

Request: Grants and ongoing funding to support local government efforts to reduce homelessness.

Description: As California continues to face a severe housing shortage and increased cost of living, the current homelessness crisis continues to escalate across the State. This is an issue that can't be addressed by one agency alone. As part of a collaborative effort, Merced County is working with its six cities and the Continuum of Care to develop a Regional Homelessness Plan that focuses on a variety of key areas, including outreach and engagement, navigation services and transitional housing, long-term supportive housing, and the system supports needed to coordinate these activities. The development of this plan will better position the County and its partners to access State and Federal funding dedicated to addressing the statewide homelessness crisis. This is part of a long-term goal to address and resolve chronic homelessness in Merced County through a holistic approach as opposed to a patchwork of scattered services.

In 2021, Merced County opened its "Navigation Center," which is a 15,000 square-foot facility that serves as a low-barrier emergency sheltering option for individuals currently residing in public spaces and other areas not suitable for human habitation. This initial step of transitioning individuals out of homelessness includes providing a safe and service-rich temporary shelter with connections to onsite supportive services. Clients are assigned a case manager. The goal is to link Navigation Center clients to permanent supportive and affordable housing units as quickly as possible, while simultaneously working on barriers to sustainability such as lack of income and behavioral health challenges. The total cost of the Navigation Center was approximately \$6.8 million and will require nearly \$1.8 million annually to operate.

The Navigation Center is one element of the proposed regional plan to address homelessness—a collaborative effort between Merced County, its six cities, and the Continuum of Care. Other elements include outreach and engagement, transitional housing, long-term supportive housing, and the system supports needed to coordinate these activities. In early 2021, the Board of Supervisors renewed an agreement with the Merced County Rescue Mission to provide other communities outside of the City of Merced with access to similar services on an appropriate scale by renting homes distributed across Merced County that will be similarly used as low-barrier Navigation Centers.

The goal of the Navigation Center is to successfully stabilize and place individuals experiencing homelessness into permanent supportive/affordable housing. The facility has approximately 75 beds, kitchen and dining facilities, laundry, classroom, clinic, and office space for support service providers. Due to COVID-19 safety requirements, the Center initially opened with a 66-bed capacity.

Necessity: The Navigation Center was completed in the first quarter of 2021. Ongoing funding is needed to help maintain operations of this facility (\$1.8 million annually) as well as distributive housing (\$100,000 per unit annually).

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