

MEMORANDUM



Bellevue Parks &
Community Services

DATE: March 1, 2022

TO: Human Services Commission Members

FROM: Toni Esparza, Assistant Director
Parks and Community Services Department

SUBJECT: Agenda Item for Tuesday, March 1, 2022
Planning for upcoming funding process

Staff will bring information and recommendations for the Commission's consideration on the following topics relative to the upcoming funding process:

Topic 1: City of Bellevue Policies on Human Services:

Staff will provide a brief overview of relative City of Bellevue policies from the [Comprehensive Plan](#), the [Diversity Advantage Plan](#), [2021-2023 City Council Vision and Priorities](#), and the [2022 State Legislative Agenda](#).

These policies inform all decision making and recommendations for the Human Services Commission.

Topic 2: Funding Review Process

Staff will provide information for the Commission's consideration as they consider strategies for developing funding recommendations when the requests exceed the funding available.

Background:

Items for Consideration in the Upcoming Funding Cycle

1. Requests exceed funding

2021-2022:

2021 Human Service Fund Requests: approximately \$7 million

2021 Human Service Fund Dollars Awarded: approximately \$4.5 million

2023-2024:

- General Fund Funding Available: approximately \$5.5 million

- Currently funded contracts in 2022 (GF, 1590, and ARPA) total: over \$13 million

2. Services/agencies are emerging and developing in response to the changing needs and demographics in Bellevue, yet it has historically been difficult for new agencies to access city human service funding.

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Priorities:

The 2021-2022 Human Services Needs Update identifies the following as the most prominent themes emerging from the data and the strongest areas of need based on the data collected. Staff recommend adopting these priorities directly from the Human Services Needs Update. These priorities would provide guidance on funding area priorities and equity priorities and are informed by data:

Emergent themes to consider when making funding recommendations:

Increased needs will continue post-pandemic

- The pandemic has highlighted that health, social, and economic equity is still not a reality; COVID-19 has disproportionately impacted communities of color, putting them more at risk of getting sick and dying from COVID-19.
- Pre-pandemic safety nets were eliminated, which means post-pandemic that the slightest unexpected expense could plunge a household into homelessness, meaning vulnerable households will be living in a precarious situation for quite some time.
- COVID-19 guidelines led to social isolation for many individuals in our community, especially older adults and people with disabilities. The stressors of social isolation, the disruption of daily life, and grief have strained many people's mental health and coping abilities.

High cost of living in Bellevue

- High cost of living and lack of affordable housing continues to be a major concern for Bellevue residents across all segments of the population, but some groups are particularly vulnerable to the housing crisis (i.e., low-income individuals, people with disabilities, and older adults on fixed income.)
- The rising cost of living and doing business in Bellevue is a significant challenge for the human service sector, impacting everything from staff recruitment and retention to service delivery.
- Many families still struggle to provide for their children because the cost of living in Bellevue is outpacing earnings. Affordable, quality childcare is critical so that families can work and provide for their families, but many families struggle to find accessible, affordable childcare.

Lack of access for certain groups

- Despite the individual and collective efforts of our region's human service providers, there remain substantial challenges to ensure all members of Bellevue's diverse and growing community have the resources they need to thrive.
- Many residents are not aware of how to access human services when the need arises, and several are unaware of what resources exist. Some of the factors that contribute

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to this include not having easy access to a computer, limited language skills, not needing to access services in the past, and fear about accessing services.

- The need for more culturally- and linguistically-responsive human services grows as East King County becomes more diverse. In addition to providing translated information, there is a need for more diverse staff who are not only bilingual but also culturally competent. There is also a specific need for more culturally responsive behavioral health services due to the stigma around accessing services.
- Coordinated transportation is a rising issue for all population and in all services areas, especially for older adults, people with disabilities, and individuals that work non-traditional hours. Transportation is needed for residents to attend medical appointments, maintain employment, access human services, pick-up groceries, and to stay engaged in the community.

Challenges experienced by human service agencies

- Human service providers inevitably face capacity challenges, even without a global pandemic. However, COVID-19 has caused not only a tremendous increase in service need, but it has also required significant adjustments to how services are delivered. Both of these have stretched organizations' already-limited resources.
- Nonprofit agencies are reporting substantial increases in operations expenses due to the COVID-19 pandemic, including staffing costs (e.g., hazard pay), increase service demand, personal protective equipment and cleaning supplies, and technology requirements for virtual services. In addition, agencies are reporting a reduction in revenue.
- Providers report that they are experiencing a staffing shortage due to their inability to pay a competitive wage. They reported that with the cost of living in East King County, there is an extra challenge in maintaining staff since many cannot afford to live here.

Areas of need with a significant increase to consider when making funding recommendations:

Behavioral Health Services

- Behavioral health needs in our community outweigh the capacity of our providers and providers are reporting extensive waiting lists for services.
- Although behavioral health needs are experienced by individuals from all socio-economic groups, there is an inverse relationship between household income and feelings of anxiety and depression.
- There is a significant increase in need for behavioral health services for children and youth, as well as higher rates for youth suicidal ideation and attempt. The pandemic further intensified the strains on young people's mental health and well-being, as well as on the youth mental health system.

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Homelessness

- Preventing individuals from entering homelessness prevents ongoing trauma that can lead to other challenges and is more cost-effective than attempting to return an unhoused individual to stability. Behavioral health services have been identified as a key strategy to maintaining housing stability. In addition, providing financial assistance to help residents maintain their housing is an important strategy for ending homelessness.
- Homelessness shelter and services continues to be an increasing need in East King County.
- East King County has low-barrier shelters that provide services for each of the following populations: single men, single women, families with children, and youth and young adults. However, the shelters are often either close to capacity or over capacity. When a shelter is over capacity, they provide local resources as well as refer individuals to shelter in either Seattle or South King County, forcing Bellevue residents to leave their city of residence in order to access resources.

Racial and Ethnic Discrimination

- Racial and ethnic discrimination is a rising concern in our community.
- Many refugees and immigrants are refusing services and disengaging from other public or private systems. The most commonly cited reason for doing so was the perception that accessing resources is not safe for them or their family due to their citizenship status. These fears about immigration status are also fueling the stress felt by both children, youth and their families.
- The number of hate crimes and bias incidents have been increasing both in the reports gathered by Bellevue Police Department and through reports gathered by King County Coalition Against Hate and Bias (KCCAHB), a community-led initiative to address hate and bias incidents by strengthening and networking communities who experience racist and bigoted treatment and all forms of oppression.

Domestic Violence

- Survivors of domestic violence are faced with barriers to housing and legal services. The high cost of housing in Bellevue creates a serious challenge for survivors who want to remain in the community to maintain their jobs and support systems. Accessing pro-bono or affordable legal representation for child custody, protection orders, immigration, and financial issues is another huge challenge. Without these services, it becomes much harder for survivors to maintain their safety, return to employment, and become self-sufficient.
- The rise in domestic violence was reported by several providers who stated that people have been isolated due to COVID-19, which has led to increased stress for many households. This stress has resulted in more reports of domestic violence.

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Legal Services

- Many low-income people are not able to access legal services due to inability to pay for legal fees. Low-cost or free civil legal aid and free legal assistance are a growing need for many residents.
- Provider's stated that there is a significant lack of resources for those who need legal assistance to address their immigration status in the courts and for those trying to attain citizenship.

Topic 3: Mutual commitments for commissioners

The Human Services Commission dedicates immense time during Commission meetings, and also outside of Commission meetings, during the funding application review process. As we will potentially have several new Commissioners participating in this year's review, staff suggest that the Commission adopt "Mutual Commitments" to provide clarity on what Commissioners feel is necessary to the process, and to ensure that new Commissioners feel informed and oriented.

DRAFT Mutual Commitments

1. Commissioners will read the Human Services Needs Update to inform recommendations
2. All commissioners commit to reading all applications and all meeting materials in advance of meetings
3. Commissioners commit to meeting at least one time with their "partner" outside of the regular meeting schedule to review assigned applications on a more in-depth basis