

Merced City and County Continuum of Care, CA-520

Homeless Housing, Assistance and Prevention Program Application Narrative

There were 607 persons who were counted as homeless in our 2019 point in time count, 322 were sheltered and 285 unsheltered. In 2018, 514 persons were counted as homeless, 202 were sheltered and 312 unsheltered this represents 93 more homeless persons counted in are CoC service area. This narrative will outline how our CoC jurisdiction plans on addressing the needs of our community to prevent and end homelessness.

1. SUMMARY OF HOMELESSNESS IN THE MERCED CITY AND COUNTY CONTINUUM OF CARE JURISDICTION

A. Submitted data from Merced City and County Continuum of Care HUD Longitudinal System Assessment from October 1, 2017 – September 30, 2018

B. Data provided from COC Longitudinal System Assessment

1. Total number of households served in:
 - 368 - Emergency Shelter, Safe Haven and Transitional Housing
 - 157 - Rapid Rehousing
 - 31 - Permanent Supportive Housing
2. Total number of disabled households served across all interventions:
 - 140
3. Total number of households experiencing chronic homelessness served across all intervention:
 - 232
4. Total number of 55+ households served across all interventions:
 - 194
5. Total number of unaccompanied youth served across all interventions:
 - 2
6. Total number of veteran households served across all interventions:
 - 105
7. Number of individuals served across all interventions who were:
 - 188 - Female
 - 375 – Male
 - 3 - Transgender
 - 0 - Gender Non-Conforming
8. Total number individuals served across all interventions who were:
 - 259 - White, Non-Hispanic/Non-Latino (only)
 - 169 - White, Hispanic/Latino (only)
 - 95 - Black or African American (only)
 - 10- Asian (only)
 - 13 - American Indian or Alaska Native (only)
 - 3 - Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander (only)
 - 16 - Multiple races

2. DEMONSTRATION OF REGIONAL COORDINATION

A. Coordinated Entry System (CES) Information

1. Description of CES functionality

a. Policy Oversight Entity: CoC Board

The CoC Board is the Merced CES policy oversight entity. Policy-level oversight ensures that the goals and standards for coordinated entry developed during the CoC's CE planning process are being met. The CoC includes relevant mainstream service providers in coordinating services and assistance and conducting activities related to continual process improvement. The core responsibilities of the policy oversight entity are to establish and oversee the policies that allow the coordinated entry process to operate in accordance with the planning group's decisions related to coordinated entry's core elements: Access, Assessment, Prioritization, and Referral. This builds off the decisions made in the planning process in four core areas:

- Clearly describe and document participation expectations for participation in CE, including:
 - Use of appropriate assessment tools
 - Participation in case conferencing or other coordination mechanisms. Case conferences include CE staff meetings to discuss cases, resolve barriers to housing, and make decisions about priority, eligibility, termination, and appeal
 - Use of CE to fill project vacancies or openings
 - Addressing the safety needs of survivors of domestic violence
 - Incentives or penalties associated with meeting or failing to meet those expectations
- Determine local data collection and data quality expectations by:
 - Establishing written procedures for how each data collection expectation will be met and which entity, project, or project type is expected to collect the data
 - Including the HMIS lead in planning for management of data
 - Aligning expectations with evaluation planning
- Define data sharing protocols by:
 - Ensuring adequate privacy protections of all participant information, including written P&P for obtaining participant consent to share and store participant information for purposes of assessing and referring participants through the CE process
- Select a data system for CE, which is HMIS.
 - The CoC is responsible for the following for participating agencies:
- Ongoing staff training on the operating policies and procedures
- Data collection and analysis support

Management Entity: Collaborative Applicant and HMIS Lead

Two roles are designated as the management staff for CE. (1) is the Collaborative Applicant as the coordinator who works for the management entity, the CoC Board, to lead the coordinated entry day-to-day process. (2) is the HMIS lead as a system administrator who oversees data entry for the HMIS. The CoC board ensures that the management entity has the formal authority to compel all providers included in the CE to meet the expectations, standards, and responsibilities set for them by the CoC. Management entity responsibilities include:

- Establishing day-to-day management structures
 - Following the P&P outlined in this guide to implement the CES
 - Administering the grievance and appeal process for families and individuals in situations that are not resolved at the provider level, outlined in our CES policy & procedure guide.

- Supporting existing or building new collaborations with mainstream resources
- Documenting costs of operating CE and identifying eligible funding opportunities for those costs
- Monitoring CE requirements from funders
- Establishing a clear, accessible communications plan, outlined in the P & P guide.
 - Identify points of contact for CE questions and information at each agency
 - Dedicated email addresses and procedures for communicating about participants
 - A website for forms and news
 - Methods for development and distribution of waiting lists
 - Procedures for communication about enrollment vacancies and referrals of selected participants
- Promoting standardized screening and assessment processes
 - Developing forms for each step of the CE process which follow the sequence and decisions logic of the CE process and stages to make data collection efficient
 - Together with each agency participating in CE, review the CE forms for clarity and ease of use.
 - Maintain up-to-date versions of forms and document any changes, noting the date of change, reason for the change, and the entity requesting or making the change.
- Developing and delivering training
 - Provide training protocols and at least one annual training opportunity to participating staff at organizations that serve as access points or otherwise conduct assessments. The purpose of the training is to provide access to materials that clearly describe the methods by which assessments are to be conducted with fidelity to the CoC's CE process, including its written policies and any variations.
 - Update and distribute training protocols at least annually, which include the requirements for prioritization and the criteria for uniform decision-making and referrals.
- Conducting monitoring at both system and project level
 - Monitor participant outcomes through system performance measures, including review of Participant status and outcome reports from HMIS will be reviewed monthly or quarterly
 - Monitor participating providers for their program's fidelity to the CE P&P

Additional tasks assigned to the Management Entity include:

- Recruit, train, and onboard participating partner agencies into the CES.
- Make ongoing site visits and implement quality assurance strategies for CES process.
- Maintain information about all providers' available housing and service programs, client eligibility, and housing inventory. All information will be updated at least annually.
- Assure data and application quality, and when appropriate work with providers to improve submission processes.
- Manage the By-Name List(s) and housing referrals, in accordance with the CoC Written Standards and CES Policies & Procedures.
- Facilitate case conferencing processes with the Case Conferencing Committee, veterans group, or other groups as needed with the goal of assuring clients are referred to appropriate interventions.
- Create and implement a strong marketing strategy for the CES that targets providers who serve homeless individuals and families, and educates the broader community about how to access the CES.
- Convene various CoC groups to keep stakeholders updated and aware of changes to the CES.

- Lead efforts for evaluation and continuous quality improvement which include both provider feedback and client input, including outcome reports.
- Provide ongoing updates to CoC Board and relevant committees of the CoC.
- In cases where no Access Point can be identified, connect client to the CoC Administrator for direction in completion of the CES application.

Evaluation Entity: CoC Board

The CoC Board is responsible for the evaluation process, which is the use of participant and provider data to measure the functioning of the CoC. Regular and ongoing evaluation of the CE system will be conducted to ensure that improvement opportunities are identified, that results are shared and understood, and that the CE system is held accountable.

b. CES Assessment Process

The CoC's CE process will provide a standardized assessment process to all CE participants, ensuring uniform decision-making and coordination of care for persons experiencing a housing crisis. All persons served by CE will be assessed using the VI-SPDAT. All access points must use this tool to ensure that all persons served are assessed in a consistent manner, using the same process. The VI-SPDAT documents a set of participant conditions, attributes, need level, and vulnerability, allowing the access point and/or assessment staff to identify a service strategy to the HMIS Lead who manages the CoC's prioritization list.

Merced City and County CoC uses the Vulnerability Index – Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (VI- SPDAT, e.g. the assessment survey) created by OrgCode Consulting, Inc. and Community Solutions as the standard triage assessment tool. This assessment tool will be used for all homeless individuals and households in Merced City and County.

The CES listing prioritizes individuals with the greatest vulnerabilities based on VI-SPDAT assessments scores. The CES committee works to ensure that people experiencing homelessness receive the right housing interventions by matching them to available resources as quickly as possible by programs removing barriers in order to access housing. All funded programs must align and comply with core components of Housing First. Individuals experiencing homelessness shall have voluntary services tailored to meet their current needs by removing all barriers to housing and giving them a choice in where to live and whether to participate in available programs or accept additional services. Referrals to housing and services are person centered and based on the individual needs in order to connected them with permanent housing or permanent supportive housing. All housing providers are mandated by our CoC Charter to adhere to Housing First Practices and follow the Core components in regards to housing homeless individuals.

All service providers and/ or vendors that receive funding as a sub recipient must provide all eligible activities in a manner consistent with the Housing First practices described in California Code of Regulations, Title 25, Section 8409, subdivision (b)(1)-(6). Sub recipient allocated funds for eligible activities that provide permanent housing (as defined in Section 50490(k)) shall incorporate the core components of Housing First, as provided in Section 8255, subdivision (b) of the Welfare and Institutions Code. Housing First is an evidence- based model that uses housing as a tool, rather than a reward, for recovery and that centers on providing or connecting homeless people to permanent housing as quickly as possible. Under the Housing First model, services offered are as needed and requested on a voluntary basis, and do not make housing contingent on participation in services.

Phases of Assessment

All projects participating in CE will follow the assessment and triage protocols of the CE system. The assessment process will progressively collect only enough participant information to prioritize and refer participants to available CoC housing and support services.

The CoC has adopted the following phased approach to engage and appropriately serve persons seeking assistance through the CE system:

1. **Initial Triage (Immediately):** This first phase will focus on identifying the immediate housing crisis, and clarifying that the CoC crisis response system is the appropriate system to address the potential participant's immediate needs.
2. **Diversion or Prevention Screening (Immediately):** The second phase of assessment can also happen immediately upon engaging with a participant. During this phase, CE staff will examine existing CoC and participant resources and options that could be used to avoid the participant entering the homeless system of care.
3. **Crisis Services Intake (Immediately):** The third phase should also happen immediately, as it is intended to collect all information necessary to enroll the participant in a crisis response project such as emergency shelter or other homeless assistance project.
4. **Initial Assessment (Within 3 business days):** During the fourth phase, assessors will collect information to identify a participant's housing and service needs with the intent to resolve that participant's immediate housing crisis.
5. **Comprehensive Assessment (Within 5 business days after initial assessment):** In the fifth phase, the assessor will seek information necessary to refine, clarify, and verify a participant's housing and homeless history, barriers, goals, and preferences. Assessment information supports the evaluation of the participant's vulnerability and prioritization for assistance.
6. **Next Step / Move On Assessment (Ongoing):** The final phase will collect information revealed or known after an Initial Assessment is conducted when that new information might suggest a revised referral strategy. Or it will re-evaluate participants who have been stably housed for some time and who might be ready for less-intensive housing and service strategies.

Assessment Screening

The CE process may collect and document participants' membership in Civil Rights protected classes but will not consider membership in a protected class as justification for restricting, limiting, or steering participants to particular referral options

Assessor Training

The CoC is committed to ensuring that all staff who assist with CE operations receive sufficient training to implement the CE system in a manner consistent with the vision and framework of CE, as well as in accordance with the policies and procedures of its CE system.

The HMIS intake and assessment survey can only be conducted by staff or volunteers who have successfully completed training and been authorized by Community Action Agency (CAA) or Human Services Agency (HSA) HMIS. All intake and assessment surveys will be conducted using the approved HMIS Intake Forms and the Assessment Survey tool for the intended individual or family.

After initial training, the CoC will provide at least annual training for persons who will manage access point processes and conduct assessments for CE. Training will be offered at no cost to the agency or staff, and will be delivered by an experienced and professional trainer who is identified by the CoC. The purpose of the training is to provide all staff who administer intakes and

assessments with access to materials that clearly describe the methods by which assessments are to be conducted with adherence to the CoC's coordinated entry written policies and procedures.

Topics for training will include the following:

- Review of CoC's written CE policies and procedures, including variations adopted for specific subpopulations;
- Requirements for use of assessment information to determine prioritization;
- Intensive training on the use of the CE assessment tool; and
- Criteria for uniform decision-making and referrals.

In addition, all assessment staff must be trained at least once regarding:

- How to conduct a trauma-informed assessment of participants, with the goal of offering special consideration to survivors of domestic violence and/or sexual assault to help reduce the risk of re-traumatization.
- Safety planning and other next-step procedures to be followed in the event that safety issues are identified in the process of conducting an assessment.

All staff administering assessments use culturally and linguistically competent practices in order to reduce barriers for underserved populations, including but not limited to immigrants and refugees, youth, individuals with disabilities, and LGBTQ individuals. The CoC shall further these practices by:

- Incorporating cultural and linguistic competency training and person-centered approaches into the required annual training protocols for participating projects and staff members;
- Using culturally and linguistically competent questions for all persons that reduce cultural or linguistic barriers to housing and services; and
- Providing staff access to and training in the procedures for obtaining interpretation and accessibility services.

CAA HMIS Systems Administrator will monitor the quality and consistencies of intake and assessments entered into HMIS and provide feedback, training, and adjustments to policies and procedures as necessary to address issues that may arise. Additionally, CAA HMIS may revoke the right of any individual user or agency to participate in HMIS and/or coordinated entry if the individual or agency violates user agreements or policies and procedures.

Participant Autonomy

It is crucial that persons served by the CoC's CE system have the autonomy to identify whether they are uncomfortable or unable to answer any questions during the assessment process, or to refuse a referral that has been made to them. In both instances, the refusal of the participant to respond to assessment questions or to accept a referral shall not adversely affect his or her position on the CE's prioritization list.

The CoC will not deny services to any participant based on that participant's refusal to allow their data to be stored or shared unless a Federal statute requires collection, use, storage, and reporting of a participant's personally identifiable information as a condition of program participation. All CoC coordinated entry participants are free to decide what information they provide during the assessment process, to refuse to answer assessment questions, and to refuse housing and service options without retribution or limiting their access to other forms of assistance.

Note that some funders require collection and documentation of a participant's disability or other characteristics or attributes as a condition for determining eligibility. Participants who choose not to provide information in these instances could be limiting potential referral options.

If participants reject options, the CoC must describe the conditions for participants to maintain their place in CE prioritization lists. Programs may require participants to provide certain pieces of information to determine program eligibility only when the applicable program regulation requires the information in order to establish or document eligibility.

c. **Referral**

Notification of Vacancies

All CE participating providers will enroll new participants only from the CoC's CE referral process. To facilitate prompt referrals and to reduce vacancy rates, participating providers must notify the Collaborative Applicant of any known and anticipated upcoming vacancies.

When a TH, RRH, or PSH vacancy occurs or is expected to occur in the immediate future, the provider agency with the vacancy must alert the CE Coordinator via email within 1 business days of the vacancy. The notification must include specific details of the vacancy, including the project name, unit size, location, and any funder-defined eligibility requirements.

The Collaborative Applicant will provide vacancy information to the CE Governing Committee, which will work to identify a prioritized household to fill the vacancy during the next regularly scheduled housing referral coordination meeting. The Collaborative Applicant will use the by-name list to identify the highest prioritized and eligible household to fill the vacancy and refer the household to the provider with the vacancy.

All participating housing providers will enter their program inventory and eligibility criteria in HMIS. Program staff will work with the HMIS system administrator and CoC CES Administrator to make sure program information stays up to date. Additional eligibility criteria will be used to pre-screen individuals and households on the CES Administrator for basic eligibility

Participant-Declined Referrals

One of the guiding principles of CE is participant choice. This principle must be evident throughout the CE process, including the referral phase. Participants in CE are allowed to reject service strategies and housing options offered to them, without repercussion.

Individuals and families will be given information about the programs available to them and provided choices whenever feasible based on assessment information, vulnerability and need scores, preliminary eligibility pre-determinations, and available resources. Of the options available, participants will be afforded their choice of which project to be referred to. If an individual or family declines a referral to a housing program, they remain on the prioritization list until the next housing opportunity is available.

Provider-Declined Referrals

There may be instances when agencies decide not to accept a referral from the CE system. When a provider agency declines to accept a referred prioritized household into its project, the agency must notify the Collaborative Applicant of the denial and the reason for the denial. Refusals by projects are acceptable only in certain situations, including these:

- The person does not meet the project's eligibility criteria.
- The person would be a danger to self or others if allowed to stay at this particular project.

- The services available through the project are not sufficient to address the intensity and scope of participant need.
- The project is at capacity and is not available to accept referrals at this time.
- Other justifications as specified by the “referred to” project.

The agency must communicate the refusal to the Collaborative Applicant within 2 business days of making the refusal. The agency must notify the Collaborative Applicant why the referral was rejected, how the referred participant was informed, what alternative resources were made available to the participant, and whether the project staff foresee additional, similar refusals occurring in the future. This information will then be shared by the Collaborative Applicant with the CE Governing Committee, which will discuss and decide on the most appropriate next steps for both the project and the participant.

2. Promotion of utilization of CES

a. Affirmative Marketing & Outreach

All persons participating in any aspect of CE such as access, assessment, prioritization, or referral shall be afforded equal access to CE services and resources without regard to a person’s actual or perceived membership in a federally protected class such as race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age, familial status, or disability. Additionally, all people in different populations and subpopulations in the CoC’s geographic area, including people experiencing chronic homelessness, veterans, families with children, youth, and survivors of domestic violence, shall have fair and equal access to the coordinated entry process.

Each project participating in CE is required to post or otherwise make publicly available a notice (provided by the CoC) that describes coordinated entry. This notice should be posted in the agency waiting areas, as well as any areas where participants may congregate or receive services (e.g., dining hall). All staff at each agency are required to know which personnel within their agency can discuss and explain CE to a participant who seeks more information.

The CoC will affirmatively market housing and supportive services to eligible persons in the CoC’s geographic area who are least likely to apply in the absence of special outreach, including the following sub-populations: people experiencing chronic homelessness, veterans, families with children, youth, and survivors of domestic violence. Coordinated entry outreach will be designed to ensure the coordinated access process is available to all eligible persons regardless of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age, familial status, disability, actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity, or marital status. Coordinated entry outreach and any marketing materials will clearly convey that access points are accessible to all sub-populations.

Good faith efforts at conducting an affirmative marketing strategy shall include the following:

1. Advertising in locations or media that are used and viewed or listened to by those identified as least likely to enter CoC services and housing;
2. Marketing CoC services and housing to specific community, religious, support organizations or other groups frequented by those least likely to enter CoC services and housing;
3. Developing a brochure or handout that describes CES processes to be used by persons experiencing a housing crisis to locate, identify, and access CES services;
4. Insuring that the CES management staff and operators of CES access points have read and understood the Fair Housing Act, and the purpose and objectives of the CES AMS. Outreach will be conducted by existing outreach teams and programs in the community that act as coordinated entry access points, including outreach resources that specifically target people experiencing chronic homelessness, veterans, families with children, youth, LGBTQ youth, and survivors of domestic violence and human trafficking. Culturally

competent outreach resources with strong existing ties to the community's most vulnerable populations will serve as coordinated entry access points to ensure that all subpopulations access coordinated entry. Outreach will be available in the following languages to meet the needs of minority, ethnic, and groups with Limited English Proficiency (LEP): Spanish and Hmong Assessments

b. Complaint and Appeal Processes

The CoC is committed to ensuring that no information is used to discriminate or prioritize households for housing and services on a protected basis such as race, color, religion, national origin, sex, age, familial status, disability, actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identify, or marital status.

The CE participant information packet must include a form that details who the point of contact is for filing and addressing any nondiscrimination complaints, which can be filed by participants if they believe the nondiscrimination policy has been violated in their case during the CE process. Additionally, this form will describe and provide contact information on how to access the appeal process if they are not satisfied with or have any questions regarding how their complaints are handled. This form must be reviewed at the access point by CE staff, and must be signed by each participant.

c. Non-discrimination Policy

The CE system must adhere to all jurisdictionally relevant civil rights and fair housing laws and regulations. The CoC has designated the CE Governing Committee as the entity responsible for monitoring agencies on compliance with all CE requirements, including adherence to civil rights and fair housing laws and regulations. Failure to comply with these laws and regulations will result in a monitoring finding on the project, which may affect its position in the local CoC rating and ranking process.

- Fair Housing Act - prohibits discriminatory housing practices based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, disability, or familial status.
- Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act - prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.
- Title VI of the Civil Rights Act - prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.
- Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act - prohibits public entities, which include state and local governments and special purpose districts, from discriminating against individuals with disabilities in all their services, programs, and activities, which include housing and housing-related services such as
- housing search and referral assistance.
- Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act - prohibits private entities that own, lease, and operate places of public accommodation, which include shelters, social service establishments, and other public accommodations providing housing, from discriminating on the basis of disability.

The Merced City and County CoC and all agencies participating in the coordinated entry process must comply with applicable equal access and nondiscrimination provisions of federal and state civil rights laws during every phase of the coordinated entry process.

Outreach will be conducted by existing outreach teams and programs in the community that act as coordinated entry access points, including outreach resources that specifically target people experiencing chronic homelessness, veterans, families with children, youth, LGBTQ youth, and survivors of domestic violence and human trafficking. Culturally competent outreach resources with strong existing ties to the community's most vulnerable populations will serve as coordinated entry access points to ensure that all subpopulations access

coordinated entry. Outreach will be available in the following languages to meet the needs of minority, ethnic, and groups with Limited English Proficiency (LEP): Spanish and Hmong Assessments

3. Our Jurisdiction's Challenges Related to CES and Plans to Address these Challenges

- Service providers who do not receive grant funding do not always understand the importance of the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), so they do not enter their clients into the system.
- Not all stakeholders are comfortable with HMIS or do not have the staffing needed, requiring the lead HMIS agency to make entries on behalf of others.
- Not all vouchers for permanent housing that have been made available from the Merced Housing Authority are being used, largely due to landlords unwilling to rent to the homeless.
- We understand that our CEC Policies and Procedures are not in full compliance with recent HUD guidance and they are being updated. We recently awarded CESH money to the HMIS lead agency to expand and improve the HMIS system for CES information and listing.
- On a county wide level, we are having difficulty housing the chronically homeless due to the amount of case management needed for them to maintain housing and the unwillingness of landlords to rent to the chronically homeless.
- Overall, we acknowledge a need to re-focus on measurable outcomes for our system of care as opposed to responding to the immediate needs before us.

Therefore, we are in the process of addressing these challenges.

In August 2019 a consultant was contracted to assess the current state of homelessness in Merced County, identify gaps in addressing it, update our CEC Policies and Procedures, and recommend next steps to ensure that our systems are aligned and funding is being used effectively.

3. RESOURCES ADDRESSING HOMELESSNESS

A. Existing Programs and Resources

1. Listing of all funds Merced County uses to provide housing and homeless services for homeless populations (federal, state and local)

a. Federal Funding			
Project	Purpose	Amount	Fund Source
Project Hope Westside 2019	Permanent Supportive Housing	\$159,124	HUD CoC Consolidated Application
Project Home Start	Permanent Supportive Housing	\$141,578	HUD CoC Consolidated Application
Sierra Saving Grace Homeless Project	Permanent Supportive Housing	\$41,721	HUD CoC Consolidated Application
Sierra Saving Grace Homeless Project 2	Permanent Supportive Housing	\$84,699	HUD CoC Consolidated Application
Sierra Saving Grace Homeless Project 3	Permanent Supportive Housing	\$91,696	HUD CoC Consolidated Application
CA CoC Planning Grant	Planning activities for CoC	\$28,939	HUD CoC Consolidated Application
HMIS Renewal Grant	HMIS Lead Agency Grant	\$82,709	HUD CoC Consolidated Application
CES Grant	CES Lead Agency Grant	\$36,385	HUD CoC Consolidated Application
Sierra Saving Grace Homeless Project	Rapid Re-Housing	\$144,740	ESG
b. State Funding			
CalWORKS Permanent and Temporary Homeless Assistance	Rental assistance for homeless CalWORKS families	\$1,195,485	CA Dept. of Social Services
CalWORKS Housing Support Program	Rental assistance and support services for homeless CalWORKS families	\$2,813,523	CA Dept. of Social Services
Home Safe Program	Housing assistance	\$747,080	CA Dept. of Social Services
Housing and Disability Advocacy Program	Supportive services for disabled persons who are homeless	\$261,788	CA Dept. of Social Services

b. State Funding Cont.			
Mental Health Services Act Housing Program	Permanent Supportive Housing	\$1,131,713	CA Dept. of Mental Health
Homeless Emergency Aid Program (HEAP)	Outreach and Engagement Center, Services, Rental Assistance, Transportation	\$727,073	HCFC SB 850
Homeless Emergency Aid Program (HEAP)	West Side Bridge Housing	\$219,126	HCFC SB 850
Homeless Emergency Aid Program (HEAP)	UPHILL Program, rental assistance for elderly 50-64	\$200,000	HCFC SB 850
Homeless Emergency Aid Program (HEAP)	AIM High House Youth transitional housing aged 18-24 years' old	\$125,000	HCFC SB 850
California Emergency Solutions & Housing (CESH)	Homeless 2 Housing Rapid Re-Housing Program, rental assistance, deposit assistance	\$350,000	HCD, State ESG, SB 2
California Emergency Solutions & Housing (CESH)	UPHILL 2 Program, case management, housing navigation, housing advocacy, rental assistance	\$159,800	HCD, State ESG, SB 2
California Emergency Solutions & Housing (CESH)	D Street Navigation Center, operating support for 24 hour navigation center	387,900	HCD, State ESG, SB 2
California Emergency Solutions & Housing (CESH)	HMIS & CES Expansion Project	95,630	HCD, State ESG, SB 2
Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness (PATH)	Community outreach, case management, mental health services	\$95,503	Dept. of Health and Human Services
Outreach and Treatment Program	Rental assistance for homeless with mental illness	\$210,000	Dept. of Health Care Services
D Street Shelter	60 bed temporary shelter Operated by Merced County Community Action Agency	\$546,928	CA Assembly Bill 97
Outreach and Engagement Center	Outreach, assessment & referrals for homeless individuals	\$1,609,526	CA Assembly Bill 97

b. State Funding Cont.			
Rescue Mission	Transitional shelter	\$60,000	CA Assembly Bill 97
Rescue Mission	50 beds transitional shelter w/ supportive services	\$986,354	CA Senate Bill 850
Juvenile Hall Demolition	Cleared site for construction of new Navigation Center, opening Oct 2020	\$474,694	CA Assembly Bill 97
Navigation Center <u>Construction</u>	75 bed shelter w/ supportive services; opening Oct 2020	\$1,749,441	CA Senate Bill 850
Navigation Center <u>Construction</u>	75 bed shelter w/ supportive services; opening Oct 2020	\$2,500,000	Central CA Alliance for Health
Navigation Center <u>Operations</u>	75 bed shelter w/ supportive services; opening Oct 2020	\$2,250,559 (3 years)	CA Senate Bill 850
Navigation Center <u>Operations</u>	75 bed shelter w/ supportive services; opening Oct 2020	\$984,852 (3 years)	CA Senate Bill 2
Health Care Navigator	Outreach to homeless; assist w/ accessing Medi-Cal	\$1,173,963	CA Dept. of Health Care Services

2. How the above resources are integrated or coordinated with Merced CoC members?

Five of the above projects are delivered through partnerships with other CoC members, including:

- Merced County Community Action Agency is a non-profit corporation which operates 12 beds of permanent supportive housing and a 60 bed temporary shelter through contracts with Merced County.
- Merced Rescue Mission is a non-profit organization which will operate 50 beds of transitional shelter housing through contracts with Merced County.

Merced County also integrates its staffing resources in various ways to further the efforts of the CoC:

- Merced County employs several staff members to provide support services to the homeless population, including outreach staff, case managers, substance abuse counselors, housing navigator and health care navigator.
- Merced County lends staff support to assist with the annual Point in Time count.
- Merced County Human Services Agency is now the Collaborative Applicant for the Merced City and County Continuum of Care.

Merced County offers short term housing assistance, housing search assistance, credit repairs, crisis counseling, substance use disorder counseling, job training, transportation, and other services which support homeless individuals and families. These services are integrated into the overall system of care and utilized by other Merced CoC providers.

3. Current gaps in housing and homeless services for homeless in Merced County.

Merced County's population is 282,928; more than a third are Medi-Cal members. Merced County is known for rates of poverty and unemployment approximately double the national average, and a shortage of housing which is affordable for residents. These factors have contributed to increasing rates of homelessness in Merced County.

In December 2019, the Merced County Homeless Management Information System documented that 1,503 unduplicated homeless adults had sought shelter services since December 2018.

The January 2019 Point in Time count discovered that 26% of those homeless persons contacted self-identified as current substance abusers, and 35% stated they had been admitted to the emergency department or hospital more than once during the previous year.

The target population usually have had frequent contact with law enforcement. They are likely to have a history of chaotic life functioning, leading to an erratic work history, financial instability, substance use disorder, and untreated medical conditions.

Therefore, the needs of the target population include:

- basic shelter, meals and showers;
- assistance in accessing permanent housing, transportation, mainstream benefits, and employment;
- medical assessment, treatment and referrals; and
- substance use disorder treatment.

It is clear that additional shelter beds and additional case management staffing are necessary to address homelessness and return individuals to productive functioning in the family, workplace, and community.

B. HHAP Funding Plans

1. How jurisdiction plans to use HHAP and how it will complement existing funds to close identified gaps in housing and homeless services for homeless in Merced City and County Continuum of Care.

The current plan is to use HHAP funding to continue current existing projects that were funded by HEAP and/ or CESH funding. We have 8 projects that were funded by one time only HEAP and/ or CESH funding, that are making an impact in our community assisting homelessness. All projects are listed above in funding break down for our jurisdiction.

- a. 8% Youth Set-aside will be used to continue to fund Youth Transitional Housing already established and in need of on-going funding.
- b. 7% Administrative funding will be used for the Collaborative applicant to manage HHAP funding, RFP processes, contracting, invoicing, reconciliation of expenditures, monitoring of contracts and measurable for projects, as well as reporting requirements.
- c. Rental Assistance, for Permanent Housing, Rapid Re-Housing and Temporary Housing

- d. Operating support for Navigation Center/ Shelter Services
 - e. Transportation Services
 - f. Flexible Subsidy Funds, Landlord Incentives to rent to the homeless
 - g. System Support if needed to bring HMIS and CES in line with all current regulations, policies and procedures from HUID, HCD, California State Dept. of Healthcare, Social Services and Mental Health.
- f. The County is constructing a 75-bed shelter with support services on site, which will be known as the Merced Navigation Center. The Merced Navigation Center will open in October 2020 and will operate 24 hours per day. Construction will be accomplished via funding provided by Senate Bill 850 and (potentially) the Central California Alliance for Health. Residents will receive coordinated care on site, including: case management; medical assessment and referrals; substance use disorder treatment; assistance in accessing mainstream benefits; job training and employment assistance; and assistance in locating permanent housing.
2. How Merced County will ensure that HHAP funded project will align and comply with core components of Housing First.

Homeless individuals will be referred to the Outreach and Engagement Center, added to CES listing, imputed into HMIS and be connected to temporary or permanent housing swiftly and with no treatment preconditions or other barriers. A case manager, housing navigator and/or housing advocate will be assigned to assess housing needs of each person experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness and link the resident to available housing resources.

Homeless individuals will be referred by: first responders and outreach workers who visit homeless encampments, parks, under bridges, and other places where homeless congregate; hospitals; and providers who participate in the CES.

4. PARTNERS ADDRESSING HOMELESSNESS

A. Collaborating Partner Efforts

1. Collaborative partners who will work on identified HHAP project and how Merced County will work with them

Merced Police Department will refer homeless individuals to the Outreach and Engagement Center. Merced Police Department responds to complaints of homeless individuals appearing to sleep in public spaces not meant for human habitation, exhibiting signs of severe service needs, or otherwise coming into frequent contact with law enforcement.

County departments such as Merced County Human Services Agency, Merced County Behavioral Health and Recovery Services, Public Health, and local service providers will offer supportive services at the site of the Outreach and Engagement Center in order to meet the needs of the person experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness. Other collaborating partners are direct service provider organizations including:

- Turning Point, a non-profit organization which connects homeless individuals to housing and service providers;

- Sierra Saving Grace, a faith-based non-profit organization which connects homeless individuals to housing and service providers;
- Healthy House, a non-profit organization which connects homeless individuals to housing and service providers, with emphasis on overcoming challenges related to differences in language and culture;
- Symple Equazions, a non-profit organization offering transitional housing for youth 18-24
- Department of Veterans Affairs, which connects individuals to housing and service providers, with emphasis on veterans, their dependents and survivors;
- Merced Police Department, which responds to complaints of homeless individuals appearing to sleep in public spaces not meant for human habitation, exhibiting signs of severe service needs, or otherwise coming into frequent contact with law enforcement;
- Merced County Community Action Agency, a non-profit corporation and the largest shelter provider in Merced County; and
- Merced Rescue Mission, a faith-based non-profit organization which provides several transitional shelter facilities.

All homeless persons or at risk of homelessness will receive a needs assessment in order to make linkages to appropriate providers. A clinical assessment will be performed to determine psychosocial history, a mental status exam and an alcohol and drug assessment.

Residents will then be assigned a case manager to monitor progress based on the initial assessments. The case manager will assure that residents receive support with group counseling and accessing all programs as appropriate, including Medi-Cal, Supplemental Security Income, employment assistance and transportation assistance.

A housing navigator will work with residents and the supportive services providers to locate and secure the appropriate level of permanent housing for residents. The housing navigator will check with Merced Housing Authority for rental assistance. Through the Housing Choice Voucher program, Merced Housing Authority offers up to \$850 per month in rental assistance for 2,803 units, 150 of which are prioritized for homeless individuals or families.

Catholic Charities will come to the Outreach and Engagement Center or Navigation Center and offer supportive services, including financial assistance for housing placement.

Merced County Community Action Agency, the lead HMIS agency, will provide support and assistance to all service providing staff having difficulty using HMIS.

2. Barriers that Merced County experiences in partnering, and how these barriers will be addressed

Examples – lack of key stakeholders or service providers, political bureaucracy, approval methods, lack of community input

Merced County’s barriers are not unique to other County organizations.

- The size of the organization presents challenges in information-sharing
- The organization’s institutional structure does not easily address homelessness. Departments which address specific aspects of homelessness are not staffed to take responsibility for a project which was initiated by another.

- Identifying clear goals for the Merced City and County CoC – both in form and function – has proven challenging. Discussions regarding the type of services needed in our community took place for more than a year. On-going funding is a concern when approving a new project.
- Local stakeholders lack the appropriate resources to house and case manage chronically homeless individuals with untreated mental illness, severe substance abuse, and chronic health conditions.
- Some service providers are not funded by Continuum of Care, therefore, do not participate in the CoC or HMIS. We are still considering ways to partner with non-CoC service providers.
- Homeless individuals willing to accept shelter or housing must wait longer for other assistance such as food, services, etc. due to a cumbersome and time-intensive referral process.
We intend to address this barrier by designating specific days and times that service providers will be available to provide immediate connection to resources, rather than simply referrals.
- Merced County is known for a scarcity of housing which is affordable for its residents. At the same time, housing exists which is vacant due to substandard conditions.
- Merced County intends to apply for Community Development Block Grant funding this year with which to augment its code enforcement division. Through a more robust code enforcement program and existing housing rehabilitation loan programs, the County intends to turn substandard properties into viable housing.

As described previously, a consultant has been contracted to assess the current state of homelessness in Merced County, identify gaps in addressing it, update our CEC Policies and Procedures, and recommend next steps to ensure that our systems are aligned and funding is being used effectively. These recommendations will include those for optimal utilization of the Merced City and County CoC.

3. If no collaborative partners have been identified – process of how Merced County intends to include new and existing partners on HHAP project.

Collaborative partners have been identified above, Merced City and County CoC will continue to work with community partners, community members, services providers and those facing homelessness currently in Merced County. We will continue to hold workshops, planning meetings, SWOT sessions, and community educational planning events.

5. SOLUTIONS TO ADDRESS HOMELESSNESS

Measurable goals that HHAP will be expected to achieve in Merced County

The total number of unduplicated individuals and or families that we plan to serve is 150 and of the 150 served we plan on placing 90 of those individuals into permanent housing or 60% of the total number of homeless individuals or families served.

1. Increase the percent of successful temporary housing exits into permanent housing or supportive permanent housing by ten percentage points (10%) annually, using a baseline of 50%.
2. Decrease the percent of our jurisdiction's total homeless population that is unsheltered by five percentage points (5%) annually, using a baseline of 50%.

3. Reduce the number of our unsheltered homeless population aged 60 or older by fifteen percentage points (15%) annually, using a baseline of 50%.

SERVICE GOALS FOR FUNDING	Number of individuals served	Individuals placed in permanent housing	Percentage Permanently Housed
Provide Rental Assistance, Housing Relocation Assistance, and/ or Housing Stabilization Services, Utility Payments and Deposits for those persons who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.	150	90	60%
Provide Transitional Youth Housing aged 18-24, with services and case management	40	10	25%
Provide Bridge Housing, with services and case management	40	20	50%
Provide Shelter/ Navigation operational services to those experiencing homelessness, and on-going Outreach and Engagement services to the homeless	150	0	0

To accomplish these outcomes, we will continue to work on updating our CoC 10-year Strategic Plan, Merced County Regional Plan, and assess programs that work and show positive outcomes vs those that do not. Reallocate funding where needed when service gaps are found, or projects prove to be ineffective. We will work closely with service providers, community partners, local businesses and jurisdiction leadership.



HOMELESS HOUSING, ASSISTANCE AND PREVENTION PROGRAM (HHAP) ANNUAL BUDGET TEMPLATE

APPLICANT INFORMATION

CoC / Large City / County Name:

Merced City & County CoC

Receiving Redirected Funds? Y/N

No

Administrative Entity Name:

Merced, County of Human Services Agency

Total Redirected Funding

\$ -

HHAP FUNDING EXPENDITURE PLAN*

ELIGIBLE USE CATEGORY	FY20/21	FY21/22	FY22/23	FY23/24	FY24/25	TOTAL
Rental Assistance and Rapid Rehousing	\$ 187,500.00	\$ 187,500.00	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 375,000.00
Operating Subsidies and Reserves	\$ 45,000.00	\$ 45,000.00	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 90,000.00
Landlord Incentives	\$ 11,092.19	\$ 10,000.00	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 21,092.19
Outreach and Coordination (including employment)	\$ 50,000.00	\$ 50,000.00	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 100,000.00
Systems Support to Create Regional Partnerships	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Delivery of Permanent Housing	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Prevention and Shelter Diversion to Permanent Housing	\$ 40,000.00	\$ 40,000.00	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 80,000.00
New Navigation Centers and Emergency Shelters	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Strategic Homelessness Planning, Infrastructure Development, CES, and HMIS (up to 5%)	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Administrative (up to 7%)	\$ 25,067.50	\$ 25,067.50	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 50,135.00
TOTAL FUNDING ALLOCATION						\$ 716,227.19
	FY20/21	FY21/22	FY22/23	FY23/24	FY24/25	TOTAL
Youth Set-Aside (at least 8%)	\$ 45,000.00	\$ 45,000.00	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 90,000.00

*Narrative should reflect details of HHAP funding plan

COMMENTS:

FINAL



COUNTY EXECUTIVE OFFICE

James L. Brown
County Executive Officer

2222 "M" Street
Merced, CA 95340
(209) 385-7637
(209) 385-7375 Fax
www.co.merced.ca.us

Equal Opportunity Employer

February 11, 2020

Amber Ostrander, HHAP Program Grant Manager
Homeless Coordinating and Financing Council
Business, Consumer Services, and Housing Agency
915 Capitol Mall, Suite 350A
Sacramento CA 95814

Dear Ms. Ostrander:

I am writing in support of Merced City & County Continuum of Care's application for the Homeless Housing, Assistance and Prevention Program (HHAP) assistance grant, administered by the Homeless Coordinating and Financing Council. It is my understanding that Merced City & County Continuum of Care intend to use these funds for ongoing operating needs of housing projects currently funded through HEAP and CESH.

Currently the CoC is funding projects with HEAP grant money, for a rental assistance program for the elderly aged 50-64; Outreach and Engagement Center including case management, transportation, and rental assistance; a 10 bed Bridge Housing Project on the Westside; and a 10 bed Transitional House with services for Youth ages 18-24.

CESH round 1 funded projects include the operational needs of a Navigation Center/ Shelter; expansion of our HMIS/ CES programing; and a Rapid Rehousing Program for individuals and families; as well as additional funding for rental assistance for the elderly aged 50-64.

Merced County and Merced City & County Continuum of Care will continue to coordinate on projects assisting individuals and families facing homelessness or at risk of homelessness. Regularly scheduled meetings will be held that include all regional stakeholders to discuss the ongoing needs of our community to prevent and end homelessness. We would appreciate your favorable consideration of Merced City & County Continuum of Care's application.

If there are any questions regarding this matter, please feel free to contact Alexandra Pierce at 209-385-7637 extension 7456.

Sincerely,

James L. Brown
County Executive Officer
Merced County