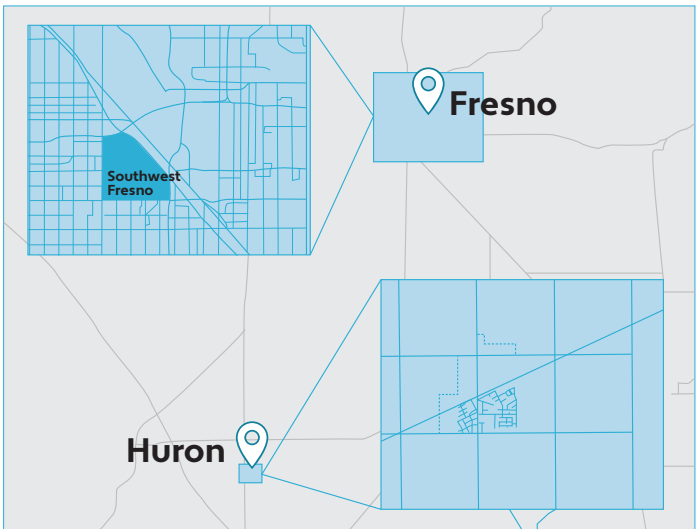




Fresno Economic Opportunities Commission

fresnoeoc.org



ABOUT THIS PROJECT


Every year Fresno County produces almost \$8 billion in crops and livestock as one of the top agriculture-producing counties in the country. Despite this prosperity, roughly one in four Fresno County residents are experiencing poverty or living in poverty. Fresno’s poverty rate (22%) is twice the nation’s average and appears to be driven by two interrelated factors: low wage jobs and low economic mobility. To help combat inequitable resident poverty, the Advancing Fresno County Guaranteed Income Program offers residents a monthly supplement of \$500 to 150 households with young children (5 and under) in southwest Fresno and Huron, addressing concentrated poverty in these areas.

WHY WAS THIS NEEDED?

The two designated zip codes eligible for the guaranteed income program, 93706 (southwest Fresno) and 93234 (Huron) are currently home to more than 30% of residents experiencing poverty and have some of the highest levels of concentrated poverty in the city of Fresno and the westside of Fresno County, respectively.

Southwest Fresno, a racially diverse urban environment, has a history of inequitable opportunities marked by redlining, disinvestment of resources, lack of development and zoning laws that allow air polluting factories. Conversely, 93234 which is a small rural community located about 45 minutes west of the city of Fresno, is a predominately farm worker area and almost entirely Latino. While there are distinct differences, both zip codes are home to families fighting to climb out of poverty and years of systemic neglect.

Challenge: In 2021, a coalition of local organizations led by the Fresno Economic Opportunities Commission crafted a \$5 million proposal in response to the State’s Request for Applications to its Guaranteed Income Pilot Program. The proposal would have awarded \$1,000 to program participants. The following year,

<p>IMPACTED LOCATION</p>  <p>Fresno, California</p>	<p>YEAR APPROVED</p> <p>2024</p>
	<p>TYPE OF TRANSACTION</p> <p>Grant Support</p>
	<p>GRANT SUPPORT</p> <p>\$100,000</p>
	<p>KRESGE PROGRAM</p> <p>American Cities</p>

the California Department of Social Services awarded more than \$25 million in grant funding to seven guaranteed income pilot projects across the state - direct monthly payments of \$600 to \$1,200 went to more 1,900 Californians, including youth aging out of the foster system and pregnant women in their first or second trimester. Not a single community in Fresno or the Central Valley was included in guaranteed income funding, despite being home to some of state's highest concentrated poverty, the highest rent increases in the country and persistently low wages.

Public opinion proved to be an additional challenge for the coalition working to shift perceptions of poverty and who was worthy of assistance.

Solution: The coalition, undeterred by the State's refusal to include the pilot, decided to move forward with designing a new pilot program: one that better reflected the needs of residents navigating some of the Valley's more challenging economic circumstances. Armed with data and insights from the community, new eligibility requirements for enrollment were established and the hard work of finding funders for the program began. Funders from across the state and country were pitched the reimagined version of the pilot and leaders leaned into the philanthropic community for support funding the effort.

Mobilizing local media, pilot organizers published op-eds, pitched stories, and wrote articles to help elevate research noting the positive outcomes of basic income programs. Persistent narrative change efforts using a collective of voices from leaders to community organizers were employed to ensure the new pilot program stayed top of mind for residents, elected officials, and potential funders.

EVALUATION

With an emphasis on working to move "pilots to policy" organizers tapped researchers affiliated with the Center for Community Voices (CCV) at Fresno State to conduct the local research evaluation, assess basic needs, financial stability, well-being, parent-child relationships, self-efficacy, and civic engagement while also examining how it interacts with other benefits programs to demonstrate its effectiveness. Evaluators will use surveys, listening sessions, and small focus groups to measure qualitative outcomes. As part of the Center of Community Voices' guiding principles to center community expertise, program participants will help determine some of the evaluation criteria. For pilot participants, CCV will implement a storytelling cohort, for participants to express their experiences through writing, video and art projects designed to humanize the pilot, in addition to more conventional traditional research evaluation methods. This will allow members of the cohort the freedom and flexibility to express their experiences in a way that makes sense for them. This will include writing projects, video projects, and art projects designed to humanize the experience and tell the story in a way that can be richer and more effective and faster than reading a multi-page research report.

KEY PARTNERS

The California Wellness Foundation is providing half of this project's funding, along with support from The California Endowment, Central Valley Community Foundation, Delta Dental Community Care Foundation, James Irvine Foundation, The Kresge Foundation, Sierra Health Foundation, and Mayors for a Guaranteed Income, with a total of more than \$1 million raised. The Fresno Economic Opportunities Commission, which will administer the program, is also providing financial and administrative support.