



UNITED WAY

Youngstown and the
Mahoning Valley

COMMUNITY INVESTMENT GUIDELINES

For the funding cycle beginning January 1, 2027
and ending December 30, 2027



How to Use This Guide



The United Way of Youngstown and the Mahoning Valley Community Investment Guidelines are meant to give a detailed overview of who we are and how our funding process works. It includes requirements on eligibility, reporting, and programmatic focus. You should read each section carefully, as we have tried to provide detailed instructions and anticipate the most frequently asked questions about our grantmaking priorities. The first sections of the document contain information relevant to all applicants. In the Appendix, you'll even be able to preview the questions asked in our application. This is primarily a digital document and contains hyperlinks to outside resources and materials that present a broader view of our work in the community and how we collaborate with our strategic community partners.

Alternative Resources

While not a replacement for this guide, we acknowledge that video and audio resources can be very helpful tools. In addition to the links included in this document, we invite you to review our Community Investment webpage, which will contain pre-recorded information, and our PowerPoint presentation (to be posted July 2026). All other pages on our site describing our work will be useful to you as well.

RESOURCES

Our Community Investment webpage contains comprehensive information about our funding priorities, past partnerships, and success stories. The pre-recorded PowerPoint presentation will walk you through the application process step by step. We encourage all applicants to explore these digital resources before beginning their application.

CONTACT

Questions and clarifications about the investment process are welcome and should be directed in writing to Kielly Rapp at kjrapp@ymvunitedway.org. We are committed to supporting you through the application process and ensuring you have access to all the information you need to submit a successful proposal.

Questions? Contact Kielly Rapp at
kjrapp@ymvunitedway.org

Our Goals and Why We Fund

At the United Way of Youngstown and the Mahoning Valley, we prioritize our role as a collaborator and convener. Our ability to fund meaningful work is tied directly to our ability to fundraise by sharing the story of our collective impact; both within our own programs and with our partners. We believe that a community investment goes beyond dollars granted; it's a partnership built on shared successes and shared learning.

- ⊕ We invest in partnerships of shared successes and shared learning
- ⊕ We create space for families to grow without limitations
- ⊕ We unite our community to motivate activism and lasting change

Through partnership, we lift up families and individuals as they cultivate a future beyond the circumstantial constraints put on them. We provide choices, we provide opportunities. We create space for families and individuals to grow without limitations, elevating communities by building a future with equality for all. Lasting change cannot happen alone. We unite our community around our strategic focus to motivate and encourage activism and change.



About the Funding

Education → Emergency → \$2,500-\$50,000 → One Year

United Way of Youngstown and the Mahoning Valley (UWYVM) is seeking applications from nonprofit organizations to receive funding for program areas relevant to Education and Emergency Services. Funding will be provided to qualifying programs for one year and is expected to range from \$2,500-\$50,000. Once a partner agency program is chosen, funding distributions will begin on January 1, 2027. Our investment streams are open to any eligible human services agency and are competitive. Please thoroughly read these guidelines before applying. By investing in community partners with their own individual and innovative approaches, our goal is to create a collective impact on the success of children, youth, adults and families.



Investment Process Principles

The United Way of Youngstown and The Mahoning Valley is committed to being an excellent steward of donor dollars through our investment process with clear investment objectives linked to strategic priorities across the valley. In order to uphold these values, we have developed a key set of investment process principles that guide how we evaluate, fund, and support community programs.

- ⊕ Clear investment objectives linked to strategic community priorities
- ⊕ Transparent stewardship of donor dollars through rigorous evaluation
- ⊕ Collaborative partnerships focused on measurable community outcomes

These principles ensure that every dollar invested creates meaningful, measurable impact in our community. Our approach balances rigorous accountability with supportive partnership, recognizing that lasting change requires both structure and flexibility. We believe in transparent communication, shared learning, and collaborative problem-solving with all our funded partners.



Programmatic Requirements

Before being allowed to complete your application, you will be asked to verify these conditions as well as additional programmatic requirements. Starting on the following pages you will find more details related to those requirements and alignment with United Way of Youngstown and The Mahoning Valley priorities.

- ⊕ 100% of participants must reside in Mahoning County focus areas
- ⊕ Annual reporting of participant demographic and zip code data required
- ⊕ Alignment with regional initiatives and communities of practice expected

Summary of Programmatic Requirements: 100% of program participants residing in the specific areas of focus within Mahoning County, Hubbard, Girard and Liberty communities. Ability to share data annually including participant demographic and zip code related data. Alignment with and participation in related regional initiatives. We are investing in the results of your program. Success will be defined in different ways for different programs, but ultimately your program must make a compelling case for its success in helping families and individuals thrive.



Two Focus Areas

Our United Way prioritizes two strategic focus areas that address the most pressing needs in the Mahoning Valley. These investment streams guide our community partnerships and funding decisions, ensuring resources reach programs that create meaningful, measurable impact for families and individuals throughout our region.

EMERGENCY SERVICES

Focuses on funding programs that serve our community's most vulnerable population. Our agencies provide programs that allow community members to easily access resources by providing food, clothing, shelter, and emergency and crisis intervention services. This includes increasing food access to individuals and families, clothing assistance, emergency shelter assistance, and disaster response and relief.

EDUCATION

Focuses on programs that serve children from birth through 8th grade. We want children to enter kindergarten with the knowledge and skills they need to thrive, schools to better connect families with resources that help them learn and grow, and summer programs that enable students to continue learning year-round.

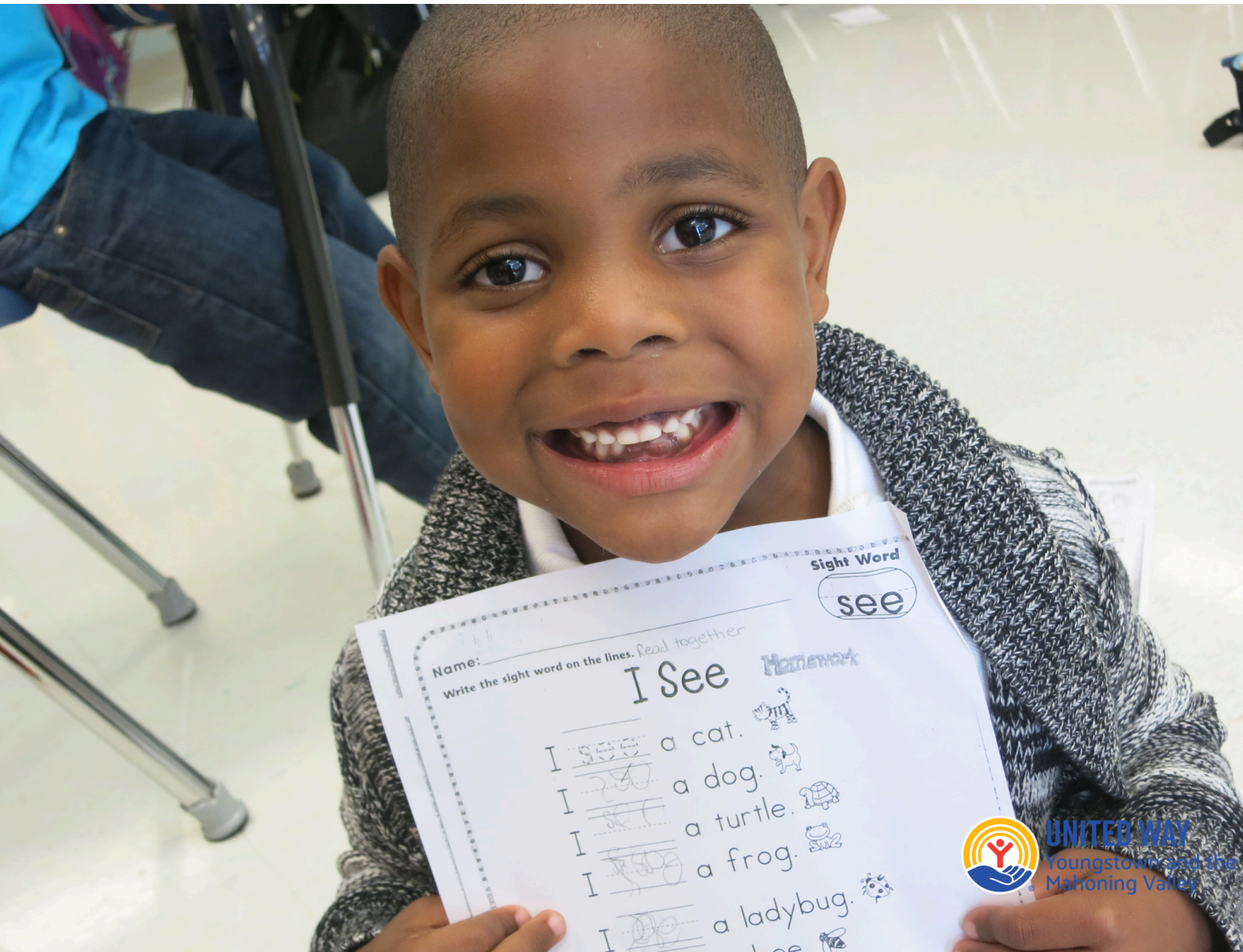


Together, we create lasting change through strategic investments in education and emergency services.

Community Investment: Education

Our United Way focuses on programs that serve children from birth through 8th grade. We want children to start kindergarten with the knowledge and skills they need to thrive, more schools to connect families to resources and tools to help them learn and grow, and summer programs that enable students to continue learning year-round.

Through strategic investments in education, we aim to create lasting impact by supporting programs that prepare our youngest learners for success and provide ongoing support throughout their educational journey.



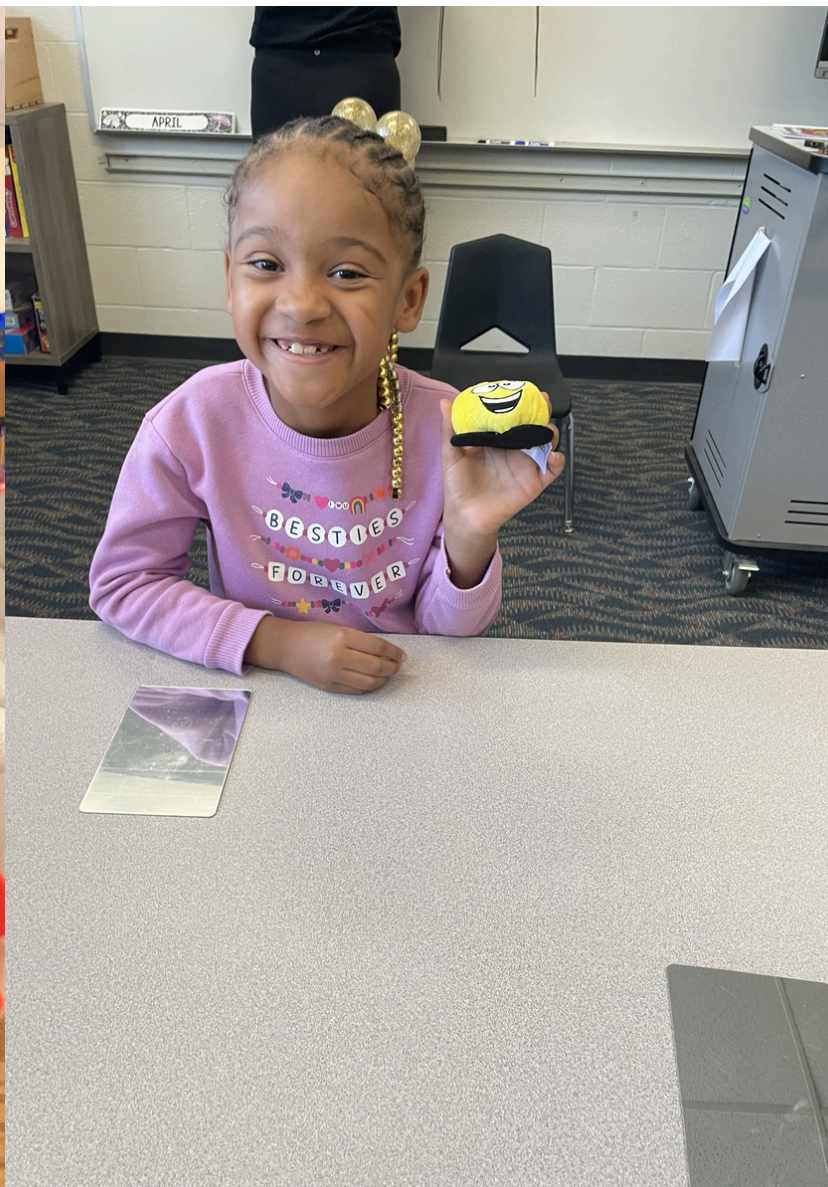
PILLAR 1: Early Learning

- Children enter school ready to succeed.
- Improve access to quality early learning opportunities for children ages 0-5.
- Provide resources and support to families that strengthen positive interactions and attain the skills and knowledge to promote early learning at home.
- Our focus on early learning ensures that every child in the Mahoning Valley has the foundation they need to thrive academically and socially. By investing in programs that support children from birth through age five, we create pathways to success that benefit families and communities for generations to come.



PILLAR 2: Youth Success

- Supports children from kindergarten through 8th grade
- Provide quality and engagement in school, out of school, and summer opportunities for students Kindergarten-8th grade that reinforce and enhance academic and social/emotional learning.
- Prepare students to make the successful transition from elementary to middle school and middle school to high school.
- Increase access to support services for students and their families.



PILLAR 3: Family Stability

- Help individuals and families build strong, stable foundations by supporting programs that help meet their basic needs and improve their quality of life.
- Provide individuals and families with tools and resources to become financially secure and self-sufficient. Increase access to quality and affordable liaisons to assist with navigating programs.
- Family stability is the cornerstone of community resilience. Entire communities thrive when families have the support they need to manage their finances, access essential services, and build toward self-sufficiency. Our investments in this pillar focus on connecting families with trained professionals who can guide them through complex systems and help them achieve lasting stability.



Community Investment In Emergency Services

Our United Way focuses on funding programs that serve our community's most vulnerable population. Our agencies provide programs that help community members access resources that allow them to overcome barriers by providing food, clothing, shelter, emergency and crisis intervention services. This includes increasing food access to individuals and families, clothing assistance, emergency shelter assistance, and disaster response and relief.



PILLAR 1: Affordable Housing

- Utility assistance
- Mortgage assistance
- Rental assistance
- Emergency shelter
- Home weatherization
- Down payment assistance
- Disaster response and relief



PILLAR 2: Food Insecurity

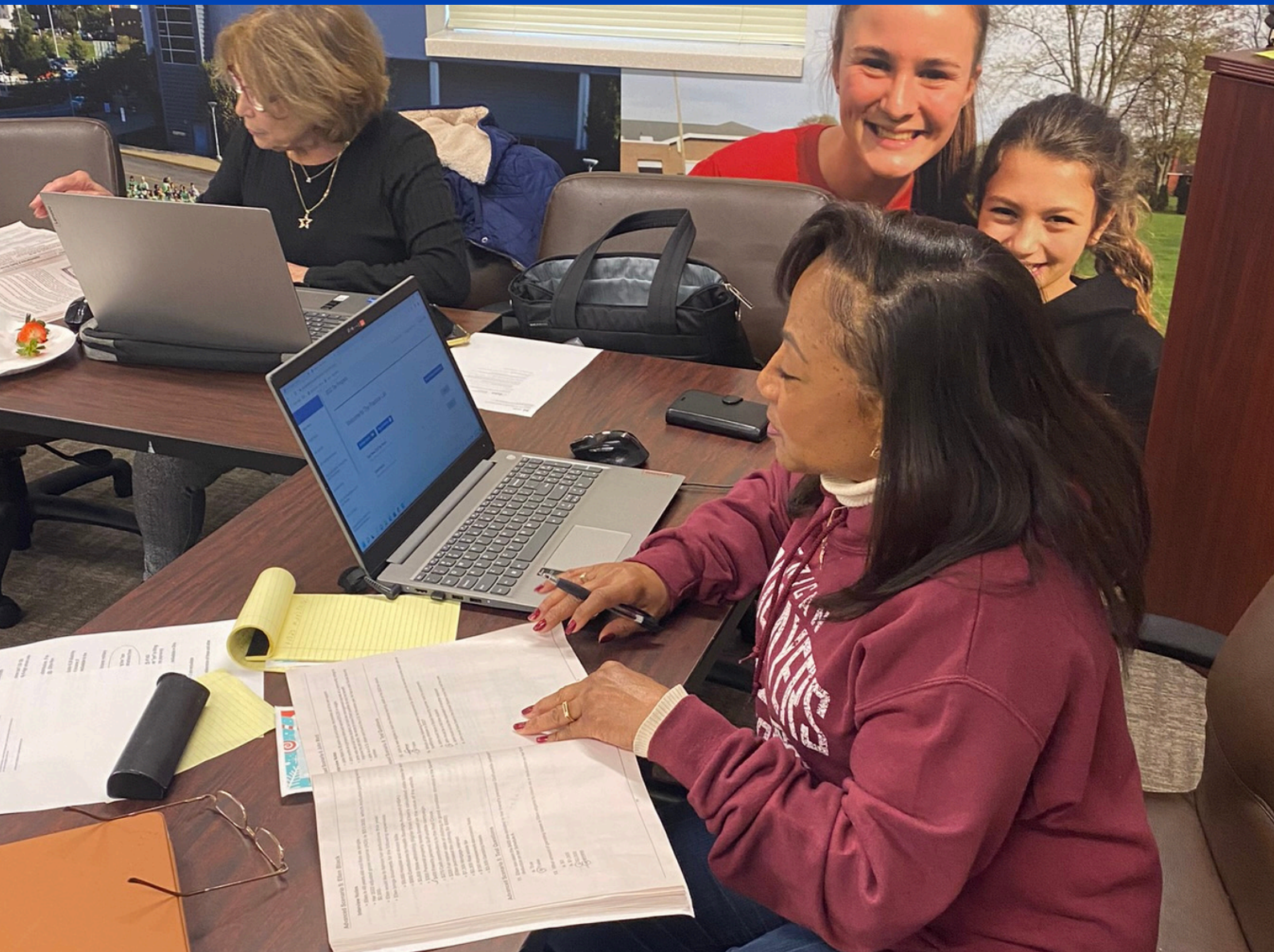
Diminish food insecurity and promote healthy food access to everyone in our community. This includes programs that promote warm meals, grocery vouchers, pantry access, healthy meal plans, and access to fresh and healthy food.

Our partner agencies work tirelessly to ensure that no family in the Mahoning Valley goes hungry. Through collaborative efforts with local food banks, community kitchens, and nutrition programs, we create pathways to food security for individuals and families facing hardship.



PILLAR 3: Financial Stability

Create temporary and permanent solutions for individuals with financial burdens by connecting them to agency programs that assist with credit debt solutions, budgeting, tenant rights, bankruptcy, eviction, and accessing essential household needs.



How to Apply

All applications and supporting documents will be submitted through the United Way of Youngstown and Mahoning Valley online portal. No emailed or mailed submissions will be accepted.

Step 1: Login or sign up to United Way of Youngstown and the Mahoning Valley Grant Portal - E-CImpact. Use the link provided to open the agency portal page to log in or sign up:
<https://agencye-cimpact.com/login.aspx?org=37605U>

Set up your organization account. This will include a summary, mission and key contacts. If your organization already has an account, sign in accordingly.

- ⊕ Submit through the official E-CImpact online portal only
- ⊕ Create or verify your organization account with mission and key contacts
- ⊕ Ensure all contact profiles are current for timely communication



Application Steps Continued

Once you have set up your organization account and verified your contact information, you're ready to begin the application process. The following steps will guide you through finding available funding opportunities and initiating your Request for Proposal. Please note that timing is critical—the submission window opens on a specific date, and you should be prepared to begin promptly.

- ⊕ **Step 2:** Find open Investment Streams in the System using the left-hand toolbar
- ⊕ **Step 3:** Start Request for Proposal (RFP) Process on July 15th at noon
- ⊕ **Step 4:** Select "create new project or program" to add your program title

Once you have logged in or signed up, you will find all open funding streams on the left-hand toolbar. All eligible organizations are welcome to submit one or more RFPs in either funding stream. You may attach multiple projects or programs to an RFP submission, though you will enter all details for each. You will see a button in the middle right or top right of your screen to add the title of your project or program. Please click this to add the name of the project or program for which you are seeking support. If the program already exists in our system, simply select the name of that program.



Final Application Steps

Step 5 → Deadline → August 31st → Step 6

Step 5: Complete Submission no later than August 31st by 5 PM

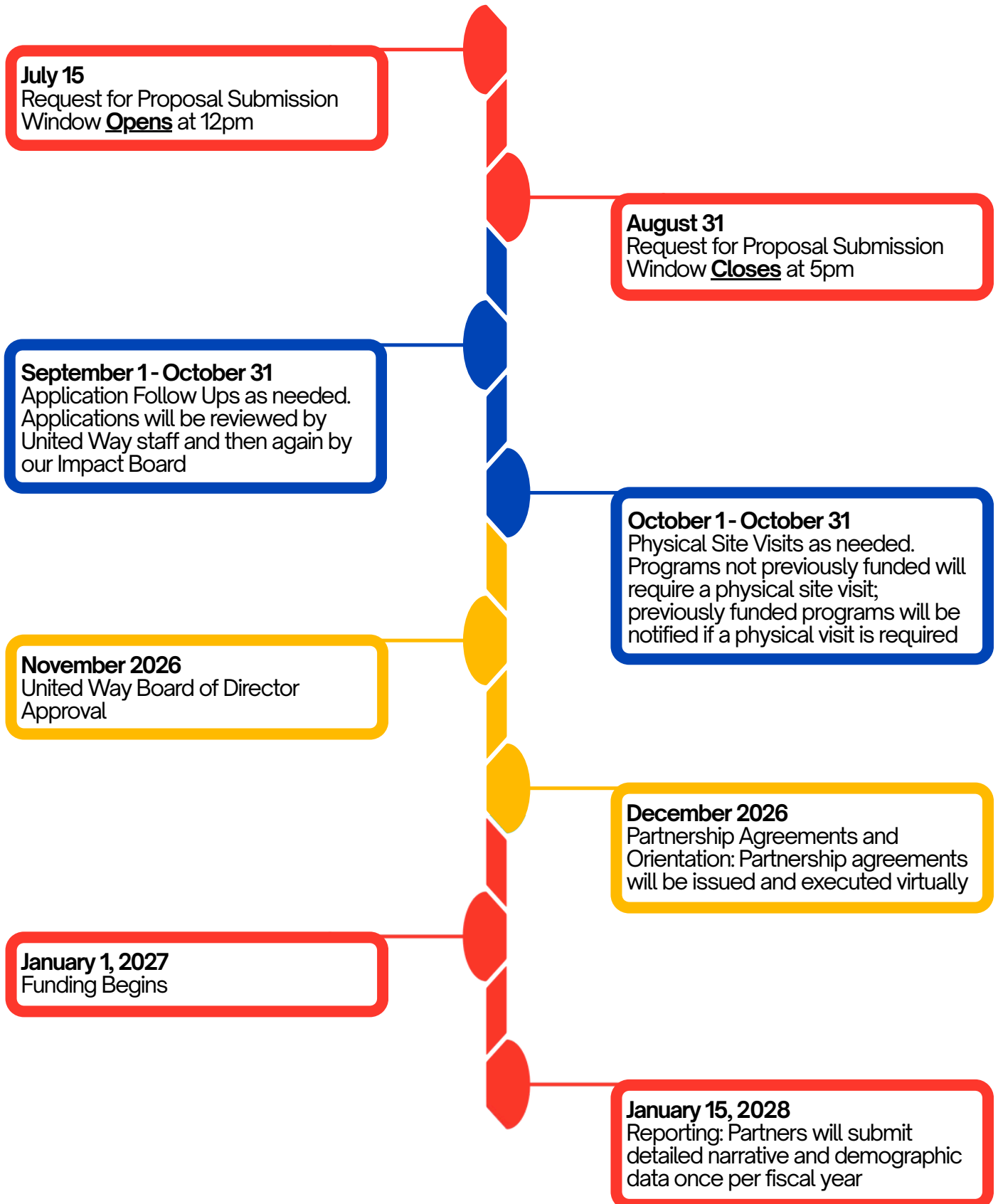
No late submissions will be accepted. Please ensure all required documents and information are uploaded to the E-Impact portal before the deadline. We recommend submitting at least 24 hours early to allow time for any technical difficulties.

Step 6: Answer Follow-Up Questions as Needed

Our grant portal allows reviewers to ask questions directly to applicants via email notification attached to your submission. Responses will be expected within 3 business days to ensure a timely review process. Monitor your email regularly during the review period and respond promptly to any clarification requests from United Way staff or Impact Board reviewers.



Investment Process Timeline



Resources

In the same way that we do not discourage applicants from using spell-check, we do not discourage you from using AI as a way to assist in your development of a grant application. However, we all know there are times where when you want to ignore the squiggly line to get your point across-even if the computer doesn't agree. The same philosophy should be considered when using a chatbot or other AI tools.

Our suggestion is to create your own content, and then use AI as a highly efficient partner to check for length, readability, tone, etc. You can prompt your preferred tool to adjust the character count to meet application requirements ("Capture the same meaning of this response in only 200 words"), or where your phrasing matches your intent ("Did I answer the question completely?"). You could even try to have it answer our question for you, but only as a first draft for you to respond and edit.



How to Leverage AI as a Tool

In the same way that we do not discourage applicants from using spell-check, we do not discourage you from using AI as a way to assist in your development of a grant application. However, we all know there are times where when you want to ignore the squiggly line to get your point across—even if the computer doesn't agree. The same philosophy should be considered when using a chatbot or other AI tools.

- ⊕ Use AI to check and adjust character count for application requirements
- ⊕ Prompt AI to verify your phrasing matches your intent and answers questions completely
- ⊕ Let AI generate first drafts, but always respond to and edit the content yourself

Our suggestion is to create your own content, and then use AI as a highly efficient partner to check for length, readability, tone, etc. You can prompt your preferred tool to adjust the character count to meet application requirements ("Capture the same meaning of this response in only 200 words"), or where your phrasing matches your intent ("Did I answer the question completely?"). You could even try to have it answer our question for you, but only as a first draft for you to respond and edit.



Considerations for Using AI

It is important to remember that many of the tools available to you "learn" from a wide variety of sources—not just winning grant applications! In most cases, the tool is just looking to match the "form" of response you are asking for—it is not verifying the accuracy or completeness of the "content" it is producing back to you. We strongly encourage you to look out for and edit away signals of an AI-generated response.

- ⊕ Over-repetition of words and phrases used in the question or prompt
- ⊕ Topical responses that lack specific details about the context or idea
- ⊕ Factual errors, manufactured anecdotes, or formulaic structure

Successful grant applications, AI-generated or not, capture the human connection between the author, reviewer, and the project. Unfiltered AI use can hinder that, and suspected AI use can bias a reviewer's opinion of the grant application. The United Way of Youngstown and The Mahoning Valley is committed to addressing that bias directly in our review process, but we also encourage applicants to take steps to avoid it altogether. Like with any tool, use AI to your advantage—and do so judiciously and alongside the rest of your usual resources.



Ethical Considerations and Data Security

Unless you are using a localized AI tool—something you have purchased access to and can make use of on your computer without an active internet connection—all data that you put into an AI supported tool can be used or accessed by the host of that tool. Just as with all online interactions, exercise caution. You do not have to disclose the use of AI tools as part of your grant writing to United Way of Youngstown and the Mahoning Valley. Beyond the considerations mentioned above that lead to vague and disconnected submissions, you will not be penalized for using AI tools.

DATA PRIVACY

When using AI tools, be mindful of what information you share. Avoid entering sensitive organizational data, client information, or confidential financial details into public AI platforms. Consider using enterprise-level AI solutions that offer data protection guarantees when handling sensitive grant-related information.

FURTHER RESOURCES

A lot has been written about the use of AI tools in a wide range of industries—the benefits and pitfalls, as well as tips and tricks for using tools effectively. To stay informed about best practices, we recommend exploring trustworthy sources of information from nonprofit technology organizations, grant writing associations, and digital security experts.



Protecting your organization's data while leveraging technology responsibly.

Funding Request Amounts

Eligibility → Documentation → Financial Review → Awards

When formulating a funding request, programs should ask for what is needed and not simply apply for the highest possible amount. One year funding total per program is expected to range between \$2,500-\$50,000. Financial eligibility requires organizations to demonstrate fiscal responsibility through current audits, 990 forms, and liability insurance documentation. All applicants must submit their organization's most recent 990 tax filing, most recent audit or financial report, and proof of current liability insurance coverage. These documents help United Way of Youngstown and The Mahoning Valley assess organizational capacity and ensure responsible stewardship of donor dollars invested in community programs.



Partnership Expectations

Organizations who are granted funding will receive a full, detailed Partnership Agreement outlining the various ways we intend to collaborate. Below, we have shared an overview of some of the expectations we will have for our grant recipients. These partnerships are designed to create meaningful, lasting impact in our community through shared accountability and mutual support.

- ⊕ Data and Reporting: Funded programs report annually on individuals served and key data points
- ⊕ Programs must provide estimates and projections for each goal in their application
- ⊕ Partners participate in communities of practice and regional initiatives relevant to their focus

Regional Initiatives and Communities of Practice: To support our impact pillars and engage the leadership and expertise of our strategic community partners, United Way of Youngstown and The Mahoning Valley facilitates communities of practice that involve regular meetings, resource sharing, and in some cases co-creating initiatives or special programs. Organizations who receive funding through the Community Investment will be invited and expected to participate in those groups relevant to their program's focus area. **Volunteer Opportunities:** Part of the convening conducted by United Way is gathering community members for volunteer experiences. As a funded partner, we will invite you to share volunteering needs your program may have and participate on our [GET CONNECTED](#) site.



Application Language

The following pages contain a preview of the questions you will encounter in the E-CImpact grant portal. This preview is provided to help prepare your responses before beginning the online application process. Please note that the final wording and appearance of questions is subject to change. Applicants should respond directly to what is requested in the online portal at the time of submission.

- ⊕ Program Summary, Statement of Need and Description
- ⊕ Describe your expected level of service (i.e. number of participants, people served) during the proposed grant year.
- ⊕ Describe how this program fits into your organization's overall mission and strategic plan
- ⊕ Sustainability of the Program
- ⊕ What other investments will be needed from your organization to expand program beyond grant period
- ⊕ Upload Program Budget, Operation Budget and current IRS 501 (c)(3) letter

This preview is intended as a planning tool only. For questions about the application process or portal access, please contact Kielly Rapp at kjrapp@ymvunitedway.org. We encourage all applicants to review these questions carefully and gather necessary information before the submission window opens on July 15th.

Thank You for Your Partnership



United Way of Youngstown and The Mahoning Valley is committed to creating positive change by collaborating with partners to educate and empower children and families in the Mahoning Valley. We thank you for your interest in our Community Investment program and look forward to partnering with organizations dedicated to strengthening our community. Together, we can make a lasting impact on the lives of individuals and families throughout the region. For questions about the 2027 Community Investment Guidelines or application process, please reach out to our team.

PHONE (330) 746-8494

QUESTIONS?

CONTACT KIELLY RAPP FOR INVESTMENT INQUIRIES

WEBSITE WWW.YMVUNITEDWAY.ORG

EMAIL KJRAPP@YMVUNITEDWAY.ORG