

United Way of Greater Cincinnati

Emerging Priorities Fund Fall 2026

Request for Proposals Application Questions

Funding Opportunity Overview

United Way of Greater Cincinnati invites eligible organizations to apply to the Emerging Priorities Fund, a competitive funding opportunity designed to address specific emerging challenges that are creating barriers to family stability and progress.

By concentrating resources around defined priorities within United Way's impact areas, the fund will help partners respond to immediate needs while strengthening how our community works together. Funding will support specific responses within organizations' existing work and encourage greater use of shared resources, tools, expertise and partnerships.

Funding at a Glance

Item	Details
Total funding	\$2.25 million
Priority allocations	\$750,000 each for Educational Success, Financial Empowerment and Housing Security
Request cap	Requests may not exceed 30% of a program or service's current annual budget
Project duration	Ideally completed within six months; may take up to one year The grant cycle will begin on January 4, 2027
Multiple proposals	Organizations may only submit one proposal per priority, but may receive funding under more than one priority
Application deadline	November 23, 2026 at 4:30 p.m. Eastern Time in Foundant

What Success Looks Like

- Families and individuals experience greater stability and make progress toward their goals.
- Partners strengthen their ability to respond to emerging needs and work together.
- United Way and community partners gain practical insights that inform future investments and strategies.

Funding Priorities

United Way has identified three emerging priorities using insights on community need from partners and local data. Within each priority, United Way will select a group of investments that collectively address immediate needs while seeking to learn how we can strengthen how organizations respond to those needs. This may include investments that directly serve more individuals and families, improve the effectiveness or efficiency of existing services, or strengthen the partnerships and resources that support a broader community response.

- **Educational Success:** Strengthen early education providers' ability to respond to children's behavioral and social-emotional needs.
- **Financial Empowerment:** Strengthen the local food ecosystem's capacity to respond to increasing food needs and costs.
- **Housing Security:** Address housing barriers that could interrupt progress in another active program.

Eligibility Requirements

Applicants must meet all applicable requirements below. Eligibility allows an organization to apply but does not guarantee funding. All applicants must complete the eligibility screener in United Way's grant management system, Foundant, before completing the application.

- ✓ **Organizational status:** The applicant must be a tax-exempt nonprofit organization or operate under a nonprofit fiscal sponsor.
- ✓ **Geographic focus:** At least 50% of the people expected to benefit must live in United Way's service area: Dearborn and Ohio counties, Indiana; Brown, Clermont and Hamilton counties, Ohio; and Boone, Campbell, Grant and Kenton counties, Kentucky.
- ✓ **Population served:** A majority, and at least 50%, of the people ultimately expected to benefit from the proposed work must live at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level.
- ✓ **Existing work:** The request must be for a specific effort that builds on work the organization already does.
- ✓ **Priority alignment:** Each proposal must align with one of the three funding priorities described in this RFP.

Funding Parameters

There is \$750,000 allocated to each of the impact pillars. The amount requested may not exceed 30% of a program's or service's current annual budget. Organizations can only submit one proposal per impact area, but may receive more than one award, under different priorities. Each proposal must select one priority and describe the specific effort for which funding is requested.

Use of Funds

Funding may support a wide range of expenses, but each expense must directly contribute to a targeted response to the identified priority. General program expansion or ongoing operating support, without a clear connection to that response, is not the intent of this fund.

Grantees will **not** be required to submit a line-item expenditure reconciliation. All grant funds must support the purpose and activities described in the approved proposal. **Any significant changes in programming must be reported to United Way of Greater Cincinnati.** Failure to report significant changes may result in the loss, and possibly return, of funding.

Project Duration

Given the focus on emerging priorities and needs in the community, it is assumed that the funding will immediately support programming and solutions that should be implemented within six months and not exceed one year. Applicants should propose a timeline appropriate to the work and explain why a longer period is needed when the project extends beyond six months.

Timeline and Application Process

Date	Milestone
October 26, 2026	RFP available for review on United Way's website
October 30, 2026 at 12:00 p.m. ET	Application opens in United Way's grant management system - Foundant
November 12, 2026 at 1:00 p.m. ET	Office Hours on Teams
November 23, 2026 at 4:30 p.m. ET	Application deadline
November 30 through December 18, 2026	Application review
December 22, 2026	Funding notifications
Early January 2027	Funding begins
Mid-January 2027	Required virtual grantee kickoff
June 2027	Required six-month learning debrief
Upon completion, no later than January 2028	Final report due when the proposed work is complete and grant funds have been expended

How to Apply

1. Review this RFP and the priority-specific guidance before beginning the eligibility screener in [Foundant](#).
2. Complete the eligibility screener in Foundant. Applicants that meet the requirements may proceed with the full application.
3. Complete all required application questions and upload the required financial documents.
4. Submit the application no later than November 23, 2026, at 4:30 p.m. Eastern Time. **No late applications will be accepted.**

Information and Support

The United Way Greater Cincinnati staff will host office hours on November 12th, at 1p.m. ET. Please use the link in the timeline above. Questions may be directed to Sue Casey-Leininger, Director, Impact at impact@uwgc.org.

Educational Success Priority

United Way intends to invest in projects to strengthen early education providers' ability to respond to children's increasing behavioral and social-emotional needs. The goal is to help providers better support children experiencing these challenges by strengthening the skills, practices and resources available to educators, ultimately contributing to more stable, supportive classroom environments where children can remain engaged in learning.

United Way will seek a portfolio of investments that collectively contribute to one or more of the following goals:

1. **Strengthen educator skills and practices.** Help existing educators build the knowledge, skills and tools needed to respond effectively to children's behavioral and social-emotional needs through training, coaching, consultation or other professional supports.
2. **Increase access to specialized support.** Expand access to timely behavioral health consultation, clinical services or other specialized expertise that helps educators and providers address children's needs.
3. **Strengthen provider response.** Help early education providers establish or improve practices, tools and partnerships that allow them to identify needs earlier, respond more consistently and connect children and families with appropriate supports.

Collectively, these investments should contribute to greater classroom stability, including fewer behavioral disruptions that interfere with learning, more consistent participation in early education, and stronger provider practices for supporting children with behavioral and social-emotional needs.

Shared Learning Goal

In addition to the results of individual projects, funded partners will contribute to a shared effort to better understand the behavioral and social-emotional challenges affecting early education settings, which approaches are most effective in strengthening educator and provider response, and what barriers limit access to timely support. United Way will coordinate this learning effort through shared measures, partner experiences and opportunities for collaboration among funded organizations.

Who May Apply

- Organizations that provide high-quality early education services
- Organizations that train, coach, consult with or otherwise support early education providers and educators
- Organizations that provide behavioral health or clinical services in partnership with early education providers

Examples of Eligible Approaches

Eligible approaches may include, but are not limited to:

- Training, coaching or consultation that strengthens educator practices
- Behavioral health consultation or direct clinical services for children in early education settings
- Tools, curricula, protocols or shared practices that improve responses to behavioral and social-emotional needs
- Partnerships that improve access to specialized expertise or timely support
- Staffing, technology, equipment or other capacity needed to implement the proposed response

What a Strong Proposal Will Explain

- The specific behavioral or social-emotional needs affecting children's learning and how those needs are changing
- The number of educators, providers or children expected to benefit and the current level of support available
- How the proposed work will improve educator practices, access to specialized services or provider response
- What measurable changes are expected during the grant period and how those changes will be assessed
- How the improvements or resources developed through the investment may continue to benefit providers and children after the grant ends

Financial Empowerment Priority

United Way intends to invest in a portfolio of projects that will strengthen the local food ecosystem's ability to respond to increasing food needs and costs. The goal is to help organizations meet more of the immediate food needs in our community while improving how existing resources are acquired, shared and distributed, ultimately creating a more effective and sustainable community food-support system.

United Way will seek a portfolio of investments that collectively contribute to one or more of the following goals:

1. **Meet more immediate food needs.** Increase the amount of food reaching individuals and families experiencing food insecurity, particularly where existing resources are insufficient to meet demand.
2. **Make existing resources go further.** Help organizations increase the amount of food they can access or distribute through more cost-effective approaches, expanded food rescue, improved storage or distribution capacity, or access to additional food resources.
3. **Strengthen the local food network.** Improve coordination and partnerships among food providers and related organizations to reduce duplication, address gaps in distribution and connect more providers to shared resources and infrastructure.

Collectively, these investments should help more families access the food they need while strengthening the food ecosystem's ability to meet ongoing demand with greater efficiency and coordination.

Shared Learning Goal

In addition to the results of individual projects, funded partners will contribute to a shared effort to better understand unmet food needs across the community, including where gaps exist, what types of food and services residents need, and what barriers prevent existing resources from reaching them. United Way will coordinate this learning effort through shared data, resident feedback and opportunities for collaboration among funded partners.

Who May Apply

Eligible applicants may provide food access services, coordinate food distribution, support food acquisition or rescue, provide logistics or infrastructure, connect people with food resources, or otherwise contribute to the local food ecosystem.

Partnership Expectations

Partnerships and shared approaches are encouraged but are not required. A single organization may apply for a cost-effective internal approach when it can explain how the effort will increase capacity, improve efficiency, reduce waste or duplication, or help meet growing demand.

Examples of Eligible Approaches

Eligible approaches may include, but are not limited to:

- Expanded procurement
- Shared purchasing, storage, transportation, distribution or delivery
- Equipment, vehicles, refrigeration, technology or other infrastructure
- New or expanded partnerships among food providers or related community organizations
- Internal process improvements that increase reach, reliability or cost-effectiveness
- Staffing, data, coordination or communication needed to strengthen the response

What a Strong Proposal Will Explain

- The specific increase or change in food needs the organization is experiencing, supported by available data or service trends
- The current level of food access, distribution or other relevant activity, including any documented unmet demand
- How the proposed investment will increase food access, improve resource efficiency, strengthen organizational capacity or improve coordination, as applicable.
- The measurable additional results expected during the grant period, including the number of households reached, additional food distributed, increased capacity or other relevant improvements
- How the applicant estimated those results and why the proposed approach represents an effective use of resources
- How the investment may create ongoing benefits, such as increased food-rescue capacity, access to additional resources, reduced costs or stronger partnerships

Housing Security Priority

Applications must address housing instability when it threatens to interrupt an individual's or family's progress in another active program, such as workforce development, education or financial coaching, that supports longer-term economic mobility.

United Way intends to invest in projects that help participants overcome immediate housing barriers so they can remain engaged in these programs and continue making progress toward greater financial stability and economic mobility.

United Way will seek a portfolio of investments that collectively contribute to one or more of the following goals:

1. **Prevent housing instability from interrupting progress.** Provide timely, targeted assistance to help participants overcome housing barriers that could cause them to withdraw from or lose progress in an existing program.
2. **Support continued engagement and progress.** Help participants remain connected to education, employment, financial coaching, or other programs that contribute to greater long-term stability and economic mobility.

3. **Strengthen program response to housing barriers.** Help organizations improve how they identify housing challenges, connect participants to appropriate resources, and coordinate assistance before housing instability disrupts progress.

Collectively, these investments should help more individuals and families maintain their progress toward greater financial stability while strengthening organizations' ability to address housing-related barriers within their existing programs.

Shared Learning Goal

In addition to the results of individual projects, funded partners will contribute to a shared effort to better understand how housing instability affects participation and progress in other programs, which types of assistance are most effective in preventing disruptions, and where gaps in available resources or coordination limit organizations' ability to respond. United Way will coordinate this learning effort through shared measures, partner experiences, and opportunities for collaboration among funded organizations.

Who May Apply

The proposed housing response **must** be connected to an active program in which the individual or family is participating. The applicant may operate that program directly or work through an existing partnership with the organization that does.

A housing organization may apply when it has an existing partnership and a clear approach for helping participants remain engaged in or make progress through the connected program.

Eligible Housing Expenses

Any housing-related expense may be proposed when it addresses a barrier that threatens participation or progress in the connected program. Examples include rent, rental arrears, utility assistance, deposits, application fees, temporary lodging, moving expenses, housing navigation, or rental assistance covering multiple months.

Assistance may continue over multiple months, but the grant-funded response must be time-limited and connected to an individual's or family's participation or progress in the other active program.

What a Strong Proposal Will Explain

- The existing program in which participants are engaged and the progress that housing instability is putting at risk
- The specific housing barriers participants experience and how frequently those barriers disrupt participation or progress
- How the proposed assistance will identify and resolve housing barriers in a timely, targeted way
- The number of participants or households expected to receive assistance and the measurable changes expected in program retention, participation or progress
- How the applicant will assess whether assistance helped participants remain engaged or continue making progress
- How the investment may improve the organization's ability to identify and respond to housing-related barriers beyond the grant period

Participation, Reporting and Learning

Funded organizations will participate in the following activities:

- A virtual grantee kickoff in mid-January 2027
- Shared learning or coordination activities connected to the funded work
- A six-month learning debrief in June 2027
- A final report when the proposed work is complete and grant funds have been expended, but no later than January 2028
- Sharing relevant tools, practices and lessons with United Way and other funded organizations

United Way may offer additional convenings during the grant period. Details and participation expectations will be communicated in advance.

Measures and Learning

Applicants will provide both United Way-defined information and applicant-defined measures. Each proposal must identify one principal output, one or two intended outcomes, and how progress will be assessed.

Across the fund, United Way will gather information about who benefited, what was completed, what changed for families or participating organizations, how capacity or collaboration changed, what was learned and what should be sustained, changed or expanded.

How Applications Will Be Reviewed

United Way will first confirm that applications meet the eligibility requirements. Eligible applications will then be reviewed competitively within the selected priority.

Reviewers will consider:

- Alignment with funding priorities: How clearly the proposal addresses the identified challenge and contribute to one or more of the priority's stated goals.
- Focused and feasible approach: Whether the proposed activities build on existing work and can reasonably be implemented within the grant period.
- Expected results: The extent to which the investment is expected to produce meaningful, measurable improvements for individuals, families, educators, providers, or participating organizations.
- Organizational capacity: The applicant's experience and ability to carry out the proposed work, including the capacity of any partners involved.
- Value of the investment: Whether the requested amount is reasonable in relation to the expected results, including potential improvements in efficiency, capacity, or longer-term benefits.
- Measurement and learning: Whether the applicant has identified realistic measures, supported its estimates, and demonstrated a willingness to contribute to shared learning.

Portfolio Considerations

In addition to evaluating individual proposals, United Way will consider how investments collectively advance the goals of each funding priority. This may include balancing projects that address immediate needs with those that improve service effectiveness, strengthen organizational capacity, or support greater coordination.

Funding decisions will consider the combined potential of selected projects to achieve meaningful results, address gaps, and generate insights that inform future community investments.

Application Questions

The questions below reflect the full application in Foundant. Conditional questions will appear based on the funding priority and organizational status selected.

Organization Information

Legal organization name

Response: *Short text*

Organization address

Response: *Address fields*

Organization website

Response: *URL*

Year the organization began operating

Response: *Number*

Primary application contact name, title, email and phone number

Response: *Contact fields*

Executive Director or Chief Executive Officer name and email

Response: *Contact fields*

Tax status

- ☐ 501(c)(3) nonprofit
- ☐ Other tax-exempt nonprofit or entity
- ☐ Applying through a nonprofit fiscal sponsor

Response: *Single select*

If applying through a fiscal sponsor, provide the sponsor's legal name, contact person and email address

Response: *Conditional contact fields*

Current annual organizational budget

Response: *Currency*

Number of full-time-equivalent employees

Response: *Number*

Approximately how many people does your organization serve each year?

Response: *Number or estimate*

What percentage of the people expected to benefit from the proposed work live in United Way's nine-county service area?

Response: *Percentage*

Select each county expected to benefit from the proposed work

Response: *Multi-select county list*

What percentage of the people expected to benefit live at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level?

Response: *Percentage*

Proposal Overview

Selected funding priority

- ☐ Educational Success
- ☐ Financial Empowerment
- ☐ Housing Security

Response: *Single select carried forward from the eligibility screener*

Amount requested

Response: *Currency*

Name of the existing program, service or area of work this proposal builds upon

Response: *Short text*

Current annual budget for that program or service

Response: *Currency*

If your organization is submitting other Emerging Priorities Fund proposals, list each proposal, selected priority, related program or service and amount requested

Response: *Conditional short response*

Proposed start and end dates

Response: *Date fields; The work should be completed within six months when feasible and may take up to one year.*

Provide a brief summary of the proposed work. Describe what the requested investment will make possible, who will benefit, and the primary result you expect to achieve.

Response: *Narrative;*

Community Need and Proposed Approach

What specific challenge will the proposal address? Describe who is affected, how the need is changing, and the data or experience that demonstrates the need. Include an estimate of the number of people, providers, or organizations expected to benefit.

Response: *Narrative*

Describe the proposed approach and how it will contribute to the goals of your selected funding priority. Include primary activities, key timing, and responsible organization or partners (if applicable), and how the proposal builds your organization's existing work, experience or capacity.

Response: *Narrative and estimates*

How will the requested funds be used? Identify the primary uses and the approximate amount or share supporting each.

Response: *Narrative*

Priority Specific Questions

Only the questions for the priority selected in the eligibility screener will appear.

Educational Success

Reminder: your organization must currently provide early education services, direct support to early education providers or educators, or behavioral-health or clinical services in partnership with early education providers serving children from birth through age 5.

Which approach best describes the proposed work?

- ☐ Educator capacity-building
- ☐ Direct behavioral-health or clinical services
- ☐ Both

Response: *Single select*

Describe the behavioral and social-emotional needs affecting children's learning. How will the proposed approach strengthen educator skills, access to specialized support, or provider response?

Response: *Narrative*

How will the proposed improvements create more stable, supportive classroom environments?

Describe the changes you expect to see in educator practices, classroom response, or children's participation in learning. providers,

Response: *Narrative*

Financial Empowerment

Reminder: Your organization must currently provide food access services, coordinate food distribution, or otherwise support the local food ecosystem.

Which approach best describes the proposed work?

- ☐ New or expanded partnership
- ☐ Cost-effective operational practices or approaches
- ☐ Both

Response: *Single select*

Describe the unmet food needs or operational challenges the proposal will address. How will the proposed work increase food access, make existing resources go further, or strengthen the local food network?

Response: *Narrative*

What makes the proposed approach cost-effective or valuable beyond the immediate grant period? For example, describe additional food resources that would become available, increased distribution capacity, reduced costs or waste, or improved process or partnerships. If partnerships are part of the proposal, describe each partner's role.

Response: *Narrative*

Housing Security

Reminder: the proposed work must address a housing barrier that could interrupt an individual's or family's progress in another active program, such as workforce development, education or financial coaching.

Does your organization operate that program or have an existing partnership with the organization that does?

Response: *Yes or No*

Identify the connected program and the organization that operates it.

Response: *Short response*

Describe the housing barriers participants experience and how those barriers threaten their engagement or progress in the connected program.

Response: *Narrative*

Describe the housing assistance that will be provided, how participants will be identified, and how assistance will be coordinated with the connected program.

Response: *Narrative*

If a partner organization is involved, describe its role and the existing working relationship.

Response: *Conditional narrative*

Results Measurement and Learning

What is the principal output the proposed work will produce? Identify the primary activity, service or improvement and the expected quantity or reach.

Response: *Narrative and numeric estimate*

What is the current level of activity or performance related to this output? Provide a baseline or reasonable estimate, when available, so United Way can understand what the proposed investment will add or improve.

Response: *Numeric estimate and explanation; applicants may indicate when a baseline is unavailable*

Identify one or two outcomes expected during the grant period. Describe what will change for participants, educators, providers or organizations and how you will determine whether those changes occurred.

Response: *Narrative with expected numerical results*

Briefly explain how you developed your estimates. Include relevant assumptions, prior experience, current demand or other information supporting your expected results.

Response: *Short narrative*

Priority-Related Measures

Select the measures that are relevant to the proposed work and provide an expected value when available. Applicants may also propose another measure.

Educational Success Measures

- ☐ Number of educators or providers trained, coached or supported
- ☐ Change in educator knowledge, confidence or practice

- ☐ Number of children or families receiving support
- ☐ Change in provider response, referral or support practices
- ☐ Change in classroom stability, such as reduction of behavioral disruptions or exclusions
- ☐ Another applicant-defined measure

Financial Empowerment Measures

- ☐ Number of households reached
- ☐ Additional amount of food acquired, rescued, stored or distributed
- ☐ Increase in food storage, transportation or distribution capacity
- ☐ Change in cost, time, reliability or food waste
- ☐ Number of organizations benefiting from a shared approach
- ☐ Another applicant-defined measure

Housing Security Measures

- ☐ Number of individuals or families receiving housing assistance
- ☐ Number or percentage of identified housing barriers addressed
- ☐ Number or percentage of participants who remain engaged in the connected program
- ☐ Number or percentage of participants who continue making progress toward the connected program's goals
- ☐ Another applicant-defined measure

Shared Learning and Coordination

What is one important question or challenge you hope this project will help your organization and United Way better understand? Consider emerging needs, barriers to effective services, promising approaches, or opportunities to improve how organizations respond.

Confirm that the organization will participate in the virtual kickoff, shared learning or coordination activities, six-month debrief and final reporting, and will share relevant tools, practices or lessons

Response: *Required acknowledgment*

Financial Information and Uploads

Does the organization anticipate any major changes to its current budget during the grant period? If yes, explain.

Response: *Yes or No with conditional narrative*

Required Uploads

- ☐ Current fiscal-year organizational budget
- ☐ Most recent completed-year financial statements, whether audited, reviewed, compiled or internally prepared
- ☐ Most recent IRS Form 990, if applicable
- ☐ Fiscal sponsor agreement or letter, if applicable

Additional Information and Certifications

Is there anything else reviewers should know to understand the organization or proposed work?

Response: *Optional narrative*

Use of Artificial Intelligence

United Way recognizes that organizations may use generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools to support grant writing, research and other aspects of their work. We encourage responsible use of these tools and are interested in learning how applicants are using them to support their work.

Did your organization use generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools in preparing this application? Select all that apply

- ☐ No, we did not use generative AI tools
- ☐ Yes, for editing, proofreading, or improving clarity
- ☐ Yes, for brainstorming or organizing ideas
- ☐ Yes, for drafting or developing application responses
- ☐ Yes, for research, analysis, or developing estimates
- ☐ Yes, for another purpose

Response: *Multi-select*

Optional: How, if at all, has AI helped your organization prepare this application to support its broader work?

Response: *Narrative*

AI use will not affect application eligibility or funding decisions. Applicants remain responsible for the accuracy and completeness of submitted information and should not enter confidential or personally identifiable information into AI tools without appropriate safeguards. United Way may use approved AI tools to support application review and analysis; final funding decisions will be made by people.

Permission to Share Application Information

United Way occasionally works with other funders and community partners who may be interested in supporting projects aligned with their priorities. With your permission, United Way may share your application to help identify additional funding or partnership opportunities.

May United Way share your application with other philanthropic funders or potential funding partners for the purpose of exploring additional support for your proposed work?

- ☐ Yes, United Way may share our application for this purpose.
- ☐ Please contact our organization before sharing our application.
- ☐ No, please do not share our application outside United Way's grant review process.

Response: Single select

Your response is optional and will not affect your application's eligibility or funding consideration. Permission to share does not guarantee additional funding or partnership opportunities.

Applicant Certification

I certify that the information in this application is accurate; the requested funds will be used for the proposed work; and, if funded, the organization will fulfill the participation, learning and reporting expectations described in this RFP

Response: *Required acknowledgment*

Authorized representative name, title and date

Response: *Signature fields*