

United Way FY26 Application Guide

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Each of the primary questions on the application is included below. For each one, we’ve provided “*Advice to Consider*” and a written sample called “*Kitten Mittens*”.

Advice to Consider can be used to begin brainstorming the types of things you can talk about; you do NOT need to talk about all or even most of them. Simply use it as guidance when considering the best way to explain your program(s).

Kitten Mittens is to give a general idea of what the length and structure of a good application CAN look like. **It is only ONE example and should not be used as a template nor considered the only right way.**

Program Description and Alignment

Provide a description of how your program operates and explain how that aligns with the strategy selected above. (3500 characters)

Advice to Consider:

- **You should cover two things in this question:**
 1. **An overview of your program, explaining what it does**
 2. **A specific explanation of how it aligns with the United Way strategy—or strategies—under which you are funded**
 - **Be explicit and clear in how the work you do supports our goals**
- It may be helpful, but is not required, to discuss the following in your program overview:
 - Program model or structure
 - Program duration
 - Best practices implemented/rationale behind implementation
 - Relevant accreditations

Kitten Mittens Sample:

Kitten Mittens' primary program, Mittens 4 Kittens (M4K), uses a multistep approach to support and uplift the under resourced kitten community. We initially began by providing mittens to kittens that arrived at our Kitten Service Center Monday through Friday but have developed a more sophisticated, 3-step case manager model—described below—that addresses the full spectrum of kitten needs in KittyLand.

- **Step 1 – Intake:** Before providing direct resources to a kitten, we conduct an intake process. The intake includes a complete assessment of the kitten's fur, paw size, and previous wardrobe needs using a research-based assessment framework. Once the kitten has completed the intake process with their assigned case manager, they begin the remedy process.
- **Step 2 – Remedy:** The remedy process begins by providing the kitten a week's worth of mittens. The case manager then provides any other immediate kitten-specific needs, including kitty litter, wet and dry cat food, and catnip. Finally, to promote wholistic well-being, the case manager ensures the kitten has a home with a cat tower, windowsills with significant natural light, and lots of yarn to keep them entertained.
- **Step 3 – Follow Up:** The case manager conducts a follow up with the kitten every 4-8 weeks for 6 months. The follow up includes an informal connection (which mostly consists of pets and cuddles) as well as a formal evaluation of the kitten's needs and resources. The formal evaluation helps determine the kitten's successes & challenges and assess if they need any additional resources which could include additional mittens, cat food, kitty litter, catnip or further connections to companions.

M4K aligns with The Purrfect Way of Central KittyLand's (TPWCK) Kitten Health strategy 2 to, *"Create opportunities for Kittens to have physical needs and emotional supports required to thrive. This includes: shelter, clothing, food, and companionship"* by providing the full spectrum of kitten needs – quality shelter, kitten food, and kitten mittens – so that kittens can be successful in KittyLand. According to the Urban Kitty Institute, 46% of kittens in KittyLand are unable to access mittens while 30% do not have a shelter with adequate sunlight. Research shows that when kittens have sufficient mittens, they are 3

times more likely to play with yarn at developmental level, and they even purr more. Furthermore, kittens with access to adequate sunlight and companionship tend to live longer and cuddle more. By directly providing these key resources to kittens that otherwise wouldn't have them, M4K is ensuring all kittens in KittyLand are able to thrive.

Populations and People Served

Describe the participants served by your program and explain why your program serves them specifically. (2500 characters)

Advice to Consider:

- In this section we are looking for two primary things:
 1. A comprehensive explanation of who is being served
 2. An explanation of why those specific people need your services
- Specific demographic information
 - demographic characteristics could include, but are not limited to: **age, criminal history, education level, race, ethnicity, gender, gender-identity, sexual orientation, refugee status**, immigration status, **veteran status, household income**, disabilities, religion
 - In bold are the demographic characteristics that we specifically ask you to track and report
- United Way is focused on investing in programs that provide resources and opportunities based on the specific needs and aspirations of people facing inequities
- It would be helpful to provide a description of challenges faced by participants, as well as strengths that may be utilized to support participants' goals

Kitten Mittens Sample:

Kitten Mittens serves kittens within the greater Kittyland area (Cat, Gato, and Purr counties). While Kitten Mittens does not discriminate against any kittens and will serve cats of all ages, we primarily focus on kittens ages 0-6 months. Kittens 0-6 months face significant barriers to staying warm and healthy, specifically: limited fur, inability to create their own shelter, and larger family sizes.

Additionally, within this age bracket, we give priority to the following groups:

- 95 percent of kittens served were identified as **under resourced**
 1. These kittens were born into homes and kitten families that were not able to provide the kitten with at least 7 pairs of mittens, 3 daily meals, or a shelter with a cat tower and adequate sunlight.
- 48 percent of kittens served were identified as **displaced**
 1. Many kittens in KittyLand are born into large litters. Generally, in litters larger than 3, it is hard for all kittens to be provided with enough mittens. When a kitten doesn't get enough mittens, they will often be forced to leave their litter to find a companion that will provide them with sufficient mittens.
- 42 percent of kittens served were identified as **unsheltered**
 1. Many of the kittens that are displaced from their families are not able to find shelter immediately and must utilize resources like Kitten Mittens to find shelter.
- 37 percent of kittens served were identified as **Sphinx cats**
 1. Sphinx cats are naturally born with a barrier to staying warm—they do not have fur. This results in many Sphinx kittens needing additional mittens, regardless of how resourced the litter they are born into is.

Use of Funds

Expanding on the budget you've provided, describe specifically how the "Amount Requested" from United Way will be used in the program. Please also explain how our funding supports your program/agency and, if relevant, why you're asking for an increase in funding. (2500 character)

Advice to Consider:

- From this section, we are looking to understand:
 - How United Way's funding would be used
 - How United Way's funding creates impact within your agency and program
 - Why your program needs funding from us to operate
 - If you're asking for a different amount of funding than what you currently receive, explain why
- The description should be detailed; we want to know exactly how our funds support your program.
- Examples of possible uses include, but are not limited to:
 - staff salaries
 - program materials
 - trainings
 - marketing materials
 - occupancy
- United Way funds are not to be used for general infrastructure projects

Kitten Mittens Sample:

We are requesting **32,000** Smitten Kitten Pesos from TPWCK for the M4K program – an increase of 2000 Pesos (6.7%) from our previous year's application. This represents **31%** of our total program budget. The requested amount would be utilized in the following way:

- Salaries & Benefits: **24,000 Pesos**
 - Case Managers are the most important part of the M4K program. The full cost to employ a case manager is about 8,000 Pesos annually. We would use TPWCK funds to support three case managers.
- Home Renovations: **5,000 Pesos**
 - Often, a good home is found for a kitten, but they do not have all the accommodations needed for the success of our participants. We subsidize the costs of installing cat towers and new windows when needed.
- Operations and Occupancy: **2,000 Pesos**
 - 2,000 pesos will be allocated to our warehouse and operations facility where we hold all our supplies and conduct the initial intake process with our kittens.
- Travel, fuel, mileage: **1,000 Pesos**
 - For kittens that need new homes, follow ups are conducted at their new homes. We reimburse our case managers for all their travel expenses, averaging about 1,000 pesos annually.

TPWCK's funds are central to the success of the M4K program. Several of our primary funders restrict our use of their funds to program supplies and home renovation materials. Therefore, a large majority (about 80%) of our funding for program staff (case managers) comes from the TPWCK funding. We are no longer planning to use TPWCK funding for general program supplies, because over the past year we've developed strong partnerships with local businesses that provide 95% of our program's kitten supplies as in-kind donations. However, we have seen about a 10% increase in cases over the past year and need to hire an additional caseworker to help manage the need. With an increased caseload, we also have to do additional home renovations to house the kittens. These two reasons are why we are asking for a 2000 Peso increase this year.

Performance Measures and Impact

How do you know your clients are better off? If the data doesn't show that clients are better off, explain why and what you are doing about it. (3000 characters)

Advice to Consider:

- **What we're looking for is:**
 - **To better understand how you think about program impact and how your data informs your decisions. We want to know that you are being systematic and thoughtful about the design of your program.**
- Is the program performing as anticipated?
- What positively impacted performance?
- What negatively impacted performance?
- How does this story inform your understanding of your performance?
- How can it inform your efforts?

Kitten Mittens Sample:

Our performance measures are:

- Number of kittens served: 135
- Number of kittens assessed: 130
- Number of kittens who have a trusted caregiver: 114
- Number of basic needs referrals: 247
- Number of kittens who are playing at the appropriate developmental level: 109
- Target Measure: Percent of kittens who are playing at appropriate developmental level: 84%

Kitten Mittens uses the Development Assessment for Animal Welfare and Growth (DAAWG) screening tool. The DAAWG screening tool produces a score for individual kittens that directly links to the potential for developmental success and indicates where a kitten is on the path toward stability. The tool is made up of 25 items measuring health, growth, behavior, and is recognized by the National Institute of Kitten Health as the best practice in animal welfare assessments.

- Kitten Mitten continues to increase the number of kittens served year over year. This year, an additional 20 kittens received services.
- While the number of kittens increased, so did the needs and developmental challenges and barriers of those kittens. This is reflected in the data, which shows 84% of kittens playing at the appropriate developmental level. This is a 7% decrease from the previous year. Specifically, several new kittens came from highly traumatic backgrounds and exhibited severe PTSD.
- Furthermore, recruiting volunteer caregivers has been significantly more challenging since the end of the pandemic, so several kittens had longer wait times to be placed with a trusted caregiver. This results in less kitten growth and development than what could be possible if all kittens had a trusted caregiver.
- To address these challenges, we have hired an additional social worker for kittens that specializes in PTSD treatment and support and are in the process of redeveloping our volunteer recruitment strategy.

Participant Voice & Program Improvement

How does your program learn from clients and/or your target population to obtain actionable information and improve service delivery and outcomes? (2500 characters)

Advice to Consider:

- **We are hoping to see that you have a system for gathering feedback from participants and are using that feedback to make decisions and improve programming.**
- Types of participant voice can include, but are not limited to:
 - Surveys, Listening Circles, Advisory Boards, and Programmatic Interactions
- Consider including one specific story/example of a time feedback was directly implemented into programming
- On the application, there is a link to the Participant Voice Handout that we developed. This can help you think about how you receive participant voice and how to frame it on the application.

Kitten Mittens Sample:

Kitten Mittens conducts several cat-centered methodologies to receive actionable participant feedback. These include:

- Surveys
 - Upon completion of Step 2, a survey is conducted in-person with all kittens. The survey contains questions on a scale of zero to 10 purrs that cover overall satisfaction, satisfaction with case manager, and impact on quality of life. The more the kitten purrs when the question is being asked, the more positive the feedback.
 - Every 6 months, survey results are compiled and analyzed during an internal strategic planning meeting. From these results, strengths and areas for growth are identified and programming is altered as needed.
- Product testing sessions:
 - Once a month, Kitten Mittens obtains new products. These include new mittens with different patterns and thread types and counts, new cat towers, and new kitten food/catnip. For each type of product (mittens, towers, food), we place one sample of each new product in a room with 10 test kittens (all of whom are participants that have opted into the session and will be given additional mittens of their choosing for participating). We then track which products get more attention from the kittens and begin purchasing more of that product to utilize in our programming.
- Programmatic interactions:
 - Throughout the intake and remedy processes, our case managers note which products invoke the most purrs out of the kittens. During our biannual strategy sessions, case managers discuss the products that are most popular and we purchase more of those products.

Changes made as a result of kitten feedback have included the following:

- Several kittens indicated the intake process took too long and was too burdensome, so we worked with our case managers to reduce inefficiencies and streamline the process. What had taken about two days is now covered in one half-day session, resulting in kittens moving through the process faster and finding the resources and supports they need even sooner.

- Inclusion of additional mitten sizes: extra-small and extra-large paw sizes
- Improved thread count: changed yarn so it holds up better in washes, is softer, and has added stretch
- Began purchasing more tuna and less dry food

Equity Commitment

How does your organization create an inclusive environment and a sense of belonging for program participants, staff, and volunteers? (3000 characters)

Advice to Consider

- We want to see that you're actively taking steps to create a welcoming space and catering your services and organizational operations to the needs and experiences of the people you serve.
- Does your organization have an equity statement or commitment that can help guide your answer?
- Are there policies and practices in place to incorporate an equity lens into your organization's work?
- What policies/practices do you use to work towards having your board and committees represent the populations you serve?
- What types of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) training, resourcing or learning opportunities do you provide your staff?

Kitten Mittens Sample

At Kitten Mittens, we are committed to creating an environment where every person and every kitten that engages with our organization feels supported, empowered, and connected to our mission.

Representation

According to our bylaws, two of our Board of Directors positions must be filled by foster parents of current or former Kitten Mittens participants. Our current foster parent representatives have been long-term volunteers and they play a key role in ensuring we understand the perspectives of kittens from all backgrounds.

We have a kitty-focused Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee led by staff that is working to conduct a review of our policies and practices and will make recommendations to the leadership team on potential changes that Kitten Mittens can implement. From our last review of our policies and practices, we adopted the practice of intentionally recruiting staff from the neighborhoods that face the most significant barriers to providing mittens and shelter to kittens. Over the past year, two of four open positions were filled with people who have a background in those communities.

Participant Inclusion

Our physical environment has been designed to be accessible and welcoming to kittens of all physical abilities, including automated kitty doors in all entrances and exits, accessible kitty-facilities in all bathrooms, and cat beds of various sizes and varieties in the waiting room.

All staff receive required annual training on best practices of feline inclusion and belonging, provided by the Center for Feline and Canine Excellence. Staff also have an annual cat-centered DEI goal with the purpose of learning more about equity issues within the kitten community and how to create inclusive kitten programming. Additionally, staff have access to supplemental professional development through the Center for Feline and Canine Excellence's self-guided trainings and monthly webinars. Finally, staff are provided monthly readings and resources from the local library and free online sources to learn more about issues facing the kitten community.

Staff and Volunteer empowerment

Additionally, we conduct annual anonymous surveys with both our staff and volunteers that address the following:

- The degree to which they feel they belong within the organization
- If they feel the organization celebrates diverse people and ideas
- Recommendations for policy/practice changes that would empower them in their work
- Any general feedback for improving DEI efforts within the organization