



Luanne Thomas Ewald, Board Chair
Darien Hudson, Ed.D., President & CEO

FY 2026-27 Community Access and Response Fund Request for Proposals

United Way for Southeastern Michigan is opening a competitive Request for Proposals (RFP) to support eligible 501(c)3 nonprofits in Macomb, Oakland, Washtenaw, and Wayne counties that are providing services to address an individual or family's immediate needs in the areas of 1) emergency food assistance in Macomb, Oakland, Washtenaw, and Wayne Counties, or 2) STEAM-focused Out-of-School Time programming in Washtenaw County. Organizations are invited to apply for funding ranging from \$15,000 to \$50,000 for a 12-month grant period.

The FY 2026-27 Community Access and Response Fund investment process is an open call for applications from both potential and current funded partners who meet the eligibility criteria and funding priorities laid out in the application.

Applications are due no later than Friday, March 27, 2026, at 5:00 PM

United Way for Southeastern Michigan's Impact Vision

United Way for Southeastern Michigan is dedicated to helping individuals and families move from crisis to stability and from stability to prosperity in Macomb, Oakland, Washtenaw, and Wayne counties. Every household should have access to systems and services that provide support during times of crisis, ensuring they can regain stability. Families should have safe homes, and the resources needed to foster healthy growth and development. Households should have access to nutritious food and opportunities to achieve financial self-sufficiency. We partner with organizations across the region to turn this vision into reality, empowering individuals and families to build brighter, more secure futures.



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Making a Difference Together for ALICE Families

In Southeastern Michigan, more than 40% of households struggle to afford their basic needs. They are parents who can't afford quality childcare. They are seniors who are forced to choose between buying food or medication. They are families who are struggling to keep up with the cost of living. They are our family members, our co-workers, our friends, and our neighbors. They are ALICE (ALICE is an acronym for Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed). Our first responsibility as an organization is to serve families who fall under the ALICE threshold.

At United Way for Southeastern Michigan, the [ALICE Report](#) serves as our guidepost for making informed decisions about how and where we invest limited resources to maximize community impact. The report highlights areas of focus where we can target not only financial and technical support resources, but where we can advocate for policies that have the greatest potential for impact on ALICE households.

Our Collective Charge

We are seeking values-aligned community partners to join us in making durable changes to the wellbeing of ALICE families. To do this, we must work together to lift individuals and families above the ALICE threshold by increasing financial resources and reducing household costs.

Investing in a Coordinated Network of Partners

Connecting those who are most at risk to the support they need is a dynamic and complex undertaking that requires resources and collaboration to establish a shared responsibility for the economic wellbeing of ALICE households.

As the state's largest local United Way and 2-1-1 call center, United Way works side by side with community partners throughout Macomb, Oakland, Washtenaw and Wayne Counties to improve

and expand programming, foster collaboration, remove barriers to coordinated service delivery, and provide thought partnership and capacity building support to strengthen the fabric of nonprofit agencies in our region.

Together, we are creating a more connected social service ecosystem—one in which no matter which door a person walks through, the phone number they dial, or the database they search, they are quickly connected to resources that meet their needs.

FY 2026-27 Community Access and Response Fund Priority Areas

This year, the Community Access and Response Fund has two priority areas. **Organizations may submit only one application** and should choose the priority area that best aligns with their services or programming and offers the strongest potential for competitiveness.

1) Community Access and Response Fund- Emergency Food Assistance Track

Over 600,000 individuals in Southeastern Michigan are food insecure, which means they don't have access to enough food to support an active, healthy life. That's up 12% from the prior year. Food insecurity affects 190,000 children in our region and nearly 40% of people facing hunger don't qualify for SNAP, many of them are ALICE ([Feeding America, Map the Meal Gap](#)).

Over the last 12 months, we have seen an unprecedented surge in demand for food assistance caused by overlapping crises. The emergency food sector has faced cuts and/or freezes to multiple funding sources including SNAP, TEFAP, EFSP, and grants to purchase food from local farmers. In Michigan, more than 3 million pounds of food deliveries to Michigan Food Banks were cancelled by the USDA, challenging food providers to keep their shelves stocked and limiting their ability to meet growing demand. Persistent economic challenges, stagnant wages, underemployment, and increased costs have left

families with less in their budget to put food on the table, forcing more households to turn to pantries for help. Additionally, sweeping nationwide eligibility changes mean that 123,000 Michiganders are at risk of losing some of their food assistance including children, seniors, veterans, and people with disabilities—due to stricter work requirements, narrowed exemptions, and administrative barriers.

Southeast Michigan boasts a vibrant and resilient emergency food sector. Funding for this priority area will be used to keep families fed, stabilize our regional food network, and meet the moment. Organizations providing emergency food services across Macomb, Oakland, Washtenaw and Wayne counties are invited to apply. Eligible Services Include: Pantries, Community/Soup Kitchens, Food Vouchers/Gift Cards, etc.

2) **Community Access and Response Fund- Washtenaw STEAM Initiatives Track**

This year, United Way for Southeastern Michigan will prioritize funding for out-of-school time (OST) STEAM initiatives serving students in Washtenaw County. Learning about STEAM—Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics—helps students develop critical thinking skills and approach problems with logic, creativity, and flexibility. Of course, strong foundational literacy skills are also essential for STEAM exploration. United Way will prioritize funding for programs that align with students’ curricular STEAM learning, including through literacy supports and artistic activities. Educational and youth-focused organizations with OST programs that incorporate any or all aspects of STEAM learning are eligible to apply for this unique funding opportunity. STEAM education has never been more important, with STEAM occupations growing 3.5 times faster than other fields. There will be an estimated shortfall of 1.4 million workers in these occupations across the country by 2030. Despite the growth in STEAM occupations, only 16% of high schoolers express

interest in a STEAM career and only 6.4% have taken a foundational computer science course.

Recent state budget cuts eliminated multiple sources of funding supporting STEAM teaching and learning throughout the state. Additionally, Washtenaw County youth-serving organizations fall outside of the catchment area for other supplemental grant opportunities and United Way support programs. Focusing on Washtenaw-serving organizations for this opportunity will help balance investments across our footprint and ensure students all around our region have access to impactful STEAM learning initiatives. While United Way will continue to provide resources, connections, and other supports to Washtenaw-based organizations, we believe that this unique and necessary grant opportunity achieves multiple, complementary results.

Eligibility Criteria and Funding Priorities

Funding from this grant opportunity will be used to bolster organizations providing services that address an individual or family's immediate need in one of the identified priority areas. Investment decisions will be made based on a variety of criteria, including but not limited to the scoring rubric, geographic scope, past performance and partnership with United Way, gaps in services, and client population. All of which are designed to identify organizations that have the capability to create the most impact both individually and collectively for our region.

Funding criteria includes, but is not limited to:

- 1) Organizations that demonstrate their services are aligned to the priority areas and are meeting immediate needs.
- 2) Organizations with a track record of successfully providing the proposed services.

- 3) Organizations that demonstrate an understanding of barriers to services and provide evidence for how they increase access, dignity, and reduce/eliminate barriers.
- 4) Organizations that partner with others to collaboratively address community needs and strengthen the nonprofit network.
- 5) Organizations that target populations who disproportionately fall below the ALICE Threshold.
- 6) Organizations that demonstrate they are reaching a significant number of individuals/households, aligned to their application and responsive to community need.
- 7) Organizations that serve people living in communities with high concentrations of ALICE.
- 8) Organizations that are in a stable financial position. An organization's prior fiscal year revenue and/or operating budget may be considered in the award determination. Generally, the requested amount should not exceed 15% of the prior year's revenue or current operating budget.
- 9) Organizations that are 501(c)3 nonprofit organizations. Organizations may apply via a fiduciary, if applicable. Organizations must be in good standing with the State of Michigan and the Internal Revenue Service and will be required to upload a copy of their IRS designation letter, 990 form, W-9, and financial statements.

ALICE Commitment

We stand with the 42% of households in Southeastern Michigan who struggle to afford a basic monthly budget. These Asset-Limited, Income-Constrained, and Employed (ALICE) households are at the core of our mission.

We center the unacceptable number of people struggling to make ends meet, particularly those ALICE households disproportionately impacted due to age, race, and gender.

We dedicate ourselves to addressing their immediate, unmet needs while strengthening the community networks and systems required to reduce financial precarity and expand opportunity.

We believe in engaging our community, illuminating disparities, and investing in solutions that dismantle systemic barriers to success. Together, we strive to ensure that every family has the opportunity to prosper in Southeastern Michigan.

Through our grant investments, we will work to ensure that the balance of our cohort is reflective and responsive to our community’s current diverse needs.

Grant Timeline

| Activity | Date |
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| Organization + Financial Information Office Hours <i>Optional</i> | Option 1: Friday, February 13, 2026, from 10:00 am – 11:00 am, Click here to Join Option 2: Friday, February 20, 2026, from 10:00 am – 11:00 am, Click here to Join |
| Applicant Webinar: Washtenaw STEAM Track | Tuesday, February 24, 2026, from 11:00 am – 12:00 pm, Click here to Register |
| Applicant Webinar: Emergency Food Supports Track | Wednesday, February 25, 2026, from 11:00 am – 12:00 pm, Click here to Register |
| Application Opens | Monday, March 2, 2026 |
| Application Office Hours <i>Optional</i> | Option 1: Tuesday, March 10, 2026, from 10:00 am – 11:00 am, Click here to Join Option 2: Thursday, March 19, 2026, from 11:00 am – 12:00 pm, Click here to Join |
| Application Closes | Friday, March 27, 2026, at 5:00 PM |

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|-------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Funding Determination Notifications | Week of June 22, 2026 |
| Grant Period | July 1, 2026 – June 30, 2027 |

Applications are due no later than Friday, March 27, 2026, at 5:00 PM

How to Apply and Grant Resources

All applications must be completed and submitted through United Way's online grants management platform [SurveyMonkey Apply](#).

- **Application Questions**
 - [Emergency Food Assistance Track](#)
 - [Washtenaw STEAM Initiatives Track](#)
- **Rubric**
 - [Emergency Food Assistance Track](#)
 - [Washtenaw STEAM Initiatives Track](#)
- [Organization and Financial Information Questions](#)
- [SurveyMonkey Apply Manual](#)

United Way for Southeastern Michigan Contact Information

- For questions on the FY 2026-27 Community Access and Response Fund and to schedule time to speak with a team member, please contact: partnernetworks@unitedwaysem.org
- For questions and technical support navigating [SurveyMonkey Apply](#), please contact: sma@unitedwaysem.org