

FEBRUARY 27, 2026

FY 2026-2027 COMMUNITY INVESTMENTS

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

UNITED WAY FOR SOUTHEASTERN MICHIGAN



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FY 2026-2027 Community Investments

Frequently Asked Questions

Application Window: March 2 – March 27 at 5:00PM

Investment Framework Overview

United Way's Funding Framework is centered around a set of three grant opportunities designed to resource and engage a coordinated network of partners providing a continuum of services under a shared vision of helping ALICE individuals and families move from crisis to stability and from stability to prosperity across our region. The three funds are:

Community Access & Response Fund (Fund 1) – Provides flexible funding for organizations meeting immediate, more acute needs of individuals and families. For 2026/2027, this opportunity will be an open, competitive application.

Wraparound Services & Stability Fund (Fund 2) – Provides flexible funding for organizations or established collaboratives providing wraparound services to stabilize individuals and families. For 2026/2027, this opportunity will be a closed invitation-only process.

Connect4Care & Systems Change Fund (Fund 3) – Funding for regionally recognized institutions or collaboratives to address the systemic issues that are driving up the number of ALICE households and connect individuals to more integrated, seamless and dignified systems of care that support lasting, long-term stability for individuals and families at scale. For 2026/2027, this opportunity will be a closed invitation-only process.



General Application

Q: Is United Way running an open, competitive application process this year?

A: Yes. The 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.

Q: When is the application due?

A: The application window for all Funds is March 2-27. All applications must be completed in our grant management portal [SurveyMonkey Apply](#).

Q: Where on United Way's website are the RFPs and Scoring Rubrics published?

A: All information related to United Way's investment process is located on our website. <https://unitedwaysem.org/our-partners/grants-hub/proposal-opportunities/>

Q: Will applications be in SurveyMonkey?

A: Yes. All applications must be submitted through our grant management portal, SurveyMonkey Apply (SMA). To access United Way's SMA platform please visit: <https://apply.unitedwaysem.org/>.

Q: What are the priority service areas for the Community Access & Response Fund?

A: This year, the Community Access and Response Fund has two priority areas:

- 1) Emergency Food Assistance - This includes food pantries, community or soup kitchens, and food voucher or gift card programs
- 2) STEAM-focused Out-of-School Time programming in Washtenaw County

Q: Can you apply for more than one Fund and/or both priority areas in Fund 1?

A: No. We are only accepting one application per organization. Organizations must choose the priority area that best aligns with their services or programming and offers the strongest potential for competitiveness.



Q: If my organization is receiving a renewal award through the Wraparound Services & Stability Fund, can I also apply for the Community Access & Response Fund?

A: No. Organizations receiving renewals through the Wraparound Services & Stability grant are not eligible to apply through the Community Access & Response Fund. To extend resources to as many organizations as possible we are only accepting one application per organization.

Q: Why has United Way decided to make the 2026/2027 Wraparound Services & Stability Fund opportunity invitation only?

A: United Way believes that renewing grants for core partners delivering wraparound services to ALICE households, will lead to greater stability for those individuals and families.

Q: What is the grant term?

A: July 1, 2026, through June 30, 2027

Q: What is the funding range?

A: The funding range for the Community Access & Response Fund, which is our only open opportunity this year, is \$15,000-\$50,000.

Q: How much funding will be distributed? How many grants will be awarded?

A: To maximize the total resources available, we are actively fundraising to support community investments, so a total amount is not finalized at this time. Additionally, there is not a specific number of anticipated awards. The number of partners in a cohort is largely based on the number of competitive applications received and available funding.

Q: If I have never applied for a grant from United Way, what is my first step?

A: An Organizational & Financial Profile must be created in United Way for Southeastern Michigan's grant management portal, [SurveyMonkey Apply \(SMA\)](#) in order to access and complete a grant application. Organizations that are already in SMA do not need to complete the form but should make updates as needed. New organizations will have to complete the initial profile. If you are uncertain whether your organization has an existing SurveyMonkey Apply account, please reach out to United Way's Grants Management team at sma@unitedwaysem.org for confirmation *before*



creating a new profile. For instructions on how to set up an account and create your Organizational & Financial Profile click here:

- [Setting Up an SMA Account](#)
- [Updating your Organizational & Financial Profile](#)

Eligibility

Q: Does an organization need to be a nonprofit to receive funding?

A: Yes, these funds are meant to be dispersed as awards to nonprofit organizations. An organization 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. Organizations may apply via a fiduciary, if applicable.

Q: Can schools or school districts apply for the Washtenaw STEAM OST Track?

A: No. This opportunity is only intended for Washtenaw serving community-based organizations (CBO). A school district may serve as a fiduciary for an eligible CBO.

Q: If we have a grant that is closing with United Way, will we still be eligible?

A: Yes. This 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 applications.

Q: Can an organization use a fiduciary to apply?

A: Yes. Organizations may apply via a fiduciary, if applicable. All applicant organizations must be 501c3s 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.

If your organization is utilizing a fiduciary to receive funds, the fiduciary must be the organization that creates the organizational account within [SurveyMonkey Apply](#). They also must complete the Organization and Financial Information profile. If the fiduciary organization is unsure if their organization has a SurveyMonkey account, please have them reach out to sma@unitedwaysem.org.



United Way suggests having the fiduciary invite a representative of the sponsored/implementing organization to be a member of the account so that the sponsored/implementing organization can complete the application and subsequent reporting requirements.

Q: Can both the fiduciary and sponsored organization apply for a grant?

A: Yes. Both a fiduciary and the sponsored organization may submit individual applications for this grant. However, the programming and services that each is applying for should be different and specific to their organization. Organizations who are acting as a fiduciary AND applying on their own should first contact the United Way team before they begin the application process by emailing sma@unitedwaysem.org.

Q: Can an organization acting as a fiduciary sponsor multiple organizations?

A: Yes, a fiduciary may apply on behalf of multiple sponsored organizations but please reach out to the United Way team prior to beginning the application process by emailing sma@unitedwaysem.org.

Q: Are programs that have their administrative home at a university eligible to apply?

A: Yes. We welcome submissions from applicants using a fiscal agent, including from higher education institutions such as colleges and universities. All applicant organizations must be 501c3s in good standing with the State of Michigan and the Internal Revenue Service.

If your organization is utilizing a fiduciary to receive funds, the fiduciary must be the organization that creates the organizational account within SurveyMonkey Apply and the Organization and Financial Information profile. If the fiduciary organization is unsure if their organization has a SurveyMonkey account, please have them contact the United Way team at sma@unitedwaysem.org.

Note the following difference when it comes to required documentation for applicants using a higher education fiscal agent:



- Budget, financials, and balance sheet/audits: Submit your program/project OVERALL current and previous year annual budgets. We do not need the budgets, nor audit of the higher education institution.

Programmatic

Q: Are organizations able to apply to support pilots that move families who fall within Federal Poverty levels to ALICE threshold income levels? Can we add to the work that we are already doing?

A: Applicants may apply to support existing and/or new services, but we are looking for demonstrated expertise/history of providing the proposed services to a community. Applicants should carefully review the grant materials, including application and scoring rubric ahead of submitting an application.

Q: If an organization applies for the maximum award amount, will United Way consider funding at a lower amount?

A: Yes. Depending on the number of competitive grants received, we do reserve the right to adjust the funding amount. If this is the case for your organization, you will have an opportunity to adjust your metrics and budget to align with the revised award amount.

Emergency Food Assistance

Q: Is there a deep dive analysis of the 2-1-1 calls involving food insecurity to get more at root causes and specify most requested geographies within UWSEM footprint?

A: United Way has a robust dashboard on our website that provides a look at 2-1-1 calls and referrals. Data is available at the county, city, and zip code level. <https://unitedwaysem.org/our-impact/2-1-1-impact/>

Q: If an organization with experience in emergency food assistance is launching a new project (i.e. a new food pantry), would that be competitive for this opportunity?



A: Funding from this opportunity is not intended to support pilot programs. However, funding may be used to enhance or expand programming if an organization has a track record of providing emergency food services. Applicants should carefully review the grant materials, including application and scoring rubric to decide if this opportunity is a good fit for the organization and the proposed programming.

Washtenaw STEAM Initiatives

Q: Is there a specific age group this grant is focusing on? Would 5-7 year olds be an appropriate age group for this grant?

A: Funding for this opportunity can be used to support aligned programming/services for children in early childhood all the way through 12th grade. In the application, organizations will identify the age ranges they plan to serve.

Q: If we are a program that incorporates expressive arts and mental health, do we need to be all of STEAM or just an aspect of it?

A: Organizations need to address a minimum of one aspect of STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Mathematics) programming. United Way does not expect organizations to address every aspect of STEAM.

Q: Since only out-of-school time programs are eligible, how should organizations go about connecting the programming to a school?

A: Organizations should describe how their programming connects or is an extension of what students are learning in school. In the application organizations will also share the top schools that their students attend.

Q: Can an organization submit one application with two proposed programs and split the funding?

A: This is permissible. United Way encourages organizations to carefully review the application and scoring rubric to ensure both programs are aligned with the Funds intent. Throughout the



application, we will be looking for consistency between community need, proposed services, and organization's experience and track-record of success

Q: In the past, our organization has used Washtenaw Intermediate School District (WISD) as a fiduciary for United Way grants. Are school districts able to act as a fiduciary for this funding opportunity?

A: Yes. School districts may serve in a fiduciary role for a sponsored community-based organization.

Budget and Financial Information

Q: What are the general overall budget guidelines?

A: The requested amount should not exceed 15% of the prior year's revenue or current operating budget. When reviewing budgets, we do flag line items for overhead/indirect that are above 15%. We also look for benefits to be no more than 30% of your salary line item. If you have extenuating circumstances that make either of these difficult for your organization, please explain that in your application.

Q: Can organizations apply for general operating or a specific project?

A: We are committed to providing organizations with flexible, operational funding to amplify impact. We are asking for organizations to fill out a budget and are leaving the use of funds description up to each organization. We ask that organizations stay within a 15% allowance for overhead/indirect expenditures in alignment with the [current Federal de minimis rate](#), and approximately a 30% benefit rate. Aside from these stipulations, budgets can be very flexible to meet the organization's needs.

Q: Can an organization filing the 990-N eligible to apply for funding as well?

A: Yes, 990-Ns are acceptable, and organizations are eligible to apply for funding.



Q: Does an organization need to have an audit, or will a financial review and 990 form be sufficient?

A: Depending on your annual operating budget total amount, organizations may be required to have an audit with the information uploaded to your Organization and Financial Information profile in Survey Monkey Apply. For more information on the specific documents required for your organization to fulfill this requirement, please refer to the Financial and Audit Requirement resource available in SMA under the Financial Information task: [UWSEM Financial and Audit Requirements resource](#).

If there are barriers to your organization providing this information, please contact us to discuss the specific circumstances for your organization at PartnerNetwork@unitedwaysem.org.

Q: We are currently in the middle of our audit. Will our application still be considered if the audit isn't complete before the application due date?

A: Yes. We understand that depending on an organization's fiscal year, financial documents may not be available for 2025. Please upload your most recent documents. We expect that this will be 2023-2024 for most organizations.

Evaluation and Scoring

Q: How does United Way arrive at funding decisions?

A: United Way is committed to investing in organizations and groups aligned with our impact focus areas and ensuring that emerging and smaller-sized organizations advancing community solutions for ALICE families also have access to funding.

United Way remains thoughtful about how we invest and distribute resources into community for shared impact. Applications will be scored using a rubric (provided in the application materials) and consider annual budget size, current financial position as well as compliance to state and Federal regulations.



Decisions will be made based on the strength of the application, proposed services, geographic spread, service population, among other considerations to ensure that the portfolio of funded partners is reflective and is responsive to the diverse needs of our community.

Q: Is past performance a funding award consideration?

A: United Way is excited to work with values-aligned community partners in our region. As we look to the future, we take a variety of factors into consideration, including past performance, communication, and timeliness of report submissions.

Q: If United Way does not fund the entire amount requested, would United Way consider funding at a lower amount?

A: Yes. We do reserve the right to adjust the funding amount and may not award organizations their full ask. When this occurs, organizations are given an opportunity to revise their metrics and budget to align with the funded amount.

Q: Does the fact that an organization does or does not participate in employee United Way donations impact chance for funding?

A: No that is not a factor in the decision-making process.

ALICE

Q: What is ALICE?

A: ALICE is an acronym for Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed, and represents the growing number of families who are unable to afford the basics of housing, child care, food, transportation, health care, and technology. In southeastern Michigan, more than 40 percent of households struggle to afford their basic needs.

The 2025 [ALICE Report](#), produced by the [Michigan Association of United Ways](#) in association with [United for ALICE](#), reveals the magnitude of financial hardship in Michigan.



The report measures how families are faring by comparing household earnings to the true cost of living in our region. It's a more accurate measurement of household finances than the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), which is based on food prices established in the 1970s and indexed to inflation, meaning it doesn't capture the reality of essential household expenses like health care, food and child care.

While 14% of households in our region are reported to live at or below the poverty level, an additional 28% of households have incomes below the ALICE survival budget. Combined, these two numbers make up the percentage of total Macomb, Oakland, Washtenaw and Wayne County households that fell below the ALICE Survival Budget Threshold.

Q: Why is United Way focused on ALICE families?

A: At United Way, we mobilize a network of hundreds of partners and thousands of donors, advocates and volunteers to advance equitable communities where households are stable and children thrive.

The ALICE Report serves as our guidepost for making informed decisions about how and where we invest limited resources to maximize community impact. It 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. It also provides evidence of what many already know to be true – that too many working households in our state and in our region are just one missed paycheck or unexpected doctor's bill away from financial crisis.

They are the reason United Way for Southeastern Michigan is working alongside our partners and community to close the gap between what people are earning and the cost of living so that every family, in every ZIP code, has an equal opportunity to thrive.

Q: Who should we reach out to if we have specific questions about whether the communities in which we work have ALICE families?

A: While we know that ALICE households are present in every community, there are cities and zip codes across our region where the percentage of households that fall below the ALICE threshold is 40% or greater. We are interested in funding organizations whose services are targeting these



communities, understanding the disproportionate impact that concentrated poverty has on a household's well-being and access to resources. To explore which the size of a community's ALICE population visit: <https://www.unitedforalice.org/county-reports/michigan#6/45.061/-86.416>

Q: Where can I learn more about ALICE?

A: For more information about ALICE please visit the links below.

- <https://unitedwaysem.org/our-work/alice-report/>
- <https://www.uwmich.org/alice-report>
- <https://www.unitedforalice.org/state-overview/Michigan>

Points of Contact for Further Questions

- For more information on these grant opportunities, please visit our grants partner hub website at: UnitedWaySEM.org/Grants.
- For questions or support related to the investment strategy and funding cycle, please email: PartnerNetworks@UnitedWaySEM.org
- For questions or support related to accessing our grant management platform, SurveyMonkey Apply (SMA), please contact the Grants Management team at: SMA@UnitedWaySEM.org