



CORNERSTONE FOUNDATION

2026 Cornerstone Foundation Grants Program

The Cornerstone Foundation is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization with a mission of “Empowering Credit Unions to Impact their Communities.” The Cornerstone Foundation provides grants and scholarships thanks to generous support from Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri, Oklahoma and Texas credit unions, the Cornerstone League, Cornerstone Resources, credit union chapters, corporate sponsorships, CIF investors, industry groups, and individual donations.

Types of Grants and Scholarships available:

- Professional Development Grant
- Southwest Credit Union Management School (SCMS) Scholarship
- Community Development Grant
- Chapter Grant
- Disaster Relief Grant

Professional Development Grant

Cornerstone credit unions of **any asset size** may apply for one Professional Development Grant annually.

Application deadline is February 27, 2026.

Grants Committee review on March 11, 2026.

Grant applications may be submitted for the following Professional Development options:

Training Calendar for CU Staff and Volunteers

- Certifications: CU Development Educator Program (CUDE), FiCEP Program (CCUFC), etc.
- Conferences, seminars, workshops, and webinars offered through Cornerstone or industry related organizations, and the training must be beneficial to credit union development.

The **Training Calendar** may include one or more events for individuals from the credit union. The credit union will receive one total grant to cover registration fees, lodging, and travel for approved events. The credit union may prioritize how funds are allocated, but only for events listed in the original grant application.

Cornerstone Foundation staff will review applications as they are received, but all applications will be evaluated by the Grants Committee using a points-matrix system. Funding is based on financial need and available dollars. Partial grants may be awarded.

Professional Development Grants must be used within the calendar year awarded. Funds will be reimbursed upon submission of expenses and a required grant impact report. Acknowledging the grant to staff, board, and via social media is encouraged but not required for reimbursement.

The Cornerstone Foundation does not offer grants or scholarships for the following:

- Meals/dining
- Alcohol or entertainment expenses
- Higher education purposes such as university, college, or trade school
- Political engagement such as state and national GAC or congressional caucus
- Travel outside the continental US (apart from the Richard L. Ensweiler I-CUDE Scholarship)

The SCMS scholarship process is separate from the Professional Development Grants. All Cornerstone credit unions are eligible for SCMS Scholarships, a Professional Development Grant, and a Community Development Grant.

Southwest Credit Union Management School (SCMS) Scholarship

Scholarships are available for first, second, and third-year students enrolled in SCMS.

Application deadline is April 30, 2026.

Scholarship Committee review on May 7, 2026.

Tuition is first paid directly to the school; awarded scholarships are then sent to the credit union on behalf of the student. SCMS scholarship awards are based on a points-matrix system, and only partial scholarships are awarded except for a full scholarship given to a first-year young professional: C2C (Connect to Collaborate) Scholarship.

Community Development Grant

The Cornerstone Foundation supports the credit union philosophy of "People Helping People," with a focus on financial wellness. The National Credit Union Foundation has identified 12 barriers to financial well-being, known as [Development Issues](#). Community Development Grants are available to help credit unions address these issues, benefiting members and communities.

All Cornerstone credit unions, regardless of charter, are eligible for one grant per calendar year. Grants can fund new projects or expand existing ones. A credit union may reapply after completing a previous grant project and submitting a final report, if the request is for a new year.

Grant approval for previously funded requests will be limited to 1-3 years, and growth in the project must be a factor for additional years' funding consideration.

Community Development Grant applications accepted year-round.

Applications received after December 4, 2026, will be considered for a 2027 grant, and reviewed in January.

The Foundation's Grants Committee will review completed applications within 2-3 weeks. Incomplete applications will not be considered. Priority is given to proposals that:

- Demonstrate a clear community need
- Include an evaluation plan to measure impact
- Create opportunities and/or decrease disparities for historically marginalized or disinvested communities, people, or groups

Credit unions may apply individually or in conjunction with a partner to deliver the programming or events.

Credit union partnerships examples:

- Non-profit, community service organizations
- Education-related organizations or schools
- Religious organizations (if the program or services are open to the community at large and/or credit union membership)

Additional eligible grant opportunities:

- Minority Targeted Development
- Financial Wellness
- Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFI) or Minority Depository Institution (MDI) assistance

Grant requests must include:

- A full project budget (expenses and revenue with narrative for line items), amount requested from the Foundation, and how the remaining project revenue will be raised to fully fund the initiative. Sound financial management must be demonstrated by the applicant.
- Clearly stated goal of the funded project or event must address the documented community needs of the credit union and their members.
- If applicable: A letter of support from the partner organization, clearly stating the development needs to be addressed and how the organization will be an active partner.
- If applicable: Proof of the partner organization's 501c3 tax-exempt status letter, program materials, and a recent annual report.

Grant amounts are up to \$10,000, but full funding is not guaranteed. Grant funding will be issued per the Community Development Grant agreement. Funding is awarded based on need, level of impact, and dollars available. Approved grants must be implemented within 12 months.

Grant recipients must share their projects on social media and credit the Cornerstone Foundation. A final report, including testimonials and success stories, is due within two weeks of project completion.

The Cornerstone Foundation does not provide grant support for the following:

- General operating expenses – which includes, but not limited to the following: technology, digital banking, audits, policy reviews and assessments, equipment, payroll, furniture
- Capital campaigns or “bricks and mortar”
- 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 and other fundraising events
- Marketing and promotional products
- Scholarships for credit unions' community partners or to individuals
- Direct donations to credit unions supporting community nonprofits without a project component

For questions on eligible expenses, contact the Cornerstone Foundation staff.

Cornerstone Chapter Grants

Cornerstone Chapters serve a very important purpose in the credit union system. They are a source of professional and organizational development, local credit union awareness, and community outreach. Grants are available for Cornerstone chapters to help them achieve their goals and objectives.

Each chapter is eligible to apply annually for **one (not both)** of the following:

- Professional Development Grant – Max Grant Size: \$2,000
 - Training or educational programs or speakers beneficial to member credit unions
- Community Development Grant – Max Grant Size: \$10,000
 - Community Outreach Program that supports one of the [12 development issues](#)
 - (See Community Development Grants above)

Chapter Grant Deadlines:

Professional Development Grant application deadline is February 27, 2026.

Applications will be reviewed by the Grants Committee March 11, 2026.

Community Development Grant applications accepted year-round.

Applications received after December 4, 2026, will be considered for a 2027 grant, and reviewed in January.

Funding is awarded based on financial need, level of impact, and availability of funds. Partial grants may be awarded. A chapter annual budget and a project budget are required. Approved Chapter Grants will follow the corresponding grant guidelines listed above for credit unions. Chapters will be required to notify all credit union CEOs in the chapter of the grant award.

Disaster Relief Grant

The Cornerstone Foundation's Disaster Relief Program offers financial assistance to credit union staff and volunteers facing urgent needs after a disaster. This support helps them resume their roles and continue serving members. While grants do not address long-term recovery, they aim to ensure safety and meet essential needs like food, shelter, and transportation.

For grant guidelines, "disaster" includes natural events like hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, earthquakes, wildfires, and other weather disturbances, as well as man-made disasters such as fires and acts of terrorism. It excludes economic disasters and health events such as accidents, epidemics, or pandemics.

Eligibility:

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

Disaster relief funds assist with the following:

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

Disaster relief funds do not assist with the following:

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 expense
- Medical, dental, and funeral expenses related to the disaster, including lost prescription medications, or personal liability for accidents occurring in your home

Grant Phases

Phase I Grant

- **Purpose:** Relief for urgent disaster-related expenses (up to \$1,000)
- **Eligibility and Timing:** Available year-round, up to 60 days post-disaster
- **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 2 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

- **Purpose:** Financial support for significant disaster-related losses (up to \$5,000)
- **Eligibility and Timing:** Begins no sooner than 90 days after Phase I disbursement, contingent on available funds
- **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 grants guidelines or processes questions:

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