



United Way of  
Southwestern Indiana

## **United Way of Southwestern Indiana Fall 2023 Request for Proposals Empowering Employment**

United Way of Southwestern Indiana requests proposals to reduce barriers to employment for low-income individuals and families in Vanderburgh, Warrick, and/or Spencer counties.

### **Supporting Background**

United Way of Southwestern Indiana (UWSWI) is dedicated to increasing economic upward mobility for residents of Spencer, Vanderburgh, and Warrick counties. We invest in best-in-class nonprofit programs; we provide direct services to low-income individuals and families; we facilitate dialogue across sectors; and we advocate for equitable public policy. All our efforts are driven by a desire to see our neighbors reach economic self-sufficiency and our community's children break cycles of generational poverty.

Poverty is a complex issue with many influences. To address the multidimensional nature of poverty, UWSWI prioritizes the following pathways towards upward mobility:

Empowering Employment  
Thriving Next Gen

Mental Health  
Social Stability & Growth

The current Request for Proposals (RFP) is aligned with UWSWI's Empowering Employment Pathway.

Stable, living-wage employment is essential for helping those in poverty improve their economic circumstances. At a time when employers report having job opportunities available, one may easily assume that it's simple for workers to find and keep the living-wage employment they need. Unfortunately, the data shows that for multiple areas in our region, both urban and rural, people of prime working age are struggling with unemployment. The U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) has identified multiple census tracts in Evansville and large swaths of our outer counties as "distressed communities" due to our high rate of prime-age workers (25-54 years old) not working. The prime-age employment gap is considered an important indicator of economic distress because, "it accounts for prime-age workers who have stopped looking for jobs and left the labor force, not just those who are currently unemployed." (U.S. EDA, 2023). Falling 5% behind the national average for prime-age employment was concerning enough to warrant government designation as "distressed." In some segments of our community, that gap is over 30%. ([see EDA distressed communities mapping](#))

With jobs available and lots of prime-age folks not working, we see an obvious disconnect in our labor market. This is disheartening for local businesses, certainly. But is it potentially devastating to poor people and their children.

There is no single explanation for our area's high prime-age employment gap. This year the Indiana state government has commissioned research to understand the impact of a lack of affordable childcare on labor participation. Anecdotally, we hear our neighbors' frustration over infrastructure issues and what they mean for local employment. Lack of childcare, lack of transportation, and lack affordable housing are often cited as barriers which prevent our workers from getting or keeping a good, stable job. Other potential workers are cut out of the workforce due to previous incarceration or other legal barriers. Sometimes even a seemingly small thing like an employer's requirement that new hires purchase particular clothing or equipment can sabotage a low-income person's chance for a better career.

### **Grant Purpose**

At United Way, we recognize these and other barriers can make getting or keeping a good job feel like an uphill battle. With the Empowering Employment Pathway Grant, we seek to invest in nonprofit programs that address barriers to employment. We welcome proposals from community partners who are actively supporting our community's workers.

### **Grant Details**

The Empowering Employment Pathway Grant application will open via UWSWI's grant portal in the fall of 2023. An information session for interested applicants will be hosted at the time of the grant's launch. Grant awards will be announced in December 2023. Exact dates and deadlines will be released in the coming weeks.

The minimum request is \$50,000.

### **Eligibility Requirements:**

Applicants must be either:

- a 501(c) 3 organization as registered with the IRS
- or a community group with a 501(c)3 organization serving as its fiscal agent/sponsor

Proposed projects must provide services in Spencer, Vanderburgh and/or Warrick counties. Funds awarded by UWSWI are restricted for use in Spencer, Vanderburgh and/or Warrick counties.

Applicant organizations must have strong organizational leadership supportive of community impact principles. Applicant organizations must have internal capacity to manage fiscal and performance expectations.

Proposed programs must serve a majority (50% or more) low-income clients. UWSWI defines low-income as households earning no more than 185% of the Federal Poverty Guideline, based on household size.

### Grant Scope & Priority

- Non-profit programs working to reduce barriers to employment are encouraged to apply. We welcome proposals from a diverse range of service types, addressing various barriers.
- Competitive candidates will have the ability to track & report aggregate data on program participants' employment status, household size, and income.
- Priority consideration will be given to programs serving primarily low-income populations. (90% or more of program participants)
- Priority consideration will be given to programs serving historically marginalized groups or groups known to experience disparities in their rates of poverty relative to local averages.