UNITED WAY
Central Maryland

UNITED FOR OUR FUTURES

A Summary of United Way of Central Maryland's 2026-2030 Strategic Direction

CHARTING A FUTURE WHERE ALL CAN THRIVE

For more than 100 years, United Way of Central Maryland has been a trusted, unifying force for good, helping people and neighborhoods across our region adapt and build resiliency in times of change and crisis.

That history matters. It reflects enduring partnerships, deep organizational credibility, and a proven ability to evolve while staying rooted in what matters most: **our mission to improve lives by empowering leaders and mobilizing the caring power of our communities to advance the common good.**

As we enter our second century, our strategic direction builds on this legacy of partnership and proven results. It reflects the power of a network that spans neighborhoods, nonprofits, employers, foundations, governments, and residents themselves. Together, this network has helped families stabilize, young people succeed, and communities grow stronger. Not through one-size-fits-all solutions, but through co-created solutions with those closest to the challenges and opportunities.

Today's environment underscores why this approach works. Uncertainty is a defining feature of our world, making flexibility and adaptability in both our programmatic and philanthropic approaches essential. We meet this reality with clarity–staying focused, connected, and forward-looking; delivering on what's needed now and investing in what must endure, while keeping a watchful eye on emerging challenges and opportunities.

This strategic direction is grounded in more than aspiration–it is grounded in a century of experience. We have learned what it takes to create lasting change: Listen first, lead alongside communities, stay flexible as conditions shift, and invest in solutions that strengthen people and systems together.

Our mission to improve lives by empowering leaders and mobilizing the caring power of our communities to advance the common good.

Our vision for the future is when every person thrives–and where United Way of Central Maryland is recognized as a hub for social change.



A STRATEGY FOR A CHANGING WORLD

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The United for Our Futures plan is intentionally structured around short-term action and mid-range priorities, grounded in a guiding 10-year aspiration as well as our 10-year plans for Young Men United and our United For Childcare Initiative.

The first two years focus on reinforcing our core capabilities, ensuring we are responsive, aligned, and effective amid ongoing change. This phase prioritizes access to basic needs, bolsters other nonprofits, elevates resident leadership, and reinforces our role as a trusted community partner.

Years three through five concentrate on expanding the scale of effective programs and initiatives, deepening collaboration, and advancing the systems-level change required for lasting impact. Because conditions will inevitably continue to evolve, we will refine this phase in 2027 so that our strategies remain relevant, informed, and responsive to what we are learning.

By pairing near-term action against a ten-year horizon, we position our organization and our partners to not only respond to immediate needs, but to build the systems, leadership, and capacity required to help young people and families, especially those low wage-earning families living as ALICE (**A**sset **L**imited, **I**ncome **C**onstrained, **E**mployed) to change the trajectory of their paths and live their best lives on their own terms, fulfilling our mission and deepening our impact.

OUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES: A SHARED FRAMEWORK FOR SUCCESS

Over the next five years, we will center efforts on three interconnected goals:

Advancing Impact

We will work alongside residents, nonprofit partners, and cross-sector collaborators to drive meaningful change for people living as ALICE, focus on the essentials for stability, support community-led solutions, and address barriers that limit access to opportunity.

Accelerating Relationships and Resources

We will elevate ALICE's own voice in driving change and strengthen and expand relationships with donors and their families, employers, foundations, and public partners, creating innovative ways to give, lead, and engage to deepen and broaden philanthropic investment in our work and the community.

Amplifying Organizational Effectiveness

We will continue evolving how we operate and shape future-ready talent, investing in our people and systems to remain agile, accountable, and effective. This includes expanded use of data and technologies, and collaboration where needs are greatest.



OUR FOCUS: INTERSECTING NEEDS

United Way of Central Maryland brings a comprehensive approach to every challenge, actively listening and responding to local needs. From strengthening local resilience to advancing financial security, youth opportunity, and wellbeing, we will mobilize communities to action so everyone can thrive.

Our work remains centered on households living as ALICE.

We will focus on four interconnected impact areas that together support stability, opportunity, and long-term resilience:



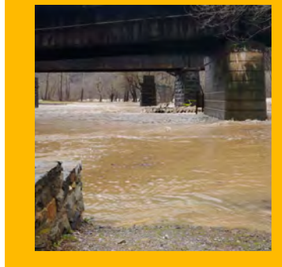
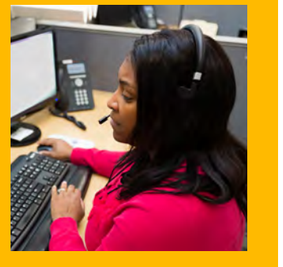

YOUTH OPPORTUNITY

We help create pathways for young people to reach their goals, from early learning through high school graduation, college, career training, and leadership development.



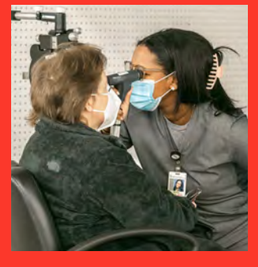

FINANCIAL SECURITY

We help our neighbors get by–and get ahead–by providing pathways to financial security. Our work spans assistance with the basics like housing, reliable childcare, and managing bills and budgets, to supporting special populations in life and work.

COMMUNITY RESILIENCY

From emergencies to natural disasters to life's unexpected challenges, we respond quickly and efficiently to urgent needs today so our neighbors can recover, rebuild, and become more resilient in the future.

HEALTHY COMMUNITY

We work alongside residents, local leaders, and partners to strengthen health and well-being by investing in people, relationships, and systems that help communities navigate challenges and build resilience over time.

OUR APPROACH TO LEADERSHIP AND PARTNERSHIP

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A grounding principle and our core beliefs provide the filters–the litmus test–for every decision we make. They shape our priorities, inform our partnerships, and anchor our actions as we translate goals and objectives into measurable impact.

Our approach is grounded in our commitment to community-driven action. Lasting solutions are built with the people most affected by today's challenges. We connect people and resources, support leadership, amplify voices, and advocate for changes that help people and neighborhoods thrive.

OUR CORE BELIEFS



Communities thrive when people have the basics they need. Safe housing, education, health, and financial security are essential–but there is no single path to stability. We support people in defining their own needs and measures of success.



Leaders exist in every neighborhood. The people closest to the challenges have critical insight and solutions. We listen, respect lived experience, and work alongside residents to turn ideas into action.



Complex issues require coordinated approaches. We unite partners across systems and sectors to address challenges from multiple angles, creating solutions that are stronger and longer-lasting.



Partnership multiplies impact. Nonprofits, employers, foundations, governments, and residents each have a role. We focus on alignment, shared goals, and collective effort to fuel positive change.



Communities change–and so must we. We learn alongside our partners and those we serve, adapt our approaches, and lead with integrity so we can deliver what's needed, where it's needed.



Progress accelerates when knowledge is shared. Freely sharing our data, program models, and insights–which we use to advance and scale effective solutions–enables others to act and innovate alongside us to drive progress at a larger scale.

RESPONDING IN THE MOMENT. BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE.

In 2014, Janelly was a high school freshman, a new mother, and uncertain about her future. What she knew for sure was this: she wanted to continue her education and build a strong life for herself and her child.

The United Way Family Center at Benjamin Franklin High School in Baltimore made that possible. As part of its first class of participants, Janelly received free, on-site childcare right in her school. She no longer had to choose between caring for her daughter and finishing high school. With that immediate support in place, Janelly could focus on school, stay on track to graduate, and plan her next steps.

More than childcare, the Family Center provides quality early learning for infants and toddlers, parenting classes, compassionate and trusted staff, and pathways to resources and employment after graduation. "It was a safe environment," Janelly shared. "I learned how to be a mom. Nothing is impossible when you have people who want to support you."

While still a student–and raising her young daughter–Janelly earned her Certified Nursing Assistant credential, later becoming a Certified Medical Assistant. Today, she's taking the next step toward becoming a nurse.

Her daughter, now an honor student, echoes her mom's sentiments: "The Family Center helped my mom and me grow up together and have a good relationship."

Janelly's journey shows how immediate help with basic needs can lead to lasting change. It's also why our United For Childcare initiative focuses on expanding access to quality, affordable childcare; supporting parents and providers; and strengthening the workforce and local economy–so families can thrive today, and growth and opportunity can span generations.



"It was a safe environment," Janelly shared. "I learned how to be a mom. Nothing is impossible when you have people who want to support you."

A CLEAR PATH TOWARD LASTING SOCIAL CHANGE

Guided by what history has taught us and driven by what the future demands, the United For Our Futures 2026-2030 strategic direction reflects both who we are and who we are becoming.

By 2030, United Way will be firmly established on a new trajectory: operating at greater scale, with sharper focus, deeper partnerships, and stronger systems that allow us to respond quickly while advancing long-term social change. We will have shifted from opening pathways for neighborhood leaders to fully supporting resident-led solutions; from addressing immediate needs to building long-term stability and resilience for families living as ALICE; and from transactional funding to deep, sustained partnerships that strengthen the nonprofit ecosystem and the lives of everyone who calls Central Maryland home.

WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS

- More people with the stability, security, opportunity, and confidence to thrive,
- Communities where residents shape and lead the solutions that affect their lives,
- Stronger systems and policies that remove barriers and expand opportunity,
- Partnerships that deliver collective impact across sectors and regions,
- And a United Way of Central Maryland increasingly recognized as a regional–and growing national–hub for social change, where data, learning, and innovation are shared freely so others can translate ideas into action and accelerate enduring impact.

This vision depends on shared commitment. Donors, employers, foundations, governments, nonprofits, and residents all play a vital role. Together, we will continue to expand meaningful ways to give, lead, and engage across generations–grounded in transparency, trust, and outcomes that reflect both impact and thoughtful stewardship.

United Is The Way to meet today's challenges and to build a future where everyone can thrive. By working together and sharing what we learn, United Way of Central Maryland will fuel change far beyond any single organization–advancing our role as a hub for social change and strengthening Central Maryland for generations to come.

2026-2030 STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE

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To learn more about how to join us, and to receive updates about our progress implementing our 2026-2030 strategic direction, please visit our website:

UWCM.ORG

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