



**PHOENIX EMPLOYMENT FIRST CENTER
Request Submitted to City of Peoria
Revised December 2021**



Project Overview

Our project will be located in Downtown Peoria at the center of a metropolitan statistical area of just under 400,000 people. We predominately serve individuals and families that have experienced or are experiencing homelessness. It's often the case that some household members have a disability of some kind, many times related to a mental health issue. We expect to serve this kind of population at the employment center, a population often missed by traditional forms of employment and workforce development services.

The Phoenix Employment First Center will occupy a three story building on the corner of Madison and Fayette Avenues. The site was deliberately selected due to its close proximity to several of our supportive housing programs, ensuring easy and equitable access for the targeted population. The building sits between two of our organization's supportive housing developments – the 84-unit New Hope Apartments and the 10-unit Madison Apartments. A new 24-unit affordable housing development is currently under construction on the adjacent property to the prospective Phoenix Employment First Center with a \$5.5 million commitment from the Illinois Housing Development Authority (IHDA). Therefore, we will have 118 supportive housing units within a block of the project site and an additional 58 units within 1.5 miles.

At least one floor of the building will be dedicated to staff and meeting space for one-on-one employment-based service provision in order to facilitate consistent, frequent and early contact with our residents as well as community members being served by the center. Another floor will provide multimedia training space, computer lab and office/meeting space for community partners in order to coordinate related services in the workforce ecosystem. The ground floor will be designed to house a social enterprise coffee shop/café that our organization will operate and utilize in coordination with employment programs.

Community Need

Unemployment in Peoria County is higher than neighboring counties and the state as a whole at over 7% prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The current rate for the metropolitan area is 9.8%. Unemployment rates are higher and household income substantially lower in the urban core of Peoria. Individuals with disabilities or that are experiencing some form of housing instability are under greater financial hardships and face more barriers to both employment and housing.

Among the 400+ persons served through our traditional homeless support services since the beginning of 2020, the unemployment rate is more than 75% (excluding targeted COVID-related assistance). This unemployment rate is devastating when compared to the overall unemployment rate for our community. For our consumers with

employment, they hold part-time jobs, typically at the prevailing minimum wage. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), as the primary funder for Homeless Assistance funds via the Continuum of Care (CoC) collaboration holds us to defined Community Performance Standards as a consideration in the annual funding competition. **Of the seven performance metrics, our CoC's lowest performance is in the category of increased earned income.** Not only is this the lowest performance metric, it has decreased significantly from 2019 to 2020, largely as a result of the COVID pandemic. **The percentage of participants demonstrating an increase in earned income while participating in CoC-funded homeless assistance programs in our community dropped from 13% in 2019 to only 7% in 2020.**

Along with the lack of affordable housing, insufficient earned income and unemployment are among the key causes of homelessness. As a supportive housing provider, we have worked for three decades to ensure access to housing for the Peoria region's most vulnerable populations. We have learned that housing self-sufficiency cannot be achieved or sustained without the financial well-being that comes from sound employment. We have long employed a Housing First model and supported our residents in various ways to help access employment. However, we are not achieving strong levels of employment among our residents. This project will mark a turn to an Employment First model to conjoin with our highly effective housing first efforts. The local workforce development needs are high enough that Illinois Central College has recently been awarded funds for a workforce equity center on its campus.

This project will coordinate and provide employment services to higher risk clients with multiple barriers to employment, including housing instability and disabling conditions, which are often missed by broader workforce development efforts. We will take the approach that every participant is employable and work with them to get jobs, gain experience and build skills through perseverant programming that continuously builds upon small successes. We intend to develop a social enterprise on site that will create a new business in the community while creating hands-on paid training opportunities for our participants. These participants will strive to obtain secondary job certifications that foster employment out in the traditional workforce upon completion of the program. The project will prioritize job retention and reemployment services to support the longer-term employment success of participants. We will also offer financial capability services so that participants can manage earned income and start to build assets, thereby helping participants build savings to protect against future episodes of homelessness and get on track to financial well-being.

Project Timeline

Time Period	Activity
January – February 2021	Secure capital funding for acquisition
March 2021	Acquisition completed
February – April 2021	Architectural and engineering plans updated
May – July 2021	Secure additional capital funding for minor rehab, structural upgrades and/or modernization, and finishing
August – December 2021	Complete rehabilitation, updates and modernization of facility
January 2022	Initiate on site program operations
March 2022	Expand on site services to include co-location of other education and workforce development collaborative partners
June 2022	Launch social enterprise café/coffee shop on site

Project Budget

Capital Expense	Amount	Source	Status
Acquisition	\$655,000	PCDS	Completed
Rehab, Structural Upgrades and Modernization; Security/Access Control Systems; Fixtures/Equipment	\$680,000	City of Peoria	Pending Request
Rehab, Structural Upgrades and Modernization; Security/Access Control Systems; Fixtures/Equipment	\$881,266		Pending
Infrastructure/Data/Communications Upgrades; Office Furnishings	\$100,000	PCDS	In Progress
<i>Total Budget</i>	\$2,316,266		

The annual operating budget for the program is not included in this project budget and is funded by traditional and new grant sources.