



**Framingham State University Nonprofit Giving Course
Grant Proposal
March 26, 2020**

Mission & Overview

We mobilize wide-ranging resources to provide innovative and personalized services that lead families and individuals to housing stability, economic self-sufficiency, and an improved quality of life.

Founded in 1983, Metro Housing|Boston serves the most vulnerable and disadvantaged residents of the Greater Boston area (Boston plus 30 surrounding communities), empowering them to move along the continuum from homelessness to housing stability. Our programming reaches more than 25,000 households annually, providing voucher administration, housing support services, and emergency transition funding. Metro Housing also fields a robust direct service portfolio, including intensive case management for participants with extreme challenges, and colocates services in partnership with fourteen community stakeholders across Greater Boston.

Combining hands-on experience with in-depth research to effect systemic change, we are a trusted resource in the fight to end homelessness. We foster cross-sector partnerships, working seamlessly with government, nonprofits, and corporations to amplify our impact and provide holistic solutions. Our professional and responsive staff delivers a diverse continuum of services, including homelessness prevention for at-risk families, rehousing resources for the currently homeless, and self-sufficiency programs for participants prepared to take the next step toward economic independence.

Needs Statement

The harsh statistical reality of affordable housing is inescapable. Rents are rocketing skyward while wages remain stagnant, putting a greater and greater number of low-to-moderate (LMI) income residents at risk of housing instability and homelessness. According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition's (NLIHC) Out of Reach 2019 report, the Fair Market Rent (FMR) for a two-bedroom apartment in Massachusetts is \$1,758, necessitating an hourly "Housing Wage" of \$33.81. A minimum wage earner at \$12 per hour would have to work an untenable 113 hours per week just to maintain FMR housing. While unemployment numbers look good on paper, the profusion of low-income employment obscures the job market's failure to keep pace with the inflation of rental rates.

The problem is in even sharper relief in the communities Metro Housing serves. While the economy in Greater Boston is booming, the widening income and housing gaps leave LMI residents in extreme peril. In the Greater Boston area, the Housing Wage rises to an unconscionable \$42.19, nearly double the national average of \$22.96. Suffolk County has the highest median two-bedroom rent in Massachusetts (\$2,730), according to the 2019 Greater Boston Housing Report Card from the Boston Foundation, and the overall median for the Boston Metro area is \$2,500, ranking third amongst metropolitan areas nationally.

In order to compensate for these unfortunate financial realities, vulnerable families often have to devote a greater percentage of household income to maintaining housing, leaving them without adequate resources to meet basic needs or acquire necessary healthcare. Even with these sacrifices, many families struggle to meet rent payments and can easily fall into homelessness. In 2018, Boston's Annual Homeless Census counted 6,203 individuals living in shelters, transitional housing and motels.¹ Unrepresented in that statistic are the many doubled up in overcrowded apartments because they cannot afford independent housing. Metro Housing|Boston currently maintains a ten-year waitlist of those seeking Section 8 vouchers, and opportunities for subsidized housing are extremely limited – the average wait for public housing is eight years.

Program Description

Emergency assistance programs have a verifiably effective record of mitigating housing instability. According to a 2019 report produced by the Regional Housing Network of Massachusetts, Residential Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT) payments provided a humane and cost-effective alternative to the state's family shelter program. Averaging \$3,130, RAFT payments ensuring continued housing saved the Commonwealth an average of \$43,321 per family in shelter costs alone. These payments were not simply a short-term fix, as only 6.5% of recipients in FY17 returned for additional RAFT funding in FY18, indicating a tangible link between the successful application of emergency assistance and long-term housing stability.

Unfortunately, the breadth of the increasing need has overtaxed governmental assistance programs beyond their current capacity. Available RAFT funding was expended by late May in FY19, leaving vulnerable families without a critical safety net for nearly two months. Additionally, families in the 50-80% Area Mean Income (AMI) range are ineligible for RAFT, yet experience many of the same housing struggles as lower-income residents. There is no consistently available mechanism to address the financial struggles of those "over-income" families, leaving them in an uncomfortable middle ground between governmental assistance and self-sufficiency. Even among families qualified for RAFT, narrow restrictions on its usage often prohibit crucial housing expenditures and move-in costs.

Metro Housing fields a slate of programs and tools designed to overcome the specific and diverse barriers our participants face in the search for affordable, sustainable housing, including the Emergency Assistance Fund (EAF). Supported by the United Way and private donors, the EAF provides Housing Supports case managers with a flexible and invaluable tool to help participants maintain their housing stability in the most desperate circumstances. When an over-income participant or critical expense is ineligible for state-funded emergency benefit programs like RAFT, Metro Housing case managers utilize the EAF to make small strategic payments to help homeless residents enter housing or allow those at imminent risk of homelessness to remain housed.

With an average payment of approximately \$500 per household, EAF helps to resolve rent or utility arrearages and pay rental deposits and other startup costs to enable residents to move into safer or more appropriate housing. Case managers connect recipients with other resources, from furniture banks to vocational programs, in order to promote healthy home lives and sustainable long-term outcomes. Metro Housing case managers creatively purpose these small payments to resolve immediate barriers to stable housing, whether it involves lodging a family in a hotel over a weekend until a shelter room becomes available, or covering short-term living expenses for parents unable to work while experiencing a health crisis.

¹ Boston Public Health Commission. City of Boston 39th Annual Homeless Census. 2019.

Objectives

The Emergency Assistance Fund supports Metro Housing's organizational goal of helping low-income residents who face a housing crisis to remain housed. To this end, the objectives of this tool are to:

- Make small strategic payments to promote positive outcomes for vulnerable residents ineligible for RAFT assistance.
- Connect participants with additional resources, programs, and benefits to promote sustained positive outcomes.
- Ensure that residents who receive funding have a successful long-term outcome (i.e., avoid eviction, move into affordable housing, maintain/restore utility service, receive necessary mental and physical health care, and address unmet basic needs).

Staff Involvement

All Housing Supports case managers can access the EAF for their participants. Metro Housing's case managers are seasoned employees with a strong work history and training in human services. Our staff is diverse, reflecting the spectrum of cultures of and languages spoken in the communities we serve. In the Housing Consumer Education Center (HCEC), fourteen case managers assist thousands of families and individuals each year. HCEC case managers help clients navigate the complex application process for affordable housing, obtain benefits, access emergency funds, obtain legal assistance if needed, and locate resources for childcare, adult education, and job training.

Case managers work with a client base most likely to qualify for the Emergency Assistance fund: people who are very-low income, elderly, struggling with chronic mental illness and/or ill health, or are trying to rebuild their lives after experiencing domestic violence, long-term homelessness, or addiction.

Metro Housing's Director of Housing Supports reviews and approves all EAF requests submitted by case managers. The Assistant Director of Housing Supports oversees the administration and coordination of both RAFT and EAF programs to eliminate any overlaps and ensure that funds are purposed correctly for maximum impact and effectiveness.

The Emergency Assistance Fund is available on an ongoing basis throughout the year, contingent upon the availability of funding. The infrastructure to review applications and disburse funding is designed to be responsive to time-sensitive situations. Within the current structure of the program, it takes approximately two weeks to process and act on funding requests. This timeframe allows for both careful review of and efficient response for time-sensitive situations.

In their first contact with a participant who presents a pressing housing need, case managers conduct an in-depth assessment to determine his or her barriers and types of support needed, from budgeting workshops to housing search assistance to emergency funds to avert a crisis. The case manager works with the participant to complete a comprehensive application for emergency funding.

Case managers collect information about each participant regarding household resources and barriers to affordable housing. Throughout the case management process, case managers track the services provided and each participant's progress toward housing stability. For the Emergency Assistance Fund, we define success based on the number of residents who successfully find or retain housing because of this assistance.

Risk Analysis

Direct assistance programs like the Emergency Assistance Fund are often subjected to questions about whether a small amount of funding makes measurable difference in a household's long-term financial stability. Like our funders, Metro Housing stewards our resources carefully. We are strategic in how we deploy funding, both to ensure that disbursement is more than a stopgap measure for the household and to make funding available to as many qualified households as possible.

Our extensive intake process with each participant determines the scope of his or her need and the availability of other resources/assets, including utilities assistance, public sources of emergency assistance, food and clothing banks, before we turn to this particular fund. Thus, in every case we are confident that the fund resolves a pressing need that is left unmet by other sources and services. Our staff also acts as the financial agent for disbursement, making payments directly to vendors to ensure proper usage of these funds.

Sustainability Plan

In June 2016, Metro Housing finalized a five-year strategic plan after an eighteen-month process, which included involvement from the entire staff, the board of directors, and other key community stakeholders. The plan addressed the need to grow our sources of private support, including corporate and foundation grants and individual donations. It also produced a capital campaign that culminated in our new permanent home in Roxbury Crossing, part of a larger initiative designed to revitalize the neighborhood. The relocation increased both accessibility to our participants and enhanced our visibility in the community. The new building was designed with flexible breakout space, affording the opportunity to host fee-for-service trainings to boost program income. Owning our own space also affords us much greater latitude for reduction of expenses.

In order to ensure the sustainability of the organization, Metro Housing has made a significant strategic investment in our data collection and management infrastructure. With the installation of a new Case Management System by SMC Partners in FY20, Metro Housing now has the capacity to track a more extensive range of outcomes and metrics for success than in prior years. The organizational commitment to data enhancement – using FY20 as a baseline – will facilitate the strategic allocation of human and financial resources for maximum participant impact. Longitudinal data accumulation will facilitate more detailed evaluation of program effectiveness and direction, while also compiling invaluable research data on the populations we serve.

Metro Housing's FY20 operating budget is \$12,818,754, which supports a staff of 150 providing services to more than 25,000 Greater Boston households. Personnel costs make up 81.7% of the total operational budget. While Metro Housing looks like a medium-to-large organization on paper, some context is required to understand our actual financial position. The vast majority of organizational revenue (79% of FY20's \$12,818,754 budget) is tied to voucher administration, while our social services arm is, in practical terms, a much smaller organization where relatively small amounts of funding can make a substantive difference in program direction, scope, and effectiveness. Our Housing Supports division runs extremely lean, providing expert housing search assistance and case management services to thousands of at-risk Greater Boston residents on an FY20 budget of only \$2,691,938, with 76.7% supporting staffing costs.

While government contracts make up the bulk of organizational revenue, financial support for our social service initiatives is provided largely by a combination of charitable foundations, corporate donations,

and individual private donors. In order to both fund and diversify our programming portfolio, Metro Housing's Development team works with Housing Supports to pursue program-specific grants and unrestricted donations through appeals and fundraising events. The Development team is currently engaged in raising \$950,000 toward the overall projected FY20 budget of \$12,818,754. While this only represents 7.4% of overall operational funding, the government contracts supporting voucher administration serve as extremely consistent annual sources of income. Our fundraising efforts constitute 35% of non-voucher-related income, and without this generous support from private donors, staffing cuts to our vital social service programs would prevent our participants from getting the crucial assistance they need.

Impact Stories

Dina is a 40 year old mother of two children, living in Boston. After living with an abusive partner for many years, she decided to leave in search of a better future for her and her children. Dina is employed, and supports her children on a salary of \$50,000 a year, enough to pay for market-rate rent and living expenses, but not enough to build up significant savings. Dina knew she needed to leave her home, but did not have enough money to pay the security deposit on a new apartment. Her income level made her ineligible for RAFT funds. Metro Housing provided Dina with \$1,000 to secure an apartment outside of the city. Today, Dina and her children are starting a new life, free from fear, in a new community.

Edward is an 88 year old man living in a one-bedroom apartment in Roslindale. Despite his age, Edward continued working part-time to be able to afford the \$1,500 rent on his market-rate apartment. With his pay and a small income from Social Security, he managed to meet his monthly expenses. However, when he was diagnosed with cancer, Edward was unable to continue working and subsequently fell behind in his rent. When Edward came to Metro Housing for help, his case manager helped him to learn about the range of benefits for which he was eligible, including food stamps, medical assistance, and support from elder services and the Veterans Affairs Administration. We contacted his property owner to negotiate partial rent payments from the EAF while we worked with Edward to obtain a housing subsidy and find an affordable apartment that meets his needs.