

# New Music Inc. – Chicago

*Funding, mentorship, and cohort learning for small-budget, artist-led music groups and organizations.*

## Overview and Guidelines

### Our Definition of New Music

New Music USA's mission is to nurture a vibrant and inclusive community for artists and listeners. To us, that means supporting the many musical approaches and ideas being created and performed today. We welcome all artists/organizations who are curating compelling sonic experiences, influencing original musical creations and presentations, and contributing to the sounds of tomorrow.

### About the Program

**New Music Inc.** is a city-specific incubator initiative supporting small-budget, artist-led new music groups and organizations through pivotal stages of organizational growth. Spanning 18 months, the hands-on program combines financial investment and peer-to-peer learning within a cohort environment that includes leaders who represent a range of music genres, neighborhoods, and backgrounds. A local Program Coordinator facilitates the initiative, working closely with participants to help them reach their goals.

With generous support from Walder Foundation, this cycle of New Music Inc. will support 12 new music groups and organizations based in the city of Chicago. The Program Coordinator for New Music Inc. – Chicago is brand strategist and arts executive [Kori Coleman](#).

New Music Inc. is open to organizations working in any music style. The cohort will consist of a broad array of organizations reflective of the breadth of creators and artists who are contributing to Chicago's unique music community, including performance groups, ensembles, collectives, record labels, festivals, presenters, and venues. A 501(c)3 tax status is **not** required.

The program will explore themes and challenges identified by participating organizations in collaboration with our Program Coordinator and New Music USA staff. We anticipate that this may include topics such as audience development, fundraising, marketing, board development, and other areas of strategic planning.

Originally launched in 2020 as the New Music Capacity Building Program in NYC, the program, re-named New Music Inc., has since expanded to Baltimore, Chicago, and Los

Angeles. Rooted in community building that is guided by a resident Program Coordinator, New Music Inc. aims to provide meaningful support for artist-led organizations at critical points of growth. Through mentorship, sustained guidance, and financial awards all within a cohort experience, the program helps organizational leaders identify, chart, and pursue their unique capacity needs. Each cycle enables us to help support the long-term connectivity and strength of the designated city's new music ecosystem.

## **Who Can Apply?**

We welcome applications from small-budget, artist-led music organizations with an average annual operating budget of between \$10,000 to \$250,000 over the last 3 years. Types of eligible organizations include, but are not limited to, performance groups, ensembles, collectives, record labels, festivals, presenters, and venues.

Applicant organizations must be based in Chicago. All applicants must confirm their ability to fully commit to program activities during the proposed timeframe of the program (see *Summary of Program Activities below*).

Successful applicants will:

- Have the ability to track and articulate outcomes and contribute strongly to the cohort
- Be self-motivated and enthusiastic to work with others
- Demonstrate artistic merit and performance history
- Have worked with music creators who are influencing the future of music and sound
- Demonstrate commitment to relationship building and collaboration with artists, other organizations, and the community
- Show that they would benefit from hands-on assistance with strategic planning, goal setting, and networking
- Have the ability to fully participate in the New Music Inc. program (i.e. commit time for participation across 18 months, have a key person/people who can represent the organization, etc.)
- Be active in the pursuit of moving their organization to the next level (goals, i.e. increasing funding to pay themselves, solidifying organizational structures, building donor/fundraising base, deepening collaborations, etc.).

## **Deadline/Timelines**

The application deadline is February 26, 2026, at 11:59pm CT. The application portal will open on January 29, 2026, at 10:00 am CT.

Awardees will be notified of their selection in May 2026 with a public announcement to follow in early June. The program's convenings will begin in June 2026 and will continue roughly every other month through November 2027.

## Summary of Program Activities

With support from Walder Foundation, New Music Inc. – Chicago will combine flexible financial support with professional development opportunities for **twelve** Chicago-based organizations, who must commit to the program's activities for the duration of 18 months. Selected groups will receive:

- An **\$8,000 grant for general support** aimed to help offset participation in the program (two installments over 18 months).
- **Assistance in developing a strategic plan.** You will be guided by the Program Coordinator to set clear goals and objectives.
- **Eight cohort learning sessions (3 in-person, 5 virtual):** a mixture of learning and collaborative sessions to gain knowledge and skills around pertinent topics, to share progress and ideas, and to hear from guest speakers and experts in response to needs expressed by members of the cohort. Cohort learning sessions will begin in June 2026 with one 2-hour meeting running approximately every other month through November 2027. Attendance from an organizational representative at all program convenings is required.
- **Four 1:1 check ins** between participant organizations and the Program Coordinator.
- **Dedicated mentorship sessions (4 to 6 sessions)** with a Chicago-based arts professional. Awardees will be paired with a mentor in alignment with their specific goals and interests (e.g. fundraising, marketing, organizational development, etc.).
- **Up to \$5,000 to be used as a travel exchange** to collaborate with peer organizations from active or alumni New Music Inc. cohorts in Baltimore, Los Angeles, or New York.

## Eligibility

New Music Inc. does not provide long-term financial support. Instead, this program aims to serve as a catalyst, by supporting collaboration and new ways of working to assist organizations with their own long-term planning and sustainability.

Eligibility requirements:

- Must be based and regularly doing work in the city of Chicago
- Must be an organization and NOT an individual artist

- Have a minimum of three years of performing, programming, and budget activity at the time of the application
- Must not be a previous awardee of New Music Inc. - Chicago
- Have an average annual budget between \$10,000 to \$250,000 over the past three years. We aim to build a cohort with a diverse range of budget sizes
- Have a dedicated organizational bank account
- Have a commitment to producing, performing, and/or commissioning the work of living, US/territories-based music creators on a regular basis in Chicago
- Have the organizational capacity to participate in the program fully including participation from either a dedicated staff, volunteer, and/or Board liaison

Other considerations:

- You do not need to have a 501(c)3 status

## Review Criteria

- Artistry
  - As demonstrated by the quality of the submitted music examples;
  - Quality and breadth of the organization's programming, including creators and/or musicians involved.
- Impact
  - History of performing or programming new music in Chicago
  - Commitment to performing, programming, and engaging with work by living music creators
  - Role in the applicant's community/borough/neighborhood that is reflective and responsive to the community they serve.
- Organizational Readiness and Capacity
  - The importance of participating in this program at this stage of the organization's development: why now?
  - The applicant's position to move to the next level through track record of gradually building audiences, growing their profile, financial growth, and developing their organization
  - Demonstrated ability to fully participate in the program for the 18-month duration

## Application Materials

### Organization Information

- Provide a **brief history of the organization** (organization bio). *Suggested length is 100-500 words.*
- Please provide your **organization mission and/or vision statements**

and describe the beneficiaries of your work, including creators, artists, audiences, participants, partners, and the broader community. *Suggested length is 100-250 words.*

## **Narrative**

- Written/video/audio narrative outlining the following points (written narrative or up to 5-minute video)
  - Provide highlights of your upcoming programming (virtual and/or in-person) displaying your commitment to new music, the new music program planned, and any artist development opportunities. *Suggested length is between 100 to 400 words, or brief video/audio.*
  - Describe the three biggest challenges for your organization at this time and explain why. *Suggested length is between 100 to 400 words, or brief video/audio.*
  - This program includes a grant to be used to build the capacity of your collective/ organization. Please summarize where the organization currently is in development and what you see as the next stage of, or area for growth. *Suggested length is between 100 to 400 words, or brief video/audio.*
  - What do you hope to accomplish through the program? How will this grant meet the challenges listed above? *Suggested length is between 100 to 400 words, or brief video/audio.*
  - Why is participation in the program important at this stage in your organization's development? Why do you need a program like this? Elements include peer cohort learning sessions, collaboration, mentorship opportunities, travel grant, etc. *Suggested length is between 100 to 400 words, or brief video/audio.*

## **Work Samples**

- 2 to 3 work samples demonstrating the work of living creators
  - Ensembles/collectives: please provide examples of recent performances that feature the work of different music creators
  - Presenters/venues/other: please provide examples of recent performances of different artists featuring the work of music creators

## **Past Programming**

- Programming list from your most recent season, highlighting music by living creators. You can provide additional information about past seasons at your discretion (text, file upload, or link).
- Please feel free to upload any programs, brochures, documents, etc. that represent past programming (past three years only).

## **Finances**

- A budget/financial statement for your current financial or fiscal year
- A budget/financial statement or audit for your last financial year. This can be an audited statement, a QuickBooks report, 990, or an Excel sheet.
- When does your fiscal year start and end?

- Your organization's budget totals over the last three years. This section requires you to provide a brief numerical response, the income total, and expenses total for each year.

### **Organization Structure**

- In what year did your organization or collective begin?
- Is your organization a 501(c)3?
- If applicable, how many board members does your organization have? If your organization does not have board members, how many designated volunteers help you to support the day-to-day of the organization?
- How many staff members does your organization have?
- How many staff members are paid?
- Briefly describe how your organization makes decisions and divides the organization's work (suggested length is 10 to 250 words).
- If awarded, please describe who will be the primary person responsible for participating in the program activities (as described in Summary of Program Activities in the guidelines) and their role in the organization (suggested range is between 3 to 50 words).

### **Support from the New Music USA Team**

For help with your application the following services will be available:

- Application Webinar: February 5, 2026, 1pm CT
  - [Register here](#)
- Q&A: February 18, 2026, 1pm CT
  - [Register here](#)
- All Webinar and Q & A sessions will be recorded and uploaded to [this page](#).
- If you have a technical issue with the application site, email [grants@newmusicusa.org](mailto:grants@newmusicusa.org) with "Technical Issue" in the subject line.

Due to the high volume of applications, New Music USA **is not able to:**

- Accept applications after the stated deadline of February 26, 2026, at 11:59pm CT.
- Consider or inform applicants of incomplete or improperly submitted applications.
- Provide feedback on grant applications.

Notifications and any communications about your application will be made via email from our application site. Please add [noreply@mail.smapply.net](mailto:noreply@mail.smapply.net) to your contacts to ensure you receive these communications.