



MSI Community Connections

January 17, 2026 - December 19, 2026

\$60,000

Lani Wo

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Letter of Inquiry



Griffin Museum of Science and Industry
5700 S DuSable Lakeshore Drive
Chicago, IL 60637

November 11, 2025

John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation
Office of Grants Management
140 S. Dearborn Street
Chicago, IL 60603

Dear Office of Grants Management:

The Griffin Museum of Science and Industry (MSI) is a nonprofit museum located in the heart of Chicago focused on creating hands-on, interactive, scientific and educational experiences for children and families. Founded in 1933, the MSI has spent over ninety years building curiosity and driving young minds to

explore new knowledge. In keeping with this mission, MSI is looking to start a program that connects socioeconomically disadvantaged communities in Chicago with funded transportation and admissions to the museum's exhibits for more equal accessibility.

Several communities in Chicago simply do not have the financial means to support trips to MSI, and live at or below the poverty line. In order to judge public desire for this project, we have chosen to work with the communities of Riverdale, Fuller Park, and Washington Park for a trial period of the aforementioned program; and we are asking for \$60,000 in order to cover transportation, general admissions, and smaller miscellaneous things such as color-coded nametags.

The MacArthur Foundation has worked with MSI since 1979 as part of its longstanding commitment to upholding existing public-serving Chicago foundations and bettering the city through philanthropic means. In funding this project, the MacArthur Foundation and MSI would be creating a deeper bond and making strides towards a common goal—ensuring that everyone has a chance to grow up with the tools needed to lead Chicago into its bright future.

Thank you for your consideration for this project.

Sincerely

Lani Wo, Museum of Science and Industry

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Need Statement

According to the Office of the Inspector General's data, fifteen of Chicago's designated community areas have populations where $\geq 30\%$ live at the poverty level or less¹. For the sake of this project, I'll be focusing on the three with the highest percentages: Riverdale, Fuller Park, and Washington Park.

In all three of these communities, over 30% of their populations make \$25,000 or less in income a year, with Riverdale at 31.7%², Fuller Park at 63.7%³, and Washington Park at 48.3%⁴. Additionally, in these communities, a substantial percentage of their populations are without household vehicle transportation, with Riverdale at 20.4%, Fuller Park at 56.5%, and Washington Park at 39.7%.

No other organizations are currently focusing on creating access to funded transportation and visits for the Griffin Museum of Science and Industry, given the specificity of this project's scope, leaving a hole that MSI seeks to fill.

It is a reasonable assumption given the amount of people living at or below the poverty level with incomes less than or equal to \$25,000 and without personal vehicles, that transportation for them and their children may be difficult to find. While public transportation through CTA can be a viable option for many, funded transportation can be easier for parents who prefer a safer and more direct route to a family-friendly monthly activity. Through Metropolitan Shuttle⁵, school bus rental for each of the three

¹ City of Chicago Office of Inspector General. (n.d.). *Socioeconomic and City Data Comparison Dashboard*. Chicago Office of Inspector General. Retrieved November 12, 2025, from <https://igchicago.org/information-portal/data-dashboards/socioeconomic-and-city-data-comparison-dashb>oard/

² Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning. (2025, August). *Riverdale Community Snapshot Release* [Municipality Series]. Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning. Retrieved November 12, 2025, from https://www.cmap.illinois.gov/wp-content/uploads/dlm_uploads/Riverdale.pdf

³ Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning. (2025, August). *Fuller Park Community Snapshot Release* [Municipality Series]. Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning. Retrieved November 12, 2025, from https://www.cmap.illinois.gov/wp-content/uploads/dlm_uploads/Fuller-Park.pdf

⁴ Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning. (2025, August). *Washington Park Community Snapshot Release* [Municipality Series]. Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning. Retrieved November 12, 2025, from https://www.cmap.illinois.gov/wp-content/uploads/dlm_uploads/Washington-Park.pdf

⁵ Metropolitan Shuttle. (n.d.). *School Bus Rentals in Chicago*. Metropolitan Shuttle. Retrieved November 12, 2025, from <https://www.metropolitanshuttle.com/chicago-charter-bus/chicago-school-bus-rentals/>

communities from local parks would be anywhere from \$1,935 - \$3,225 for three buses. This would cover a six hour period of time in which the buses were rented. Other costs to be covered by the grant include the group general admission fees⁶ covering twenty-eight kids and ten adults per community group, totalling to \$1,638 for all three. This brings the average total cost to \$3,573 - \$4,863 for one trip. If we were to offer this once a month for a year, the final cost would be around \$42,876 - \$58,356.

The MacArthur Foundation's commitment to Chicago and its socioeconomically disadvantaged communities, as well as its mission to help create more equal access to educationally and culturally relevant experiences for families and, more specifically, children makes it the perfect fit for this project. The MacArthur Foundation has regularly given grants⁷ to the Museum of Science and Industry since 1979 for both events and general operation. This grant would be an extension of their already longstanding relationship with the museum while also furthering the positive impact the MSI has on the young minds of Chicago.

⁶ Griffin Museum of Science and Industry. (n.d.). *Groups and Field Trips*. Griffin Museum of Science and Industry. Retrieved November 12, 2025, from <https://www.griffinmsi.org/groups-and-field-trips#pricing>

⁷ MacArthur Foundation. (n.d.). *Museum of Science and Industry*. MacArthur Foundation. Retrieved November 12, 2025, from https://www.macfound.org/grantee/museum-of-science-and-industry-396_tmp/

Project Description

The Griffin Museum of Science and Industry (MSI) has been a staple of education and entertainment for children in Chicago for years. Whether it was on a field trip or a day trip with family, many young adults have fond memories of visiting the museum. However, the unfortunate reality is that visiting the museum isn't always financially feasible for some Chicagoans. This project provides funded transportation and general admission to MSI for socioeconomically disadvantaged Chicago communities. The proposal covers one year of monthly funded visits and busing for three of these communities: Riverdale, Fuller Park, and Washington Park. By promoting through collaboration with the Chicago Park District, MSI is aiming to reach as many families as possible. The hope is that this project will eventually be expanded to cover other disadvantaged communities within Chicago so that everyone can have access to MSI's hands-on scientific experiences.

On the third Saturday of every month, MSI will be offering funded transportation and general admissions for the three designated communities. Signup for this event will occur through a link on the MSI website. This link will also be advertised through collaboration with the Chicago Park District in the Events section on their website and through flyers placed in fieldhouses and libraries. It will require an individual eighteen or older to leave contact information (email and phone number), indicate how many children will be accompanying them (with a maximum of three children per adult), and sign all of the mandatory museum waivers. These adult-children groupings will be referred to as clusters for clarity in this description. MSI is looking to partner with Metropolitan Shuttle to rent school buses for the sake of transportation to and from the museum. The buses to be rented max out capacity at forty people. MSI will be covering admissions costs for ten adults and twenty-eight children with two spots for volunteers per bus given that not every cluster is likely to be made up of one adult and three children.

Buses will be rented from 11am to 5pm for a total of six hours. Pickup boarding for clusters in our three communities will be from 11am - 11:20am and occur at a designated park for each community: Golden Gate Park for Riverdale, Fuller Park for Fuller Park, and Washington Park for Washington Park.

Assisting in pickup will be two volunteer staff members from MSI per bus. They will be wearing color-coded shirts and equipped with nametags that match the color designations (red for Riverdale, purple for Fuller Park, and green for Washington Park), as well as carrying snacks for the clusters. Average travel times for Riverdale and Fuller Park is about fifteen minutes, while Fuller Park is about thirty minutes. With the idea that these groups will be visiting from 12pm - 4pm, this gives buffer time for any traffic-related incidents that may hinder the buses on the way to the museum.

While at the museum, the six MSI staff members who were assisting with boarding will be floating in pre-designated locations around the museum to offer assistance to any of the clusters involved with this program, regardless of which community group they were from. On the ground floor, one will be located in the Entry Hall. On the Lower Level (1), one will be located next to the Brain Food Court and one will be next to the Farm Tech exhibit. On the Main Level (2), one will be located in the Rotunda and one will be next to the Yesterday's Main Street exhibit. On the Balcony Level (3), one staff member will be next to the 727 Take Flight exhibit.

During this time, clusters will be free to explore the exhibits covered by general admission as they see fit. While snacks were provided, any meals (such as lunch) will need to be packed or purchased by those participating in the program themselves. Children must be accompanied by the adult designated in their cluster at all times.

Dropoff boarding will occur from 4pm - 4:20pm on E Museum Drive for each group. Once again, this allows buffer time for any traffic-related occurrences that might hinder bus travel.

Progress for this project will be monitored through two primary means: optional surveys sent through email post-monthly trip and how full buses are, with three primary check-ins. After every trip, an optional survey will be sent to the emails provided at signup with a general rating of 1 - 5 stars and a spot for open feedback from participants. Alongside this, the number of people signing up each month will be recorded and put into percentages to show growth over time. There are three official check-ins for both of these occurring on the same dates. The first is May 16, 2026—or the five month mark. The goal is to be at 50% capacity filled and 50% approved by this time. The second check-in is the nine month mark on

September 19, 2026. The goal is to be at 75% capacity filled and 75% approved at this time. The final check-in is December 19, 2026, or the eleven month mark and the final offered trip. The goal is to be 85% capacity filled and 85% approved at this time.

With how well-known and popular the MSI is for families looking for an educational and entertaining way to spend time together, these goals are not expected to be difficult to reach. While the surveys are optional, the lack of pressure to complete them as well as the idea that completing the survey might help this project to be offered in the future may encourage participants to fill them out.

The model set forth for this project is easily replicable and could be offered at any number of educational, exhibit-based foundations in Chicago, including (but not limited to) the Shedd Aquarium, the Field Museum, and the Adler Planetarium.

While this is set to run for one year, any further implementation of this project would require more funding. The ultimate goal is to have this program run continuously throughout every community within Chicago, with this first project being a test run to see how high community desire is for this project as well as allow for any necessary adjustments to be made.

This project is intended to help Chicagoans that want to foster the curiosity and inherent thirst for knowledge that children have building inside of them. While money should not create a barrier between education and quality time, the unfortunate reality is that it often does. This is just one small step MSI can take to help break that barrier down.

Evaluation Plan

In assessing the success of this project, MSI will be collecting quantitative data by tracking how many people are participating. In order to organize this information, both the amount of people who have signed up and who have actually arrived for transportation will be noted from each community group. The data points from all three communities will be considered both separately from one another to see individual community success, as well as combined together to gauge overall program success. Furthermore, breaking down this data in between the two age groups (adults and children) will allow for a better understanding of how covered admissions are being used and if they should be adjusted in the future.

A second form of quantitative data collected will be an approval-rating system through optional surveys sent out to every adult that signed up for the program. Through a five-star system, participants will be able to mark their satisfaction with their trips and the overall program.

Through the same survey, qualitative data will be collected through an open feedback text box option that will be available for all participants as well. This will allow us to catch and document any specific notes or comments about the program directly from those who have taken part. Additionally, a space for open feedback will allow us to address any pressing problems with haste to ensure that the rest of the offered trips for the year run as smoothly as possible.

All data will be collected and analyzed by the project manager.

While all of this will be collected and monitored for the entire duration of the program to, as stated above, ensure any urgent issues are handled and taken care of, official check-ins will occur at the five month mark (May 16, 2026), the nine month mark (September 19, 2026), and the eleven month mark (December 19, 2026).