

United Way FY27 Application Guide

Systems Change

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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 correct approach.**

System Description

Describe the system you are trying to change. (4000 characters)

Advice to Consider:

This is your opportunity to set the scene for why your program is important. In order to properly understand the value of your program, our volunteer reviewers need to have a holistic understanding of how the system works and the challenges/problems it creates. Some information that may be helpful to include in your description is:

1. How the system currently functions*
2. Who the system impacts—especially populations disproportionately affected
3. The challenges or barriers in the system that result in inequitable outcomes
4. Ways the system could be improved or made more effective

***How the system currently functions** refers to a brief explanation of how things work today in the space your program operates. It helps reviewers understand the *current landscape* before they evaluate your proposed solution.

This might include:

- The key players (organizations, agencies, partners, service providers)
- The standard process or pathway people must navigate
- How services or resources are typically delivered
- Current policies, funding structures, or workflows
- How people enter, move through, or interact with the system
- Where decision-making or coordination happens

Kitten Mittens Sample:

*The system we are trying to change is the **Kitten Infrastructure and Warmth Access System (KIWAS)**—the interconnected web of policies, practices, and cultural norms that determine which kittens in KittyLand have access to safe, warm environments and which are left with cold, unprotected paws.*

Currently, KIWAS operates through a decentralized network of local Cat Councils, Paw Protection Districts, and private Cat Condos, each responsible for setting warmth and comfort standards for kittens. However, there is no coordinated policy that ensures equitable access to quality homes that allow kittens to be safe and warm. This results in significant disparities between neighborhoods—some kittens enjoy radiant-heated floors and window sunshine quotas, while others are left to shiver in drafty alleyways.

Who the system impacts:

KIWAS disproportionately impacts kittens from under-resourced litters, stray kittens, and furless breeds such as Sphynxes. These kittens face the highest barriers to paw warmth. Additionally, community

caregivers—often volunteers with limited resources—shoulder the burden of trying to fill systemic gaps without adequate support or funding.

Current challenges and negative outcomes:

- **Fragmented governance:** Each Paw Protection District enforces warmth standards differently (or not at all).
- **Lack of accountability:** No mechanisms exist to measure paw-temperature equity or report outcomes publicly.
- **Cultural bias:** Long-haired cats dominate policymaking boards and often overlook the needs of furless or street-born kittens.
- **Reactive interventions:** Warmth issues are treated symptomatically (through mitten distribution) rather than structurally (through better insulation, heat access, or community resources).

How the system could be improved:

KIWAS could be improved through coordinated policy reform, cross-sector collaboration, and community-led oversight. Specifically, we envision:

- Standardized Paw Warmth Equity Policies (PWEPS) across all districts
- A centralized Paw Warmth Data Dashboard for transparency and accountability
- Incentives for feline architects and developers to include warmth-friendly design in shelters and homes
- A governance model that centers kittens and caregivers most affected by the cold

Program Description and Alignment

Explain how your initiative aims to shift or improve the system described above and how this aligns with the strategy you selected. (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:

Our initiative, *The Pawsitive Change Initiative (PCI)*, works to reform the KIWAS system by addressing its root causes rather than its symptoms. We convene key feline stakeholders—local councils, caregiver

networks, shelter developers, and kitten advocates—to collaboratively design and implement policy and practice changes that ensure every kitten in KittyLand has access to paw warmth as a basic right.

*PCI uses a **three-pronged systems change model**:*

1. Policy Reform & Advocacy:

*We partner with Cat Councils to develop and pass the **Home Warmth Equity Act (HWEA)**, which would require every Paw Protection District to meet standardized home temperature standards.*

2. Data and Accountability:

*PCI established the first-ever **Kitten Home Warmth Equity Index (KHWEI)**, a publicly available dashboard that maps warmth inequities across KittyLand by neighborhood. This data can be used to help establish new policies that require access to warm housing in all neighborhoods.*

3. Cultural Change & Leadership:

Through our “CoMITTed to Warmth” campaign, we challenge narratives that frame cold paws as an individual kitten’s problem. We train kittens’ caregivers to lead public forums, testify before the Cat Councils, and design community warmth plans.

PCI 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 eradicating the barriers that many kittens face in accessing quality shelter, kitten food, and kitten mittens – so that kittens can be successful in KittyLand.

Many kittens are born into homes that are not adequately designed for their warmth and safety. By working with local leaders to establish baseline home warmth standards, we are addressing the root causes that lead to kittens not having the physical needs required to thrive.

Population Impacted

Describe who is impacted by your initiative and why these populations are your focus. (2500 characters)

Advice to Consider:

- In this section we are looking for two primary things:
 1. A comprehensive explanation of the populations your initiative supports
 2. An explanation of why those specific populations will benefit from systems change
- 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
- United Way is focused on investing in programs that address the challenges experienced by people facing inequities

Kitten Mittens Sample:

Our work directly impacts kittens with the least access to warmth, including:

- ***Under-resourced kittens*** in low-income litters and unsheltered colonies
- ***Sphynx kittens***, who lack fur and face systemic exclusion from warmth policymaking
- ***Stray and foster kittens***, who experience instability and are often left out of warmth data collection systems

We intentionally focus on these groups because they are most disproportionately affected by warmth inequities. According to the Kitten Research Institute (KRI), 75% of kittens from low-income litters and 85% of foster kittens live in communities that do not have Home Warmth Equity Acts. It is the kittens living in those communities that most need the policy changes for which we advocate.

Use of Funds

Expanding on the budget you've provided, describe specifically how the "Amount Requested" from United Way will be used for the program and how your program benefits from United Way funding. (2500 characters)

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.
- Please note, you will need to include a line item “use of funds” on the second tab of your Excel budget which should align with the information included below.

Kitten Mittens Sample:

*We are requesting **42,000 Smitten Kitten Pesos** from TPWCK to support the second phase of the Pawsitive Change Initiative. The requested funds will be allocated as follows:*

- **Policy & Systems Coordination (18,000 Pesos):** Supports one full-time System Change Coordinator who manages the Paw Warmth Equity Act working group, facilitates coalition meetings, and coordinates advocacy with the Council of Cats.
- **Community Leadership Stipends (10,000 Pesos):** Provides stipends for 20 community “Meow-nitors” (lived-experience leaders) who collect warmth data, facilitate listening circles, and co-design policy recommendations.
- **Data and Evaluation (7,000 Pesos):** Supports the development and maintenance of the Paw Warmth Equity Index dashboard and related analysis.
- **Communications & Campaign (5,000 Pesos):** Covers printing and digital materials for the “Warmth is a Right” campaign, including posters, social media graphics, and the public Paw Warmth Equity Report.
- **Operations (2,000 Pesos):** Covers minimal administrative overhead including purr-lic relations and the Zoom “Meow Rooms” platform.

TPWCK’s flexible systems-change funding enables us to do what traditional project-based grants rarely support: policy advocacy, community organizing, and data infrastructure—all critical components of long-term structural change.

Scorecard Performance Measure Data

Explain how you assess progress toward your systems change goal. Describe the progress you have made to date. (3000 characters)

Advice to Consider:

- **What we're looking for is:**
 - **To better understand how you think about impact and how your data informs your decisions. We want to know that you are being systematic and thoughtful about the design of your initiative.**
- Some questions to consider include:
 - 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:

Each quarter we do a full review and analysis of our systems change outputs and outcomes and at the end of each fiscal year we do a finalized review of the resulting impact. This allows us to regularly check in on efforts made and then connect those efforts to longer-term successes. During the quarterly analysis, the outputs we review are:

- *Number of meetings held with Cat Council members*
- *Number of Cat Council meetings spoken at*
- *Number of info sessions and trainings provided on the KHWEI*
- *Number of site visits on the KHWEI dashboard*
- *Number of public forums held*

Meanwhile, the outcomes we review each quarter are:

- *Number of HWEAs introduced*
- *Number of HWEAs passed*
- *Number of times the KHWEI is referenced in policy proposals*
- *Number of community warmth plans drafted*

After reviewing these outputs and outcomes each quarter, we compile them at the end of each fiscal year to develop a full understanding of the work completed throughout the year. We then analyze community level data, including the percent of kittens in warm housing, and the percent of kittens with adequate supplemental supports. We do our best to analyze the correlation between our outcomes and the larger community-wide impact.

Progress to date:

- *The Home Warmth Equity Act (HWEA) has been introduced in three and formally passed in one of five Paw Protection Districts. We are confident that at least one more district will pass the HWEA in the coming months.*
- *Several local Cat Councils are now regularly using data from our Kitten Home Warmth Equity Index (KHWEI) to influence their decision making. We have heard from several council members that they were not fully aware of the disparities that exist in their districts, and we are using this as a springboard to continue advancing conversations around the importance of passing HWEAs.*
- *Initial data from the one Paw Protection District that passed a HWEA shows that kittens experiencing inadequate home warmth has gone down 5%. We expect this trend to continue as more kitten housing facilities begin to comply with the new home warmth standards.*

Equity Commitment

How does your systems change approach intentionally center equity and how are impacted communities meaningfully involved in shaping and leading this work? (3000 characters)

Advice to Consider

- **We want to see that you're being thoughtful, including an equity lens in your program, and ensuring those impacted by the systems are included in organizational decision making as much as possible.**
- 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 equity training, resourcing or learning opportunities do you provide your staff?

Kitten Mittens Sample:

Equity is not a byproduct of our work—it is the method and the goal.

Our systems change model centers the voices of those closest to the work and most knowledgeable of the challenges faced by under-resourced kittens. Specifically:

- **Leadership by Impacted Kittens:** Over half of our Board of Directors are caregivers of affected litters.
- **Community Co-Design:** All policy proposals (including the PWEA) are co-written in Warmth Circles, facilitated by community members rather than external consultants.
- **Resource Redistribution:** 25% of all funding goes directly to stipends and supports for impacted kittens participating in leadership roles.

- **Accountability & Transparency:** We hold quarterly “Paws & Policy” listening sessions where community members review data, provide feedback, and approve next-step priorities.

Through these structures, impacted kittens are not simply consulted—they are the primary agents driving the systemic transformation from cold paws to warm futures.