

**United Way of Southwestern Indiana
Spring 2025 Request for Proposals
Social Stability & Growth
Purpose Statement**



United Way of
Southwestern Indiana

United Way of Southwestern Indiana requests proposals to support the social stability and growth of low-income individuals and families in Vanderburgh, Warrick, and/or Spencer counties.

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 Social Stability & Growth Pathway.

A growing body of research reflects on the critical role of social connection in all areas of human well-being, including economic well-being. As outlined in *Connective Tissue*, a collaborative effort drawing upon research from the Harvard Human Flourishing Program, the U.S. Department of Labor, the Economic Policy Institute, and numerous other experts – **"Indeed, economic connectedness, the degree to which low-income people are connected to high-income people, is the greatest predictor of economic mobility identified to date."** (Pressler, *Connective Tissue: Regenerating Connection within Communities, Reimagining the Role of Policy.* June 2024)

Research on economic mobility refers to the above concept as "bridging social capital." When low-income families form relationships with those from higher socio-economic backgrounds or those with valuable knowledge they lack, a bridge is built. These bridges of social support are key tools for low-income families as they strive to improve their economic status.

Unfortunately, this type of bridging social capital has become harder for low-income families to find in recent decades as our society has become increasingly segregated by socio-economic status. The *Connective Tissue* framework warns that **"We seem to be caught in a negative feedback loop of inequality: the growing separation of our social lives is contributing to the growing separation of our economic lives, and the growing separation of our economic lives is reinforcing and amplifying the sorting of our social lives."**

While bridging social capital is paramount for long-term upward mobility, the *Connective Tissue* framework also acknowledges the vital importance of "bonding social capital" – the strong support networks within families, peer friendships, and close-knit communities. These relationships offer emotional support, practical assistance, and a sense of belonging, which can be vital for navigating challenges and building resilience. By strengthening these bonds, low-income families create the stable foundations they need to build a better life.

Yet even this essential form of social support is on the decline. Research from the Office of the U.S. Surgeon General has examined the “epidemic of loneliness and isolation” in the United States. Findings suggest that adults today have fewer friends than they did 30 years ago, and they spend significantly less time with the friends they do have. (Murthy, Vivek. *“Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation: The U.S. Surgeon General’s Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community”* May 2023)

Research by the Survey Center on American Life found that these social changes are hitting people without college degrees especially hard. This group reports having significantly fewer close friends and significantly higher rates of social isolation compared to those with a college degree. (Cox, *“The College Connection,”* December 2021). It is well known that individuals without higher education are more likely to be low-income. Therefore, we must consider the implications of these research findings on low-income families’ chances for economic upward mobility.

Considering the challenges low-income families face in building either bridging or bonding social capital, United Way of Southwestern Indiana asks, what can the non-profit community do to remove these barriers and make social capital more attainable?

Social Stability & Growth Pathway Grant Details

The Social Stability & Growth Pathway Grant application will open via UWSWI’s grant portal in March of 2025. An information session for interested applicants will be hosted at the time of the grant’s launch. Grant awards will be announced mid-year. Exact dates and deadlines will be released in the coming weeks.

The minimum grant request is \$50,000.

Eligibility Requirements:

Applicants must be either:

- a 501(c) 3 organization registered with the IRS
- or a community group with a 501(c)3 organization serving as its fiscal 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 and internal capacity to manage fiscal and performance expectations.

Grant Scope & Priority

- 1) The intention of this funding is to serve families who are experiencing financial and social instability. Although not required, priority consideration will be given to programs with a multi-generation service model – offering services for both parents/caregivers and their children.
- 2) Often lack of connectivity to people and resources creates a barrier to social capital development. Priority will be given to programs with proven strategies for reducing social isolation and engaging with families and individuals who have been or are at risk of being isolated in our community.
- 3) Service to individuals and families across the spectrum of poverty is essential to our community. However, services to people living in severe and active crisis must prioritize their clients' basic needs before the client can focus on relationship building. Bearing this in mind, the Social Stability & Growth Pathway Grant will focus on funding programs serving the ALICE population (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) or those who have stability in their basic needs and are pursuing financial self-sufficiency.
- 4) The goal of building social capital is directed toward life-long relationships that transcend participation in a program. Consequently, the grant will give priority consideration to programs which foster long lasting, social relationships, particularly those which reach across socio-economic groups.
- 5) Best practices indicate program participants who are empowered to make choices about their service have stronger outcomes than program participants who are not granted this autonomy. One example of this might be allowing a program participant to select the person who will serve as their mentor or community partner. The Social Stability & Growth Grant will give priority to programs which demonstrate efforts to empower their clients through choice.
- 6) Poverty and the challenges of upward mobility exist broadly throughout our nation and our local community. However, data tells us that some subpopulations are more likely to experience poverty than the general population. Women, People of Color, people with disabilities, and single parents are just a few examples of groups who experience disproportionately high rates of poverty. The Social Stability & Growth Grant will prioritize programs which support social capital building and reduce disparities across groups.