





DUCATION

GROUNDWORK

FOR GROWTH







AT A **GLANCE**





7,236



325K

RIVER CRUISE **GUESTS**



17K+

HOURS OF VOLUNTEER SERVICE



80

WALKING **TOURS ACROSS** THE CITY



440+

VOLUNTEERS & DOCENTS



MEDIA **MENTIONS**



16K

STUDENTS SERVED



© 8.4B

MEDIA IMPRESSIONS



As I reflect on my first year as CEO and President of the Chicago Architecture Center, I am thrilled to present our 2023 Annual Report, themed "Groundwork for Growth." This past year has been a journey of discovery and has laid a new foundation for the future of our organization.

In 2023, we embarked on a comprehensive review of our organization's structure, streamlining processes, auditing budgets and reallocating resources to maximize our impact. This restructuring has positioned us for sustainable growth and fostered a culture of innovation and collaboration among our dedicated team. For a nearly 60-year-old organization, the energy among our staff, docents, volunteers and board feels refreshingly like a start-up.

Throughout the past year, we worked to ensure that every aspect of our organization reflects excellence and inclusivity and embraced diversity as a driving force behind our creativity. Through our mission-based public programs, civics portfolio and world-class tours, the CAC is committed to empowering curious, thoughtful citizens from all over the world to appreciate a holistic view of the built environment. We see the entirety of Chicago as our campus and are dedicated to continue inspiring people to discover why design matters.

I extend my gratitude to our dedicated staff, passionate volunteers and supportive stakeholders for your unwavering commitment to our shared vision and your willingness to challenge each other to create an inspiring body of work. We are poised to build upon the solid foundation laid in 2023 and continue to work toward the goals of our 2025 Strategic Plan and beyond.

Eleanor Esser Yorshi

ELEANOR ESSER GORSKI, AIA
CEO and President
Chicago Architecture Center



As my tenure as Board President of the Chicago Architecture Center draws to a close, it is with great pleasure that I reflect on the remarkable progress we have made in laying the "Groundwork for Growth" in 2023. Since assuming the role of Board Chair in March 2022, I have witnessed firsthand the dedication and passion of our incredible team in advancing our mission to inspire curiosity and appreciation for the built environment.

Eleanor Gorski's inaugural year as CEO and President has been exceptional. Her leadership and strategic vision have been instrumental in redefining our organizational structure and setting the stage for future success. I am immensely proud of the hard work and commitment demonstrated by our board members, docents and staff throughout this journey. Their unwavering dedication to our mission has been the driving force behind our achievements and a year for record firsts in 2023: first residency of an architectural firm, first time participating in the Chicago Architecture Biennial as an exhibit site, first year hosting the Architecture and Design Film Festival on-site, and first Open House Chicago kick-off party with our partners at Willis Tower.

I am filled with optimism for the future of the Chicago Architecture Center. With a solid foundation in place, I am confident the CAC will continue to thrive and make significant contributions to the architectural landscape of our city and beyond.

I extend my deepest gratitude to all who have contributed to our success and look forward to witnessing the continued growth and impact of this remarkable organization.

fun Shings

ANN THOMPSON, FAIA
Board Chair, 2022-2023
Executive Vice President,
Architecture and Design,
Related Midwest



CAC'S 2025 STRATEGIC PLAN

In 2023, the CAC completed the second year of its current strategic plan, which covers 2022 – 2025.



GOAL 1

CAC is the premier destination to start your exploration of Chicago, the city of architecture.



GOAL 2

CAC is a leading forum that educates and inspires people of all ages to take active roles with the built environment to attain the communities they want, need and deserve.



GOAL 3

CAC strives to represent the diversity of Chicago through everything we do.



GOAL 4

CAC develops a comprehensive digital strategy to bring Chicago's architecture to people everywhere.



GOAL 5

CAC has diversified its funding streams to ensure its long-term viability.

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EXPLORATION, EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY CONVENING

While the downtown location is our headquarters, all of Chicago is CAC territory for exploration, education and community convening. In 2023, the CAC positioned itself as the center of a campus that extends across Chicagoland. This year, examples of programming and partnerships across Chicago's 77 community areas included:

- 1. Girls Build! Camp at Gage Park Library
- 2. Staff education at the Bronzeville Historical Society
- 3. Volunteering at Walt Disney Creativity Day in Hermosa
- 4. "Folded Map Project" film screening and collaboration to encourage Open House Chicago participants to explore a new neighborhood
- 5. Film Screening of "Committee of Six" at the **Green Line Performing Arts Center**
- 6. Meet & Greet with Park Rangers from Pullman
- 7. Thomas Heatherwick book talk in Fulton Market









DEVELOPMENT

A CULTURE OF PHILANTHROPY

In 2023, the Development team continued to advance an organization-wide culture of philanthropy, as demonstrated by the diversity of sources who supported the CAC financially. CAC colleagues in the Exhibition, Programs, Education and Marketing teams were active partners in the creation of proposals and plans to present to funders.







\$250,000

LARGEST SINGLE GRANT

Unrestricted general operating support
Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity



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FINANCIAL OR IN-KIND SPONSORS FOR REFRAMED: THE FUTURE OF CITIES IN WOOD

Including the Softwood Lumber Board and leading architecture, engineering and design firms from North America and Europe



\$50,000

MULTI-YEAR CONTRIBUTION

From Docent Cynthia Bates to support docent enrichment activities and promote increased interaction and collaboration between CAC docents and employees



39

FOUNDATION AND GOVERNMENT FUNDERS

61% success rate on grant applications submitted



\$403,575

RAISED FOR THE 2023 GALA

With support from the CAC Board and Development Committee

LEARNING & ENGAGEMENT

PARTICIPATION GROWTH

As new KPIs (key performance indicators) were established, the team continued to expand our program reach and participation numbers. K-12 Learning team averaged 6 programs and 567 participants per month in those programs, a 27% increase from 2022. The Adult Learning/Programs team averaged 4 programs and 600 participants per month in those programs. The new KPI tracker will be beneficial in 2025 to track growth from 2023 – 2024.

PROGRAM PORTFOLIO EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT

A full evaluation and assessment was completed in Summer 2023 to review impact, gaps and opportunities for all learning programs. Once the program audit was complete, we began building an evaluation and survey strategy to collect and report appropriate and vital data. Part of the strategy was to ensure the right people were in the right roles/job titles for the Center and program needs. As 2023 closed out, 100% of the Learning Team was either a new hire or had a title change during the year.



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We loved seeing all the different STEM organizations in one place. We are so glad we came! I think the location and diverse activities were great for kids to get interested in STEM."

Parent of Engineering Fest Student



Teen Fellows

In 2023, the Learning Team is proud to share that we welcomed the largest class of Teen Fellows in the program's history. 33 students began their journey with us in the Summer of 2023 and to-date, we have a 90% retention rate, up 50% from the 2022 class.

50% increase in students looking to attend City Colleges or Universities, perusing an ACED degree (up to 100% from 50% pre-assessment)

100% increase in students stating they have met a BIPOC architect (up from 0% from pre-assessment)



EXHIBITIONS



REFRAMED: The Future of Cities in Wood told the story of mass timber and featured architectural models of mass timber projects from around the world. The exhibition ran from April 2023 through January 2024.

Co-curated by the Chicago Architecture Center and the Council on Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat, and presented by the Softwood Lumber Board, an iteration of the exhibition traveled to The Skyscraper Museum in New York following its run at the CAC.

This thoughtful and encyclopedic display of emerging technology and design... underscores the message that wood is more than just an environmentally useful construction material. In skilled and talented hands, it can be the basis of first-rate architecture and urbanism."

Architectural Record on REFRAMED and ReCovered



ReCovered accompanied REFRAMED and focused on the inequities that parallel shade/tree coverage throughout the city such as economic disparities, and crime rates.

The exhibition ran from April 2023 through January 2024 and was co-curated by Ross Barney Architects.



Systems chronicled the work of trailblazing Parisian design firm ChartierDalix, with an emphasis on projects that marry architecture and ecology, create innovate new public spaces in cities and reinvent existing buildings through sensitive rehabilitation efforts. The exhibition shared the speculative work ChartierDalix conducted in Fall 2023 during an eight-week residency at the CAC, focused on efforts to revitalize the Loop. This exhibition was the CAC's first official entry as a site in the Chicago Architecture Biennial.



Archetypes was the CAC's first shoppable gallery. Our first floor orientation space transformed into a gallery featuring prototypes, passion projects and other one-of-a-kind items produced by the Chicago architecture and design community. Pieces ranged from chairs and tables to glassware, ceramics and artwork, with a focus on singular pieces that are iterations of a larger creative and design process. The show ran from November 2023 through January 2024.

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OPEN HOUSE CHICAGO

MEETING COMMUNITIES WHERE THEY ARE

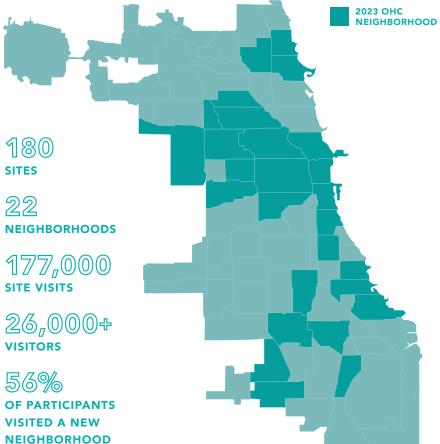
In 2023 OHC worked strategically with community partners in each of the 22 neighborhoods in order to increase the impact of the program on the community by meeting residents of the neighborhoods where they are and allowing them to present their own neighborhoods to visitors.

Open House Chicago highlighted more than 74 live events and activations at sites, including music and dance performances, art installations and maker demonstrations unique to each site and partner. Micro-grants from DCASE funded 14 of these special arts and culture engagements for OHC attendees across the city with a special emphasis on employing Chicago artists.

DIGITAL TOOLS FOR WALKABLE EXPERIENCES

A new CAC App was launched in October to serve as the official OHC planning guide for attendees. With over 11,000 downloads, the app allowed attendees to browse sites, learn about community partners and create interactive itineraries with navigation through the city. Local "celebrities" created curated itineraries which were featured alongside audio guided walking tours to help enhance the overall OHC experience.





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We just loved seeing all the people who were out to experience their city, and really appreciated the opportunity to show them a space that most of the public doesn't see."

Site Host,

Wonder City Studio, Ravenswood

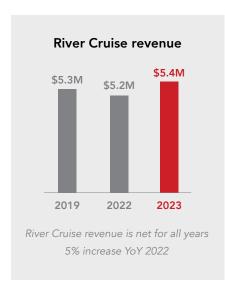


TOUR OPERATIONS

EXCEEDING GOALS

The 2023 Boat Tour/River Cruise season exceeded its goals due to the talent and efforts from group sales, box office, call center, retail staff and seasonal staff. It was no small task for these customer service focused teams working together.

As a result, the CAC was awarded "Best Tour" by Chicago Reader.









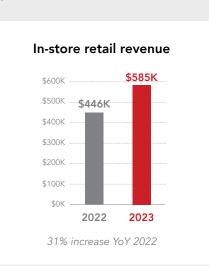




RETAIL **OPERATIONS**

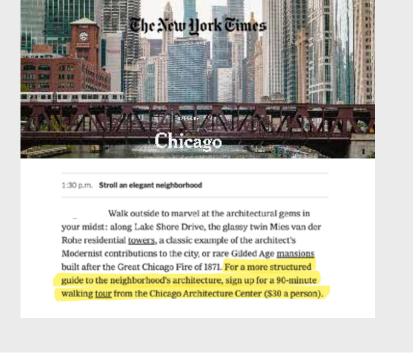
REVAMPING STORE OFFERINGS

In 2023, the Design Store focused on aligning merchandise to reflect the mission and the values of the CAC. Highest revenue-generating merchandise categories were identified as publications, home goods and textiles. Stale inventory was marked down to make room for new exclusive pieces from local artists and makers, bringing local Chicago artisans and their original work into our space. The overall store aesthetic was elevated, generating new revenue and an uptick in positive customer feedback.









MARKETING

DIGITAL FORWARD

The marketing team restructured its team to have a digital-forward approach to marketing. This includes new roles for Director of Digital Marketing, Web/ UX Designer and Digital Content Strategist. This has allowed us to create more original digital content, develop a more robust email marketing structure and improve the user experience on our website at architecture.org.

RETURN ON INVESTMENT

Advertising efforts for the year included Google, Meta, Navigator/United Airlines, Axios, Modern Luxury, Chicago Reader, Chicago Parent and more hyper-local and targeted outlets. The return on ad spend increased to apx 6.5x on Meta and an average 35.2x return on Google ads, meaning more conversions to ticket sales for each advertising dollar.





EARNED MEDIA

The CAC saw a huge uptick in earned media placements throughout 2023, including 366 media placements, 3.12 Billion impressions and a value of \$45.72 million. Highlights included a feature on Teen Fellows in the Chicago Tribune, continued placement of the River Cruise among Chicago Top 10 lists, inclusion of our walking tours on a New York Times "36 hours in Chicago" travel guide and Open House Chicago coverage, which alone garnered nearly 1B impressions at a \$8.6M value and featured placement on every major news network in the city.

EVOLVING THE BRAND

In the spring of 2023, rebrand of CAC's external advertising campaigns and new brand guidelines were launched to keep staff, partners and other keyholders aligned with a consistent look and voice. This replaced a previously scattered approach to advertising and created a unified visual identity across all programs, tours and exhibitions, increasing brand equity among Chicagoans.

MEMBERSHIP

ACQUISITION SUCCESS

Membership tested and implemented new mail and digital strategies for our acquisition campaigns. As a result, the Fall 2023 campaign saw a 2x+ ROI on the acquisition campaign, the first positive ROI since pre-COVID. September 2023 saw the highest member contributions and revenue since 2020 - \$107,703, which was 125% to goal.

OPEN HOUSE CHICAGO KICK-OFF PARTY

Membership secured a complimentary space rental and food & beverage from Willis Tower to host members in the Steel Room on the Friday preceding Open House. DCASE provided program funds to support live music, and Philip Thompson from Wonder City Studio was onsite to sign prints of the official OHC 2023 artwork "Windows of Chicago." We were able to host 200+ members with an evening of music, food and champagne for a total investment of around \$500. The party was deemed a huge success by members, board, and CAC staff







ADMINISTRATION

GROUNDWORK FOR GROWTH

In setting the groundwork for growth, nothing is more important than the people making it happen. In 2023, Eleanor Gorski's first year as CEO and President, the center underwent a staffing review and implemented several changes, including adding a roster of highly experienced chief officers from myriad backgrounds to help reset the organization's systems and refine the department structure.

Additionally, investments were made in software to support day to day operations, such as the Paylocity HR platform for payroll, staff networking and training purposes; Netsuite accounting system to streamline finance systems, and an upgraded internal server system, security monitoring and office phone platform. These investments in technology freed up our people to focus more on doing the work of CAC's mission.



HIRES



RATE



Eve Fineman, CAC Director of Exhibits welcomes contributing artists to the Archetypes opening event





Fall 2023 Staff Retreat in Fulton Market



CAC Staff at the September 2023 Designing Futures Gala at Willis Tower

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Katie Spring

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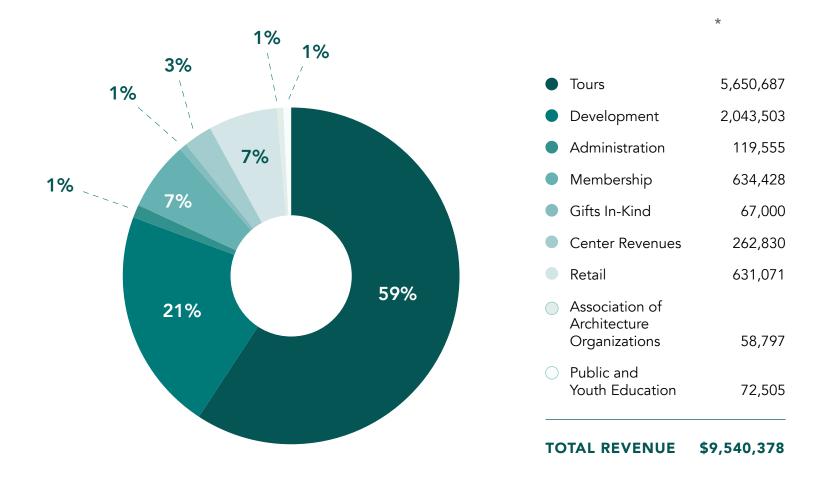
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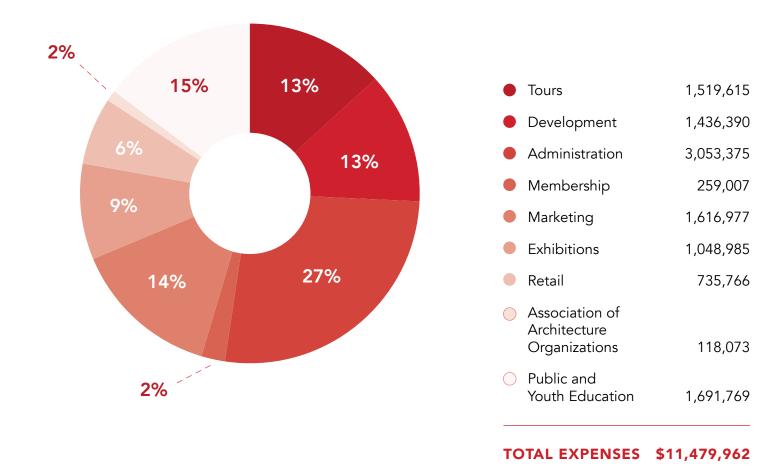
Northwestern University, Kellogg School of Management



2023 ESTIMATED REVENUE*



2023 ESTIMATED EXPENSES*



Notes on these Preliminary 2023 Budget Numbers:

- * All figures shown are estimates and will be confirmed by the Annual Audit on file at CAC
- 1. Tour revenue and expense figures include net income from the River Cruise; past years' annual reports included gross dollar amounts for all tour sales.
- 2. Approximately \$400k of 2022 expenses across all line items were posted in 2023.
- 3. Adjustments in Development's prior year pledges and receivables totaling approximately \$809k.

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Katie Martin

Marcia Matavuli

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Mark Campbell

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Monica Caparosa

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Rene Cantu

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\$10,000-\$19,999

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\$5,000-\$9,999

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