

Community Impact

# AGENDA FOR CHANGE

2025 - 2028



United Way of  
Southwest Michigan

# United Way of Southwest Michigan is proud to share our 2025-2028 Community Impact Agenda for Change.

This agenda does two things:

It details the depth and breadth of Impact Investments that United Way of Southwest Michigan will make in our community during the 2025-2028 funding cycle.

It is a call to action for nonprofits to apply for funding through Change Lives and/or Building Stronger Community Allocations.

United Way of Southwest Michigan strives to be a catalyst for positive change while remaining an impactful and sustainable organization. We continue to sharpen our focus on the most challenging issues in our community while staying grounded in the community's aspirations and acknowledging the diverse realities of our neighbors.

With that in mind, United Way of Southwest Michigan has established an Impact Guidepost to Decrease the number of households who have incomes below the ALICE threshold in Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren Counties. Our Impact Areas, Strategies, and Investments align with this guidepost and are outlined in the following pages.

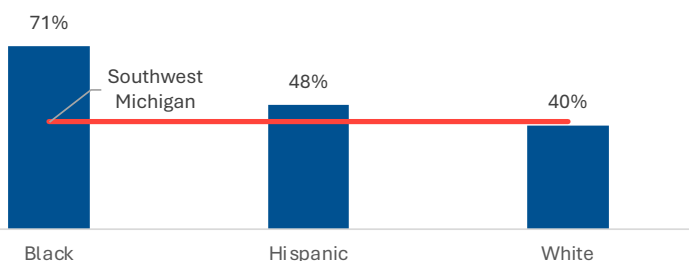
The modified language and focus in this Community Impact Agenda for Change reflects alignment with updates made by United Way Worldwide as well as

careful consideration of UWSM's long-term organizational goals.

United Way of Southwest Michigan values and prioritizes Turning Outward to our communities' aspirations. We strive to act in ways that are relevant to the community and ring true to those we serve. We continue to work to embed the public knowledge we gain through community conversations into our organizational practices and investments.

United Way of Southwest Michigan prioritizes investments in programs and projects that focus on addressing equity and reducing disparities. UWSM aims to integrate equity into both our resource allocation process and outcome analysis process. We acknowledge that not every person has the same lived experience, which means that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to changing lives and building stronger communities.

Inequities in economic opportunity have contributed to a gap in the percentage of households living below the ALICE threshold



What if everyone had access to the resources they needed to thrive? When you support United Way, you're helping us build stronger, more resilient communities that can withstand the challenges of tomorrow. **With United Way, the "what ifs" become "what's next," and together, we can make it happen.**

# GLOSSARY

**ALICE** – An acronym which stands for Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed. Those in this income level earn more than the Federal Poverty Level, but not enough to meet their basic needs.

**Build Stronger Communities** – This type of investment includes projects that make change to systems, policies, environments, or capacity.

**Change Lives** – This type of investment includes programs that will lead to change in individuals.

**Collective Impact** – Collective Impact is the commitment of a group of actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem, using a structured form of collaboration.

**Community Cohesion** – Community cohesion is a conceptual framework which attempts to measure the social relationships within a community. It relies on criteria such as: the presence of a shared vision, inclusion of those with diverse backgrounds, equal opportunity, and supportive relationships between individuals.

**Demographics** – Basic characteristics of those served. United Way of Southwest Michigan asks that Impact Partners track age, gender identity, race/ethnicity, and zip code of residence.

**e-ClImpact** – The funding and reporting management system used by many United Ways across the country.

**Equity** – The intentional inclusion of everyone in society. Equity is achieved when systemic, institutional, and historical barriers based on race, gender, sexual orientation, and other identities are dismantled and no longer predict socioeconomic, education, and health outcomes.

**Equity Statement** – An organization's commitment to build a diverse, equitable and inclusive environment, welcoming and serving people of all backgrounds.

**Fiscal agent** – Agencies that are responsible for receiving and disbursing funding to vendors and maintaining financial records and documentation on behalf of another Local Recipient Organization.

**Funding Cycle** – UWSM has a one-, two- or three-year funding cycle, depending on the investment.

**Impact Area** – United Way of Southwest Michigan has four Impact Areas – Healthy Community, Financial Security, Youth Opportunity, and Community Resiliency.

**Impact Cabinet** – A committee of the United Way of Southwest Michigan Board of Directors that oversees the work of the Impact Strategies department. The Impact Cabinet approves the funding recommendations made by the Investment Teams. The Impact Cabinet then proposes the funding recommendations to the United Way of Southwest Michigan Board of Directors for final approval.

**Impact Partner** – A nonprofit organization that is approved to receive funding from United Way of Southwest Michigan.

**Investments** – Financial and/or other resources contributed to organizations and programs with the intention to generate a measurable, beneficial social or environmental impact.

**Investment Team** – A group of volunteers that recommend and monitor the funding decisions for each three-year funding cycle.

**Progress Reports** – Partners must provide progress reports. Every six months, the reports will include a success story, updated contact information and a program narrative. Annually, these reports will include number served, demographics, updates on outputs/outcomes/indicators, organization and program budgets, and leveraged dollars. These reports are submitted through eClImpact.

**Public Knowledge Report** – A report detailing the results of research that United Way conducted to learn and develop a deep understanding of Southwest Michigan community members’ lives and what matters to them, including their shared aspirations and concerns and how they see and experience the community in which they live and work.

**Measurement/Evaluation Tool** – The mechanism used to track outcomes.

**Mobilize Resources** – This strategy outlines United Way of Southwest Michigan’s commitment to invest financially in these impact areas and invest through promoting and providing avenues of volunteerism. This strategy is United Way specific and is not taking applications for funding.

**Outcomes** – The measurable change that takes place in the lives of the people served. Such changes include awareness, knowledge, skill, motivation, and behavior.

**Outputs** – The number of units of service provided (i.e., the number of people served).

**Partner Memorandum of Agreement** – The agreement that United Way of Southwest Michigan enters into with each Impact Partner. The PMOA outlines the responsibilities and requirements that are expected of both United Way of Southwest Michigan and the Impact Partner.

**Program Budget** – When applying for funding, each organization must provide a program budget.

**Operating Budget** – When applying for funding, each organization must provide an organizational budget.

**Strategies** – Types of interventions that United Way of Southwest Michigan has identified for possible investments.

**Turning Outward** – An orientation – a mindset, a posture – of using the community as a reference point for creating change; seeing and hearing people in the community and acting with intentionality to create change that fits their aspirations.

**Volunteer Engagement** – A strategy that encourages collaboration between agency staff and volunteers to develop meaningful volunteer opportunities that positively impact the agency and the community.



# **2025-2028 IMPACT AREAS & INVESTMENT COMMITMENTS**

**Healthy Community**

**Financial Stability**

**Youth Opportunity**

**Community Resiliency**

**United Way of Southwest Michigan will make the following  
investments in our community during the 2025-2028 funding cycle.**

# HEALTHY COMMUNITY

Improving health and well-being for all

## Why do we invest in Healthy Communities

By investing in initiatives that prioritize both physical and mental well-being, address food insecurity, and support vulnerable households, communities can enhance long-term financial stability by fostering healthier, more productive populations. Additionally, supporting households with incomes below the ALICE threshold is vital for building economic resilience.

- Building healthier environments and improving access to spaces that support healthy habits can contribute to reduced healthcare costs and increasing productivity.
- Supporting mental health can lead to improved school and workplace performance & attendance and decreased healthcare expenditures.
- Combating food insecurity not only improves health outcomes but also reduces healthcare costs associated with treating related conditions such as obesity and chronic diseases.

## LONG TERM GOALS

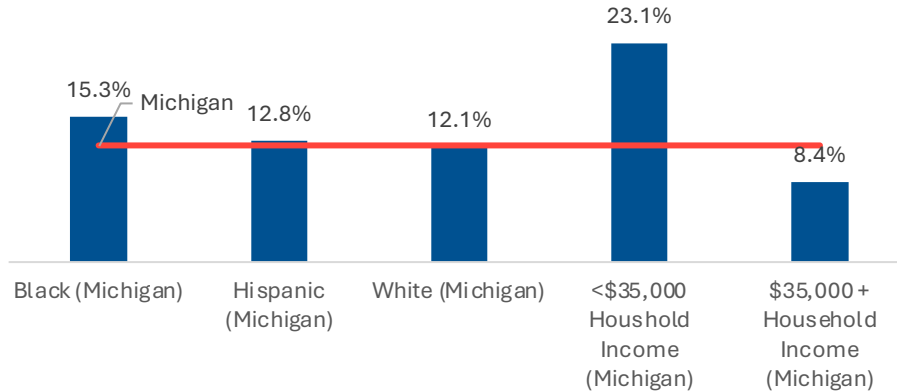
1. Decrease the number of people who report poor physical and/or mental health and reduce racial and economic disparities
2. Decrease the number of people who are food insecure and reduce racial and economic disparities

## INVESTMENTS

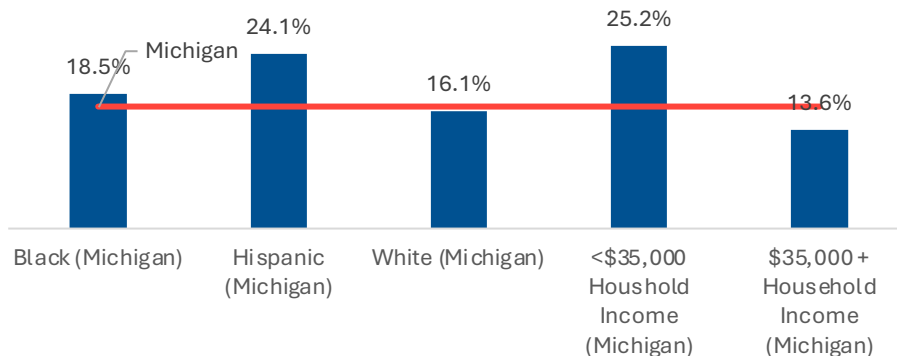
- Collective Impact – Be Healthy Berrien
- Fiscal Agent – Emergency Food and Shelter Program
- Mobilize Resources – Volunteer Engagement
- Change Lives & Build Stronger Communities Allocations

# IMPACT SNAPSHOT

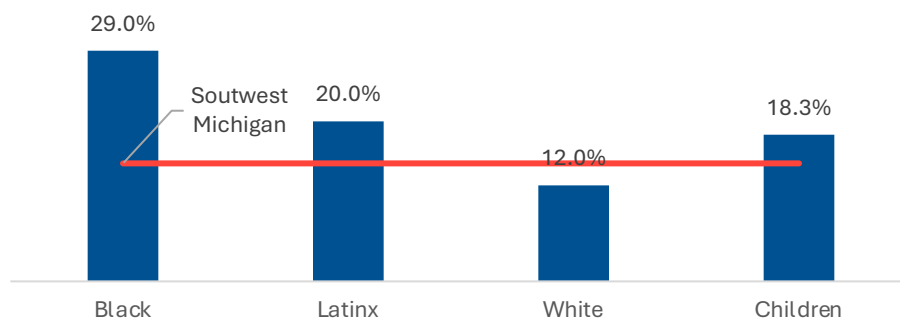
Income Disparity in Physical Health - those with lower incomes are nearly **3 times more** likely report having poor physical health



Income Disparity in Mental Health - those with lower incomes are nearly **twice as likely** to report having poor mental health



14.8% of people in Southwest Michigan experience **Food Insecurity**. The need is **even greater among Children, Black, and Latinx** community members





# FINANCIAL SECURITY

Building financial stability & strength

## Why do we invest in Financial Security

For households below the ALICE threshold, targeted support programs and resources are essential to provide pathways to financial stability, including access to education, job training, and affordable housing. Addressing the root causes of financial insecurity among these households not only improves their quality of life but also strengthens the overall economic resilience of the community.

- Financial stability enables families to navigate challenges effectively, leading to healthier lives and better educational outcomes for children.
- Higher post-secondary education rates contribute to increased wages and help lift people out of poverty, benefiting both individuals and the economy.
- Unemployment not only impacts individuals' income but also has broader societal and economic repercussions, including health problems, family strain, and mental health challenges. Communities with high unemployment rates face various challenges, such as limited resources, inadequate housing, and underfunded schools.
- Homelessness has significant societal costs, affecting healthcare, safety, and the efficient use of tax dollars.

## LONG TERM GOALS

1. Decrease the percentage of adults who are unemployed and reduce racial and economic disparities
2. Decrease the number of adults who do not have a post-secondary credential and reduce racial and economic disparities
3. Reduce the number of households who spend over 35% of their income on housing costs and reduce racial and economic disparities

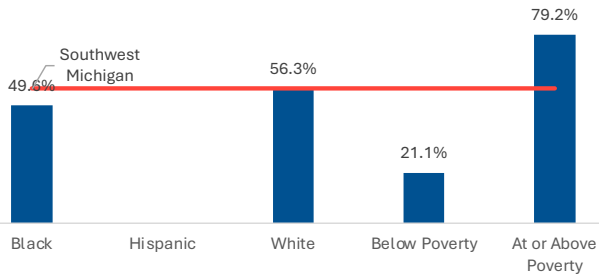
## INVESTMENTS

- Fiscal Agent – Emergency Food and Shelter Program
- Mobilize Resources - Volunteer Income Tax Assistance
- Mobilize Resources – Rake A Difference
- Mobilize Resources – Volunteer Engagement
- Advocacy – Public Benefit Access
- Change Lives & Build Stronger Communities Allocations

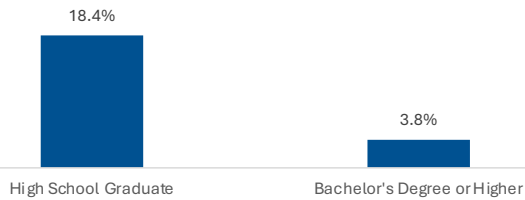


# IMPACT SNAPSHOT

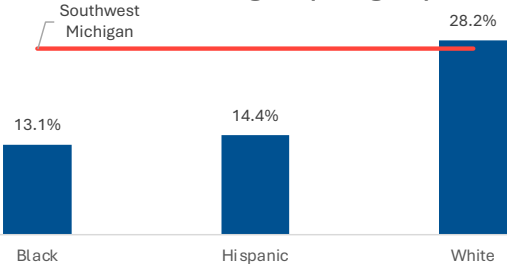
Disparities in the **Employment/Population** ratio show that workers age 16+ without a job are **3 times more likely to live in poverty**



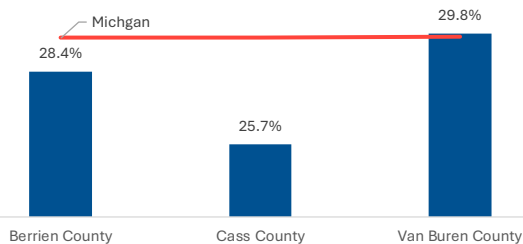
Adults with only a high-school diploma are nearly **5 times more likely to report living in poverty** than adults with a Bachelor's degree or higher



Inequities in access to higher education have contributed to a disparity in **adults earning a Bachelor's Degree (or higher)**



Those whose **Mortgage or Rent Payment is greater than 35% of their income** varies by county in Southwest Michigan



# YOUTH OPPORTUNITY

Helping young people realize their full potential

## Why do we invest in Youth Opportunity

Investing in education, particularly for students below the ALICE threshold, is essential to fostering their long-term financial stability.

- A child's ability to read at grade level by third grade is crucial for future success, as it marks the transition from learning to read to reading to learn, impacting performance across all subjects. Students who struggle with reading are at risk of falling behind academically, making it harder to graduate from high school and find gainful employment.
- High school graduation is a standard requirement for most jobs and higher education opportunities, and not completing high school is linked to limited employment prospects, low wages, and poverty.
- Moreover, graduating from high school significantly increases future earning potential, with studies estimating a conservative \$260,000 difference in lifetime earnings between graduates and non-graduates.

## LONG TERM GOALS

1. Decrease the number of 3rd graders not reading proficiently and reduce racial and economic disparities
2. Improve the High School graduation rate and reduce racial and economic disparities

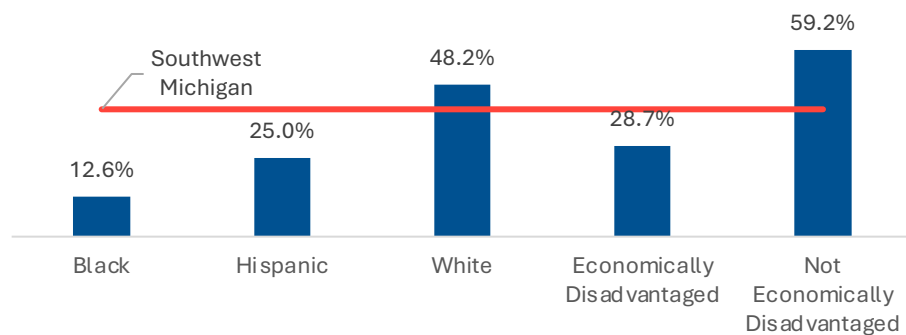
## INVESTMENTS

- Mobilize Resources - Dolly Parton Imagination Library
- Mobilize Resources – Cass County School Supply Spectacular
- Mobilize Resources – Volunteer Engagement
- Change Lives & Build Stronger Communities Allocations

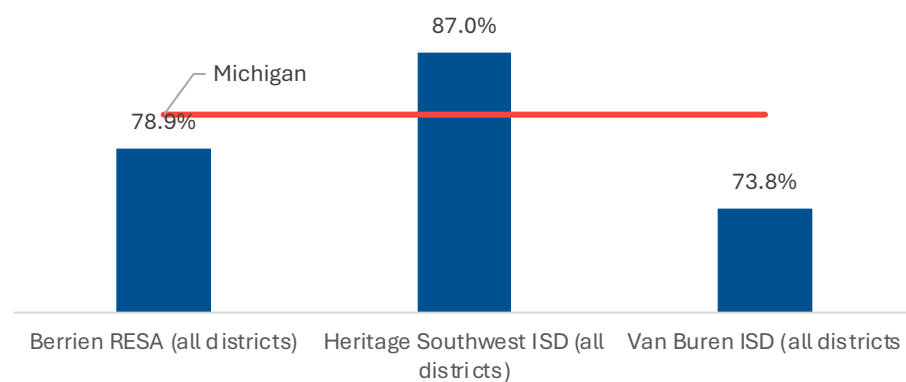
# IMPACT SNAPSHOT



Income Disparity in Reading Proficiency - **3rd Graders** living in economically disadvantaged homes are **1.5 times less likely to read proficiently**



**High School Graduation Rates** in Southwest Michigan compared to the State graduation rate



# COMMUNITY RESILIENCY

Addressing urgent needs today and advancing a better tomorrow

## Why do we invest in Community Resiliency

Investing in community resiliency programs, such as crisis response call centers and disaster relief and recovery projects, is paramount for safeguarding individuals and communities against unforeseen challenges and catastrophes, especially for those below the ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) threshold. These initiatives play a crucial role in mitigating the impact of crises, ranging from natural disasters to personal emergencies, by providing timely support and resources.

- By supporting crisis response call centers, communities can ensure that individuals facing crises have access to immediate assistance and guidance, reducing the severity of potential outcomes.
- Disaster relief and recovery projects facilitate the restoration of essential infrastructure and services, aiding communities in their recovery efforts and promoting resilience in the face of adversity.
- Investing in these programs helps bolster community cohesion and preparedness, enabling swift and coordinated responses to crises and fostering a sense of collective responsibility and support.
- Prioritizing community resiliency initiatives is essential for safeguarding lives, protecting livelihoods, and ensuring the long-term well-being and stability of communities, particularly those most vulnerable to disasters and emergencies, such as those below the ALICE threshold.

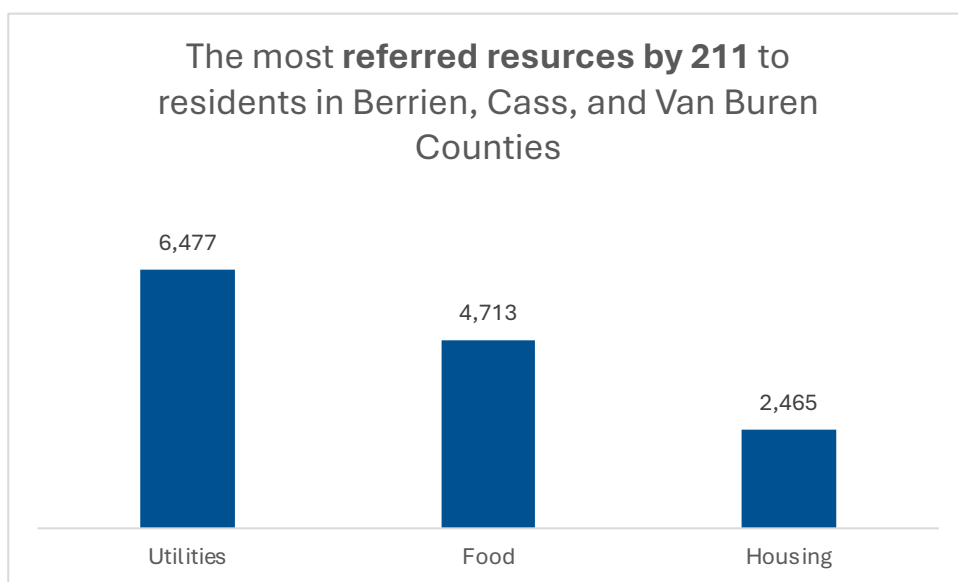
## LONG TERM GOALS

1. Sustain the community's capacity to respond to disasters

## INVESTMENTS

- Mobilize Resources – 211 Call Center Services
- Advocacy – Michigan 211 Infrastructure
- Mobilize Resources - Disaster Relief & Recovery
- Mobilize Resources – Volunteer Engagement
- Mobilize Resources – Emerging Issues

# DATA SNAPSHOT



**\$532,780.51 raised for the COVID-19 Response CARES fund.**





## CALL TO ACTION

**Nonprofit organizations serving Berrien, Cass, and/or Van Buren counties are invited to apply to become a United Way of Southwest Michigan Impact Partner by applying for funding through the Change Lives and/or Building Stronger community allocation process.**

**Excluded from funding consideration:**

- Capital projects (projects to construct new facilities or make significant, long-term renewal improvements to existing facilities)
- Political candidates or organizations
- Litigation
- Organizations that discriminate because of age, race, ethnic origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability, or gender.
- For profit entities

# DECISION TOOL

## CHANGE LIVES

**Is United Way Change Lives funding right for you?**

**This type of investment includes programs that will lead to change in individuals.**

**This tool will help determine if your organization can meet all of the requirements to receive United Way funding under Change Lives.**

***Before you apply for funding through the 2025-2028 funding cycle, consider your answers to these questions?***

- Does your program align with the Impact Areas, Strategies and Outcomes/Outputs outlined in this document?
- Can your program measure one or more of the Outcomes/Outputs listed in the applicable Issue under Change Lives?
- Does your program have a measurement tool that can be administered on a regular and consistent basis, or are you willing to implement one prior to the start of the funding cycle?
- Can your program track the categories of demographics outlined in this document (age, gender, ethnicity, zip code of residence)? If not, is there a justifiable reason?
- Is your organization willing and able to provide all of the information and reporting outlined in the Funding Request documents?
- Is your organization willing to adhere to all of the terms and conditions set forth in the Partner Memorandum of Agreement?

## BUILD STRONGER COMMUNITIES

**Is United Way Build Stronger Communities funding right for you?**

**This type of investment includes projects that make change to systems, policies, environments, or capacity.**

**This tool will help determine if your organization can meet all of the requirements to receive United Way funding under Build Stronger Communities.**

***Before you apply for funding through the 2025-2028 funding cycle, consider your answers to these questions?***

- Does your program align with the Impact Areas, Strategies and Indicators outlined in this document?
- Can your program measure one or more of the Indicators listed in the applicable impact area under Build Stronger Communities?
- Does your program have a measurement tool or evaluation plan that can be administered on a regular and consistent basis, or are you willing to implement one prior to the start of the funding cycle?
- If applicable, can your program track the categories of demographics outlined in this document (age, gender, ethnicity, zip code of residence)? If not, is there a justifiable reason?
- Is your organization willing and able to provide all of the information and reporting outlined in the Funding Request documents?
- Is your organization willing to adhere to all of the terms and conditions set forth in the Partner Memorandum of Agreement?

If your answer to ANY of these questions is "no," then it is not suggested that you seek UWSM funding. If you are unsure of your answer, you are encouraged to contact the Impact Strategies department for clarification and guidance. Contact information is provided at the end of this document.



# CHANGE LIVES

This type of investment includes programs and services that will lead to change in individuals

## Impact Area: Healthy Community

Improving health and well-being for all

### STRATEGIES:

- **Emergency Food Assistance**
  - a. Related Outputs: # of people provided with food, # of meals provided
- **Mental Health Support**
  - a. Related Outputs: # of people receiving services, # of people participating in programs
  - b. Related Outcomes: % of participants who improve their mental health, % of participants who improve their social/emotional health.

## Impact Area: Financial Security

Building financial stability & strength

### STRATEGIES:

- **Workforce Development: Removing Employment Barriers & Enhancing Job Readiness**
  - a. Related Outputs: # of people receiving services, # of people participating in program
  - b. Related Outcomes: % of participants who gain, maintain, or improve employment status
- **Adult Education & Job Training**
  - a. Related Outputs: # of people receiving services, # of people participating in programs
  - b. Related Outcomes: % of participants who earn job-relevant credentials, % of participants who increase their skills, % of participants who are working toward post-secondary education or credentials, % of participants who gain post-secondary education or credentials
- **Financial Education & Coaching**
  - a. Related Outputs: # of people receiving services, # of people participating in programs
  - b. Related Outcomes: % of participants who improve their financial health, % of participants who increase their financial knowledge
- **Homelessness Prevention & Affordable Housing**
  - a. Related Outputs: # of people provided shelter, # of people provided with case management/housing assistance
- **Emergency Financial Assistance**
  - a. Related Outputs: # of bills paid for emergency financial assistance, # of people provided emergency financial assistance, value of bills paid for emergency financial assistance.

# Impact Area: Youth Opportunity

## Helping young people realize their full potential

### STRATEGIES:

- **Childcare & Early Childhood Development**
  - a. Related Outputs: # of children receiving services, # of families/caregivers receiving services, # of children participating in programs, # of families/caregivers participating in programs
  - b. Related Outcomes: % of participants (children) who show progress toward or achieve developmental milestones, % of participants (caregivers) who increase knowledge of children's development
- **In-school, After-school & Summer Learning**
  - a. Related Outputs: # of youth receiving services, # of youth participating in programs
  - b. Related Outcomes: % of participants who improve in academic learning metrics, % of participants (children) who show progress toward or achieve developmental milestones, % of participants (children) who increase their reading level
- **Literacy Development**
  - a. Related Outputs: # of youth receiving services, # of youth participating in programs, # of families/caregivers receiving services, # of families/caregivers participating in programs
  - b. Related Outcomes: % of participants (children) who increase their reading level, % of participants (children) who read more frequently, % of participants (caregivers) who read to their children more frequently
- **College & Career Readiness**
  - a. Related Outputs: # of people receiving services, # of people participating in programs
  - b. Related Outcomes: % of participants who graduate high school on time, % of students who develop soft skills, % of participants who are working toward post-secondary education or credentials, % of participants who gain post-secondary education or credentials

# BUILD STRONGER COMMUNITIES

This type of investment includes projects that make changes to policies, systems, environments, or capacity.

## Impact Area: Healthy Community

Improving health and well-being for all

### Long Term Goals:

1. Decrease the number of people who report poor physical and/or mental health
2. Decrease the number of people who are food insecure

## Impact Area: Financial Security

Building financial stability & strength

### Long-Term Goals:

1. Decrease the unemployment rate
2. Decrease the number of adults who do not have a post-secondary credential

## Impact Area: Youth Opportunity

Helping young people realizing their full potential

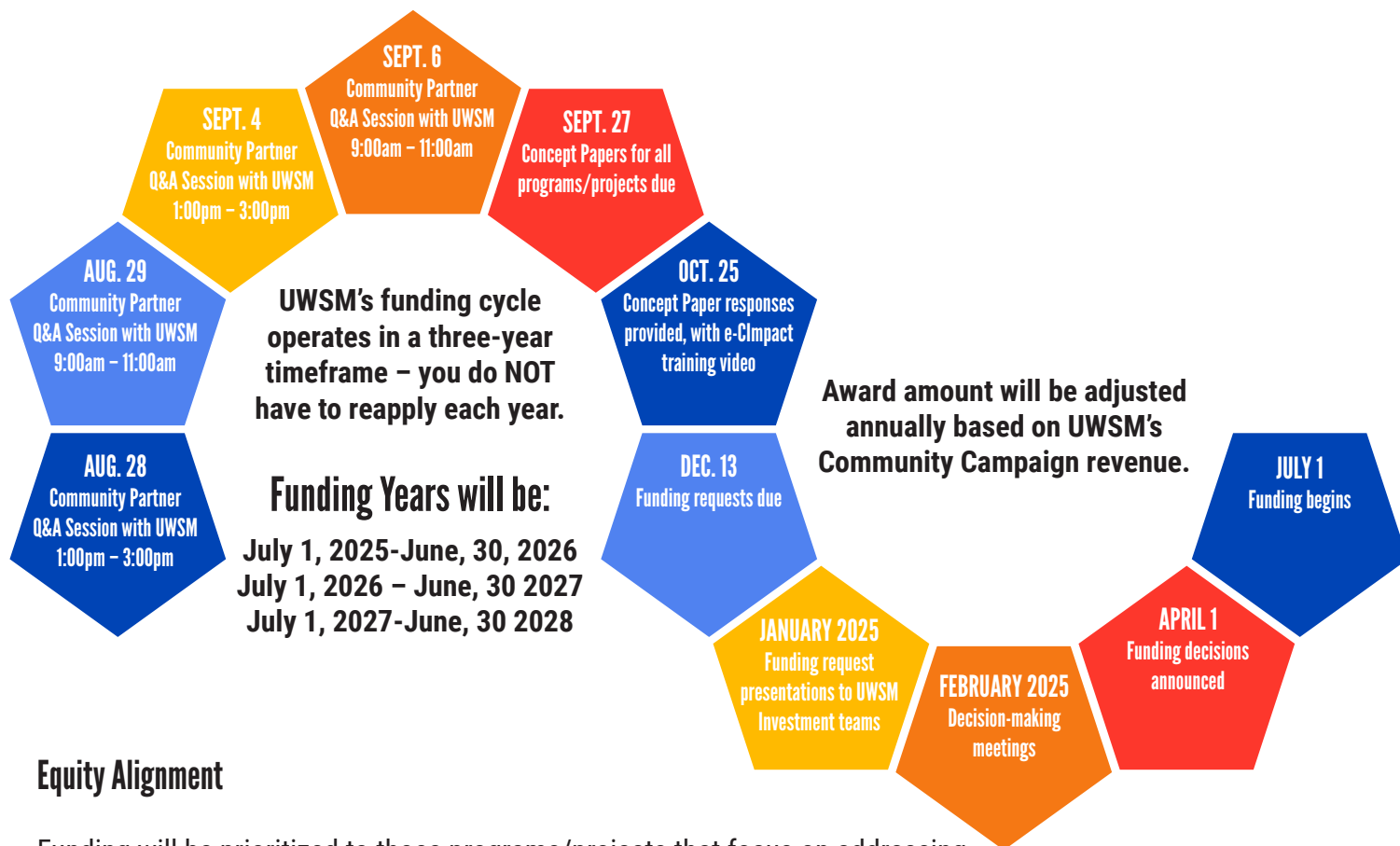
### Long-Term Goals:

1. Decrease the number of 3rd graders not reading proficiently
2. Improve the High School graduation rate

### Outcome Measures:

1. # of policies or practices created, changes, or promoted
2. # of people trained and applying new knowledge/skills
3. # of organizations impacted
4. # or value of equipment purchased
5. # of ways or value of additional capacity created

# FUNDING APPLICATION PROCESS



## Equity Alignment

Funding will be prioritized to those programs/projects that focus on addressing equity and reducing disparities as detailed in program goals, strategies, activities, and/or intended results.

Impact partners must have an organizational equity statement (or commit to creating one by July 1, 2025) and will be asked to disclose the extent to which the organization's leadership and staff reflects the demographics of program participants/populations served.

## Public Knowledge Alignment

Funding will be prioritized to those programs/projects that align with the learnings detailed in the [Public Knowledge Report](#):

Building Community Cohesion through:

1. Community Connections & Collaboration,
2. Reduced Divisions Within Communities,
3. Increase Equity, Equality, & Diversity,
4. Greater Representation from Community Members in Decision-Making,
5. Equitable Access to Resources
6. Safety

A complete [data book](https://www.uwsm.org/agenda-process) can be found online at <https://www.uwsm.org/agenda-process>  
Impact Agenda for Change Questions, Email: [impact@uwsm.org](mailto:impact@uwsm.org)