



Commonwealth Giving Fund Community Needs & Grantmaking Report

Q1 2026

This inaugural quarterly report provides an overview of key community needs across Massachusetts, outlines our methodology for identifying high-impact grant opportunities, and updates donors on the progress of our grantmaking program.

Our Continuing Mission

The Commonwealth Giving Fund identifies community needs across Massachusetts and regrants funds to proven nonprofit organizations serving those needs. Our purpose is to ensure that donor contributions translate directly into meaningful, local impact. In many cases, donors have charitable inclinations but are unsure how best to make donations that will affect the most change in their local community. Our role is to provide a structured, research-driven approach to identifying and funding the organizations where charitable contributions can do the most good.

Community Needs Across the Commonwealth

Winter Shelter Capacity & Cold-Weather Risk

Massachusetts consistently experiences severe cold-weather risks during the winter months, creating urgent pressures on the state's shelter system. According to data from the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), demand for emergency shelter beds rises sharply from December through March each year, often exceeding system capacity, particularly in Greater Boston, Worcester County, and the Merrimack Valley. The 2024-2025 winter season saw continued strain, with many shelters operating at or near full capacity and reporting shortages of seasonal supplies such as warm clothing, blankets, and winterized sleeping materials. For residents facing homelessness or housing instability, cold-weather conditions escalate the risk of hypothermia, frostbite, and other life-threatening health conditions, as noted in Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) seasonal advisories.

Given these factors, expanding access to safe, heated shelter space is a critical community need during the first quarter of 2026. Charitable dollars deployed toward established Massachusetts shelter organizations, particularly those offering low-barrier winter beds, have an immediate, measurable impact. Supporting these programs helps ensure individuals and families have refuge during the coldest months of the year, when demand for emergency shelter is most acute.

Migrant & Refugee Support

Massachusetts continues to experience significant increases in newly arrived refugees, asylum seekers, and migrant families, placing heightened demands on community-based organizations that provide housing assistance, case management, legal aid, and basic necessities. According to the Massachusetts Office for Refugees and Immigrants (ORI) and recent updates from the Governor’s Office, the Commonwealth has seen substantial growth in refugee and migrant arrivals over the past two years, driven by geopolitical instability, humanitarian crises, and federal resettlement allocations. This influx has strained both the state’s shelter system and local nonprofits that serve immigrant and refugee populations, many of which report overwhelming demand for basic support—including temporary housing, English language instruction, transportation assistance, school enrollment support for children, and access to community health services.

Nonprofits working in this space face significant operational challenges, including resource shortages, staff capacity limitations, and rapidly evolving client needs. Charitable support directed to organizations specializing in refugee resettlement, immigrant assistance, and transitional support can provide essential relief during a period when need is high and state systems are overextended. Private philanthropy plays a vital role in filling service gaps, ensuring that newly arrived individuals and families receive the stability and support necessary to safely integrate into Massachusetts communities.

Food Insecurity

Food insecurity remains one of the most persistent and widespread community challenges in Massachusetts. According to The Greater Boston Food Bank’s annual “Hunger in Massachusetts” report and analysis from the Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center (MassBudget), more than 1 in 5 households with children experience food insecurity, and overall demand for food assistance has remained significantly elevated since the COVID-era surge. Rising food costs, increased housing expenses, and stagnant wage growth have contributed to sustained pressure on food pantries, community kitchens, and meal distribution programs across the Commonwealth. Many organizations report serving record numbers of households and continue to face shortages in both food supply and volunteer capacity.

As food insecurity cuts across regions, age groups, and socioeconomic categories, charitable contributions directed toward established food-assistance nonprofits yield immediate results. These organizations are uniquely positioned to translate funding into direct community impact through the distribution of fresh produce, shelf-stable groceries, and prepared meals. Given the volume of need reported statewide, addressing food insecurity remains a priority funding area for the first quarter of 2026.

Grantee Selection Update

As the Commonwealth Giving Fund is newly established, our initial grantmaking decisions remain under review while we work to accumulate sufficient charitable funds for meaningful distribution. During this inception period, we are focusing on building a strong foundation for responsible grantmaking by refining our evaluation criteria, monitoring emerging community needs, and identifying Massachusetts nonprofit organizations whose missions align with our areas of focus. Once adequate funds have been received, we will initiate our first grant cycle and announce selected grantees in the following quarterly report.

Our Methodology

Each quarter, the Commonwealth Giving Fund conducts a structured review of publicly available information to identify areas of greatest need across Massachusetts and determine where charitable funds can have the most meaningful impact. Our approach emphasizes transparency, research, and alignment with established community indicators. Specifically, we analyze:

State and Regional Public Data

We review key data published by Massachusetts agencies and research institutions, including:

- **Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH)** reports on community health trends, behavioral health needs, and disparities.
- **Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE)** data on student outcomes, district-level funding challenges, and achievement gaps.
- **Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD)** reports on housing insecurity, homelessness trends, and emergency shelter usage.
- **The Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center (MassBudget)** analyses of child welfare, economic inequality, food insecurity, and state-level social service needs.
- **UMass Donahue Institute** demographic and economic research relevant to community well-being.

These sources help us identify statewide and regional issues that merit targeted charitable support.

Nonprofit and Sector Reports

To ensure funds support organizations with proven effectiveness, we monitor:

- **Candid/GuideStar profiles**, which offer transparency metrics and organizational evaluations.

- **Sector-wide reports** from organizations such as the Massachusetts Nonprofit Network (MNN), which highlight trends, challenges, and capacity gaps within the nonprofit sector.

These resources allow us to assess which organizations are demonstrating measurable outcomes, strong leadership, and responsible stewardship of donor dollars.

Emerging Community Issues

We also track ongoing developments through:

- Local news and investigative reporting on community needs throughout the Commonwealth.
- Updates from school districts, community health centers, senior service agencies, and regional service providers.
- Public comments, statements, and advisories issued by statewide coalitions addressing issues such as food security, mental health, and youth services.

This helps us stay responsive to emerging or urgent needs, especially those arising unexpectedly.

Funding Prioritization

After completing our quarterly review, we assess which needs are most urgent, which organizations demonstrate strong accountability and impact, and where timely grants can meaningfully expand or stabilize community services.

Invitation to Continue to Support

We invite you to support our mission and help expand our impact across the Commonwealth. Donations may be made by check payable to **Commonwealth Giving Fund, Inc.** or securely online at www.commonwealthgivingfund.org/donate. Every contribution, large or small, directly supports the charitable work of trusted Massachusetts nonprofits.

Commonwealth Giving Fund, Inc.

With appreciation,

The Board of Directors

www.commonwealthgivingfund.org