Organization	Lakewood Community Services Center
Organization Type	Not-For-Profit
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Board President	William Barmann
Federal Tax ID #	34-1446497
DUNS #	615939998
Project/Program Name	Homelessness Prevention Assistance
Total FY27 Project Budget	$315,374
FY27 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.

Housing Stability Case Management: Housing stability is influenced by individualized services that include counseling, referrals/links to mainstream services and benefits, landlord mediation, and ongoing monitoring and evaluation of progress toward meeting the goal of maintaining housing stability.

Housing Search & Placement Services are provided by the LCSC social worker to all clients who meet program eligibility guidelines. Services are dependent on each client's need for support in the search. As the inventory of available affordable units in Lakewood continues to decrease, clients need more help in identifying landlords. For clients forced to move because of a non-renewal of lease in a building that has been sold or renovated, the LCSC social worker assists the client in identifying an affordable/appropriate unit. A unit that is supported by ESG Homelessness Prevention funds must pass a HUD defined habitability inspection. In addition, any unit in which a child under seven resides, or will reside, must undergo a visual inspection for evidence of lead paint.

Financial Assistance in the form of security deposits, rent arrears, and utility deposits and payments are available to qualified applicants.

Community Need: The need for housing assistance continues to grow because of the increases in rent and utilities without a commensurate increase in wages – particularly for low-wage workers. The number of clients served with ESG is lower than it has been in recent years due to LCSC receiving HOME ARP funding from the City of Lakewood in 2024. LCSC was directed to spend down the HOME dollars before using the ESG funds. The HOME funds are more flexible than the ESG funds in several ways:

a) the income cap to receive assistance is 50% of the Area Media Income vs ESG's cap at 30%;
b) HOME allows six (6) months' rent in arrears vs ESG's three (3) months;
c) recipients of HOME funds can reapply as needed vs ESG allowing one application per calendar year.

LCSC's focus remains on keeping at-risk tenants stable in their existing units and gas and electric utilities payment current.

Beneficiaries: In the first six months of 2026, 38 households with 70 unique individuals received rent and/or utility assistance. This is almost two times as many households that received ESG assistance in the first 6 months of 2025. Seventy-eight percent (78%) of the recipients received utility assistance only. Remaining households received rent and utility assistance or just rent assistance. This suggests that as very low- income households experience reduced household income, they are more likely to delay paying for utilities to keep a roof over their heads and food on the table. In the first six months of 2026, LCSC administered a total of $99,362.30 of ESG funds to help stabilize Lakewood households. Even if an applicant does not qualify for cash assistance, all individuals that seek housing assistance are 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 and 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 were 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 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 decreasingly reasonable in Lakewood. The 2026 caps are as indicated below. We are finding fewer clients living in two- and three-bedroom units that are within these HUD rent reasonableness guidelines.

FY 26 Cleveland-Elyria, OH MSA Fair Market Rents *(effective 10.1.25 until further notice)*				
Efficiency	**One Bedroom**	**Two Bedroom**	**Three Bedroom**	**Four Bedroom**
$933	$1,058	$1,279	$1,646	$1,760

Our goal 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 manager 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's case worker 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 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. LCSC works collaboratively with the City of Lakewood's Department of Human Services, specifically, the Department of Aging and the Family Collaborative. Lakewood City Schools Social Workers and classroom teachers frequently refer families. Social service coordinators at the subsidized senior living complexes in Lakewood confer with the LCSC Social Worker on behalf of residents needing assistance.

3. Program Design, Uniqueness & Innovation

LCSC is qualified to provide housing stability case management 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 II with 29 years' experience, 16+ of which have been with LCSC. LCSC recognizes that as a recipient of Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) funding, participating in the Cuyahoga County Continuum of Care Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) Clarity, is a requirement. HMIS is designed to capture client information and outcomes during program participation. Annually, LCSC provides reports to the City of Lakewood to assure the City's compliance with HUD regulations.

Although we have established good working relationships with Lakewood landlords through years of housing placement activities, finding landlords willing to accept renters who have an eviction history remains challenging. Lakewood has become a very desirable community for renters, so landlords and property management companies continue to raise their rents. 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(s)

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. This equates to a maximum of $22,050 per year for a single person household; $33,000 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 or rent arrears for households with a court-ordered eviction. A client may receive a 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,
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 the LCSC social worker. 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 arrears are paid. The landlord must sign a Rental Assistance Agreement stating the amount of rent required to prevent eviction. Before moving forward with payment, LCSC performs a HUD-required inspection of the unit to ensure it meets habitability standards. If there are children under the age of 7 living in the unit, a Lead Paint Visual Inspection is also required. 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 help from the LCSC social worker) for a more affordable rental unit.

It is only after the LCSC screening activities that the action plan and housing search (if moving is the only option) begin in earnest. The significant hurdles that many clients face are:

- having very low-income,
- poor rental history, and
- the lack of affordable housing units.

In addition, many Lakewood landlords are reluctant to take Housing Choice Vouchers (formerly known as Section 8) because of the inspections required and the delays in receiving the first housing payment from the local Housing Authority. Having had a previous eviction can eliminate some clients. Landlords have their choice of tenants because of the high demand for units, so they are inclined to reduce their risks. On a positive development, the current Housing Court Judge has implemented an Eviction Expungement program for tenants. This will help when they are looking to rent in the future.

A new rent assistance barrier has emerged recently. Several property management companies have taken the position that they are not required to accept the ESG or HOME rent arrears payments. HUD regulations require the landlord to sign a Rental Assistance Agreement, which basically prevents the landlord from accepting the rent arrears payment and then turning around and evicting the tenant. Recently the Housing Court Magistrate has upheld Lakewood's "Pay to Stay" Ordinance, which requires landlords to accept a tenant's rent if offered. LCSC has been an advocate for clients who have been in this situation.

Once stably housed, the LCSC Social Worker can engage with the client to develop a case management plan, referrals, and links to mainstream benefits and services, all aimed at maintaining housing stability. 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 ongoing progress/outcomes report for every client.

7. Client Outreach Strategies & Efforts

Since 1982 when LCSC first opened, it has been based in the community. The location may have changed, but it has always been accessible on foot and by bus/car. In May 2025, LCSC opened a permanent office in the Birdtown neighborhood of Lakewood. Over 50% of all recipients of the LCSC Home Food delivery Program live in Ward 4, the LCSC new office location. The availability of utility and rent assistance is well known among the lower income residents of Lakewood:

- Many households hear about LCSC through word of mouth from neighbors and family members,
- Clients looking for assistance at Lakewood churches and the ST. Vincent DePaul Society are directed to LCSC,
- LCSC participates in Community Fairs, and
- has flyers available at the 2 library locations in the City,
- Lakewood Housing Court provides information about how to contact LCSC for assistance with the Court Eviction Hearing Notice sent to Tenants,
- LCSC website

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 worker has ongoing relationships with staff at the City of Lakewood Division of Youth and Division of Aging, with Neighborhood Family Practice, the Patient Navigator at the Lakewood Family Health Center, the Family Resource Coordinators at the City of Lakewood schools, and 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	% ESG Funded	Qualifications & Responsibilities
Senior Manager, Client Services	25	30%	LSW, CDC II, intake, assessment, application review/information verification, landlord negotiation, housing search and placement, HMIS and Access database entry
Executive Director	10	10%	Program oversight, HMIS review, required reports, client intake and assessment.

10. Implementation Schedule (add rows if/ as necessary)

Non-applicable. Program is ongoing.

11. Projected Beneficiaries (January 1 – December 31, 2027)

	Persons	Households
Total Unduplicated Persons & Households to be Served	140	80
Unduplicated Very-Low Income* Persons & Households to be Served	140	80

**< 30% Area Median Income*

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

Data Collection Tools: As an ESG recipient, LCSC 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 entered into LCSC's 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.

III. FY27 PROGRAM BUDGET

i. Expenses

Expense Category	ESG Funding Request	Agency Matching Funds	Other Matching Funds	Total
Housing Stability Case Management Services				
Staff Salaries	$18,789	$17,000	$17,408	$53,197
Fringe Benefits	$5,890		$8,082	$13,972
Short-Term Rental Assistance	$118,800			$118,800
Financial Assistance	$9,325			$9,325
Inspections (Habitability & Lead)		$4,740		$4,740
LCSC Program Oversight/Admin				
Staff Salaries		$10,675	$15,360	$26,035
Fringe Benefits		$3,830		$3,830
HMIS				
HMIS				
Staff/Administration		$8,300		$8,300
Hardware, Equipment, Software		$3,000		$3,000
Training				
Overhead				
% of Mortgage		$5,390		$5,390
Utilities/Phone		$3,950		$3,950
Insurance Property		$2,004		$2,004
Insurance Liability		$5,735		$5,735
Cleaning Service		$750		$750
Equipment/Equip Maintenance		$5,800		$5,800
Supplies/Printing/Copying		$2,000		$2,000
Encryption Software		$4,200		$4,200
Financial Consultant	$2,200			$2,200
Unrestricted foundation program funds to be used as needed			$42,150	$42,150
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
FY27 ESG Request	**$155,000**		**$155,000**
Total Funding Sources/Program Budget	**$193,000**	**$122,374**	**$315,374**

IV. FY27 BUDGET NARRATIVE

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

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

- Partial support for case manager's salary/fringe benefits to provide 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
- 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 rental and utility checks and tracking of ESG assistance

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 housing 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 will prove challenging as the fundraising goal for this program match is currently very aggressive, and in light of the competition for foundation funding at this time.

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 2026 and Q 1 & 2, 2027 equal to at least $38,000. In addition, LCSC has committed $77K+ of agency funds.