Serving Los Angeles County with Compassion and Determination Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic
Using approximately $4.8 million in U.S. Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding, the Los Angeles County Development Authority (LACDA) assumed responsibility for administering the Rent Relief Program targeted to the unincorporated areas of the County. The Rent Relief Program, implemented in May 2020, provides up to $1,000 per month, for up to three months, directly to property owners on behalf of an income-eligible tenant household that can demonstrate job loss, furlough, or reduction in hours or pay as a result of the pandemic.

The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors (BOS) selected the LACDA to take the lead on implementing the Rent Relief Program in the First and Second Supervisorial Districts. Through the collaboration of two LACDA Divisions – one with significant experience managing grants, and the other that manages successful tenant and landlord programs, the LACDA quickly put the wheels in motion to launch the Rent Relief Program. A staff of 12 employees were assigned to manage a dedicated phone number and email address and add the property owner information to a database created for a lottery drawing which selected program participants. In total, 426 property owners in the First and Second Supervisorial Districts were selected, and are being confirmed for eligibility.

Given the overwhelming need that still exists among County property owners and renters, on June 23, 2020, the BOS approved a motion to allocate up to $30 million in CARES Act funding to expand the County’s rent relief efforts. The motion is aimed at preventing a huge increase in homelessness given that 21% of the Los Angeles County population, 365,000 persons, have lost their jobs due to COVID-19. The rent relief efforts will focus on households most at-risk of homelessness and disadvantaged areas of the County where households are most likely to fall into homelessness.
PUTTING DOLLARS INTO ACTION

As a steward of various local, State, and Federal grant funds, the LACDA has used its funding to assist in the recovery and rebuilding efforts to address a variety of crises including the 1994 Northridge earthquake, the 2008 Great Recession, and the 2018 wildfires. Despite its excellent track record administering grant funding, the LACDA could not have anticipated responding to a global pandemic.

As COVID-19 began to spread throughout Los Angeles County, a state of emergency was declared. COVID-19 has caused health, economic, and housing crises all at once. It has also exacerbated the current disparities in health, housing, and economic development for people of color and those with limited means.

As new funding was made available through the CARES Act in March 2020, the LACDA took immediate action to apply, make programming changes to its online grant system, and work with 48 participating cities and each Supervisorial District to identify programs that would make the most impact to address resident needs.

During the months of April, May, and June, as unemployment in Los Angeles County reached over 20%, the number of homeless increasing, and COVID-19 not going away; the LACDA rolled up its sleeves to develop and implement business assistance programs to help minimize job losses. The agency worked with its participating cities and the BOS, on very quick timelines, to implement emergency rent relief, business assistance programs, and other COVID-19 response services including grab-and-go meals, hygiene stations, and distance programming for youth and seniors.

The LACDA remains committed to addressing the evolving needs of Los Angeles County communities, residents, and businesses.

STAY CONNECTED, STAY HEALTHY

In partnership with T-Mobile and Blue Marble Health, the LACDA encouraged its older adult public housing residents to stay active during the COVID-19 pandemic, while following the Los Angeles County’s Safer at Home Order. T-Mobile donated 200 Android LG Aristo phones and Blue Marble Health provided access to their health app, which includes in-home workouts. The phones were distributed to public housing residents in June 2020.

This program is currently offered to residents at Harbor Hills and South Bay Gardens Public Housing communities and may be expanded to other residents in the future.
On June 23, 2020, the LACDA funded a loan to Rice Field Corporation (RFC) for $1.745 million, utilizing CDBG revolving loan funds. RFC is a family owned and operated manufacturer of authentic Asian foods founded in 1987, with two manufacturing plants located in the City of Industry and La Puente. The company will use the loan funds to purchase new equipment that will help automate current operations.

As part of the loan requirements, RFC will be adding an additional 25-40 jobs to its over 200 person staff.

This loan was already in the pipeline being underwritten when COVID-19 presented itself. The pandemic posed new challenges to closing the loan and ensuring that RFC completed the loan process. Despite the LACDA office closures, the small business loan team worked directly with the owner to ensure the timely and accurate execution of loan documents so that funds were wired to meet deadlines posed by equipment vendors. Their collaborative efforts are to be commended for ensuring that during such a trying time the LACDA is still able to fulfill its commitment to RFC.

FINDING A NEW RHYTHM

The LACDA has ramped up its creativity to ensure that it continues to provide educational enrichment programming to its public housing residents. Among the many efforts undertaken to keep residents engaged and public housing communities thriving, staff at the Nueva Maravilla Public Housing community implemented virtual drumming lessons on May 12, 2020. The agency purchased drums to help youth continue hands-on learning from home. The online program, offered in partnership with the Rhythm Arts Alliance and the Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture and supported by the Los Angeles County Probation Department, was well-attended and quickly became a favorite among youth.

The LACDA’s Resident Services team continues to help families thrive despite the COVID-19 pandemic, by fulfilling not only the needs of its residents, but providing support and a much-needed distraction from current events. The next goal is to move the Nueva Maravilla summer book club online, start virtual Hip-Hop classes, and implement online group academic tutoring sessions.

KEEPING BUSINESSES GOING STRONG

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