2027 Grants & Scholarships Program

The Cornerstone Credit Union Foundation is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization whose mission is "Empowering Credit Unions to Impact their Communities." Serving credit unions and chapters in the Cornerstone region of Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri, Oklahoma, and Texas, the Foundation provides grants and scholarships made possible by generous support from credit unions, chapters, the Cornerstone League and Cornerstone Resources, corporate sponsors, CIF investors, industry groups, and individual donors.

Choose the Right Opportunity

Start with the purpose of the request, then review the full program section before applying.

Opportunity	Best fit	Who may apply	Maximum	Deadlines
Professional Development Grant	Training, certifications, conferences, workshops, or webinars	Cornerstone credit unions and chapters	CU: $5,000 Chapter: $2,000	Deadline: Feb. 26, 2027
Southwest Credit Union Management School (SCMS) Scholarship	Tuition support for first-, second-, or third-year students	Credit union staff and volunteers enrolled in SCMS	Partial awards and two full-tuition scholarship opportunities	Deadline: Apr. 30, 2027
Community Impact Grant	Financial wellness or community development projects/programs	Cornerstone credit unions and chapters	Up to $10,000	Accepted year-round
Disaster Relief Grant	Urgent and significant disaster-related needs	Eligible CU staff and volunteers	Phase I: $1,000 Phase II: $5,000	Year-round, based on phase timing

Cornerstone credit unions of any asset size may apply annually for one Professional Development Grant, one Community Impact Grant, and one SCMS Scholarship per student.

Cornerstone chapters may apply once per year for either a Professional Development Grant or a Community Impact Grant, but not both.

Disaster Relief Grants are awarded directly to eligible Cornerstone staff and volunteers, not to the credit union.

General Application Principles

- Awards depend on the eligibility requirements, evaluation criteria, and available funding for each program.
- Full funding is not guaranteed unless specifically stated.
- Incomplete applications will not be considered.

Professional Development Grant

Supports training and education that benefits credit union or chapter development.

Application Deadline: February 26, 2027 | Grants Committee Review: March 11, 2027

Credit Union Eligibility

Cornerstone credit unions of any asset size may apply for one Professional Development Grant per year regardless of other grants and scholarships received. The maximum award is $5,000, but full funding is not guaranteed.

Credit Union Training Calendar

- Include a proposed training calendar with estimated registration, lodging, and travel costs for one or more eligible professional development events for credit union staff or volunteers.
- Eligible Professional Development:
  - Certifications, including CU Development Educator (CUDE), FiCEP (CCUFC), etc.
  - Conferences, seminars, workshops, and webinars offered through Cornerstone or other industry-related organizations
- One grant is awarded to the credit union and may be used only for eligible events on the training calendar. The credit union may decide how to allocate the award among the approved events.

Chapter Eligibility

Cornerstone chapters may apply annually for either a Professional Development Grant or a Community Impact Grant, but not both. The maximum Professional Development Grant award for a chapter is $2,000.

Chapter Guidelines

- Funds may support a speaker, training, or educational program that benefits the chapter's member credit unions.
- An annual budget and financial summary must be submitted.

Application, Review, and Reimbursement Process

- Submit one online application on behalf of the credit union or chapter.
- Foundation staff review each application for completeness and eligibility. The Grants Committee evaluates eligible requests using a points matrix, and applicants are notified following committee review.
- Funds are reimbursed after submission of expense documentation and the required grant impact report.
- Grants must be used during the 2027 calendar year.
- Grant recognition: Credit unions must notify their board of directors. Credit unions are encouraged, but not required, to communicate the grant award to all staff and share it on the credit union's social media channels. Chapters must notify CEOs of all chapter credit unions and recognize the Foundation's support on the chapter's social media channels.

Ineligible Expenses for Credit Unions and Chapters

- Meals or dining; alcohol or entertainment
- Rental fees to host an event
- University, college, or trade-school education
- Political engagement, including state or national GAC events or congressional caucuses (education on advocacy and PAC is acceptable)
- Travel outside the continental U.S. (apart from the Richard L. Ensweiler I-CUDE Scholarship)

The SCMS Scholarship process is separate from the Professional Development Grant.

Southwest Credit Union Management School (SCMS) Scholarship

Scholarships are available to credit union staff and volunteers enrolled as first-, second-, or third-year SCMS students. Students may apply each year of the SCMS program.

Application Deadline: April 30, 2027 | Scholarship Committee Review: May 18, 2027

Application and Award Process

- SCMS tuition must first be paid directly to the school.
- Scholarship funds are issued to the credit union on behalf of the student.
- Applications are evaluated using a points matrix, and awards cover a portion of tuition.
- The following full-tuition scholarships are also available:
    - C2C (Connect to Collaborate) Scholarship: Awarded to a third-year young professional selected by classmates. The recipient receives tuition reimbursement after graduation.
    - Janine McBee Honorary Scholarship: Awarded to a second-year student selected by SCMS faculty. The scholarship is applied in advance toward the recipient's third-year tuition.

Community Impact Grant

Supports projects and programs led by credit unions and chapters that address community development needs and reduce barriers to financial well-being, including one or more of the 12 Development Issues. Credit unions may also apply for assistance to support Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) or Minority Depository Institution (MDI) efforts. Applicants may request up to $10,000. Full funding is not guaranteed.

Application Timing

Applications are accepted year-round. The Foundation's Grants Committee will review completed applications within two to three weeks. Applications received after December 3, 2027 will be considered for a 2028 award and reviewed in January.

Credit Union Eligibility

All Cornerstone credit unions, regardless of charter, may receive one Community Impact Grant per calendar year regardless of other grants and scholarships received.

Chapter Eligibility

Cornerstone chapters may apply annually for either a Professional Development Grant or a Community Impact Grant, but not both.

Partnerships

Credit unions and chapters may apply independently or partner with another organization to deliver the program. Eligible partners may include nonprofits, schools or educational organizations, community service groups, or qualifying religious organizations. All grant-funded partnership programs must be open to the broader community and/or the credit union's membership.

The credit union or chapter must have an active role in a clearly defined project that addresses a documented need among its members or community. Grant funds are issued directly to the credit union and cannot be used simply as sponsorship or passed through to another organization.

Review Priorities and Application Requirements
Priority is given to projects that:
- Address a clearly documented need within the community or credit union membership.
- Include an evaluation plan with measurable outcomes.
- Create opportunities or reduce disparities for historically marginalized or disinvested communities, people, or groups.

Applications must include:
- A clearly stated project or event goal connected to the documented needs of the community, credit union, or members.
- A complete project budget showing:
  - All anticipated expenses and revenue.
  - A narrative explanation for each budget line item.
  - The amount requested from the Cornerstone Foundation.
  - How the remaining funds will be secured to fully support the project.
- Evidence that the applicant can responsibly manage the project's funding.
- Chapters must submit an annual budget and financial summary.
- If the project involves a partner organization, also include:
  - A letter of support describing the community need, the partner's role, and how the partner will actively participate in the project.
  - The partner's 501(c)(3) determination letter, program materials, and most recent annual report, if applicable.

Funding and Implementation
- Awards are based on financial need, expected impact, and available funding.
- Grant funds are issued according to the terms of the Community Impact Grant Agreement and are generally provided in advance.
- Approved projects must be implemented within 12 months of the award.

Recognition and Reporting
Grant recipients must:
- Credit unions must notify their board of directors and recognize the Foundation's support on the credit union's social media channels. Credit unions are encouraged, but not required, to communicate the grant award to all staff.
- Chapters must notify CEOs of all chapter credit unions and recognize the Foundation's support on the chapter's social media channels.
- Submit a final report within two weeks after the project completion or within 12 months of the award date (whichever occurs first).
- Include photos, videos, testimonials, and success stories in the final report.

The Foundation does not provide grant support for:
- General operating expenses – including, but not limited to the following: technology, digital banking, audits, policy reviews and assessments, equipment, payroll, furniture
- Capital campaigns or bricks-and-mortar projects
- Fraternal organizations
- Religious organizations for religious purposes
- Political entities, organizations, or activities
- Organizations that discriminate on the basis of sex, religion, gender, or national origin
- Sponsorships, golf tournaments, or other fundraising events
- Marketing and promotional products
- Scholarships for community partners or individuals
- Direct donations to community nonprofits without a project component

Disaster Relief Grant

Provides financial assistance to credit union staff and volunteers with urgent needs following a qualifying disaster. This support helps them resume their roles and continue serving members. The program aims to support immediate safety and essential needs like food, shelter, and transportation rather than long-term recovery.

What qualifies as a disaster?

Natural events like hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, earthquakes, wildfires, and other weather disturbances, plus man-made disasters such as fires and acts of terrorism. Economic disasters and health events such as accidents, epidemics, or pandemics are excluded.

Eligibility

- Credit union staff and volunteers in the Cornerstone region, employed or serving at the time of disaster and during the grants process
- One grant per affected household

Eligible Expenses

- Structural damage to primary residence
- Damage to inoperable primary vehicle
- Lodging for mandatory evacuation or displacement
- Grocery staple items
- Insurance deductibles

Ineligible Expenses

Please note that this is not an exhaustive list of all excluded items.

- Personal property loss (i.e., furniture, appliances, tools, lawn equipment, boats, ATVs, etc.)
- Shed, Fence, Barn, Gazebo, Detached Garage, Pool, Spa, Playground
- Landscaping/Trees (unless tree is impeding ability to get vehicle out of property to get to work or if tree is on home or primary vehicle)
- Business or second homes
- Lost wages or lifestyle expenses
- Fast food or restaurant
- Childcare or care for displaced extended family or friends
- Transportation for evacuation or alternate routes to work
- Disaster preparedness and cleanup expenses
- Medical, dental, and funeral expenses related to the disaster, including lost prescription medications, or personal liability for accidents occurring in your home

Phase	Purpose and timing
Phase I **Up to $1,000**	Urgent disaster-related expenses. Available year-round, up to 60 days after the disaster.
Phase II **Up to $5,000**	Significant disaster-related losses. Begins no sooner than 90 days after Phase I disbursement and depends on available funds.

Grant Phases

Phase I Grant Application Process

- Employee/Volunteer Online Phase I Application Submission
    - **Required Documentation:**
        - Detailed estimate of damages
        - Photos of loss/damage
        - Invoices or receipts for incurred expenses
        - Online supplemental form submission by credit union CEO
- Grants Committee Review and Communication to Applicant
    - Notification to applicant within two weeks (may vary during widespread disasters)
    - Funds disbursed via ACH to recipient's financial institution account

Additional Resources for Immediate Financial Assistance:

- Red Cross, FEMA, United Way, Local Community Organizations & Churches

Phase II Grant Application Process

- Status check with credit union CEO for Phase I recipients
- Employee/Volunteer Phase II Application Submission
    - **Required Documentation:**
        - Detailed description of sustained damages
        - Photos of damage
        - Invoices or receipts for incurred expenses
        - Proof of insurance and FEMA assistance status (adjustment or denial)
        - Supplemental approval form from credit union CEO
- Grants Committee Review and Communication to Applicant
    - Application submission deadlines for coordinated review and approval
    - Notification sent directly to applicants; summary provided to credit union CEO
    - Funds disbursed via ACH to the recipient's financial institution account

Contact for all grant guidelines or process questions:

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