

A man with dark hair and a tattoo on his left arm is seen from the back, wearing a dark blue t-shirt and a brown backpack. The backpack has a blue patch with the United Way logo. He is standing in front of a wall covered in colorful graffiti. The text "Dreaming, planning, and working together." is overlaid in large white font.

Dreaming, planning, and working together.

Our Strategic Vision 2022-2025





Live United for a stronger tomorrow.

What will Champaign County be like in 100 years? Who will be here? How will they feel about this place? Will their needs be met? More than that, will they be in a position to feel strong, supported, happy, and safe?

We're thinking a lot about those questions these days. United Way of Champaign County's centennial is only a couple of years away. It's been an amazing century of generosity and commitment, and we want to use this moment to imagine our future. Our donors, colleagues, friends, and cities will define it. **We promise that we will be a consistent and trustworthy partner in Champaign County -- so we want to be sure you understand where we're headed and how we're thinking about the next few years at United Way.**

By dreaming, planning, and working together, we can all make the most of our time, talent, and resources.

Our goals for the community

We want to live in a community that is flourishing and always improving. We can't be intimidated by big problems or shy away from big actions that address them. We believe that a flourishing community is:

EQUITABLE

We must remove barriers that hold our neighbors back. Those barriers might impact an individual or the entire community. They might be generational and systemic. An equitable community provides resources where they are needed most so that everyone has the opportunity to thrive.

RESILIENT

In the face of hardship, we must be able to fulfill people's critical needs. A resilient community ensures people have their basic needs met. And it provides opportunities for people to grow their skills and improve their circumstances.

CAPABLE

No one organization is equipped to tackle every issue. We must constantly build the capacity our problem solvers have to improve Champaign County. A capable community respects, supports, and develops new people, ideas, and solutions.

INTERCONNECTED

The challenges we face don't spring from a single source, and people aren't one-dimensional. As a result, we have to bring together nonprofits, businesses, community organizers and leaders, and anyone else who can lend a hand. An interconnected community recognizes the power of open minds and shared work.

Our broad, long-established view of the community allows us to knit together teams that deliver sustainable solutions. Take the Early Childhood Home Visiting Consortium, for example. In 2019, the Champaign-Urbana Cradle To Career kindergarten readiness team recognized that the expanding number of programs that assess local kids' development had become confusing for parents. As part of the team, United Way of Champaign County led the providers through a formal process to establish all members' roles and responsibilities, to improve the ways the programs collaborate, and to build a coordinated, easier-to-understand system. This approach to early childhood services helps parents feel confident, makes referrals among programs more straightforward, reduces duplication of services, and ensures that all children have access to quality care and education in their early years.

Our work in the community

United Way of Champaign County works alongside programs and organizations that take on our community's most challenging problems. We provide vision, leadership, funding, and coordination. And we're here for the people having the greatest positive impact -- people preventing crises, providing security and safety, and lending guidance in complex social service systems.

We take three approaches to community impact. In each case, dozens of community members volunteer with us to develop our funding strategies, assess proposals, monitor progress and impact, and adjust our course on an ongoing basis. That input is invaluable. It ensures we are delivering positive outcomes and that we stay a reliable and accountable partner.

COMMUNITY ESSENTIALS

About 45 percent of households in Champaign County struggle to make ends meet, according to United Way's Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed program, which we call ALICE. Our community essentials grants support programs that provide food, housing, healthcare, clothing, and technology access to those who need it most.

COMMUNITY BUILDING

We always have to look for new approaches and keep an eye out for emerging problems. Our community building work brings nonprofits, businesses, government agencies, and people together to listen to needs, to explore innovative solutions, and to encourage fresh partnerships.

COMMUNITY CHANGE

Sustainable improvements are built from work that is focused, solution-oriented, and evidence-based. Our community change grants support programs that partner closely with us on highly focused, multi-year initiatives that address systemic issues -- improving our neighbors' health, education, and financial stability.

We invest annually in the Eastern Illinois Foodbank through the Champaign County Food Fund that we helped establish in 2007. This support allows the foodbank to provide regional pantries and soup kitchen programs with nutritious staples that then go to the people who need them most -- much more efficiently and effectively than if we provided nominal funding to numerous small-scale programs. The program was an immediate success and significantly increased the staples that 35 agencies could distribute.

Our new approaches

The COVID-19 pandemic and important anti-racism activism in 2020 brought difficult truths to light. Persistent, systemic discrimination, as well as many of our neighbors' tenuous financial situations, were both laid bare. Too often, many of us forget or ignore these realities.

In Champaign County, Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed (ALICE) households have increased significantly. Gun violence is as high as it has ever been. Child abuse and neglect cases are among the highest in Illinois. The achievement gap among students of color is alarming and growing. Demands on social services have only grown, and reserves and funding have been drained.

The three-part approach to community impact that we described on the previous page is a significant change in our funding and partnership strategy. Our model is evolving, and we want to be sure you understand that strategy. It is necessary. It will increase our impact. And it will allow United Way of Champaign County to be:

COMMUNITY-ORIENTED

We will focus on what our community needs rather than focusing on particular agencies, organizations, or programs. That will help us better understand and address systemic challenges which hinder progress, growth, and better quality of life.

FORWARD-LOOKING

We will better anticipate and prepare for emerging and future needs.

NIMBLE

We will better address critical needs more quickly and pivot to new, higher-impact approaches more readily.

EQUITY-ORIENTED

We will work with more programs that serve diverse communities and provide new capacity-building opportunities for African American- and Black-led nonprofits. We will also strive to draw at least 35 percent of our board and committee membership from communities that have been marginalized historically.

TRANSPARENT

We will marry data, evidence, best practices, and community sentiment to create easy-to-understand, well-defined requests for proposals and impact reports. That will put more dollars than ever before into Champaign County-based organizations and make our funding decisions easier to understand for partners and donors alike.

PARTNERSHIP-ORIENTED

We will consistently ask two fundamental questions: Who in our community is in crisis, vulnerable, and disproportionately affected by current circumstances? And how can we fund and create partnerships that will best alleviate that?

Our support from the community

We have the honor of living in a generous community. Even with that tremendous support, we have to work hard in order to stay strong as an organization. The stability and health of our community is a top priority, and so is the stability and health of our United Way.

We are establishing a comprehensive long-term plan for growth that is driven by community needs. These important resource development efforts will be:

RESPECTFUL

We will honor our donors' wishes and treat them with the highest level of respect, professionalism, and care. They deserve nothing less, and we will always strive to do more.

CREATIVE

We will encourage and support new donors, embrace new tools and approaches, seek out new affinity groups and a diverse set of partners and supporters, and investigate and implement new programs that diversify our revenue streams.

STEWARDSHIP-FOCUSED

We will consistently update our donors on their investments in our work. We will also, when possible and appropriate, request and use their input regarding the best use of funds in our community.

AUTHENTIC

We will reflect our donors' passions as we address the greatest community needs, so that our donors trust our word and our work. That means we must be transparent, consistent, and forthright.

Our 2020 campaign raised more than \$3.4 million from a mix of individuals, workplace campaigns, corporate gifts, and events. More than 4,000 people give to United Way of Champaign County. Our largest donors are tremendously dependable, and they trust us. This year, more than 85 percent of our leadership-level donors had given to United Way in the previous year.



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