PIMA COUNTY/CITY OF TUCSON, AZ, HPRP-FUNDED PREVENTION PROGRAM

Pima County and the city of Tucson partnered to design and operate one program with funding from HUD's Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-housing Program (HPRP). Under the program, called Project Action, five subgrantees provided direct services to both city and county residents. Households accessed homelessness prevention services through referrals from community agencies, a Web portal, or a telephone hotline. If households were determined eligible for services after program screening, they could receive financial assistance and housing stabilization services. Length of stay in the program averaged 159 days, with a median 135 days.[129]

Community Description

Pima County has an estimated population of 990,213 and is approximately 9,000 square miles. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, approximately 15.7 percent of the general population and 15.1 percent of people age 18 through 64 are below the federal poverty level.[130] During the 2011 point-in-time count, the Tucson/ Pima County Continuum of Care (CoC) homeless service system identified 726 persons in emergency shelters, 1,161 persons in transitional housing, 15 persons in safe haven beds, and 724 unsheltered persons (i.e., living in places not meant for human habitation, such as cars, encampments, or parks). Of these 2,626 homeless persons, 32 percent were persons in families and 68 percent were individuals or unaccompanied youth.

The Tucson/Pima County CoC has almost 100 different homeless assistance programs. Service providers are located both in the city of Tucson and the rural areas of Pima County. Specifically, this CoC has 21 emergency shelter programs, resulting in more than 600 beds; 50 transitional housing programs, resulting in roughly 1,300 beds; and 25 permanent supportive housing programs resulting in approximately 1,050 beds.

In the spring of 2006, the Tucson Planning Council for the Homeless, along with the city of Tucson, Pima County, and the Arizona Department of Housing developed a plan to end homelessness. The plan focuses on recommendations to stakeholders on topics such as homelessness prevention, employment, housing, supportive services, private sector engagement, transportation, collaboration and coordination, data gathering, education, and pilot projects. As noted in the plan's Guiding Principles section, city and county officials want to develop new housing models building on their existing network of emergency shelters and transition housing programs. They prefer, however, to expand homelessness prevention services because of their efficiency and cost effectiveness.[131]

DESIGN AND SETUP OF HPRP PREVENTION

Tucson's Housing and Community Development Department and Pima County's Department of Community Development and Neighborhood Conservation partnered to design and operate one HPRP program covering both areas. These governmental agencies decided a joint HPRP program would use the community's resources most efficiently and effectively. Over 3 years, Tucson administered a total of $2,534,340 and Pima County a total of $1,063,430 in HPRP funds.

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[129] Length of stay numbers are approximate, calculated using a weighted average over multiple programs.

[130] Data on poverty were obtained from the U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (2005–09).

[131] Patricia DeVito, *Plan to End Homelessness*: *Pima County, Arizona*, Spring 2006: p. 4.

Before HPRP, Pima County relied on community action agencies to provide financial assistance to households struggling with economic hardships. Twelve community action agencies served county households, regardless of their residential location, household composition, or type of financial assistance needed. The agencies received a monthly allocation from the county to provide residents with emergency financial assistance. Households could use this assistance toward rent or utilities but could only receive it once a year.

This financial assistance was first come, first served. A household needing financial assistance had to call each community action agency to inquire whether funding was available. Agencies with no funding available would tell households to call another community action agency. In 2009, Tucson's Human Services Planning Committee decided to use their community development block grant (CDBG) funding to provide economically struggling households with emergency financial assistance and the city's General Fund money for case management, education, job training, and youth services. These programs did not have any influence on development of Tucson/Pima County HPRP.

In April 2009—after the HPRP grants were announced, but before they were awarded—the city and county held two hearings to provide the public information about HPRP and get input. In summer 2009, the city and county formed a design group of 12 stakeholders with expertise about local populations and services for low-income and homeless people. The group met three times, presented HPRP design ideas to a larger set of community stakeholders, and subsequently incorporated their feedback into the final plans.

At that time, many Arizona residents were facing financial hardships and housing foreclosures. Some members of the design team and the public thought HPRP funding should be used to prevent foreclosure. HUD regulations, however, prohibited HPRP funding from being used for foreclosure assistance. Other design team members thought HPRP funding should provide financial assistance and services to residents who were on the brink of homelessness but unaware of services that could help. The design team recognized that the community already had housing programs and supportive services for the chronically homeless population and households needing transitional or permanent supportive housing. Instead, the team focused their HPRP efforts on assisting households in the process of being evicted from rental housing who would be homeless "but for" this financial assistance.

Ultimately, the design team proposed that 75 percent of HPRP funding target homelessness services and 25 percent target rapid re-housing services. The city and county felt concerned that households that had never accessed housing services might be wary of being labeled homeless after applying for financial assistance. Therefore, the team named their HPRP initiative Project Action to avoid the connotation.

Tucson and Pima County have nine subgrantees under their combined HPRP program. Five (Southern Arizona AIDS Foundation, CODAC Behavioral Health, Primavera Foundation, Money Management International, and Southern Arizona Legal Aid) provide clients with direct services to form the HPRP partnership. Non-Profit Industries, Inc. developed the Web portal subgrantees used to screen HPRP applicants. Bowman Systems and Symmetric Solutions provided the HMIS system, user licenses, and technical assistance. Additionally, Tucson/Pima County contracted with a local two-person evaluation team to examine HPRP implementation and impacts.

Exhibit E.20: City of Tucson/Pima County Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-housing Program Subgrantees

Agency/Person	Award Amount With City of Tucson	Award Amount With Pima County	Total Award
Southern Arizona AIDS Foundation	$2,090,117	$856,833	$2,946,950
Primavera Foundation	$172,891	$26,650	$199,541
CODAC Behavioral Health	$68,828	$103,935	$172,763
Southern Arizona Legal Aid	$20,280	$8,750	$29,030
Money Management International	$8,500	$3,500	$12,000
Non-Profit Industries	$25,900	$10,950	$36,850
Symmetric Solutions	$53,375	$20,300	$73,675
Bowman Systems	$9,574	$3,697	$13,271
City of Tucson (phones and housing inspections)[a]	$19,569	$2,315	$21,884
Evaluation Team (Leslie Carlson and Joanne Basta)	$1,947	$26,500	$28,447
Total	$2,470,981	$1,063,430	$3,534,411

Source: The city of Tucson's Housing and Community Development Department and Pima County's Department of Community Development and Neighborhood Conservation, 2012.
[a] Staff from the city of Tucson conducted all housing inspections for Project Action.

Southern Arizona AIDS Foundation (SAAF), CODAC, and Primavera provided HPRP clients with financial assistance and support services. Staff roles fell into three categories: intake specialists, resource specialists, and contract specialists:

- Intake specialists responded to requests and inquiries regarding HPRP assistance. They answered calls and e-mails about services and conducted an over-the-phone eligibility screening with applicants. Applicants passing the intake specialists' eligibility screening were referred to a resource specialist.
- Resource specialists conducted intake and client assessment and delivered case management services. They also ensured that applicants provided all necessary documentation for eligibility.
- Contract specialists reviewed all necessary client documentation, including their lease agreements and eviction notices, and conducted rent reasonableness evaluations for all units they provided with financial assistance. Contract specialists administered all financial assistance to HPRP households' landlords and utility companies. SAAF was the only organization that employed contract specialists because the organization was able to deliver financial assistance quickly, sometimes in the same day.

Money Management International (MMI) conducted a financial education class for all households accepted to HPRP. Two MMI educators led the class twice a month.

Southern Arizona Legal Aid reviewed all lease agreements and eviction notices to ensure landlords followed proper protocol and had not overcharged their tenants in eviction, rental, or service fees.

IMPLEMENTATION

Outreach

Tucson and Pima County made a concerted effort to reach out to local organizations and agencies to inform them about Project Action. Staff delivered presentations to school liaisons, domestic violence shelters, community action agencies, rural service networks, the HUD CoC, and other community groups highlighting the eligibility guidelines and services offered. Additionally, Project Action dedicated one resource specialist to work with Pima County's rural community agencies by traveling to those areas and providing information about HPRP services. Through these efforts, awareness of Project Action quickly circulated.

Point of Entry

Throughout the grant period, Project Action received requests for assistance through two channels: (1) a Web portal with an e-mail option and a toll-free telephone number, and (2) referrals from community agencies.

During the design period, the city and county worked with Non-Profit Industries to developing the Web portal, where households could assess their preliminary eligibility for HPRP services. The Web portal screened for a household's residential address, homelessness and housing status, possession of an eviction notice or utility shut-off notice, length of time as a resident of Pima County, and total gross income. Households without Internet access could answer the same questions through the toll-free telephone number.

A household determined preliminarily eligible for HPRP services was instructed to either leave a message with Project Action's toll-free telephone number or send an e-mail with contact information. An intake specialist would then contact the household and continue with a more detailed eligibility assessment.

The website also listed community resources, including food assistance, public benefits, employment and training opportunities, health care services, and legal aid. If the screening determined a household was not eligible for HPRP, that household could refer to this list for assistance.

Project Action accepted referrals from a limited set of community organizations, specifically Southern Arizona Legal Aid, the Primavera Foundation, and agencies in the rural areas of Pima County. Additionally, during Year two, one resource specialist was placed at Legal Aid once a week to screen their clients for eligibility and provide information about Project Action.

Project Action dedicated one resource specialist from CODAC to serve households in the rural areas of Pima County. This "circuit rider" worked with food banks, medical agencies, school liaisons, parent organizations, and rural agency committees to get client referrals for Project Action. If a rural agency referred a household to this resource specialist, she conducted an eligibility screening over the telephone. If the household was eligible, she would travels to the household to complete a full assessment and intake and to review eligibility documentation.

Intake: Eligibility and Assessment

Tucson/Pima County screened for additional criteria beyond HUD's HPRP eligibility criteria. To be eligible for Project Action HPRP assistance, applicants needed

- To have resided in Pima County for at least 3 months,
- To have less than $3,000 in the household's bank account,
- To have an eviction notice and a written lease agreement, and
- To have had a sudden or significant loss of income.

During the recession, many residents had moved from larger cities in the Southwest (Los Angeles, Las Vegas, Phoenix, etc.) to Pima County because of loss of housing or employment. Because of this, city and county staff wanted to restrict HPRP assistance to residents who have lived in Pima County for at least 3 months.

Additionally, Project Action staff wanted to ensure that HPRP assistance would to reach households that recently experienced a sudden or significant loss of income, believing short-term financial assistance would help them achieve self-sufficiency and housing stability. They did not want to assist households experiencing ongoing, long-term financial instability.

Project Action described a sudden or significant loss of income as

- Unforeseen financial set back or life change,
- Loss of job or reduced hours,
- Medical issues,
- Medical bills causing inability to pay other bills,
- Car repairs,
- Financial aid disruption,
- Divorce or breakup of relationship,
- Death in family, or
- Loss of roommate or other living arrangements.[132]

In summary, households could first access the Web portal or call the toll-free number for initial eligibility screening. If households met initial eligibility parameters, a Project Action representative would contact them. Then an intake specialist would complete a more detailed screening, examining a household's needs, housing situation, and income resources. If a household met Project Action's program qualifications, the intake specialist would schedule a meeting with a resource specialist.

During the first 4 months of program implementation (December 2009 to March 2010), Project Action did not have intake specialists. Households would e-mail Project Action or leave a message at the toll-free telephone number, and a resource specialist would follow up. Therefore, resource specialists were managing all applicant eligibility screenings, intakes, and case management. Due to the community's

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[132] List provided by Project Action.

demand for HPRP services, applicants waited between 4 and 6 weeks. Project Action staff, along with the city and county, decided that they needed an additional layer of staffing primarily responsible for contacting the applicants and conducting eligibility screenings. When intake specialists were added, applicant wait time decreased exponentially to between 2 and 4 days.

Intake collected information such as household composition; income, benefit, and employment information; housing status; and possession of an eviction notice or utility shut-off notice. Resource specialists reviewed all household documentation and uploaded it to HMIS. Finally, resource specialists informed households of program guidelines and expectations, such as participation in monthly case management and keeping a record of completed employment applications.

The final review of a household's documentation was conducted by the contract specialists. Contract specialists completed rent reasonableness evaluations for all housing units and worked with Southern Arizona Legal Aid to evaluate lease agreements and eviction notices. Lawyers specifically examined these documents for unjustified charges on the eviction notice, falsified lease information, or mistakes. Approximately 75 percent of all reviewed leases and eviction notices needed clarification or further investigation.

Once all documentation was finalized, contract specialists approved the household for program participation and processed financial assistance.

"But For" and Sustainability Rules

If households met all eligibility requirements and were referred to an appointment with a resource specialist, they would likely receive HPRP assistance. Approximately 90 percent of referred households received assistance. Resource specialists used their own judgment whether a household would be homeless "but for" HPRP assistance, relying on the household's documentation. However, resource specialists often consulted each other during weekly meetings to review cases and documentation. Project Action staff stated that their decision making process went through many stages and had several checks in place.

Prevention Activities
Households could receive financial assistance for rental payments, security and utility deposits, rental and utility arrearages, utility payments, moving cost assistance, motel or hotel vouchers, and storage. Housing stabilization services included case management, referrals to other community services and mainstream agencies, legal services, and employment referrals.

Financial Assistance. Project Action capped financial assistance based on a household's number of members. Individuals were allowed up to $4,000. Households with two to three members were allowed up to $6,000 and households with four or more members, up to $10,000. This set amount included current rental and utility payments, as well as arrearages. Financial assistance could last up to 12 months. For households needing financial assistance beyond 12 months, the resource specialist would ask his or her supervisor to approve an extension not exceeding the 18 months allowed by HUD. Households were reassessed for program eligibility every 3 months.

One resource specialist estimated that households received financial assistance (and accompanying case management services) for approximately 6 months and that most households received the maximum amount of financial assistance for which they qualified.[133] Until August 2011, households exiting the program without receiving their maximum allocated amount of financial assistance were allowed to reenroll to receive the remaining balance. Given the demand for HPRP services, after August 2011, program staff ultimately decided clients could not use the program a second time at the cost of crowding out first-time applicants.[134]

During the first 4 months of program implementation, Project Action allowed all households a maximum of $8,000 over 12 months. However in March 2010, staff determined if they continued with this financial assistance model, all funding would be quickly spent. Therefore, they developed an alternative approach based on the number members in the household. Project Action staff explained that assistance ends for clients at various points in time, including:

- Clients exhausting their maximum amount of funding or time,
- Clients not being eligible for assistance at reassessment, or
- Clients self-determining that they no longer needed assistance.

Case Management. Resource specialists took a case-by-case approach: some clients needed case management contact daily, weekly, or monthly while others required less.

Project Action required households to meet with resource specialists at least once a month to check in on their housing stability and employment search, though most checked in more often. One resource specialist stated that she had contact with her clients an average of three times a month. Case management services were usually not provided after financial assistance ended. This is mostly due to the large caseload (roughly 30 to 40 clients) resource specialists maintain.

Resource specialists worked with households to determine eligibility for services and benefits accessible from outside HPRP. They often referred clients to Pima County's One Stop, which provides career development services and training for youth and adults.

Additionally, households were required to attend a 2-hour financial education class with MMI within 1 month of receiving assistance. This class explores topics such as

- Money and credit.
- Financial goals.
- Wants versus needs.
- Insurance.
- Budgeting and income.
- Debt.
- Savings.
- Credit, credit reports, and credit scores.

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[133]Notes for the Project Action community stakeholder meeting February 8, 2012, indicate that median length of time in the program was 122 days (approximately 4 months) and that the mode was 91 days. However, this included 69 Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) clients who only received move-in deposit assistance and thus were only served for 1 or 2 months. So the median for non-VASH households was greater than 4 months.
[134] Notes for the Project Action community stakeholder meeting February 8, 2012, indicated that as of August 2011, 15 households returned to Project Action for a second round of assistance.

Interviewed resource specialists noted that their clients reacted positively to this class and were interested in taking more financial education classes.

DATA AND MONITORING

HMIS allowed Project Action to share data between subgrantees, the city and county, and the evaluation team. Most Project Action staff said HMIS was a great tool for communication between subgrantees and allowed them to serve households quicker.

Tucson/Pima County hired an evaluation team to regularly examine client-level data and conduct several studies exploring components of their HPRP implementation.

In addition to reporting on quarterly HMIS data for households receiving HPRP services, the evaluation team is conducting three studies.[135]

1. Client Survey

- This survey is intended for program participants who have received financial assistance and case management services for at least 3 months.
- Survey questions focus on client satisfaction and clients' perceptions of increased knowledge and increased stability.

2. Case Management Study

- Evaluation questions include
  - What case management services did Project Action provide clients?
  - How did these services function as an intervention to help clients strengthen their self-sufficiency and housing stability?
- Data sources include
  - HMIS case notes,
  - A focus group with resource specialists, and
  - Client survey data.

3. Follow-up study of clients who have exited the program

- Evaluation questions include
  - What is the housing status of Project Action clients 6 months after program exit?[136]
- Preliminary findings include
  - 10.8 percent of respondents were living in temporary situations (mostly living temporarily with friends and family), and
  - 89.2 percent were living in relatively permanent situations.

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[135] All information regarding Tucson/Pima County's evaluation efforts was provided by the grantees and the local evaluation team.
[136] The evaluation team contacted 102 out of 166 households, a 61.4 percent response rate.

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

Tucson and Pima County did not plan to continue Project Action after HPRP funding ended June 2012. They do not believe that the Emergency Solutions Grant they expect to receive will be large enough to continue operating a program like Project Action. Pima County will most likely return to using the community action agencies for homelessness prevention.

Exhibit E.21: Pima County and the City of Tucson, Arizona, Project Action Prevention Overview, Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-housing Program				
	Persons		Households	
	#	%	#	%
Total served Year 1[a]	447	100	168	100
Persons in families	362	81	—	—
Adults without children	85	19	—	—
Total served Year 2[a]	899	100	318	100
Persons in families	756	84	—	—
Adults without children	142	16	—	—
HPRP services				
Rental assistance	—	—	376	92
Case management	—	—	374	92
Security/utility deposits	—	—	142	35
Outreach and engagement	—	—	284	70
Utility payments	—	—	276	68
Housing search/placement	—	—	55	14
Legal services	—	—	151	37
Credit repair	—	—	232	57
Motel and hotel vouchers	—	—	5	1
Moving cost assistance	—	—	50	12
Destination[b]				
Total leavers	1,071	100	—	—
Homeless	2	<1	—	—
Institutional setting	1	<1	—	—
Permanent housing with subsidy	67	6	—	—
Permanent housing without subsidy	937	87	—	—
Family or friends	36	3	—	—

Source: Project Action Annual Performance Report Data, 2009 program start through September 30, 2011.

— not applicable

[a] Total served numbers may not add to 100 percent because the "children only" and "unknown" categories are not included in this table. Numbers may add to greater than 100 percent due to data reporting errors.

[b] Destination numbers may not add to total leavers because the "other," "hotel/motel," "unknown," and "deceased" categories are not included in this table.

"Homeless" includes the following destinations: emergency shelter, TH for homeless persons, staying with friends (temporary tenure), staying with family (temporary tenure), place not meant for human habitation, safe haven, and hotel or motel paid by client.

"Institutional setting" includes foster care, psychiatric facility, substance abuse or detox facility, hospital (non-psychiatric), and jail or prison.

"Permanent housing" with subsidy includes housing owned by client with ongoing subsidy, rental by client with VASH subsidy, rental by client with other ongoing subsidy, and Permanent Supportive Housing for Homeless Persons.

"Permanent housing" without subsidy includes housing owned by client without ongoing subsidy and rental by client with no ongoing subsidy.

"Family or friends" includes living with family, permanent tenure or living with friends, permanent tenure.