

# HOME GOOD

## CES TRIAGE TOOL UPGRADE REQUEST FOR PARTNERSHIP

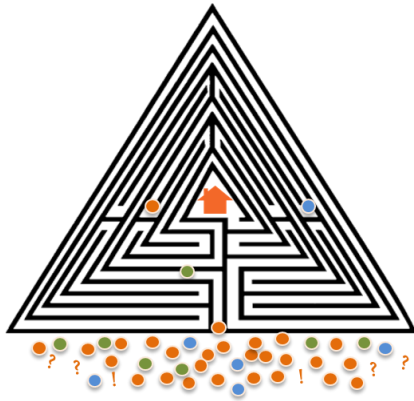
*Home For Good Funders Collaborative CES Triage Tool RFP to identify a research partner for a multi-year effort to study and strengthen the assessment, administration, and application of LA's homeless system tools.*



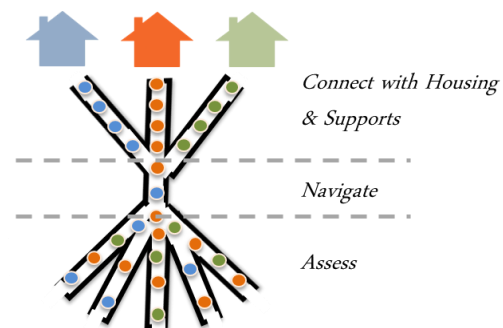
# BACKGROUND

Coordinated Entry System (CES) is more than just a tool, it is how we work together. As LA's system to end homelessness grows, we remain committed to ensuring all elements of our system grow and improve with us.

## BEFORE CES



## WITH CES



A decade ago, LA had strong programs and initial service assessments, but no comprehensive system stitching together providers and resources. Individuals experiencing homelessness would have to navigate a complex maze, searching for the right program fit and advocating for access. As a result, many of those with the highest service needs were not finding their way inside and LA's limited supportive housing was not necessarily serving those it was designed to most help. In 2013, the Coordinated Entry System (CES) was launched locally with frontline staff leading the charge in redesigning the way we coordinate housing and services to best meet the needs of individuals experiencing homelessness in LA. One of the first challenges this group tackled was identifying a common set of questions to help assess a person's need for services and housing, creating a foundation for coordinating care across organizations, regions, and systems. After investigating assessment options used by other communities, the providers leading the first CES pilot selected a well-researched and tested tool called the VI-SPDAT (Vulnerability Index - Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool). The VI-SPDAT asks a series of questions about housing, health and personal circumstances and provides an acuity score to help communities match individuals to available resources. Each of LA's three coordinated homelessness systems (youth, families, adults) utilizes a version of this tool, as do many communities throughout the nation and internationally. Over time, the tool has been changed and combined with other resource eligibility and HUD questions becoming the questions and forms used today.

Though this has been a valuable tool for LA during this time of immense systemic change, there is a sense from early research, provider feedback, and client experience that the tool and how it is utilized may need to be enhanced to better serve all populations. In particular, based on the findings and recommendations of the [Ad Hoc Committee on Women and Homelessness](#) and the [Ad Hoc Committee on Black People Experiencing Homelessness](#) there is an understanding that this tool may not be capturing the full vulnerability of particular populations.

Understanding the central importance of the survey tool and need for potential enhancement, the Home For Good Funders Collaborative has partnered with the [LA Homeless Services Authority](#) and [Homelessness Policy Research Institute](#) to release a **CES Triage Tool Upgrade Request for Partnership to identify a research team for a multi-year project to study and strengthen the assessment survey, administration of the tool, and application of responses.**

For more background, please see provided reference documents on the history of CES, Ad Hoc Committee reports, and copies of the system tools on the Grantseekers webpage at [www.homeforgoodla.org/grantseekers](http://www.homeforgoodla.org/grantseekers).

# UPGRADING LA'S SYSTEM TO END HOMELESSNESS

When CES was created it was meant to support our system in identifying the needs of any individual, youth, and family experiencing homelessness and connect them to housing and services to meet those needs. Within that system, the survey has been a community tool, assisting decision-making and prioritizing limited resources. Ultimately, this system is meant to be a platform by which we coordinate across organizations and regions to provide holistic, person-centered care to everyone experiencing homelessness in LA County.

CES was created by our community and has always been meant to grow and change with our community to best serve all individuals, youth, and families experiencing homelessness. At this time, our community has committed to taking on an upgrade process that looks at how our system functions and flows, the policies and practices we utilize to administer services and housing resources, and the tools and data that inform our decisions. **Through this large-scale system upgrade we hope to advance equity, improve system flow, and increase confidence in the system to support appropriate service connections for all those experiencing homelessness.**

## TRIAGE TOOL UPGRADE

At the core of our system upgrade, is an effort to examine, test, and enhance the survey tool and process. This triage tool is the foundation of how we communicate within our system, prioritize limited resources, and connect those experiencing homelessness to housing solutions and other services.

The CES Triage Tool Upgrade RFP seeks a research team to investigate, test, evaluate, and implement enhancements across 3 core components of LA's homeless service system tools: Assessment, Administration, Application, referred to as "the 3 As" from this point forward.



### ASSESSMENT

#### the questions

language  
length  
order



### ADMINISTRATION

#### the process

who  
when  
where  
how



### APPLICATION

#### the data

the scoring  
relation to other data  
immediate uses

We all must play a role in enhancing our system. The research team selected will be a vital partner as part of a larger effort to update our system tools and their application, thinking creatively with system partners, community-based organizations, and system participants to identify opportunities for improvement. Public partners, system leaders, and philanthropic partners are committed to come alongside the selected research team to support implementation and institutionalization of proven improvements to ensure actualized and felt changes are made to our system's structures and processes. Specifically, the selected research team will coordinate closely throughout the project with the core system team (LA Homeless Services Authority, United Way of Greater LA and Homelessness Policy Research Institute) to further refine project plan, execute pilots, and communicate and implement findings.

## REQUEST FOR PARTNERSHIP DETAILS

Through this CES Triage Tool Request for Partnership (RFP) we are searching for a research team that will be a partner in a multi-year project to improve LA's system.

**Type of Research:** The majority of research will focus on evaluating and facilitating the design and piloting of solutions in partnership with key community tables and core planning team to ensure frontline system staff and participants are at the center of design and decision-making. Key stakeholders are committed to a continuous approach for improving and testing new ideas in real-time and developing structures and processes that will lift up promising approaches identified by the research team.

**Funding Support:** Up to \$1.5M will be provided over 3 years to support research design, testing and evaluation. This funding is intended to cover all research related costs. Separately, the funding community will explore support for community-based organizations and system participants through pilot phase.

**Use of Funds + Activity List:** Funding may be used for any project costs that further the goals of the approved project plan, including but not limited to the below listed activities. No more than 10% of total funds may be used annually for general administrative/indirect purposes related to the project.

- Salary and benefits of team for all phases of project, including all investigation, design, statistical analysis, project management, and pilot execution
- Project-related travel
- Meetings and convenings related to project and pilots
- Partner or participant compensation
- Materials design, production, and dissemination

**Project Timeline:** Project is anticipated to last 3 years (January 2020 – December 2022).

**Applicant Eligibility:** All applicants must be qualified research institutions or teams with the experience and capacity to conduct needed research and testing outlined in the RFP. Research team may include organizations or individuals located outside of Los Angeles but must have at least one major project partner local to LA County to support project coordination and pilot implementation.

**Project Scope/Priority Questions:** Research team will partner with community and core team members to explore opportunities to design and test system improvements across the 3 As. Below is a list of Priority Questions consolidated from feedback across several stakeholder groups, that represent the key questions our community is grappling with and is prioritizing for research:

*ASSESSMENT – the language, length, order, and type of questions in the actual tool*

- How does our system currently balance specificity and standardization? How should we balance the needs of special population needs while maintaining consistency and comparability across the system?
- There is anecdotal and preliminary data leading us to believe that the tool may not be collecting the true vulnerability of some participants. Is this true and if so how can we increase accuracy of responses by using alternative wording, particularly on underreported questions? Where would observational responses by surveyors help increase accuracy?

- Knowing that the current length of the survey can lead to incomplete surveys, how can a progressive survey be incorporated to lessen survey fatigue without impacting effectiveness? How can relational questions be used within the tool for progressive engagement?

#### ADMINISTRATION – *the who, where, when, and how we survey participants*

- Understanding the importance of the relationship of the surveyor and participant for both the experience and accuracy of the survey, what would it mean to/how would we incorporate non-scored questions and protocols into the process meant to build rapport and client trust?
- What variables in survey administration best promote participant engagement and response accuracy? (i.e., who is administering the survey, when it is administered, and the space it is administered in)?

#### APPLICATION – *how we score and what we do with data collected*

- What should the role of the tool be? How should the responses/score from the survey be used in relation to other available information, such as regional case conferencing and validated County data? Are there ways the tools should not be used in assessing acuity and connecting participants to housing and services?
- How can the tool provide immediate feedback to support service connections and build frontline agency in the tool? How could/should the tool be used to provide connections to services beyond housing, such as employment, prevention/diversion, etc.?
- How would potential changes to the assessment as a result of this process reconcile with survey scores and responses already collected through the coordinated systems?

Reflecting that we do not know what we do not know, we also welcome the research teams to offer additional systems questions that fit the goals of our system upgrade and this RFP.

## APPLICATION FOR PARTNERSHIP

Eligible researchers interested in joining our community's upgrade project are encouraged to apply. Recognizing that researchers may have specialties that fall under specific areas, we highly encourage collaborative research applications. Using the below list of narrative questions and templates, research teams are asked to share their experiences, qualifications, interest in partnering, and initial project ideas.

**I. RESEARCHER EXPERIENCE + APPROACH (2-4 PAGES)** – Please provide an outline of your previous, relevant research experience, using the below questions as a guide. Experience and qualifications are demonstrated both in past research such as studies and reports, as well as internal organizational values, reflections, processes, and actions.

- *Research Approach* – Please describe the team's expertise across a range of research modalities. What type of research approaches do you have the most experience? How do you apply a race equity lens to your work?
- *Previous Experience* - Provide a description of your research team's previous experience and qualifications in each of the following areas. Wherever possible, use examples related to homelessness, trauma-informed systems/tools, and Los Angeles-based research. Please note, experience in any or all of the following areas may make an application more competitive, but are not required for eligibility.
  - a) Research on disproportionately impacted populations, such as black households, domestic violence survivors, older adults, women, transition aged youth, and LGBTQ.
  - b) Community-centered research that works in partnership with frontline leaders and system participants throughout design and evaluation.

- c) Research that has led to realized systems-level change through policy or process improvement, include researcher's specific contribution to change.
- d) Research through a continuous improvement framework that provides ongoing opportunity for learning and advancement.
- e) Experience with trauma-informed tools and systems similar to the homeless service system? Experience assessing instrument validity and reliability?

If research team is missing essential experience across any of the 3 A's, please describe how you will look to learn, partner, or employ another strategy to fill this project need.

**II. PROPOSED PROJECT DESIGN (MAX. 4 PAGES – NOT INCLUDING CHARTS/VISUALS)** – Please provide an outline of your initial project plan, directly addressing the following categories and questions. Include charts or visuals where it helps to further illustrate your initial project plan.

- *Project Approach* – How does your team understand the need for this particular project? How do you see the role of the research team in this project? How do you plan to account for implicit and explicit bias as part of your project design and pilot development?
- *Project Design* – What questions will your team plan to solve for (Reference Priority Questions page 4-5) ? What research design do you think will be most appropriate to accomplish the outlined project goals? How did your team decide to prioritize across the 3 A's and balance community priorities?
- *Community-Centered Approach* – CES was launched as a community-designed tool and has always been best enhanced through community ideas and input. How will you ensure that frontline leaders and individuals with lived expertise are an integral and authentic part of your research process? What are the best strategies that you have used/seen and plan to use to engage this community in a meaningful way?
- *Project Timeline + Prioritization* – Please describe the project timeline submitted as part of this application. What did your team decide to prioritize and pilot for the first 12 months of the project? What parts of your proposed timeline do you anticipate may change with more planning?

**REQUIRED ATTACHMENTS** – Complete and submit the following attachments, using templates where provided.

- **Application Cover Sheet (Template)** – Provide an application snapshot of your research team and project.
- **Diversity Equity Inclusion Worksheet (Template)** – Optional worksheet to outline project team and organizational commitment to internal diversity, equity, and inclusion. If applying as a single entity, complete template for entire organization. If applying as a collaboration of several entities, please complete demographic data specifically of research team members.
- **Proposed Timeline (Template)** – Sketch out first 12-months of your research approach and prioritized project plan, including pilots, related to community's outlined priorities across the 3 A's as listed above.
- **Estimated Project Budget** – Provide outline of estimated project costs given current research design using your own project budget.

## **APPLICANT QUESTIONS**

Questions related to this opportunity will be accepted through Tuesday, November 12, 2019 at 5pm PDT by email to [rfp@unitedwayla.org](mailto:rfp@unitedwayla.org).

An optional, informational webinar will be held on Monday, November 4, 2019 from 1:30-3pm PDT to provide an overview of this opportunity and answer applicant questions. RSVP with name and email to [rfp@unitedwayla.org](mailto:rfp@unitedwayla.org) to be provided with webinar access information.

All responses to submitted questions will be compiled into a Frequently Asked Questions list that will be regularly updated and uploaded to the Home For Good Grantseekers webpage at [www.homeforgoodla.org/grantseekers](http://www.homeforgoodla.org/grantseekers).

## **SUBMISSION & REVIEW**

Applicants may submit applications for review until Thursday, November 14, 2019 at 5pm PDT by email to [rfp@unitedwayla.org](mailto:rfp@unitedwayla.org). No hard copy proposals or proposals submitted after the close date will be accepted. All document should be submitted in their original format (i.e., Word, Excel) to support the review process.

Submissions meeting the minimum qualifications will be advanced for review and recommendation by system and service leaders and Funders Collaborative members.

Applications will be evaluated against a series of criteria, including the following:

- Research team has qualifications, experience, and capacity necessary to fully execute and appropriately partner in research project.
- Experience with and integration of a community approach that authentically centers the voice and experience of frontline leaders, individuals with lived expertise, and current system participants.
- Understanding & application of equity as a core value of the research team and outcome of the project.
- Strength of project description and potential of design to address critical community questions.
- Willingness to partner in design and implementation throughout project period with core team.

Selection is anticipated to be made by end of December 2019. After approval by the Funders Collaborative, the Homelessness Policy Research Institute and individual funders partnering to support this project will work to directly contract with selected researcher.