



Request for Proposals (RFP) - Fundraising Consultant

Introduction

Chicago Women in Philanthropy (CWIP) invites proposals from experienced fundraising professionals to partner with us in expanding and diversifying our revenue streams. We seek a consultant who can design and implement strategies to raise **\$250,000–\$500,000** annually through sponsorships, grants, major gifts, and individual donations.

Background

Chicago Women in Philanthropy (CWIP) is a dynamic network advancing equity through philanthropy, nonprofit leadership, and social impact. Guided by our **mission** to build an inclusive community that educates and empowers professional women to grow personally and professionally—and to advocate boldly for themselves and their communities—we are committed to creating an **equitable, inclusive, and connected social sector**, our **vision** for the future.

As CWIP's footprint expands, so too does the need for sustainable resources to support our signature initiatives—particularly our mentorship programs, women-led community grantmaking, and volunteer engagement efforts. This effort will also strengthen our growing commitment to mentor not only women in the sector, but also girls through our GIRLS program.

To achieve these goals, CWIP is seeking to develop a **comprehensive fundraising strategy** that secures sponsorships, institutional grants, major gifts, and individual donations. Historically, our organization has relied on a strong volunteer and event-based fundraising model, including our Annual Luncheon. While these efforts have served us well, we recognize the need to ensure long-term stability.

Therefore, CWIP is investing in dedicated fundraising capacity by engaging a **paid consultant** who can strengthen donor cultivation, expand institutional giving, and build strategic sponsorship development. This investment will allow us to diversify our funding, deepen engagement with our community, and advance our mission to empower women and girls while driving meaningful change across the social sector.

CWIP's Story and Impact

The Need

According to 2023 data from the [U.S. Census Bureau](#) and [U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics](#), women in Illinois:

- Make up just over half (50.6%) of the total population
- Own 19.7% of all employer firms, less than one-third of firms owned by men
- Make, overall, 83.6% of what men in Illinois make (in several cases significantly less when adjusted by race and ethnicity)

According to an [April 2024 HBR article by Cathleen Clerkin](#), women are overrepresented in the nonprofit sector (70-75% of nonprofit workers identify as women), yet men move up the organizational ladder more quickly, a phenomenon referred to as the “glass elevator.”

- **Women under-index as nonprofit CEOs overall, even more so in large organizations.** “Overall, 62% of nonprofit CEOs or executive directors identified as women while 38% identified as men. However, larger organizations were increasingly likely to have a male CEO.” ([Clerkin 2024 article](#))
- **Men make up the majority of board members for large organizations.** “Women represent the majority of board members for organizations with up to \$1 million in expenses. For organizations with more than \$1 million in annual expenses, the results are flipped: The majority of board members are men.” ([Candid 2024 report](#))
 - **Race accelerates the glass elevator even more quickly.** “White male CEO representation increases with organization size, while BIPOC female CEO representation decreases. An intersectional analysis of CEO race and gender indicates that white male CEOs are better represented among larger organizations. By contrast, BIPOC women CEOs see sharp and steady declines in representation as organizational expenses grow.” ([Candid 2024 report](#))
 - **Not only do underrepresented leaders—women, non-binary folks, BIPOC leaders, leaders with disabilities, LGBTQIA+ leaders, etc.—demonstrate high levels of efficiency and effectiveness in managing resources, they also are critical voices in ensuring funding is allocated from a community-centered lens.** In [Bold Ventures' 2024 Community Engaged Grantmaking guide](#), the authors assert that “unilateral decisions about resource allocation—made without the input of the individuals and communities they are intended to serve—fall short of achieving the transformative social change that philanthropy promises.”

Impact and Growth Highlights

- **Membership:** We celebrated our first full year of organizational memberships in 2025, and grew total membership by over 40%. We're now more than 385 strong, far surpassing our goal for this year to grow to 300 members.
- **Community Engagement:** 88% of program attendees credit CWIP with expanding their personal networks. We celebrated our largest Making a Difference Annual Luncheon ever in May 2025, where we celebrated our 2025 Making a Difference Award honoree, Z Scott, and surpassed our previous records in both attendees gathered and funds raised. We surpassed our goals, gathering a capacity crowd of 560 supporters and raising over \$165,000.
- **Mentorship Programming:** CWIP engages more than 100 Chicagoland women and girls in mentoring programs annually.
 - In 2025, our GIRLS Leadership Mentorship Program engaged a dozen 5th and 6th grade girls in extended mentorship relationships and development events. We also launched a Career Day mentoring event for high school girls, attracting more than 25 young women participants who gave clear feedback about the value of continuing this new program.
 - Our Women's Leadership Mentoring Program, or WLMP, engaged a dozen mentorship pairs in the Emerging Leaders cohort, and another dozen mentorship pairs in the Mid-Career Leaders cohort, through one-on-one mentorship connections, professional development events, and group social gatherings. We also upped our commitment as an organization to mentees, extending a full-year CWIP membership to all of our mentees to ensure they continue to benefit from all CWIP has to offer and, just as importantly, to ensure CWIP can benefit from their contributions as community members.
- **Professional and Leadership Development:** Annually, over 1,000 social sector leaders receive professional development from CWIP. CWIP had a record level of programming in 2024-2025. Two-thirds of participants reported advocating for themselves following a CWIP event.
 - Our Racial Equity and Social Justice Committee went right to the heart of several critical conversations, hosting interactive programs on the value of affinity groups to the social sector and a two-part series on collective responses to the shifting tide of DEI, among other programs.
 - Our Programs committee reimaged and relaunched our speed mentoring event, now called Mentorship Merry-Go-Round, to reinforce that everyone is a mentor. In that same vein, we delivered a sold-out Face to Face with Funders event where funder representatives and grantseekers connected and learned from one another.
- **The CWIP Voice:** We are using our organizational voice in new and expanded ways, with our Communications Committee leading the way to keep our community members informed and engaged. We formalized our process for using our CWIP organizational voice in the local and national conversation. We activated that by sharing our perspectives and signing on to several statements in support of maintaining the critical freedoms of funders and nonprofits to do our work.

Scope of Work

The selected consultant will:

- Assess CWIP's current fundraising landscape and identify opportunities for growth.
- Provide recommendations for donor cultivation, stewardship, and retention.
- Develop and implement a comprehensive strategy to meet the \$250k–\$500k revenue goal.
- Support sponsorship, grant, and individual giving strategies.
- Secure sponsorships and institutional grants aligned with CWIP's mission.
- Cultivate and steward individual donors, including mid-level and major gift prospects.
- Support board and committee members in fundraising advocacy.
- Align event fundraising (including the Annual Luncheon) with broader development goals.
- Offer guidance on development infrastructure, processes, and staffing as appropriate.
- Advise on fundraising events, campaigns, and best practices.
- Provide progress reports and recommendations to staff and board leadership.

Deliverables

- Fundraising plan with benchmarks toward the \$250k–\$500k goal.
- Fundraising assessment and recommendations report.
- Donor cultivation and stewardship strategy.
- Action plan with short- and long-term fundraising strategies.
- Sponsorship and grant proposal templates.
- Coaching and support for staff and/or board members in development roles.
- Periodic progress check-ins and final summary report.
- Progress reports (monthly/quarterly as agreed).
- Final report summarizing activities, outcomes, and recommendations for next steps.

Qualifications

The ideal consultant will have:

- Demonstrated success raising at least \$250k annually for nonprofits.
- Proven experience in nonprofit fundraising strategy and execution.
- Expertise in corporate sponsorships, grants, and major donor cultivation.
- Familiarity with Chicago's philanthropic and nonprofit landscape.
- Strong communication and partnership skills.
- Experience working with boards and volunteer committees.

Proposal Requirements

Proposals should include:

1. Consultant background and relevant experience.
2. Approach to fundraising strategy and donor development.
3. Examples of past fundraising successes.
4. References from at least two nonprofit clients.
5. Scope of work, timeline, and proposed fee structure.

Timeline

- **RFP Issued:** December 15th, 2025
- **Proposals Due:** January 30th, 2026

An interview may be requested with selected consultants in January/February

- **Work Begins:** February/March 2026

Submission

Please submit proposals to:

Sarah Witt

Association Manager

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