

UNITED IS THE WAY TO HELP.



**Call for Systems Change Partners:
Expanded Systems Change Examples**



United Way
of Greater Cincinnati

Letter of Opportunity Application

Organizational Information

General Information

- Organizational Profile
- Leadership & Primary Contact Information
- Funding Request

Short Narrative

- Overview of Current Programs and Services

Priority Area Narrative

- Promote Economic Well-being
- Family-Centered
- Community-Based
- Inclusive Practices

It's helpful to think of the Letter of Application as two distinct sections.

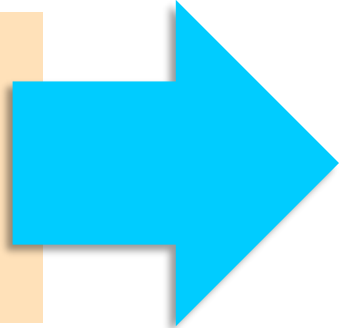
The first part of the application is about **your organization – who you are and how you align to the funding eligibility & priority areas.**

Letter of Opportunity Application

Organizational Information

General Information

- Organizational Profile
- Leadership & Primary Contact Information
- Funding Request



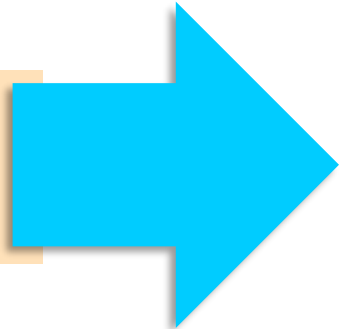
Organizational Profile: Organization Name, Structure, Address, Phone Number, Website, Years in Operations, Annual Budget, Major Funding Sources, Staff Capacity, Service Capacity

Leadership & Primary Contact Information: Name, Pronouns, Title, Email, Phone, and Demographics (Age Range, Gender, Race)

Funding Request: Funding Request and Minimal Funding Required Request

Short Narrative

- Overview of Current Programs and Services

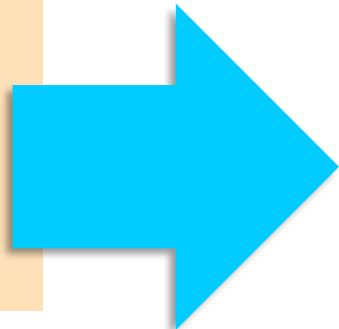


Description of Programs/ Services

Identify **Geographical** Focus Area(s), Primary **Outcome** Area(s) and **Strategy** Area(s)

Priority Area Narrative

- Promote Economic Well-being
- Family-Centered
- Community-Based
- Inclusive Practices



Narrative & uploads to describe and demonstrate organizational practices for each of the four priorities

Promote economic well-being – **required upload (excel template)**
Family-centered – optional upload
Community-based – optional upload
Inclusive practices – **required upload (non-discrimination policy)**

Letter of Opportunity Application

The second part is **your perspective on the systems change opportunities** you think United Way should align funding around.

Ideas for Systems Change

Systems Change Opportunities Narrative

- Description
- Organizational (potential) contributions
- Targets for Impact
- Targeted Partners & Collaboration

References

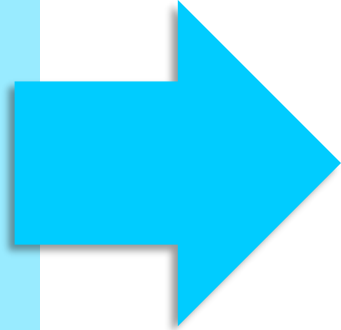
- Community
- Staff
- Volunteer
Leadership

Letter of Opportunity Application

Systems Change

Systems Change Opportunities Narrative

- Description
- Organizational (potential) contributions
- Targets for Impact
- Targeted Partners & Collaboration



Opportunity Title: A brief description of the opportunity.

Systems Change Opportunity: Briefly describe the opportunity

Organizational Primary Contribution Type: Deepening Understanding, Testing Innovations, Mobilizing Advocates, Other

Organizational Contribution(s): Example(s) of how you can contribute to potential solutions. **This will help demonstrate your interest & willingness to work collaboratively in systems change solutions.*

Targeted Impact: Provide a realistic two-year goal or outcome(s)

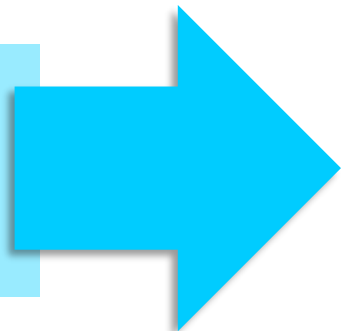
Targeted Partners & Collaboration: Suggested or necessary partners, partnership and/or collaboration.

Optional: Additional perspective or insights

Opportunity References

References

- Community
- Staff
- Volunteer Leadership



Name, Contact and connection for up to three "references"

System Change Examples

The following slides are provided to **illustrate the diversity of potential systems change opportunities** that we anticipate to see through this process. We hope that the examples show how systems change opportunities can look very different – from change opportunities at a micro-level to a high-level. Some opportunities might focus on addressing explicit parts of systems (like the flow of resources) and others may seek to address the less visible parts of the system (like relationships and values). **Most opportunities that seek to disrupt the status quo are systems change efforts.**

Within the application, the systems change opportunity section is your chance to **share your perspective on key systems change opportunities** that you think should be supported through this funding cycle.

You do not need to present a solution in the application, nor do you need to have defined partnerships to address the opportunity. We're asking that you share how your organization can bring strengths, expertise, innovation, relationships or other assets to the table to be part of a solution (that will be co-created along with other partners if you are funded).

Systems Change: Policy

This is an example of systems change through policy change by adjusting an eligibility requirement.

Opportunity Title: Broaden definition of work requirements for parent students to access childcare benefits

Systems Change Opportunity: Kentucky requires adults to meet work requirements to qualify for childcare benefits. For parents enrolled in post-secondary classes, this means that they must work full time in addition to going to class to maintain childcare benefits. Changing the policy to treat college class time as “work” for eligibility purposes would help more parent students focus on school and earn a degree – an important milestone towards higher earnings and more economic well-being.

Organizational Primary Contribution Type: Deepening Understanding

Organizational Contribution(s): Through our housing program, we could story bank parent’s experiences with the current policy and quantify the impact on families’ ability to earn a degree and reach financial stability.

Targeted Impact: Create a case for the change and identify a congressional champion to introduce revised eligibility language into law.

Targeted Partners & Collaboration: We would need support from United Way and other policy partners to leverage existing relationships with congressional leaders and people of influence.

Systems Change: Relationships & Practices

This is an example of systems change by creating new relationships through a network and shifting practices among and within partners because of the relationship.

Opportunity Title: Improved flexibility and access to State & Federal financial assistance resources

Systems Change Opportunity: Public financial assistance comes with limitations – defined by state and/or Federal departments that may make the resource inaccessible. But in addition to those regulations, local rules, practices and policies can create additional barriers that get in the way of families accessing these financial resources – like cumbersome applications or hard to understand eligibility. Unlike Federal or State regulations, local policies/ practices are easier to change.

Organizational Primary Contribution Type: Test Innovations

Organizational Contribution(s): Through a partnership with Hamilton County JFS, United Way manages an initiative called Project Lift. Project Lift has built a network of traditional and non-traditional partners along with HCJFS that work to reduce barriers to accessing financial assistance and have influenced practice change. We believe that the learnings from this innovation could be better documented and scaled to change the practices at other local Job and Family Services or equivalent offices in other communities. We also believe that our current work could provide new learnings to generally inform public and non-traditional partnership in order to expand access to services.

Targeted Impact: Establish a case study to document our current partnerships with government and non-traditional partners and identify 1-3 opportunities that could benefit from taking a similar network-based approach to expand access to nonprofit and public benefits through the network.

Targeted Partners & Collaboration: To replicate the project in other states, we would need to partner with organizations that already have close working relationships with state departments that manage/ oversee TANF/PRC funds.

Systems Change: Mindsets

This is an example of systems change by building new mindsets among service providers.

Opportunity Title: Embedding asset-based approaches in nonprofit paperwork and forms

Systems Change Opportunity: It's still very common to see social service enrollment forms that are deficit-based. This might show up as questions about barriers, history (framed based on challenge) or other questions that focus on what is lacking. We think this is evidence that too often there is a dominate deficit-based approach to providing services. We think there is a system change opportunity to flip those practices by adopting and embedding asset-based language and practices into everyday nonprofit paperwork – like enrollment forms, case plans and outcome assessments.

Organizational Primary Contribution Type: Mobilize advocates

Organizational Contribution(s): Our organization is currently part of collaborative and other community-based groups that get together to share updates and stay informed about practices in our field. Our staff has been using an asset-based enrollment form for the last several years and we believe that our staff, now asset-based advocates, could help influence the spread of these practices by leveraging our relationships and connections to other nonprofit direct service and management level staff.

Targeted Impact: Within two years, we'd like to see more nonprofits have a majority of asset-based questions on any necessary paperwork. We think that it might be reasonable to at least 15 partners to make this change over the next two years.

Targeted Partners & Collaboration: At this point, we're not sure of any necessary partners. This change is applicable to a many organizations. It might be helpful to listen to families to help determine where they think the most deficit based services or processes are to help target partner outreach.



Systems Change: System Capacity

This is an example of systems change by using innovation-focused strategies to test new solutions to increase capacity in the system to meet more families' needs.

Opportunity Title: Exploring innovative (temporary) housing solutions

Systems Change Opportunity: Studies showed that there was already a gap in affordable housing in Hamilton and COVID has perpetuated the problem of families needing affordable housing. In more rural areas, not only is there limited housing stock but there are less services to support families who might need housing stabilization or temporary housing- while looking for a more permanent solution. Beyond the current housing supports and programs provided in the community, we think there is an opportunity to explore more innovating housing solutions by learning from practices in other communities – like leveraging mini-homes or mobile homes as temporary housing.

Organizational Primary Contribution Type: Deepen understanding

Organizational Contribution(s): Our organization works closely with families to try to help them find affordable housing. We have deep understanding of all of the challenges that get in the way, particularly the unique challenges of families in rural communities. As part of our work, we have a few examples of different, out of the box housing solutions that we were able to help with by tapping into our networks and the networks of families. For example, we placed a family in a (free!) short term rental that was the house of a board member's friend. The house was going to be empty while it got a new roof and other minor repairs before being listed for sale. We think this examples and other information about what families are experiencing could spark ideas for other innovative solutions.

Targeted Impact: Because this is such a big issue, we're not certain about the impact over two years, but do believe that it would be feasible to design and test several (3-5) innovative solutions a small scale to inform more longer-term, scalable solutions.

Targeted Partners & Collaboration: We would need other out of the box thinkers and probably a diverse set of partners to consider more nontraditional approaches to helping families have affordable housing. It would also be helpful to have project management and innovation support.

System Change Examples

The following slides provide 2 scenarios related to presenting a systems change opportunity.

For each scenario, background information is provided as well as a fictional first draft of the applicant's system change opportunity questions. We'll then provide you with a few questions to ask to see if opportunity is really a systems change opportunity or not. When it is not a systems level change, we also provide an example of how the application could reframe the questions to present a systems change opportunity.



United Way
of Greater Cincinnati



Scenario 1

An organization is experiencing a challenge in scaling their program across the region. They currently serve about 500 families a year and measure some outcomes that they believe are well aligned to promoting economic well-being. Every year, they have about 100 families on a waiting list as a result of limited funding for staff roles. Without the right staffing levels, they can't enroll more families.

They feel that one of the biggest obstacles holding them back from expanding is the lack of evidence related to the longer-term impact of their program. They are interested in systems change opportunities to make sure more families can get the services they want, including their own.

Scenario 1: 1st Draft

This is the first draft that the organization has put together to describe their systems change opportunity.

Opportunity Title: Expanded services to new families

Systems Change Opportunity: Annually, we are only able to serve a fraction of people that ask for our services due to limited resources. Although we have limited quantifiable evidence for the outcomes our programs help families achieve. But we know they are working! We need United Way to invest in us to scale our program. Through this expansion we can help more families reach their goals. This will directly help more families on their path towards economic well-being.

Organizational Primary Contribution Type: Testing Innovations

Organizational Contribution(s): Our organization has heard from many of the families we serve that being part of the program changed their lives. If we could scale our solution significantly to have offices in each of the counties in United Way's footprint, we could reach an estimated 5,000 more families in two years.

Targeted Impact: As we serve 5,000 families over the next two years, we'll use some of the resources to hire an evaluator and document our process and results. We believe that this will lead to a replicable evidence-based model that may be able to be funded federally for longer term sustainability. Other partners may also be able to replicate it with our support.

Targeted Partners & Collaboration: We need United Way as a scaling partner and may need partners that will allow us to co-locate at their organization to ensure that our scaling efforts can be efficient and limit any additional overhead.

Scenario 1:

1st Draft

The organization decided to call United Way to talk through their idea. Here are a few questions that they were asked by United Way staff during the conversation...

1. Think about the iceberg, is your opportunity focused on working above or below the water?

Solutions that are focused above the water usually will not result in systems change. Try exploring the bigger challenges (or root causes) that might be below the surface. You may want to ask “why” a few times or consider how this challenge might be affecting other organizations to help identify a root cause.

2. How could this opportunity benefit from collaboration with other partners? What strengths or expertise do you bring to the table?

If there's already a proven solution, then this systems change opportunity may not be a good fit. It's helpful to remember that, at this point, United Way is only asking you to share how you might be able to leverage your expertise to explore or develop solution(s) with other community partners. We have an operating assumption that most systems challenges are complex and there's rarely one solution. We believe there is opportunity to bring new perspective, expertise, iteration, and innovation to figure out new or different solutions - that's why we think it's necessary to collaborate.

3. What's your theory of change? How could impact over the next two years ladder be an important first step towards systemic change that, in the longer run, would help more families to achieve economic well-being?

By advancing systems change work, we are ultimately working to impact families beyond individuals touched by any one program or community partner. Two-year progress may only help us make an important first step or reach an important milestone, but there should be a theory in place that helps connect the dots from the impact over two years to longer-term impact that helps more families have achieve economic well-being across our whole community.

Scenario 1: 1st Draft

Not Systems Change

Opportunity Title: Expanded services to new families

Systems Change Opportunity: Annually, we are only able to serve a fraction of people that ask for our services due to

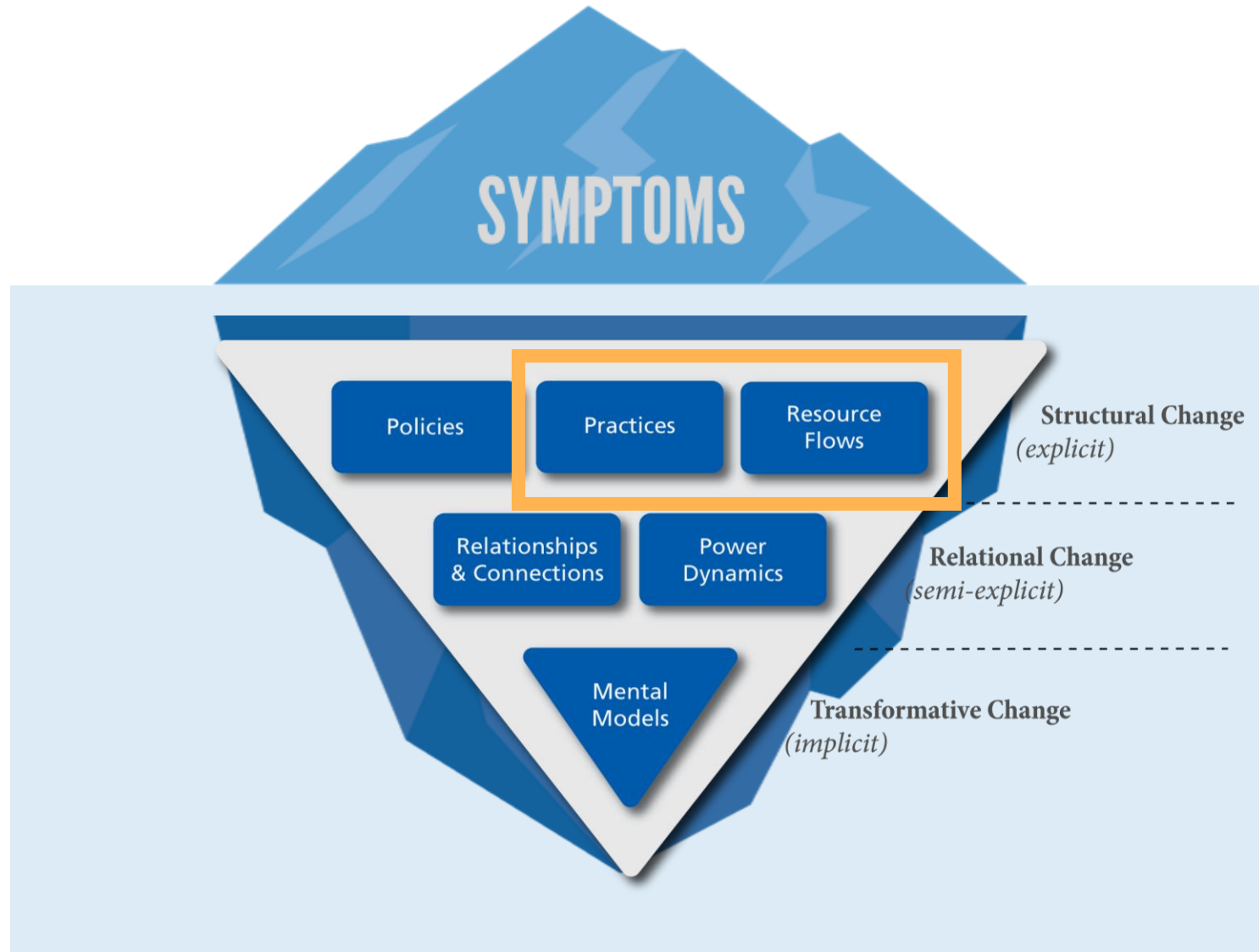
Ultimately, the organization decided that the first draft was only focused on scaling a programmatic solution that addressed the symptoms of financial insecurity. It was focused on working “above the water” and, while having a positive impact on the specific families they served, they were not sure it would address the root causes of financial insecurity.

But... they realized that the challenge of building evidence, often necessary for nonprofit programs to access resources, was a systems issue. Resources and capability (practices) are components of the system.

able to be funded federally for longer term sustainability. Other partners may also be able to replicate it with our support.

Targeted Partners & Collaboration: We need United Way as a scaling partner and may need partners that will allow us to co-locate at their organization to ensure that our scaling efforts can be efficient and limit any additional overhead.

Scenario 1: Getting to a 2nd Draft





Scenario 1: Getting to a 2nd Draft

The organization went back to the questions United Way asked during their conversation to re-think their systems change opportunity.

Here's their 2nd draft. It better explains a systems level challenge, framed as an opportunity, to build system capabilities around evaluation.

Systems Change: 2nd Draft

System Capability

Now, the example presents a systemic opportunity to strengthen system capability around evaluation.

Opportunity Title: Building nonprofit evaluation capabilities to improve evaluation (and in the future grow capacity).

Systems Change Opportunity: Annually, we are only able to serve a fraction of people interested in our services due to limited resources. We think this, along with the data we do collect, shows that our programs are working! But we feel that our evidence is insufficient. Working within our limited resources, we often don't have the funding to hire evaluators to help us build validated evidence that proves that our program and model are as successful as we know they are. We often rely on volunteer data support because we have limited internal capacity to drive strong outcome measurement and evaluation. Without validated outcomes, we don't have the right level of evidence to attract new funding sources. Not only are we facing this issue, but we believe, through conversations and relationships with other organizations, that this is a significant sector challenge.

Organizational Primary Contribution Type: Other

Organizational Contribution(s): We don't think our contribution fits well into any of the categories. We have a strong relationship with a professor at a local university that has been helping our organization with a stronger evaluation plan. They have also helped us build better tools to document our outcomes, processes used, and create more compelling tools to communicate the success of our programs. We think by sharing these resources, we could help other organizations build capability.

Targeted Impact: If our assumption that improved capability will help nonprofits build more evidence, then we believe impact could be measured by the ability to attract new revenue. And more evidence and financial support for nonprofits would help expand capacity to impact more families. A two-year goal would be related to increased capacity in evaluation and revenue.

Targeted Partners & Collaboration: Partners with existing evidence-based programs or partners who already have created evidence-based programs. They would provide critical insights to inform this opportunity.

The opportunity now focuses on disrupting systemic challenges that create patterns or trends, like limited funding or lack of evidence, in the nonprofit sector.

The organization is clear about their expertise and what they can bring to the table. They don't need to present a full solution.

There's a general theory of change that helps connect the dots between the two-year goal and longer-term impact.

Scenario 2

An organization is concerned about a recent loss of a nonprofit in their region that supports youth programming. The organization operated one of the largest after school programs. Although this applicant organization helps families and often works with children in the families, they are not experts in youth programs.

They see a critical gap in their community and would like to explore opportunities that could help make sure youth get the services and supports needed.



United Way
of Greater Cincinnati

Scenario 2: 1st Draft

This is the first draft that the organization has put together to describe their systems change opportunity.

Opportunity Title: Making sure youth have safe & enriching after school support.

Systems Change Opportunity: Recently, the primary youth after school provider in our community closed because they didn't have enough employees to continue their services. Data shows that youth who live in our community often are more likely to get involved in the criminal justice system if they are behind in school. Last year, state report cards for our local district showed a 17 point drop – primary due to low attendance rates and lower academic performance. We are concerned about the ripple effects of virtual school environments and believe that many of these youth might fall through the cracks without safe, enriching after school services.

Organizational Primary Contribution Type: Deepen Understanding

Organizational Contribution(s): Our organization also works with youth but helps them with their health needs as part of work we do to support families. Although we are not an academic-focused organization, we can leverage our trusted relationships to help understand their needs and how they might benefit from afterschool programs. We can use these insights to help identify the programs and types of partners that might be the best fit for our community.

Targeted Impact: Recruit a new partner to our community to run after school programs.

Targeted Partners & Collaboration: Youth focused programs already funded by United Way that could come into our community, like Boys & Girls Club.

Scenario 2: 1st Draft

The organization decided to call United Way to talk through their idea. Here are a few questions that they were asked by United Way staff during the conversation...

1. Think about the iceberg, is your opportunity focused on working above or below the water?

Solutions that are focused above the water usually will not result in systems change. Try exploring the bigger challenges (or root causes) that might be below the surface. You may want to ask “why” a few times or consider how this challenge might be affecting other organizations to help identify a root cause.

2. How could this opportunity benefit from collaboration with other partners? What strengths or expertise do you bring to the table?

If there's already a proven solution, then this systems change opportunity may not be a good fit. It's helpful to remember that, at this point, United Way is only asking you to share how you might be able to leverage your expertise to explore or develop solution(s) with other community partners. We have an operating assumption that most systems challenges are complex and there's rarely one solution. We believe there is opportunity to bring new perspective, expertise, iteration, and innovation to figure out new or different solutions - that's why we think it's necessary to collaborate.

3. What's your theory of change? How could impact over the next two years ladder be an important first step towards systemic change that, in the longer run, would help more families to achieve economic well-being?

By advancing systems change work, we are ultimately working to impact families beyond individuals touched by any one program or community partner. Two-year progress may only help us make an important first step or reach an important milestone, but there should be a theory in place that helps connect the dots from the impact over two years to longer-term impact that helps more families have achieve economic well-being across our whole community.

Systems Change: Not Systems Change

This example is communicated too narrowly by focusing on a specific programmatic solution to address a bigger challenge of making sure youth are successful.

Opportunity Title: Making sure youth have safe & enriching after school support.

Systems Change Opportunity: Recently, the only youth after school provider in our community closed because they

On reviewing the question, the organization decided that the first draft was focused on addressing the needs of youth through a specific programmatic solution. It was focused on working “above the water” and, while it is a gap in their community, there could be other ways to look at how they would address youths’ needs and ensure they can assess the supports needed.

Access. They realized that this might be a key root cause that could be a systems change opportunity. Not only can geographical location pose a challenge to accessing services, but sometimes youth are not interested in participating because it’s “not cool”. And that access challenges is connected to mindsets and values.

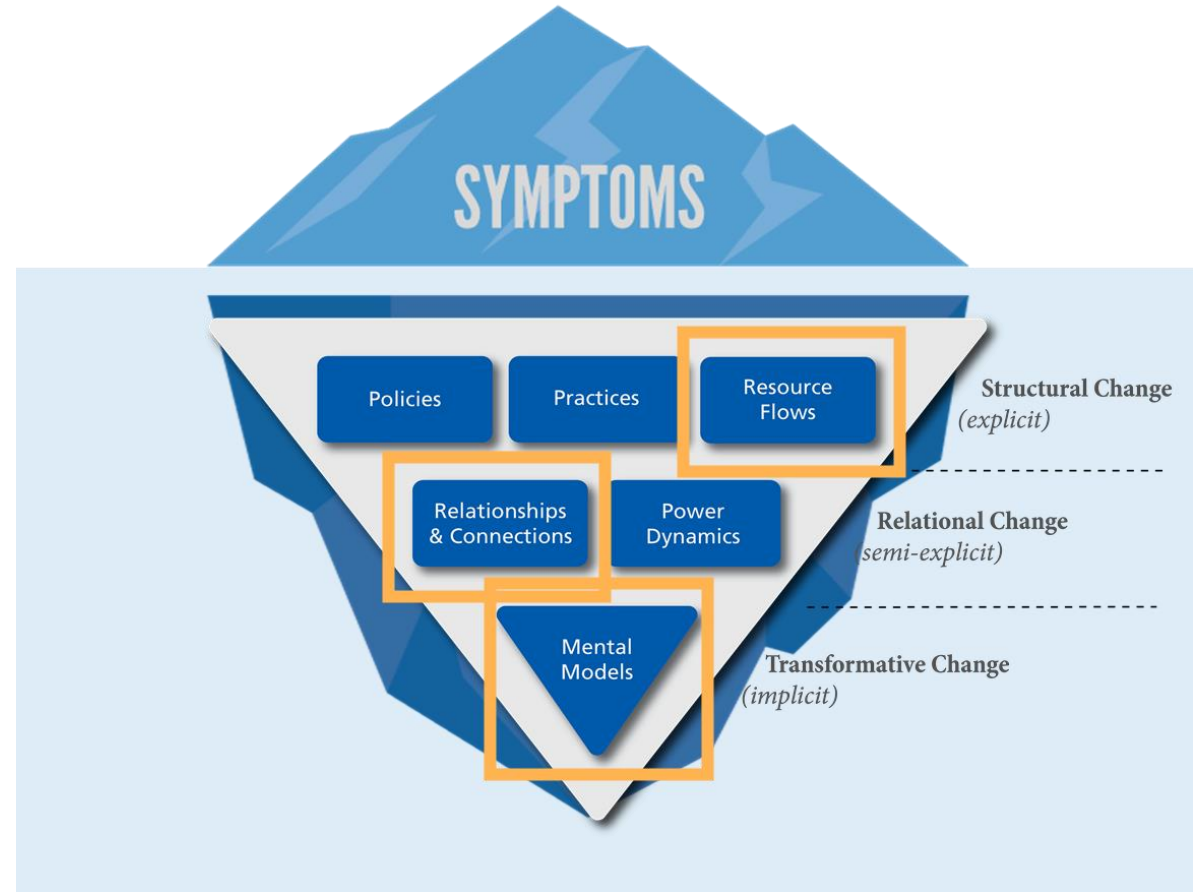
Targeted Impact: Recruit a new partner to our community to run after school programs.

Targeted Partners & Collaboration: Youth focused programs already funded by United Way that could come into our community, like Boys & Girls Club.

Scenario 1: Getting to a 2nd Draft

As the staff discussed the challenges related to people accessing the services or supports they needed, the staff believed that it was most related to:

1. Resource flows: Organizations and programs having the right resources to be located where they are most needed.
2. Relationships & connections: In serving youth specifically, having strong connections to schools is important. Relationships can help open new opportunities for co-location or partnerships to reach youth in innovative ways.
3. Mental models: Youth programs and other programs need to appeal to the targeted audiences, understand their mental models and align to shared values.



Scenario 1: Getting to a 2nd Draft

Using their new perspective, the organization went back to the questions asked during their conversation with United Way and reframed the systems change opportunity to address the challenges related to access.

Here's their 2nd draft. It better explains a systems change opportunity: improving relationships among partners involved in the system and aligning values to improve the accessibility of programs for youth.



United Way
of Greater Cincinnati

Systems Change: Relationships & Values

Now, the example shows how the specific problem in the community is connected to a root causes that get in the way of youth being successful – accessing the right supports.

Opportunity Title: Improving relationships and aligning values to better serve youth

Systems Change Opportunity: Recently, the primary youth after school provider in our community closed because they didn't have enough employees to continue their services. Data shows that youth who live in our community often are more likely to get involved in the criminal justice system if they are behind in school. Last year, state report cards for our local district showed a 17 point drop – primary due to low attendance rates and lower academic performance. We are concerned about the ripple effects of virtual school environments and believe that many of these youth might fall through the cracks without safe, enriching after school services.

This is a critical gap in our community, while we would like to address this gap by figuring out alternative opportunities for youth to connect to the services they might need, we know that accessibility of services is a challenge shared by many nonprofits. We believe that building stronger relationships, particularly with school districts, and aligning our values to the values of the populations we seek to support is a huge systems change opportunity that can positively impact our communities.

Organizational Primary Contribution Type: Deepen Understanding

Organizational Contribution(s): Our organization also works with youth but helps them with their health needs as part of work we do to support families. Although we are not an academic-focused organization, we believe that our history of building strong relationships with health systems (like school-based health clinics) could be applicable to building relationships with school systems. Additionally, health isn't always seen as "cool" and we have tested out different ways to effectively communicate our services to youth – these lessons could also help find solutions for this opportunity.

Targeted Impact: We have a theory that improved relationships and aligned values will better help reach targeted populations and a two-year period is sufficient to test out this theory. Within two years, we think it's reasonable to track changes in relationships and learn more about the values of certain populations to see if that improves the usage of services.

Targeted Partners & Collaboration: Because this opportunity is focused on centering youth, we think it would be helpful to have educators and other youth-focused programs already funded by United Way - like Boys & Girls Club.

The opportunity now focuses on addressing a root issue of helping targeted populations – the challenges related to providing accessible services.

The organization shares expertise that could inform solutions. While not the specifically what might be required, they see parallels to the opportunity.

The organization shares a broad theory of change and how the two-year period could be used to "test" it and learn more.

Questions

If it would help to explore your systems change opportunity through a phone call or if you have any questions related to the application, please email:

impact@uwgc.org



THANK YOU!



United Way
of Greater Cincinnati