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Santa Barbara Foundation's Critical Needs Response Fund Awards More Than \$1 Million to Local Nonprofits

36 nonprofits across Santa Barbara County received rapid-response grants; next phase will deepen investment in key areas as impacts continue

(SANTA BARBARA, CA) — Since launching the [Critical Needs Response Fund](#) in September 2025, the [Santa Barbara Foundation](#) (SBF) has awarded \$1.03 million to nonprofit organizations across Santa Barbara County — 11 months of rapid-response grantmaking in the face of funding cuts and policy changes as well as surging demand for nonprofit services.

The Critical Needs Response Fund provides unrestricted, flexible grants to help nonprofits maintain continuity of essential services, stabilize operations during funding disruptions and adapt to a rapidly changing funding environment.

Across 12 grant cycles in under a year, grants of \$10,000 to \$50,000 reached 36 organizations countywide, supporting essential services in food, housing, healthcare, safety and childcare. Even so, awards only met part of the need: those same organizations had requested nearly \$1.73 million.

“Over the past year, our local nonprofits told us what this moment is demanding of them. Some had lost funding overnight; others were being asked to do far more with far less,” said Jackie Carrera, president and CEO of Santa Barbara Foundation. “This fund let us respond quickly, and what we learned is shaping where we go next.”

Grants sustained organizations delivering essential services — both those facing acute operational disruption from funding losses and those pivoting or expanding to meet increased community need — from food rescue and meal programs, to shelter, counseling and healthcare providers serving families countywide.

“This funding is a huge sigh of relief for us as we prepare to navigate the challenges ahead,” said Alma Harmsen, Executive Director of Partners in Housing Solutions. “We are incredibly grateful to SBF’s commitment to supporting organizations during such a critical time.”

Santa Barbara Foundation anticipates continued need. According to the Foundation’s “2025 State of Nonprofits in Santa Barbara County” report, 62 percent of local nonprofit leaders report increased demand for services — yet only 20 percent of their organizations can fully meet the needs.

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Building on what the Foundation learned in its first year, the Critical Needs Response Fund is evolving from broad rapid response grantmaking to a proactive, collaborative, focused strategy that concentrates resources on the county's most acute pressure points.

"We will continue to collaborate closely with our partners working to solve gaps in a few focused areas," says Liz Thasiah, Santa Barbara Foundation's vice president of programs. "We're paying close attention to areas like food security and health care, where reductions in federal nutrition assistance and anticipated losses in health coverage are expected to deepen community need in the year ahead."

The Critical Needs Response Fund was established in partnership with Santa Barbara Foundation's family of fundholders, local private foundations and corporations, including [Montecito Bank & Trust](#) and the [Patricia Bragg Foundation](#).

Community members, businesses or philanthropic partners who wish to contribute to the Critical Needs Response Fund may learn more and make tax-deductible gifts at SBFoundation.org/CriticalNeeds or may reach out to Tammy Sims Johnson, Santa Barbara Foundation vice president, philanthropic services at TJohnson@SBFoundation.org.

About Santa Barbara Foundation

Founded in 1928, the Santa Barbara Foundation actively connects donors, nonprofits, government, businesses and the people of Santa Barbara County to take on the most challenging needs facing our region's communities. Recognizing that its work depends on the strength of the social sector, the Foundation is committed to the health and vitality of local nonprofits. Knowing that together we can do more, the Foundation mobilizes charitable giving and connects their expertise to that of donors, nonprofits and residents to create meaningful impact on the communities of our county. SBFoundation.org.

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