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by YUUMA NAKAMURA — July 16, 2021 in Bank of America 0

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[Bank of America](#) announced Thursday it has awarded \$655,000 in grants so far this year to 18 nonprofits in Fresno, Tulare, Kings, Madera and Merced counties that will help drive economic opportunity and upward mobility for individuals and families and put them on a path toward stability and success.

The local nonprofits receiving funding will help address two key factors in improving economic mobility: access to educational and workforce development services building pathways to employment, including providing resources to rebuild careers that may have been impacted by the pandemic, and basic needs fundamental to building life-long stability, including access to food, shelter and health services.

While the Fresno-Visalia region is experiencing general economic recovery, the state Employment Development Department reports that unemployment rates exceed 8.8% in the region. In addition, the Census Bureau reports that poverty levels range from 16-20%. Both are well above the statewide average.

“The strategic investment into immediate short-term and longer-term needs has been key in helping disadvantaged communities progress as society begins to safely reopen,” said Mark Riley, president, [Bank of America](#) Fresno-Visalia. “By investing in the region’s incredible network of nonprofits, [Bank of America](#) provides philanthropic capital to help advance economic and social progress, enabling our community to succeed.”

Specifically, many of the organizations are using the bank grants to bolster their workforce development programs in some of the region’s most vulnerable neighborhoods. For example, the Fresno DRIVE Initiative will use the funds to launch an upskill training and internship program to train teens and young adults from disadvantaged backgrounds for jobs with the region’s employers. The United Way of Fresno and Madera Counties will use the grant to help fund its African American Leadership Program, a nine-month program focused on the personal and professional development and growth of Black leaders, while the Fresno Area Hispanic Foundation will use the support to help Hispanic-Latina women launch and expand small businesses in the region.

Other organizations receiving grants are:

- Fresno County: Boys & Girls Club, Central California Food Bank (funding also supports

- Tulare County: Community Services & Employment Training (CSET), Family Services of Tulare County, Visalia Emergency Aid Council and the Visalia Rescue Mission.
- Merced County: Merced County Food Bank
- Madera County: Madera Food Bank and Madera Rescue Mission
- Kings County: Kings Community Action Organization.
- The funding also includes the commitment to Fresno's two Student Leaders this year.

The grants so far this year build on the \$1 million awarded to nonprofits in 2020 and \$500,000 in 2019. These grants are part of the company's commitment to responsible growth as it works to improve the financial lives of individuals and families, and additional grants in the region will be announced later this year. Philanthropic and volunteer investments play a key role in this effort to build thriving communities. In 2020, bank employees in the region recorded more than 4,600 volunteer hours to benefit the community in a variety of ways.

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