

## County of San Diego: 2021 CSAC Challenge Awards Executive Summary

**TITLE:** Rapid ERAP Implementation Provides Help When Needed

**OVERVIEW:** San Diego County's swift development of its Emergency Rent and Utilities Assistance Program helped thousands of vulnerable households impacted by the pandemic avoid displacement and substantial debt.

**CHALLENGE:** Thousands of San Diego County residents became at risk of housing displacement due to financial impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic. Through HR-133, the Federal Government made \$25 billion available to state and local governments for Emergency Rental Assistance Programs (ERAP). The County of San Diego received a direct allocation of \$48.8 million. The State of California received \$2.6 billion and, through SB-91, gave options for local jurisdictions to access these funds. There were two major challenges for this program: developing and implementing an entire new program while meeting strict deadlines and complying with state and federal rules; and ensuring fair and equitable access to the program assistance.

**SOLUTION:** To meet the immediate need of renters and landlords, the County implemented, designed, and set in operation an entirely new program within a matter of weeks. This included developing new online application and case management system, onboarding and training 200 temporary staff, developing policy and program design, and community outreach and engagement. The County leveraged the application and case management software platform that was initially developed by a neighboring jurisdiction. Additionally, to ensure fair and equitable access to the program, the County's Board of Supervisors set local priorities including a priority for health equity. Households located in areas that have less access to healthy opportunities, as identified by the Healthy Places Index (HPI), were given priority over households located in high health opportunity areas.

**INNOVATION:** The County's goal was to develop a program that could be implemented as fast as possible, meet all State and federal rules, and reach underserved communities. The County intentionally designed the application process and program policies to be as straightforward and streamlined for two important reasons; to make the application process user-friendly and fast for renters and to make the eligibility review process manageable. The application was streamlined to ask a minimal number of questions and take advantage of the self-certification flexibilities allowed. Applications could be submitted without uploading verification documents, speeding up the process. The resulting application takes an average 15-20 minutes to complete, in comparison to other jurisdictions that had reported application completion times of close to one hour. The application was translated into several languages, including Spanish, Tagalog, Arabic, Vietnamese, Mandarin, Somali, Farsi, and Swahili. All flyers and frequently asked questions were also translated and applicants with

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limited internet access or that needed additional language support could call and speak to a representative. How-to videos were developed in English and Spanish and six community-based organizations within the region were available to help those who needed additional assistance with completing applications or gathering eligibility documentation. The County's extensive outreach campaign throughout the region leveraged the communication networks established for the County's COVID-19 response. This included working with multiple sectors, such as faith-based organizations, health care, education, and other community-based organizations to help distribute program flyers and other announcements. The County sent over 800,000 postcard mailers to residents in high-poverty and low HPI areas. Targeted radio, social media, and newsprint ads in English, Spanish, and other non-English language publications were also used. The County regularly communicated with the 16 cities within the ERAP jurisdiction and developed an outreach toolkit to help those cities and their community contacts promote the program in their local areas. Additionally, the County conducted in-person outreach activities in various communities at swap meets, food distribution sites and community events.

**RESULTS:** Between March and July 2021, the County awarded 95% of the ERAP funds available; \$92.8 million in assistance to over 11,600 households. The program was successful in preventing evictions and housing instability for thousands of low-income renters who have faced financial hardships due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. While many other jurisdictions throughout the state and nation are struggling to deliver the funds, the speed of the County's development and implementation of ERAP is a model of rapid response in addressing an immediate community need.

**REPLICABILITY:** The design and implementation decisions that led to the County's success in delivering the ERAP funds to renters and landlords within the community can be replicated by other counties. In general, counties can use the example of leveraging existing contracts, temporary workforce, and community connections to implement the program. Also, program design choices and outreach methods can be replicated in other areas for one-time emergency response programs or on-going programs that a county may operate.

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**ADDITIONAL MATERIALS:** [Media Toolkit \(Media, Flyers and Videos\)](#), [Landlord Flyer](#)