

EVANSTON COMMUNITY FOUNDATION



YOUR PARTNERSHIP IN ACTION

FOR NOW, FOREVER, FOR EVERYONE!



500 Davis St., Suite 702, Evanston, IL 60201 | evanstonforever.org

A YEAR OF CHALLENGE, A YEAR OF ACTION

2025 has tested our community in new ways. From federal budget cuts to growing needs, many of Evanston's nonprofits are facing some of the most difficult challenges in their history.

But when our community is in crisis, Evanstonians step up. With your help, the Evanston Community Foundation is meeting the moment with more responsive grantmaking, deeper collaboration, and bold investments in local leaders and organizations.

Together, we're doing more than just reacting. We're building a stronger, more just Evanston — one that will be ready for whatever comes next.

How ECF is Meeting the Moment

INVESTING IN EVANSTON

- Launched Resilience Grants to help nonprofits weather sudden federal and state funding losses.
- Shifted all Community-Led Grants to unrestricted support, reflecting our trust in local organizations to decide what their communities need most — and giving them the flexibility to adapt, grow, and lead.

EMPOWERING LEADERS

- Expanded our Leadership Circles to support Black, Latine, and executive nonprofit leaders.
- Launched Board Leadership Training via the Ubuntu Leadership Institute Initiative.

ADVANCING JUSTICE

- Prioritized funding to BIPOC-led organizations and those focused on racial equity.
- Deepened Community-Led grantmaking to ensure those most affected by injustice guide funding decisions.
- Continued long-term support of reparative initiatives that address systemic harm.

OUR MISSION

Our mission is to mobilize community resources to drive systemic social change and build a thriving and resilient Evanston.

We achieve this by:

- Investing in the community with a sustainable and long-term perspective.
- Empowering Leaders to foster innovation and collaboration.
- Prioritizing community voice and choice.

OUR VISION

We envision a vibrant, just and equitable Evanston, where everyone feels valued and a sense of belonging.

OUR VALUES

- Collaboration
- Community
- Innovation
- Joy
- Resilience



RESPONSIVE GRANTMAKING:

A Rapid Response to Community Crisis

In 2025, Evanston nonprofits faced a dual crisis. On one hand, organizations saw sudden and significant funding cuts from federal, state, and local sources. On the other, many were serving communities under increasing threat — including our undocumented neighbors facing fear, misinformation, and uncertainty about their safety and future.

In response, ECF launched Resilience Grants to provide flexible, rapid-response funding that allowed nonprofits not just to survive, but to adapt in a time of uncertainty. Some organizations used these dollars to sustain core services like housing support, legal aid, and mental health care. Others pivoted quickly to offer “Know Your Rights” workshops and emergency resources for families navigating possible deportation.

These grants empowered local leaders to respond to the moment — to protect their communities, offer stability, and ensure no one was left behind.

In total, we distributed **\$300,000** in Resilience Grants this year — all part of our broader effort to meet the moment. ECF is on track to distribute an anticipated **\$3.4 million** in grantmaking across Evanston in 2025, thanks to the generous support of donors like you.

Resilience Grants

Launched in 2025, Resilience Grants help nonprofits navigate sudden financial hardships like federal, state, or local budget cuts. They sustain essential services such as counseling, housing, legal aid, and emergency support, keeping critical programs running during times of uncertainty.

Childcare Network of Evanston

Curt's Café

*Erie Family Health Center
(Evanston/Skokie)*

Evanston CASE

*Evanston Public Library
(Friends of the Evanston Public
Library, fiscal sponsor)*

Evanston Scholars

*Family Promise Chicago
North Shore*

*Farmworker and Landscaper
Advocacy Project (FLAP)*

*Infant Welfare Society of Evanston
(IWSE)*

*James B. Moran Center for Youth
Advocacy*

Northlight Theatre

Open Communities

Padres Empoderados

PEER Services, Inc.

Rebuilding Exchange

The Harbour, Inc.

Youth Opportunity United (Y.O.U.)

Collective & Enduring Grants

These multi-year, collaborative grants support nonprofits working together to tackle complex challenges and build long-term, systemic solutions for Evanston.

Books & Breakfast – 2025 Summer Program

City of Evanston – Financial Empowerment Center

Community-Led Grants

Selected by ECF's community-led committees, these unrestricted grants provide flexible operating support to nonprofits that demonstrate strong commitments to equity, inclusion, and meaningful local impact.

Books & Breakfast

Chessmen Club of the North Shore

Childcare Network of Evanston

Connections for the Homeless

Curt's Café

*Erie Family Health Centers,
Evanston Branch*

Evanston ASPA

Evanston Grows

*Evanston PEACE (Community
Organizing and Family Issues -
COFI)*

*Family Promise Chicago
North Shore*

*Gichigamiin Indigenous
Nations Museum*

Her Rising Initiative

*Infant Welfare Society of Evanston
(IWSE)*

*James B. Moran Center for
Youth Advocacy*

McGaw YMCA

Open Communities

Padres Empoderados

Shorefront Legacy Center

Sokana Collective Worldwide

YWCA Evanston/North Shore

Catalyst Grants

Catalyst Grants are small but powerful seed investments directed by ECF. They spark innovation, support emerging ideas, and fund early-stage projects that can grow into lasting community impact.

*City of Evanston - 2025 Town
Gown Conference*

City of Evanston - UpSquad

*Evanston Community Cooperative
- Multiple Employer Welfare
Arrangement (MEWA)*

*Evanston Public Library -
Evanston Care Network Sunset*

*Evanston RoundTable Media -
Racial Equity Journalist*

WHAT I LEARNED FROM LEADERSHIP EVANSTON

By Robby Bardwell, Senior Director of Development, ECF

In my three years at the Evanston Community Foundation, I've watched colleagues go through our Leadership Evanston program and come out inspired and energized. This year, it was finally my turn, and from day one, I knew I was part of something special.

Each Leadership Evanston cohort is carefully curated to reflect the heart of our city. Our 33rd cohort included nonprofit leaders, police officers, Rotarians, small business owners, faith leaders, and community volunteers — a group as diverse and dynamic as Evanston itself.

Over ten months, we met twice a month, gradually building trust, connection, and a shared sense of purpose. What struck me most was the network we built. Leadership isn't just about vision, it's about relationships. It's about knowing who to call when a challenge arises and being willing to show up when others call on you. I saw firsthand how alumni of this program continue to support one another long after graduation, collaborating to solve real issues in our community. Our cohort was no different.



Robby Bardwell



UBUNTU LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

AN **ECF** INITIATIVE



EMPOWERING LEADERS

As the year progressed, a new kind of urgency entered the room. Every session, someone shared hard news: a grant cut, a program at risk, a federal department on the chopping block. We listened to the CFOs of Districts 65 and 202 talk about the fragility of education funding. We heard about potential research losses at Northwestern. It became clear that no organization or institution was being spared.

Still, every project group showed up on presentation day with ideas to make Evanston better. That's what stuck with me the most. Even in the face of enormous uncertainty, people in our cohort kept going. They kept dreaming, kept building, kept caring for one another and for this city.

Leadership Evanston reminded me how proud I am to work for ECF, a foundation that doesn't just fund solutions, but brings people together to create them. In a year when so much has felt out of our control, this experience grounded me in something deeper: the power of connection, and the belief that we can face anything if we do it together.



Twogether, Leadership Evanston, Cohort 33



INFANT WELFARE SOCIETY OF EVANSTON (IWSE):

Keeping Families Afloat: How Resilience and Flexibility Make a Difference

In the heart of Evanston, the Infant Welfare Society (IWSE) stands as a beacon of hope for families facing extraordinary challenges. With a mission that goes far beyond traditional childcare, IWSE provides comprehensive support to the community's most vulnerable families, particularly those in the lowest economic tiers.

Stepping Up Amidst Funding Uncertainty

2025 brought unprecedented challenges for IWSE. Federal funding threats to an already resource-strained early childhood sector created a perfect storm of financial insecurity. "Sometimes we're operating for months without critical funding," said Stephen Vick, IWSE Executive Director.

The Evanston Community Foundation's Resilience Grant became the bridge needed to ensure IWSE could maintain critical services without interruption. This support meant keeping dedicated staff employed and continuing vital programs that support families at their most vulnerable moments.

One powerful example illustrates the grant's impact:

When IWSE discovered that a young mother enrolled in one of its programs was sleeping on a train with her two young children, they were able to immediately mobilize resources. By leveraging partnerships and emergency funds, they quickly secured hotel housing and eventually a new apartment for the family.



“ Sometimes we're operating months without critical funding. ”



Beyond the Resilience Grant, IWSE received a Community-Led Grant that provided crucial unrestricted support. This flexible funding allowed the organization to address needs that aren't typically covered by traditional grants.

“Unrestricted funds allow us to do everything from maintaining our facilities to providing extended mental health services,” Steve explains. Whether it’s replacing an air conditioner or supporting a family through an extended crisis, these funds provide the critical flexibility nonprofits need to truly serve their communities.

More Than Childcare: A Holistic Approach

IWSE’s work goes far beyond babysitting childcare. They serve families through Early Head Start, supporting children from the lowest-income backgrounds. Their comprehensive approach includes nutrition education, mental health resources, and support for entire family units.

“We’re preparing children for kindergarten and beyond,” Diana Newton, IWSE’s Director of Development, emphasizes. “If we don’t support brain development and family stability in these critical early years, we’re setting up challenges for future education.”

By supporting the Evanston Community Foundation, donors aren’t just giving money—they’re providing lifelines to families, supporting innovative programs, and helping build a stronger, more resilient community.

As Steve puts it, “The foundation’s support means we can keep fighting for our families, even when everything else seems uncertain.”



Baby plays with blocks at IWSE

SPECIAL THANKS

To Our Community Partners

 **HAGERTY** Northwestern *William Blair*

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AND SUSTAINABLE DESIGN ENGINEERS

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 **Endeavor Health**

 **NATURE'S PERSPECTIVE
LANDSCAPING**

 **Rotary**

 **akerman**

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 **UL** **Standards &
Engagement**

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Strategic IT Service Provider

 **WINSTON
& STRAWN**
LLP

 **ZS**

Join Us in Shaping Evanston's Future

If the stories inside moved you, we invite you to be part of this vital work. Your gift helps ensure that Evanston is a place where everyone can thrive — now, forever, and for everyone.

Here's how you can give:

- Visit evanstonforever.org/give
- Mail your gift using the enclosed envelope
- Scan the QR code below to give online in just a few clicks

Thank you for investing in a stronger, more just Evanston!

Empowering our community through the Now Fund for now, forever, and for everyone.

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