



WHATCOM COUNTY  
**HEALTH AND  
COMMUNITY  
SERVICES**



**UNITED WAY**  
Whatcom County

## 2025 Community Impact Grants Common Application

### PART A: COVER PAGE

*Please fill out this form completely. Note that individual funding agencies have specific grant requirements and will require supplemental materials. Please check the agency website below for details.*

#### To which source are you applying?

- City of Bellingham’s Housing or Human/Social Services NOFA:  
<https://cob.org/services/housing/funding-opportunities-2/partnerships-funding>
- United Way of Whatcom County’s Community Impact Fund:  
<https://www.unitedwaywhatcom.org/help-for-organizations/>
- Whatcom County Health and Community Services:  
<https://www.whatcomcounty.us/Bids.aspx>

#### Agency Contact Information:

Agency Name: Opportunity Council

DBA (if applicable): Click here to enter text.

EIN: 91-0787820 UEID (from SAM.gov): J8DRQDDFBA64

Mailing address: 1111 Cornwall Ave. – Bellingham, WA 98225

Website: oppco.org

General phone: 360-734-5121

State of Washington Business License Number(s): SWV0007244

#### Executive Director (or authorized representative):

Name: Greg Winter

Title (if not ED): Click here to enter text.

Email: greg\_winter@oppco.org

Phone: 360-734-5121

#### Application Contact (If different):

Name: Debbie Paton

Title: Community Services Director

Email: debbie\_paton@oppco.org

Phone: 360-734-5121

#### Program Information:

Program Name: Opportunity Council Services

Program Address: 1111 Cornwall Ave. – Bellingham, WA 98225

Are all program services delivered at this address?  Yes  No



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**Funding Request:** The award amount is dependent on the funding organization. Please see individual funder's supplemental materials for more information about the funds available.

How much funding per year are you requesting for this program?

\$ 60,000

Total Annual Project Budget:

\$ 321,000

Annual Organizational Budget:

\$ 60,738,396



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## PART B: AGENCY INFORMATION

Please limit your responses to no more than two pages for questions 1-5.

1. **Agency Mission.** Please paste or copy your agency's mission statement below.

Opportunity Council helps people improve their lives through education, support, and direct assistance while advocating for just and equitable communities.

2. **Agency Beneficiaries.** Briefly describe the intent of your agency's programs and who primarily benefits from them. Please describe your organization's impact, specifying the number of beneficiaries or clients served per year and their demographics.

Opportunity Council (OC) serves families and individuals with limited incomes in Whatcom County; many of the households benefitting from our programs are experiencing homelessness or other crises and are in need of support to regain stability. Throughout our history, we have provided a wide array of services ranging from meeting immediate basic needs to longer-term programs such as education and employment supports or long-term housing programs. Opportunity Council serves all ages, and last year the agency served over 15,000 individuals. Over 65% of people served who shared demographic information reported living with a disabling condition; 22% reported Hispanic/Latino/Spanish Origins and 78% reported Not Hispanic/Latino/Spanish Origins; and over 300 individuals served reported Veteran status.

3. **Qualifications and expertise.** Briefly summarize your agency's qualifications and expertise (e.g., years of operation, accreditations, experience of staff members, and number of volunteers). Please mention any recent major organizational changes.

Established in 1965, OC serves the community through social services, education, advocacy, and housing development. OC is governed by a volunteer Board of Directors equally representing the private, public, and low-income sectors of the communities we serve. Over 150 community members volunteered with our programs last year.

Since 1987 Maple Alley Inn (MAI) has been serving healthy meals to individuals in need. MAI has continually evolved to hold the nutritional needs of its clients at the center of its delivery model. The MAI Coordinator has been with the program for 15 years and has been instrumental in developing key relationships with food suppliers and social service and health care providers that partner with the program. A team of over 45 dedicated volunteers are essential to the day-to-day operations of both the kitchen and garden where much of the food for the meals is grown, and many of the volunteers have been with the program for over 20 years.

OC has provided financial literacy and job readiness services to low-income households for over 15 years. We understand the interrelated nature of finding steady income and managing expenses as a foundation for resiliency and stability, and as a result work to further integrate these two services. Rounding out our qualifications and experience, the emergency child care voucher program has been in existence for 30 years with the support of United Way funding. This program consists of one Emergency Child Care staff member who has been trained in the intake procedures with a background and degree in early childhood education, early learning care and counseling, and resource navigation techniques.



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4. **Racial Equity and Social Justice.** What steps has your organization taken to address issues of racial equity and social justice within your agency? Which steps are complete, and which are planned or ongoing?

As a Community Action Agency, OC was founded as part of the Civil Rights movement, and we continue to fight for a just and equitable community in all facets of our mission. Our work aims to eradicate the causes and conditions of poverty, and we see every day how barriers of racial inequity, disability access, and other biases have impeded access to economic security for children, families, and communities. Guided by our values of diversity, collaboration, respect, integrity, listening, learning, and a data-driven approach, we adapt to evolving inequities, service barriers, and outcomes. Every three years, we conduct a community needs assessment to identify service gaps, inequities, and barriers keeping people in poverty. Our tripartite board ensures governance includes individuals with lived experience, local government representatives, and private citizens, while the planning committee focuses on recruiting a diverse group of committed community members. Continuing DEI strategies from our 2021 Strategic Plan, we focus on cultural competence, equity, and increasing staff and governance diversity to better reflect the communities we serve. Two employee-led DEI committees address client barriers, service access, and employee experiences. DEI is further integrated through recruiting efforts and program-based committees reviewing equity data and staff cultural competency. The agency continues to respond to lessons learned and inequities revealed during the pandemic and continues to foster partnerships with organizations representing underserved populations that were developed at that time. Our 2025-2027 Strategic Plan includes tools for racial equity in housing, commitments to health equity, and expanding services and partnerships with marginalized communities. Strategic employment efforts build diverse teams through targeted networking, accessible hiring, and professional development.

5. **Agency Funding.** List your organization's most significant funding sources from greatest to least (including the United Way, Whatcom County Health and Community Services and City of Bellingham); dollar amounts are not necessary. Significant funding sources can be defined as sources that make up more than 15% of your program budget. If you have many funding sources, you may list them by category (i.e., federal, state, foundations, individual donors). Please mention any anticipated or recent changes in your future funding or financial position.

Washington State  
Whatcom County  
Puget Sound Energy  
US Department of Health and Human Services  
Child Care Aware of Washington  
US Department of Housing and Urban Development  
City of Bellingham  
US Department of Veterans Affairs



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## PART C: PROGRAM INFORMATION

Please limit your responses to no more than two pages for questions 6-8.

6. **Program Summary.** Briefly summarize the program and its core activities in one or two sentences.

As a key part of the community's safety net, Opportunity Council's program scope is delivered through multiple core activities: Maple Alley Inn prepares and serves hot, nutritious meals to anyone in need, addressing food insecurity in Whatcom County. Employment case management provides employment and job readiness services for individuals receiving federal food assistance (SNAP). The emergency child care voucher program provides families short-term financial assistance for child care.

7. **Program Purpose.** Identify the community need(s) that the program addresses. What are the measurable outcomes that will result from the services provided?

### *Basic Needs*

Combating food insecurity –

MAI has two primary goals with its operations: to minimize food insecurity and to enhance overall health by increasing access to other basic needs through connections to a variety of service providers. As reported by Feeding America, Whatcom County has a 12.5% Food Insecurity Rate, or over 28,000 people who are living without adequate resources for food. Healthy food access is the foundational building block for health and ultimately affects a person's ability to function productively in society.

MAI measures numbers of individuals served and number of meals served. In addition to providing nutritious food, the program offers a space where guests can come together in a dignified setting to share a meal and connect with health and social service providers onsite.

### *Economic Mobility*

Vocational readiness support –

According to the 2024 Whatcom Prosperity Project Report: Respondents were asked to rank the importance and availability of various services. One of those services is living wage jobs. In Whatcom County 45% of respondents listed living wage jobs as an extremely important service (ranked number 6 of 16 services). Respondents were also asked to rank the availability of those same list of services. In Whatcom County 39% of respondents described living wage jobs as not easy at all to access. Living wage jobs and housing were most often indicated as not at all easy to access of all the services. Respondents were also asked to identify their household barriers to getting or keeping a job in the past 12 months. Whatcom County residents indicated many barriers which could be addressed through employment case management, including: not the right job skills, no tools, clothing, equipment, no telephone or internet access, not knowing how to search for a job. Forty-four percent (44%) of Whatcom County respondents indicated that an emergency cost of \$500 would be a crisis. The primary outcome measures are exits to employment and employment retention at 90 days. Outputs such as job search coaching and employment supports are also measured.



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### *Breaking the Cycle of Poverty*

Affordable childcare/ Parenting support –

The emergency child care voucher program provides families with children ages 0-13, who are experiencing financial distress, a sudden medical emergency or living in a homeless or transitional situation, short-term financial assistance for child care. Payment is made directly to licensed early childhood caregivers/educators, while families attend to medical, legal, and other important appointments, seeking housing/employment, or are working. In particular, this program provides: (1) family access to, or the ability to remain in, a safe, high-quality, licensed early care and education programs and

(2) access to individualized, comprehensive services with our Emergency Child Care Voucher Staff including, but not limited to

(a) identifying and selecting a child care provider who meets the families' needs, our educational standards, and understands their situation;

(b) assisting with determining eligibility for longer-term, states subsidized child care through Working Connections, or support while on the subsidy waitlist;

(c) assessing, screening, and referring to other Opportunity Council programs which support families in crisis and homeless/emergency situations.

8. **Program Status.** How long has this program been in operation in Whatcom County? Since your last application, have you made any changes in how you offer services? If this is a new program, how far along is your agency in the planning process? What resources has your organization already invested?

Opportunity Council is celebrating 60 years of community service in 2025. MAI has been in existence since 1987 and has continued as an important resource to those experiencing food insecurity. We also welcome social service and health providers to the meals, where they offer onsite information, referrals, health services, and application assistance during dining hours. The program continues to be supported by its many dedicated, long-time volunteers and equally attracts new volunteers that find a fulfilling opportunity to serve their community at Maple Alley Inn. Our employment case management program has been in operation in Whatcom County for over 15 years. Since our last application the program has expanded partnerships to further enhance services for job seekers: in partnership with Whatcom County Health & Community Services, OC is the provider for the Access ID program which helps people gain their WA State ID card, improving their ability to secure employment and housing; and in partnership with Northwest Workforce Council, OC is piloting a new Job Club program that offers facilitation by our trained staff and support through peer connections made in the job club cohorts. The Emergency Child Care Voucher program has been in existence for over 30 years with the support of the United Way. This program is known and relied upon by families and child care providers to help stabilize families and children in a time of crisis and emergency. A recent change to the program was adding child care vouchers to families in a job training program to ensure employment and financial stability for the family. This program is also receiving funding from the Healthy Children's Fund to be able to support more families.



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### UNITED WAY FOCUS AREAS

1. To support financial stability in Whatcom County, we have identified three funding priorities below, basic needs, economic mobility, and breaking the cycle of poverty. Choose **one** category below that best aligns with your agency/program:

#### Basic Needs

- Food security
- Stable, attainable, affordable housing
- Health and mental health care access

#### Economic Mobility

- Financial literacy and training
- Vocational readiness training and support
- Adult education programs

#### Breaking the Cycle of Poverty

- Affordable child care and early learning programs
- Academic programs to increase student attendance and achievement
- Parenting support
- Addiction treatment and recovery
- Abuse prevention

2. Please describe how your program/agency services align with the category you selected above.

Opportunity Council's (OC) program scope directly aligns with United Way's Focus Areas of Basic Needs (Food Security) and Economic Mobility (Vocational readiness and support).

OC's hot meal service, Maple Alley Inn, helps to meet basic food security needs of income limited households in our community. We know that not all people have the same access to safe and healthy food, and high food and living costs have exacerbated this for many. Food insecurity is defined by the USDA as the limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or the limited ability to acquire foods in a socially acceptable way. Maple Alley Inn exists to alleviate food insecurity in our community by providing a reliable source of nutritionally dense foods in a dignified setting. While MAI does not provide all the meals one might need over the course of a week, it does provide several healthy meals each week that people can count on to supplement their food costs and ensure access to highly nutritious food. Community members who come to MAI receive meals to eat in the dining area and are also able to take an additional meal with them. These additional meals are often brought to



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family members who could not be at our distribution location or eaten by the guest at a later time. Additionally, MAI maintains a table of surplus bread, fruits, vegetables, and other items that guests are welcome to take to further stretch their food budgets. MAI also maintains information to help connect clients to other food resources and enrollment access to the Basic Food (SNAP) Program.

Opportunity Council's services further align with United Way's focus areas through our employment case management programming. Our employment case management program provides individualized support for jobseekers and specializes in serving clients with multiple barriers to employment and helping to reduce these barriers one by one. Participants may come with spotty employment history, substance use and mental health challenges, and/or lack of the basic things needed to gain and maintain employment such as shoes and clothing, valid ID, or transportation. These rich employment services weave direct job readiness support with financial literacy and training. The primary goal of our employment program is to prepare clients for employment and to assist in obtaining living wage jobs. These activities are situated squarely within the framework of Economic Mobility by increasing income through employment.

3. Please provide two or three key outcomes you measure that indicate progress toward your mission. List the number of clients being served, what you track, and the most recent results.

Annually Maple Alley collects data on two primary measures which include number of unique individuals served and number of meals served. In our current program year, 444 guests and 10,923 meals have been served. We anticipate the following outcomes: 500 unique individuals to be served and 10,000 meals provided. MAI sees a large proportion of clients returning each week to share meals with fellow guests and to stretch their food budgets.

The primary outcome metric we capture in employment case management is exits to employment. Based on national data related to the population served in our program, we expect around 30% of clients enrolled in our program to exit with employment. Our actual outcome during the current reporting period is 33% (24 out of 72 enrolled clients).

We also measure key metrics around engagement. 44% of BFET participants progressed to the employment-ready, job search portion of the program. 56% of clients received an employment support, which can include (but is not limited to) transportation assistance, interview and work clothes, and hygiene vouchers.

In 2025 we expect to enroll 60 participants over the course of the program year and have set a goal that 35% will secure employment.



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4. How does United Way's investment help meet the funding needs of the organization or program? Please give specific examples of how United Way funds are/will be utilized.

United Way funds are utilized to support the coordination of meals and services at Maple Alley Inn. Funds are fully directed to staffing the MAI coordinator position. The MAI Coordinator plans meals, shops for ingredients, and leads the cooking and serving of meals each week with help from a part-time assistant and over 50 volunteers who support the program. The coordinator is the main driving force behind the success of this program. United Way remains a critical piece of the overall funding for the Maple Alley Inn program.

United Way funds are leveraged to bring other funding sources for vocational readiness programming to the community through OC's employment services, expanding the reach of this important local support. United Way funds are utilized to support employment case management direct service providers, and the funds serve as match to other funding sources that round out the program's overall budget. For every local match dollar, a dollar comes to the community from other sources, thus doubling the local investment. United Way is one of our primary match partners which allows us to provide job readiness programming and support Economic Mobility through employment.

5. Briefly describe how your agency/program will utilize community partnerships or coordinate with other agencies (UW partner agencies, other community non-profits, government agencies, local companies, schools, etc.) to advance your work/mission.

Maple Alley has a long history of partnering in the community to enhance its service delivery. Beginning with the location where the meals are delivered, MAI currently cooks and serves out of Faith Lutheran Church. MAI partners with local businesses to stretch the program's limited budget such as Joe's Garden for produce and bread from Avenue Bread. Haggen shares flowers with the program, creating a beautiful dining area for guests. At times we also collaborate with the Bellingham Food Bank to prepare portions of food for our meals that are too small for food bank distribution.

Partnering is essential to expanding MAI's impact beyond meals. A host of community partners including Unity Care NW for healthcare navigation, Compass Health for behavioral health outreach, Ideal Option for substance use information, Basic Food Outreach, Veterans' services outreach, the Homeless Outreach Team, and Whatcom County Health & Community Services (onsite vaccine administration) provides an easily accessible entry point to services for many vulnerable diners. We are also able to assist guests with transportation by providing bus passes through our partnership with the Whatcom Transit Authority.

Our employment case management program works closely with Opportunity Council programs, including housing, Coordinated Entry, and the Community Resource Center, to identify referrals and for collaborative case staffing and goal alignment. Community partnerships include WorkSource, Evergreen



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Goodwill, Bellingham Technical College, Northwest Indian College, and Whatcom Community College to ensure we are collaborating and not duplicating services, as we serve different population groups across this network of providers. Additionally, we partner with a diverse section of local institutions, businesses and organizations in support of helping our clients reduce barriers and achieve employment. A sample of these partnerships includes Western Washington University, Compass Health, Lake Whatcom Center, Hempler Foods Group, Computers for People in Need, Whatcom County Health and Community Services, and Cascade Connections.

6. United Way focuses on ALICE households in Whatcom County. ALICE refers to households that earn more than the Federal Poverty Level but not enough to afford the basic cost of living in our community.
  - a. What percentage of your program recipients are below the ALICE threshold based on the survival budget for Whatcom County? 77% of guests accessing hot meals report incomes below the ALICE threshold; All of our employment program participants are below this threshold when they enter our program as they are receiving Federal SNAP benefits which is lower. Our program goal is to move them first into the ALICE threshold and then through other interventions, including financial literacy, individualized case management support and career planning, and then begin to move them towards financial stability and wealth building.
  - b. What percentage of your program recipients are ALICE (above FPL but below the ALICE threshold)? Maple Alley Inn's most recent reporting shows 77% of clients are below 30% AMI (approximately 125% FPL) 12% of clients are between 31-50% AMI (Approximately 235% FPL) and 11% of clients are between 51-80% AMI (Approximately 375% FPL). Around 54% of our employed clients are ALICE.
  - c. Do you collect client data by zip code? Not currently.

Visit the [United for ALICE](#) website for the most recent (2024 report) Whatcom County data to determine the survival budget guidelines for ALICE households.

7. Please share an example of a client who was helped by your services.  
*\*Note: if you receive a 2025 Community Impact Grant, this story may be shared on your behalf by United Way for the purpose of our community fundraising. Names and details may be altered for privacy.*

**John** came in to Maple Alley Inn after having lost his wallet and ID. He was discouraged and unused to being unhoused and sleeping on the street. It was on a very cold day that a neighboring church had brought in hand-knitted hats and scarves for guests at our program. He was happy to choose a thick and colorful scarf and sat down to enjoy his meal. Staff went to talk to him about what resources he might need – and referred him to where he could get help with replacing his ID through Opportunity Council's employment services. We also told him where the cold weather shelter was and where he could get



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additional clothing. He said he was overwhelmed that people would care about feeding someone in his situation and make such a beautiful meal for all these people who needed to eat.

He is waiting for his ID after having connected with the employment team and continues to come in for meals. He said it feels good that people know his name and ask how it's going and talk to him about his plans. He said it's nice to feel like people are rooting for him.

**A mother and two adult sons** came in for lunch after recently losing their housing. They had been living in their car while they worked on a plan and were happy to find a hot and healthy meal and a warm place to be while they ate it. They had been eating mostly fast food and were so happy to see our salad and vegetables. They also take a second meal to go, so that they have dinner for the night.

They love the atmosphere of community at Maple Alley Inn and said it makes them feel less isolated in their situation and have connected with other guests and outreach people to get help with clothing and dog food.

**An employment program participant** with carwash experience was able to write about his transferable skills in a cover letter to earn a job in a new field as a line cook.

**An employment program participant** learned how to advocate for themselves at their workplace, ultimately earning them more hours and training opportunities.