

## **ERAP Comprehensive Implementation Grants in Contra Costa County**

### **Overview of recommended approach**

Through the new Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP), approximately \$70 million in federal funds have been allocated to Contra Costa County to provide emergency rental assistance to help keep local residents housed during the pandemic. The funds must be spent or encumbered by August 31, 2021, so it is imperative that a well-designed outreach and distribution program be launched as quickly as possible.

Under SB 91, the state gave counties three options on how to distribute the ERAP funds. Contra Costa chose Option A, in which the County's allocation of rental assistance funds were entrusted to the state to administer through the statewide application portal and hotline. The state, in turn, has contracted with LISC (Local Initiatives Support Corp.) to establish a Local Partner Network (LPN). The LPN is composed of community-based organizations (CBOs) that commit to one of three successively involved levels of effort and engagement: Tier 1 (promotion), Tier 2 (promotion and outreach), and Tier 3 (promotion, outreach, and technical assistance to help applicants navigate the state application process).

Under the ERAP structure, 1.5% of each jurisdiction's ERAP funds (\$514,000 in Contra Costa) remain under the County's control, to be used for local implementation activities that supplement the LPN by ensuring that the county's most vulnerable residents -- those who are most marginalized, least connected to County services, and most at risk of eviction and possible homelessness -- are contacted and supported by local, trusted community organizations.

The following recommendations for local outreach and implementation are designed to accomplish those tasks, utilizing \$464,000 of the total allocation of \$514,000. To date, most of the CBOs participating in the LPN have been contracted to conduct Tier 1 and Tier 2 activities -- i.e., outreach and navigation assistance. However, few of the CBOs selected by LISC (of those identified to date) are based in Contra Costa County; rather, most are regional or statewide in scope. An additional consideration is that the local outreach grantmaking program described in this proposal will likely be able to get funds out the door more quickly than LISC can, thus reaching residents sooner who are in dire need of information and support.

Therefore, we recommend that the County invest its local funds (via RCF Connects, as fiscal agent/grants manager) for ERAP implementation in more locally-based CBOs that can leverage their deep and trusted ties to reach the communities most impacted by COVID-related housing insecurity. The program is designed to help local CBOs conduct outreach and marketing that is granular and specific to geography, language, and demographics -- with a focus on advancing equity in communities that are socially, economically, and linguistically marginalized.

This cohort of outreach organizations will be tasked with connecting community members to LPN Tier 3 organizations, which can then assist with navigating the ERAP portal. It is important that County- and LISC-funded CBOs are able to communicate with one another around real-time program gaps and solutions. For that reason, we recommend that LPN members also attend the countywide convenings described below.

At the same time, it is important that the CBOs focusing on this highly localized outreach can coordinate and problem-solve with one another at the sub-county level (e.g., to meet needs that are specific to East, Central/South, and West County, respectively).

Alongside and as a complement to this specialized and localized outreach, a new Housing Stability Service is needed to integrate the growing number of local programs to assist renters. This need will not be addressed by the LISC-run hotlines. Indeed, in selecting Option A, Contra Costa County decided to forego local control over designing assistance for renters and landlords. Hence, a portion of the County-retained funds for implementation should be allocated to local measures that are targeted to fill in the gaps created by participating in the statewide ERAP. Along these lines, the County should also retain a small amount to pay for supplementary marketing activities or other emergent activities, as needed.

## Recommended expenditure plan

1. **COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT: \$313,320**
  - A. **\$50,000: Project management/facilitate partner convenings**
  - B. **\$263,320: Grants to CBOs** to outreach to and engage with residents who can benefit from ERAP
2. **HOUSING STABILITY SERVICE: \$75,000**
3. **EMERGENT NEEDS: \$20,000** (will be used as needed to supplement the state's marketing program, or for other emergent needs identified during implementation)
4. **FISCAL/ADMIN FEE: \$55,680** (RCF Connects' 12% standard fee)

## Program design

1. **COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT**
  - a. We propose that the County contracts with RCF Connects, which has affirmed their interest and capacity to take on the role of fiscal agent and grants coordinator for the ERAP project. The scope of work includes:
    - i. Convening an **ERAP Oversight Team**, potentially comprising the current group of county leaders (DCD, CAO and EHSD), and CBOs (EBASE, EBHO, Monument Impact, Ensuring Opportunity) to monitor overall progress and confer as needed on data collection and other key project deliverables.

- ii. **Issue an RFP and select trusted CBOs and faith communities to perform location-specific, language-specific, and/or demographic-specific ERAP outreach** (in partnership with, and complementary to, LISC's LPN) in one or more regions of the county. The County's recent successful Census outreach mini-grants program will be used as a model, in that the grants application process was simple, decisions were made quickly, and funds were allocated to CBOs both large and small, and to a mix of long-time contractors in some instances and those new to contracting with the county in other cases, in order to deepen and broaden the demographic, geographic, and cultural reach into the communities identified as most at risk. The RFP will be sent to a wide network of CBOs, including those recently involved in Census outreach, voter engagement, and vaccine administration, as these organizations have extensive experience working within the communities identified by the Urban Institute as being most vulnerable to COVID-caused housing insecurity.<sup>1</sup> Most grants are anticipated to range from \$2,000 to \$30,000 in size. While residents facing eviction risk and housing insecurity live in every region of the county, some communities have been more deeply impacted than others, and the distribution of grant funds will be designed to address that inequitable impact. Data sources including Bay Area Equity Atlas and the Urban Institute report are among the objective sources that will be used to determine the best allocation of funding across regions of the county. Additional consideration will be given to areas of the county, particularly near-East and far-East county, that are in the process of strengthening their nonprofit infrastructure and may need additional support. Lastly, consideration will be given to geographic gaps in LISC's Local Partner Network coverage in Contra Costa (e.g., few East County organizations have applied to date).
- As noted below, in addition to the direct outreach grants, funds will be allocated to an identified CBO in each region of the county (East, Central/South, and West) to provide local coordinating support in their sub-region, such as supporting RCF in convening and surveying sub-regional grantees to identify region-specific needs and gaps.
- iii. **Regularly convene countywide and sub-regional Coordinating Council** of grantees, LISC LPN members, and other stakeholders (including County departments such as EHSD) to plan and align

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<https://www.urban.org/features/where-prioritize-emergency-rental-assistance-keep-renters-their-homes>

outreach strategies, share data, and discuss ways to troubleshoot, adapt, and expand approaches to implementation. The Coordinating Council will provide a forum for grantees to identify and relay relevant feedback and needs to the county, state, and LISC; share ideas and outcomes regarding outreach and navigation strategies; and collect and share data on project activities and outcomes with their peer organizations. Three organizations with deep community networks and extensive experience in convening nonprofit collaboratives have been identified to convene/coordinate grantees and other stakeholders in each region of the county, to address needs and trends that are specific to each region. Committed partners in each region include:

- **West County: RYSE Center** (which convenes the 200+ member West County COVID Community Care Coalition)
  - **Central/South County** (which includes Concord/Pleasant Hill/Martinez, Lamorinda, and Danville/San Ramon): **Family Justice Center** (which convenes the 200+ member Central/East County COVID Community Care Coalition)
  - **East County** (which includes Bay Point and all communities east): **East Contra Costa Community Care Alliance (ECCCA)**, which has a diverse mix of CBO members and is fiscally sponsored by RCF Connects.
- iv. **Coordinate with the 211 information and referral system**, operated by the Contra Costa Crisis Center. 211 will also be a key partner in sharing data with the Coordinating Council about housing-related needs and services, toward the shared goal of developing a coordinated, countywide housing stability ecosystem and referral network.
- v. Create and administer a **grant reporting process**.
- vi. Collect, prepare and report **data and program outcomes** to the County for submission to the State.
- b. The goal of this Outreach approach is to augment, rather than duplicate, the work of LISC's designated LPN partners, by contracting with smaller local organizations that have deep local roots and trusted ties to specific demographic, cultural, and linguistic communities that are disproportionately impacted by COVID. These are communities that LISC LPN partners may

either lack experience in serving, or need assistance in connecting with the large numbers of under-served residents who need specialized support. The Outreach CBOs that receive subgrants from RCF through the RFP process will be responsible for delivering one or more of the following activities. (Note: Grantee responsibilities may evolve during implementation, as the cohort develops best practices through peer-to-peer learning.)

- i. Send regular eblasts to contacts/clients for the duration of the ERAP.
- ii. Make regular social media posts for the duration of the ERAP.
- iii. Make announcements at all community convenings during the course of the ERAP.
- iv. Conduct phone-banking, door-knocking, and/or flyering, as needed or appropriate, based on access needs of the target community.
- v. Refer applicants in need of navigation assistance to LPN Tier 3 organizations; provide additional navigation services if LPN groups are unable to meet an applicant's specific needs.
- vi. Refer contacts to the new Contra Costa Housing Stability Service (described below) as needed, to connect residents to additional information and services, such as assistance in paying utility bills, finding new housing, or referral to a housing counselor or legal service provider.
- vii. Conduct activities in a location-specific, language-specific, and/or demographic-specific manner, per each grantee's contract.
- viii. Provide data on program activities and outcomes.
- ix. Participate in regular countywide and sub-regional (East, Central, or West County) convenings to share insights and problem-solve over the duration of the ERAP.

## 2. LOCAL HOUSING STABILITY SERVICE

- a. RCF will issue an RFP for up to \$75,000 to **contract with a CBO** to establish and operate a countywide Housing Stability Service.
- b. The Housing Stability Service will be accessible by phone and through a web portal, and will be **staffed during business hours** by a housing counselor, paralegal, or person with other relevant housing and customer service expertise. As both an integral part of, and an important complement to, the

rental assistance outreach network described above, the Housing Stability Service will help residents prioritize their housing needs, understand their rights as tenants, and access and navigate a complex array of housing-related services during a critical period of risk for tens of thousands of tenants. The Housing Stability Service is envisioned as being complementary to the county's 211 service. Whereas 211 covers a wide range of needs and provides referral contact information for a resident to follow up on, the Housing Stability Service will offer a deep knowledge of housing services and supports across a range of systems and organizations, and will provide a "warm hand-off" in connecting residents personally and directly with the services and agencies best-positioned to address their needs. In addition to making these personalized referrals, Housing Stability Service staff will also, when needed, offer brief consults and templates to guide residents in taking appropriate steps to stay housed. In this way, residents with more complex needs will receive services, including and also beyond the state's ERAP, to help them stay housed. This approach provides a proactive way to stabilize renters going into the long economic recovery period to come, thus accomplishing the core goals of the federal program and of SB 91 by preventing a wave of homelessness and the attendant human suffering and increased county costs. It also conforms to the guidance provided by the US Treasury Department in FAQ 23, which affirmed that Fair Housing counseling, legal services, and case management related to housing stability, are authorized uses of ERAP funds.

- c. The Housing Stability Service will help **maximize and integrate the county's existing investment in tenant supports**, including the moratorium on certain evictions and rent increases and the tenant and landlord counseling offered through ECHO Housing, Bay Area Legal Aid, Centro Legal, and Contra Costa Senior Legal Services.
- d. The Housing Stability Service will **feed into, rather than compete with, the State-run ERAP hotlines**, which are narrowly focused on ERAP applications for tenants and landlords. It will also complement Bay Area Legal Aid's and Centro Legal's existing legal services hotlines. The latter two hotlines cover all legal issues and geographies within the scope of these organizations and, as such, are generally overwhelmed and not tailored to tenant issues in Contra Costa.
- e. The Housing Stability Service will serve as a **point of connection to more dedicated services** for seniors, residents of subsidized housing, undocumented residents, and others at high risk of losing their housing. It will greatly reduce the existing burden on vulnerable tenants, who until now have

had to navigate this complex landscape on their own.

### 3. RESPONSE TO EMERGENT NEEDS

- a. RCF Connects will reserve \$20,000 to address emergent community needs in a fast-changing environment. For example, funds may be necessary to supplement and localize the statewide marketing efforts that were launched this week.

### 4. FISCAL/ADMINISTRATIVE FEE

- a. RCF will retain \$61,680 -- its standard 12% fee -- to offset the costs of serving as the fiscal agent and grants administrator for the comprehensive implementation program.

## RCF Connects Qualifications

**Mission:** RCF Connects mobilizes the power of connection to build healthy, thriving communities that are safe and diverse, and where families flourish and children are given new hope for a bright and abundant future. As a regional community foundation for Contra Costa County, RCF Connects partners with the community to inspire leadership and to share the vision for work in five areas: Community Growth, Health, Restoring Neighborhoods, Education, and Public Safety. RCF Connect's work is driven by a strong aspiration to work with their communities to strengthen economic, racial, cultural, social, and gender equity. This aspiration is expressed both in the outcomes they strive for and in the ways in which they do their work. Equity is both their organizational value and their goal. For more information: [www.rcfconnects.org](http://www.rcfconnects.org).

**Trusted relationships:** RCF Connects currently operates programs and makes grants across Contra Costa, supporting CBOs and residents through multiple programs and initiatives, including Ensuring Opportunity, Richmond Housing Renovation Program, SparkPoint Contra Costa, Healthy Richmond, and Mobility LABs in Antioch. Through the SparkPoint initiative, RCF Connects maintains offices in Richmond, Bay Point and at both Contra Costa College and Diablo Valley College, and over 19 community partners are linked through these locations. These locations serve as community hubs for a variety of resources, were key distribution points for the Census work, and currently provide a variety of cash, rent, utility and other assistance services. Free tax services through the VITA program are provided to ensure that residents receive their stimulus checks. RCF Connects also serves as the fiscal sponsor for several county-wide collectives, including the Multi-Faith ACTION Coalition and the East Contra Costa Community Alliance. In addition, RCF Connects has deep connections with local and regional philanthropic organizations, including convening and administering both the Richmond Funders Forum and the Contra Costa Funders Forum.

**Rental assistance administration:** During the pandemic, RCF Connects partnered with the Richmond Rapid Response Fund to distribute \$200,000 in rental assistance funding to support impacted residents in Richmond. RCF Connects also distributed, in partnership with Tipping Point Community, an additional \$225,000 in direct financial assistance to residents in East Contra Costa.

**Grants and contracts administration:** RCF Connects has extensive experience and systems in place to administer grants and contracts, including regranting and asset distribution under tight timelines. RCF has managed large and complex grantmaking projects for both public and private entities, including the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), East Bay Municipal Utilities District (EBMUD), City of Richmond, Chevron, the Richmond Mayor's Community Fund, Menbe's Way Fund, and the West Contra Costa Literacy Coalition.