



2026-27 COMMUNITY IMPACT GRANTS

INVITATION AND GUIDE



UNITED WAY

South Central Michigan

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

United Way of South Central Michigan seeks to partner with nonprofit agencies in Calhoun, Clinton, Eaton, Ingham, Jackson and Kalamazoo counties that address the needs of people in financial hardship and persons who have been historically oppressed and marginalized. The 15-month 2026-27 Community Impact Grant request for proposals is focused on supporting initiatives which lift our local communities by:

- Reducing racial and economic disparities;
- Addressing the needs of Asset-Limited, Income Constrained, Employed (ALICE) households in financial stability, and safety net (basic needs);
- Creating opportunities for every person to reach their full potential.



VISION

Strong, caring communities where every person is valued, thriving, and connected for the common good.

OUR VALUES

EQUITY

Applying principles of diversity, inclusivity, justice, antiracism, empathy and trust to every facet of our work and our culture, with a firm commitment to historically underrepresented and marginalized people.

COMMUNITY

Solving the toughest social issues that affect local individuals and families, changing lives and strengthening our region in the process.

INTEGRITY

Pursuing our work with transparency, accountability and dignity, constantly learning and adapting to the changing needs of our communities.

MISSION

We bring together the people, ideas and resources to lead with our communities and create a flourishing, equitable life for everyone.

COLLABORATION

Working hand-in-hand with communities and partners to honor their voices, build trust, increase impact, and grow diversity in ideas and representation throughout our shared efforts.

COMPASSION

Caring passionately for the people we serve, the colleagues we work alongside, and the communities we strive to improve.

RESULTS

Driving impact through innovation, creativity and leadership that brings new ideas, new resources, and equitable, lasting solutions.

PRIORITY IMPACT AREAS



In pursuit of our vision – the creation of strong, caring communities where every person is valued, thriving and connected for the common good – United Way of South Central Michigan has identified the following priorities for this grant invitation and guide:



HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

Often referred to as a “safety net,” supporting access to basic needs such as food, shelter, healthcare, transportation and childcare is more essential than ever.

DESIRED OUTCOME: Community members have access to basic needs.

Approaches include, but are not limited to: emergency shelter, food access, personal items (including diapers, clothing, vital documents, etc), crisis healthcare and public health

Examples of possible metrics include, but are not limited to: # of nights of shelter, # of meals provided, # of diapers provided, # of individuals receiving medical care, etc



FINANCIAL SECURITY

Our emphasis on building communities where every individual can thrive compels us to partner with organizations that empower ALICE to sustain a family and build financial opportunity for future generations. We want to empower nonprofits to help more adults thrive in a career, live in quality housing, and build generational wealth.

DESIRED OUTCOME: Households have tools and capital to decrease debt and build generational wealth.

Approaches include, but are not limited to: rental assistance, home ownership, employment opportunities, career training, small business support, debt relief/asset building, etc

Examples of possible metrics include, but are not limited to: # households that obtained housing because of services/interventions, # individuals receiving supports for wage growth, # of individuals who spend more than 40% of their income on housing, # of Households who decrease their total household debt, etc



YOUTH OPPORTUNITY

Because building a long-term foundation for thriving communities requires an investment in children and youth, United Way of South Central Michigan is dedicated to increasing the capacity of children- and youth- serving organizations that provide for their basic needs, offer safe spaces and experiences for them to grow and learn, and create settings where they are valued as individuals and connected to caring adults.

DESIRED OUTCOMES: All families in the community have access to high-quality, affordable childcare and early childhood education. Young adults are prepared and equipped for post-secondary education or career training opportunities.

Approaches include but are not limited to: Access to childcare/preschool, Post Secondary Education Supports, Youth Career training

Examples of possible metrics include, but are not limited to: # of households receiving childcare assistance, # of new childcare slots created, # of individuals earning credentials, etc

Additionally, UWSCMI strives to create a network of funded partners and collaborations that increases **Community Resiliency**. As we face new and unanticipated challenges, United Way is committed to partnership with those who seek to build resilient communities that are more connected, supportive and ready to respond to any challenge. Examples of UWSCMI investment in Community Resiliency include 211 Helpline and Disaster Relief and Recovery.



ELIGIBILITY

Eligible nonprofit entities which serve the people of Calhoun, Clinton, Eaton, Ingham, Jackson and/or Kalamazoo counties are encouraged to apply, including the types of organizations listed below:

- A legally registered 501(c) (3) Public Charity, including faith-based nonprofits
- Organizations that have an active 501(c) (3) Public Charity serving as a fiscal sponsor

While financial hardship exists for many households across our region, we know that particular populations experience hardships at a higher rate. Because of this, UWSCMI is committed to providing equitable access to support, resources and programming that addresses root causes of inequity. Therefore, organizations must serve one or more of the following populations disproportionately below the ALICE threshold:

- BIPOC households
- single-headed households with children
- households headed by individuals 25 and younger or 65 and older
- persons with disabilities
- those serving areas where 41% of the total population meets ALICE criteria.

UWSCMI holds core values of equity, integrity, collaboration, community, compassion, and results. These are detailed on Page 2 of this report. Proposals and organizations must align with these values in order to be considered for funding.



FOCUS CONSIDERATIONS

Grassroots, collaborative programs, and collective impact initiatives are of particular importance to furthering our priority impact areas, as are agencies that intentionally cultivate the success of BIPOC leadership and communities. Agencies and programs that fall into one or more of these areas will be given additional consideration. Agencies that are intentional about fostering the economic welfare of their own employees who are ALICE, or intentional about lifting wages and benefits above the ALICE threshold will be given additional consideration as well.



AWARD PROVISIONS

The amount available for grantmaking is based on the revenue from our annual fundraising. Grant applications can include requests to support all facets of program delivery, including general operation costs. Organizations awarded grants will receive payment in five equal installments beginning in July of 2026. Agencies will be asked to submit a mid-year report or host an on-site visit. Additionally, all organizations receiving grant funds will be required to submit a final report by December 31, 2027.



REVIEW CRITERIA AND EVALUATION

The 2026-27 Community Impact grant process involves multiple layers of review. First, a team of volunteers and staff will review all proposals that we receive by the December 18, 2025 deadline. They will employ a rubric to evaluate the quality of each application and then carefully and thoroughly discuss which services and combination of programs would provide the most support to our community in alignment with our priority impact areas. This committee will then make recommendations to UWSCMI's local advisory body who will consider the recommendations, consult with volunteers, staff and others as needed to address questions or concerns to ensure they fully understand and support the recommendations. After this multi-layered review and evaluation, award designations will be announced by or before May 1, 2026. UWSCMI may follow up with clarifying questions during this evaluation process.

APPLICATION STEPS AND GRANT TIMELINE



STAGE & DATES	ACTIVITY
PREPARATION	Deepen your knowledge of ALICE households in our community. Access UWSCMI's 2024-2025 Impact Report. Access Agency Instructions for accessing e-Clmpact. Access office hours with our staff. Schedule time with staff to discuss this funding opportunity, your work and/or your application.
SNEAK PEEK	Access an exclusive sneak peek of the Grant Guide via the UWSCMI digital community on October 20, 2025. Visit unitedforscmi.org to learn more.
APPLICATION DEVELOPMENT October 27 – Thursday, December 18, 2025 at Noon	Set up an e-Clmpact account if your agency is new to the system, or log in to your existing e-Clmpact account and request a UWSCMI 15-month grant application. Application Available on e-Clmpact: Monday, October 27 Ongoing Office Hours: schedule time to meet with staff. Application Submission Deadline: Thursday, December 18 at Noon
UWSCMI REVIEW January 2026 – March 2026	UWSCMI Staff and Community Partners Review Application. Questions (if any) will be sent to applicant via e-Clmpact. Responses will be accepted via e-Clmpact, by e-mail, or virtual meeting upon request.
FINAL DECISIONS April 2026	UWSCMI local advisory body reviews and makes final grant selection decisions.
NOTIFICATION & NEXT STEPS May 1, 2026 – Friday, June 5, 2026	Notification of grant award will occur by May 1, 2026. Those selected to receive grant funding will receive a grant agreement, and those selected for partial funding will be given the opportunity to make adjustments to their budget or planned outputs in e-Clmpact. Grant Agreement Submission Deadline: Friday, June 5 at Noon.
GRANT PERIOD July 1, 2026 – September 30, 2027	UWSCMI staff are available to support grantees and will reach out via your preferred contact method at least once each grant year. Year-End Reporting will occur each August after the end of each grant year. Grantees will receive reminders and support to complete reports.

MORE INFORMATION



Regional applications that span multiple communities (example: Jackson County and Kalamazoo County) can be submitted as a single application.

All grant application work will be done through the e-CImpact portal.

Language accommodation will be provided. The e-CImpact portal can be accessed in English, French, and Spanish. Translation and interpretation services are available in Arabic, Burmese, French, and Spanish.

Technical assistance and support from United Way of South Central Michigan staff is available throughout the application process and full term of the grant.

COMMUNITY SPECIFIC INFORMATION

BATTLE CREEK AND KALAMAZOO

In 2024-25 grant sizes range from \$8,647-\$97,814 with an average grant size of \$46,340. Available funding is based on the success of UWSCMI's fall fundraising campaign. We expect the 2026-2027 grant cycle to be extra competitive, so these amounts are likely to change.

Additional Questions? Contact Dwayne Bagley d.bagley@uwscmi.org

CAPITAL AREA

In 2024-25 grant sizes range from \$5,000-\$40,000 with an average grant size of \$14,441. Available funding is based on the success of UWSCMI's fall fundraising campaign. We expect the 2026-2027 grant cycle to be extra competitive, so these amounts are likely to change.

Additional Questions? Contact Celaina Boylan-Castilla c.boyland-castilla@uwscmi.org

JACKSON COUNTY

In 2024-25 grant sizes range from \$6,071-\$38,478 with an average grant size of \$16,941. Available funding is based on the success of UWSCMI's fall fundraising campaign. We expect the 2026-2027 grant cycle to be extra competitive, so these amounts are likely to change.

Additional Questions? Contact Ebone' Young e.young@uwscmi.org

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: Why is the 2026-27 grant cycle 15 months rather than 1 year? Is UWSCMI moving away from multi-year funding?

A: To respond to shifting fundraising cycles and budget timelines, UWSCMI is shifting our annual grant year from a July 1-June 30 cycle to an October 1-September 30 cycle. To make this adjustment, we are entering into a transitional 15-month cycle to reset our grant year. We intend to introduce multiple grant programs, including a multi-year opportunity, in our 2027-28 grant cycle.

Q: I'm interested in applying, but I'm not sure where to start. Who can I talk to?

A: Applicants are encouraged to begin by reviewing the grant invitation and guide. If you still have questions or would like to talk more about your specific program or organization, [please schedule time to meet](#) with a UWSCMI staff member. Office hours are available from October 20, 2025-December 18, 2025. Applications will open October 27, 2025.

Q: I'm forming a new nonprofit but we haven't secured our own 501(c)(3) status. Can I apply?

A: To be eligible for a grant, organizations must be a legally registered 501(c)(3) Public Charity in good standing OR be fiscally sponsored by a 501(c)(3) Public Charity in good standing. If you have a fiscal sponsor, you will be required to submit documentation reflecting your fiscal sponsorship relationship signed by the Executive Director of the sponsoring agency. For more information on fiscal sponsorship, and to access the required UWSCMI fiscal sponsorship verification form, please see the glossary below.

Q: I'm trying to create an e-CImpact account, but I'm having trouble. How can I get help?

A: Applicants are encouraged to review the agency instructions available here. If you need additional technical assistance or have questions about e-CImpact, please contact communityimpact@uwscmi.org.

Q: If I'm able to fit all priority impact areas, does this make my grant more competitive?

A: We find that having a specific focus in 1-2 priority impact areas is more realistic and impactful. This allows organizations to provide key interventions and supports to ALICE families that are measurable and achievable. You will not be penalized for selecting several impact areas. However, selecting all priority impact areas does not generally make your application more competitive in the review process.

Q: If I've received funding from United Way of South Central Michigan or any of its former United Way entities, am I still eligible to apply?

OR

Q: I have historically received funding from UWSCMI in multiple grant cycles. Am I guaranteed funding?

A: The 2026-27 grant cycle is a new and highly competitive grant cycle. Previous award of funding does not guarantee funding this cycle. We encourage any organization with interest in applying to review the grant guide to verify alignment with UWSCMI priorities. Grant applications will be reviewed and scored based on alignment to the priority impact areas and focus considerations outlined in the grant invitation and guide. Final funding decisions will be based on these factors and responsiveness to community needs.

Q: Who will review our grant application?

A: Grant applications will be reviewed by UWSCMI staff and a team of volunteers. Each region (Battle Creek/Kalamazoo, Capital Area, and Jackson County) will have its own localized review team. In composing our staff and volunteer teams, UWSCMI strives to build teams that reflect the values, lived experiences, and demographics of our local communities and, in particular, ALICE households. Once grants have been reviewed by UWSCMI staff and volunteers, recommendations will be reviewed by a local volunteer leadership body that includes local nonprofit, corporate, and municipal partners including UWSCMI board members. This volunteer leadership body will provide final approval of grant decisions.

Q: Where does UWSCMI's grant funding come from?

A: United Way brings together the strength and care of our communities in many ways. Our grant funding reflects this approach. Annual grantmaking is funded by individual and corporate donations to the annual United Way giving campaign. Due to the variability of the campaign, the amount of money available for annual grants is not guaranteed and grant processes can be quite competitive. An agency that was previously funded may not be funded at the same rate (or at all) in subsequent grant cycles. If your organization would like to help support the annual giving campaign or increase visibility of UWSCMI fundraising efforts, please reach out to Cameo King at c.king@uwscmi.org.

Q: What can grant funds be used for?

A: UWSCMI funding can be used to support all aspects of program delivery, including but not limited to: Personnel Expense, Professional/Contract Fees, Evaluation Expense, Office Expenses, Staff Training/Travel Expenses, Equipment Purchases, Occupancy Costs, Direct Client Expenses, etc. Funding MAY NOT be used for costs related to building or renovations, or any activities that discriminate based on race, color, religion, age, sex (including pregnancy), national origin, marital status, familial status, sexual orientation, gender identification, veteran status, physical, mental or developmental ability, genetic information, height or weight, or any other protected class.

Q: The grant guide states that “additional consideration” will be given to collaborative requests, grassroots initiatives, collective impact, BIPOC-led and/or BIPOC-serving organizations, and agencies that are intentional about fostering the economic welfare of their ALICE employees. What does this mean?

A: “Additional consideration” means that requests that meet one or more of these priority criteria will be given an extra point on the application rubric. Requests not meeting these criteria will not be negatively scored. For more information on definitions of “Collaborative”, “Grassroots”, “Collective Impact”, “BIPOC”, “ALICE”, please see the glossary below.

Do you have a question that isn't listed here? Contact our community impact staff at communityimpact@uwscmi.org

GLOSSARY

ALICE: 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. These workers often struggle to keep their own households from financial ruin, while keeping our local communities running. ([United for ALICE](#))

BIPOC: BIPOC stands for Black, Indigenous, and people of color. Intended to center the experiences of Black and Indigenous groups and demonstrate solidarity among communities of color, the term “BIPOC” is more descriptive than “people of color” or “POC”. It acknowledges that people of color face varying types of discrimination and prejudice. Additionally, it emphasizes that systemic racism continues to oppress, invalidate, and deeply affect the lives of Black and Indigenous people in ways other people of color may not necessarily experience. Lastly and significantly, Black and Indigenous individuals and communities still bear the impact of slavery and genocide.

“BIPOC” does not replace naming Black people and should not be used when referring to an individual or an issue that affects a specific group of people. Remember, there is no “one size fits all” language when it comes to talking about race. Language is crucial, but it isn’t the answer. The term “BIPOC” is simply a tool to frame a broader discussion for collective action on issues of race and gender in our community. ([YWCA of Seattle](#))

Collaboratives: A collaborative request is one in which two or more community partners are working together on the proposed project. Funds may or may not be divided among the project partners. Documentation of partnership will be required in the form of contracts, memoranda of understanding, letters of support, and/or other documents to demonstrate partnership in good faith. UWSCMI prioritizes partnership and collaboration as the best way to solve community issues and to serve the multi-faceted needs of ALICE.

Collective Impact: “Collective impact” is a specific term to describe a network of community members, organizations, and institutions who advance equity by learning together, aligning, and integrating their actions to achieve population and systems level change ([learn more about the origin of the term collective impact](#)). The five conditions of collective impact include: a common agenda, shared measurement, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and a strong backbone organization. ([Collective Impact Forum](#))

Fiscal Sponsorship: A fiscal sponsor is a nonprofit organization that provides fiduciary oversight, financial management, and other administrative services to help build the capacity of charitable projects ([Council of Nonprofits](#)). UWSCMI requires documentation of a fiscal sponsorship agreement signed by representatives of each organization. This document can be found here and uploaded to your grant application.

Grassroots organization: Community-based organizations, neighborhood groups, etc. that help residents actively join together to improve their city block, neighborhood, or community.

UWSCMI additionally defines “grassroots” organizations within the following criteria:

- Annual operating budget under \$350,000 for the last 3 years.
- Work is conceived and done by people closely related to the issue and/or served by the mission of the organization.