



City of San Antonio

Agenda Memorandum

File Number:20-7450

Agenda Item Number: 3.

Agenda Date: 1/27/2021

In Control: Housing Commission

DEPARTMENT:

Neighborhood and Housing Services Department

DEPARTMENT HEAD:

Verónica R. Soto, FAICP, Neighborhood and Housing Services Department Director

COUNCIL DISTRICTS IMPACTED:

Citywide

SUMMARY:

Briefing and possible action on the Covid-19 Emergency Housing Assistance Program (EHAP) evaluation survey results and proposed amendments to the EHAP.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

On April 23, 2020, City Council approved the creation of the Emergency Housing Assistance Program (EHAP). The program provides eligible applicants rental or mortgage assistance, utility assistance, and cash assistance. As of January 21, the City has approved \$69 million in assistance to residents seeking emergency rental, mortgage and utility assistance to over 27,269 households.

The total budget for the EHAP is \$86.8 million. The U.S. Treasury awarded the City an additional \$46.8 million for rental assistance and City Council will take action on the acceptance of the funds and the proposed amendments to the EHAP in mid-February. If approved, the EHAP budget could increase to \$133.6 million

and remain open through September 2021.

At the request of the Housing Commission, City staff developed and distributed a survey to all EHAP applicants, participating property managers & owners, and implementation partners. The purpose of the survey was to solicit feedback on the program and its impact. Commissioners requested a survey that:

- 1) Takes should be no longer than three (3) minutes to complete and;
- 2) Focuses on EHAP evaluation (Access, Usage, and Outcome Experiences)

The survey was drafted with input from members the Outreach Working Group and Housing Commission. Once approved by the Housing Commission, the survey was reviewed by the Culture and Neighborhood Services Committee on November 2nd. This Council Committee has oversight over the Housing Pillar of the Recovery and Resiliency Plan adopted by City Council in June 2020 and since that time oversees the EHAP.

ISSUE:

Staff will present the survey data to the Housing Commission. Staff will also provide an overview of the current program criteria and guidelines and solicit feedback on potential amendments to the EHAP.

Survey

The survey was distributed directly to EHAP applicants, property managers and owners who had clients in the program, and implementation partners who help clients apply for assistance. Flyers promoting the survey were placed in the Financial & Housing Recovery Centers and NHSD's lobby (open by appointment only). The survey was also distributed through Council offices, the SA Speak Up website, neighborhood associations, Housing Commissioners, and members of the outreach working group.

The survey was live November 9th - December 31st on the SA Speak Up website. Staff called a sample of people that appeared to not have email addresses in order to reach out and ensure participation. In total, staff contacted 27 households by phone. Six completed the survey by phone with staff. Others requested links to complete it on their own or declined.

Notable takeaways from the survey include:

- 7,091 total responses including 500 in Spanish.
 - o Two thirds of those came from the emails sent through the automated EHAP system
 - o Other referral sources were SA Speak Up, council staff, or survey links shared through NHSD communications

- 6,281 (89%) of the responses came from people who sought assistance.
 - o 68% of respondents who applied received assistance.
 - o Over 56% found the process ‘easy or somewhat easy,’ and 22% found it ‘neither easy nor hard.’ 65% said that staff were ‘easy’ to work with.

- 84% stated that the money they received was enough to keep them housed at the time.

- 66% were struggling again when they took the survey.

- 56% stated that more money for rent would have been helpful. 21% felt more money for utilities would have been helpful.

- 95% of landlords would recommend the program, though over half said the assistance was timely.

- 65 respondents were implementation & outreach partners. Of these, 78% found the application easy or somewhat easy. 74% said the assistance was enough to keep their clients housed.

EHAP Amendments

Staff is recommending amendments to the program guidelines for the EHAP. The amendments will consider the survey results and stakeholder feedback. The proposed amendments will be presented to the Housing Commission for input. At minimum, staff will propose extending the number of months an applicant may receive assistance. Staff will also present the amendments to the Cultural and Neighborhood Services Council Committee on February 1st for their consideration and will also explore additional public input opportunities the week of February 8th prior to proceeding to City Council on February 18th for approval.

ALTERNATIVES:

Staff is requesting Commissioners’ input on the survey data and proposed amendments to the EHAP.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no fiscal impact at this time.

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff is requesting input on the survey data and proposed amendments to the EHAP. Housing Commissioner input will be shared with the Culture & Neighborhood Services Committee.