

**UNITED WAY OF NORTHEAST FLORIDA, INC. – EVICTION DIVERSION PROGRAM**

**FY 2023-2024 City Grant Term Sheet**

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**Grant Recipient:** United Way of Northeast Florida, Inc. (“United Way” or “Recipient”)

**Program Name:** Eviction Diversion Program (the “Program”)

**City Funding Request:** \$1,000,000

**Contract/Grant Term:** January 1, 2024 – December 31, 2024

**Any substantial change to this FY 2023-2024 City Grant Proposal Term Sheet (the “Term Sheet”) or a budget change not within 10% of the attached Program budget line-items will require City Council approval.**

**PROGRAM OVERVIEW:**

With this grant, the Jacksonville Eviction Diversion Collaborative, United Way of Northeast Florida, Jewish Family and Community Services, Jacksonville Area Legal Aid, and Duval County Court System, can build upon the successes of the local initiatives that have been in place since the pandemic to provide eviction diversion services in Duval County, Florida. Duval County has over one million residents. According to Redfin, the average rent in Duval County has increased by 31% and nearly 50% of all Jacksonville renters spend at least one-third of their income on rent. Jacksonville ranks in the top ten among large cities in every measure of rising housing costs and 11,889 evictions were filed in FY 21-22. Thus far, in FY 22-23, there have been 11,412 evictions filed through March, which puts us on target to reach 15,216 eviction case filings by the end of June. This is an increase of 34% in eviction filings comparing FY 21-22 to FY 22-23.

The eviction process will improve significantly by employing a dedicated Jewish Family and Community Services facilitator who will identify, early in the process, eligible eviction cases that meet established criteria to reduce the number of evictions. The facilitator will be vital to resolving eviction cases by quickly screening cases to determine if a tenant will be able to fulfill future rent payments after housing assistance funds resolve their current arrears and to refer these cases to local service providers.

Eviction cases move through the Court process very rapidly, and currently, tenants are directed to other community agencies that provide housing assistance more slowly than the eviction process. Tenants are required to file an original answer to the summons with the clerk and provide copies to the landlord within five business days of receipt of the summons and deposit rent into the Court Registry, creating an obstacle to avoiding eviction. If the tenant does not file an answer and does not deposit the rent into the Court Registry, the landlord may file a motion for default and a motion for final judgment with a proposed final judgment order.

It is imperative that those tenants eligible for eviction diversion are identified quickly. One strategy is to provide eviction diversion information with the summons. This information will include eligibility requirements and steps the tenant should take to contact the facilitator. This will allow quicker identification of eviction cases that can be fast tracked to access available housing assistance and avoid eviction. The facilitator can notify Judges when eligible cases are in the pipeline to avoid eviction. The Judges can set the cases for hearing and define the steps the tenant must then follow to stay the eviction process.

To expedite identification of eligible tenants, the facilitator will develop a flyer that will be distributed with the eviction summons outlining eligibility requirements and steps the tenant should take to contact the facilitator. This will allow quicker identification of eviction cases that can be fast tracked to notify the Judicial Assistant that the case meets criteria and to give the facilitator the ability to identify the needs of the tenant that go beyond simply financial assistance and to refer the tenant to the agencies who can provide the resources the tenant may need. United Way of Northeast Florida, Jacksonville Area Legal Aid, and Jewish Families and Community Services have been on the front lines of the eviction crisis for many years assisting tenants to avoid eviction.

Additionally, the facilitator will coordinate with litigants, attorneys, and the Judges' offices in managing eviction cases targeted for rental housing assistance. This individual will report directly to the Trial Court Administrator and the Administrative County Court Judge.

Finally, information will be added to the Fourth Judicial Circuit's website (jud4.org) and provided to the Clerk of Court directing tenants who have been served with an eviction summons to contact the facilitator. The facilitator will then have further means to identify and assist tenants who are able to fulfill future housing costs with short-term and immediate assistance and, thus, avoid eviction.

United Way has seen an unprecedented number of calls requesting rental and utility assistance. Sixty percent of the calls coming into the United Way's 2-1-1 help line, nearly 65,000 calls, are from residents seeking this assistance. The significant rise in inflation has increased the living expenses for tenants bringing housing instability and evictions to a crisis level. Through this grant funding, the facilitator position can help the Court support, strengthen, and build upon the success of local agencies who have served the Northeast Florida community to provide housing and rental assistance to community members who would be forced out of their housing through eviction.

Jacksonville Area Legal Aid has represented tenants for decades and has worked with local partners to build an infrastructure that helps end preventable evictions while working within the limited framework allowed by Florida law. Jacksonville Area Legal Aid has effectively partnered with United Way of Northeast Florida and Jewish Family and Community Services to develop an eviction diversion program with limited funding.

The facilitator position will be the liaison for the Court with these community agencies to connect tenants facing eviction with the resources and services available to avoid evictions. The eviction process can be daunting for tenants who are unfamiliar with Court processes and who often do not know where to turn for assistance. Once the facilitator identifies a tenant who can pay future rent, that tenant is connected to local agencies to provide essential and ongoing housing assistance to the community that includes financial assistance, financial counseling, job training, housing relocation assistance, legal aid, negotiating with landlords, and social services. Participation by the Court in the community's efforts to relieve the housing crisis for tenants and landlords is vital to the success of eviction diversion.

### **Eviction Diversion Program Eligibility Criteria**

Applicants must meet the following requirements to be eligible for receipt of financial assistance through the Eviction Diversion Program. Documentation is required to confirm eligibility.

Eligible applicants must be:

- A U.S. Citizen or Legal Resident Alien
- A resident of Duval County (including the Beaches and Town of Baldwin)
- Delinquent on the payment of rent, certain utilities and/or home energy costs due on or after November 1, 2023, resulting in the potential for non-payment notice and resulting filing of an eviction in Duval County
- Part of an "Eligible household" is defined as follows:
  - Household must include one (1) or more individuals who are obligated to pay rent on a residential dwelling in Duval County; and
  - United Way and its partners must also make a determination that:
    - One (1) or more individuals within the household is:
      - a child under the age of 18 years, or a senior citizen over the age of 65 year;
      - experienced a temporary reduction in household income, incurred significant costs, or experienced other financial hardship due and can attest to such in writing;
      - can demonstrate an imminent risk of homelessness as evidenced by an eviction notice being filed with the 4<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit – Duval County Court.
    - The household has a household income that is equal to or below the ALICE threshold based on

household composition.

- Any household receiving Eviction Diversion Funds, mitigating immediate risk of homelessness, will clearly be able to demonstrate their ability to financially remain self-sufficient after funds have been disbursed (See Exhibit 3 – Landlord Form).

## **PROGRAM SCOPE OF WORK AND DELIVERABLES:**

Jewish Family and Community Services will hire two facilitators to coordinate the Eviction Diversion Program – one will be housed at the court system and will have access to court documents, and the second will process payments to landlords, utility services, etc. Up to three months of rent and/or utility payments will be provided through this support to ensure a family reaches stability and is not evicted. The facilitators will spend 100% of their time coordinating this project, ensuring clients meet Program criteria, contacting landlords, facilitating payment of rent or utilities to stabilize the family, making referrals to additional services needed for family stabilization, maintaining records, and tracking outcomes. These positions will be funded through City of Jacksonville funding provided to Jacksonville Area Legal Aid.

Jacksonville Area Legal Aid will provide legal representation as needed to ensure families are able to remain stably housed in their homes.

United Way will serve as a referral source for families facing eviction, assist in the recruitment of landlords to reach out proactively when they have families facing eviction due to temporary loss of income or a temporary increase in expenses, monitor the impact and success of the Program, convene partners periodically to ensure successful operation of the Program, provide all required reporting to the City of Jacksonville, and advocate for additional funding should the Program prove to be successful.

Fourth Judicial Circuit Trial Court Administrator and Duval County Court Judges will support the needs of the position and assist with the Eviction Diversion Program implementation.

## **PROGRAM COSTS/PAYMENT TERMS:**

\$950,000 of funding through this contract will be used for rent and utility payments made directly to landlords and utility companies for the purpose of diverting eviction cases and keeping the family stably housed. The remaining \$50,000 will be used for telephone and database support (administrative costs).

## **PROGRAM IMPACT & REPORTING:**

### Data Collection/Records Retention

United Way and its partners will collect information from each applicant/household and retain records on the following:

- Address of the rental unit;
- Name, address, tax identification number or DUNS number, as applicable, for landlord;
- Amount and percentage of monthly rent covered by City Funds;
- Total amount of each type of assistance (*i.e.*, rent, rental arrears) provided to each household;
- Amount of outstanding rental arrears for each household;
- Number of months of rental payments for which City Funds are provided;
- Household income and number of individuals in the household;
- Gender, race, and ethnicity for the primary applicant for assistance

## Evaluation

United Way and its partners will evaluate the effectiveness of the initiative at diverting evictions through measurement and reporting of the following metrics:

- Number of families who avoid eviction and remain in their homes
- Number of families remain in their same homes 6 months after receiving eviction diversion assistance according to JEA utility records
- Attempts will be made to contact individuals who no longer remain in their homes six months after receiving eviction diversion funding to determine the cause of their move
- Number of landlords who proactively seek eviction diversion assistance for their renters

## **ADDITIONAL GRANT REQUIREMENTS AND CONDITIONS:**

Recipient's expenditure of City funds for the Program and the provision of services shall be subject to Chapter 118, Parts 1 – 5 of the *Jacksonville Ordinance Code*, and the terms and conditions of any contract entered into between the City and Recipient. Recipient shall use the City funds for the Program in accordance with the City Council approved Term Sheet and Program budget. The City's Grant Administrator may amend this Term Sheet or the approved Program budget consistent with the Program's needs, provided that any substantial change to this Term Sheet or a budget change not within 10% of the attached Program budget line-items will require City Council approval.