



## REALTOR® Family First Initiative — Overview

**SUMMARY:** To help provide a steady source of funding for the REALTOR® Relief Fund, Washington REALTORS® is encouraging all our local associations to make an annual contribution of \$200 to the RRF. If all our associations approve this modest contribution as the very first item in each year's budget – in essence and action, putting the REALTOR® Family First – we can collectively provide a strong, stable source of funding for the RRF.

**BACKGROUND:** When rural areas of Washington State were devastated by the worst wildfires in state history for two straight years, the REALTOR® Relief Fund was there to provide life-changing assistance, through both sets of fires. That experience left Washington REALTORS® thankful that the funds were on hand to provide help immediately, but also left us thinking: where do the RRF's funds actually come from? Not every disaster is on the epic scale of a Superstorm Sandy, or the recent flooding in Louisiana and Texas, or Hurricane Matthew. Those events often inspire significant contributions from around the country as REALTORS® open their hearts and their wallets to assist fellow REALTORS® in need, as well as those in the stricken community who need assistance with housing payments. But how can we assure a steady source of funding that isn't driven by responses to mega-catastrophes, so that funding is available the next time a wildfire, or tornado, or smaller-scale flooding strikes?

**THE IDEA:** We thought to ourselves, there are about 1,000 REALTOR® associations in the REALTOR® organization, right? So what if every association in the country agreed to contribute just \$200 to the RRF every year? That's no big deal. Even the smallest board of 50 members could afford \$200. Heck, just get 10 members to kick in \$20 each at a breakfast meeting. If every association made that small, \$200 contribution we'd have around \$200,000 for the RRF, every year, as a solid, reliable funding base.

In addition, this seems like an excellent vehicle for illustrating the true power and collective strength of the Three-Way Agreement. What a great example of, "we're all in this together!"

So, our state leadership (2016 President Karen Schweinfurth, 2017 President Margo Wheeler Willis, 2017 President – elect Jerry Martin) got together and said, let's get this thing started. Let's do it in Washington.





**THE DETAILS:** A few key points we will be stressing to our local associations:

1. This is not a contest to see who can raise the most money. It's a simple request to give just \$200 every year, to the RRF. If a larger association wants to give more, say \$300 or \$500, no one will object. But it is NOT an expectation
2. Fifty percent (50%) of the money that our locals contribute will stay in Washington for use in situations that may not rise to the level of a national relief effort. (NOTE: Washington does not have a state Relief Foundation, so we don't know how the existence of a foundation might affect another state's willingness to try something like the REALTOR® Family First idea)
3. The state association also will make a significant annual contribution to the program.
4. In Washington, this will NOT count toward compliance with Core Standards. The letter and spirit of Core Standards is to focus on advocacy and community involvement. The REALTOR® Family First initiative is, as the name suggests, first and foremost focused internally to make sure there are funds available to help fellow REALTORS® when disaster strikes. And frankly, it doesn't feel right to give "easy" Core Standards credit for simply writing a \$200 check. We should expect more from ourselves.

**THE DOWNSIDE:** We recognize there may be objections to this concept, and it may not be right for all areas of the country. Here are the primary concerns we've heard so far:

1. We're supposed to be an "advocacy first" organization.  
This sends the wrong message

WR believes that REALTORS® can maintain a concentrated and powerful focus on advocacy while still doing the right thing for our members. In our view, the REALTOR® Family First concept will not divert significant funds or time from our advocacy effort, nor will it somehow set a bad precedent; remember, we're only talking about \$200. What the initiative is really saying is, "don't forget your fellow REALTORS®. Make them a priority."

2. We shouldn't use dues dollars for charitable purposes—that should be an individual decision by individual REALTORS®

We respect this position, but when it is raised in Washington we believe there are at least two responses.





First, the REALTOR® Relief Foundation is different. This isn't a matter of members advocating for their favorite charities, nor of using dues dollars that could be used on behalf of members for other purposes that are not directly related to the REALTOR® mission. This is by, for and about REALTORS®. It is about keeping some of our members' dues in-house, within the organizational family to use on behalf of members first (remember, even when some RRF funds are used for housing payment assistance to members of a devastated community, that directly helps members and their businesses), and very importantly, **every dollar that goes to the RRF is paid out to recipients... there are no administrative costs involved because all administrative costs are borne by the affected Realtor associations.**

Second, even if a board is reluctant to use dues dollars, we're only talking about \$200. Hold a bake sale. Ask for personal contributions at a general membership meeting. This can be done.

**THE ROLLOUT:** We will introduce this concept to our incoming state and local leaderships at our state Leadership Conference, October 19-21.

The REALTOR® Family First idea also will be discussed several times at the NAR Convention. At the RCE Leadership Luncheon on November 6, WR CEO Steve Francks will be on a panel, moderated by Martin Edwards, that will be discussing various aspects of the RRF's mission and capabilities. Francks will be introducing Washington's REALTOR® Family First concept to the hundreds of AE's and association volunteer leaders in attendance.

We also expect President Karen Schweinfurth and President-elect Margo Wheeler Willis to be presenting the concept at the Medium States Idea Exchange Council on November 3, and also at the State President/Presidents-elect Information Exchange on November 6.

