

Please submit your proposed initiative idea by responding to the below questions and sending to [ARPA@cambridgema.gov](mailto:ARPA@cambridgema.gov). Please use the subject line: "Cambridge American Rescue Plan Community Project Idea".

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## **A. Project Idea Information**

### **Name & Contact Information of Submitter**

Kavish Gandhi, projectrighttoshelter@gmail.com

**May the City contact you for more information?**      **Yes**      No

### **Project Idea Description**

**(250 words or less and please also specify how the proposed project or program idea would address negative community impacts from the pandemic):**

This project proposes that the City of Cambridge rehouse 400 individuals experiencing homelessness between April 1, 2022 and April 1, 2023, and functionally end homelessness by April 1, 2024. This could be accomplished through the proposed Cambridge Unhoused Stipend Program (CUSP), which would cover the full cost of living for participating unhoused individuals and families for three years, and a significant portion (at least rent less 30% of household income) for the following 7 years. CUSP embraces a Housing First approach to ending homelessness, and performs three key activities:

- Identifies eligible households,
- Finds and secures available units, and
- Moves those eligible households into those units, and provides long-term supportive services as necessary.

We have attached a more detailed description of CUSP to this email. This proposal was written by Project Right to Housing and incorporates input from homelessness services providers and unhoused community members.

The unhoused community has been disproportionately affected by the ongoing pandemic. Limited shelter and housing options have left many people on the street or in crowded congregate shelters where life is difficult and the risk of contracting COVID-19 is high. There have been reductions and changes to resources, including health services, day centers and homeless services, that were available to people who are unhoused prior to the pandemic, making their lives significantly more challenging. Stringent requirements for identification and other impediments have also made it hard for many unhoused people to gain access to federal aid that many people have been able to obtain.

Though the burden of the pandemic has eased somewhat, rehousing through CUSP will go a long way towards sustainably addressing these needs, which remain at crisis levelsmic.

## **B. Project Idea Eligibility Assessment: What can funds be used for?**

The City of Cambridge can use its allocation of funds towards projects and programs that are consistent with any of the below use categories as established by Congress.

Please select the statutory category under which the proposed project best fits:

- × *To respond to the Public Health Emergency or its negative economic impacts*
- To Support Essential Work by providing pay or grants to essential workers*
- To Support the Provision of Public Services impacted by revenue declines*
- To support necessary investments in water, sewer, and broadband*

## **C. Other Compliance/Policy Considerations**

### **1. How does the proposed initiative address immediate or delayed public health, economic, or other community harms resulting from or exacerbated by the COVID-19 public health emergency?**

Across the country, unhoused individuals and families were disproportionately affected by COVID-19. Whereas 420 in 1000 homeless individuals were hospitalized in the entire year of 2013, 286 were hospitalized with the coronavirus in March 2020 alone, including 40 in Middlesex County. Cambridge was no exception.

In addition to being disproportionately affected by COVID-19, broader negative economic prospects have also affected unhoused individuals who already face challenges maintaining a livelihood with no permanent housing and address.

CUSP would directly address these exacerbated harms by housing these individuals and families quickly and scalably. The City of Cambridge is already funding and considering funding several ARPA proposals on the merit of their service to unhoused community members. This proposal builds on existing work in a meaningful and necessary way.

### **2. Could the proposed initiative serve historically underserved, marginalized, or adversely affected groups in the Community? If so, how?**

This initiative directly serves unhoused individuals.

Unhoused individuals are historically underserved, with no stable place to stay and difficulty accessing food and health services, among many challenges. CUSP aims to serve unhoused individuals with their housing needs which, according to a housing-first model, is a first step in supporting their many needs.

As of 2021, at least 67% of Boston's homeless population are people of color, and the reality is similar in Cambridge. CUSP would create housing opportunities for many people of color.

Unhoused people are marginalized, often criminalized simply for trying to meet their most basic needs, functionally “criminalizing life itself”.<sup>1</sup> Providing people with housing, as CUSP is doing, is shown to result in 40% fewer arrests and less interactions with the carceral system<sup>2</sup>.

**3. How could the proposed initiative serve disproportionately impacted communities<sup>3</sup> and/or communities with high unemployment rates, limited economic opportunity, and/or housing insecurity who experienced a negative economic impact from the public health emergency?**

CUSP would directly serve unhoused residents of Cambridge. Unhoused community members are disproportionately impacted by COVID-19; based on CDC-reported data for Boston Medical Center in July of 2020, homeless individuals comprised 24.3% of non-ICU hospitalizations, 15.9% of ICU hospitalization without mechanical ventilation, 15.1% of ICU hospitalization with mechanical ventilation, and 15.3% of those of whom died. Homeless community members also have limited economic opportunity; the unemployment rate among unhoused adults may be as large as 90%,<sup>4</sup> compared to less than 10% among the general population, reflecting an array of barriers to finding a job, first and foremost the lack of a stable home. Finally, the unhoused community, by definition, is housing-insecure.

**4. Can performance metrics be developed for the proposed initiative to measure progress in meeting intended goals and community benefits? If so, please provide examples.**

Performance metrics that would be important to collect and analyze as the program is developed include, but are not limited to:

- Number of unhoused families and individuals permanently housed through CUSP
- Number of CUSP-eligible individuals screened into the program
- Number of CUSP-eligible individuals working with a CUSP case manager
- Number of landlords participating in the Landlord Partnership Program (LIP) and Landlord Incentives Program (LIP), proposed as part of CUSP
- Average holding fee and security deposit paid to landlords under LPP
- Average security deposit and application fee paid to landlords under LIP

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1

<https://www.bostonglobe.com/2020/06/28/metro/homeless-boston-beyond-laws-can-criminalize-life-itself/>

2

[https://denvergazette.com/news/homelessness/disrupting-a-false-narrative-denver-supportive-housing-program-decreases-arrests-emergency-room-visits/article\\_2d447b3a-e5b0-11eb-91d6-93c2bb153302.html](https://denvergazette.com/news/homelessness/disrupting-a-false-narrative-denver-supportive-housing-program-decreases-arrests-emergency-room-visits/article_2d447b3a-e5b0-11eb-91d6-93c2bb153302.html)

<sup>3</sup> “Disproportionally impacted communities” are demographic groups with exacerbated health inequities along racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic lines including low-income and socially vulnerable communities. Per federal rules for using SLFRF, “in identifying these disproportionately-impacted communities, recipients (the City) should be able to support their determination that the pandemic resulted in disproportionate public health or economic outcomes to the specific populations, households, or geographic areas to be served.” Federal Register Vol. 86, No. 93, Pg. 26791.

<sup>4</sup> More discussion of the estimated unemployment rate of unhoused adults, as well as the institutional barriers to finding employment, can be found in:

<https://socialinnovation.usc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Homelessness-and-Employment.pdf>

- Average amount claimed per unit, beyond the security deposit, from the \$5000 damage reimbursement fund
- Average “time to housing”, defined as # of days from initial screening to move-in to a unit. Each individual step should also be measured:
  - # of days from screening to assignment to a case manager
  - # of days from assignment to a case manager to successful identification of a unit (either through LPP or LIP)
  - # of days from successful identification of a unit to move-in
- Quarterly, rather than annual, point-in-time estimates of total # of unhoused families or individuals residing in Cambridge
- Geographic distribution of CUSP-participating individuals/families, with a goal of placing individuals in a wide variety of Cambridge neighborhoods – the exact performance metric could be the sum of squares distance between the empirical distribution and a uniform distribution.
- (longer term) rate of housing retention over time, particularly after the first 3 years of CUSP
- (longer term) a purely numerical cost-benefit analysis of the average \$ amount spent per CUSP participant, versus average \$ amount spent before the implementation of CUSP – this can be estimated using methodology similar to that of <https://destinationhomesv.org/home-not-found-the-cost-of-homelessness-in-silicon-valley/>
- Emergency department usage and estimate of health cost/city spending savings for CUSP housed participants compared either to folks who are not yet housed or themselves in prior years before CUSP

Many of the above metrics could and should be broken down by demographic and income categories, as well as by individuals vs. families, to further get at any differences between how CUSP is effectively serving different subgroups of the unhoused community.

##### **5. Please provide the Funding Amount Requested.**

We request \$10 million. The estimated first-year cost of the program is \$15 million. In our attached proposal, we propose a dollar-for-dollar matching by Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, in which case the funding amount requested, for the first year, would be \$5 million. Allocating \$10 million with matching could cover the program for its initial two years, after which it could be funded by expanding funding for Cambridge’s Affordable Housing Trust.

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##### **Background Information about the Program**

In March 2021 as part of the \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), Congress appropriated \$350 billion in funding to the U.S. Treasury for distribution among every State, County, City, and other communities in the nation. This funding, known as State & Local Coronavirus Fiscal Recovery Funding (SLFRF), is intended to provide additional relief to address the continued impact of COVID-19 on the economy, public health, state and local governments, individuals, and businesses.

The City of Cambridge has received \$88.1 million in American Rescue Fund/SLFRF funding, including

\$64.9 million directly from U.S. Treasury and another \$23.2 million from the Commonwealth as part of Middlesex County’s SLFRF allocation. The City has until December 31, 2024 to obligate its allocation in full to eligible projects and programs and must spend its total allocation by December 31, 2026.

As the City considers projects and programs to be implemented using its allocation, the City wants to ensure that planned uses of the funding incorporate input and feedback from constituents, communitybased organizations, and other community stakeholders. As such, you are invited to submit initiative ideas for City consideration using the below form. The form is tailored so that submitted ideas are consistent with the minimum range of funding use options as established by ARPA and U.S. Treasury regulations.

The City intends to reference submitted ideas as it continues to decide upon and shape initiatives that both address community pandemic recovery needs, while being consistent with applicable federal rules for the use of the funding.