

I. Introduction

The City of Austin (COA) seeks proposals in response to this Request for Proposals (RFP) from qualified social service providers (Offerors) with demonstrated experience in providing services to individuals and households experiencing homelessness, providing crisis services to individuals or households experiencing homelessness, and/or providing low-barrier, emergency Cold Weather Shelter to individuals and households experiencing homelessness during qualifying weather conditions and events. This solicitation seeks proposals to implement Cold Weather Shelter(s), as needed, based on the temperature activation policies agreed upon by the awardee(s) and the City of Austin and when the City of Austin announces a Declaration of Emergency due to extreme weather events.¹ Under a City declared emergency, the City will provide supplemental emergency shelter capacity to meet additional sheltering needs if needed.

II. Background and Purpose of Funding

The estimated number of people experiencing homelessness (PEH) who are unsheltered in the Austin area has risen in recent years. According to the Ending Community Homelessness Coalition’s (ECHO) 2021 Point-in-Time Count estimates, which looked at the state of homelessness in January 2021, there are around 2,200 PEH who are unsheltered on any given night in the Austin/Travis County area. Estimates as of December 2021, based on the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) by-name list, show that number may be closer to 2,500. The size of this population, as well as elevated risk due to the heightened prevalence of chronic disease among PEH, clearly indicates the need to offer low-barrier shelter when conditions are particularly hazardous.

Prior to 2020, non-profit and faith-based organizations coordinated with the City of Austin to provide access to low-barrier, emergency shelters when outside temperatures were at or below 32°F and dry or at or below 35°F with rain and/or at least 15 mph winds, conditions which did not necessarily merit a City of Austin Declaration of Emergency. From 2020 – 2022, the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in disruptions to that service delivery model that resulted in the City of Austin coordinating, managing, and operating Cold Weather Shelters for individuals and households experiencing homelessness. To fill this gap in services, the City has directly operated Cold Weather Shelters utilizing City-owned Recreation Centers and existing City of Austin staff reassigned to the effort.

For additional background, below are some historical figures from Cold Weather Shelter activations:

- The Winter 2021-22 season’s average utilization of Cold Weather Shelters was 161 people per activation. The average utilization of Cold Weather Shelters on nights without emergency declarations was 138 people per activation. Note that Declarations of Emergency have, in the past, activated additional shelter capacity and services provided by the City of Austin and other partners.
- The goal of this solicitation is to establish a low-barrier Cold Weather Shelter program that will activate, at a minimum, when temperatures are at 35°F or below, which is a change from current operating procedure. According to NOAA’s temperature data from Winter season 2018-19 through the Winter of 2021-22, this would result in 26 activations per year.

Feedback received after the 2021-2022 Winter season from City partners, community stakeholders, and the Austin/Travis County Homelessness Response System Leadership Council² highlighted the need for dedicated and improved resources for responding to this need. City departments and staff participating in the implementation of Cold Weather Shelter operations cited challenges recruiting City staff to volunteer at Cold Weather Shelters and inadequate budget resources to fund Cold Weather Shelter Services. Feedback from the community highlighted the need to increase the activation temperatures that trigger Cold Weather Shelter, increase the hours of operations, improve outreach and awareness of Cold Weather Shelters, improve transportation options, and increase and improve the services provided as part of Cold Weather Shelter.

The historical need for low-barrier Cold Weather Shelters and the feedback described above demonstrate a clear need for a dedicated provider(s) to coordinate, manage, and operate Cold Weather Shelters.

Solicitation Objectives

The objectives of this solicitation are to:

1. Provide safe, low-barrier, accessible shelter for unsheltered individuals during life-threatening cold weather conditions
2. Ensure adequate transportation to proposed shelter(s) that includes accommodating individuals with mobility limitations. Historically, Capital Metro (CapMetro) has been able to provide limited transportation service from a central embarkation point
3. Maintain high-quality, reliable, and consistent Cold Weather Shelter operations based on agreed upon activation and operations policies
4. Create pathways for unsheltered individuals/households to connect to housing and support services provided by the community providers working in the homelessness response system

III. Funding and Timeline

Department: Austin Public Health

Services Solicited: Cold Weather Shelter

Available Funding: Approximately **\$1,225,338**, subject to City Council approval of the 2022-2023 fiscal year budget

Number of Agreements and Contract Term: APH anticipates awarding 1 agreement beginning on November 1, 2022. Proposals must be submitted using the 12-month budget allocation. Collaborative applications will be considered, however a lead agency must be identified.

Minimum Amount: Offerors may submit a proposal for less than the full amount available provided that RFP objectives are met.

Awarded programs may be structured as a reimbursable-based agreement or a deliverables-based agreement, as defined below, which will be determined by Austin Public Health:

1. Reimbursable Agreement- An Agreement where an agency is reimbursed for expenses incurred and paid through the provision of adequate supporting documentation that verifies the expenses.

² [Letter to City of Austin: Improve inclement weather response for unhoused people - ECHO \(austinecho.org\)](https://austinecho.org)

2. Deliverable Agreement- An Agreement where an agency is reimbursed for a report or product that must be delivered to the City by the grantee (or by the Subgrantee to the Grantee) to satisfy contractual requirements. It can include goods or finished works, documentation of services provided, or activities undertaken, and/or other related documentation.

IV. Services Solicited

Program Services

Offerors should propose to provide comprehensive, turn-key, Cold Weather Sheltering services to include space/facilities that allow for congregate or non-congregate overnight sleeping accommodations and adequate staffing to support basic needs of the clients; the coordination of communication, outreach, and transportation with relevant partners; the provision of meals and needed supplies to shelter clients; the provision or coordination of necessary supportive services; and the provision or coordination of security and safety resources for as long as cold weather conditions persist.

The information presented below represents the minimum program requirements that the City is requesting. However, we encourage Offerors to enhance and expand upon the program elements where feasible such as but not limited to: higher temperature threshold for activation, capacity for more beds, and expanded hours of operation. Additional points may be available for Offerors who can provide enhanced or expanded services.

Cold Weather Shelter Activation and Operation:

Shelter(s) will be activated, as needed, based on agreed upon temperature activation policies between the awardee(s) and the City of Austin. Standard Operating Procedures for activation will be updated and finalized by HSEM, Austin Public Health, and other relevant partners with awardee(s) input. Shelter(s) will **at minimum** be capable of:

1. Activating when overnight temperatures in Austin and/or Travis County reach 35°F or below, which we estimate will result in approximately 26 activations per Winter
2. Operating from at minimum of 5 PM on the first day of activations to 9 AM the next morning, or similar hours with reasonable explanation of difference

Awardee(s) may be required to support other extreme weather events, pending establishment of standard operating procedures as described above.

Facilities and Capacity:

Awardee(s) will be responsible for ensuring that shelters:

1. Provide space to accommodate at least 200 total congregate or non-congregate beds for individuals 18 years or older, per night of activation and adequate amenities for full bed capacity such as a sufficient number of toilets
 - a. If shelter is congregate, Offerors are encouraged to offer separate space and amenities for female-identifying individuals.
 - b. Families with minor dependents should, at minimum, be referred to appropriate shelters and/or offering a limited amount of financial assistance for shelter at hotels during activations.
 - c. Any unaccompanied minors will be referred to appropriate providers.
2. Provide, when possible, storage space for personal belongings

3. Provide appropriate space and equipment for secure storage of medication, which may include secure refrigerator access
4. Provide clean sleeping pads or cots, pillows, and blankets
5. Have plans/protocols in place for pets to shelter with their owners, including coordination with Austin Animal Center or other appropriate service providers to coordinate space and personnel needs
6. Are accessible by all individuals, including those with limited mobility, according to Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Standards
7. Are properly maintained and repaired
8. Have sufficient technology in place such as Wi-Fi and electrical outlets and/or charging stations for personal devices
9. Have security measures in place to ensure shelter spaces are safe for participants and minimize termination from shelter only when behavior presents an immediate threat to health or safety of clients, staff, or volunteers
10. Comply with all relevant health and safety codes and regulations

Communication and Outreach:

Awardee(s) will be responsible for communicating to the community before and during activations, including:

1. Conducting communication and outreach to people experiencing homelessness who are likely to utilize Cold Weather Shelter, including but not limited to press releases to media outlets, social media, listservs (e.g., CTOSH), coordination with street outreach providers, social service providers, etc.
2. Notifying and updating the Cold Weather Shelter hotline (ICEE) with current activation status
3. Coordinating with the City of Austin Public Information Office, Homeland Security and Emergency Management, Homeless Strategy Division, and Public Health Emergency Preparedness to ensure consistent and clear messaging to the public
4. Adhering to a robust Language Access Plan that indicates how participants with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) will gain access to shelters.

Transportation:

Awardee(s) will coordinate with CapMetro and other service providers as appropriate to ensure people experiencing homelessness have transportation to Cold Weather Shelter location(s). Depending on the program design proposed, offerors may need to provide or arrange transportation as part of their proposed services and budget. Transportation costs will be an eligible expense.

Offerors may propose any combination of embarkation point(s) and walk-up access, with the goal being shelter accessibility.

Shelter Services:

Shelter(s) will provide at minimum:

1. Registration process for clients which may occur either at an embarkation point or upon shelter entry
2. Support for basic needs, such as self-management of medical needs, food, water, sanitation, etc.
3. Referrals to Coordinated Entry as requested
4. Provision of information about case management, benefits enrollment, and/or other services
5. On-site crisis intervention services, such as on-site staff trained in crisis response methodologies, such as de-escalation techniques

6. Clothing, personal hygiene, and cold weather supplies
7. Service coordination with community organizations that also support Cold Weather Shelter
 - a. Service coordination with the City may include communications with:
 - i. Homeless Strategy Division and Austin Public Health
 - ii. City of Austin Homeland Security and Emergency Management
 - iii. Downtown Austin Community Court
 - iv. Communications and Public Information Office
 - v. Austin Animal Center
 - vi. Parks and Recreation Department
 - vii. CapMetro
 - b. Service coordination with other agencies may include:
 - i. Linkages to services with appropriate community service providers for street outreach, behavioral/mental health, services for veterans, and other key community services that are necessary for shelter guests
 - ii. Established relationships with youth and family shelters for appropriate accommodations
 - c. Shelter(s) should coordinate with Austin Public Health to ensure any public health protocols are established and followed, as needed, particularly in the case of public health emergencies and management of safety measures related to COVID-19 and monkeypox.

Staffing:

Awardee(s) will ensure appropriate staffing levels to support, provide, or coordinate the following Cold Weather Shelter services: registration, provision of meals, overnight sheltering oversight staff, security, minor repairs, facility maintenance, and information about additional supportive services as appropriate. Awardee(s) should be prepared to mobilize staff on the necessary timeframe. Staffing may be subcontracted through third-party providers, and any such arrangements should be reflected in initial proposals. Staff should be trained at minimum in:

1. Trauma-Informed Care
2. Harm Reduction Principles
3. De-escalation
4. Mental Health First Aid
5. Public health protocols as appropriate

Data Collection and Reporting

For all programs serving individuals, agencies will track and report the number of unduplicated clients served per night and over the course of the contract year and document proof of the services provided where applicable. Client tracking should include methods for securely recording name, race, ethnicity, gender, age, and other demographics of the people served without violating client confidentiality. All demographics may be self-reported, and no individual may be turned away for refusing to provide this information.

Offerors must align performance measures with the City's Austin Strategic Direction 2023 indicators for homelessness. APH staff will work with recipient staff to develop and track meaningful, measurable performance measures.

Utilization of the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) for tracking clients is required. If HMIS is used by awardee(s), but is not used on-site at Cold Weather Shelters, required client data will

need to be entered into HMIS within 24 hours after the end of each activation day. In the case of multiple consecutive activation days, data should be entered within 24 hours after the final activation day.

The Awardee(s) must be capable of maintaining and providing accurate data to the City of Austin, the Continuum of Care HMIS Lead Agency to complete the annual Housing Inventory Count (HIC), and the Point-in-Time (PIT) Count if an activation coincides.

After each activation, organizations will be required to report the following to the City:

Data Collection:

Conditions

1. Temperature on the night of the activation
2. Time the activation announcement was made to the community within an agreed upon timeline

Data

1. Number of individuals registered per activation
2. Number of unduplicated individuals per activation night at each Cold Weather Shelter
3. Demographics of all individuals who registered and only those who stayed including at minimum gender, race, and ethnicity
4. Number of involuntary exits from the shelter
5. Number of critical incidents that occur in shelters, such as medical emergencies, disputes, violence or threats of violence, etc. (number, type, resolution)

Performance Measures:

On a quarterly basis, the awardee will be required to report the following:

Output: Number of unduplicated individuals served per 12-months

Outcomes:

1. Percent of individuals seeking shelter who receive shelter.
Numerator: Number of individuals seeking shelter at a Cold Weather Shelter site
Denominator: Number of individuals who receive shelter at a Cold Weather Shelter site
2. Percent of individuals entering the shelter without a Coordinated Assessment (CA) who receive CA
Numerator: Number of individuals without a CA who receive one
Denominator: Number of individuals entering the CWS without a CA

V. Principles of Service Delivery

The implementation of Cold Weather Shelter must adhere to the following principles:

- **Trauma-Informed Practices:** Successful offerors will apply the principles of trauma-informed practice to program and service delivery: safety, choice, collaboration, trustworthiness, and empowerment.

Examples of applied principles may include an expanded food choice that honors an individual's health preferences and needs, and discreet delivery of services that avoid or eliminate stigma³.

- Language Access Plan: Offerors will be in development of or already have developed a Language Access Plan. A language access plan is a document that guides the implementation of quality language assistance services to individuals with limited English proficiency. Language access plans include a four-factor assessment that identifies the ways services and resources can be provided to ensure program participants are able to participate in and benefit from all program services equally. Examples of some language assistance services include oral interpretation, bilingual staff, written translation, or notices to staff and program participants of the availability of language assistance services. Awardee(s) may ensure language access directly through staff or through subcontractors capable of medical translation and interpretation.
- Collaboration with Community: Successful applicants will participate in local planning groups potentially including but not limited to the Homelessness Response System Leadership Council's committees and workgroups which are directly related to the purpose of this funding.
- Referrals: Applicants should offer access to referrals and information on how to access other services and providers.
- Equitable Service Delivery: Offerors must ensure that programs are providing services that meet the needs of diverse populations, considering systemic, institutional, and environmental barriers and inequities that exist and seeking to mitigate the effects on participant outcomes.
- Harm Reduction: Offerors are encouraged to apply a Harm Reduction philosophy to activities and services provided to participants engaged in substance use⁴.
- Program Accessibility and Low-Barrier Emergency Shelter Structure: Programs should actively seek to eliminate barriers to services such as lack of transportation, limited communication and outreach, space needs for pets and possessions, drug and alcohol related requirements for admission, and other restrictions for individuals who are not acting in ways that are unsafe to themselves or others.⁵
- Crisis Intervention and De-escalation: Program staff should receive training in appropriate evidence-based crisis intervention and de-escalation techniques to ensure the safety of all parties and prevent unnecessary exits from the shelter and promote safe and supportive environments.

Best Practices

All supportive services programs are encouraged to incorporate the following best practices:

- Evidence-based Practices: Evidence-based practices are those which have been developed from research, are found to produce meaningful outcomes, can be standardized and replicated, and often have existing tools to measure adherence to the model. The Offerors are encouraged to use evidence-based practices in their proposed program designs.

³ [Trauma-Informed Care](#)

⁴ [Harm Reduction | SAMHSA](#)

⁵ [The Keys to Effective Low-barrier Emergency Shelters Presentation \(endhomelessness.org\)](#)

- Incorporating Perspectives from People with Lived Experience: Programs should be designed with input from individuals with lived expertise.
- Livable Wage: The City of Austin recommends offerors follow Strategic Direction measure EOA.C.3 and pay at least a livable wage to all staff working on the program.⁶
- Competencies for Working with People who are Homeless: The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration has put forth needed competencies in the areas of knowledge, skills and attitudes which are necessary to hold in order to provide effective services for individuals at risk of or experiencing homelessness. A full description of competencies, theoretical frameworks and corresponding practices can be found [on the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration \(SAMHSA\) website](#).

VI. Priority Populations

The priority population consists of adult households experiencing Homelessness as defined by the McKinney – Vento Homeless Assistance Act 42 USC 11302 Sec.103, and amended by the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act of 2009.

- Any individual 18 years old or older who is in need of shelter on an evening when a Cold Weather Shelter is activated is eligible to receive services during activation.
- Any presenting unaccompanied youth under the age of 18 will be referred to an appropriate youth shelter, such as SAFE Children’s Emergency Shelter or LifeWorks.
- If the offeror is not able to accommodate families, any presenting family with children must be referred to an appropriate family-based shelter, such as Salvation Army. Those referral mechanisms must be established in advance.

City of Austin Client Eligibility Requirements

Standard City of Austin Social Service Client Eligibility requirements are waived.

VII. Additional Resources

- [Austin Strategic Direction 2023 \(SD2023\)](#) informs the City of Austin’s 6 pillars and direction for 5 years
- The [Summit to Address Unsheltered Homelessness in Austin](#) is a working document of the city’s plan presented in March 2021
- [The Ending Community Homelessness Coalition \(ECHO\)’s Action Plan](#) including recommendations from ECHO and the Bloomberg iTeam
- [National Coalition for the Homeless: Winter Homeless Services Report \(nationalhomeless.org\)](#)
- [U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Limited English Proficiency](#)
- USICH’s [Key Considerations for Implementing Emergency Shelters](#)
- [Emergency Shelter Learning Series - National Alliance to End Homelessness](#)
- [Trauma-informed Care, The Trauma Toolkit](#)
- [Mental Health First Aid](#)

VIII. Application Evaluation

A total of 100 points may be awarded to the proposal. Each proposal will be evaluated as to how it aligns with the goals of this RFP and whether each question has been adequately addressed.

⁶ [EOA.C.3 - Dollars-per-hour wage that an individual must earn to support a family in Austin | Open Data | City of Austin Texas](#)

RFP # 2022-008 Cold Weather Shelter Evaluation Rubric		
Form 1: Offer Sheet	Offerors must print, sign, scan and upload signed forms.	No points, but Offeror must submit signed form.
Form 2: RFP Proposal		
Part I: Fiscal and Administrative Capacity	Agency Information	No points awarded, but Offeror must pass threshold defined in Offeror Minimum Qualifications in C - Scope of Work.
Section	Category	Maximum Points Eligible
Part II: Scored Proposal	Agency Experience & Performance	12 points
Section 1: Experience and Cultural Competence	Principles of Service Delivery Cultural Competence & Racial Equity	
Section 2: Program Design	Program Work Statement Project Timeline Program Clients Served Activation & Operation Facilities & Capacity Communication & Outreach Transportation Program Services & Delivery Crisis Intervention & De-Escalation Service Coordination & Planning with Other Agencies	
Section 3: Data Informed Program Management	Data Security & Systems Management Quality Improvement & Feedback Performance Measures APH Priorities	12 points
Section 4: Cost	Program Staffing & Time	11 points

Form 3 Effectiveness	Program Budget & Funding Summary	
	Cost Effectiveness & Number of individuals served/ total budget = Cost Analysis	10 points
		Total: 100 points
Form 4: COA Certifications and Disclosures	Offerors must print, sign, scan and upload signed forms.	No points, but Offeror must submit signed form.

IX. Applicant Minimum Qualifications

- Agencies, board of directors, or leadership staff submitting a proposal must have a minimum of two years established, successful experience providing services.
- Agency must be a non-profit organization, quasi-governmental entity, or otherwise qualified social service provider (including for-profit) able to conduct business in the State of Texas, and legally contract with Austin Public Health.
- Agency must have submitted all applicable tax returns to the IRS and the State of Texas (e.g., Form 990 or 990-EZ and state and federal payroll tax filings).
- Agency must be current in its payment of Federal and State payroll taxes.
- Agency must be eligible to contract and are not debarred from contracting with the City of Austin, State of Texas and Federal government, according to SAM.gov, and State and City Debarment information.
- Agency cannot owe past due taxes to the City.
- Agency must have the ability to meet Austin Public Health’s standard agreement terms and conditions, which includes Social Services Insurance Requirements.
- Agency must have an active Board of Directors that meets regularly and reviews program performance, financial performance, and annually approves the agency budget. The Board of Directors shall have a strong commitment to fundraising to ensure well-funded, sustainable programs and operations.

X. Application Format and Submission Requirements

See **Exhibit B: Solicitation Provisions, and Instructions** for all requirements.

The Application must be submitted in the Partnergrants database. No late submissions will be accepted. Responses should be included for each question.

Please note: Only name your uploaded documents with letters and numbers. To reduce possible submission and/or review delays, please ensure any attached file from your local drive DOES NOT contain any special characters. Letters and numbers are acceptable.

Offerors Initial Steps: Registration

1. Confirm your organization is a registered vendor with the City of Austin.
 - To find the City of Austin Vendor Number please visit Austin Finance Online and search for the organization’s legal name.
 - To register to become a potential City of Austin vendor, go to Austin Finance Online to register.

2. Be a registered user in the Partnergrants system. The proposals will be submitted through this web-based system.
 - To register, visit Partnergrants and click on “Register Here.”
 - Note that the organization’s City of Austin Vendor number is required to complete registration in Partnergrants.

Offeror Initial Steps: Pre-Application

3. Complete an Annual Agency Threshold Application in the PartnerGrants database.
 - This form must be submitted once per 12 months and remains valid for all competitions closing within that time period. The threshold application will be reviewed by APH staff and the agency will be notified once approved.
 - Once logged into PartnerGrants, click on “Opportunity” and then opportunity title “Annual Agency Threshold Application-Applicants for Funding Start Here” to complete a new threshold application.
 - Submit one per agency per 12-months and note the submission date for future use
4. Complete an **Intent to Apply form** for each proposal the offeror plans to submit by the due date identified in Form 1 – Offer Sheet.
 - Once logged into PartnerGrants, click on “Opportunity” and then opportunity title “RFP 2022-008 Cold Weather Shelter” and complete an Intent to Apply form including a Threshold Certification verifying completion of Step 3 above.
 - Offerors may submit more than one Intent to Apply form and must submit a unique Intent to Apply form for each proposal per the guidelines of the RFP.