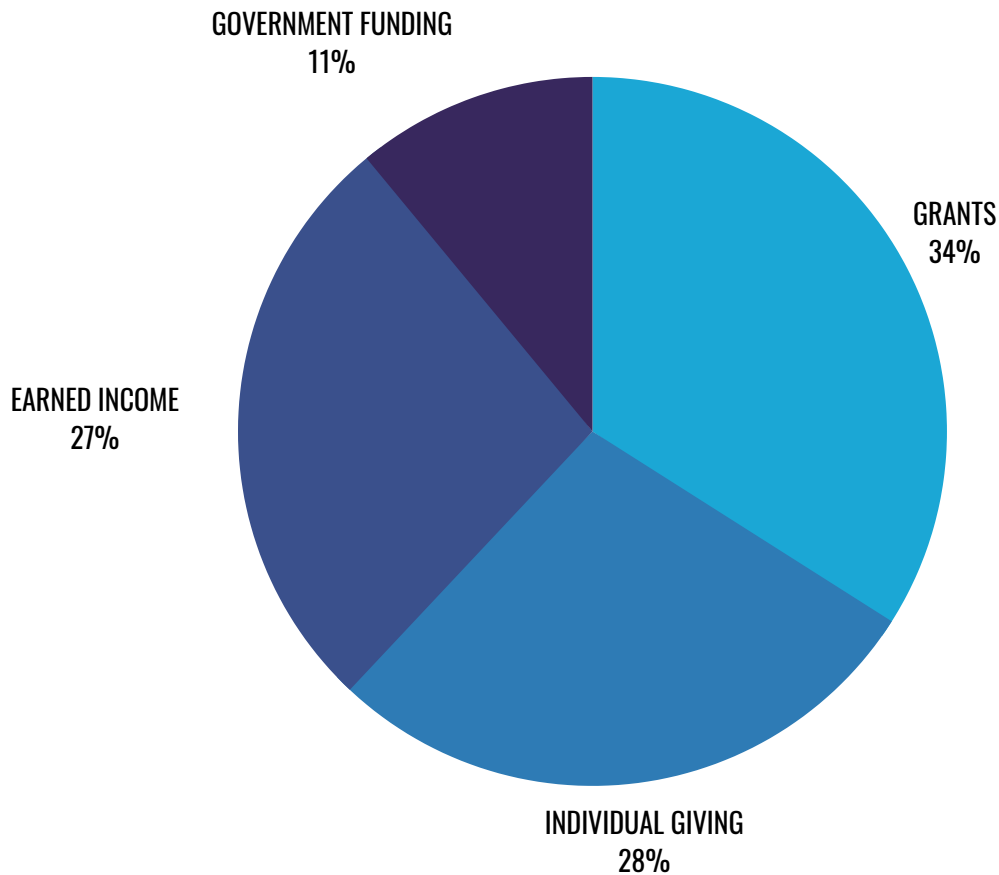
FUNDERS

Albert Pick, Jr. Fund
Bader Philanthropies
Chicago Community Trust (CCT)
Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events (DCASE)
Illinois Arts Council Agency (IACA)
Illinois Humanities
Literary Arts Emergency Fund
Polk Bros. Foundation
Raitt Family Foundation
Ralla Klepak Foundation for Education in the Performing Arts



FISCAL YEAR 2021 FUNDING

The Chicago Poetry Center has recently experienced significant growth year to year, including a 46% increase in our annual organizational budget over the past three fiscal years. We are committed to this process of strategic growth and revenue stream diversification as we pursue our mission in powerful, equitable, and sustainable ways.



STAFF & BOARD

FY21 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Secretary: Elizabeth Blinderman
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Helene Achanzar, Director of Programs
Kristina Kim, Intern Manager
Kara Kowalski, Website Intern
Marty McConnell, Director of Strategy & Innovation
Gabrielle Nelson, Social Media Intern
Sabrina Szos, Programs Intern
Alexandria Valentine, Executive Assistant

POETS IN RESIDENCE

Fullamusu Bangura
Davon Clark
Larry O. Dean
Teresa Dzieglewicz
Crystal Vance Guerra
Jyreika Guest

Joshua Nguyen
Tarnynon Onumonu
Noel Quiñones
Leslie Reese
Timothy David Rey
Eemanna Rivers

Chanell Ruth
Stuti Sharma
Luis Tubens
Joy Young



GROWING

I used to be a word
But now I am a book
I used to be an empty water bottle
But now I am full
I used to be blank
But now I am colored
I used to be a reader
But now I am a writer
I used to be a listener
But now I am a speaker
I used to be a member
But now I am the leader

-Irving C., 4th Grade



www.poetrycenter.org