



# MEMBERS HELPING MEMBERS

SOUTHERN PINE ELECTRIC



## MEMBERS HELPING MEMBERS QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

### 1. What is Members Helping Members?

Members Helping Members is a charitable program to generate and collect voluntary donations. These funds are then used to benefit organizations in Southern Pine Electric's service area for the purpose of improving the quality of life for our members and their communities. The program is designed based on the Operation Round Up criteria.

### 2. How did it get started?

Palmetto Electric Cooperative in South Carolina created the first Operation Round Up Program in 1989, and since then it has been adopted by more than 250 electric cooperatives across the nation. Operation Round Up has raised more than \$50 million for electric cooperative communities across the United States since its introduction. Many co-ops choose a different name for their individual program, and Southern Pine has selected "Members Helping Members."

### 3. How does it work?

The bills of participating Southern Pine Electric members are rounded up each month to the nearest dollar amount. That amount, which is completely tax deductible, is donated to local organizations in our service area. All funds stay in the community to benefit the members of Southern Pine Electric. For example, if a member's bill is \$145.50, it would be rounded up to \$146.00. Then, the rounded fifty cents would be deposited into the Southern Pine Electric Trust Fund, Members Helping Members. The average contribution per account is \$6 per year.

### 4. What is the Southern Pine Electric Trust Fund, Members Helping Members?

The Southern Pine Electric Trust Fund, Members Helping Members, is set up to represent the members of Southern Pine Electric, and the funds collected through the program, for charitable purposes. The mission of the program is to distribute money collected from Southern Pine Electric members through the program to worthwhile, charitable, and educational purposes, which will improve lives within the electric service area. Member donations will be placed in the Southern Pine Electric Trust Fund, Members Helping Members, and be administered by the Pinebelt Foundation, a charitable organization described in Sections 501(c)(3) and 509(a)(1) of the Internal Revenue Code.

We have partnered with the Pinebelt Foundation to collect funds and provide vetting on all applications to ensure funds will be used for the greater good in the communities we serve. The Foundation will make award recommendations and present to a Member Advisory Committee for review and award. The advisory committee may request additional information or determine if personal visits are necessary for fact gathering. The 11-County Member Advisory Committee then votes on all grant requests.

This program is an example of people coming together and pooling their resources to accomplish a greater good, much like the residents of our service territory did in 1938 when they formed Southern Pine to bring electricity to rural homes and farms. It was something they could not accomplish alone, but together it was achievable.

### 5. What is Southern Pine Electric's goal for this program?

Cooperatives are governed by seven principles. The seventh principle is Concern for Community. Our goal through this program is to help improve the quality of life for the people and communities we serve. Southern Pine has a long history of community support, from children's programs to non-profits. Many worthy member organizations can use additional funding to enhance their mission and help more people. This program provides Southern Pine Electric members with the opportunity to extend our community commitment and provide additional funding for the communities to grow and thrive.

### 6. Who will oversee the money collected from this program?

Southern Pine Electric's Board of Directors has selected an eleven-member Member Advisory Committee, being one member from each county within the co-op's service territory. Each Advisory Committee member must be a member of Southern Pine Electric, in good standing, and will serve three, one-year terms. The Advisory Committee members will not be able to serve for more than three consecutive years. No member of the board of directors, or their immediate family, may serve on the member advisory committee. No applicant should discuss an application, or the application process, with any Southern Pine Electric board member or advisory committee member.

**7. Why are members automatically signed up for the program?**

The system will automatically enroll members. However, it is completely up to each member as to whether they will participate. Opting out is easy but we believe our members will want to participate so that they can benefit from this program.

**8. If I have more than one account, will each account be rounded up?**

Yes. Each account is automatically enrolled through the system. If you wish to remove any, or all, of your accounts from the program, simply call us at 800-231-5240, email [optout@southernpine.coop](mailto:optout@southernpine.coop) or complete an opt-out form at [southernpine.coop/MHM](http://southernpine.coop/MHM). Opting out is easy but we hope that you will want to benefit from this program.

**9. What if a member does not wish to participate? How can you opt-out?**

Members can easily opt-out of the program. Contact a Southern Pine Electric member service representative at 800-231-5240, complete the opt-out form at [southernpine.coop/MHM](http://southernpine.coop/MHM), or email [optout@southernpine.coop](mailto:optout@southernpine.coop) to submit the request.

**10. Will new members automatically become part of the program?**

Yes, new members will be automatically enrolled in the program but can easily opt out.

**11. How are requests for funding handled?**

Member organizations that seek funding from the Southern Pine Electric Trust Fund, Members Helping Members, must complete a thorough grant application through the Pinebelt Foundation, our charitable partner, who will manage the collection, vetting, and recommendations of all applications based on the criteria of the Member Helping Members grant guidelines. Southern Pine’s Member Advisory Committee will review all eligible grant applications and the Pinebelt Foundation recommendations, to ensure funds will be used for the greater good in the communities we serve. Awards may range up to \$10,000 per organization per year.

The decision of the Member Advisory Committee, representing each county within the service territory, shall be final.

Applications will be available during the months of February and August and only accessible online at [southernpine.coop/MHM](http://southernpine.coop/MHM) with a link to the Pinebelt Foundation for the application. Applications will NOT be accepted via mail, FedEx, USPS or at any Southern Pine Electric Cooperative location or at any Pinebelt Foundation location.

**12. How often are funding decisions determined?**

Grant applications will be accepted twice a year as follows:

<u>Application Period</u>	<u>Review and Award Period</u>
February	May
August	November

Incomplete applications will not be considered or kept on file. Repeat applicants must complete a new application. Applicants will be notified by mail of the decision regarding their request. Checks will be made payable to the organization who made the request.

**13. If you are not a Southern Pine Electric member, can you still participate in this program?**

No. Only Southern Pine Electric members can participate since funds come from rounding up members’ electric bills to the next dollar.

**14. Who can apply for funding?**

Any organization headquartered in Southern Pine Electric’s eleven county service area, being Covich, Covington, Forrest, Jasper, Jefferson Davis, Lawrence, Newton, Rankin, Scott, Simpson, and Smith, is eligible to apply for funding. Based on Southern Pine Electric’s Trust, Members Helping Members’ guidelines, nonprofits, community-based or volunteer organizations, educational, civic organizations, fire departments, emergency first responders, law enforcement organizations, and shelters that generally qualify as exempt under 501 (c)(3) may apply for grants. Trust funds will not be used for political or national organizations.

Although there are many worthy charitable and educational projects and community needs in our service area, the limited availability of funds requires us to establish funding priority categories. Funds will be used for the greater good of our communities for organizations or charities who align with Southern Pine Electric Cooperative’s mission, culture, and values.

Funding priorities include, but are not limited to, projects that focus on the following:

**Community Service:** Programs, projects, and organizations that are important components of a community’s overall quality of life, and the safety and well-being of its residents.

**Economic Development:** Programs and projects designed to promote greater economic stability by helping to expand and diversify, local economies and promote tourism.

Community leadership programs designed to improve problem solving skills and empower people to become self-reliant in identifying solutions to local economic and social problems.

**Education and Youth:** Schools served by Southern Pine Electric Cooperative may apply for grants for programs/projects that benefit students and/or teachers.

Programs that are designed to combat critical social problems affecting youth.

Programs and projects that promote wellness and encourage youth participation in athletics and physical fitness activities.  
Programs and projects that promote academic achievement and advancement by students.

**Environment:** Programs and projects that promote community recycling, beautification, and natural resource preservation.  
Community-based environmental quality education programs.

**15. Can a member nominate an organization for funding?**

No. Forms must be filled out by those requesting assistance. However, a member can forward the information to an organization that they feel is most deserving.

**16. What are the limitations on grant applications?**

Awards may range up to \$10,000 per organization annually. Contributions will only be made to support bona fide charitable, nonprofit organizations and activities that align with Southern Pine Electric's culture and values.

Contributions generally will not be made for:

- Lobbying or political issues or campaigns
- Fund-raising dinners, raffles, and other such events
- Individuals
- Capital fund campaigns
- National or state fund drives
- Advertising
- Internal payroll and administrative expenses of an organization
- Operating expenses

**17. Are contributions tax-deductible?**

Yes. All donations are tax-deductible.

**18. Will members be able to find out where the money goes?**

Yes. We will publish the disbursements in the Today in Mississippi as well as post the information at [southernpine.coop/MHM](http://southernpine.coop/MHM) and on media sites. There will also be an annual report for the Southern Pine Electric Trust Fund, Members Helping Members, provided at the Annual Membership Meeting each November.

**19. When will applications for the program be accepted from non-profit organizations?**

The initial grant applications are intended to be first accepted during the month of February 2025 and reviewed and awarded in May of 2025.

Then, moving forward, grant applications will be accepted twice a year during the months of February and August and reviewed and awarded by the member advisory committee during the months of May and November, respectively.

**20. When will this program start?**

The program began in October 2024, with the first awards to be made in May of 2025.