Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Last Updated: August 20, 2020

Q. What is Valley of the Sun United Way?

A. Since 1925, Valley of the Sun United Way has unified diverse partners, donors, businesses, nonprofits, government, and faith-based communities to build a stronger Valley for us all. United Way belongs to our community, so we seek community input on the most pressing issues. Then, we bring people, organizations and companies together to proactively solve them. Right now, many people seek trustworthy insights and information AND they want to help, but they don’t know how. United Way makes it simple for people and organizations to be part of the solution; to come together to take ACTION.

October marks our 95th anniversary serving Maricopa County. As the ripple effects of the pandemic continue to unfold in ways none of us could have imagined, we’re going back to our roots by nimbly responding to the fast-changing and evolving needs of families and individuals in our community and the non-profits and schools that serve them.

Q. How is Valley of the Sun United Way working in our community in light of COVID-19?

United Way belongs to our community and our number one focus is to nimbly and effectively respond to, and develop solutions for, our Valley’s most pressing needs. We will ACTIVATE resources, ACTIVATE corporate and nonprofit partners, ACTIVATE change, ACTIVATE hope, and provide real solutions to the immediate and evolving needs of our community. This year, we’ll focus on 3 approaches:

#1 We’ll continue to address the immediate needs of families and individuals, focusing on hunger, housing and homelessness, financial stability, education and out of school time, and the ongoing/emerging needs of our neighbors.

- To do this, we’ll collaborate with and support our current nonprofit and school partners, as well as filling other gaps laid bare by the pandemic.
- Keep vital nonprofits and schools whole so they can continue providing uninterrupted services to meet the growing demands for:
  - Emergency meals
  - Food delivery for seniors
  - Filling meal gaps for students
- Emergency shelters
- Support Services for individuals living in permanent supportive housing
- Access to affordable quality childcare and early education
- Quality afterschool and out-of-school time programs so parents can work
- At-home learning materials, programs and tutoring to help kids read at grade level
- Initiatives to guide high school students to graduation, college and career
- Providing vital essentials such as masks, sanitizers, diapers
- Emergency rent, utilities and other financial assistance that maintains family stability
- Support of 2-1-1 to ensure people are connected to the services they need
- Resources to meet the fast-changing needs during this unprecedented time

#2 Address the social, economic, education and racial inequities that have become so clear and have increased with this pandemic. For example, we’ll work with partners to address the digital divide and so that every student in the Valley has equal access to a quality education whether that’s at home or in a physical classroom. We’re exploring how United Way might support equal access to quality health care, job training, addressing systemic racism and other community needs as they emerge.

#3 We’ll re-engage our community-centered planning process to develop long-term solutions to the issues our community tells us are most vital. To do this, we’ll:
- Launch a 5-year community-informed impact plan and rally our donors, partners and community to help develop the solutions needed.
- Fund programs that address the root causes of issues.
- Use our voice to drive policy and create public awareness around change needed.
- Convene the right parties to create solutions, and lead to ensure the change needed happens,
- Rebuild our community to be stronger than ever.

What did Valley of the Sun United Way do to respond to COVID-19?
A. In collaboration with our nonprofit partners, Board of Directors, and donors, United Way created the United for the Valley COVID-19 Response Fund to support Maricopa County’s health and human service, education nonprofits and school partners’ growing list of critical needs. We launched the fund in March, 2020 in collaboration with the Arizona Community Foundation (ACF) and its statewide fund, to ensure effective and efficient fundraising and grant distribution in Maricopa County. Thanks to the generosity of so many in the community:
The fund raised nearly $3MM and has provided support to 543,281 individuals (as of August 2020).
66 Partners and 75 Programs supported
Breakdown by Category:
  o 358,061 (66%) Emergency Needs: Foods and Homeless Prevention
  o 68,938 (13%) Organization and Capacity Support
  o 116,282 (21%) Youth Programming, Including Tech Support for Virtual Programming
We elevated United Way’s gifts in kind program to connect needed goods and supplies, with a value of $740,000 from its corporate partners to nonprofits with critical needs.

Please view more details from our comprehensive COVID-19 response report: www.vsuw.org/covidreport

Aside from COVID-19 what were United Way’s results last year:

20 Partner and Community Thought Leader input sessions have been held (January-August) and will continue to be held so that we work collectively to support community needs. We funded 98 programs for 74 nonprofit partners for a total of $6.5M invested, to result in:

  • 2,188 tenants retained permanent housing
  • 635,646 individuals received an emergency meal
  • 18,125,262 emergency meals served
  • 4,058 adults obtained employment
  • 7,000 kids received School Readiness Kits
  • 79,205 children received Breakfast in the Classroom across 108 schools
  • 573 Community members received Wise Choices Financial and Nutritional Training
  • 1,095 lbs (over half a ton!) of fresh produce grown via The Garden Harvest Program, which was distributed to community members from gardens VSUW volunteers helped to build
  • Over 7,000 volunteers supported projects and programs throughout Maricopa County

Q. How is VSUW addressing Diversity, Equity and Inclusion?

A. Valley of the Sun United Way stands in solidarity with community members and other organizations calling for systemic change. When we launched our 2020 priorities in January, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion were included in our plans. We've started this important work by looking inward first, and have developed a committee of staff and board members led by Dr. Maria Harper-Marinick and Ruben Alvarez to help assess and direct our work. That committee, with input from our
community, will develop a plan for the most effective role Valley of the Sun United can play in building racial, economic, education and social equity in our community.

**We ACTIVATE: Solutions for our community by:**

- Preparing kids for success in the kindergarten
- Preparing kids to read at grade level by 4th grade
- Providing quality programs after-school and in the summer
- Preparing kids for college and career
- End hunger in the classroom and at home for families
- End homelessness
- Increase incomes of households to maintain stability

**Q. We ACTIVATE: Change for kids in our community by:**

**A.**

- Improving access to quality early child care, fostering childcare center quality improvement, improving caregiver training, access to child care scholarships and School Readiness Kits in select communities
- Helping kids read at grade level by 4th grade with Vello, an online 1:1 reading tutoring program and Read On initiatives in select communities
- Improving quality after-school and summer programs focused on mentoring, resiliency skills, and providing education support programs for students from cradle to college
- Partnering with schools to ensure students are prepared for college and career

**Q. How are you addressing hunger in our community?**

**A.**

- By supporting the emergency food network to obtain and distribute food to help meet the community’s need, including emergency meals
- By ensuring children in schools have additional meals with supplemental Snack Packs
Q. How are you addressing homelessness/housing?

A. 
- By providing permanent supportive housing solutions for chronically homeless individuals
- By providing emergency shelter and basic needs services for individuals experiencing homelessness
- By increasing access to shelter, housing, and services for individuals at risk of homelessness

Q. How are you increasing financial stability of families?

A. By mobilizing trained financial coaches to help households build savings and create budgets

Q. Does United Way accept Gifts-in-kind? If so, where do those materials go?

A. In response to COVID-19, United Way ramped up its Gifts-In-Kind program in 2020 to connect goods and services from our corporate partners to organizations with urgent needs. There have been numerous donations of products including Food, Water, PPE/face masks, disinfectants and personal hygiene items totaling more than $740,000 cash value. These materials have been collected and distributed across our network of nonprofit partners, schools and organizations who continue to have growing and urgent needs since March 2020.

Q. Does United Way offer Virtual Volunteer/At-Home Volunteer opportunities?

A. This is an unprecedented time, and it can feel like challenges keep mounting. Companies and people want to help, but many don’t know how. At United Way, we know it will take EVERY one of us in the Valley to pull together to respond to the urgent and changing needs brought on by the pandemic and to rebuild our community to be even stronger than before. That’s why we’re making it simple for you to ACTIVATE and be part of the solution! We’ll provide opportunities to be an activist where ever you are – at home, at work, at school. United Way is dedicated to taking action and we invite you to join us!

United Way offers various virtual and at-home volunteer opportunities to meet the unique interests and passions of all volunteers.
If you’re interested in giving back to your community, in a safe and effective way, visit www.vsuw.org/volunteer to explore the latest opportunities.

You and your family can help the community from under your own roof. Unique and fun At-Home Volunteer Activities are listed at: www.vsuw.org/athome

Q. What does it mean to Advocate for United Way?

A. To advocate means to champion a cause. We invite you to become an advocate in our community. At United Way, we advocate for:

- Policies that support quality early learning opportunities, provide access to quality child care, and increase parent involvement opportunities to ensure school readiness for young children
- Best practice and research-based policies focused on improving high school graduation rates and college readiness
- Policies that help families achieve financial security through financial education and asset-building opportunities
- Policies allowing families to easily navigate assistance programs, eliminating barriers and unnecessary bureaucracy
- Policies that protect and strengthen the human service safety net for the growing number of families in need of assistance.

You can speak out to improve our community, share information about social issues with friends or family, or wear our LIVE UNITED or VIVE UNIDO shirt to show your support for United Way. Your voice helps us to address poverty in Maricopa County. Stay current with the latest issues we care about at vsuw.org/advocate.

Q. Why should I donate to Valley of the Sun United Way?

A. United Way does what no one single organization can do alone – guide local community members to achieve their potential through education and become self-sufficient by earning a stable income. Plus, with the simplicity of payroll deduction, you can help support neighbors by investing in solutions and ACTIVATE: Change in Maricopa County.

When you choose to donate directly to Valley of the Sun United Way, you join us in collectively supporting local kids, families, and neighborhoods.
Q. Is United Way a national or local organization?

A. Valley of the Sun United Way is a local, autonomous non-profit organization. Like the 1,800 United Ways across the country, we are governed by a local volunteer Board of Directors. Valley of the Sun United Way pays nominal dues to United Way Worldwide in exchange for important cost-saving services such as staff training, community research information, campaign materials, national marketing partnerships and ongoing consultation.

Q. What does Valley of the Sun United Way do in addition to raising money?

A. Since inception, United Way has mobilized the caring power of individuals and organizations to improve lives across the U.S. Valley of the Sun United Way has served the needs of individuals and families in Maricopa County since 1925 and is the largest non-profit investor of health and human service programs in Maricopa County. We bring partners together from every sector – public, private, non-profit – to do what no single organization can do alone: create solutions that transform individual lives and drive systemic change that impacts entire communities.

Q. Why are there two United Ways in Maricopa County?

A. Maricopa County does in fact have two United Ways, each with distinct roles, serving the human care needs of local residents. Mesa United Way raises money and helps provide assistance only within the City of Mesa. Valley of the Sun United Way raises money throughout Maricopa County, except for the City of Mesa, and provides services county-wide. Valley of the Sun United Way offers donors a variety of giving options to accommodate individual giving preferences, and honors designations to Mesa United Way, any other United Way or qualified health and human service non-profit organization.

Q. What is Valley of the Sun United Way’s overhead costs?

A. Valley of the Sun United Way incurs costs for fundraising, marketing and common business operations such as accounting, human resources and overall organizational management. As careful stewards of our donors’ contributions, Valley of the Sun United Way operates with the utmost efficiency and effectiveness. Less than 10 percent is spent on administrative cost and approximately 90 cents of every dollar goes back into the community to improve lives throughout the Valley.
Q. How do I know that my donation will help those who need it most?

A. Local human care programs that receive United Way funding go through rigorous review and evaluation by Valley of the Sun United Way. This is a competitive process, and programs are selected based on their performance against specific measures that demonstrate impact for individuals and families experiencing poverty. Our Community Impact Committee reviews funding across all of United Way’s strategies to ensure funding aligns with our organizational goals. All funding recommendations are presented to, and approved by, our Board of Directors. This extensive process ensures donors’ dollars are invested in human care programs that are proven to obtain results and transform lives.

Q. How is Valley of the Sun United Way held accountable?

A. Valley of the Sun United Way prides itself on being a trustworthy and accountable organization. A volunteer committee of financial experts meets year-round to monitor the organization’s financial position. Collectively, we maintain high standards of operation and are reviewed each year by an independent auditor, who verifies that our financial statements are sound. In addition to posting our Form 990 on our website for public review, we are an active member of the Better Business Bureau and a past recipient of its Ethics Award, which recognizes businesses for maintaining high ethical standards and accountability in their business practices.

Q. Why should I give directly to Valley of the Sun United Way instead of designating my donation to another non-profit organization?

A. To encourage collective impact, Valley of the Sun United Way brings together partners from every sector – public, business, non-profit, and faith-based organizations – to get things done. Together, with your support, we will ensure kids succeed, end hunger, end homelessness, and increase the financial stability of families and individuals, ACTIVATING solutions in ways no one organization can do alone.

Q. Does VSUW allow designations to any 501(c)(3) and not restricted them to only health and human services?

A. As with all donations, United Way honors a donor’s choice to designate to any 501(c)(3) organization.
Q. What does partnership with Valley of the Sun United Way mean?

A. For the last several years Valley of the Sun United Way has talked about partnerships differently. We partner with hundreds of businesses, organizations and individuals to ACTIVATE: Solutions. Some partners receive funding, while others do not. These partners bring the expertise, resources and commitment needed to ACTIVATE: HOPE for every child, individual and family in our community by ensuring children succeed in school, ending hunger and homelessness, and increasing the financial stability of families and individuals.

As a result of the ongoing evolution of our work, Valley of the Sun United Way is focused on doing much more than funding the efforts of other agencies and organizations. We help support families, kids, and neighborhoods. We do this by continuing to fund partners through an investment process and aligning funding to our goals. Additionally, we will also be working with partners (traditional and new) in different ways - as grant partners, on pilot projects, on collaborative partnerships, etc.

Q. What criteria must nonprofits meet in order to be eligible for donor designated funds?

A. Nonprofits are subject to a certification process and must meet the following minimum standards:

- Be classified by the Internal Revenue Service as a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organization, and be in compliance with all applicable state and federal statutes and regulations, including the maintenance of corporate status as designated by the state of incorporation’s regulatory agency
- Be governed by a board of community volunteers
- Not knowingly employ individuals or contribute funds to organizations found on the US Government, United Nations, or European Union terrorist related list

Q. What criteria must agencies meet to be eligible for grant funding?

A. Agencies are responsible for adhering to a number of compliance criteria in order to receive United Way program grant funding, including:

- Be classified by the Internal Revenue Service as a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organization, and be in compliance with all applicable state and federal statutes and regulations, including the maintenance of corporate status as designated by Arizona’s Corporation Commission
• Be governed by an active, rotating volunteer board that represents diverse elements of the community

• Demonstrate sound financial and program management in accordance with Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP) and be willing to make full disclosure

• Adhere to all applicable state and federal statutes and regulations regarding equal employment opportunity and non-discrimination

• Comply with all federal immigration laws and regulations that relate to its employees and compliance with the E-verify requirements under A.R.S. § 23-214(A)

• Comply with any and all applicable fingerprinting and background check requirements, as necessary, for staff and/or volunteers under the Arizona Revised Statutes

• Not knowingly employ individuals or contribute funds to organizations found on the US Government, United Nations, or European Union terrorist related list

• Provide annual compliance documentation, including but not limited to vendor information, ACH deposit information, and a completed W9

• Provide projected and actual financial information, client beneficiary data, and service statistics including specified periodic outcome measurement data in VSUW’s required format for all VSUW-funded programs upon request

Q. How are Valley of the Sun United Way Partners held accountable?

A. Local human care programs that receive United Way funding go through a rigorous review and evaluation by Valley of the Sun United Way staff. This is a competitive process, and programs are selected based on their performance against specific measures that demonstrate impact for individuals and families experiencing poverty. This helps ensure donors’ dollars are invested in human care programs that are proven to obtain results and improve lives.

Q. How much influence do I have over how my contribution is invested?

A. Donors are given options for investing in our community. These choices include donating directly to Valley of the Sun United Way, the most proactive way to ACTIVATE: Change. Donors may also choose to invest in one or more of our focuses to achieve that goal - ensure kids succeed in school, end hunger, end homelessness, or increase the financial stability of families. United Way also honors
a donor’s choice to designate to a specific non-profit agency as long as it meets required criteria.

Q. The agency I want to support is not listed. Can I still restrict my contribution to that particular agency?

A. We encourage a contribution to Valley of the Sun United Way because it is the best way to support a diverse range of human care programs to serve our community’s most pressing needs. United Way develops and invests in best practices to maximize every dollar. To verify if an agency meets United Way’s criteria, please call the agency certification line at 602.631.4813. All calls will be returned within 48 hours.

Q. Last year, I contributed directly to the Arizona Charitable Tax Credit Fund and qualified for a tax credit. Is that option still available? What are the benefits of choosing this option?

A. Yes, donations to Valley of the Sun United Way’s Arizona Charitable Tax Credit Fund, qualify for the Arizona state tax “Credit for Contributions to Qualifying Charitable Organizations”. Valley of the Sun United Way is an Umbrella organization for the Arizona Charitable Tax Credit Fund. Gifts made to the “Arizona Charitable Tax Credit Fund” can qualify for the credit, and can be reported using code 20726.

Your contribution to the Charitable Tax Credit Fund is leveraged to address the multiple causes of poverty in the Valley. By donating a portion of your United Way contribution to the charitable tax credit fund, you help people increase their self-sufficiency and you could receive a dollar-for-dollar state tax credit this tax year. Donate up to $400* for individuals and up to $800* for those filing jointly. You don’t have to itemize deductions to claim a credit for contributions to a Qualifying Charitable Organization.

- Provide your name, home address and phone number on your pledge card or online at vsuw.org/taxcredit in order to receive an acknowledgement for your tax records.

- For more information about United Way’s Arizona Charitable Tax Credit Fund and the Arizona state tax “Credit for Contributions to Qualifying Charitable Organizations”, call 602.631.4800.

* Valley of the Sun United Way is not a tax advisor. As with any financial recommendation, contact a qualified tax professional for advice on your specific tax situation.
Q. What does the Charitable Tax Deduction mean for taxpayers?
A. It means that taxpayers can still make a tax deductible donation for Arizona taxes even if they don't itemize and choose to take the standard deduction. The Charitable Tax Deduction will allow the amount equal to 25% of the total amount of a taxpayer's charitable deductions to be added to the standard deduction beginning for taxable years from and after December 31, 2018.

Q. Why do you want to know how long I’ve been giving?
A. Valley of the Sun United Way takes opportunities to recognize loyal donors through our Loyal Contributors Program. This program identifies, thanks, and communicates with long-time donors who have positively impacted the lives of so many people through their support. If you've been giving for five years or more, we want to recognize your commitment. Please visit vsuw.org/loyal to receive loyal contributor communications from Valley of the Sun United Way. If you do not wish to be contacted, please let us know and we will remove you from the contact list of loyal donors.

Q. I am already on a tight budget. How can I afford to give?
A. The need is enormous and every contribution helps. Even a modest contribution per pay period or monthly online helps improve the lives of many kids and families throughout the Valley. By investing in our community through payroll deduction or monthly online, you can spread your contribution over the coming year—making it more manageable than a one-time contribution.

You may also choose to get involved by volunteering or advocating with United Way. As a volunteer and advocate you can lend your time, muscle and voice to help champion a cause. You can volunteer for United Way’s School Readiness Kit assembly, or deliver Snack Bags to local schools. As an advocate you can share important information about key social issues with others. To learn more about volunteering with United Way, please call 602-631-4800 or visit www.vsuw.org/volunteer

Q. What is Shop For A Cause Marketing?
A. Just like our generous donors and hardworking volunteers, businesses have partnered with Valley of the Sun United Way to unite against homelessness, to unite against hunger, to ensure the success of children, and to increase financial stability in the Valley. By shopping with these businesses, you’re taking the steps to ACTIVATE: Change. These businesses are dedicating a portion of their proceeds to United Way. It’s an easy and fun way to give back and benefit your community.
Watch our video about these partnerships:  https://youtu.be/6OyT_BxWJ_4
Learn more:  www.vsuw.org/causemenu

Q. What is Women United?
A. Women United is made up of more than 800 members that come together to attend leadership sessions, connect with one another socially and professionally, volunteer together, and ACTIVATE change in our community. Women United hosts the We Are United Luncheon as well as a Community Leadership Breakfast. Women United members make an annual gift of $1,000 to the work of Valley of the Sun United Way to ensure kids succeed in school, end hunger and homelessness, and increase the financial stability of families. There is a three-year Step Up opportunity as well, which brings recognition of membership the moment you sign up.
Learn more:  www.vsuw.org/womenunited

Q. What is Generation United?
A. Generation United is a community of emerging leaders who look to advance the mission of Valley of the Sun United Way through volunteering, giving, and connecting with one another. Our group is led by a steering committee representing corporate and community partners of Valley of the Sun United Way. We like to have fun while making a measurable impact in our community with educational opportunities, professional development, and networking events.
Learn more:  www.vsuw.org/genu

Q. What is Planned Giving (or Legacy Society)?
A. Planned Giving, also referred to as Legacy Society, allows donors to include Valley of the Sun United Way in their estate plan. It’s a memorable and unique arrangement that allows the donor to create a legacy that will benefit individuals and families. An endowment at United Way assures a long-term vision for Maricopa County.

The Legacy Society furthers United Way’s mission by encouraging estate gifts that provide perpetual support of health and human services. The Legacy Society is for those who have made arrangements for a bequest or planned gift to Valley of the Sun United Way. While the annual United Way campaign significantly impacts immediate needs, estate gifts can provide continuous support and flexibility to meet emerging needs of our community well into the future. For additional details, contact Lisa Groves at 602-631-4806 or via email at lgroves@vsuw.org.
Q. I had a friend, family member or neighbor who reached out to United Way but did not get help.

A. First, on behalf of Valley of the Sun United Way, we apologize for the fact that you did not receive the attention you needed. Since Valley of the Sun United Way does not provide direct services, sometimes we are unable to address their specific situation for a variety of reasons. Sometimes the service they are seeking is not provided in our community, or they don’t meet the eligibility requirements of the agency providing the program, or, they are requesting assistance outside of the scope of services we are connected to.

If you or someone you know is in need of help, you will find the most complete and up-to-date information with 2-1-1 Arizona, a program of the Crisis Response Network that links individuals to vital community services 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. We encourage you, if you are able, to use their website 211arizona.org to find more about resources that may be available to you. You may also call them by dialing 2-1-1 from a phone number with an Arizona area code, or 1-877-211-8661 from anywhere.