Organization	Lakewood Community Services Center
Organization Type	Not-For-Profit
Address	12900 Madison Avenue, Lakewood, OH 44107
Contact Person & Title	Trish Rooney, Executive Director
Phone	216.226.6466
Email	trish@lcsclakewood.org
Board President	Karen Cook
Federal Tax ID #	34-1446497
DUNS #	615939998
Project/Program Name	Homelessness Prevention Assistance
Total FY26 Project Budget	$315,374
FY26 ESG Funding Request	$155,000

I. ABSTRACT

Homelessness Prevention provides case management and cash assistance for rent and/or utilities to Lakewood households at imminent risk of becoming homeless with the goal of keeping individuals/families stably housed for the longer term.

Housing Stability Case Management Services Housing stability can only be influenced by individualized services that include counseling, referrals/links to mainstream services and benefits, landlord mediation, the development of an individual case plan with the goal of ensuring permanent, stable housing and ongoing monitoring and evaluation of progress toward meeting the goal of maintaining sustainable housing.

Housing Search & Placement Services must be provided by LCSC social workers to all clients who meet the program eligibility guidelines. The services are dependent on each client's need for support in the search and his/her capacity to complete a rental application and to understand the terms of a lease. As the inventory of available affordable units in Lakewood continues to decrease, clients need more help in identifying landlords. Should moving to a new unit be the only option or negotiating with a landlord to work out terms that allow them to remain in current housing after a court-ordered eviction has been filed. For clients who are forced to move – often because of a non-renewal of lease in a building that has been sold or renovated, social workers undertake the exhaustive process of identifying an affordable/appropriate unit. Any unit that is supported by ESG Homelessness Prevention funds must pass a habitability inspection and any unit in which a child under seven resides or will reside must undergo a visual lead inspection. Clients who have a utility shut off are referred when possible to one of the large agencies serving Cuyahoga County that has significant HUD funded utility assistance to preserve the highest percentage of our HUD funding for rental assistance.

Financial Assistance in the form of security deposits, rent in arrears, utility deposits and payments, motel vouchers, and moving costs is available to qualified applicants.

Community Need: FY2025 number of clients served with ESG funds is significantly lower than it has been in recent years due to LCSC receiving HOME ARP funding via the City of Lakewood in early 2024. These are the very last of the unspent COVID dollars distributed by Cuyahoga County. The HOME funds are far more flexible than are the ESG funds: the income cap to receive assistance is 50% of the Area Media Income vs ESG's cap at 30%; HOME allows six (6) months' rent in arrears vs ESG's three (3) months; recipients of HOME funds can reapply as needed vs ESG allowing one application per calendar year. Having said this, we will fully expend the 2025 funding in the allowable period of time based on the ever growing number of Lakewood residents facing housing instability.

Based on our experience, we know that our focus should remain on keeping at-risk residents housed in their current units as rents continue to increase and landlords remain unlikely to take new tenants who have an eviction history. We continue to use ESG funding for utility shut offs because clients have little success making timely appointments with county-wide agencies providing assistance (notably Step Forward, formerly CEOGC, and Cleveland Housing Network). Note: these are clients who are required to keep utilities connected as a condition of their leases.

Beneficiaries: we anticipate that 40 households will receive cash assistance in 2026. We are challenged with the higher per person cash assistance necessary as rents continue to increase and low- cost rental units are scarce. All households that apply, even if they do not qualify for cash assistance, will be eligible to receive housing stability case management services as described above.

II. PROJECT NARRATIVE

1. Community Needs Addressed/Service Gaps Filled

Community Impact: Keeping individuals/families housed in Lakewood has an impact on the individual household as well as on the greater community. Client families are much better served while remaining in their own homes and in their home community. Keeping families stably housed has an overall impact on the stability of an apartment building/multi-family home and the other residents living in them and expands to the neighborhood. The social network that is formed among families who are neighbors is important to the family, the neighborhood, and the city. Keeping children in their current homes/schools can have an impact on absenteeism and social and behavioral problems. Academic and social needs remain negatively impacted by remote learning during the pandemic. It is especially important to keep children in their Lakewood school if at all possible.

Much of our past success has depended on the availability of affordable rental units in Lakewood and the willingness of landlords to keep tenants with a payment of rent in arrears. LCSC has developed successful relationships with many of the landlords in the city and have a real advantage when negotiating with property owners to work with us to keep their tenants housed. We can often leverage this advantage because we were able to provide very significant payments of rent in arrears during the pandemic – to both private landlords and management companies in the city. The one issue that is beyond our control is the increase in rent costs across the city. There is a mismatch between HUD's income cap of 30% AMI and the current cost of rent, which often leaves applicants without the necessary income to pay for food, transportation, and utilities, all of which negatively impact their potential to remain stable. Also, HUD's cap on Fair Market Rental is becoming less and less reasonable in Lakewood. The 2025 caps are as indicated below. We are finding fewer and fewer clients living in two- and three-bedroom units that are within these HUD rent reasonableness guidelines.

FY 25 Cleveland-Elyria, OH MSA - Small Area Fair Market Rents – Zip Code 44107				
Efficiency	**One Bedroom**	**Two Bedroom**	**Three Bedroom**	**Four Bedroom**
$910	$1,030	$1,250	$1,610	$1,720

Our responsibility is to do everything possible to keep families stably housed. Providing Lakewood families at imminent risk of becoming homeless with seamless access to LCSC's case managers is essential to client outcomes and to ensure that families in crisis: 1. Maintain safe and affordable housing so that they can be sustainable; 2. Access supportive services and benefits, utility assistance programs, etc. that will reduce the cost of housing/living burden; 3. Keep their children in the schools they are currently attending; 4. Provide/maintain access to healthcare/mental health providers; and 5. Establish an ongoing client/case manager relationship that will prevent a recurrent housing issue.

2. Primary Goals & Objectives

The primary goal of ESG Homeless Prevention services is to prevent Lakewood residents who are at imminent risk from becoming homeless through a combination of case management, referrals to mainstream benefits and service providers and cash assistance for rent and/or utilities.

LCSC uses the Progressive Engagement Model, which was introduced when Congress passed the HEARTH (Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing) Act in 2009. While the model is designed for rapid re-housing services for the homeless, it is a valuable approach to serving the complicated needs of individuals and families at imminent risk of becoming homeless. Progressive Engagement's strategy is to begin by offering a small amount of assistance initially, then adding more if needed to help households reach stability. LCSC provides the cash assistance needed for individuals/families to remain housed and adds case management services that address the barriers to sustainability identified during assessment. The model allows LCSC case workers to continually assess and monitor the efficacy of the stability plan and to add more or different links and resources, as necessary. For those households who do not qualify for cash assistance, Progressive Engagement still offers a valuable tool to assess barriers and to provide ongoing (and escalating if needed) links and referrals.

An essential component of a progressive engagement approach is its reliance on partnerships that can support an individual's or family's success. LCSC has adopted this approach for several years and has expanded it significantly as the needs of Lakewood households have grown more complex.

3. Program Design, Uniqueness & Innovation

LCSC is uniquely qualified to provide HUD's eligible services and to offer ongoing counseling and support because our Senior Manager of Client Services is a Licensed Social Worker and Licensed Chemical Dependency Counselor III with 29 years' experience, 16+ of which have been with LCSC. We are in the process of recruiting a second social worker to replace our former Manager of Client Services who has moved into a new position. Because housing issues continue to be the most significant need in Lakewood, we have made the decision to create a new position of Manager of Client and Housing Services who will dedicate two thirds of his/her time to housing stability and will oversee LCSC's data entry into the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), which is designed to capture client information and outcomes during program participation. Although we have established good working relationships with Lakewood landlords through years of housing placement activities, we continue to face increasing difficulty in finding landlords willing to accept new renters who are considered high risk because of their eviction history and their income. This coupled with a decreasing number of affordable housing units has made negotiating agreements for the payment of rent in arrears for an existing unit our best – but often most expensive - option in most instances. Although the sales of low rent units to management companies has slowed significantly as interest rates have risen, landlords know that they are able to increase rent and often do so.

Clients who do not qualify for ESG-funded Housing Stability and Case Management Services and Housing Search and Placement Services do receive ongoing services from LCSC, but these are funded by CDBG and/or foundation dollars.

4. Target Population

As an Emergency Solutions Grant-funded program, Homeless Prevention assistance is available to Lakewood residents of extremely low income (no higher than 30% of the Area Median Income, which equates to a maximum of $19,000 per year for a single person household; $30,000 per year for a household of four). Successful applicants must prove that they have sufficient income to remain stable after one-time cash assistance in the form of utility assistance for a shut-off; rent in arrears for households with a court-ordered eviction (if they opt to stay in current housing and landlord agrees); security deposit and up to three months' rent if remaining in current housing is not possible. As our clients are at HUD's extremely low-income threshold with low paying jobs (many in the service industry), the slow return to full employment or the opportunity for better employment has and will continue to be a challenge in successful housing stability.

To be eligible to receive ESG Homelessness Prevention assistance, a client:

1. Must be a current Lakewood resident with a court-ordered eviction, or utility shut-off notice (when maintaining utilities is a condition of the lease), or a notice that the dwelling is being sold and the landlord has issued a non-renewal of lease
2. Must remain in Lakewood if moving to a new unit is the only rental option
3. Must meet HUD's Extremely Low-Income guidelines (at or below 30% of the Area Median Income)
4. Cannot have received ESG assistance within one year of the date of the new application
5. Must have proof of sufficient income to remain stably housed after one-time assistance

5. Geographic Service Area

ESG Homelessness Prevention assistance is available to residents of Lakewood only.

6. Services Provided & Delivery Strategy

HUD's Homelessness Prevention Assistance program has an exhaustive list of eligible services that are provided to individuals/families (see Attachment B). Every client who is referred to LCSC for services and/or who expresses a need for homelessness prevention assistance has an initial assessment meeting with an LCSC social worker, unless the social worker knows that a particular client has received ESG assistance within the last year. LCSC now requires all applications for assistance be made in person and a meeting is scheduled only after the client confirms that he/she has ALL the required documentation. Once the application is completed the LCSC social worker assesses applicants for housing barriers and works with the landlord to confirm that he/she is willing to keep the client when rent in arrears are paid and has the landlord sign a Rental Assistance Agreement stating the amount of rent required to prevent eviction. Before moving forward with payment, LCSC performs a HUD-required of every unit to ensure it meets habitability standards. The landlord must contact Lakewood Municipal Court to cancel the eviction hearing once the agreement is signed and the unit passes inspection. LCSC social workers also look at the client's other household expenses (utilities, car payment, medical insurance, child support, etc.) to determine if the household income is sufficient to cover rent and expenses going forward. If it is determined that the household income is insufficient, the client is given the option to search (with significant help from the LCSC social worker) for a more affordable rental unit if one can be found.

It is only after the LCSC screening activities that the action plan and housing search (if moving is the only option) begin in earnest. Currently, significant hurdles that face many clients (and the successful housing placement services delivered by the LCSC social workers) are poor rental history and/or the significant decrease in affordable housing. In addition, many Lakewood landlords are reluctant to take vouchers because of the inspections required and the length of time before the housing agency makes the first rental payment. Poor rental histories eliminate almost all clients because landlords have so many individuals seeking rental units in Lakewood. The housing search for clients who for whatever reason cannot stay in their current units has become very labor-intensive because there is on average a four-week period from receipt of the court-ordered eviction to the actual red tag eviction date in which to find and secure a new unit (all of which require a habitability inspection and repairs and a visual lead inspection, if necessary, before a check can be cut). We are now facing a new barrier that has negatively impacted anyone renting a unit from AIY Properties, the largest rental management company in Lakewood. HUD has made a Rental Assistance Agreement between the landlord and LCSC (and all ESG/HOME rental program providers) a mandate. AIY refuses to honor one term in the agreement that protects the renter from increased rent for the duration of the assistance and has refused to sign it, even though it means that no rent in arrears is available for any tenant who qualifies for the program.

The development of a case management plan, referrals, and links to mainstream benefits and services, and the determination of any additional services with the goal of housing stability start at this point for clients who qualify for assistance and for whom LCSC can secure appropriate housing or for clients who can remain in a current unit. Clients who receive services are monitored on an ongoing basis to ensure they are stably housed and are receiving the services they need to become sustainable. Throughout the entire engagement, all client activity is entered into the HMIS software in compliance with HUD's program requirements, which informs an ongoing progress/outcomes report for every client who receives services.

7. Client Outreach Strategies & Efforts

Community outreach efforts are similar to those for all programs and services offered at LCSC. The LCSC social workers have ongoing relationships with staff at the City of Lakewood Division of Youth and Division on Aging, with Neighborhood Family Practice, the Patient Navigator at the Lakewood Family Health Center, Family Resource Coordinators at the City of Lakewood schools, social workers at the Westerly Apartments and at Fedor Manor. Direct referrals are simple and ongoing. Information is available at the Lakewood Public Libraries, all schools, churches, City Hall, etc. and in these organizations' social media. All LCSC services are listed with United Way's 211 First Call for Help. Because LCSC has provided rental assistant through both CARES Act ESG and CDBG COVID rental programs, and now with ARPA funds, landlords are continually referring their tenants to us for help. As mentioned earlier, we have considerable negotiating leverage with landlords based on the amount of rent in arrears they have received due to COVID rental relief programs and our long history of administrating homeless prevention funds.

8. Partnerships/Collaboration with Community Organizations Serving Low-Moderate Income Persons

Community outreach efforts are similar to those for all programs and services offered at LCSC. The LCSC social workers have ongoing relationships with staff at the City of Lakewood Division of Youth and Division on Aging, with Neighborhood Family Practice, the Patient Navigator at the Lakewood Family Health Center, Family Resource Coordinators at the City of Lakewood schools, social workers at the Westerly Apartments and at Fedor Manor. Direct referrals are simple and ongoing. Information is available at the Lakewood Public Libraries, all schools, churches, City Hall, etc. and in these organizations' social media. All LCSC services are listed with United Way's 211 First Call for Help. Because LCSC has provided rental assistant through CARES Act ESG, CDBG COVID rental programs, ARPA funds and now HOME rental assistance funds, landlords are continually referring their tenants to us for help.

9. Project Staffing

Title	Hours/Week Devoted to Program	% CDBG-Funded	Qualifications & Responsibilities
Senior Manager, Client Services	20	30%	LSW, CDC III, intake, assessment, application review/information verification, landlord negotiation, housing search and placement, HMIS and Access database entry
Manager, Client & Housing Services	15	35%	LSW intake, assessment, application review/information verification, landlord negotiation, housing search and placement, Oversight of HMIS and Access database entry
Executive Director	5	10%	Oversight, HMIS review, City & OHS reporting program fundraising

10. Implementation Schedule

Not Applicable Program ongoing.

11. Projected Beneficiaries (January 1 – December 31, 2026)

	Persons	Households
Total Unduplicated Persons & Households to be Served	88	40
Unduplicated Very-Low Income* Persons & Households to be Served	88	40

*< 30% Area Median Income

12. Program Evaluation (data collection & analysis, outcome measurement procedures & methodology)

Data Collection Tools: LCSC as an ESG recipient is mandated to enter all client data into the County's Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) software program, Clarity. Client information is entered at intake and assessment and throughout the engagement to create a progress report for each client. Exit data include date of exit; destination; referrals to benefits; amount of cash assistance. Additionally, all clients who receive ESG services are also entered into our own proprietary Access client database which captures demographic information; length of time in our community; source of income; and number of clients with special needs. This information informs the monthly Accomplishment Report LCSC provides to the City of Lakewood.

Outcome Measurement Procedures/Methodology: Client services are also entered into the County's HMIS system, Clarity. This software tracks length of time receiving shelter services; services received (from LCSC and from other community providers); and objectives at entry and exit points.

III. FY26 BUDGET NARRATIVE

1. How will City of Lakewood CDBG funds will be utilized to support the proposed program.

The City of Lakewood ESG funds will be used as follows:

- Partial support for case managers' salaries/fringe benefits for housing stability case management services and housing search and placement
- Partial salary support for Executive Director for program oversight
- Cash assistance for rent/rental deposit
- Cash assistance for utilities, motel vouchers
- Salary support for staff member for HUD-mandated habitability inspections of properties
- Support to LCSC CPA firm for monthly reporting to City of Lakewood; cutting and weekly tracking of landlord/utility checks

2. How will the proposed program function if the agency does not receive the full amount of requested funding.

This program is essential to the health, safety, and stability of low-income Lakewood residents. If LCSC does not receive full HUD support for the program, we would have four possible options: 1. Contribute additional agency funds for salaries; 2. Reduce the amount of rental assistance per household; 3. Assist fewer households; 4. Secure additional foundation funding, which may prove to be difficult as the fundraising goal for this program match is already very aggressive, especially given the amount of foundation funding we request for pantry/delivery.

3. Describe the agency's efforts to develop/leverage other sources of funding to support the proposed program.

LCSC has secured $45,000 in foundation funding and will have additional foundation requests submitted in 4th Q 2025 and Q 1 & 2, 2026 equal to at least $38,000. In addition, LCSC has committed $77K+ of agency funds.

IV. FY26 PROGRAM BUDGET

i. Expenses

Expense Category	ESG Funding Request	Agency Matching Funds	Other Matching Funds	Total
Housing Stability Case Management Services				
Staff Salaries	$18,787	$17,000	$12,408	$48,195
Fringe Benefits	$5,864		$8,082	$13,946
Housing Search & Placement Services				
Staff Salaries	$10,374	$10,000	$15,975	$36,349
Fringe Benefits	$2,552	$4,000	$3,535	$10,087
Short-Term Rental Assistance	$105,900			$105,900
Financial Assistance	$9,323			$9,323
Inspections (Habitability & Lead)		$3,740		$3,740
LCSC Program Oversight/Admin				
Staff Salaries		$9,676	$5,000	$14,676
Fringe Benefits		$2,830		$2,830
Homeless Information Management System				
Staff/Administration		$7,300		$7,300
Hardware, Equipment, Software		$2,000		$2,000
Training				
Overhead				
% of Mortgage		$3,940		$3,940
Utilities/Phone		$3,700		$3,700
Insurance - Property		$1,006		$1,006
Insurance - Liability		$3,735		$3,735
Cleaning Service		$750		$750
Equipment/Equipment Maintenance		$4,800		$4,800
Supplies/Printing/Copying		$1,000		$1,000
Encryption Software		$1,200		$1,200
Mileage		$697		$697
Financial Consultant	$2,200			$2,200
Unrestricted foundation funds (used as needed)			$38,000	$38,000
Total	**$155,000**	**$77,374**	**$83,000**	**$315,374**

ii Funding Sources/Revenues

Source	Requested	Committed	Total
FY25-FY26 ESG Carry Forward Funds *(est)*			$0
Other (Non-ESG) Federal			
State/County Government			
Private Sector *(Foundations, etc)*	$38,000	$45,000	$83,000
Earned Revenue			$0
LCSC Agency Matching Funds		$77,374	$77,374
FY26 ESG Request	**$155,000**		**$155,000**
Total Funding Sources/Program Budget	**$193,000**	**$122,374**	**$315,374**