



AGENDA REPORT

TO: Council President Nikki Fortunato Bas
Members of the City Council

FROM: Sofia Navarro
Interim Director, Economic
and Workforce
Development Department;
The Office of Mayor Sheng
Thao

SUBJECT: C.R.I.S.E.S. Act Pilot Program Grant
Agreement With Family Bridges, Inc.

DATE: February 22, 2024

RECOMMENDATION

Mayor Sheng Thao and Economic and Workforce Development Department Recommend That The City Council Approve The Following:

A Resolution (1) Accepting and Appropriating A Community Response Initiative to Strengthen Emergency Systems Act (CRISES Act) Grant In An Amount Not To Exceed Three Million Five Hundred And Fifty-Eight Thousand Nine Hundred and Ninety-One Dollars (\$3,558,991) Awarded By The California Department of Social Services; And (2) Authorizing The City Administrator To Negotiate And Execute A Grant Agreement With Family Bridges, Inc. In An Amount Not To Exceed Three Million Five Hundred And Fifty-Eight Thousand Nine Hundred and Ninety-One Dollars (\$3,558,991) To Provide Crisis Response And Community Mediator Services Through August 31, 2026, In Accordance With The CRISES Act Grant Pilot Program

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City of Oakland was awarded \$3.5 million by the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) as part of the Community Response Initiative to Strengthen Emergency Systems Act (CRISES Act) Grant Pilot Program. The CRISES Act Pilot Program is awarding local governments grant funding to partner with community-based organizations (CBOs) for emergency response pilots to lessen the reliance on law enforcement agencies as first responders to crisis situations unrelated to a fire department or emergency medical service response. The City of Oakland applied for an open Request for Application (RFA) from the CDSS in partnership with Family Bridges, Inc. with a proposed program that will serve the Oakland Chinatown area and Downtown Oakland, as well as parts of Jack London Square, Little Saigon, and Lake Merritt. The proposed program will combine non-law enforcement crisis response services with Family Bridges' effective work with at-risk and unhoused individuals by building trusting relationships and providing housing system navigation services. The pilot program will be administered by the Economic and Workforce Development Department for the period of October 1, 2023 through August 31, 2026.

CED Committee
March 12, 2024

BACKGROUND / LEGISLATIVE HISTORY

C.R.I.S.E.S. Act Grant Pilot Program

In accordance with Assembly Bill 118, the Community Response Initiative to Strengthen Emergency Systems Act (CRISES Act), the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) announced the CRISES Act Grant Pilot Program and the statewide administration of \$9.5 million in grant-making funds for community-based organizations to prop up emergency response pilots. The CDSS issued a request for application (RFA) for the CRISES Act Grant Pilot Program on March 21, 2023. In order to apply for the grant program, the CDSS required applicants to initiate a public solicitation process to identify and partner with one or more community-based organizations (CBOs) in order to jointly pursue an application. The Department of Violence Prevention (DVP) planned and announced a virtual information session with potential CBO partners to be held on June 30th, 2023 and invited thirty-two organizations identified by DVP as likely potential partners. At the virtual session, the City reviewed the pilot program details with the attending organizations and announced a July 5, 2023 proposal deadline. After receiving a proposal from Family Bridges, the Department of Violence Prevention and the Office of the Mayor reviewed and approved the proposal. The City of Oakland submitted its joint application with Family Bridges on July 7, 2023 and was given final notice of the grant award by the CDSS on December 13, 2023. Following review of the program details as proposed by Family Bridges, the City determined that the Department of Economic and Workforce Development would be most compatible for hosting the grant responsibilities.

Family Bridges, Inc.

Family Bridges has a long history of serving residents of Oakland's Chinatown area, spanning back to 1968 when a group of volunteers founded the Oakland Chinese Community Council --a Chinese-language information and referral service --to assist new immigrants from China. Over many years, the organization's services diversified, and they began to actively reach out beyond the Chinese community. In 2000, the organization changed its name to Family Bridges, Inc. Other Asian cultures are represented in Oakland Chinatown such as Vietnamese, Korean, Filipino, Japanese, Cambodian, Laotian, Mien, Thai, Polynesian and others, making it a pan-Asian area. Consequently, many languages and dialects can be heard. Recently the area is experiencing more diversity with increased numbers of non-Asian BIPOC peoples. The Oakland Chinatown community business district covers 52 square-blocks, with the core of Chinatown spanning 16 square-blocks and the population density of this area is twice that of the City.

Family Bridges staff members are uniquely positioned to de-escalate conflicts among community members and stakeholders and to connect people in need or in crises with relevant assistance programs and services. As all Family Bridges staff are BIPOC and/or refugees/immigrants, and/or were formerly incarcerated, gang-impacted, and/or experienced violence-based trauma, they have lived experiences that mirror many of the clients they assist, enabling them to use a level of empathy required to defuse and de-escalate heated situations. With a harm reduction approach that honors clients where they are, staff tap into their own lived experiences to provide an effective intervention. Staff facilitate restorative encounters between houseless residents, formerly incarcerated individuals, and other community members, such as store owners, to address conflicts or offenses as well as to build relationships and work toward community healing through establishing trusting relationships and increasing readiness for them to receive ongoing holistic services that address their social, emotional, physical, and basic needs.

Prior to the official launch of the Community Ambassador program in July 2021, Family Bridges has responded to crisis situations. The organization has been pivotal in providing humane interactions with houseless individuals and calming individuals who had a mental health episode and ensuring their immediate safety and/or stabilization while instilling a sense of safety among other community members. Staff also act to prevent situations from happening or worsening by initiating friendly conversation, providing comfort and validation, giving information and referrals, and distributing food, water, clothing, and hygiene kits.

With Community Mediators (formerly, Community Ambassadors) who foster a relationship-based and community affirming response, Family Bridges offers non-punitive, non-judgmental intervention. The goal is to stabilize the situation, address the triggering factor or distress outcome, and provide some relief or warm referral. Family Bridges's approach focuses on meeting people where they are; staff help people get the support or assistance they need and facilitate their maintaining or regaining a measure of agency, dignity, and respect.

From July 2022 through January 2024 the Community Ambassadors have de-escalated and mitigated 118 violent/hate incidents; performed outreach to houseless individuals 8,326 times; extinguished 22 sidewalk and trash can fires; and made 3,157 referrals to community resources. Only eight 911 calls were made during that period, and five were due to automobile accidents. The low number of 911 calls reflects the efficacy of how Family Bridges intervenes, such as by de-escalating heightened situations and providing relevant information and referrals.

ANALYSIS AND POLICY ALTERNATIVES

During this pilot project, Family Bridges will serve the Oakland Chinatown area (the organization's primary area for their existing programming) and Downtown Oakland, as well as parts of Jack London Square, Little Saigon, and Lake Merritt. By reaching beyond Chinatown, this project will extend and enhance Family Bridges' existing programming, such as the Community Ambassador program that was officially launched in July 2021. The program's services benefit the merchants and establishments, workers, residents, houseless, and visitors of Oakland Chinatown and surrounding areas. This expansion will allow project staff to provide services to a greater number of individuals who are struggling to access services and secure housing, whether that be due to mental health challenges, being recently incarcerated, language barriers, or other obstacles. In the course of their work throughout the community, Family Bridges has provided services to persons who are gender non-conforming, persons with disabilities, young persons of color, and persons with immigration status concerns. Its Housing and Community Services Department specializes in meeting the needs of community members who are unhoused, in large part, by hiring formerly incarcerated individuals as program staff.

The proposed project would be a hybrid of components from three Family Bridges programs: (1) the Community Mediator program, (2) Oak Street Community Cabins, and (3) Stop the Hate Program. By combining elements from these into the pilot project, Family Bridges will be able to extend and enhance its housing/system navigation services to support the unhoused population in the 52 square-blocks of the Chinatown business district area to include Jack London Square, downtown Oakland, and parts of Little Saigon and Lake Merritt. As opposed to "dealing with" the unhoused, Family Bridges views their work as addressing the needs of the unhoused. They adopt a holistic and flexible approach that allows staff members to offer real-time, hands-on support that is tailored to the needs of the individual in front of them, which varies due to every person's unique context. The components drawn from their work that will be implemented during this project include:

- Housing navigation services;
- Targeted outreach to unhoused individuals, especially lone individuals without the social structure of a group encampment;
- Accompaniment to appointments to meet basic needs and obtain key documents for wellbeing (such as identification, public benefits, and healthcare services);
- Public safety building through dialogue with unhoused individuals on issues such as safe options for needle disposal; and
- Relationship building from consistent, visible, and accessible staff presence in the community.

Housing/System Navigation & Support Services include better positioning for stable housing through measures such as assisting individuals to obtain IDs, Social Security cards, income and/or disability verification and to enroll in Medi-Cal, health insurance, CalFresh, SSI/SSDI, or other public benefits. Family Bridges staff are peers who share the same or very similar experiences as clients, and they approach their work with a non-judgmental and harm reduction approach that honors clients where they are. This project will enable dedicated staff to proactively engage houseless and formerly incarcerated individuals who are disenfranchised or at risk of disenfranchisement at all phases of their journey. Being consistently available will enable not only a trusting relationship and the ability to achieve more optimal outcomes but will also leverage the ongoing momentum that can be created with regular positive interactions.

To continue increasing their accessibility for the community, Family Bridges proposes establishing a dedicated phone number that community members can call for assistance. Currently, community members tend to reach out to staff members directly on their personal cell phones, a product of the staff members' close relationship with the community they serve. Staff are prepared to continue responding to these direct calls but also hopes to offer a more organized and centralized process to deploy staff as a new option. Project staff plan to advertise this new dedicated, call-in number in a variety of ways to the community, such as flyer and business card distribution as well as via various communication platforms, (e.g., radio, TV, social media, website, etc.) when deemed effective. Family Bridges will also share the call-in number with other service providers in the area and with the City of Oakland to share with their various departments, bolstering the overall support network for the community.

Project staff will be on the streets of the target area six days a week, proactively engaging with members of the community, mitigating incidents or intervening when conflicts or crisis incidents occur, providing assistance to meet basic needs, and making referrals to community resources as appropriate. Many existing public safety and community outreach programs are reactive to the needs of the community, and although Family Bridges responds to crises/emergency calls, the organization also proactively meets people's basic needs.

Project staff may provide accompaniment and in-person system navigation support to appointments necessary to obtain basic documents (e.g., identification, social security card, and health coverage) and medical or behavioral health care, facilitate the application process for Medi-Cal and enrollment or re-engaging with primary care providers, and/or arrange transportation to such appointments. Staff will also conduct initial intakes and Homeless Management Information System entries as appropriate --key staff are authorized to use the Alameda County Homeless Management Information System (ACHMIS). Family Bridges has earned an "A" grade on ACHMIS since January 2020, when they began inputting records, through the present. This reflects the timeliness, accuracy and completeness of their staff's data entry and recordkeeping -all factors that enable quality data reporting and analysis.

Family Bridges works to create a welcoming and safe environment in the Chinatown and greater downtown area and sustains neighborhood health and wellness by promoting community and relationship building, reducing violence, restoring feelings of security, and creating an integrated, coordinated model for public safety. Strategies to do so include:

- Readily mitigating, de-escalating, and defusing tense situations;
- Brokering and facilitating genuine mutual respect, appreciation, and relationship building among merchants, workers, and residents (particularly the houseless);
- Fostering peaceful and visible interactions bridging racial and socioeconomic backgrounds; and
- Connecting people to resources and addressing basic need issues.

The organization has established itself as a trusted and valued entity in the community, and the Community Mediators have cultivated positive relationships with business owners and residents (including unhoused individuals) through their consistent and visible presence in the area. Because Community Mediators constantly interact with community members in a respectful, supportive, and humble manner, business owners and residents in the existing area of Family Bridge's programming have become familiar with staff members and the type of work and assistance they offer. Community members reach out directly to Family Bridges staff to help in defusing conflicts, assisting individuals experiencing mental health crises, accompanying residents to appointments, and much more. Staff also encounter these situations organically throughout the day because of their physical presence, without the need for calls for service.

The City's public safety responders and community partners will be informed of Family Bridges' project so that calls for service that they receive which can be safely and effectively addressed by Family Bridges staff are directed to them. This process will be refined over the course of the project implementation period as public safety responders and community partners become more familiar with the project and Family Bridges' capacity for response services within the project area. With the establishment of a dedicated call-in number, Family Bridges will create a protocol to identify and triage calls and other requests or notifications about crisis situations. Staff will focus on the specific elements of each call or contact to prioritize and activate an appropriate and timely response. Family Bridges will also establish an understanding or agreement (e.g., MOU) with various local entities who could receive the requests initially from the community and/or could receive referrals from them in the course of addressing the crisis situation.

Finally, Family Bridges will continue to attend local events and set up booths to further relationships with community members. One such event is "Town Nights," that Family Bridges hosts in partnership with the City of Oakland's Department of Violence Prevention. With a focus on preventing violence and fostering unity, Town Nights offers safe spaces for families, friends, and neighbors to come together and enjoy free food, music, games, and more on Friday nights during the summer, when instances of violence tend to be on the rise. The booth set up by Family Bridges is aimed at encouraging young people to express their emotions in a game format, with the hope that this sparks wider conversations for families to engage with one another as well as to recognize and address their biases in healthy ways.

Innovative initiatives spearheaded by the City and strategic collaboration with community-based organizations like Family Bridges will provide residents of Oakland with greater opportunities for positive outcomes. Family Bridges' flexible approach allows staff to address the unique needs of each community member and offer support appropriate to the context of the situation. The holistic approach that Family Bridges fosters creates a more inclusive community wherein residents have

increased opportunities to receive the care they need. The City is committed to exploring equity-focused alternatives to traditional policing to better serve its residents. Family Bridges' wealth of knowledge, deep relationships, and compassionate philosophy are essential in meeting the needs of our most vulnerable populations, and the City is eager to support their work to address these challenges safely and effectively.

FISCAL IMPACT

Beyond staff-time costs stemming from grant program administration on the part of the Economic and Workforce Development Department, the pilot program will be entirely funded by the grant funding awarded by the California Department of Social Services.

PUBLIC OUTREACH / INTEREST

The City of Oakland hosted a public solicitation process in June of 2023 to compile feedback from potential CBO partners on the future of a potential pilot program as well as to answer questions about the intent and prospect of partnership with the City for the pilot program.

COORDINATION

Initial grant application discussions and the public solicitation were carried out by the Office of Mayor Thao and the Department of Violence Prevention. Following the receipt of the grant award, the Office of the Mayor began coordination with the Economic and Workforce Development Department for further administration of the grant.

SUSTAINABLE OPPORTUNITIES

Economic: The proposed grant funding will be coming directly from the California Department of Social Services.

Environmental: There are no environmental impacts related to this program.

Race & Equity: For more than three years, Family Bridges staff have been working with the houseless community in and around Oakland Chinatown who are largely Black/African American. Staff ensure that they are responsive to the needs of marginalized communities by asking them directly what they need and how they can best assist them. They empower clients to speak their truth by maintaining cultural humility and a perpetual learner mindset as they seek to understand and take the necessary time to listen to clients and ensure they feel heard and cared for. Using data from the Alameda County Housing Management Information System (ACHMIS), from January 2020 to February 2024 the demographics of Family Bridges' houseless clients were 37.84% Black/African American, 20.95% White, and 14.19% Asian. Approximately 86.49% had disabilities, 77.03% had mental health disorders, and 46.62% had substance use/abuse issues; many had multiple conditions. The vast majority (78.38%) had been chronically unhoused, and 71.62% had been unhoused for more than one year. Family Bridges is committed to ensuring their team is multi-racial, multi-ethnic, and possesses cultural competence to interact with people from similar as well as different backgrounds. The team currently has the following language capabilities: Vietnamese, Laotian, Mien, Thai, Samoan, Tagalog, Spanish, Chinese (Cantonese, Mandarin), and English.

ACTION REQUESTED OF THE CITY COUNCIL

Mayor Sheng Thao and Economic and Workforce Development Department Recommend That The City Council Approve The Following:

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For questions regarding this report, please contact Sofia Navarro, Interim Director of Economic and Workforce Development, at 510-238-3474.

Respectfully submitted,

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