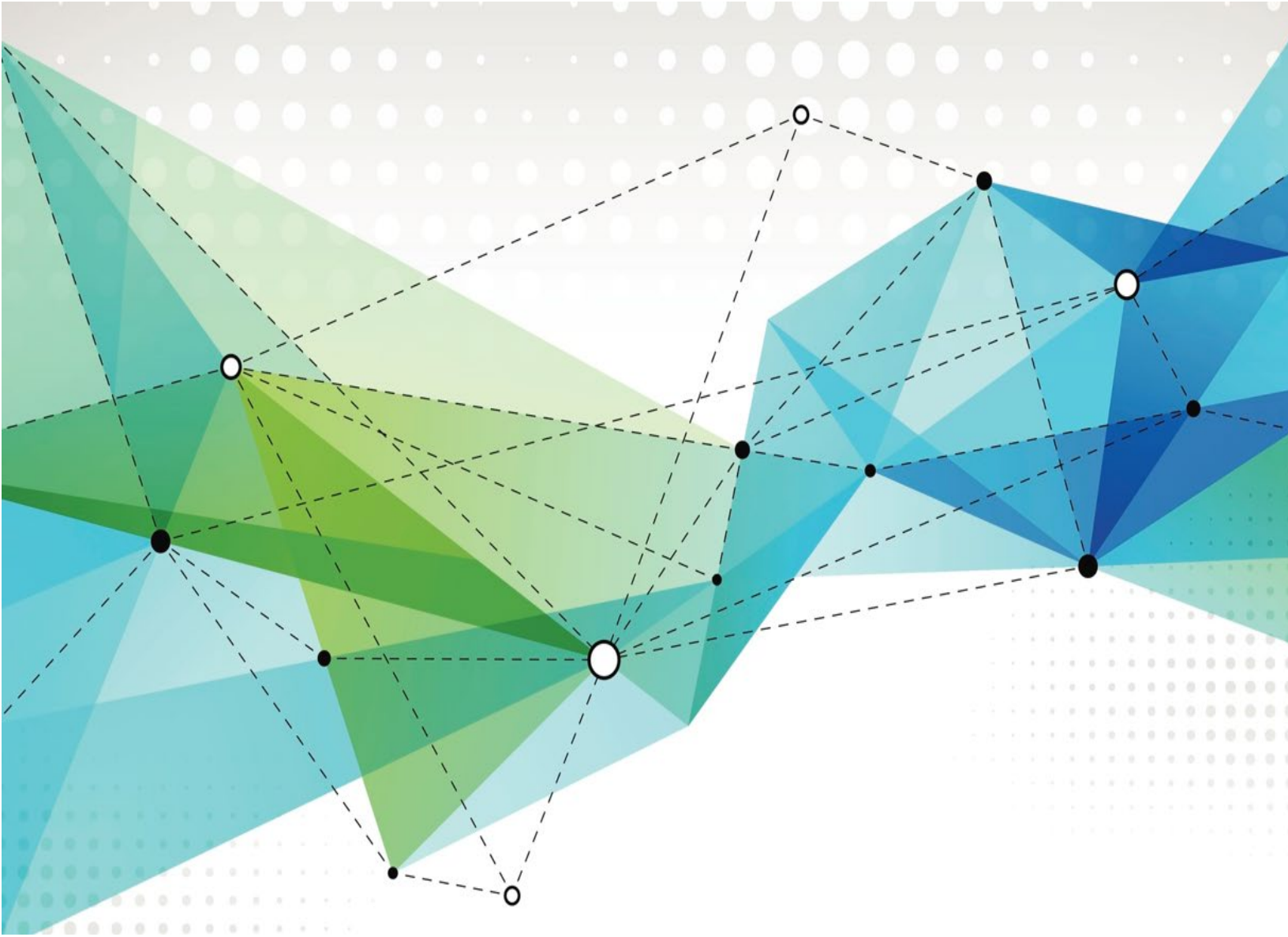




Convergent Headwinds



A collaborative initiative of Foundation for the Carolinas,
United Way of Greater Charlotte, The Lee Institute and SHARE Charlotte

Nonprofit Response Messaging Toolkit

August 12, 2026

Situation

About convergent headwinds

A set of federal and state changes to food assistance, health coverage, and housing is arriving at the same time, on the same households, across Charlotte-Mecklenburg.

Studied one program at a time, each change looks manageable; together they compound, and they land on the organizations that serve those households at the same moment those organizations face their own funding pressure.

- The NC state budget signed in July funds Medicaid but shifts most new food-assistance administrative costs to counties
- Federal funding for housing and homelessness is contested through this fall in Congress and the courts.
- The heaviest provisions phase in between late 2026 and 2028.
- The timing is the point: the window to prepare is real, and it is narrowing.

Two undercurrents run beneath the policy picture and belong in your planning even though no vote reverses them:

- **A strained household economy** (sticky inflation, a 4 percent savings rate, record credit-card debt, recession-level consumer sentiment) that raises demand while thinning donors' capacity to give.
- **Eroding social capital**, with household giving participation down from two-thirds in 2000 to under half and volunteering below pre-pandemic norms, which erodes the joining, giving, and collective action the response depends on.

The bright spots are practical: nonprofits remain among the most trusted institutions, and the most common reason people do not give is never being asked.

Who is at risk

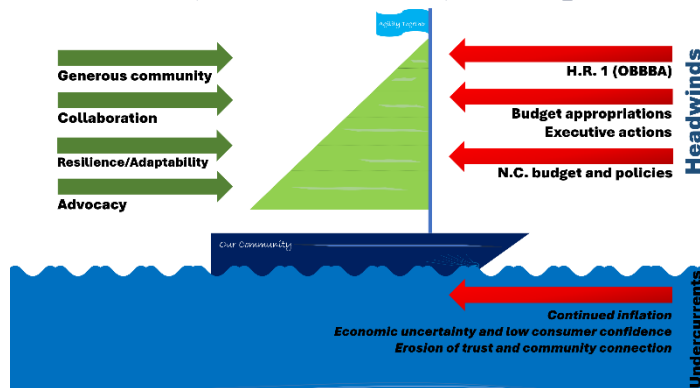
- **Food:** ~138,500 Mecklenburg residents (~63,000 households) receive SNAP, drawing roughly \$24 million a month into local retailers. The Second Harvest Food Bank of Metrolina region already counts ~569,000 food-insecure people, including ~153,300 children.
- **Health coverage:** roughly 416,000 Mecklenburg residents are on Medicaid (about one in three), including ~88,000 who gained coverage through the state's 2023 expansion and now face 80-hour-per-month work-reporting and twice-yearly redeterminations that historically drop eligible people. North Carolina lost ~214,000 ACA marketplace



enrollees for 2026, the steepest decline in the nation, as enhanced premium tax credits expired and premiums rose ~28.6%.

- **Housing:** about half of Charlotte renters are cost-burdened, and the region carries a deep shortage of units affordable to its lowest-income households, even as OBBBA's housing-tax-credit expansion improves the longer-term production pipeline.
- **Homelessness:** the 2026 Point-in-Time Count found 2,018 people experiencing homelessness on a single night, with unsheltered homelessness up ~12% to 499, even as local shelter capacity contracted because programs closed or downsized, and as the HUD-funded response system faces deep proposed cuts.

Headwinds, undercurrents, moving forward



Key milestones timeline

- **July 2026.** NC budget signed: Medicaid funded, most new SNAP administrative costs shifted to counties. Statewide public-camping ban vetoed; a legislative override attempt is pending.
- **October 1, 2026.** Medicaid narrows for certain lawfully present immigrants; the county SNAP cost-shift takes effect (roughly \$52 million statewide).
- **December 4, 2026.** The federal stop-gap funding law (a continuing resolution) expires; federal fiscal year 2027 (FY2027) funding is decided this fall for HUD (the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the main federal funder of housing and homelessness work), the HOME and CDBG programs (the two principal federal block grants for affordable housing and community development), and small-business supports.
- **December 31, 2026.** The Medicaid work requirement begins: 80 hours a month, ages 19 to 64, with renewals every six months.
- **2027 to 2028.** The heaviest Medicaid and SNAP reductions phase in and the county cost-shift grows.



- **Watch items.** The camping-ban override vote; multistate litigation over the Medicaid work-requirement rules; Senate action on extending the Affordable Care Act (ACA) premium tax credits that lower marketplace health-insurance costs.

The compound effects



Read separately, each headwind is a serious but bounded problem. Read together, they describe something different: a set of pressures that share the same households, the same neighborhoods, and the same overburdened providers, arriving in the same window.

The same households sit at multiple intersections.

A working parent in west Charlotte may simultaneously be an expansion-Medicaid enrollee facing work-reporting, a SNAP recipient facing benefit erosion, and a cost-burdened renter whose voucher buys less. A shock in any one domain spends down the margin that was holding the others together. The losses are not parallel; they cascade.

The same neighborhoods absorb the concentration.

These exposures cluster in the historically under-resourced corridors of the economic-mobility crescent, and fall disproportionately on Black and Latino residents and on children, deepening disparities the region has spent years trying to close, and putting Charlotte's well-documented mobility challenge at risk of moving backward.

The same providers are hit from both sides.

Demand rises across food, health, housing, homelessness, and behavioral health at the very moment the nonprofits and clinics that meet it are losing staff and funding. Capacity contracts as need expands, visible already in shrinking shelter beds and eliminated nonprofit positions.

The timing concentrates the shock.

Most of the heaviest OBBBA provisions take effect between late 2026 and 2028; the appropriations cuts and EHV wind-down are landing in 2026; the state budget remains unresolved. These are not spread comfortably across a decade, they overlap, which is precisely what turns serious challenges into a convergent one.



Response

The basics always carry the weight

The organizations that come through hard seasons well are running the core disciplines they needed in easy ones. Nothing in this packet substitutes for the fundamentals of a well-led nonprofit, and none of it will work if the core is not already strong.

- **Steady cultivation and stewardship.** Relationships built before the ask, gratitude expressed year-round, donors treated as partners in all seasons; crisis appeals only work on ground that ordinary cultivation prepared.
- **Disciplined fundraising practice.** A written plan, a maintained pipeline, timely asks, and reliable follow-through; the environment changes the context of the work, not the need to do it.
- **An engaged, working board.** Recruited deliberately, informed honestly, and meeting its fiduciary duties in every year, not only the hard ones.
- **Mission focus without drift.** Strategy that can say no; chasing headwind-adjacent funding your organization is not built to deliver is drift wearing a crisis costume.
- **Financial and operational hygiene.** Clean books, current filings, honest program metrics, and attention to quality; these are what make every claim in your messaging believable.

The tools in this packet assume a sound core and multiply it; they cannot replace it. This is not blame; it is the standard that makes the sector worth trusting, and meeting it is what earns an organization the standing to say credibly that the rest is weather.

Eight actions

Federal and state changes to food, health coverage, and housing are arriving at once, on the same households and on the organizations that serve them. Drawn from current sector guidance and the experience of organizations hit in 2025, these are the eight highest-leverage moves for the next years ahead.

Get ahead of the story: assess your exposure and give core audiences a measured heads-up now. Work out, specifically, how your organization may be affected, then reach out early, internally first, then to board, funders, and key donors, with a calm, factual alert before impacts arrive. Effects that are at least somewhat predictable should never land on your stakeholders as out of the blue: surprise reads as a failure to prepare, and it forces crisis appeals on supporters who were not anticipating requests beyond their usual patterns of giving and help.

Get ruthlessly clear on what is mission-critical, and protect prevention hardest.

Distinguish mission-critical from mission-adjacent and let that drive resource decisions. In



this convergence, the highest-leverage services are upstream: benefits navigation, enrollment help, eviction prevention, and bridge support. Flag those lines before cutting them, and ask funders for help holding them.

Collaborate structurally, not just informally. With full mergers harder to finance, the sector is turning to shared-services agreements, fiscal sponsorships, and networked partnerships, and the results can be material: shared back offices, consolidated sites with higher service volume, and new funding unlocked.

Know your federal exposure line by line. Diversify before the gap opens. Your nonprofit may not be affected directly by federal budget decisions. But if yours is, map every revenue stream to the force that controls it: enacted law, annual appropriations, or state pass-through. The 2025 mid-cycle grant terminations proved that funding thought guaranteed can vanish quickly, and replacing federal dollars is slow. Build reserves matched to your actual risk, and start diversification conversations now, not after a notice arrives.

Institutionalize scenario planning, on a fast clock. Replace the static annual budget with quarterly stress tests of programs and funding pipelines, with predefined bridging and reprioritization options. Organizations hit in 2025 moved to weekly scenario tracking during volatile stretches.

Put your board to work as a strategic asset. Bring the board into scenario planning early; boards that have done the what-if work respond faster and more confidently when conditions change. Their legal, financial, and technical expertise, and their networks to funders, employers, and legislators, are advocacy and fundraising infrastructure in a year when relationships move outcomes.

Document your impact data and tell the story relentlessly. Your service numbers and client stories are the evidence base for advocacy and the case for flexible private support. Count what the changes cost you: rising demand, lost grants, staff cuts. The widely cited finding that 86 percent of local nonprofits report negative impacts exists because organizations reported it, and that data now shapes funding and policy decisions.

Equip everyone around you to advocate - it works. Advocacy is simply speaking up for your mission and the people you serve by educating decision-makers and sharing data and stories. No staff is big enough, so equip your multipliers, board, donors, volunteers, and partners, with a monthly 60-second action alert, a one-page local data snapshot, a consented story bank, and short advocacy-versus-lobbying training.



Messages & Calls to Action

Messaging is advocacy

The tone this toolkit strikes, and recommends is serious, but not histrionic. The facts are sober enough on their own. Overstatement costs credibility with exactly the audiences whose trust matters most, and understatement forfeits the urgency that is warranted. Say what is documented, say what is uncertain, and say what you are doing about it.

In reviewing and adapting the sample messages below, the text in **[teal brackets]** is a placeholder for you to complete. Everything else is ready to adapt.

The core message platform

Every audience version below is built from the same five-part spine. Keep the spine; change the emphasis, examples, and ask.

- **What is happening.** Federal and state changes to food assistance, health coverage, and housing are arriving at the same time, on the same families, and they compound. Most of the heaviest changes phase in between late 2026 and 2028.
- **Why it matters here.** This reaches our neighbors and the people we serve: one or two of the six facts above, plus one sentence on what it means for your specific mission.
- **What we are doing about it. [ORGANIZATION RESPONSE: 2 to 4 sentences on your preparation, e.g., scenario planning completed, prevention services protected, coalition tables joined, reserves reviewed, board engaged]** This is the credibility paragraph: it shows preparation, not panic.
- **What you can do.** Two or three specific calls to action matched to the audience, drawn from the menu below. Always give more than one way to help.
- **Why we are confident, and grateful.** Engagement is already working (the FY2026 outcome, the court rulings, the veto), this community has met hard moments before, and we are genuinely thankful for this audience's partnership. End on resolve, not fear.

A one-sentence version for any setting: *"Big changes to food, health coverage, and housing are landing on the same local families at the same time; we have planned for it, we are part of a coordinated community response, and here is how you can help."*

Calls to action: the menu

Offer choices; people act when they can pick the way that fits them. Draw two or three per audience from this list.



- **Advocate.** Contact members of Congress on FY2027 housing and community-development funding before December 4; urge state legislators to sustain the camping-ban veto; share your view with county commissioners on implementation choices.
- **Recruit.** Bring one person: a colleague to a briefing, a friend to a volunteer shift, a fellow funder to the table, a neighbor to a community meeting.
- **Give.** Flexible or unrestricted gifts, monthly giving, a stretch gift this year, employer matches, donor-advised-fund grants, and gifts targeted to prevention services.
- **Volunteer.** Direct-service shifts, and skills-based roles: enrollment assistance, data, finance, communications, grant writing, language access.
- **Donate resources.** In-kind goods, pro bono services, meeting space, transportation, technology, and surplus food or supplies.
- **Share and connect.** Share accurate information with networks; connect a neighbor to help before crisis; with consent, share your story of impact for advocacy.
- **Coordinate.** Join a coordination table rather than starting a parallel effort; align giving or programming with the shared community picture.

Public talking points

- **The challenge is convergence.** Charlotte-Mecklenburg faces federal and state changes to food, health care, mental health, and housing that are arriving at the same time, on the same families. They compound rather than add.
- **This reaches real neighbors.** These are not abstractions. They show up as a missed meal, a lapsed prescription, an eviction notice, or a shelter with no open bed, often for the same household at once.
- **There is still time.** Most of the deepest impacts phase in between late 2026 and 2028. The window to prepare is open now, and narrowing.
- **Coordination is the difference.** The headwinds are largely fixed; how we respond is not. A coordinated community response does far more with the same resources than scattered, siloed effort.
- **We are honest about what we can do.** Philanthropy and local government cannot replace funding at this scale, and we will not pretend otherwise. We focus on the gaps we can genuinely close, prevention, navigation, and bridge support, and on coordinating so every effort counts.



- **This is about who we are.** Charlotte-Mecklenburg has met hard moments before by acting together. The question now is whether we gather ourselves to do it again.

For donors and philanthropic partners

- Your giving can be more effective when it is coordinated around a shared picture of need; we can help direct it where it closes a real gap rather than duplicating effort.
- Flexible, prevention-focused support, helping a family stay housed or keep coverage, is among the highest-return philanthropy available right now, in both dollars and human terms.

For nonprofit and provider partners

- We see the strain on the organizations that hold the safety net, and protecting your capacity is part of the strategy, not an afterthought.
- A shared table and a common picture mean less duplication and fewer families falling through the cracks between programs.

For public-sector and civic partners

- This is a nonpartisan, evidence-based read of what is coming and who is exposed, a common starting point, not a political position.
- Coordination across the County, the City, funders, and providers lets limited public dollars reach the cleanest, highest-need gaps without duplication.

For the broader public and community members

- These changes will touch people you know, neighbors, coworkers, classmates' families, not a distant 'them.'
- There is a constructive role for everyone: staying informed, supporting frontline organizations, and helping neighbors connect to assistance before a crisis hits.

Questions you may be asked

"Aren't you just being alarmist?" No. These are documented, scheduled changes drawn from public sources. We are deliberately measured: we name what is fixed, what is still open, and what we can realistically do.

"Can't philanthropy just fill the gap?" No, and we say so plainly. The scale of public funding dwarfs private giving. Our role is to coordinate, to fund prevention, and to protect the delivery system, not to backfill.

"Is this political?" No. Our focus is the people affected and the community's response. We work with partners across the spectrum, and our value depends on staying a trusted, neutral table.



Messages by key audience

Each section below gives what the specific audience most needs to hear, talking points, a complete sample message ready to adapt, and matched calls to action.

The sample messages follow the five-part spine and are written to be sent nearly as-is once you complete the **[bracketed placeholders]** and put them in your own voice.

Staff

What they most need to hear: Honesty about what is coming, stability about their jobs to the degree you can offer it, and a meaningful role in the response.

Talking points

- Demand for our services is likely to rise as benefit and coverage changes phase in; here is what is changing and when, in plain terms.
- Here is our organization's honest exposure, and here is what leadership has already done to prepare. **[summarize scenario planning, reserves, board engagement]**
- Your observations matter: what you see at intake and in casework becomes the data and stories that shape funding and policy.
- Take care of yourself and each other; sustained demand is a marathon, and protecting our team is part of the strategy.

Complete sample message (adapt freely)

Subject: What is changing around us, and how we are prepared

Team,

You may have seen news about big changes to food assistance, Medicaid, and housing programs at the federal and state level. We want you to hear directly from us what this means for **[ORGANIZATION]** and for the people we serve.

Over the next eighteen months, several changes arrive at once: new food-assistance work rules and county costs begin this fall, the Medicaid work requirement starts December 31, and federal housing funding is decided by December 4. For many families we serve, that will mean more paperwork, more confusion, and more need at our door. A few of the changes also touch our own funding.

Here is what we have already done to prepare: **[ORGANIZATION RESPONSE: two to three plain sentences, e.g., mapped our funding exposure, run the three planning scenarios with the board, protected our navigation and prevention services]**

What we ask of you: keep doing the excellent work you do; log what you are seeing through **[intake or case-note process]**; bring questions to **[name or channel]**; and take care of yourself and each other, because this is a marathon, not a sprint.

We will update you **[cadence, e.g., at each monthly all-staff]**. We are genuinely grateful for this team, and we are prepared for this.

– **[Leader name]**

Calls to action



- Learn the basics of the changes so you can answer client questions confidently.
- Log client impacts through **[your intake or case-note process]** and flag urgent situations early.
- With client consent, capture stories for advocacy and reporting.
- Join an internal working group; as private citizens, add your voice on public decisions if you choose.

Board

What they most need to hear: The fiduciary picture, evidence of management preparation, and a specific invitation to use their expertise and networks.

Talking points

- Three distinct forces are in motion: enacted federal law to prepare for, contested federal funding decided this fall, and a signed state budget that shifts costs to counties.
- Here is our revenue exposure by line, and here are the three scenarios we have modeled with trigger points and pre-decided responses.
- Advocacy is now a governance topic: boards should understand what nonprofits legally can and cannot do, and ours has real standing to engage.
- Your networks, to funders, employers, and legislators, are strategic assets this year, not courtesies.

Complete sample message (adapt freely)

Subject: Preparing **[ORGANIZATION]** for the converging policy changes: briefing and three asks

Dear **[Board member name]**,

Ahead of our next meeting, I want to brief you on the changing environment, show you what management has done, and ask for your engagement in three specific ways.

What is happening: federal law now tightens Medicaid and food assistance through new work-reporting rules; federal funding for housing and community programs is contested in Congress through December 4; and the new state budget funds Medicaid but shifts most new food-assistance costs to counties. The heaviest changes phase in between late 2026 and 2028, and demand for our services is expected to rise as they do.

What we have done: **[ORGANIZATION RESPONSE: exposure mapped line by line, the three scenarios modeled with written triggers and predecided actions, prevention services flagged for protection]**

What we ask of the board: first, engage with the scenario plans at **[meeting date]** and pressure-test them; second, open doors, because introductions to funders, employers, and elected officials matter unusually this year; and third, help us advocate appropriately, for which we will provide a twenty-minute briefing on what nonprofits can and cannot do and a one-page data snapshot you can carry into any meeting.

With this board's partnership, I am confident we can turn a hard season into our most credible one. Thank you for your service and your leadership.



Gratefully, **[Executive Director name]**

Calls to action

- Put a standing headwinds item on the agenda through 2027.
- Make introductions to funders, employers, and elected officials; join advocacy visits, and carry the one-page data snapshot to every meeting.
- Give and help get: lead by example on flexible support.
- Champion structural collaboration options (shared services, partnerships) rather than defaulting to going it alone.
- Recruit skills-based volunteers and one new board-level ally for the organization.

Donors

What they most need to hear: The honest stakes, proof you are prepared, and the specific difference their gift makes now, with agency in how they help.

Talking points

- Changes arriving through 2028 will touch people you know: neighbors, coworkers, the families of front-line employees.
- No charity can replace public funding at this scale, and we will not pretend otherwise; our job is to close the gaps local generosity genuinely can close.
- Prevention is the best return in philanthropy right now: keeping a family fed, covered, or housed costs far less than the crisis that follows.
- Your flexible support is what lets us move when the situation moves. **[name a concrete example of what a flexible gift enabled]**

Complete sample message (adapt freely)

Subject: An honest update on the year ahead, and how you can help

Dear **[Name]**,

I am writing with an honest picture of the year ahead, and with gratitude for what your support makes possible.

Federal and state changes to food assistance, health coverage, and housing arrive together over the next two years, and they land on the same local families. **[one local fact or one-sentence client story, with consent]** Demand for our work is rising as a result.

We are prepared. **[ORGANIZATION RESPONSE: one to two sentences, e.g., we have mapped our exposure, planned for the three most likely scenarios, and joined the coordinated community response]** What we cannot do is meet this moment alone, and I will not pretend otherwise: no charity can replace public funding at this scale. What we can do, with you, is close the gaps local generosity genuinely can close, and prevention is where your dollars work hardest, because keeping a family fed, covered, or housed costs far less than the crisis that follows.

However you choose to help, a flexible gift, monthly support, bringing a friend to see the work, an hour of your time, or a short message to Congress before the December 4 funding deadline, thank you. It matters more than you know.

With gratitude, **[name]**



Calls to action

- Make a flexible or unrestricted gift, start a monthly gift, or consider a stretch gift this year.
- Recruit: host a small gathering, bring a friend to a tour, share our updates with your network.
- Volunteer, including skills-based roles; check your employer for matching gifts and in-kind support.
- Advocate: use the 60-second action alert; a short message to Congress on housing funding before December 4 costs nothing and helps.

Volunteers

What they most need to hear: Why they matter more right now, specific new ways to plug in, and appreciation that is genuine and frequent.

Talking points

- Demand is rising for a reason you can explain in one sentence: benefit and coverage changes are squeezing the same families from several directions at once.
- More hands genuinely change what we can do: here are the specific roles where we need help now. **[list 2 to 3 current volunteer needs]**
- Skills count double: enrollment help, data, language access, and professional services stretch our staff further than any other gift of time.

Complete sample message (adapt freely)

Subject: Why you matter even more right now

Dear **[Name]**,

You may have noticed our lines getting longer. There is a reason: changes to food assistance and health coverage are squeezing local families from several directions at once, and more changes arrive over the coming months.

Your time is one of the most powerful responses this community has. Right now we especially need help with **[two or three current needs, e.g., Saturday distribution shifts, enrollment-help table, delivery drivers]**. And if you have professional skills, enrollment assistance, translation, data, communications, driving, those stretch our small team further than anything else you could give.

Two easy asks: consider adding a shift during our busy periods, and consider bringing one person with you next time. A friend, a coworker, a neighbor; recruitment by volunteers is how this work grows.

Thank you for standing with us. Volunteers are how this community shows what it is made of, and we could not do this without you.

– **[name]**

Calls to action

- Add a shift during peak periods; sign up for **[specific upcoming need]**.
- Bring one person: recruit a friend, coworker, or family member to join you.



- Take a skills-based role: enrollment assistance, translation, data, communications, drivers.
- Be an ambassador: share accurate information, and advocate as a private citizen if you choose.
- Give if you can, including in-kind items from our current needs list.

Funders

What they most need to hear: A clear-eyed read of the landscape, evidence of discipline, and specific ways their capital and influence do the most good.

Talking points

- The sector data is unambiguous: 86 percent of local nonprofits report negative impacts, and demand on philanthropy has surged while most foundations report strain; the delivery system itself needs protecting.
- Here is our exposure, our scenario work, and our coordination commitments; we are managing this, not reacting to it.
- What helps most, in order: flexible and multiyear support, bridge capacity for contested federal gaps, investment in prevention services, and funding for the coordination infrastructure itself.
- Your voice carries: funder advocacy on FY2027 appropriations and funder alignment around a shared community picture multiply every grant you make.

Complete sample message (adapt freely)

Subject: How **[ORGANIZATION]** is navigating the converging pressures, and where partnership helps most

Dear **[Name]**,

I want to share how we are navigating the policy and funding changes now converging on our community, and where partnership would matter most in the year ahead.

The picture, briefly: federal changes to Medicaid and food assistance phase in through 2028; federal housing and community funding is decided in Congress by December 4; and the new state budget shifts most new food-assistance costs to our county. Locally, 86 percent of surveyed nonprofits already report negative impacts, and demand on philanthropy is surging nationally while need rises.

Our preparation: we have mapped our funding exposure line by line, modeled the three near-term scenarios with written triggers and predecided responses, and joined the coordinated community tables rather than duplicating effort. **[ORGANIZATION]**

RESPONSE: one specific result or decision worth naming]

What helps most, in order: flexible and multiyear support; bridge capacity for contested federal gaps; investment in prevention services, which carry the highest return in a contraction; and support for coordination itself. Beyond dollars, your voice with peers and policymakers this fall multiplies every grant you make.

We would welcome a conversation at your convenience. Thank you for the partnership that makes this work possible.

With appreciation, **[name and title]**



Calls to action

- Convert restricted support to flexible where possible; extend to multiyear commitments.
- Stand up bridge or emergency capacity for federal disruption; fund prevention lines explicitly.
- Coordinate with peer funders around the shared community picture; fund the tables, not just the programs.
- Lend your institutional voice in the fall appropriations window; simplify reporting so scarce staff time goes to service.

Community leaders (civic, faith, neighborhood, business)

What they most need to hear: That this is a shared community stake, not a charity appeal; that the response is coordinated and nonpartisan; and that their convening power has a specific use.

Talking points

- This reaches the workforce, congregations, and neighborhoods you lead: about 1 in 3 county residents is on Medicaid, and the changes arrive through paychecks, pharmacies, and rent.
- This is nonpartisan and evidence-based: the community's response is about protecting neighbors and the local economy, not taking political sides.
- A coordinated response already exists and is producing results; the ask is to strengthen it, not to invent something new.
- What community leadership uniquely offers: convening weight, trusted voices, and early connection of residents to help before crisis.

Complete sample message (adapt freely)

Subject: A request for your leadership

Dear **[Name]**,

I am writing to ask for your leadership on something that will touch the people you **[serve, employ, or lead]**.

Over the next two years, federal and state changes to food assistance, health coverage, and housing arrive together in our community. About one in three of our county's residents relies on Medicaid; these changes reach workplaces, congregations, classrooms, and neighborhoods. This is not someone else's community; it is ours. This is a nonpartisan effort to protect neighbors and the local economy, and a coordinated community response already exists and is producing results. The ask is not to invent something new; it is to strengthen what is working with the one thing you uniquely have: trusted convening power.

Specifically: **[one specific ask for this leader, e.g., host a 30-minute briefing for your congregation or chamber; add your voice on federal housing funding before December 4; publicize where residents can get enrollment help before crisis]**



Thank you for considering it; this is what community leadership is for. I would welcome twenty minutes at your convenience.

Respectfully, **[name and organization]**

Calls to action

- Host a briefing for your congregation, chamber, association, or neighborhood.
- Lend your voice in the fall window: FY2027 housing funding, and sustaining the camping-ban veto.
- Connect people early: publicize where residents get enrollment and assistance help before crisis.
- Direct resources: sponsorship, in-kind support, employee volunteering, and matching gifts.
- Join a coordination table and bring one peer institution with you.

Clients and program participants

What they most need to hear: Plain, practical, dignified information; reassurance that help is here; and zero shame. Never recruit clients into advocacy as a condition of service; invite, at most, and gently. This sample is written as a flyer or handout rather than an email.

Talking points

- Some rules for food assistance and Medicaid are changing over the next year; many people will get more paperwork, and some will get notices they do not expect.
- The single most important thing: respond to every letter, keep your address current with the county, and bring us anything confusing. Many people lose help they still qualify for just because of paperwork.
- Come early. If something changes with your benefits, your coverage, or your housing, the sooner we know, the more we can do.
- There is no shame in any of this. These are big changes made far away; getting help navigating them is the smart move.

Complete sample message (adapt freely)

Some benefit rules are changing. We are here to help.

Some of the rules for food assistance (SNAP) and health coverage (Medicaid) are changing over the next year. You may get new letters or forms in the mail. Do not ignore them, and do not panic about them.

The most important things you can do: 1. Open and answer every letter, even if it is confusing. 2. Keep your address up to date with the county. 3. Bring anything confusing to us; that is what we are here for. 4. Come early if something changes, because the sooner we know, the more we can do.

Many people lose help they still qualify for just because of paperwork. Do not let that be you or your neighbors; share this with anyone who might need it.

There is no shame in any of this. Helping you through changes like these is exactly what we do.

Questions? **[ORGANIZATION contact, location, and hours]**



Calls to action

- Respond to every notice; update your address; ask us about anything confusing.
- Come in early when something changes, before it becomes an emergency.
- Tell a neighbor: accurate information shared person to person protects the whole community.
- If you want to, share your experience to help decision-makers understand; always your choice, never required.

Elected officials and media

What they most need to hear: Local evidence, a specific and reasonable ask, and a credible, nonpartisan messenger.

Talking points

- Lead with your local numbers and one real (consented, de-identified if needed) story; specificity is what moves both audiences.
- Make one ask at a time: FY2027 federal housing funding before December 4; sustaining the camping-ban veto; implementation choices that reduce paperwork churn.
- Offer access: a site visit, a data snapshot, a client voice; be the easiest credible source they have.

Complete sample message (adapt freely)

Subject: Local data on the federal and state changes, and one request

Dear **[Representative / Editor name]**,

In our programs alone, **[one local data point, e.g., food distribution is up 14 percent since March; 240 of our clients face new Medicaid paperwork this winter]**. As the changes phase in through 2028, that number will grow.

We are not asking anyone to solve everything. We are asking for **[one specific decision, e.g., federal housing and community-development funding held at current levels before the December 4 deadline]**.

We would welcome the chance to show you this work firsthand; a thirty-minute visit will tell you more than any briefing paper, and our data is available to you anytime.

Respectfully, **[name, title, organization, phone]**

Calls to action

- Invite a site visit within 30 days; provide a one-page local data snapshot.
- Register your position in the fall appropriations window and on the veto override.
- Offer yourself as an ongoing local source; respond fast when asked.



Making the message yours

General guidance: how to keep this from sounding robotic

- **Pick three points, not ten.** Choose the two facts and one story that fit your audience and cut the rest; comprehensiveness is the enemy of memorability.
- **Lead with your people, not the policy.** One real client situation (with consent, de-identified as needed) does more than any statistic; use the statistic to prove the story is not an exception.
- **Localize every number you can.** “86 percent of local nonprofits” is good; “our food distribution is up 14 percent since March” is better. Your own data beats the region's.
- **Say it in your organization's voice.** Rewrite the sample messages in the words you actually use with that audience; if your newsletters are warm and plain, this should be too.
- **Complete the response placeholder honestly.** Two true sentences about your preparation beat five aspirational ones; audiences can tell the difference, and credibility is the asset this year.
- **Never read talking points aloud verbatim.** Internalize the spine (what is happening, why it matters here, what we are doing, what you can do, why we are confident and grateful) and speak it naturally.
- **Match the ask to the relationship.** A first-time donor gets a different call to action than a twenty-year major donor; scale the ask to the trust you have earned.
- **Do not let the headwinds explain everything.** Funders and boards can tell weather from seamanship; attributing a self-inflicted problem to the environment costs more credibility than the problem itself, while owning it plainly builds trust.
- **Repeat with variation.** Plan to say this at least quarterly through 2027, refreshed with new milestones and your latest data, rather than one big announcement.

If your mission seems tangential to the headwinds

Arts and culture, environment and parks, animal welfare, civic education, historic preservation, and similar organizations are not outside this moment; the bridge just needs to be built explicitly. Options that work:

- **Your people are affected even if your programs are not.** Your audiences, volunteers, and staff include the 1 in 3 on Medicaid and the families losing food assistance; acknowledging the pressure on your community is honest, not off-mission.



- **Claim the second-responder role.** Offer what you uniquely have: space for briefings and enrollment events, communications reach, trusted convening, a food-drive or donation channel, respite and belonging when households are under strain.
- **Name your wellbeing contribution without overclaiming.** Arts, parks, faith life, and animal companionship are genuine stabilizers for people under stress; say so plainly and modestly, and pair it with one concrete supportive action.
- **Be transparent about the shared funding environment.** Donors are being asked to do more everywhere; acknowledge it, make your case on your own merits, and avoid competing with crisis appeals through crisis language you have not earned.
- **Partner visibly.** One concrete partnership with a basic-needs organization (a benefit performance, a collection drive, shared volunteers, co-located services) makes your relevance real and gives your audiences a way to act through you.

Size and scale considerations

- **Very small organizations (1 to 2 staff).** Do the minimum viable version: one scenario conversation with your board chair, one paragraph of core message, one channel done well (usually email plus one in-person setting), and heavy reliance on coalitions for advocacy and data so you are not duplicating capacity you do not have. Borrow this packet's language freely; your authenticity is your advantage.
- **Small and mid-size organizations.** Assign one owner for headwinds communications, run the three scenarios in a single leadership session with written triggers, adapt three audience modules (usually staff, board, donors), and pick one structural collaboration conversation to open this quarter.
- **Large, multi-line organizations.** Take a portfolio view: exposure and scenarios by program line, a cascade plan so staff hear from leadership before external audiences, disciplined government-relations coordination so the organization speaks with one voice, and consideration of what you can host for the sector.

Channels, platforms, and formats

- **Staff:** all-hands or team meetings first (never let staff read it externally first), followed by a written FAQ and a standing update rhythm.
- **Board:** a two-page memo plus a standing agenda item; supplement with the scenario one-pagers from Part One.



- **Donors:** a personal email or letter from the executive director, a printed or PDF one-pager for meetings and events, and phone calls for major donors; segment by relationship depth.
- **Volunteers:** a short spoken framing at shift briefings plus a follow-up email; keep it to two minutes and one ask.
- **Funders:** direct conversation first, backed by a concise written brief; add a data snapshot when you have it.
- **Community and public:** newsletter and website statement for the base message; LinkedIn for professional and funder audiences; Facebook and Instagram for supporters and volunteers; op-eds and letters to the editor for the fall window; pulpit and civic-meeting moments through partner leaders.
- **Formats that travel:** a one-page PDF, a three-slide mini-deck, a wallet-size talking card for board and staff, and a 60-second spoken version everyone senior can deliver. Match length to setting; almost every setting is shorter than you think.

