



# 2021 All-America City Award Application

## Spotlight: Building Equitable and Resilient Communities

### Community Information

**Community name and state:** City of El Paso  
**Your community is applying as a:** City  
**If applying as a region, name participating communities:** N/A  
**If applying as a neighborhood, name city:** N/A  
**Has your community applied before? Yes No If Yes, which years:** Yes, 1969, 2010, 2018, 2019 & 2020  
**Has your community been a Finalist before? Yes No If Yes, which years:** Yes, 1969, 2010, 2018, 2019 & 2020  
**Has your community been an All-America City before? Yes No If Yes, which years:** Yes, 1969, 2010, 2018 & 2020

### Contact Information

**All-America City Award contact (primary contact person available throughout competition & follow-up):**

Nicole Ferrini  
Chief Resilience Officer  
City of El Paso  
801 Texas Avenue, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor  
El Paso, Texas 79901  
915-212-1659  
[ferrininm@elpasotexas.gov](mailto:ferrininm@elpasotexas.gov)

We agree to follow the National Civic League’s rules regarding use of the All America City Award logo, a registered trademark of the National Civic League. We allow the League and the All-America City Award to share this application and the information enclosed in it with League and AAC networks to promote the work of our community. If we are named an All-America City, we agree to conduct a post-AAC conference call or regional forum for the AAC network that features our projects. If named a finalist, we understand and commit to either raising the money or covering the cost of sending a community delegation to attend and compete in the three-day [Awards Event and Conference](#). In a pay-it-forward spirit, if named a finalist or All-America City, we agree to consider supporting AAC through a National Civic League membership for a minimum of the next three years.

Signature:

Name: **Nicole Ferrini**

Date: **2/17/2021**

Title: **Chief Resilience Officer**

## Community Statistics and Map

POPULATION (most recent Census): **681,728**

Source/Date: Census.gov Quick Facts 2019

POPULATION PERCENTAGE CHANGE 2010-2020 (indicate + or -): **5.2%**

Source/Date: Census.gov Quick Facts 2019

RACIAL/ETHNIC POPULATION BREAKDOWN:

**White 80.8% - White alone, not Hispanic - 13.2%**

**Hispanic or Latino (of any race) - 80.9%**

**Black or African American - 3.8%**

**Asian - 1.4%**

**American Indian and Alaska Native - 0.5%**

**Mixed Race - 2.7%**

**Other (Pacific Islander and Native Hawaiian) - 0.2%**

Source/Date: Census.gov Quick Facts 2019

POPULATION BREAKDOWN BY AGE GROUP (percentages, if available):

19 years old and under **26.9%**

20-24 **11.2%**

25-44 **27.2%**

45-64 **22.3%**

65 and over **12.4%**

Source/Date: American Community Survey 2014-2018

PERCENTAGE OF FAMILIES BELOW POVERTY LEVEL: **20%**

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE: **3.7%**

PERCENTAGE OF HOME OWNERSHIP: **58.9%**

Source/Date: American Community Survey 2014-2018

WORKFORCE DISTRIBUTION—Name the three largest employment sectors (include military services and/or installations, if any) in your community and provide the percentage of total employed in each:

Employment Sector 1 **Healthcare and Social Assistance 18%**

Employment Sector 2 **Retail Trade 12%**

Employment Sector 3 **Accommodation & Food Services 10%**

Source/Date: JobsEQ by Chmura Economics, 2020 Q3

EDUCATION ATTAINMENT BREAKDOWN

No High School Diploma **15.1%**

High School Graduate **23.4%**

Some College, No Degree **25.8%**

Associate's Degree **8.8%**

Bachelor's Degree **18.2%**

Postgraduate Degree **8.7%**

Source/Date: American Community Survey 2014-2018



## **PART I: Tell Your Community's Story**

The City of El Paso covers over 256 square miles at the confluence of two countries, the United States and Mexico, and three states, Texas, Chihuahua, and New Mexico. As a metropolitan region, with our sister cities Ciudad Juarez and Las Cruces, New Mexico, our community represents the largest bi-national metroplex in the western hemisphere with a population of over 2.5 million people. For centuries our community has been a gateway for trade and economic development, a portal for international relations and business, but more than that it represents a confluence of culture and a community built upon the compassion and strength of our people.

Border crossings, international trade and perceptions of the binational metroplex are critical to the success of our community. Managing challenges in this context makes cross-sector and intergovernmental coordination paramount to the future of our city and the prosperity of our people. Engaging, empowering and connecting a population that spans borders and familial ties is a challenge embraced by the City of El Paso. Community events, public outreach and business opportunities are bolstered by international support. Similarly, crisis events that occur are felt across those borders. The climate crisis doesn't recognize jurisdiction, economic shifts ripple across the region and a global pandemic has no respect for international borders.

In the last three years, our community resilience has been tested. In December of 2018 El Paso was at the center of an international migration crisis. Thousands of asylum seekers poured into our city just before Christmas eve. With little external support, our community rallied with extraordinary compassion to provide shelter, food and much needed support for our fellow human beings. That effort continued for several months with nonprofit organizations and community groups in partnership with emergency responders going above and beyond to do the right thing. Then, at a time when our community was celebrating our unique identity through initiatives like 100 Resilient Cities, All America City and the International Sister Cities initiative, we were stopped in our tracks by an act of domestic terror. On August 3, 2019 a man with an automatic weapon drove 10 hours to attack our people. That hate driven act of terror was an extraordinary shock to our community. 26 people died that day and many more were impacted. Yet again, we rallied with pride in the beauty of our culture and the compassion of our people. EL PASO STRONG was born to the national stage that day. We persevere because we stand together. We are resilient because as a community we embrace diversity and emphasize equity not for some, but for all.

In 2020 our community was just beginning to recover from our trauma, then the COVID-19 crisis descended. Even though the extent of that crisis could not have been predicted, El Paso was prepared. Prepared not just because of the emergency response systems in place or the fiduciary responsibility we exercised over the past 5 years, but because our community itself is engaged, empowered and resilient.

## **PART II: Describe the Strength of Your Community's Civic Infrastructure**

Since 2015, the vision for our city has been clear and focused; to have safe and beautiful neighborhoods, a vibrant regional economy, and exceptional recreational, cultural and educational opportunities. This vision was not created by few, but rather by the many voices that make up our community. Neighborhood leaders, community advocates, elected representatives and committed public servants came together to solidify and ultimately codify the priorities that would drive our community forward. In 2018, the strategy for El Paso's future was reinforced by the release of Resilient El Paso. Among the first 20 of its kind in the world, the Resilience Strategy introduced 4 visionary pillars that took El Paso's greatest assets and matched them to her greatest vulnerabilities. That process intentionally structured over a three-year period entailed one full year of community outreach and

assessment of public perception, reaching over 70,000 people, followed by a second year of alignment between public perception and available municipal assets.

The common thread across all 4 pillars, 12 goals and 37 actions is civic infrastructure. The strength of our culture, the richness of our roots and the depths of our potential can only emerge through an empowered populace; action that begins from the grass roots up. The Center for Civic Empowerment, in the planning stages for the last 2 years, is now coming to fruition as the physical centerpiece of the City of El Paso's resident engagement and empowerment efforts. Housed at the historic Blue Flame Building in El Paso's downtown, the Center is positioned to provide access to all El Pasoans with an emphasis on the most vulnerable. Three of the city's most impoverished neighborhoods, Segundo Barrio, Chamizal and San Juan, are within a few miles of this new community resource. While these neighborhoods are classified as impoverished, they also represent a great potential for economic growth and social equity. Segundo Barrio is located immediately north of the US Mexico border and just south of downtown and represents a truly bi-national community rich with culture and potential. San Juan is nestled at the heart of El Paso's emerging medical district, the Medical Center of the Americas. Chamizal represents the rich connective tissue between downtown and the Medical Center of the Americas. All three have suffered from decades of disinvestment but have experienced recent investment and revitalization. It is because of that urban renewal that it becomes critical for the City of El Paso to focus on assuring opportunity for residents and developing inclusive investment so as to support revitalization and avoid cultural and physical displacement.

In addition to our physical investment in activating resources for our community, the City of El Paso is taking a deep dive into our existing boards and commissions. Most cities host these types of boards made up of council appointed community members, that isn't unique. What is unique in El Paso is how we engage our boards. Leveraging the City Strategic Plan as a guiding star, senior city leadership engages in two-way dialogue with members based on their community mandated purpose. Two examples of that are our Animal Shelter Advisory Board (ASAB) and our Regional Renewable Energy Advisory Council (RREAC). 5 years ago, the ASAB was a frustrated and adversarial group. In 2018, an operational support unit embedded in Animal Services and composed of senior leadership and key staff from across the municipal organization rallied to collaborate and listen. The result was a mission, a vision and key focus areas aimed at making El Paso a no-kill community. By providing a crosswalk between their vision and the city strategic plan and sincerely listening to learn from the members of the committee a completely new relationship was established. The result of that shift has been an astounding success for the Animal Shelter, achieving an 87% live release rate. Further, as the group approached its goal, a new, more holistic measure was identified. Instead of a city centric live release rate, the group established a new industry standard, measuring the regional lifesaving rate. The city is now recognized as a national leader having achieved a 96% regional lifesaving rate. This approach is currently being applied to the RREAC. As a community advisory they are charged with making recommendations for a comprehensive renewable energy strategy and pursuing renewable industry development for our "Sun City". By applying this successful model of engagement that ultimately empowers the members of the advisory our community will be better positioned to meet our energy related Climate Goals. These two examples illustrate how engagement becomes the foundational infrastructure for achieving community goals.

The City realizes that extra effort is necessary when reaching out to historically underrepresented individuals. In El Paso, that population is all too often made up of lower income residents. In many cases, those are the voices that truly need to be guiding and informing decision-making as they are often the ones most affected by

redevelopment, revitalization and environmental justice issues. Low-income residents are more likely to have barriers to participation, making it critical that the City establish an authentic community engagement model that builds long-term relationships, expands the capacity of residents, and creates a genuine sense of inclusion and ownership of solutions. This challenge came full circle as El Paso embarked on the Decennial Census effort. Together, Fearless, We Count! / Juntos, Con Confianza Contamos! was the theme that drove our community forward to participate in the census despite a contentious national discussion about who should or shouldn't be counted. The work began in April of 2018 when the City of El Paso alongside the County of El Paso passed identical resolutions forming the Paso Del Norte Complete Count Committee. That committee was composed of representatives of over 100 different organizations ranging from private sector business to educational institutions to community advocates, neighborhood leaders, media and faith-based organizations. The concept was built upon the notion that the only way to reach our entire community was to assure that the effort was led by a diverse and inclusive collective of El Pasoans. The members of the committee were invited because they represented the trusted voices in each of their individual communities. The goal of the group was specifically to educate hard to reach communities about the importance of the Census while addressing key misconceptions as well as to directly assist families in completing the Census survey online. On the ground, the outreach was driven by community health workers, who are long trusted residents of these communities. Even as the Census effort drew to a close in late 2020, the Complete Count Committee will become a resource specifically to keep those hard-to-reach communities engaged beyond the Census count. That group planned to convene this year will be key to outreach surrounding the upcoming redistricting conversations so meaningful to equal representation in all communities.

It is this type of engagement and shared leadership that allows our community to come to consensus on contentious issues before disagreement derails progress towards inclusive solutions. In 2020, our community achieved a milestone by passing the City's first Fair Housing Ordinance inclusive of protections for the LGBTQ community. That success was not achieved in silo. Driven by the City of El Paso Fair Housing Task Force (FHTF), extensive outreach was conducted in identifying barriers for this community as well as how the changes to protections would be communicated so that they could be most effective. Now that the protections have been passed, key LGBTQ Advocacy organizations have been engaged to assist with knowledge transfer and access to information for those experiencing discrimination. In addition to their work directly on Fair Housing concerns in our community, the FHTF has played a pivotal role in shaping the recently released Regional Housing Plan, focused on fair, affordable and equitable housing development practices for our growing community. 5 Working groups have been formed to begin implementation of the plan with one of them solely focused on Social and Environmental Justice.

Another example of El Paso's ability to come together to help those in need in a time of crisis for was demonstrated immediately following the tragic mass shooting on August 3<sup>rd</sup>. Within a few days of this event, leaders representing two of our strongest local philanthropic organizations came together and approached the City of El Paso about establishing what would come to be called One Fund El Paso. While both foundations had, on the afternoon of August 3<sup>rd</sup>, set up relief funds, it was agreed that there should be a single, collaborative group tasked with distribution and management of assistance for victims. A task force was immediately assembled to take on the unimaginable duty of establishing eligibility protocols for the funds and ultimately be accountable for the distribution process. True to the spirit of our community, the Task Force convened leaders from The City of El Paso, The County of El Paso, local behavioral health experts, attorneys of various areas of practice, victim

advocates, the Mexican Consulate, nonprofit and local health system leadership. The work required the group to ask questions like, who is eligible and what amount of relief is appropriate for the different levels of trauma experienced by El Pasoans. Not even those decisions were made in a vacuum. The proposed protocols were made public in an extensive campaign to receive feedback from as many community members as possible. A town hall was held where we not only discussed the protocols but stood together as we heard one by one the stories of the El Pasoans who were there. Ultimately 4 categories were established ranging from families of victims killed as a result of the attack through those who experienced psychological trauma which led them to seek ongoing mental health treatment. Our community through the One Fund raised \$11 million in 4 months, 100% of which was distributed to the victims of that day regardless of race, ethnicity, gender identity, income or nationality. This moment and this effort set a precedent for El Paso. The One Fund, set up to remain in place and be activated in the event of another crisis, worked closely to help establish the Family Resilience Center which would ultimately become the Community Resilience Center highlighted within this application.

Engaging trusted leaders across the whole of our community is critical to forward momentum. Equally important is building future leaders by engaging our youth. As a precursor to the creation of the Youth Leadership Council, planned for later this year, the City convened the Youth Budget Advisory where high school students of our community engaged in building a city budget that addressed their concerns and the future they envisioned. The students were challenged to think holistically about our community needs and learn about the dynamics of issues like city infrastructure investment, social justice for underrepresented neighborhoods, public health, economic development and more. By engaging in real decision making surrounding where the city invests its dollars, those issues became more tangible and less academic. Following a series of engagements with city leadership, the students ultimately presented their recommendations directly to the Mayor and City Council in an open session. This initiative continues on an annual basis not only providing value for a new generation of leaders, but also for the City and the community at large.

El Paso is a community that stands strongest together. We are diverse in our opinions and often have heated public debates regarding the best way to move our community forward. At the end of the day, the City of El Paso is proud to represent the role of convener, collaborator and facilitator of progress by and for our people. That is demonstrated in the events and initiatives included here. It's demonstrated in ever expanding partnerships like our Communities of Excellence initiative, inclusive of 14 public sector partnerships bound together in an effort to better align community wide investment, reaching outside the impact the City of El Paso can achieve alone. 2020 was the year that redefined everything...El Paso has been a community well equipped to rise to the challenge.

## **PART III: Describe Three Community-Driven Projects**

### **Project One - El Paso United Family Resiliency Center**

**Christina Lamour**  
United Way of El Paso  
100 N. Stanton St.  
El Paso, TX 79901  
915-533-2434 ext. 232

On August 3, 2019, a young man entered a busy Walmart store located in the heart of El Paso, Texas and opened fire. His actions resulted in the death of 23 individuals, 48 others injured and countless El Pasoans deeply affected by the tragedy. The crime, investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigations as an act of domestic terrorism and a hate crime, has often been described as the deadliest attack on Latinos in modern times.

In the wake of the mass casualty event, local, state and community agencies identified the need to stand up a resiliency center for long-term community recovery. In collaboration with county and city governments and funding through the Office of the Governor, United Way of El Paso County (UWEPC) was entrusted to be the backbone agency to host the El Paso United Family Resiliency Center (FRC) and lead efforts in long-term recovery.

### **Program Development**

United Way of El Paso County leadership recognizes the importance of developing an action plan when implementing a new program. With input from community leaders, stakeholders, future FRC participants and staff, UWEPC developed a comprehensive strategy for operation, services, programming, marketing and outreach of the FRC. This action plan for the **El Paso United FRC** took into account the needs of participants as well as the desires of the general community to help determine how the FRC facilitates long-term community recovery in partnership with key stakeholders.

UWEPC leadership included the following as part of the development of the action plan:

- Development of standard operating procedures for resource navigation, outreach, partnerships, marketing and programming.
- Establishing the need and importance of creating partnerships and engaging with the community, with clear guidelines on how to support FRC activities and mission.
- Defining the mission and vision of the El Paso United Family Resiliency Center.
- Defining the roles of FRC staff and limitations of services provided.
- Defining the target population to be served by the FRC.
- Setting priorities for serving the El Paso community, including needs assessments and continuous flexibility and improvement of programming and outreach.

The strategic planning process of the FRC is fluid and continuously updated as more information is gathered regarding the needs of participants.

### **El Paso United FRC Operations**

The El Paso United Family Resiliency Center (FRC) opened its doors on December 19, 2019 offering a place of healing and support dedicated to serving those directly and indirectly affected by the tragedy. The focus of the FRC is to disseminate information and assist community members in navigating the variety of services available in response to August 3<sup>rd</sup>.

The FRC team is comprised of resiliency navigators who, through personalized case management, connect individuals and families to credible programs and services to address their specific needs. Our culturally sensitive and trained navigators provide referrals for counseling, financial planning, legal guidance and spiritual care as well as offer documentation assistance, education on reducing mental health stigmas and peer support groups. Overall, the team aims to help visitors feel heard and supported.

United Way and the FRC are dedicated to the long-term healing of the community. Services and programs offered by the FRC will continue to evolve along with the needs of the community and of those affected by the traumatic



event. In addition to helping individuals navigate through community resources, the FRC works to reduce mental health stigmas through education, outreach and targeted messaging. The FRC also facilitates programming in non-traditional therapies and support services for specialized populations to promote resiliency and encourage healing throughout the broader community.

### **Oversight**

In addition to oversight from UWEPC leadership and an FRC Director, UWEPC also found it important to include guidance from local leaders and stakeholders when determining the strategic focus of FRC activities and decisions. On January 7, 2020, the El Paso United FRC Advisory Committee held its first meeting and continues to meet bi-monthly.

The FRC Advisory Committee is comprised of expert volunteers, each representing a subject matter, demographic or organization that is vital to the success of the FRC. The committee supports and advises United Way of El Paso County and the El Paso United Family Resiliency Center on initiatives and programming for the FRC. The FRC Advisory Committee compliments and influences the effectiveness of the Family Resiliency Center.

Membership includes representation from:

- County of El Paso – Victims Services
- City of El Paso
- Emergence Health Network
- Paso del Norte Community Foundation
- El Paso Community Foundation
- NAMI El Paso

Other members include a County Commissioner and Licensed Professional Counselor.

### **Success Stories**

Among our El Paso United FRC family is Participant “A”, a 75 year-old woman who enrolled on January 27, 2020. On the day of the tragedy, she was getting an oil change at the Cielo Vista Walmart when she heard gunshots. Participant “A” was able to escape with another elderly woman who she guided to an exit at the back of the store. Participant “A” is capable to care for herself and others despite her age. However, when she enrolled with the FRC she was struggling to pay her property taxes and was at risk of losing her home. Participant “A” was approved to receive an allotment from One Fund El Paso, but had not received it because it could affect the public benefits she receives. Through navigation and with the help of the National Compassion Fund, the FRC was able to get Participant “A” what she needed to save her home.

In October 2020, Participant “A” and her closest neighbors created the Washington-Delta Neighborhood Association, and currently meet virtually with City Representatives monthly to discuss concerns within their community. In a small way, the new Neighborhood Association was possible through the work of the FRC, which improved Participant “A’s” connection to her community.

Meanwhile, Participant “B” is a single mother of 4 children. She is an asylum seeker in El Paso whose son was present at the tragedy of August 3rd, 2019. Participant “B” is self-employed, she sells beauty products and jewelry to pay her rent and utility bills. The pandemic has left her unable to sell as she used to. She’s also at home supporting her children’s virtual learning. Even though she is home, she stays positive and active, she calls her clients to sell products and when she needs help, she reaches out to the FRC for assistance. In November 2020, an FRC resiliency navigator assisted her in applying to Project Bravo’s Community Card. Together, they worked on completing the application and providing all the documents needed. After Thanksgiving, she received a letter

stating she was eligible for the community card worth \$2,000 dollars. Participant “B” was so happy, since she now had money to buy clothes for her kids, house items, and most importantly pay for her son’s medication. Participant “B” is always trying to find the best for her children, including alternative therapy. On December 1st, one of her sons tried to commit suicide, and was taken to University Behavioral Health of El Paso (UBH). She was devastated and very worried for her son and the rest of her children. After offering counseling services several times throughout the year, Participant “B” accepted the help. The FRC was able to provide her family a referral the following day to El Paso Child Guidance Center. Participant “B” is now receiving counseling once a week to start, and her son was discharged from UBH before Christmas. At this time Participant “B” and her children are receiving counseling and she is very thankful every time she receives assistance and guidance from the FRC program and her EPCGC therapy.

### **Need for Community Resiliency Center**

Through a survey conducted by the United Ways of Texas in June of 2020, 54 percent of respondents indicated that they have been highly or moderately effected by COVID-19. Households earning below the Federal Poverty Level were nearly three times as likely to experience a high effect of COVID-19, while Hispanic households were twice as likely as white households.

With a population of almost 840,000 residents, it can be estimated that up to 453,000 individuals within the El Paso region are highly or moderately affected by job loss, reduced income, inadequate childcare, stress/anxiety and other factors as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. To assist in COVID-19 response and recovery, the local government has invested heavy resources into health initiatives, basic needs assistance, and other response priorities. However, even with the availability of these valuable resources, many El Paso residents are unaware of the opportunities for assistance or the eligibility and application process to receive aid.

United Way of El Paso County’s new program, the Community Resiliency Center (CRC), will provide assistance and navigation to community resources for individuals within the El Paso community affected by COVID-19. The **Community Resiliency Center** aims to address the needs of individuals and families within El Paso County by increasing awareness and providing information and navigation services. The Community Resiliency Center will use resource navigation to learn the needs of community members, access available resources, and assist the community member in navigating to available opportunities.

### **Program Goals**

The goals of the Community Resiliency Center are:

- To collect and disseminate accurate and timely information concerning available resources in COVID-19 response and recovery.
- To provide direct case management and resource navigation services to individuals and families within the El Paso region directly impacted by COVID-19.
- To provide individuals affected by COVID-19 with referrals to basic needs assistance and other related resources to enhance recovery and resiliency.
- Work closely with City and County governments as well as community partners to gather and release the most up-to-date information.
- Increase awareness of available services and assistance through a comprehensive marketing awareness campaign.

The Community Resiliency Center staffing is modeled after the successful El Paso United FRC. Staffing will be comprised of resiliency navigators who through personalized case management connect individuals and families to credible programs and services to address their specific needs.

## Resource Navigation

Both the Family Resiliency Center and Community Resiliency Center depend heavily on a Resiliency Navigator-based model. A Navigator serves as a one-stop information and referral resource to the many programs available in our community.

### Resiliency Navigators:

- Improves access to programs and services
- Identifies community resources to remove barriers to successful completion
- Determines what social services/ community resources El Pasoans may qualify for
- Answers questions about services and benefits
- Helps coordinate multiple services
- Assists in setting goals and developing an action plan, clearly detailing steps and timelines to follow
- Assists with applications
- If necessary, attends appointments with residents to help enable better communication
- Provides referrals to community agencies
- Educates people about Health & Wellness Issues
- Acts as an advocate for El Pasoans, specifically vulnerable populations

## PROJECT TWO

### **Nicole Ferrini**

Chief Resilience Officer  
City of El Paso  
801 Texas Ave. 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor  
El Paso, TX 79901  
915-474-2202  
ferrininm@elpasotexas.gov

The City of El Paso and our partners are committed to supporting the most vulnerable El Pasoans as we navigate through the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis. This pandemic has exacerbated deep challenges that already existed in our community including **housing affordability, homelessness, utility cost burden, access to food and the individual financial stability of El Pasoans.**

At the onset of the pandemic a cross functional team of City of El Paso departments was created to manage the challenges of this unprecedented crisis. As part of that incident command structure, the Chief Resilience Officer was placed at the helm of the Community Vulnerabilities and Human Services team. That team was charged with equitably deploying pandemic relief programs and support to ensure not only strong emergency response, but also **an inclusive and resilient recovery** plan aimed at making the El Paso Community ultimately stronger and more prepared than ever before.

Phase 1 initiated targeted and comprehensive community needs assessment. By utilizing the globally recognized community resilience needs assessment model deployed initially during El Paso's Resilience Strategy work, our team was able to capture a snapshot of vulnerabilities and priorities at the onset of the pandemic. This type of assessment was absolutely critical as it was evident from the start that available funding was a fraction of what was actually going to be needed to assist our most vulnerable. We called upon community non-profits, partner public entities and neighborhood stakeholders in order to establish an informed prioritization of need and assessment of areas where we could have the biggest impact. Over 50 agency partners were then brought together to inform the analysis. At the heart of every decision was the question, "Are these investments in crisis response inclusive, equitable, and ultimately resilient?"

The COVID-19 Community needs assessment revealed the following priorities:

**Housing + Basic Needs:** provide resources and protections, rental and utility assistance, and rapid rehousing, in order to stabilize households and promote long-term ability of individuals and families to achieve provide for their families and ensure that those impacted by COVID-19 have access to the basic health and wellbeing that most of us take for granted such as food, utilities, shelter, childcare services, and home free of domestic violence + abuse.

**Livelihood + Employment:** deliver direct financial support to individuals, families and small businesses struggling to meet financial obligations as a result of the pandemic.

Once priorities were established, the City of El Paso proceeded to identify community partners who would be key to deploying the assistance in the most effective way possible. Just over \$31 million was committed to programs ranging from rental and utility assistance to provision of food to direct financial assistance for El Pasoans. Over 50 partner agencies were engaged by the City of El Paso to ensure comprehensive and collaborative deployment of those programs. In the months since the start of the pandemic, over **10,000 households** have been provided the rental support they need to stay in their homes while suffering financial losses due to COVID, over **2,600 households** were able to keep their electricity, gas and water running, **2,000 families and essential workers** have access to childcare and over **103 million pounds** of food have been distributed.

A highlight of our resilience work over the course of the pandemic has been our ability to provide shelter and support for the most vulnerable among us; those El Pasoans experiencing homelessness. In March of 2020, the emergency declaration requiring El Pasoans to shelter in place was issued. While sheltering in place is difficult for many community members, it is most difficult for those who have no shelter to speak of. Existing El Paso emergency shelters were faced with a directive to reduce their capacity in order to comply with CDC guidelines. Shelter providers indicated to the City of El Paso that without an alternative, they would be forced to release up to 50% of their clients onto the streets. The City of El Paso alongside community partners immediately rallied to create surge capacity and immediately relocate over 80 individuals into a new shelter. That new shelter was designated the Delta Welcome Center and Delta Haven. The project leveraged two centrally located city owned properties closed to the public due to the pandemic in order to provide a single, safe point of entry for El Pasoans

experiencing homelessness. Activated less than 30 days from the declaration of emergency, the facility represents the kind of quick but deliberate action that is exemplary of a resilient community.

The Delta Welcome Center, as the name implies, serves as the primary entrance to the homeless service system. Clients are referred from across the city to the Delta Welcome Center for free COVID screening, isolation and testing for COVID-19. This model allowed for both prevention of COVID-19 within the homeless population and control of COVID-19 spread across the community at large. As a compliment to the Delta Welcome Center, the Delta Haven was also established to provide immediate surge capacity and relieve the pressure on the existing emergency shelter system. While the Welcome Center is a centralized point of access and short term stay facility, the Delta Haven has provided shelter primarily for those individuals with situations so complex that permanent housing is a challenge.

While the Delta Site solution is a temporary measure intended to address community need under COVID-19, in the last 10 months it has become more than that. It has served as a catalyst for strategic collaboration and community-wide service provider alignment. The initiative has demonstrated the effectiveness of homelessness solutions that are collaborative, inclusive and equitable.

Prioritizing homelessness became a central component of the City of El Paso response for two reasons 1) To provide a safe location for El Pasoans experiencing homelessness to shelter in place while connecting them with wrap around services supportive of long-term stabilization and 2) To prevent greater community spread of the virus.

El Paso acted quickly and decisively to protect a marginalized community; preventing them from becoming a significant source of infection for the city at large and avoiding a compounded stigma experienced by those who have no place to call home. Since its opening just over 300 days ago, the Delta solution has maintained a 0% transmission rate within the facility itself and has limited the positivity rate of individuals entering the facility to less than 3%. That is in comparison to the 15% - 20% positivity rates we have seen for communities around the country. Over **3000 individuals** have received the shelter and assistance they needed during this crisis because of this effort. Additionally, over **1200 individuals** have accessed free testing and quarantine care. Maybe the most important component of the initiative is that it is 100% zero barrier, meaning that anyone, no matter the situation, no matter their background, gender, age, race, ethnicity or point of origin is welcome, further demonstrating the level of compassion and commitment to people that exists within the El Paso community.

The system, still in place, has a primary goal of keeping anyone without a home off the street. However, it doesn't end with shelter. Establishing relationships with the people seeking assistance and holding their hand on their journey toward stability and resilience is key. One example is a woman named Jenna. The following was received as a handwritten note from Jenna following her experience at Delta.

"We were their very first clients that day. They walked us to the family section, showed us our bed, provided us with hygiene supplies, and explained to us that if we needed anything, they would find a way to get it. They did

little things to make us feel even comfier. But to us, these things were huge and life-changing— That morning, I had been in a really dark place inside. But the staff in this shelter quite literally saved my life that day.”

Now, Jenna has a full-time job for the first time in 11 years, their two-bedroom apartment is the first home she and her family have known in three years, and the children are all attending school, which they had not done in at least eight months. Creating stories like this in the face of a looming crisis is just one step in El Paso’s path to building long-term resilience. Keeping people off the streets and empowering them helped the city overall and laid the groundwork for the city’s long-term goals around processing future surges and completely eliminating every-day homelessness.

As we continue to adapt to changing conditions and implement recovery programs, the team remains forward focused ultimately institutionalizing lessons learned and expanding benefits for the community far beyond the current crisis. A true lesson learned is the importance of engagement and neighborhood coordination. We had to quickly pivot in the mid-summer to address concerns expressed by area residents about the abrupt change in what was once a senior center/recreation center. Addressing the fear of introducing those experiencing homelessness into their community. Those concerns quickly found their way into the public discourse. This could be viewed as a challenge or as an opportunity. We chose to pursue the opportunity to work even harder; helping those in need and addressing concerns of those sharing frustration by bridging municipal leaders, community-based organizations and a wealth of volunteers giving time and resources to help ease the perceived burdens on both sides. Increasing outreach, hosting education forums and taking in the concerns of all affected made for a collaborative environment that identified the middle ground ensuring safety and support for all involved. The experience indicated a greater level of transparency and communication as well as education preventing the kind of stigma that can obstruct progress. The result is better working relationships and a more comprehensive understanding of the situation on the part of both residents and the City of El Paso.

As our community, our city and our country move into an uncertain 2021 it’s critical that we do not lose sight of our success or our failures from 2020. The City of El Paso Resilience Strategy, published in 2018 and fully integrated into the City Strategic Plan the same year, calls to be revisited in 2021. Reflecting on the impact of a crisis as comprehensive as COVID-19 requires a stern emphasis on issues such as financial empowerment, household resilience and homelessness. These issues have been set forward as priorities informed by the results of programs deployed in the last year. The pride with which we celebrate El Paso’s ability to persevere compound trauma and rise above economic distress cannot overshadow the lessons learned, some the hard way; continuing to move toward recovery, knowing that the challenges didn’t begin with COVID and they won’t end with it either. That is the path of resilience, continuous improvement, ongoing learning, evolutionary systems ever focused on the needs of **our people**.

### **PROJECT THREE**

**Dr. Sylvia Y. Acosta**  
Chief Executive Officer  
YWCA El Paso Del Norte Region

201 E. Main St. Suite 400  
El Paso, TX 79901  
915-519-0000  
s.acosta@ywcaelpaso.org

Eliminating racism and empowering women is the central tenet of YWCA El Paso Del Norte Region's mission. Over the last two years, the El Paso Community has faced tragedy ranging from unprecedented racial violence to a public health crisis at a scale few have ever experienced, exacerbating the racial, ethnic, and gender disparities that exist within our protective social networks. In that time, YWCA has intervened with multiple programs created specifically to heal physical, emotional, and psychological scars left behind by adverse experience and address the needs of trauma survivors. Taken collectively, those programs and that work has built the social foundation for a resilient and equitable El Paso. By increasing access to high quality **childcare**, at low or no cost; providing **shelter, support and care** for women experiencing homelessness and recovering from domestic violence; and leading **community conversations around social equality and empowerment**; YWCA is at the forefront of breaking down barriers for the those historically left behind due to race, gender, or socio-economic status.

YWCA childcare programs provide an enriching, culturally inclusive curriculum that both enhances educational standing for students and builds generational bridges that result in a community culture that values equity and diversity. In the summer of 2020, at a time when El Pasoans had experienced more than their share of trauma, YWCA partnered with the City of El Paso to provide childcare and emergency respite childcare as part of the COVID relief effort. As schools remained closed, women were increasingly left to choose between lost hours/lost employment and lost income to childcare fees. The partnership between the YWCA and the City made possible more than half a million dollars in childcare at **no cost** to families during one of the most difficult moments our community has ever seen. More than keeping families working, this program kept hundreds of children whose educational opportunity would have otherwise been lost to this crisis, connected to remote schoolwork ultimately keeping the COVID learning gap closed. COVID response programs were deployed in addition to ongoing early education programs emphasizing STEAM learning for historically disadvantaged children, breaking down barriers across racial, ethnic, and gender lines. These programs are representative of YWCA's investment in emergency response as well as an inclusive recovery leading to long term success for our people and our community.

The practices, skills, and values that provide the foundation of YWCA's work have been on display 24 hours a day, seven days a week at the **Sara McKnight Transitional Living Center (TLC)**. The TLC is a 19-unit dormitory-style facility that caters to women and children largely experiencing homelessness as a result of domestic violence. Most participants enter the TLC through the coordinated-entry system, some are referrals from emergency shelters, and some are brought to the TLC under police escort, fleeing their abusers directly. All of the women and children at the TLC have experienced physical and/or structural violence and all of them have experienced trauma. The TLC staff stabilize, support, and advocate for each participant on an individual basis; they provide meaningful, positive developmental activities for children and youth; and they serve as much-needed trusted adults in their lives. Also on the TLC campus is a Rapid Rehousing facility, which offers rent and utility assistance providing further stability for clients. The anxiety, uncertainty, fear, and loss with which this pandemic has blighted the world has

also significantly affected our TLC clients and staff. However, due to the incredible commitment of the Homeless Services Staff and the inspiring strength of the clients we serve, there has never been a break in service at the TLC. In fact, several women currently residing in the TLC have enrolled in online secondary education and vocational programs. One woman, Jeanette, who came to reside at the TLC with her young daughter Bri just over a year ago, is an exemplary success story. She fled her abuser from elsewhere in the state after being assaulted and demeaned her throughout her pregnancy and while caring her newborn baby. If you ask her today, Jeanette does not believe that Bri would be the smiling, laughing toddler she is if they had not finally escaped out of fear for their safety. While living at the TLC, YWCA provided transportation for Bri each day to Rogers Early Learning Academy, where she is one of several children served from area homeless and domestic violence shelters. Bri and Jeanette excelled at their respective schools, and Jeanette thrived in counseling. The two of them have now successfully exited the TLC and obtained their own permanent housing. At the end of the day, YWCA's homeless services are a direct intervention that does more than address basic needs; it is the support structure that can assist families to move beyond the traumatic experience of homelessness and domestic violence, even in the context of a global pandemic.

Ultimately, intervention and support of our children and community's most vulnerable is where YWCA has shown extraordinary commitment and success. As part of YWCA's mission, we recognize that building inclusive, community-wide strength through times of tragedy and beyond is what creates true resilience for all. YWCA's Social Equality and Empowerment programming, which offers community members a safe forum for conversations about race and racism, is a kind of community capstone to our efforts. Following the August 3, 2019 shooting Dr. Sylvia Acosta, CEO of the YWCA El Paso Del Norte testified before the late Congressman John Lewis and the United States House of Representatives Ways and Means Committee, regarding the ways that the United States Federal Tax Code "subsidizes hate." Just a few weeks following the shooting, Dr. Acosta testified about the inflammatory hate speech that incited the attacker against the El Paso community, and urged the committee, as a leader in the national nonprofit community, to investigate the tax exempt status of ostensibly charitable organizations that participate in and promote hateful rhetoric. On a local level, the YWCA spearheaded a series of dinner conversations where community members could engage in civil discussions about issues related to race and racism in light of the trauma El Pasoans had suffered. When COVID took away the ability to meet in person, those discussions were held virtually. In doing so, YWCA has significantly increased the amount of online racial justice content and community opportunity to promote equity and antiracism.

In March of 2020, YWCA introduced a two-pronged approach to introducing community-wide online racial justice initiatives: A culturally responsive literacy initiative entitled "Reading with YWCA," offering guided readings of children's literature feature diverse characters and subject matter; and an online adaptation of the earlier dinner dialogues called "Courageous Conversations." The Courageous Conversation series featured a guest speaker or panel of speakers discussing social issues over Zoom. In June of 2020, nearly a year after the El Paso shooting, YWCA hosted a digital panel about eliminating hate and creating more equitable communities that included Dr. Acosta; Dr. Brenda Risch, founder and executive director of The Borderland Rainbow Center; and Brandon Wolf, an LGBTQ+ advocate and survivor of the pulse nightclub shooting. That Fall, Dr. Acosta discussed succeeding as a



Latinx woman in the publishing industry with El Pasoan Karla Martinez Editor in Chief of Vogue Mexico. During October's "Week without violence" the TLC director, along with a YWCA staff member who lived formerly lived at the TLC, and other community stakeholders discussed how domestic violence is not just "a women's issue." And finally, a YWCA board member facilitated a virtual talk with NASA physicist, the daughter of an El Paso dairy farmer, who inspires countless girls and boys in our community, showing them the possibilities of achievement through STEM pathways. Collectively, "Reading with YWCA" and the "Courageous Conversations," have the potential to effect social and political change in this community by rejecting narratives aligned with hate speech and intolerance and embracing narratives that normalize equity and inclusion.

While not comprehensive, this collection of virtual events represents YWCA continued effort to provide enriching community touchpoints during a period of trials and isolation. During the last 111 years YWCA El Paso del Norte Region's neighborhood branches have anchored their surrounding communities—as sites where parents feel secure leaving their children while they pursue education and employment goals, where seniors maintain fitness and aquatics health routines for years on end, where folks come to rehabilitate from surgeries or injury. They are a place to socialize, to learn and play, a place to feel safe, to see friends, to heal. Many of us, cities, businesses, and nonprofits alike, are still trying to figure out what "community" is going to look like in a post-COVID world. Zumba studios filled to capacity with the Silver Sneakers crowd seems like a distant memory. However, YWCA's rapid adaptation to virtual programming since last March, maintains the critical connection to the more than 50,000 individual lives we touch each year. The investments we made in 2020 as a community in an inclusive COVID recovery will yield dividends in the form of more equitable, resilient schools, neighborhoods, children, and families.

*End of Application. Thank you for submitting your All-America City Award Application!*