At Least $1 Million in Direct Assistance Available to Families Affected by Tornado

Community Response Fund commits additional $1 million based on developing direct assistance needs

(Appleton, Wis.) Aug. 31**,** 2026—Direct financial assistance will be in the hands of families affected by the July tornado starting **September 1, 2026**. In addition, the leaders of the Community Response Fund within the Community Foundation for the Fox Valley Region have committed an additional $1 million to address future direct assistance needs based on what nonprofits learn in the next weeks and months.

The funds mark the next phase of the Community Response Fund, a result of donations given by individuals or organizations as an immediate response to help people affected by the tornado. The Community Response Fund is managed by the Community Foundation for the Fox Valley Region, and the tornado relief and recovery is in collaboration with United Way Fox Cities and the Oshkosh Area Community Foundation.

Today, the fund is announcing at least $1 million to two local nonprofits which will provide direct financial assistance for families.

- LEAVEN will use the funds to provide direct financial assistance to families for essential basic needs including housing, transportation, childcare, utilities and more. The initial grant made to LEAVEN is $500,000.
- People of Progression will use the funds for direct financial assistance for basic needs as well as one-on-one individual support for those who need help navigating recovery assistance. The initial grant made to People of Progression is $500,000.

“Many people have asked us why we give the funding to nonprofits,” said Lisa Kogan-Praska, president & CEO of United Way Fox Cities. “These organizations already have trusted relationships with residents and have staff and processes in place to get help to families quickly and where it is most needed.” She adds that two organizations were selected so residents of the affected neighborhoods have multiple points to access help as many individuals may not be aware of how to navigate and access assistance.

There is no standard amount available to households because every family has been affected differently. LEAVEN and People of Progression will talk with individuals and families about what happened to their household, what they need help with immediately, and how difficult it is for the household to cover costs on its own. Assistance is based on the household’s current needs, not the total value of what was damaged or lost.

“With school starting and families continuing to navigate the unexpected costs that come with recovering from a disaster, there is already a lot of competition for their attention and resources,” said Nikki Gerhard, executive director of LEAVEN. “Our goal is to provide some financial relief at a time when families need it most, giving them a little more room to focus on what comes next.”

“People of Progression is right in the heart of the community impacted by the tornado, and we’re seeing affected families every day," said Kristen Kelly, executive director and co-founder of People of Progression. "These are our neighbors and community members. Our role is to meet people where they are, make assistance easier to navigate, and walk alongside families as they move toward stability and recovery.”

Nonprofits fast track funding

The process for families to get help is designed to be simple and flexible.

Both nonprofits will meet with individuals to confirm how the tornado affected their lives. Households will need to provide proof of their primary address, which will be checked against the official list of tornado-affected properties. From there, the nonprofits will talk with families about their immediate tornado-related needs and the assistance that may help.

Both organizations use the same guidelines to determine how much assistance a household may receive. They may work with families in different ways, so residents can start with the organization they are most comfortable working with. To get started, call or visit the organizations:

LEAVEN

- Initiate help through the website at www.leavenfoxcities.org
- Call LEAVEN directly at (920) 738-9635
- Email directly at lcrc@leavenfoxcities.org
- The organization is open Tuesday-Friday and has evening hours on Tuesday and Thursday. Please check specific hours on their website because **hours may change based on residents' needs.**

PEOPLE OF PROGRESSION

- The nonprofit is located in Menasha where there was significant damage, so it will be open for in-person walk in help at 333 First Street, Ste A, Menasha, WI 54952.
- Hours are Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday from 10am–4pm. Thursday is 10am–4pm, by appointment only.
- Information will be available on the website at https://www.peopleofprogression.com
- Call People of Progression directly at 920-815-9487

Leaders of the effort stress this financial assistance is meant to help with tornado-related needs households are facing and it is not necessarily the last tornado assistance a household may receive. "The response to this fund has been heartwarming," said Curt Detjen, president & CEO of the Community Foundation for the Fox Valley Region. "Donations are still coming in and there will be more funds available for immediate and long-term assistance." This round of funding is not intended to replace everything a family lost or pay for the full cost of repairing or rebuilding a home. Those longer-term recovery needs will be the focus of the next phase of the fund's work.

Families affected by the tornado are still dealing with it every day," said Bill Wyman, president and CEO of the Oshkosh Area Community Foundation. "Our nonprofit partners are working directly with these families and understand what they need right now. We want people to know that help is available and that their community is here for them."

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FAQs about the Community Response Fund

The Community Response Fund is managed by the Community Foundation of the Fox Valley Region in partnership with United Way Fox Cities and the Oshkosh Area Community Foundation. The fund is a collaborative effort to assess community needs, coordinate recovery efforts, and ensure donated funds are used where they can have the greatest impact. The funds are working in tandem with the cities of Menasha and Appleton and Calumet, Outagamie, and Winnebago counties.

HOW MUCH MONEY HAS BEEN RAISED?

- The Community Response Fund has raised over $4 million directly from the community and donations are coming in daily.

HOW MUCH HAS BEEN GRANTED?

- The first phase of grants totaled $580,050 and helped with emergency tornado response. We have also released $250,000 to Habitat for Humanity. These funds were distributed to organizations providing emergency shelter, food, cleanup support, volunteer coordination and other critical services.
- Today's $1 million commitment marks the next phase of the fund's response: putting financial assistance directly into the hands of households affected by the tornado through two nonprofits.
- An additional $1 million has been committed for this next phase of assistance. Before those funds are awarded, Community Response Fund leaders will look at how the first round is working and what they are learning from families and nonprofits to help guide the next round of funding.

- The next phase will focus on longer-term recovery and rebuilding needs that remain after insurance, government assistance, and other resources are considered. We anticipate these needs will be identified in the next several months.

WHAT ABOUT THE OTHER MILLIONS PLEDGED IN THE COMMUNITY?
The Community Response Fund should not be confused with donations announced in news reports by private organizations or businesses. Those efforts are separate from the Community Response Fund.

WHY NOT GIVE THE FUNDING DIRECTLY TO INDIVIDUALS INSTEAD OF NONPROFITS?
The nonprofit partners we work with are diverse and fulfill a range of needs both immediate and long term. These organizations have the staffing and processes already in place to quickly help people with immediate needs. In many cases, they are already serving families who will need help and the money from the Community Response Fund will multiply their efforts.

HOW DO THE NONPROFITS DETERMINE HOW MUCH ASSISTANCE IS GIVEN
The nonprofits work with each family to assess the status of their home, their ability to pay for utilities, their need for transportation, the loss of household goods, their ability to continue to work, and other urgent threats to their safety or basic needs. The amount is based on a household's current needs, not the total dollar value of property that was damaged or lost.