

Request for Information

Housing First Permanent Supportive Housing

Austin Housing Finance Corporation & Austin/Travis County Health and Human Services Dept.

I. Purpose

The City of Austin seeks information in preparation for a solicitation to select a development team to construct new or rehabilitated Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) using the “Housing First” model. This development will provide at least 50 PSH units to highly vulnerable, chronically homeless individuals.

A PSH unit is defined as an affordable rental housing unit that is linked to a range of support services that enable tenants, especially the chronically homeless, to live independently and participate in community life.

“Housing First” is a model supported by the Austin City Council and the Ending Community Homelessness Coalition (ECHO) by which prospective tenants are paired with a housing unit that does not require a prerequisite engagement in social services. The “Housing First” model has low- to no- barriers to tenancy, accepting individuals that might otherwise be barred from housing due to criminal history, financial/credit history or medical involvement.

There are no exclusively Housing First PSH developments in Austin. This will be the first such development funded with City dollars.

II. Background

As part of the Austin/Travis County Continuum of Care’s commitment to ending chronic homelessness, the Austin City Council has endorsed a strategy to aid in the creation of new Permanent Supportive Housing units throughout the City. Using the Permanent Supportive Housing Strategy passed in 2010, in conjunction with the 2013 \$65M General Obligation Bond for affordable housing, the City will solicit its first Housing First, PSH development project.

Through the 2014 annual point-in-time count of our homeless population, it is estimated that on any given night in Austin, 1,987 individuals are homeless. Of these, approximately 349 are considered chronically homeless. HUD’s definition of a chronically homeless person is: *“a homeless individual or head of household with a disabling condition who has either been continuously homeless for a year or more OR has had at least four (4) episodes of homelessness in the past three (3) years”*. A disabling condition is defined as *“a diagnosable substance use disorder, serious mental illness, developmental disability, or chronic physical illness or disability, including the co-occurrence of two or more of these conditions.”*

These individuals frequently confront serious, persistent issues such as addiction or alcoholism, mental illness, HIV/AIDS, and other serious challenges to a successful life, and thus require a more substantial level of care in a supportive housing environment to return to housing stabilization. Permanent supportive housing is an evidence-based practice that has been proven to be the most successful intervention for chronically homeless persons. HUD has independently verified that more than 80% of tenants in permanent supportive housing remain stably housed for more than one year.

III. Capabilities

The City is seeking information about a development team with knowledge and experience in providing Permanent Supportive Housing to chronically homeless individuals. Furthermore, the development team should have knowledge in implementing a “Housing First” model. The team must be able to:

- a. Understand and create a financial model required to sustain Permanent Supportive Housing, including the capital, operational and social services funding, which will include funding sources beyond what the City can offer.
- b. Develop PSH housing on-time and within budget, in accordance with energy efficient and sustainable practices and all pertinent federal regulations, City Code and ordinances.
- c. Establish a true “Housing First” model, including low- to no- barrier approaches to housing including criminal history, financial/credit history or medical involvement.
- d. Work within the community’s established Coordinated Assessment system for referrals, designed to prioritize individuals with greatest vulnerability and significant barriers to housing stability.
- e. Manage and operate the facility, and oversee and coordinate the activities of the various service providers.

IV. Summary of Request

Responses to this RFI should include the following information:

- a. Please provide information about how a partnership can be formed between a developer and a social service agency to form a sustainable team to develop Housing First PSH. What type of experience managing and coordinating the activities of the various service providers is required in this team?
- b. What should a financial model used to develop Housing First PSH look like?
- c. Please share some examples and specifications of similar projects developed by the team, or members of the team.

- d. What types of qualifications should a development team have to construct a Housing First PSH project? Please share the team's experience, or demonstrated understanding of developing affordable housing in Austin, Texas and/or the team's experience working with government contracts.
- e. What should a criminal background policy for a Housing First PSH project look like?
- f. What should a funding agency do to monitor compliance and ensure fidelity of a Housing First PSH program?
- g. What other information should the City consider when awarding funding to develop Housing First PSH?

V. Submission of Response

It is the responsibility of the Respondent to ensure proper understanding of the contents of this RFI. All requests for explanation or clarifications must be submitted in writing at least three (3) business days prior to the RFI closing date which is Monday, August 4, 2014 at 3:00 pm Central Time. Requests for explanation, clarifications or interpretations may be sent by email to John Hilbun at john.hilbun@austintexas.gov. The request must clearly identify the respondent's company, contact person and solicitation number.

The design of the vendor response and the amount of supporting documentation are left to the discretion of each respondent.

Submission of responses to this RFI must be received prior to the stated due date and time. All submissions must be clearly marked on the exterior of the package with the solicitation number (2014-AHFC-003) and the due date and time. Each Responder must submit one (1) original and one (1) electronic version (single PDF file on flash drive or CD) of its response. Send responses to:

US Postal Service, Hand Delivery, or Via Courier

Austin Housing Finance Corporation (AHFC)
Attn: John Hilbun
1000 E. 11th Street, Suite 200
Austin, TX 78702

Reception Phone: (512) 974-3187

VI. Disclaimer

This RFI is issued solely for information and planning purposes and does not constitute a solicitation for purchase. Any information submitted in response to this RFI should not be marked proprietary or confidential. Responses to the RFI will not be returned. Accordingly, responses to this notice are not offers and cannot be accepted by The City of Austin as such or to form or suggest a contract or commitment of any nature. Respondents are solely responsible for all expenses associated with responding to this RFI.