

United Way of South Central Tennessee

Community Investments Grant Application Guidelines

2026 - 2027

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About the United Way of South Central Tennessee

The United Way of South Central Tennessee is committed to improving lives by advancing opportunities for education, health, and financial stability for all. Through our annual Community Investment and Opportunity Grants, we award funds to nonprofit organizations serving across our 7-county region - Bedford, Cannon, Coffee, Lincoln, Moore, Rutherford, and Warren Counties.



Our grantmaking focuses on supporting programs that serve ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, and Employed) families and improve their long-term stability and ability to thrive. By investing in evidence-based programs and collaborative approaches, we work alongside our nonprofit partners to create lasting change across South Central Tennessee.

Our Focus on ALICE Families

In 2026, United Way is sharpening our focus to center on ALICE households; families who are Asset Limited, Income Constrained, and Employed. These working families earn above the federal poverty level but still struggle to afford basic necessities like housing, childcare, food, healthcare, transportation, and utilities.

This shift from our previous Bold Goals framework allows us to more directly address the barriers facing the largest segment of financially vulnerable households in our region. ALICE families are working hard but living paycheck to paycheck, and our investments will prioritize programs that help these families achieve long-term stability and the ability to thrive.

Areas of Impact

United Way grants support programs that serve ALICE households across one or more of these critical need areas:

- Housing & Shelter
- Utilities & Technology
- Child Care & Education
- Food
- Transportation
- Health Care

We prioritize evidence-based programs, collaborative approaches, and organizations that address gaps in services in our region.

Grant Programs Overview

United Way of South Central Tennessee offers two grant programs to support nonprofits serving ALICE families across our seven-county region. Organizations may apply for funding that best fits their program scope and budget.

Community Investment Grants

Funding Level: \$10,000 or more (average award in 2025: \$26,000)

Community Investment Grants support established or new programs with significant impact potential. These grants require a comprehensive application including organizational background, detailed program narrative, evidence of success or alignment with best practices, and a robust evaluation plan with shared measurements.

Best suited for: Programs with larger budgets, proven track records, and comprehensive data collection systems.

Opportunity Grants

Funding Level: Up to \$9,999 (average award in 2025: \$3,000)

Opportunity Grants provide funding for smaller-scale programs addressing critical needs in our community. The streamlined application focuses on program description, ALICE alignment, budget, and basic goals and outcomes.

Best suited for: Programs with smaller budgets, emerging initiatives, or organizations seeking to pilot new approaches.

Key Information for Both Programs

- Grant Period: One year
- Multiple Applications: Organizations may submit more than one application, as funding is awarded by program rather than by organization
- Review Process: All applications undergo the same rigorous review by volunteer reviewers and the Community Investment Committee

Additional Funding Opportunity: Thriving Community Collaborative

United Way also offers the Thriving Community Collaborative Grants, a place-based funding opportunity for innovative services delivered on-site at the Resource Center at Mitchell-Neilson. This opportunity involves a cohort model with collaborative programming and shared goals. For more information and to apply, visit yourlocaluw.org/grants.



Application Process & Timeline

Key Dates

- Application Opens: February 10, 2026
- Intent to Apply Deadline: March 2
- Application Deadline: March 10, 2026 at 11:59 PM CST
- Review Period: March – May 2026
- Funding Decisions Announced: Mid-June 2026
- Grant Period: July 1, 2026 – June 30, 2027

How to Apply

Step 1: Prepare Your Materials

All applicants must submit:

- Completed online application (Community Investment Grant OR Opportunity Grant)
- Program Budget Template
- Patriot Act Form
- Partnership Agreement

Plus one of the following:

- Up-to-date Giving Matters profile, OR
- The following documents:
 - 501(c)(3) verification
 - Most recent Annual Audit or Financial Review
 - Most recent 990 Form
 - State Charitable Solicitation Letter
 - Current Board of Directors list

For assistance creating or updating your Giving Matters profile, visit the [Giving Matters Nonprofit Resource Guide](#).

Step 2: Submit Your Application

Complete and submit your application online at: <https://form.jotform.com/260335434792156>. You will receive an automated email confirmation with a copy of your submission.

Questions?

Contact Ella Weaver at ella.weaver@yourlocaluw.org.



Review & Selection Process

Application Review

Each application is reviewed by approximately five reviewers, including members of the Community Investment Committee and trained volunteer grant reviewers. All reviewers use a standardized scoring rubric to evaluate applications based on:

- Case for Funding: Compelling need, ALICE alignment, addressing service gaps
- Overall Strength of Program Design: Activities, evidence of success, collaboration
- Effective Use & Impact of Funding: Budget alignment, sustainability, geographic reach
- Project Impact & Evaluation: Goals, outcomes, and measurement plan

Funding Priorities

United Way prioritizes programs that:

- Demonstrate strong collaborative partnerships
- Address clear gaps in services across our region
- Serve ALICE households with evidence-based approaches that build long-term stability and ability to thrive

Notification & Award

All applicants will be notified of funding decisions via email in mid-June 2026, regardless of outcome.

Funded organizations will receive:

- Award letter with funding amount
- Fully executed Partnership Agreement
- Reporting requirements and schedule

Payment Schedule

Grant funds are distributed via monthly ACH payments throughout the grant period (July 2026 – June 2027).

Reporting & Evaluation

United Way is committed to supporting our funded partners while maintaining accountability for the community investments we make together. Reporting requirements help us track progress, celebrate successes, and identify opportunities for support.

Community Investment Grants

- Quarterly Reports: Due in October 2026, January 2027 and April 2027
- Final Reports: Due July 2027
- Reports include progress on program goals, selected shared measurements, budget updates, success stories, and any challenges encountered

Opportunity Grants

- Mid-Year Report: Due in January 2027
- Final Report: Due in July 2027
- Reports include progress on program goals and outcomes, budget updates, success stories, and any challenges encountered

All reports are submitted online through a provided link. Specific due dates will be included in your award letter.

Shared Measurements Reporting

Organizations receiving Community Investment Grants will report on the shared measurements selected in their application. Quarterly reports should include progress toward your stated targets and goals for each selected measurement.

Agency Visits

United Way staff will schedule one site visit per year with each funded organization, beginning in September 2026. These visits provide an opportunity to see your program in action, meet participants (when appropriate), discuss progress and challenges, and strengthen our partnership.

Accountability

Timely and complete reporting is essential to maintaining our partnership. Late or incomplete reports may affect future funding eligibility. If you anticipate challenges meeting a reporting deadline, please contact United Way staff as soon as possible.