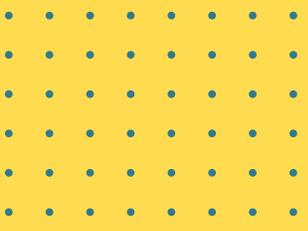
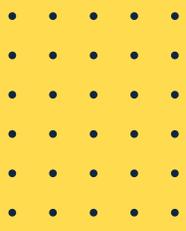


CHICAGO POETRY CENTER  
2024 - 2025  
ANNUAL REPORT



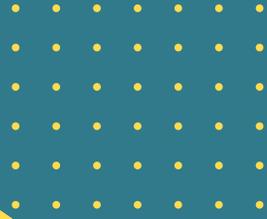


# TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 1 Letter from B
- 2 Mission, Vision, Belief, Values
- 3 50 years of CPC
- 4 Literary Life
- 5 Critical Conversations
- 6 Arts Education
- 7 CPC in the World
- 8 CPC Behind the Scenes



# LETTER FROM B



## The Chicago Poetry Center's 50th Anniversary was a year of living out our organizational values at an ever-expanding table.

The year began with a community-wide policy forum, discussion, and vote, and closed with confirmation that despite federal pressure, our values hold. I am particularly proud of the way our values of humility and integrity showed up in our community-wide decisions: CPC's board exemplified these values when, as a voting body, they voted to be one-third of a community-wide vote, recognizing a moment in which widening the decision-making table was crucial. And I feel humbled by the energy and attention that CPC Poets in Residence, Staff, and Board brought to that process.

This same spirit carried from the opening day of our retrospective exhibit and documentary premier at the Poetry Foundation, to our closing ceremonies, situated at "our house," Haymarket House, full of good neighbors. At the opening we looked back on 50 years of platforming marginalized, socially engaged voices, and celebrated all who got us to this moment. At our close we awarded three exceptional teaching artists with the Gwendolyn Brooks Award for Excellence in Teaching, and Martín Espada transferred some good-fight energy to the room to keep us moving into year 51.

This big table runs on our five core values, and on the overall idea of care and reciprocity. With each year, we grow a little further into the ways we can support our teaching artists, our staff, our students, our full community with meaningful programs, thoughtfully provided. A community with care at each position is a powered circuit that can continue to generate energy, and that is CPC's greatest success. In year 51 and all the years ahead, it is imperative that we keep tending to each role, each person—what we've built is exceptional precisely because it is caring in a whole-system manner.

It is not easy to create and maintain an energy like this in a time like this one. The years ahead will be a challenge. **It is with wild, verdant gratitude that I wish to thank everyone who has helped inform the ethos, care, and energy that has moved CPC from inception through its 50th year:** every founder, every board member, teaching artists, donor, staffer, classroom teacher, reader, student—everyone: my very deepest of whole-circuit thanks. May the following pages offer a moment of reflection and celebration in all that's been accomplished, and energy for all that's ahead.

B Sampson  
Executive Director

# 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 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 VISION

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

# OUR CORE BELIEF

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



# 50 YEARS OF CPC

POETRY FOUNDATION

## ANNOUNCING 50 YEARS OF THE CHICAGO POETRY CENTER JUNE 27 - SEPTEMBER 10

Alan Dugan

FRIDAY, MARCH 27, 8 PM  
The Poetry Center of the Museum of Contemporary Art, 237 East Ontario Street • \$22 donation • \$10 for students, MCA members

FRIDAY, MARCH 27, 8 PM  
The Poetry Center of the Museum of Contemporary Art, 237 East Ontario Street • \$22 donation • \$10 for students, MCA members

FRIDAY, MARCH 27, 8 PM  
The Poetry Center of the Museum of Contemporary Art, 237 East Ontario Street • \$22 donation • \$10 for students, MCA members

In Memory of Mr. Feolinos  
FRIDAY, OCTOBER 17, 8 PM  
The Poetry Center of the Museum of Contemporary Art, 237 East Ontario Street • \$22 donation • \$10 for students, MCA members

The Poetry Center presents an evening of poets & art to honor FRANK OTTARA. Open Friday April 18. BILL BERKSON PAUL CARROLL TED BERKSON ALICE NOTLEY PETER VOSTAKIS

The Museum of Contemporary Art, 237 E. Ontario St. \$2-\$50 donation. \$2 for students, MCA members

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 8, 8 PM  
The Poetry Center of the Museum of Contemporary Art, 237 East Ontario Street • \$22 donation • \$10 for students, MCA members

FRIDAY, MAY 14, 8 PM

FRIDAY, MARCH 27, 8 PM  
The Poetry Center of the Museum of Contemporary Art, 237 East Ontario Street • \$22 donation • \$10 for students, MCA members

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 17, 8 PM  
The Poetry Center of the Museum of Contemporary Art, 237 East Ontario Street • \$22 donation • \$10 for students, MCA members

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 8, 8 PM  
The Poetry Center of the Museum of Contemporary Art, 237 East Ontario Street • \$22 donation • \$10 for students, MCA members

FRIDAY, MAY 14, 8 PM

FRIDAY, JANUARY 23, 8 PM  
The Poetry Center of the Museum of Contemporary Art, 237 East Ontario Street • \$22 donation • \$10 for students, MCA members

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 8, 8 PM  
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FRIDAY, MAY 14, 8 PM

# THE CHICAGO POETRY CENTER

# 50

Years

## BOUNDLESS IMAGINATION SINCE 1974

This year, the Chicago Poetry Center celebrated our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

We trace our origins to the 1950s when literary censorship trials in Chicago incited local writers and editors to begin organizing and establishing spaces that welcomed diverse contemporary voices. In 1974, these grassroots efforts were formalized into the nonprofit now known as CPC.

In 2024-2025, we honored the loving labor that launched CPC and has kept it going all these years.





A retrospective exhibit and documentary produced by the Poetry Foundation launched CPC's anniversary celebrations. The exhibition included opening and closing events, as well as a commissioned broadside and documentary screening.



**Bright Bloom**

I wish I had hiked the frozen hill tonight  
for reception, called to tell you I had a good time  
hearing the two Somali cab drivers laughing  
near an avalanche of on-sale oranges.

I played a prince in absolute awe  
as the orchestra soared. I wish I had braved  
the snow to say, *I ain't want nothing but get the world.*  
How I'll whisper about the one wasp  
who lived with me here through all of October,  
that snowy owl in the nettles so close inland  
in November, the night, its lick of moon. Tell me again  
what your home looks like: wet grapefruit pulp,  
pomegranate juices running over fingers  
as the fruit is split, every dirt smudge  
on the cream carpet. The morning sunlight dancing  
off shards of glass, knocking perfume bottles  
and photographs, light emptying into itself like a sun  
at the center of a sun. This life of little regrets  
with no sad trombones. I imagine a new year  
caked with your grin, your unflagging belief  
in the bright bloom, the point just before liberation.  
The road will end one day, but on all other days,  
it does not. Think, my love, of all the stars  
where better versions are breathing.

**Helene Achanzar**

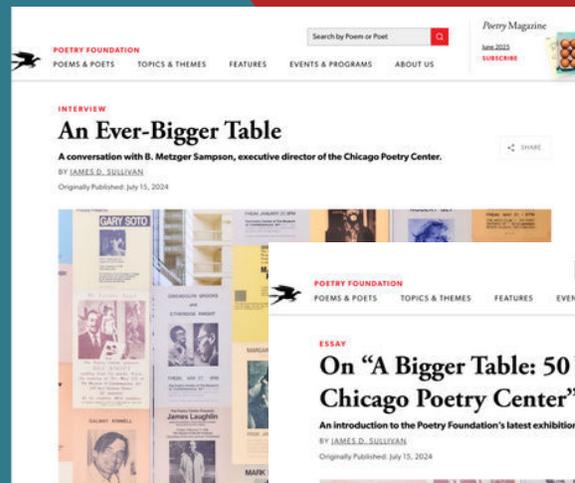
Edition of 775 produced by the Poetry Foundation in celebration of the Chicago Poetry Center's 50th anniversary and the exhibition, *Bright Bloom: 50 Years of the Chicago Poetry Center*, June 27-September 18, 2024. Designed and printed by the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago. Photo: Sara de la Haza. Commissioned Poem by Helene Achanzar with text from Michelle Alexander, Matt Rouspar, Philip Bessinger, Aja Chaudhry, Larry O. Chan, Steve Dougherty, Cha Helen, Henry McCarroll, Merve Yilmaz, C. Randall Price, Leslie Roman, Timothy David Pitt, Karim Ramey, B. Shingler, Sampson, Luis Tabares, and Jay Young.






We kicked off our 50th with a highway billboard, thanks to our friends at Wintrust.

Two articles on the *Poetry* web site delved into CPC's history and the Bigger Table exhibit, including an interview between broadside scholar James Sullivan and CPC's Executive Director, B Sampson.



NBC News, the Chicago Reader, and NewCity all took note of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations.

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Chicago's alternative nonprofit newsroom

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ARTS & CULTURE

A half century of poetic possibilities

Chicago Poetry Center celebrates a milestone with an exhibition, a new documentary, and live performances.

by Charlie Kalodziej  
June 26, 2024



THE CHICAGO POETRY CENTER



1974



2024

Chicago Poetry Center staff in 1974 and in 2024. Photo credit: Chris McNamara (1974), Moyo Abiona (2024)

When the Chicago Poetry Center (CPC) first arrived on the scene in 1974, poets were expected to imitate the classics and follow convention; anything more experimental was quick to meet an editor's trash bin. Fifty years later, the landscape of American poetry is thanks in part to CPC's tireless efforts to our poetic possibilities.

will celebrate its enduring legacy this summer with the exhibition, "A Bigger Table: 50 Years of the Chicago Poetry Center," on view June 27–September 14 at the Poetry Foundation. Cocrated through a joint partnership with the Poetry Foundation's director Fred Sasaki and library director Katherine Litwin, the exhibition will artifacts from the early days of the CPC's founding alongside original poetry on the organization's future.

hibition takes its name from the literary magazine *Big Table*, an early predecessor s CPC that was founded in 1959 by Irving Rosenthal and Paul Carroll. l and Carroll were then editors at the University of Chicago's literary magazine, *igo Review*. The duo were looking for something fresh and began nding with famed poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti, who sent Rosenthal and Carroll w synonymous with the Beat generation—Allen Ginsberg, William S. s, Jack Kerouac.

TOP VIDEOS



NEWCITY

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LIT

Fifty Years Of The Poetry Center

"Celebrating Chicago Poetry Center's five historic decades, this exhibition will feature fifty broadsides, fifty iconic vintage poetry event posters, archival materials and ephemera, and the premier of a documentary film 'A Bigger Table: Fifty Years of the Chicago Poetry Center,'" relays the Poetry Foundation. The show runs Thursday, June 27 through Saturday, September 14.

THE CHICAGO  
POETRY CENTER

50  
Years

CPC presented three free online learning opportunities designed to open professional doors for poets as a 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary community offering.

Chicago Poetry Center's  
50th Anniversary Virtual Learning Series

### HOW TO ORGANIZE A POETRY MANUSCRIPT

presented by C. Russell Price



Thursday, April 10 | 7pm - 8:30pm CT  
Register on Eventbrite for the Zoom link



Chicago Poetry Center's  
50th Anniversary Virtual Learning Series

### HOW TO SUBMIT POEMS TO LITERARY JOURNALS

presented by Lisa Low



Thursday, November 7 -- 7pm - 8:30pm CT  
Register on Eventbrite for the Zoom link



Chicago Poetry Center's  
50th Anniversary Virtual Learning Series

### HOW TO APPLY TO WRITING RESIDENCIES

presented by Keith S. Wilson



Thursday, February 13 | 7pm - 8:30pm CT  
Register on Eventbrite for the Zoom link





A powerhouse Summer Poetry Gathering closed the anniversary year with headliner Martín Espada, presentation of the newly reinstated Gwendolyn Brooks Award for Excellence in Teaching, an open mic and plenty of community-building time.



# LITERARY LIFE



THE CHICAGO  
POETRY CENTER

50

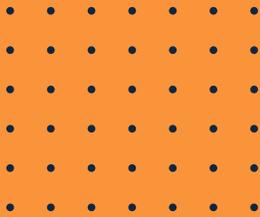
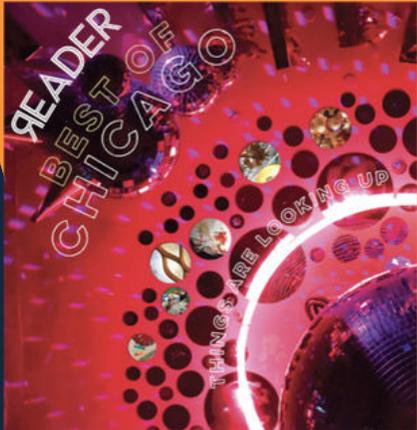


# LITERARY LIFE

Since our earliest days, uplifting marginalized voices and bringing poetry to the public has been a cornerstone of CPC's work.

During this anniversary year, the **Blue Hour** reading series featured one alumni reader and one new-to-us feature and was named the city's *Best Reading Series* by the Chicago Reader!

Our summer reading series **Poetry @ the Green** continued to thrive, and CPC poets graced stages citywide including *Estamos Aqui* at the Chicago Public Library Poetry Fest and *ECOS: A Chicago Latine Poetry Fest* where CPC students performed with Chicago Poet Laureate Avery R. Young.



p.s. – Check out our “All My Friends are Poets” video series on Intagram!



THE CHICAGO  
POETRY CENTER  
**50**  
Years



# CRITICAL CONVERSATIONS @ WORK: ANTI-RACISM



# CRITICAL CONVERSATIONS



Through a grant from Healing Illinois, from February through June of 2025 the Chicago Poetry Center offered free online Critical Conversations @ Work: Anti-Racism sessions open to all.

Critical Conversations use poetry as a springboard to increase belonging and inclusion in the workplace. By centering the dialogue on lived experiences reflected in poems, the process launches transformative discussions without requiring those most violently and directly affected by racism to tell or retell their stories of trauma and resilience.

Every participant also received the Continuing Practice Guide, a step-by-step set of directions and workbooks enabling them to continue the work at their own pace in self-guided pairs or small groups.

On post-session surveys, 82% of participants indicated that they now have new ideas for integrating anti-oppressive practices in the workplace, and 94% indicated that they found the session to be a place where they could safely explore and express complex experiences and emotions related to race and racism.

THE CHICAGO  
POETRY CENTER

**50**  
Years

# WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING ABOUT CRITICAL CONVERSATIONS



The perspectives of other people made me feel less alone.

The way the poetry invited us all in to the topics we were exploring, without any one person being put on the spot was incredible. I really appreciated the way it allowed for people to show up in whatever way they wanted to.

I loved the selection of poems placed in conversation with each other! I also greatly appreciated the vulnerability of the facilitators and participants who shared their reflections and made space for a multiplicity of experiences.

The process of telling my story was very powerful and not something I often think about. It was nice to have the space to process which is not something that I have time to do in my day to day work.

I was so impressed by the openness and vulnerability of the participants in the room. Everyone shared from their own personal experience and approached everything with lots of curiosity.

fantastic--a gentle, open, educational space that left me feeling grateful, energized, and hopeful



# ARTS EDUCATION





At CPC, we believe that 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.

We live out this belief by offering in-school and after school poetry residencies as well as pop-up performances for students in Chicago Public Schools across the city, with a focus on under-resourced schools in redlined communities.

CPC's programs serve students in kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade, using poetry to support them in achieving their academic, artistic, and social-emotional goals.

In school year 2024-2025, we offered 85 multi-week, rigorous but joyful poetry residencies across 24 schools, serving 2,125 students. We reached an additional 4,125 through pop-up performances that allowed students to witness and participate in assemblies featuring Chicago-based performance poets.

THE CHICAGO  
POETRY CENTER

**50**  
Years

# SCHOOL YEAR 25-25 HIGHLIGHTS

## MEETING EMERGING NEEDS: SPANISH-LANGUAGE CURRICULUM

This year, we successfully launched our Spanish-language curriculum. Developed by native Spanish-speaking CPC teaching artists, the curriculum offers a version of our longstanding English-language curriculum with lessons entirely in Spanish and utilizing poems originally written in Spanish rather than poetry translated from English. This curriculum was developed in response to the increasing need for Spanish-language offerings due to the influx of students with Spanish as their primary language, and encouragement from cooperating teachers who found poetry residencies to be a powerful way for newly arrived students to share their experiences and feelings, and connect with their new school environment.



## FOCUS ON OST

Through a new-to-us grant from the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), CPC offered after school (out-of-school time or OST) residencies to schools with high proportions of students from low-income households at no cost to the school. These residencies offered self-selected students the opportunity to engage with poetry and express their powerful voices during out of school time, increasing their connection to learning, the school community, and each other.

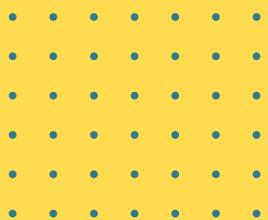
# OUTCOMES MATTER



## On post-residency surveys, 100% of teachers indicated that students:

- increased their interest in and enjoyment of reading and writing poems
- increased their confidence in reading and writing
- increased their ability to express their feelings and experiences through poetry
- increased their ability to use listening skills to identify the feelings and perspectives of others
- established positive relationships with their Poet in Residence
- increased their belief and understanding that their voices and stories matter
- felt heard and recognized within the learning environment
- learned the literary terms "line," "stanza," "simile" and "metaphor"

89% of teachers indicated that students improved in ability to give feedback to other students on their writing, and 84% indicated that students improved in ability to receive feedback from other students on their writing.



# WHAT TEACHERS ARE SAYING ABOUT POETRY RESIDENCIES



**What a joy!** Thank you for providing space for students to express themselves.

– *Natasha Ortega, Principal of Hamline Elementary*



The program really impacts our students because not only does it encourage creativity and writing, but **it also empowers students to know that writing is not just for the classroom—it's also for the real world.**

– *Mrs. Franco, 4th grade teacher at Sabin Elementary School*

My students had minimal previous exposure to poetry in our ELA curriculum, so **having CPC work in tandem with our curriculum really made all the difference for my students.** It made our learning of ELA, social studies, and science far more impactful for students.

– *Ms. Brist, Bilingual 2nd Grade teacher at Swift Elementary*

We can't say enough about how lovely this partnership is for our school. **Our teachers are so proud of our kids!**

– *Michelle Zarrilli, Principal of The O School*

THE CHICAGO  
POETRY CENTER

**50**  
Years

# ALL SCHOOLS READINGS

Each year, CPC hosts a mid-year and a year-end All Schools Reading. These events feature one reader from each poetry residency sharing their original work for a packed room of families, friends, and community members.

This year, the readings took place at the Poetry Foundation and provided stage time to 84 powerful young writers.



# POETRY OUT LOUD

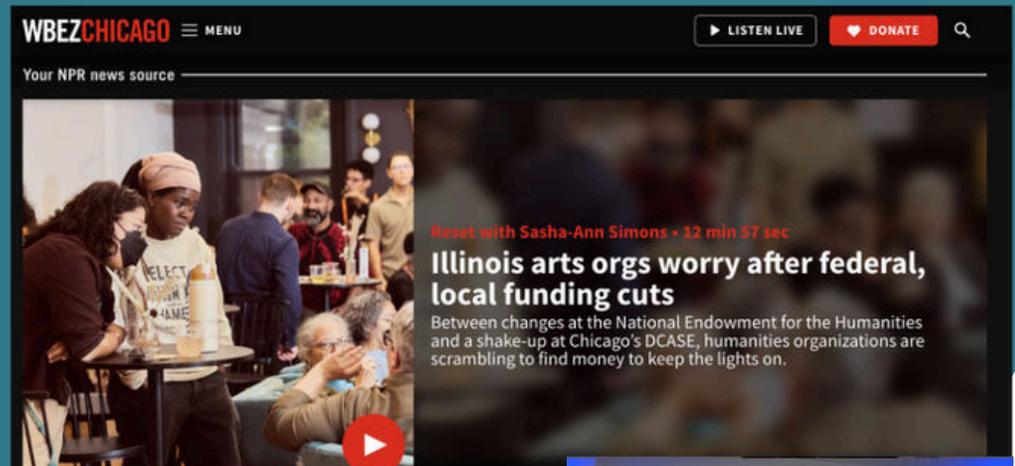
Every year, CPC runs the Chicago-area Poetry Out Loud program with funding from the Illinois Arts Council. Students compete at the school level for the chance to represent their peers at the regional competition. The winner of the regional competition, held annually at the Poetry Foundation, goes on to compete at the state level, vying for a spot on the national stage. 2025 marked the 20<sup>th</sup> year for the competition, and eight years of CPC coordinating the Chicago-area events.



# CPC IN THE WORLD



Executive Director B Sampson contributed to articles and radio segments on the federal and city government crises and their impact on Chicago arts organizations.



By Jules Yaeger  
Updated Apr 16, 2025, 9:38am CDT

SHARE COPY LINK

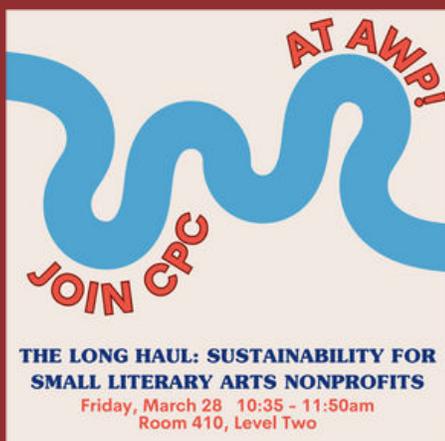
Illinois Humanities [lost a \\$2 million funding grant](#) after changes to the National Endowment for the Humanities. It funds other arts and humanities organizations around the state. In Chicago, delays and budget cuts also plague the Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events.

Reset takes a look at how local arts organizations are moving ahead.

**GUESTS:** Gabrielle Lyon, Executive Director of Illinois Humanities

B Metzger Sampson, Executive Director of Chicago Poetry Center

Subscribe to *Reset with Sasha-Ann Simons*



CPC coordinated and led a panel on sustainability for small literary arts organizations at the 2025 AWP (Association of Writers & Writing Programs) conference in Los Angeles.

# CPC BEHIND THE SCENES

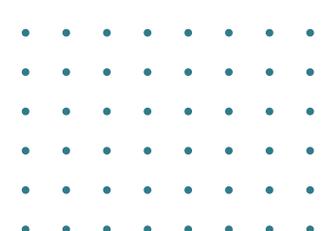
## THE CHICAGO POETRY CENTER



**1974**



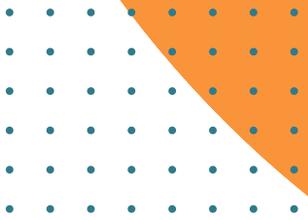
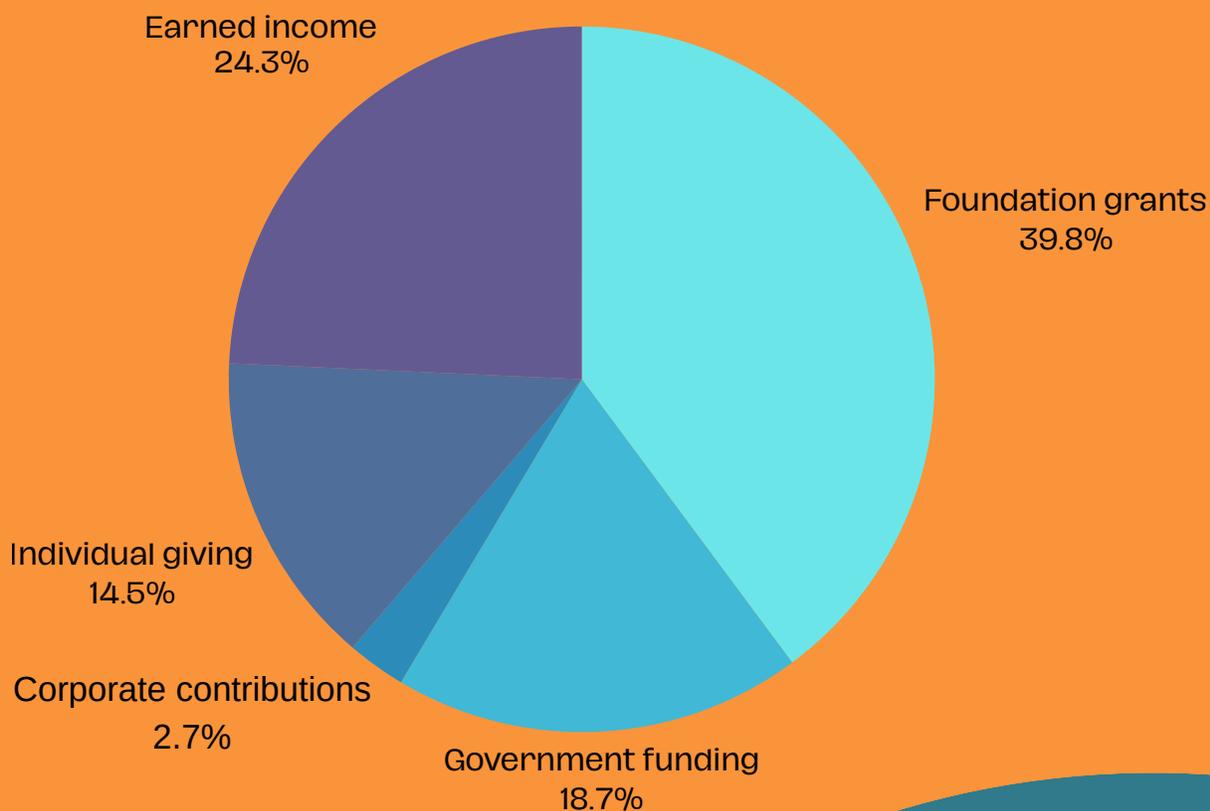
**2024**



# FINANCIALS



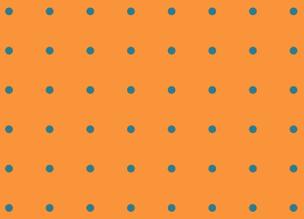
**CPC intentionally maintains a diverse range of funding streams, including support from earned income sources, foundation grants, government support, and contributions from individuals. This approach has allowed us to go more than 10 years without a deficit, and to establish a growing Board-designated cash reserve fund.**





# CPC'S SUPPORTERS

None of the work described in this report would be possible without the generous support of so many individuals, foundations, and government agencies. We are deeply grateful for their belief and investment in CPC's mission, vision, and work.



## **Thank you to the following organizations for their generous grant support of CPC:**

- Albert Pick Jr. Fund
- Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events (DCASE)
- Elizabeth Morse Charitable Trust
- Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelly Foundation
- Healing Illinois/The Field Foundation
- Illinois Arts Council
- Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE)
- Innovation 80
- Lloyd A. Fry Foundation
- Poetry Foundation
- Polk Bros Foundation
- Ralla Klepak Foundation for Education in the Performing Arts
- The Seabury Foundation



**One amazing way individuals and groups support our work is by sponsoring a classroom for a full-year poetry residency! Huge thanks to everyone who supported us in bringing poetry into schools citywide.**

**Friends of Lonna**

Linda Hultgren  
Nancy Veatch  
Ivy Lerner

**CPC's Literary Family**

Dan Campion  
Maryrose Carroll  
Kenneth Clarke  
John Dangora

**Fremd High School Teachers,  
Alumni and Friends**

Kevin Brewner  
Don Chatham  
Paul Cleary  
Karl Craddock  
Maria Mungai  
Dennis Murawski  
Anna Roesinger  
Henry Sampson

**Friends of Ana and Nina**

Elizabeth Brown  
Isabelle Davis  
Daniel Diaz  
Ana Espinoza  
Ben Fishner  
Blanca Gonzalez  
Raji Mulukutla  
Ravi Shankar  
Krishnamurthy Shyam  
Nina Sudhakar  
Rama Sudhakar  
Anupam Tantri

**Friends of B and Helene**

Kathryn Balk  
Kelsey Balk  
Whitney Capps  
William Coughlin  
Mary Deziel  
Leigh Gilkey  
Santi Khairassame  
Chelsea Lavin  
Beth Murphy  
Christine Rollins  
B Sampson  
Theodore Sowinski  
Judy Thompson  
Kathleen Vandemark  
Patrick Wojtak

**Friends of CPC**

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Casey Carpenter  
Andrea Dydo  
Allen Gorman  
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Elizabeth Harper  
Christine Rice  
Tony Trigilio  
Susan Weiss  
Jon Woolwine  
Christopher Zeeck



### **Friends of Scott Krueger**

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Lisa Matznick  
Jean Ann and Barry McCarthy  
Maura O'Hara  
Chandler Roskam  
Jill and Steve Smith  
Jane Theodore  
Dusty Weichbrodt

### **In Memory of Mary Ellen Woods**

Liza Crisafi  
Micah Krohn  
John Mangan  
Michael Melbinger  
Jane Michalek  
Janet Riley  
Harriett Robinson  
Rosemary Russell  
MJ Schmitt  
Jimbo Sullivan  
Beth Towne  
Mary Ellen Woods  
Renee Yaseen  
Ed Zier

### **In Honor of George & Reggie Lerner**

David Lerner  
Ivy Lerner  
Kendra Lerner  
Myla Lerner

### **In Honor of Robert Coleman**

Mark Coleman  
Rosalind Coleman  
Laura McCloskey

### **Life Moves with Poetry**

Elizabeth and David Blinderman  
Christina Dickerson

### **Marfa Book Company**

Elizabeth and David Blinderman  
David Egeland and Andrew Friedman

### **Quincy University Alumni**

Henry Sampson  
Michael Sennett

### **Words Make Worlds, in honor of Shahnaz**

#### **Ghodsii Hovsepian**

Sheree Hovsepian  
Maya Odum  
Tracey Patterson



### **in memory of Salvatore Filipello**

Attento Family  
Jeanne Barr  
Paula Belnap  
David and Nanci Callaway  
Christopher Childres  
Angela Filipello Chimino  
Roberta Crampton  
Maura Cullen  
Lori Friedman and Alexis Petrakis  
Dina Gallay  
Scott Gould  
Mary Jo Greene  
Robyn Hall  
David Lansburgh  
Ivy Lerner  
Michael Melbinger  
Jane Michalek  
Valerie Staublin  
Laura Svolos  
Jodi Wine

### **For the Love of Poetry**

Alex Benjamin  
Thaddeus Bieniek  
Emily Bieniek  
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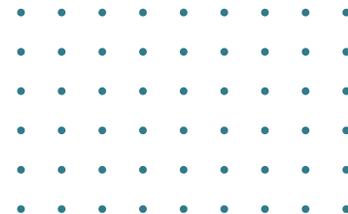
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Mailing Address:  
1448 E. 52nd St, #256  
Chicago, IL 60615

Office, Meetings, Main Event Space:  
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800 W. Buena  
Chicago IL 60613

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