

ACTIVATING HERITAGE CONFERENCE PANELS



Presented by

The Chicago
Cultural Alliance



March 10th, 2026

UIC Student East, 750 S Halsted St,
Chicago, IL 60607

2026 CONFERENCE PANELS

Media Relations for Arts & Cultural Institutions

This is a panel convened by the Chicago Cultural Alliance. Join us to meet media contacts from television, radio, and online news sites. These media professionals will present on how nonprofit institutions can best pitch a story and how to build their network within public media.



Grants for Cultural Heritage Institutions

This is a panel convened by the Chicago Cultural Alliance. Join us to meet grantors from a variety of foundations that support arts and cultural programs. Attendees will learn more about current opportunities, how to tailor their applications, and other useful information to use in developing your organization's grant strategy.



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Move Fast and Save Things: Building a Nonprofit Accelerator to Prepare Cultural Nonprofits to Face New Challenges | Case Study: Chicago Cultural Alliance's "Meeting the Moment" Series

In 2025, the Chicago Cultural Alliance launched a program series designed to strengthen and support our membership of 50 ethnic museums and cultural centers as they increasingly came under threat by the attitudes and activities of the new administration in Washington, DC. This session will 1) address why the series was launched, 2) discuss the structure of programs & activities, 3) cover how subject areas were identified, 4) discuss the outcomes for participating museums & cultural centers, and 5) explore ways that other organizations could take up similar work.



Making Visible Erased Urban Native Cultures

This panel discussion will explore how the American Indian Association of Illinois and other members of our community have effectively used social media, radio, television, and film to Make Visible the Erased Urban Native Cultures in Chicago. The panel will highlight media strategies that have proven successful, identify areas that need strengthening, and examine how philanthropic partners and media institutions can work more collaboratively with us—especially during Native American Heritage Month, but importantly throughout the entire year.

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This presentation would most benefit nonprofit leaders and communications staff—particularly those from small, underfunded, or culturally specific organizations—who are seeking practical, low-cost strategies to increase visibility and public engagement. It will also be highly valuable for philanthropic partners, foundation program officers, and individual funders interested in supporting more effective, community-led storytelling and outreach. This presentation will also benefit cultural institutions, public agencies, and media outlets committed to accurately integrating Native American history, contemporary culture, and lived experiences into year-round programming rather than limiting engagement to Native American Heritage Month alone.



Artist as Archivist: A Community Approach to Preserving Heritage

Artist as Archivist: A Community Approach to Preserving Heritage brings together artists, cultural workers, and scholars to explore how creative practice can serve as a pathway for safeguarding memory, tradition, and lived experience. This panel examines archives not only as institutional repositories, but as dynamic, community-held spaces shaped by storytelling, family histories, embodied knowledge, and artistic interpretation.

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Takeaways include: understanding how artists function as archivists by interpreting, preserving, and activating cultural memory through creative practice; exploring community-centered approaches to heritage that value lived experiences, family histories, and intergenerational knowledge alongside formal archives; learning practical and conceptual methods for documenting culture through art, folklore, material culture, and personal storytelling; recognizing the role of artists, scholars, and community members in shaping narratives that might otherwise be overlooked or marginalized; identifying collaborative strategies that strengthen cultural preservation across disciplines, communities, and generations; and will help inspire participants to consider their own archives—both personal and communal—and how these can contribute to a shared cultural future.



Weaving Memory and Roots: Indigenous Migrant Women, Cultural Resilience, and Community Healing in Chicago

This interactive workshop will explore the cultural resilience, living history, and healing practices of Indigenous Kichwa women in the Chicago diaspora. Through storytelling, dialogue, and hands-on participation, attendees will learn how community memory, ancestral knowledge, and cultural identity help migrant families navigate displacement, fear, changing policies, and social challenges.

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Participants will engage in a guided reflection using ancestral concepts such as Sami (breath), Ayllu (community), and Kawsay (life), connecting these principles to contemporary community care and cultural preservation.

You will leave this session with a deeper understanding of Indigenous Kichwa perspectives on migration, memory, and cultural resilience, grounded in real stories from Chicago's diaspora community; practical tools for creating culturally responsive programs in museums, nonprofits, and community spaces—especially for immigrant, Indigenous, and intergenerational groups; insights into how cultural centers can respond to contemporary challenges, such as fear caused by immigration enforcement, limited funding, and shifting public attitudes; experience with an Indigenous-led healing practice, including breath, intention, and community-centered reflection using the Kichwa principles of Sami, Ayllu, and Kawsay; and be shown a model of how small organizations can use ancestral knowledge and storytelling to strengthen community engagement and build emotional well-being.



An Introduction to Know Your Rights Training

Chicago Cultural Alliance members are standing united as our families and communities combat unprecedented public health and safety risks posed by Federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) activity on the streets of Chicago.

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The dire impact of current ICE activity and threat of further influx of ICE agents this spring must be met with a strong rallying cry to join together and protect one another. This session will offer an introduction to Know Your Rights training accessible to all audiences regardless of experience. We will offer tips for potential interactions with ICE agents, an overview of the basics of the immigration system, digital hygiene best practices, tips for re-entry into the US following international travel, and strategies for buddy systems and emergency planning. Time will be dedicated to Q&A and resource sharing. Participants will also compile a list of common challenges, needs, and concerns, for further action. Ultimately, this will act as an entry point toward building ICE-related mutual aid as well as an opportunity to share safety tips, resources, and draw collective strength.



Archiving Resistance: Combating Political Erasure

Recently, we've seen a sustained effort to erase not only protections for LGBTQ+ people, but also the systematic, evidential erasure of their contributions to history. This is part of an intentional attempt to rewrite history to conform to a singular ideology, one that devalues diversity and inclusion. UIC-SCUA and Chicago Collections Consortium have begun a collaborative project meant to highlight LGBTQ+ collections across the Chicagoland area. Participants will learn about digital humanities, collaborative methods, emphasizing autonomy and organizational control.

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We will demonstrate technologies available to non-profit and academic organizations like ArcGIS, controlled vocabularies, and consortia. We will also share strategies for identifying, developing relationships, and working with community members in non-extractive ways.



When the Space Is Gone: Reimagining Cultural Programming During Renovation and Disruption

Over the past three years, the Garfield Park Conservatory Alliance has been navigating a long-anticipated lobby renovation—a project that temporarily eliminated nearly all our core public-facing spaces. This panel explores how our organization responded to this challenge by rethinking not just where programming happens, but how it functions. This panel will offer practical strategies for maintaining and growing engagement without traditional program infrastructure; insights into designing low-barrier, flexible programming rooted in community participation; a real-world case study demonstrating how constraints can generate innovation; and language and frameworks for communicating program pivots to funders, partners, and the public.

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Art in Response to Injustice

Crossing Borders Music will share how it has responded to this moment when over 100 million people have been forced from their homes worldwide - more than ever before. Fleeing oppression and violence, new arrivals often experience further marginalization at their destination: scapegoating, misinformation, and dehumanization. During this interactive presentation, participants will learn how to meet this moment in ways that are relevant, community-driven, and justice-seeking. Participants will gain methods to determine and respond to community needs, determine when and how to speak up on politically sensitive topics, center the needs of survivors of injustice – not administrators or funders, and communicate with funders and the media.



Community Gardens II: Green Placemaking and Environmental Justice in

With more than 600 community gardens throughout the region, Chicago truly embodies its historic motto, Urbs in Horto, or City in a Garden. These community gardens are verdant sites of social and environmental justice. CCA Members representing a diverse array of cultural communities and neighborhoods are practicing horticultural traditions, some in their organization's greenspace, others by participating at local gardens, and still others by growing in their own backyards.



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