



# Community Social Impact



## CENTER GOALS

To measure and expand credit unions' social impact and help develop a strategic advantage in the communities they serve to become a catalyst for positive community transformation.

FILENE FELLOW



### Dr. Mai Thi Nguyen

Director, Design Lab  
Co-Director, Center for Housing Policy and Design (CHPD)  
University of California San Diego

## A WORD FROM DR. MAI THI NGUYEN

*"It has been a true honor and a privilege to be the faculty fellow of the Center for Community Social Impact. During my time as a fellow, we have lived through extraordinarily turbulent times across the globe and at home, in the US. But what buffers us from tragedy and disasters is strong and resilient communities. The research from this Center was motivated by a desire to guide the credit union industry to be more effective in accelerating community change and building community resilience. As deeply trusted and locally rooted institutions, credit unions are uniquely positioned to make an incredible impact in their communities."*

## CENTER OVERVIEW

Launched in 2020, the Center of Excellence for Community Social Impact was created to help credit unions expand their role in driving positive change in the communities they serve.

The Center's work emphasized the opportunity for credit unions to leverage their unique position as trusted, locally rooted institutions to address systemic challenges and strengthen community resilience, while also reinforcing their long-term sustainability and member value.

Operating during the midst of a global crisis, the center's three central goals became more important than ever:

- Measure and benchmark the current state of credit union social impact efforts to better understand opportunities for growth and alignment.
- Advance research on how credit unions can address complex community challenges, including housing, disaster response, and financial inclusion, through collaborative and innovative approaches.
- Identify strategies, frameworks, and tools to help credit unions implement and scale effective social impact initiatives across their organizations.

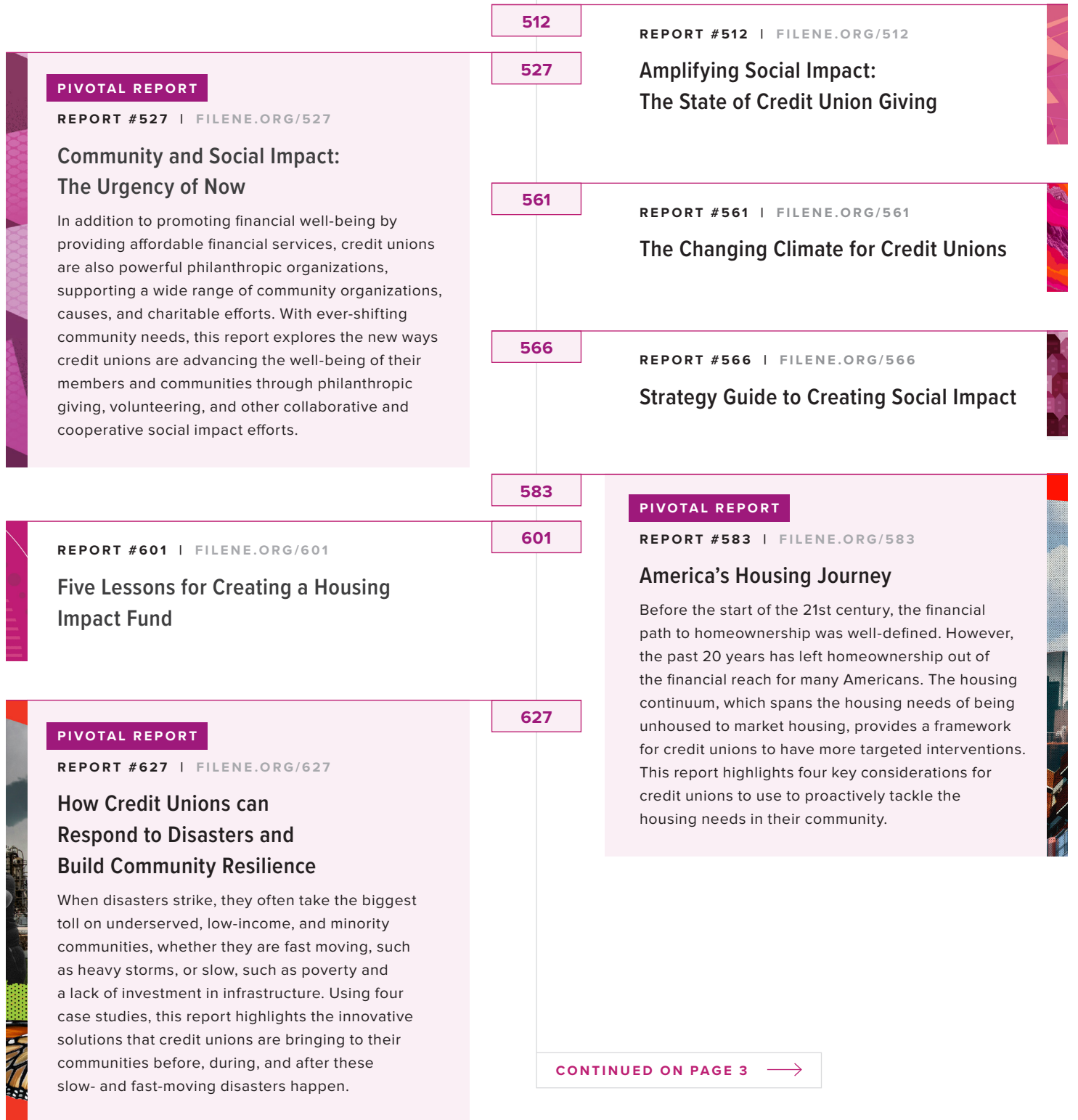
In the end, the Center's research reached nearly 792 credit unions and industry organizations, representing over \$1.31 trillion in assets, 173 thousand employees, and 76 million credit union members and contributed to two major shifts in the credit union industry:

- From isolated philanthropy to integrated, organization-wide strategy. The Center's research showed that credit unions that align giving, lending, and operational decisions around shared community goals are better positioned to drive sustained outcomes and deepen community relationships.
- From reactive initiatives to proactive resilience strategies. The Center created a framework for coordinated, multi-faceted approaches across pre-, during-, and post-disaster timeframes, showing that this approach significantly expands both the reach and durability of credit union impact.

# CENTER PUBLICATIONS & INSIGHTS

This timeline represents the Center's body of work, including the top four insights from Filene Fellow Dr. Mai Thi Nguyen's research.

AUGUST 2020



REPORT #651 | FILENE.ORG/651

### Amplifying Your Credit Union’s Mission: Financial and Community Impacts of Being a CDFI

651

655a

REPORT #655a | FILENE.ORG/655

### Meeting the Moment: How Credit Unions Are Tackling the Housing Shortage in Their Communities

REPORT #655b | FILENE.ORG/655

### Another Housing Future is Possible: How Credit Unions Can Support Shared Equity Models

655b

655c

REPORT #655c | FILENE.ORG/655

### From Land to Homes: Credit Unions’ Role in Affordable Housing

REPORT #655d | FILENE.ORG/655

### Leading the Way: Credit Union Strategy for Affordable Housing Investment Funds

655d

655e

#### PIVOTAL REPORT

REPORT #655e | FILENE.ORG/655

### Innovations on Affordable Mortgages

This report examines how credit unions are developing innovative mortgage products to expand access to homeownership, particularly for underserved and first-time buyers. Through case studies, it highlights strategies such as zero-down payment loans, down payment assistance programs, waiving private mortgage insurance, and extending loan terms to 40 years to improve affordability. The research finds that these approaches are most effective when paired with holistic, member-centered underwriting and supportive services that help borrowers succeed over time. It also emphasizes the role of partnerships with other credit unions, CDFIs, and community organizations in scaling impact while managing risk.

AUGUST 2025

FOR MORE INSIGHTS FROM THIS CENTER VISIT: [FILENE.ORG/IMPACT](https://FILENE.ORG/IMPACT)

# BY THE NUMBERS



## ACTIVITIES

The potential for major cultural shifts in the credit union industry as a result of activation of the Center's research and tools.

**13**

RESEARCH OUTPUTS

**2**

CONFERENCES & ROADSHOWS

**7**

WEBINARS & PODCASTS



## INDUSTRY INFLUENCE

The influence this Center has had to change mindsets and enhance learning for both individuals and organizations.

**10,511**

CENTER PAGE VIEWS

**9,129**

RESEARCH OUTPUT DOWNLOADS

**1,127**

WEBINAR EVENT  
ATTENDEES



## MEDIA INTEREST

The scope of interest in the Center's topic within credit union industry and trade media.

**66.62M**

POTENTIAL AUDIENCE  
REACHED THROUGH  
CUINSIGHT, CU BROADCAST,  
CU TODAY, AND  
CREDIT UNION TIMES



## OVERALL REACH

The scope of exposure of the Center's topic within the credit union industry.

**792**

CREDIT UNION AND INDUSTRY  
ORGANIZATIONS REPRESENTING...

**\$1.31T**

IN CREDIT UNION ASSETS

**76M**

MEMBERS

**173K**

EMPLOYEES

## ORGANIZATIONAL IMPACT

### AMPLIFYING SOCIAL IMPACT: THE STATE OF CREDIT UNION GIVING

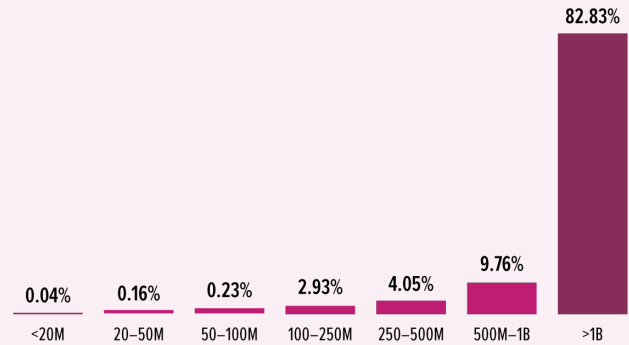
In addition to their missions to improve member well-being, credit unions also serve as important vessels for driving philanthropy in their communities. However, as the philanthropic landscape has become more competitive and a change in marketplace expectations for credit unions has shifted how they think about community engagement for positive social change. The Community Social Impact inaugural report on the “State of Credit Union Giving” examines the landscape of philanthropic and community investment practices across credit unions and provides an overview of social impact efforts in three key areas: volunteer work, charitable giving, and other collaborative efforts.

There are several key benefits that communities and businesses alike derive from corporate philanthropy including more higher employment engagement, greater consumer satisfaction, and more effective non-profit organizations. The research showed that credit unions’ generosity is on par with leaders from other industries in terms of giving as a percentage of net income. Cash donations were found to be most heavily focused locally, with the largest donations going to community events and sponsorships and state/city partnerships. Donations to nationally recognized partners were found to be roughly half of the more local partnerships.

However, not all philanthropic giving is equal; so to maximize social impact, this research highlights a framework for credit unions to use in their organization:

- **Focus on logistics:** Start by identifying an operational framework and strategy to define your social mission, assign employees to oversee these efforts, and prioritize transparency around your protocols internally and externally.

### CREDIT UNION CHARITABLE CONTRIBUTIONS BY ASSET SIZE



Source: Credit Union National Association, Community Impact Estimate, January 2020.

- **Strategically deploy your resources:** Make the best use of limited resources by identifying an area of social impact that aligns with organizational mission and values.
- **Measure what matters:** Start by using the available metrics before expanding, and use these for regular program assessments to enhance transparency and determine what levers are best used for change.
- **Empower employees:** Staff will often be called upon to help administer your efforts, their engagement fuels matching programs, and their interest in your philanthropic efforts helps attract and retain good employees.
- **Engage members:** Your philanthropic giving should not be designed to sell your business, instead it’s a chance to highlight your mission-driven reputation within the community.
- **Tell the story thoughtfully:** Use transparent reporting and storytelling to demonstrate community value and strengthen brand trust.

By doing so, credit unions amplify both mission and market relevance, proving that purpose and performance can, and should, reinforce one another.

TO LEARN MORE VISIT: [FILENE.ORG/512](https://filene.org/512)

# SYSTEM IMPACT

## ACTIVATING THE COOPERATIVE DIFFERENCE THROUGH COMMUNITY IMPACT STRATEGY

Across a series of *Community Social Impact* studies, the Center explored how credit unions can implement their people-helping-people mission to tackle the root causes behind systemic issues to improve community well-being. Credit unions hold a unique position in that they are able to define their community beyond the typical scope of branch location or current membership. Being embedded within their community places credit unions in a better position to investigate the interconnected nature of social challenges.

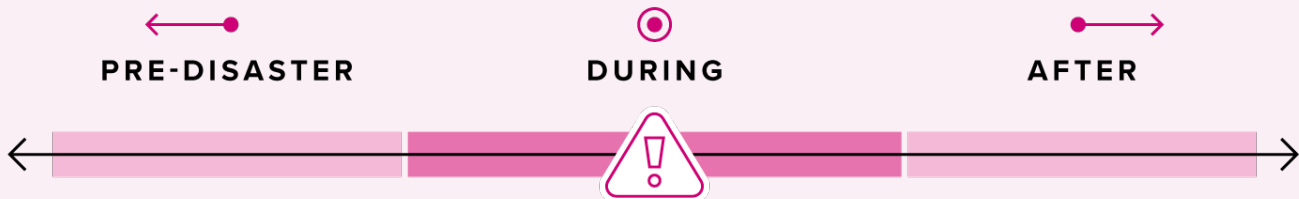
One common pattern examined in this center is the way that fast-moving disasters like Covid-19 collide in time and space with slow-moving disasters like failing infrastructure to disproportionately impact underserved, low-income, and minority communities.

Most credit unions are known in their communities for playing a role in supporting after disasters hit. However, the research shows that while isolated programs such as donations, volunteer projects, or stand-alone housing initiatives generate goodwill, they have limited long-term outcomes. When credit unions instead adopt a multi-faceted approach that connects giving, resilience, housing, and financial inclusion strategies, the overall impact expands significantly.

The timing of a credit union's response also expands its impact. The research also created a timeline framework for how credit unions can build innovative solutions relative to when the disaster unfolds.

- **Pre-disaster** measures aim to mitigate the likelihood a disaster occurs or better prepare the community for inevitable outcomes (e.g., tornadoes).
- Measures that are implemented **during** an event are aimed at immediate relief whether it's providing, information, resources, or other support.
- Measures designed for the **aftermath** of a disaster are recovery focused, providing support to the community for a better, faster recovery.

# DISASTER MEASURES RELATIVE TO TIME



When credit unions used these strategies together—combining a coordinated community impact framework with intentional timing across disaster preparedness, response, and recovery—they were better positioned to respond to community needs in ways that were both timely and sustained. Rather than relying on isolated programs, these institutions aligned giving, lending, and operational decisions around shared social impact goals.

**A few key takeaways from the research include:**

- Integrate social impact into your credit union’s core strategy by aligning philanthropy, lending, and operations around shared community goals instead of treating impact as standalone initiatives.
- Establish systems to measure community outcomes and use that data to iteratively inform decision-making, improve programs, and increase accountability across leadership and staff.

- Build and maintain cross-sector partnerships with community organizations and other credit unions to expand capacity and respond more effectively and efficiently, particularly during complex or prolonged crises.
- Invest early and consistently in housing and resilience efforts to strengthen long-term community stability and support faster, more effective recovery after disruption.

Importantly, the research shows that these approaches strengthened credit unions’ roles as trusted, visible community institutions. By maintaining a presence before, during, and after disruptive events, credit unions reinforced their cooperative identity and built credibility that supported ongoing community relationships and future collaboration.

Collectively, this center illustrates a clear takeaway: credit unions that intentionally design for community and social impact strengthen their financial sustainability, expand member reach, and elevate the cooperative difference at scale.

**TO LEARN MORE VISIT: [FILENE.ORG/527](https://filene.org/527), [FILENE.ORG/566](https://filene.org/566), & [FILENE.ORG/627](https://filene.org/627)**



**Jon Bruflat**

VP of Community Impact  
Vantage West CU



Jon Bruflat, VP of Community Impact at Vantage West Credit Union, shared how the organization is responding to growing community needs across Southern Arizona.

Headquartered in Tucson, Vantage West is the largest locally based credit union serving Pima County and the surrounding region. Bruflat emphasized that supporting small businesses, nonprofits, and members has become even more critical as community needs continue to grow.

Today’s challenges don’t take sides. Rising costs are crossing boundaries of income, family size, and geography. Food costs are up more than 25%, and housing costs have increased by over 50% since COVID—making the high cost and availability of housing some of the most urgent and unavoidable issues facing Arizona communities.

In Pima County alone, an estimated 116,000 new housing units will be needed over the next

20 years, with more than half required to be affordable for low-income families, individuals, and older adults. This reality is what drew Vantage West to Filene’s research and made its participation especially meaningful.

Through Filene’s **Housing Innovation Series**, including work such as the **Evergreen Impact Housing Fund**, Vantage West gained not only research insights, but direct access to peers and contributors through quarterly inner-circle calls.

**“The Center of Excellence is a treasure trove of research—but it’s so much more than that. It’s a network of like-minded credit unions. Each time we meet, we walk away knowing our community’s challenges aren’t isolated—and inspired to do something bigger. The examples in the research are a roadmap for what’s possible, and we’re excited to explore what we can bring to Arizona to help scale positive impact in housing.”**

Creating social impact to help more people truly thrive is not something that happens in isolation or at the tail end of other credit union business. Participating in the Center of Excellence for Community Social Impact built on WSECU's already strong foundation of work in this arena. It reinforced that having an integrated, strategic approach across the entirety of the business

(and beyond the walls, too) is what creates real change and helps communities solve some of their most intractable challenges, like increasing affordable housing. The Center of Excellence became a sort of half-laboratory and half-kitchen cabinet for social impact practitioners and leaders to expand their thinking of what's possible.



**Ann Flannigan**  
VP of Public Relations  
WSECU



## LOOKING INTO THE FUTURE

While the Center of Excellence for Community Social Impact has now ended... Filene remains committed to advancing the role of credit unions as catalysts for community well-being and systemic change. The work of this Center established a foundation for understanding how credit unions can move beyond isolated efforts to deliver coordinated, strategic impact across housing, resilience, and community investment.

Building on this momentum, Filene's Center for Member Well-Being (MWB) is expanding this work by exploring how credit unions can more holistically support the well-being of individuals and communities. This includes examining the programs, partnerships, and practices that extend credit unions' reach beyond financial services to address broader determinants of well-being, such as housing stability, financial health, and community resilience.

At the same time, FiLab is advancing this work through an increased focus on impact-driven innovation, testing new solutions and partnerships designed to address persistent social and economic challenges. By expanding into impact-focused testing, FiLab is helping credit unions experiment with and scale approaches that improve access, equity, and long-term community outcomes.

Together, these efforts reflect a continued evolution of the Center's core insight: that intentional, integrated approaches to community and social impact not only strengthen communities, but also reinforce the cooperative difference and long-term sustainability of the credit union system.

[FILENE.ORG/WELLBEING](https://www.filene.org/wellbeing)

[FILENE.ORG/FILAB](https://www.filene.org/filab)

## DIVE DEEPER

For more from the Center of Excellence for Community Social Impact visit:

[FILENE.ORG/IMPACT](https://www.filene.org/impact)

## THANK YOU

Filene's Center of Excellence for Community Social Impact is generously funded by:

