The mission of the Chronicle Season of Sharing Fund is to create stability for individuals and families facing an unexpected crisis by providing temporary assistance for housing, critical needs and access to food.
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ABOUT THE CHRONICLE SEASON OF SHARING FUND

Since 1986, the Chronicle Season of Sharing Fund has raised more than $120 million to help thousands of Bay Area families. The Season of Sharing Fund offers grants to help families in crisis so they can pay for housing and emergency needs. Through a network of more than 150 partner agencies, the Season of Sharing Fund works to identify families in need and provides short-term, critical assistance grants.

Grant monies from the Season of Sharing Fund can help families in any number of ways, such as paying the rent so they can stay in their home, covering a security deposit so they can transition out of a homeless shelter, or buying a wheelchair or other essential medical equipment that they could not otherwise afford. In addition, the Season of Sharing Fund supports Bay Area food banks by distributing more than $1 million each year to assist individuals and families who might otherwise go hungry.

The Season of Sharing Fund operates in the nine Bay Area counties, including: Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Napa, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Solano, and Sonoma.

All administrative expenses are covered by the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund and the San Francisco Chronicle. As a result, 100 percent of the money raised by the Season of Sharing Fund goes directly to help the families and communities we serve.

Additional information about the Season of Sharing Fund can be found at seasonofsharing.org.

ELIGIBLE RECIPIENTS

The Season of Sharing Fund provides one-time, non-recurring financial assistance to individuals and families who have emergency needs that cannot be met through other resources. Eligible recipients include:

- Low-to-moderate income families with dependent children under 18 years of age.
- Seniors who are age 55 and older.
- Permanently disabled individuals.
- Veterans.
- Pregnant women in their 2nd or 3rd trimester.
- Victims of domestic violence and violent crimes.
- Emancipated foster youth between 18 and 24.

Eligibility status must be validated by supporting documentation. At this time, recipients are only eligible to receive assistance once every five years, no matter the amount of the grant.
Applicants must be current Alameda County residents of six continuous months or longer. For homeless applicants, acceptable types of residency verification (six continuous months) include but are not limited to: proof of services/benefits received by agencies within the County, referral letters from shelters, and children’s school enrollment. Exceptions to the six-month residency requirement will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Send requests for consultation with a detailed explanation of the circumstances to sos@acgov.org

**TYPES OF ASSISTANCE PROVIDED**

The Season of Sharing Fund provides eligible clients funding for:
- Housing Assistance
- Critical Family Needs

The maximum amount of assistance provided is $3,000.

Assistance is provided in the form of grants that are paid directly to the supplier of services, such as a landlord, utility company, furniture store, or medical equipment provider.

**Housing Assistance**

1. SOS will only provide financial assistance with **security deposit or delinquent rent or delinquent mortgage**. In exceptional cases, if an applicant demonstrates a justifiable emergency need, SOS can consider requests for assistance for up to 50 percent of the first month’s rent if the total amount of assistance does not exceed the $3,000 grant maximum. This will be determined on a case by case basis and should be considered an exception, not a rule.

2. **Requests for deposit assistance will not be considered** if, at time of intake, applicant has already been living in the residence for more than 30 days.

3. For **subsidized housing**, only the tenant portion of the rent can be paid.

4. Alameda County SOS accepts applications for deposit assistance for addresses **outside of the County**. Requests for assistance to relocate out of state will be considered under extraordinary or life-changing circumstances, such as domestic violence.

5. Alameda County SOS Admin will verify all landlord information and property ownership through the County Assessor upon receipt of the application.

6. Assistance is not provided for subleases; maintenance or late fees; legal fees; homeowners association fees; or key, pet or remote deposits.
7. If seeking SOS assistance on the basis of **chronic or long-term homelessness**, the applicant will be required to provide recent documentation from one of the following:
   - a shelter
   - transitional housing program
   - authorized agency servicing homeless encampments
   - motel (i.e. receipts)

   If the applicant has recently become homeless and is not currently staying in one of the above, documentation will be required to substantiate the situation that caused the loss of housing, such as an eviction notice, landlord foreclosure notice, disaster report, etc.

8. Alameda County SOS will consider deposit assistance requests for those who have been granted an **initial Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher** through one of the three methods:
   - Housing Authority’s waitlist
   - HUD-VASH (Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing)
   - Family Options Program or other program targeting specialized or high-risk populations (i.e., DV victims)

   **Being issued an initial Section 8 voucher does not entitle a household to SOS assistance.** The extent to which the SOS program will consider a request for deposit solely on the basis of an initial Section 8 voucher, in the absence of other extenuating circumstances, will be based on several factors including but not limited to:
   - The nature of the current residency/housing situation
   - Household income and overall financial circumstances
   - Other efforts taken by household to resolve the need on their own

   Applicants seeking deposit assistance on the basis of an initial Section 8 voucher will not be considered for more than 75 percent of the full deposit. **Assistance in any amount is not guaranteed.**

   It is the applicant’s responsibility to provide verification of the initial status of the Section 8 voucher, i.e. orientation letter or other documentation from the appropriate Housing Authority. If it is not clearly evident from the documentation that the applicant has been newly admitted into the Section 8 program, the request cannot be considered.

**Critical Family Needs**

Critical Family Needs include emergency costs determined necessary to maintain the family unit, personal independence, or employment, which are not covered by insurance or other sources and have not yet been expended. This may include but is not limited to:
1. **Delinquent utility bills** (electricity, heating, and water only)—limited to $500 maximum. Mitigating factors contributing to the delinquency will be reviewed very carefully. The applicant must be facing a threat of turn-off (i.e. 15-day notice) and have already exhausted all other options, including a payment extension/plan with the vendor and other utility assistance programs, such as HEAP. Assistance is not provided for phone bills.

2. **Furniture**—based on the following circumstances: fire, flood, domestic violence, documented homelessness (i.e., shelter or transitional housing), recent award of custody through the courts, and family reunification (through Child Protective Services). CFN furniture expenditures are limited to beds (full size for adults, twin size for children), chest of drawers, sofa/loveseat, and dining table/chairs only. **Furniture must be requested at the time or within 30 days of housing being secured.** Please note that SOS uses a designated vendor and delivery is limited to the immediate Bay Area counties.

3. **Physician-approved medical equipment**, specifically wheelchairs and other mobility devices such as walkers, scooters, or canes. **Medical co-pays or other medical financial responsibilities cannot be considered for SOS assistance.** Referring caseworker must seek consultation prior to initiating application process. Send an email to sos@acgov.org to initiate consultation. Written recommendation from a physician will be required, and only costs for which the applicant is responsible (i.e., portion not covered by medical insurance) will be considered. SOS will not consider requests for reimbursement of costs once they have been paid by the applicant or another source.

*If unsure whether a request fits a Critical Family Need, send a written inquiry to sos@acgov.org prior to initiating the application.*

**GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

- The Season of Sharing Fund is to be used for a non-recurring single crisis. Season of Sharing Fund cannot assist when it is clear that a client’s situation has been or will be ongoing or that the situation cannot be resolved with one-time assistance.
- The Season of Sharing Fund should be used as a last resort. Other available resources must be used first to address the need to the maximum extent possible, including support from family, friends and/or other organizations. Assistance can be coupled with other resources, including what the applicant can pay, in order to cover the full cost of an item or housing expense.
- The use of the Season of Sharing Fund must resolve the immediate problem and help the family or individual regain long-term self-sufficiency.
THE SEASON OF SHARING FUND DOES **NOT PROVIDE ASSISTANCE FOR**:

- Educational tuition or school supplies.
- Clothing.
- Property taxes.
- Home modifications or repairs.
- Homeowner association fees.
- Home maintenance or late fees.
- Phone bills.
- Appliances such as washers and dryers.
- Movers or moving trucks.
- Storage.
- Hotel/motel bills.
- Food.
- Funeral expenses.
- Airline tickets or travel expenses.
- Repayment of payday loans or personal loans to friends or relatives.
- Court costs or legal fees.
- Routine medications or doctor visits.
- Parking tickets, speeding tickets, impound or towing costs.
- Car repairs, gas, automobile registration, insurance.
- Rental car expenses.
- Down payments or deposits for automobiles.
- Legal fees.
- Credit card bills.
- Wage garnishments.

***SOS also does not provide assistance if the applicant’s current housing or critical family need is a direct result of their having allocated funds to one of the above items.***

APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS AND PROCEDURES

**Eligibility Screening**

Before filling out an application, the Partner Agency should verify the applicant’s eligibility by using the online Clearance Process or contacting **sos@acgov.org** to ensure that the applicant has not received funding from Season of Sharing Fund within the last five years. The Partner Agency should also confirm that the applicant’s need is legitimate and that the household meets all the basic criteria for consideration.
Completing the Application

All Season of Sharing Fund applications must be completed by the Partner Agency. Applicant should not fill out the Intake and Budget Forms on their own. This should be done by the Partner Agency, who serves as the primary contact for the applicant.

Partner Agencies are responsible for:
- Collecting information and documentation to support the application.
- Ensuring the application, including Intake Form and Budget Form are filled out and answered in full.
- Ensuring the application packet is complete.
- Responding to questions or concerns relating to each request. If staff is uncertain about an applicant’s qualifications, he/she should contact the County Coordinator for guidance.

Online applications are requested, but manual applications will be accepted with advance approval from Alameda County SOS Admin.

Employees of SOS referring agencies cannot complete the intake and application process for themselves, family members, or other agency staff. All such inquiries for assistance must be referred to the SOS coordinator.

1. **Clearance must be approved for the primary applicant and any other adult (age 18 and older, including grown children) residing in the household. Undocumented clients will be considered.**

2. **The Intake Form should include Co-Applicants or Additional Occupants, if applicable.** Persons in one of these categories would be considered a co-applicant: 1) A spouse or partner, 2) Any adult who resides in the client’s home and contributes substantial income toward the household’s monthly expenses, or 3) Any adult who resides in the home and is on the lease agreement. Additional occupants may include adult children (i.e. college students), in-care providers or any other members of the household who contribute no income or do not have any financial responsibility toward household expenses.

3. **Applications must be completed face to face** by the caseworker with the applicant.

4. **Under “Reason: Explanation,”** a detailed explanation of why an application for assistance is being sought such as a family emergency, unemployment, etc is required. Additional narrative may be submitted on a separate page. Include all documentation validating the situation causing the applicant’s need (i.e. Red Cross report for fire, police report or restraining order for domestic violence, doctor verification for illness, etc.).
5. **On the Intake Form in the section under “What other actions have been taken...”** you should describe what other actions the client took to meet these needs (such as payment plan with landlord, borrowing money from family/friends, etc.) that were unsuccessful before applying for this grant. You may also list resources or services your agency has provided to the client, such as ongoing case management or other financial assistance.

6. **The Applicant and Co-Applicant must sign the Intake Form and Acknowledgement Form.** This is a requirement for both online and paper applications. Either the original or a PDF scan of the signed intake form must be submitted to Alameda County SOS Admin.

7. **The Budget Worksheet** must be complete and verification for each source of income attached. If the applicant is employed through a private employer, they must verify income by providing at least one month’s worth of current check stubs or similar documentation. If the applicant is paid biweekly, at least two stubs must be provided. If they are paid weekly, at least four. Check stubs must be the ones most recently received up to the point of intake. If the applicant's income fluctuates, at least two months' worth of paystubs must be provided to allow for comparison. If the need is due to a temporary loss of income, the loss of wages must be substantiated in the paystubs provided.

8. Both the caseworker and applicant have the responsibility to ensure that **all information/documentation is accurate and current at time of submission.** This includes verifying that the client’s need exists and has been accurately captured on the Intake Form.

9. If the applicant is requesting **delinquent rent assistance or other services**, the landlord/vendor must provide a **completed IRS Form W-9**. W9s are **not** required for applications requesting assistance with security deposit.

10. **All forms and supporting documentation are included in the packet.**

11. **Make a copy** of the application packet for your reference. Even if the application is submitted online, the referring agency must keep a copy in their files.

### Submitting the Application

Partner Agencies may submit completed applications:
- By email (as PDF attachment) to: sos@acgov.org
- By mail OR delivery by authorized caseworker to:
Application Review and Determination

- The Alameda County SOS Review Panel will be comprised of three community representatives and the SOS Coordinator. This is subject to change depending on the volume of applications received.

- The Review Panel convenes on Wednesday of each week at 12:00pm at the Alameda County Social Services Agency, 2000 San Pablo Ave, Oakland, unless otherwise noted.

- Application packets (intake forms and all supporting documentation) must be received by 4:30pm on the preceding Friday of the scheduled Review Panel meeting date (there will be exceptions to this timeline as needs dictate). Applications can be mailed or delivered directly to the SSA or submitted via email to sos@acgov.org.

- A maximum of eight applications per Agency per session can be submitted for review.

- Panel members will not be allowed to review applications submitted from their agency.

- Concerns regarding funding decisions should be brought to the attention of the Program Coordinator. Funding decisions reached by the Review Panel are final unless the referring agency provides additional information that impacts or changes the applicant's circumstances.

- Referring caseworkers will be notified by e-mail either on Thursday or Friday following review. Agencies without e-mail access will be notified by fax. Please allow until close of business of Friday for a response.

- It is the referring caseworker's responsibility to notify the applicant and landlord of the funding decision. Notification preference will be the decision of the referring agency. If there are concerns regarding the decision, the caseworker must submit a detailed written response within three business days of the notification by Alameda County SOS Admin. Unless otherwise noted all review panel funding decisions are final.
Exceptions to the Panel Process

If a referring agency has an application that necessitates an immediate review outside of the scheduled review process, referring staff can contact the SOS Coordinator for special consideration.

Payment

- For approved applications, Alameda County SOS Admin signs and submits the check request to the program’s fiscal agent, Catholic Charities. **Checks are made payable and mailed directly to the landlord/vendor within 14 calendar days following the approval date.** The referring agency should alert the landlord/vendor that Catholic Charities will issue the check.

- **Caseworkers must notify SOS Admin of any check-related issues.** In the event a stop payment is required the referring agency must notify SOS Admin via e-mail at **sos@acgov.org**. Please provide applicant’s full name, SSN, and explanation of the situation. Do not inquire on status of check unless 10 business days have passed since approval and landlord still has not received payment.

REQUIREMENTS FOR A COMPLETE APPLICATION

Applicants may request both Housing Assistance and Critical Family Needs on the same application. If you have questions, please contact Alameda County SOS Admin at **sos@acgov.org**

**Paper application**

- Copy of e-mail authorization from SOS Admin for manual application
- Original (signed) Intake Form
- Budget worksheet
- Signed Applicant Acknowledgment

**Online application**

- Complete online clearance process (no separate document needed)
- Printed & signed online intake form
- Printed budget worksheet
- Signed Applicant Acknowledgment
Required for ALL applications (online and paper)

- Social Security Card and Calif. I.D for each adult residing in the household
- Social Security Card and birth certificate for each minor residing in the household
- If applicable, proof of permanent disability (physician’s verification or proof of approval for SSDI / SSI benefits)
- If qualifying as a emancipated/former foster youth, veteran, victim of crime/DV, or pregnant woman, documentation must be submitted from an authorized agency or source
- Proof of all sources of income and/or benefits (example: paystubs, letter from employer, letter from government agency, or print-out of County benefits)
- Proof of emergency causing need (example: documentation of illness or unpaid medical leave, unemployment, eviction notice from previous landlord, letter from homeless shelter, etc.)

If seeking assistance with delinquent rent:
- IRS Form W-9 completed by landlord and relevant landlord contact information
- Eviction notice or notice to ‘pay or quit’
- If special payment arrangements were made, a payment arrangement signed by applicant and landlord
- Rental agreement signed by applicant and landlord
- If rental is a Section 8, copy of Housing Authority’s approval of unit and tenant’s share of the rent signed by applicant and landlord

If seeking assistance with deposit for new rental:
- Written offer to rent from prospective landlord on business letterhead, with all relevant landlord contact info (name, address, telephone number, fax if available), move-in costs, and monthly rent clearly stated.
- If special payment arrangements were made, a payment arrangement signed by applicant and landlord
- If rental is a Section 8, copy of Housing Authority’s approval of unit and tenant’s share of the rent signed by applicant and landlord
- If payment(s) has been made, copy or verification of any payment of rental cost (such as money order receipt or receipt from landlord)
- If you are currently living with others, explanation of why current situation cannot be continued until financial resources are found to allow move

If seeking assistance for Critical Family Needs:
- Current utility bill, showing applicant’s name and account number.
- Documentation of need for the item (i.e. doctor’s recommendation for medical equipment).
- Bids/estimates for the purchase of the item.
- W-9 for any new vendor.
ADDITIONAL PROGRAM GUIDANCE

Program crisis standards

Season of Sharing Fund is intended to help those who are suffering from a non-recurring crisis not of their own making that can be resolved with one-time assistance. SOS cannot assist when it is clear that a client's situation has been ongoing or will be ongoing (i.e. monthly expenses exceed income) or that the situation cannot be resolved with the one-time assistance (i.e. back rent owed far exceeds grant and applicant has no means to pay off balance). All situations will need to be validated by documentation.

The following list includes the most common needs assisted by the Alameda County SOS program and some of the most common circumstances causing these needs. Each client's situation is unique and each request is considered on a case by case basis.

Housing Assistance – Common Scenarios

Security deposits
SOS cannot assist an applicant to move into a residence that is clearly beyond what they can afford or will be only a short-term living situation. SOS emphasizes long-term solutions. Applicants are expected to be able to pay the first month’s rent. If a household demonstrates a justifiable emergency need, SOS can consider requests for assistance for up to 50 percent of the first month’s rent if the total amount of assistance does not exceed the $3,000 grant maximum. This will be determined on a case by case basis and should be considered an exception, not a rule. **SOS will not consider deposit requests if the client has already been living in the unit for more than 30 days at time of intake.**

Emergency circumstances
- Sudden need to move due to catastrophe (i.e. fire) or building being sold or foreclosed
- Inhabitable conditions – building condemned by city or conditions causing documented illness. Documented proof that repeated attempts to have the landlord address habitability issues (i.e. plumbing, electrical) have been unsuccessful.
- Medical need: i.e. can’t climb steps to second floor due to disability
- Family reunification/preservation (parent needs to secure housing in order to get children back or is at risk of losing children if doesn’t have stable housing)
- Foster or adoptive parent situations (stable housing as condition of maintaining placement)
- Relocation due to domestic violence
- Safety issues (with proof of home invasion, vandalism, harassment, etc.)
- Reasonable accommodation (needing space for in-home care provider, Housing Authority family composition/space regulations)
- Need for more living space under extreme conditions (i.e. large family living in a studio, or multiple families in small living space)

**Delinquent Rent**

SOS seeks to help families remain in their homes when the assistance will result in a long-term resolution. SOS will consider providing assistance when the applicant has exhausted all payment and assistance avenues. SOS will not assist with the eviction notice if the situation has already reached the courts. When the delinquent rent exceeds the maximum award, SOS will either need to see proof of the client’s ability to pay the remaining balance or that the landlord agrees to a payment plan. If the applicant experienced a temporary lapse in income or benefits, SOS will need to see that the income/benefits have been restored such that the applicant can continue to cover their rent and other expenses.

**Acceptable reasons**
- Temporary illness, unpaid medical leave
- Divorce or separation
- Temporary unemployment or temporary reduction in work hours
- Documented theft/robbery resulting in loss of money
- Domestic violence
- Catastrophic loss
- Loss of secondary tenant on lease agreement

**Undocumented Applicants**

If the applicant is undocumented, SOS still needs to verify as much as possible the following data: applicant’s identity and date of birth. If applicant does not have a CA ID and a Social Security card, forms of identification that may be submitted include:
- Photo ID from native country
- IRS verification of Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN) (in lieu of Social Security number)
- Hospital face sheet
- Print out of information from a government agency, such as Social Services Agency
- Similar documentation or school enrollment records may be submitted for undocumented children

***Prior to beginning clearance and intake process, please contact SOS Admin at sos@acgov.org to request a unique ID number to use in lieu of an SSN for undocumented applicants.***
Self-Employment Income

If an applicant is self-employed, the only earnings that will be considered by SOS are those that can be verified through documentation, such as:

- Most recent tax return
- Current bank statements showing deposits
- Copies of cancelled check payments received
- Confirmation by other government agencies, such as Social Services Agency or Housing Authority

Note: Handwritten letters are not acceptable verification.

Chronic Unemployment

While chronic unemployment is a widespread and drastic concern within the community, it is not one that the SOS program is intended to mitigate. If an applicant is seeking assistance on the basis of unemployment or job loss, he/she will need to provide:

- Documentation from Employment Development Department (EDD) (claim approval/denial, payment stubs) for this specific instance of job loss.
- If no documentation from EDD, applicant will need to provide a termination notice received from employer within the last 12 months as well as the last month’s worth of earnings received from that job.

***If applicant has no documentation substantiating loss of employment and is receiving public assistance benefits, SOS Admin may contact their Social Services Agency eligibility worker to verify employment history/earnings.

Applicants Receiving Public Assistance

For applicants who receive CalWORKs, food stamps, General Assistance, and other types of public assistance through Social Services Agency, SOS Admin may need to contact their respective eligibility workers if any discrepancies are identified in the submitted SOS application relating to family status or composition, residency, or income.