

MacArthur annual grants go to 9 nonprofits

April 28, 2009 By RUPA SHENOY, Associated Press Writer

CHICAGO (AP) - A union for self-employed women in India, a group that studies sociology in Russia and a Chicago think tank that runs a popular car-sharing service are among the winners of this year's MacArthur Foundation grants for nonprofit organizations.

Recipients of the "Award for Creative and Effective Institutions," announced Tuesday by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, receive a check for up to \$650,000 _ a major windfall for the groups that all have annual budgets between \$200,000 and \$5 million.

A \$650,000 grant will go to the Center for Neighborhood Technology, a Chicago nonprofit that researches and launches projects with economic and environmental benefits for urban areas, including I-Go, a car-sharing service with 200 vehicles and 12,000 members.

The company will use the grant to increase its outreach, chief executive officer Kathryn Tholin said.

"What we're all about is making cities work for the benefit of people who live in them and the health of the planet," she said. "We couldn't be more excited that the MacArthur Foundation has recognized us, but more importantly the award highlights issues we've been working on."

The MacArthur Foundation is a private, independent Chicago-based group that hands out about \$260 million in grants annually. It's known for its so-called "genius grants," \$500,000 no-strings-attached fellowships that have gone to hundreds of people since 1981.

This is the fourth year the foundation has awarded the nonprofit grants. To qualify, recipients must have previously received support from the foundation.

Over the past year, MacArthur's endowment has dipped to about \$5.2 billion from \$7 billion, but the foundation is committed to continuing the awards, president Jonathan Fanton said.

"These are organizations that have the courage to push the boundaries of what is possible," he said. "They're all organizations that have determination, fierce energy, good leadership, strong boards and have a record of really getting things done."

A joint \$650,000 grant to the Washington, D.C.-based Center for Housing Policy and National Housing Conference comes at a time when it's sorely needed, said Jeffrey Lubell, executive director at the center. The nonprofit organizations' research and advocacy on issues of affordable housing is especially important now, as communities nationwide grapple with foreclosures, he said.

"This is a time when the need is great but the available resources are low," Lubell said.

The Chicago Community Loan Fund will use its \$500,000 grant to expand its sustainable development workshops, executive director Calvin L. Holmes said. In its 18-year history, the fund has given \$36 million in low-cost loans to small developers of sustainable, affordable housing.

"We're determined with our sustainable development program to help our customers go green and stay green," Holmes said. "The money from MacArthur is allowing us to focus in on that a lot more."

Five of the nine winners are from outside the United States, including Access to Justice, a group in Lagos, Nigeria, that fights police torture; the Caribbean Natural Resource Institute in Port of Spain, Trinidad, which helps governments in the Caribbean cope with the environmental and economic effects of climate change; the Centre for Independent Social Research, a group in St. Petersburg, Russia, that studies the country's emerging social structures; Women of the Don Region in Novochoerkassk, Russia, which works to combat police abuse and promote women's rights and Mahila SEWA Trust, a trade union based in Gujarat, India, that organizes poor women workers.