

Somerset County, NJ HOME-ARP Allocation Plan

Guidance

- To receive its HOME-ARP allocation, a PJ must:
 - Engage in consultation with at least the required organizations;
 - Provide for public participation including a 15-day public comment period and one public hearing, at a minimum; and,
 - Develop a plan that meets the requirements in the HOME-ARP Notice.
- To submit: a PJ must upload a Microsoft Word or PDF version of the plan in IDIS as an attachment next to the “HOME-ARP allocation plan” option on either the AD-26 screen (for PJs whose FY 2021 annual action plan is a Year 2-5 annual action plan) or the AD-25 screen (for PJs whose FY 2021 annual action plan is a Year 1 annual action plan that is part of the 2021 consolidated plan).
- PJs must also submit an SF-424, SF-424B, and SF-424D, and the following certifications as an attachment on either the AD-26 or AD-25 screen, as applicable:
 - Affirmatively Further Fair Housing;
 - Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act and Anti-displacement and Relocation Assistance Plan;
 - Anti-Lobbying;
 - Authority of Jurisdiction;
 - Section 3; and,
 - HOME-ARP specific certification.

Participating Jurisdiction: Somerset County NJ

Date: 1/24/2022

Consultation

Before developing its plan, a PJ must consult with the CoC(s) serving the jurisdiction’s geographic area, homeless and domestic violence service providers, veterans’ groups, public housing agencies (PHAs), public agencies that address the needs of the qualifying populations, and public or private organizations that address fair housing, civil rights, and the needs of persons with disabilities, at a minimum. State PJs are not required to consult with every PHA or CoC within the state’s boundaries; however, local PJs must consult with all PHAs (including statewide or regional PHAs) and CoCs serving the jurisdiction.

Summarize the consultation process:

Somerset County Community Development Office’s consultation process included:

A virtual meeting with the Continuum of Care Committee was held on September 30, 2021, to solicit feedback on needs and gaps in shelters, housing and services. A follow up survey (via Survey Monkey) was sent out on December 10, 2021, to generate additional feedback.

The Community Development Office consulted with three local PHAs (Franklin Housing Authority, Manville Housing Authority and Somerville Housing Authority) and two statewide PHAs (New Jersey Housing and Mortgage Finance Agency and State of New Jersey Department of Community Affairs). E-mails were sent to the PHAs on December 8, 2021 requesting input prior to the HOME Committee meeting (on December 16, 2021), during which the HOME-ARP proposals would be evaluated. The PHAs were asked to provide data on their needs for shelter, housing and services. Follow up emails, which included the above-mentioned survey, were sent on December 13, 2021. In addition, on December 14, 2021, municipal administrators for Somerville and Manville were emailed to help get input from their respective PHAs.

The Community Development Office also requested and received client-specific data related to qualifying populations fleeing, or attempting to flee, domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, or human trafficking from Central Jersey Housing Resource Center (private organization that addresses fair housing), HOME of Somerset County, Safe + Sound (domestic violence service provider), Somerset County Board of Social Services, Visions and Pathways, and Volunteers of America Agape House.

List the organizations consulted, and summarize the feedback received from these entities.

Agency/Org Consulted	Type of Agency/Org	Method of Consultation	Feedback
Richard Hall	Community Health and Wellness Center	Virtual Meeting	Jay Weintraub sought hotel vouchers.
Safe + Sound of Somerset County	Domestic Violence Service Provider	Emails and Phone Calls	Ana Diaz provided specific data related to persons fleeing or attempting to flee domestic violence
Central Jersey Housing Resource Center	Fair Housing	Email and Phone Calls	Sharon Clark provided specific data related to qualifying populations including at risk of homeless and other populations where services would prevent homelessness or those with the greatest risk of housing instability
Legal Services of Northwest Jersey	Civil Rights and Fair Housing	Email	Sharon Yoo shared data related to qualifying populations contained in <i>True Poverty</i> and <i>ALICE</i> reports.

United Way	Charitable Community Services	Virtual Meeting	Joanne Hala sought a new shelter, perhaps converting a hotel.
Zufall Health	Community Health Center that offers a sexual assault support program	Email	Sarah Aleman provided data to help identify qualifying populations fleeing, or attempting to flee, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, or human trafficking
Board of Social Services	Government	Virtual Meeting	Joanne Kemp suggested an emergency shelter for single men and women.
Alternatives	Special Needs Service Provider	Virtual Meeting	Heather Bielefeldt sought a shelter for families and post-shelter services and follow up case management. Families on EA cannot use shelter.
Somerset County Youth Services	Government	Virtual Meeting	Linda Porcaro suggested a shelter designed with accommodations for families currently confined to one bedroom as their primary living space.
PIRHL	Developer	Virtual Meeting	Deanna Shipman commented that for-profits that build affordable housing should be given assistance, especially in light of skyrocketing construction costs.
Somerset County Operations & Planning	Government	Virtual Meeting	Zach Berliner raised the need for more supportive services and case management for people at risk of homelessness and added that the need has grown because of Hurricane Ida. Also recommended a liaison position to mediate with landlords.
HOME of Somerset County, Inc.	Multi-faith Housing Outreach	Virtual Meeting	Alyssa Martini suggested follow-up case management for residents leaving shelter.
Somerset County Community Development	Government	Virtual Meeting	Kim Cowart suggested to focus on people at risk of experiencing homelessness because they are spending 40% or more of gross income on rent
Somerset County Operations & Planning	Government	Virtual Meeting	Rheanah Johnson suggested to provide outreach and education to landlords to increase participation in housing assistance programs

Greater Raritan Workforce Development Board	Government	Virtual Meeting	Paul Grzella suggested that an ARP-funded project must demonstrate that they can be sustained with alternative funding sources after HOME-ARP funds are spent
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List of organizations consulted: Alternatives, Catholic Church of St Ann, Central Jersey Housing Resource Center (private organization that addresses fair housing), Greater Raritan Workforce Development Board, HOME of Somerset County, Legal Services of Northwest Jersey (private organization that addresses civil rights and fair housing), PIRHL, Richard Hall Community Health & Wellness Center, Safe + Sound of Somerset County (domestic violence service provider), SC Board of Social Services, SC Community Development, SC Operations & Planning, SC Youth Services, Soldier On, United Way, Zufall Health

Public Participation

PJs must provide for and encourage citizen participation in the development of the HOME-ARP allocation plan. Before submission of the plan, PJs must provide residents with reasonable notice and an opportunity to comment on the proposed HOME-ARP allocation plan of **no less than 15 calendar days**. The PJ must follow its adopted requirements for “reasonable notice and an opportunity to comment” for plan amendments in its current citizen participation plan. In addition, PJs must hold **at least one public hearing** during the development of the HOME-ARP allocation plan and prior to submission.

For the purposes of HOME-ARP, PJs are required to make the following information available to the public:

- Somerset County received \$2,027,018.00 in HOME-ARP Program funding.
- These funds will be used to develop housing units for individuals and families that are either experiencing homelessness or at risk of experiencing homelessness. Along with the housing units, appropriate support services will be included to help this population remain housed.

Describe the public participation process, including information about and the dates of the public comment period and public hearing(s) held during the development of the plan:

The public participation process started with a notice in the Courier News, which was published on December 17, 2021. The notice stated that the public comment period would run from December 17, 2021 to January 10, 2022. It informed the public of the availability of the HOME-ARP Allocation Plan, that an amendment would be made to the PY2021 Annual Action Plan, and that a virtual public hearing would be held on January 5, 2022. This notice was also published on the Somerset County website, along with a copy of the HOME-ARP Allocation Plan and information on attending the virtual public hearing. The public also had an opportunity

to comment at a regularly scheduled meeting of the Board of County Commissioners on January 11, 2022.

Describe any efforts to broaden public participation:

Somerset County made multiple efforts to broaden public participation.

- A virtual meeting with the Continuum of Care Committee was held on September 30, 2021, to solicit feedback on needs and gaps in shelters, housing and services. A follow up survey (via Survey Monkey) was sent out on December 10, 2021, to generate additional feedback.
- A public notice was published simultaneously in the Courier News and on the County website on December 17, 2021, with a public comment period from December 17, 2021 to January 10, 2022. In addition, a copy of the HOME-ARP Allocation Plan was put on the County website. During the public comment period, a virtual meeting was held on January 5, 2022.
- The draft Allocation Plan was presented and approved at a meeting of the Board of County Commissioners on January 11, 2022.

Somerset County did not receive any comments in writing, or orally at any of the public meetings where the HOME-ARP Allocation Plan was presented for citizen participation.

Summarize the comments and recommendations received through the public participation process:

Please refer to the table on page 2, where comments from the CoC consultation meeting are noted.

Summarize any comments or recommendations not accepted and state the reasons why:

All comments and recommendations were accepted.

Needs Assessment and Gaps Analysis

PJs must evaluate the size and demographic composition of qualifying populations within its boundaries and assess the unmet needs of those populations. In addition, a PJ must identify any gaps within its current shelter and housing inventory as well as the service delivery system. A PJ should use current data, including point in time count, housing inventory count, or other data available through CoCs, and consultations with service providers to quantify the individuals and families in the qualifying populations and their need for additional housing, shelter, or services. The PJ may use the optional tables provided below and/or attach additional data tables to this template.

Needs Assessment and Gaps Analysis Table

Proj. Type	Organization Name	Project Name	Subpopulation	PIT Count	Total Beds
ES	HOME of Somerset County	Emergency Shelter	Adults with Children	3	14
ES	Safe and Sound	Safe House	DV	13	15
ES	Board of Social Services	hotel/motel overflow	Unrestricted	55	55
ES	Board of Social Services	Hotel/Motel Placements	Unrestricted	10	10
ES	Visions & Pathways	Visions and Pathways Basic Center	Youth	6	8
ES	Volunteers of America	Agape House	Unrestricted	38	54
			ES Need	125	156
TH	Alternatives	Franklin House	Women and children	14	28
TH	HOME of Somerset County	Sunrise House	Women and children	5	5
TH	Safe and Sound	Transitional Housing	DV	8	10
TH	Visions & Pathways	Bridge House	Youth	1	2
TH	Visions & Pathways	Bridge House 2	Youth	4	4
TH	Visions & Pathways	My Place	Youth	5	5
TH	Visions & Pathways	Youth Transitional Housing	Youth	14	14
TH- Vets Only	Community Hope	HOPE for Veterans	Veterans	50	95
			TH Need	101	163
PSH	Alternatives	CSP	Single Adults	4	4
PSH	Visions & Pathways	Whitney House	Youth	3	5
PSH- CoC	Volunteers of America	CHANCE II	Singles - w/Disability or CMI	16	18
PSH- CoC- CH	Alternatives	Permanent Supportive Housing PH2	Chronically Homeless Single Adults	4	5
PSH- CoC- CH	Alternatives	Permanent Supportive Housing PH1	Chronically Homeless Single Adults	2	4
PSH- CoC- CH	Alternatives	Permanent Supportive Housing PHIV	Chronically Homeless Single Adults	1	2
PSH	pirhl development corp	Woods at Warren	Unrestricted		34
PSH	pirhl development corp	Montgomery Crossing	Unrestricted		34
			Total Beds	30	106
PSH- Vets Only	NJ PHA-VA	Valley Brook Village	Single Veterans	94	94
PSH- Vets Only	NJ PHA-VA	HUD VASH	Veterans	27	27
			Total Vets	121	121
RRH	Alternatives	RRH	Chronically Homeless Single Adults	1	1
RRH	Alternatives	RRH 2	Chronically Homeless Single Adults	5	5
			Total RRH	6	6
RRH	NORWESCAP	Homelessness Prevention Program	Unrestricted	27	27
RRH	Soldier On	Supportive Services for Veteran Families	Veterans	6	6
RRH	Community Hope	Supportive Services for Veteran Families	Veterans	22	22
			Total RRH	55	55

ES – Emergency Shelter

TH – Transitional Housing

PSH – Permanent Supportive Housing

RRH – Rapid Re-Housing

Describe the size and demographic composition of qualifying populations within the PJ's boundaries:

HOME-ARP Qualifying Populations are individuals or families that are:

1. Homeless, as defined in 24 CFR 91.5 Homeless (1), (2), or (3)
2. At risk of Homelessness, as defined in 24 CFR 91.5
3. Fleeing, or Attempting to Flee, Domestic Violence, Dating Violence, Sexual Assault, Stalking, or Human Trafficking, as defined by HUD
4. Other Populations
 - (1) Other Families Requiring Services or Housing Assistance to Prevent Homelessness
 - (2) At Greatest Risk of Housing Instability

1. Homeless, as defined in 24 CFR 91.5 Homeless (1), (2), or (3)

The best data source for the number of county residents that are experiencing homelessness is the Somerset County Point-In-Time (PIT) count, which took place on January 26, 2021. This community-wide survey, administered annually by housing and social service providers, showed that a total of 226 persons, in 175 households, were experiencing homelessness. This number is significantly lower than the 342 people that were experiencing homelessness during the 2020 PIT Survey. While the exact reason for the decrease is unknown, it is likely that fewer people were counted in 2021 because of COVID protocols that reduced the number of people that could be sheltered and a general reluctance to enter traditional community housing programs because of the pandemic and the risks associated with community housing options.

Of the persons experiencing homelessness in 2021, 57.5% identified themselves as Black/African American. This percentage is disproportionately higher than the 9.5% of the total county population that is Black/African American. The remaining race and ethnicity percentages for persons experiencing homelessness are: 23.9% White, 1.8% Asian and 16.4% Hispanic/Latino. Of the 175 homeless households counted in Somerset County in 2021, 28 (16%) were families with at least one child under the age of 18 and one adult. These families included 79 persons, including 45 children under age 18, and 34 adults. There were 9 unaccompanied minors. Of those experiencing homelessness, there were 54 children under 18 years old, 22 adults between 18 and 24 years old, 131 adults between 25 and 64 years old, and 15 adults over 64 years old. Many respondents were experiencing one or more of six disabling conditions: mental health issues, substance abuse, physical disability, developmental disability, chronic health condition and HIV/AIDS.

2. At risk of Homelessness, as defined in 24 CFR 91.5, defined as
 - (i) Having an annual income below 30 percent of median family income for the area, as determined by HUD;

- (ii) Not having sufficient resources or support networks, e.g., family, friends, faith-based or other social networks, immediately available to prevent them from moving to an emergency shelter or another place described in paragraph (1) of the “Homeless” definition in this section; and
- (iii) Meeting one of e following conditions listed in CPD Notice 21-10

This is a very broad group of people, some of which cannot be quantified with existing data sources and therefore, this estimate will be a combination of Census data and other data that can be used to make inferences and draw conclusions about this qualifying population. According to the 2018 Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy (CHAS), there are 5,710 Somerset County households that earn less than 30% of the Area Median Income. It is estimated that 83% of these households have one or more of the four housing unit problems: lacks kitchen, lacks plumbing, more than one person per room, or cost burden greater than 30% and therefore, their need for decent, safe affordable housing is even greater.

Regarding the number of households that do not have sufficient resources or support networks, e.g., family, friends, faith-based or other social networks, immediately available to prevent them from moving to an emergency shelter or another place, there is no conclusive source for the number of people that meet this criteria. In order to arrive at an estimate, the Community Development Office is using the following statistics to make an inference:

Number of Clients housed at the local emergency shelter: 15 adults and 26 children currently

Number of emergency hotel placements funded by the Somerset County Board of Social Services: 55 individuals currently

Number of emergency assistance grants funded by local churches: 64 annually

Number of emergency housing calls placed to 211: 5 daily

Regarding the number of youth that do not qualify as homeless under 24 CFR 91.5 but do qualify under the acts listed in CPD Notice 21-10, it is estimated that there are 16 individuals that meet this criteria. It should also be noted that there are a significant number of county residents that are housed, but in substandard conditions, and that they should likely be counted among Somerset County’s qualifying populations.

Overall, the County estimates that there are approximately 114 individuals currently at risk of homelessness and 1,564 households at risk of homelessness on an annual basis.

3. Fleeing, or Attempting to Flee, Domestic Violence, Dating Violence, Sexual Assault, Stalking, or Human Trafficking, as defined by HUD

The Point-In-Time report from January 26, 2021 identified 40 persons fleeing domestic violence. Within that number, 30 were living in emergency shelters and 10 were living in transitional housing. Safe + Sound Somerset – the lead domestic violence agency in Somerset County – also reported the following statistics:

Callers seeking shelter in '20: 277	Callers seeking shelter in '21: 481
Adults in shelter in '20: 34	Adults in shelter in '21: 42
Children in shelter in '20: 28	Children in shelter in '21: 41

Based on these numbers, the County estimates that approximately 564 individuals fit into this category in 2021, an increase of 225 over the number from 2020.

4. Other Populations, defined as:

(1) Other Families Requiring Services or Housing Assistance to Prevent Homelessness is defined as households (i.e., individuals and families) who have previously been qualified as “homeless” as defined in 24 CFR 91.5, are currently housed due to temporary or emergency assistance, including financial assistance, services, temporary rental assistance or some type of other assistance to allow the household to be housed, and who need additional housing assistance or supportive services to avoid a return to homelessness.

(2) At Greatest Risk of Housing Instability is defined as household who meets either paragraph (i) or (ii) below: (i) has annual income that is less than or equal to 30% of the area median income, as determined by HUD and is experiencing severe cost burden (i.e., is paying more than 50% of monthly household income toward housing costs); 8 (ii) has annual income that is less than or equal to 50% of the area median income, as determined by HUD, AND meets one of the following conditions from paragraph (iii) of the “At risk of homelessness” definition established at 24 CFR 91.5:

This is a very broad group of people, some of which cannot be quantified with existing data sources and, therefore, this estimate will be a combination of Census data and other data that can be used to make inferences and draw conclusions about this qualifying population. According to the 2018 Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy (CHAS), there are 5,710 Somerset County households that earn less than 30% of the Area Median Income. This figure represents 20% of the total number of renter households in Somerset County, or 1 in 5.

Regarding Other Families Requiring Services or Housing Assistance to Prevent Homelessness is defined as households there is no conclusive source for the number of people that meet this criteria. In order to arrive at an estimate, the Community Development Office is using the following statistics to make an inference:

Number of county residents that have a housing voucher: 502 + an unreported number of households that have a Housing Choice Voucher from NJDCA
Number of county households that are on a waiting list to get a housing voucher: 2,684

Number of county households that received emergency housing assistance from the Somerset County Board of Social Services during calendar year 2021: 131

Number of county residents that are on the waiting for the Franklin Township PHA: 991

Number of county residents that have received a security deposit or assistance with first month's rent from the Somerset County Board of Social Services during calendar year 2021: 44

Number of county households that received an emergency rent payment from the Somerset County Board of Social Services during calendar year 2021: 49

Number of county residents that received emergency assistance from the Social Services for the Homeless Program during calendar year 2021: 253

Number of county residents living in the home of another because of an economic hardship during calendar year 2021: 239.

Based on this data, the County estimates that approximately 4,391 (plus the number of households that have a voucher from the DCA) residents qualify for the "Other Population" category.

Also of note in Somerset County:

On September 1, 2021, the remnants of Hurricane Ida hit New Jersey, bringing significant rainfall and strong winds. Within Somerset County, the municipalities of Bound Brook, Hillsborough, North Plainfield, Manville, Somerville and South Bound Brook suffered severe flood damage. Therefore, in the time since the 2021 Point-In-Time Count took place, many more persons are experiencing homelessness because their housing was rendered inhabitable. Over 230 housing rental units in Somerset County were lost in this storm (Bound Brook – 10, Hillsborough – 50, Somerville – 140, South Bound Brook – 29). It is unknown how many rental units were lost in Manville, but given the extent of the damage, it is likely that a significant number of units were lost.

According to the 2021 Out of Reach Report, produced by the National Low Income Housing Coalition, the annual household income required to afford a two-bedroom unit at FMR in Somerset County is \$70,120. For a two-person family, that would be approximately 71% AMI. For a three-person family, that would be approximately 63% AMI. The 2021 True Poverty Report, produced by the Poverty Research Institute at Legal Services of New Jersey, points out that when additional household members are infants, preschoolers or school-aged children,

factoring in the cost of childcare, it is more expensive than if the additional household members were teenagers or seniors. Therefore, families with younger children, even though their annual household income is above 50% AMI, may still experience the same financial pressures as members of a lower income qualifying population household.

Describe the unmet housing and service needs of qualifying populations, including but not limited to:

- ***Sheltered and unsheltered homeless populations;***
- ***Those currently housed populations at risk of homelessness;***
- ***Other families requiring services or housing assistance or to prevent homelessness;***
and,
- ***Those at greatest risk of housing instability or in unstable housing situations:***

Based upon feedback from community members and providers, sheltered and unsheltered populations experiencing homelessness need:

- Continued access to emergency shelter and transitional housing at existing facilities.
- Continued access to supportive services in the form of housing counseling, food and energy assistance, legal services, mental health services and counseling, affordable childcare, case management and health services.
- Development of permanent housing which individuals and families could be moved into as quickly as possible.
- Case management for individuals and families leaving emergency shelter and, to the extent possible, life skills and financial management training.

Those currently housed populations at risk of homelessness need:

- Increased efforts to make clients aware of homeless prevention services and the importance of early intervention.
- Continued access to emergency assistance in the form of rental assistance, utility payments, food, and other basic needs.

Other families requiring services or housing assistance or to prevent homelessness need:

- Development of affordable permanent housing for families.
- Case management for families and, to the extent possible, life skills and financial management training.

Those at greatest risk of housing instability or in unstable housing situations need:

- Rental assistance that includes, to the extent possible, life skills and financial management training.

Identify and consider the current resources available to assist qualifying populations, including congregate and non-congregate shelter units, supportive services, TBRA, and affordable and permanent supportive rental housing:

The current resources available to assist qualifying populations include emergency shelter, transitional housing and permanent supportive housing that are provided by a number of organizations in Somerset County, including:

- Alternatives, Inc. – provides transitional housing and permanent supportive housing that are both project-based and tenant-based.
- Center for Great Expectations – provides transitional and permanent supportive housing that is both project-based and tenant-based.
- Community Hope – provides permanent supportive and transitional housing that is both project-based and tenant-based.
- NJ PHA-VA – provides transitional and permanent supportive housing that is both project-based and tenant-based.
- NORWESCAP – provides housing assistance through the Homelessness Prevention Program that is tenant-based.
- Safe + Sound Somerset – provides emergency shelter and transitional housing that are site-based.
- Somerset County Board of Social Services – provides emergency hotel placements and housing assistance via emergency rent payments and security deposits.
- Visions & Pathways – provides non-congregate emergency shelter, transitional housing and permanent supportive housing that are site-based.
- Volunteers of America (VOA) Delaware Valley – has non-congregate emergency shelter and permanent supportive housing.

According to the list of affordable developments, put out by the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs (DCA), and available at:

<https://www.state.nj.us/dca/divisions/codes/publications/developments.html>,

Somerset County has 2,948 affordable rental units. These units are further designated as 1,310 units for seniors, 541 units for special needs and 1,097 units for families. Included in these figures are transitional housing and permanent supportive housing.

Other forms of assistance are funding based, e.g. rental vouchers, grants for first month's rent/security deposits and grants for back rent/future rent/utilities.

Identify any gaps within the current shelter and housing inventory as well as the service delivery system:

The gaps within the current shelter and housing inventory include supportive services and supportive housing. While the availability of market-rate units remains steady, the relatively

limited number of units available to low-income renters makes it challenging for people in Qualifying Populations to find housing. There are fewer than 3,000 affordable rental units in the county, but over 4,700 people make less than 30% of AMI and have one or more severe housing problems. This gap – along with the higher-than-average expense of living in Somerset County – exacerbates the problem for low-income individuals and families.

In terms of supportive services, the existing agencies work hard to provide the necessary support to those in need, but the on-going pandemic has resulted in a shortage of trained workers and a growing number of clients in need of assistance.

Identify the characteristics of housing associated with instability and an increased risk of homelessness if the PJ will include such conditions in its definition of “other populations” as established in the HOME-ARP Notice:

Somerset County will not exercise this option.

Identify priority needs for qualifying populations:

The priority needs for the qualifying populations are a combination of financial assistance, housing opportunities and support services. The most efficient and cost-effective way to deal with homelessness is to prevent it by providing services and/or rental assistance to individuals and families while they are still housed. Supportive services needed include housing counseling, assistance for food & utilities, legal services, mental health counseling, childcare, and healthcare. If members of the qualifying population are experiencing homelessness, facilities and strategies are needed to provide immediate housing, such as emergency shelters, transitional housing or hotel vouchers. Individuals and families should then seek to be moved to affordable permanent housing as quickly as possible. Developing affordable permanent housing and providing case management with appropriate services would greatly help the qualifying populations of Somerset County to stave off experiencing homelessness and progress from a social safety net to self-sufficiency.

Explain how the level of need and gaps in its shelter and housing inventory and service delivery systems based on the data presented in the plan were determined:

The level of need and gaps in shelter and housing inventory and service delivery systems was determined through careful consideration of input from multiple sources, including local governments, homeless service providers, veterans’ groups, domestic violence agencies, public housing agencies and other public or private organizations that address fair housing, civil rights, and the needs of persons with disabilities.

A virtual meeting was held with the Continuum of Care Committee on September 30, 2021. The main need identified on this call was for a shelter for families that did not necessarily meet the criteria to require Social Services assistance. The need is for not only a non-congregate shelter,

but one in which family members can have appropriately-sized separate spaces. Data from the Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy show that well over 80% of rental households whose income is below 50% of AMI are living in situations with one or more severe housing problems. Other reports (Out of Reach, ALICE, True Poverty) show that even with an income greater than 50% AMI, rental units with multiple bedrooms may not be affordable. While working with clients on Emergency Housing Vouchers, advocates have encountered many instances where households are staying with relatives/friends or paying for hotel/motel rooms. Also, even when vouchers are awarded, it is nearly impossible to find available units at or under the fair market rent range.

HOME-ARP Activities

Describe the method for soliciting applications for funding and/or selecting developers, service providers, subrecipients and/or contractors and whether the PJ will administer eligible activities directly:

On November 1, 2021 Somerset County posted an RFP for Program Year 2021 HOME Investment Partnership Program, American Rescue Plan Activities (Contract #: CY-COM-0079-21) on the county website. Submissions were due on December 1, 2021 and were opened the same day. Organizations that submitted applications made presentations about their proposed activities at a committee meeting which took place on December 16, 2021. The committee made its recommendations at the conclusion of the meeting, in an effort to have commitments and agreements put in place by February 2022.

If any portion of the PJ's HOME-ARP administrative funds were provided to a subrecipient or contractor prior to HUD's acceptance of the HOME-ARP allocation plan because the subrecipient or contractor is responsible for the administration of the PJ's entire HOME-ARP grant, identify the subrecipient or contractor and describe its role and responsibilities in administering all of the PJ's HOME-ARP program:

N/A

PJs must indicate the amount of HOME-ARP funding that is planned for each eligible HOME-ARP activity type and demonstrate that any planned funding for nonprofit organization operating assistance, nonprofit capacity building, and administrative costs is within HOME-ARP limits. The following table may be used to meet this requirement.

Use of HOME-ARP Funding

	Funding Amount	Percent of the Grant	Statutory Limit
Supportive Services	\$ 0		
Acquisition and Development of Non-Congregate Shelters	\$ 0		
Tenant Based Rental Assistance (TBRA)	\$ 0		
Development of Affordable Rental Housing	\$ 1,722,966		
Non-Profit Operating	\$ 0	0 %	5%
Non-Profit Capacity Building	\$ 0	0 %	5%
Administration and Planning	\$ 304,052	15 %	15%
Total HOME ARP Allocation	\$ 2,027,018		

Additional narrative, if applicable:

N/A

Describe how the characteristics of the shelter and housing inventory, service delivery system, and the needs identified in the gap analysis provided a rationale for the plan to fund eligible activities:

The rationale behind this plan is supported by the characteristics of the shelter and housing inventory, service delivery system and the needs identified in the gap analysis. Keeping people housed before the cycle of homelessness begins is one of the best methods of reducing the number of people experiencing homelessness. Youth aging out of the foster care system face an uphill battle while working to transition to self-sufficiency and there is a critical shortage of affordable housing for this population. Providing housing opportunities with supportive services to help with budgeting and other life skills will go a long way to preventing homelessness among this population. Increasing housing opportunities for individuals currently experiencing homelessness and providing appropriate services will transition these individuals from shelters to permanent housing and provide them the services needed to stay housed. Increasing affordable housing opportunities with low incomes, compared to AMI, will reduce the risk of experiencing homelessness for individuals and families.

HOME-ARP Production Housing Goals

Estimate the number of affordable rental housing units for qualifying populations that the PJ will produce or support with its HOME-ARP allocation:

Somerset County will produce 23 affordable rental housing units for approximately 71 members of qualifying populations with its HOME-ARP allocation as follows.

- 14 units for individuals experiencing homelessness
- 6 units for individuals at risk of experiencing homelessness
- 3 for households whose income is at or below 80% Area Median Income (AMI)

Describe the specific affordable rental housing production goal that the PJ hopes to achieve and describe how it will address the PJ's priority needs:

Visions and Pathways will produce 6 HOME-ARP units for youth aging out of the foster care system. This project will prevent youth from experiencing homelessness by being housed and providing appropriate support services to build a foundation for success. These 6 HOME-ARP units will be part of a 10-unit building, with all units being dedicated – or prioritized – to youth aging out of the foster care system. Visions and Pathways' project will help address Somerset County's priority need of developing permanent housing for 6 individuals at risk of experiencing homelessness and providing appropriate supportive services.

Walters-Cornerstone Development LLC will produce 6 HOME-ARP units. These units – which are part of a larger, 75-unit building – will include 4 units for individuals experiencing homelessness, and 2 units for individuals with income below 80% AMI. This project will help address Somerset County's priority need of developing permanent housing for 22 individuals at risk of experiencing homelessness and providing appropriate supportive services.

Warren LIHTC Urban Renewal LLC will produce 5 HOME-ARP units. These units will consist of 5 units for individuals experiencing homelessness. This project, which has a total of 80 units, will help address Somerset County's priority need of developing permanent housing for 21 individuals at risk of experiencing homelessness and providing appropriate supportive services.

Concord Street Urban Renewal Associates, LP will produce 6 HOME-ARP units, as part of a larger, 88-unit development. These units will consist of 5 units for 21 individuals experiencing homelessness and 1 unit for 1 individual with income below 80% AMI. This project will help address Somerset County's priority need of developing permanent housing for individuals at risk of experiencing homelessness and providing appropriate supportive services.

Preferences

Identify whether the PJ intends to give preference to one or more qualifying populations or a subpopulation within one or more qualifying populations for any eligible activity or project:

Somerset County intends to give preference to individuals that meet the following criteria as defined in the Qualifying Populations section of CPD Notice 21-10. It is further noted and understood that Somerset County and its subgrantees must comply with all applicable fair housing, civil rights, and nondiscrimination requirements, including but not limited to those requirements listed in 24 CFR 5.105(a) when applying preferences through its referral methods. It is further noted that persons who are eligible for this preference must have the opportunity to participate in all HOME-ARP activities of the PJ in which they are eligible under this Notice,

including activities that are not separate or different, and cannot be excluded because of any protected characteristics or preferential status.

1. Homeless, as defined in 24 CFR 91.5 Homeless (1), (2), or (3):

(1) An individual or family who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, meaning:

(i) An individual or family with a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings, including a car, park, abandoned building, bus or train station, airport, or camping ground;

(ii) An individual or family living in a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designated to provide temporary living arrangements (including congregate shelters, transitional housing, and hotels and motels paid for by charitable organizations or by federal, state, or local government programs for low-income individuals); or

(iii) An individual who is exiting an institution where he or she resided for 90 days or less and who resided in an emergency shelter or place not meant for human habitation immediately before entering that institution;

(2) An individual or family who will imminently lose their primary nighttime residence, provided that:

(i) The primary nighttime residence will be lost within 14 days of the date of application for homeless assistance;

(ii) No subsequent residence has been identified; and

(iii) The individual or family lacks the resources or support networks, e.g., family, friends, faith-based or other social networks needed to obtain other permanent housing;

(3) Unaccompanied youth under 25 years of age, or families with children and youth, who do not otherwise qualify as homeless under this definition, but who:

(i) Are defined as homeless under section 387 of the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (42 U.S.C. 5732a), section 637 of the Head Start Act (42 U.S.C. 9832), section 41403 of the Violence Against Women Act of 1994 (42 U.S.C. 14043e-2), section 330(h) of the Public Health Service Act (42 U.S.C. 254b(h)), section 3 of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (7 U.S.C. 2012), section 17(b) of the Child Nutrition Act of 1966 (42 U.S.C. 1786(b)), or section 725 of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 11434a);

(ii) Have not had a lease, ownership interest, or occupancy agreement in permanent housing at any time during the 60 days immediately preceding the date of application for homeless assistance;

(iii) Have experienced persistent instability as measured by two moves or more during the 60-day period immediately preceding the date of applying for homeless assistance; and

(iv) Can be expected to continue in such status for an extended period of time because of chronic disabilities, chronic physical health or mental health conditions, substance addiction, histories of domestic violence or childhood abuse (including neglect), the presence of a child or youth with a disability, or two or more barriers to employment, which include the lack of a high school degree or General Education Development (GED), illiteracy, low English proficiency, a history of incarceration or detention for criminal activity, and a history of unstable employment;

If a preference was identified, explain how the use of a preference or method of prioritization will address the unmet need or gap in benefits and services received by individuals and families in the qualifying population or category of qualifying population, consistent with the PJ's needs assessment and gap analysis:

Somerset County's system of care for people experiencing homelessness includes a wide variety of supportive services including mental health treatment, food resources, financial literacy education, housing counseling, legal services, treatment for substance use disorder, employment and training services and various forms of emergency assistance from an array of different sources. The system also includes 156 emergency shelter beds and 163 transitional housing beds for total of 319 beds in all; they are delineated in the Needs Assessment and Gaps Analysis Table. While Somerset County's 2022 Point in Time count revealed that 226 of those beds were filled on the night of January 26, this number is a snapshot taken one night of the year in the middle of a global health pandemic that has led to a reduction in the number of persons that can be housed because of COVID protocols and a reluctance to enter congregate housing. Not only that, but it is widely understood that despite best efforts, undercounting is a concern with Point in Time counts.

It is likely that in a county with a population of at least 330,000 people, there are more than 226, even more than 319, people experiencing homelessness at any given time. That said, if the system of care were able to ensure that every person experiencing homelessness were to have a permanent housing option when they leave the system, it would need at least 226 beds and perhaps even more. Conversely, an inventory of the affordable, permanent supportive housing that is set aside for persons experiencing homelessness shows that there are only 106 beds for this population and of those beds, 38 are for people that are single. These beds are also detailed in the Needs Assessment and Gaps Analysis Table. It should be noted that there are, through the NJ Veterans Administration Housing, a combination of 121 beds and housing vouchers; however, these units are also restricted to veterans that come not only from Somerset County, but the entire NJ Veterans Administration, and are not available to the general public and therefore not included in the 106-bed count. Veterans leaving the Lyons VA Campus are eligible and do in fact apply for beds that are dedicated for persons experiencing homelessness in Somerset County. This makes getting one of the aforementioned 106 beds even more competitive. There

is a critical shortage of affordable permanent supportive housing that is available for persons leaving the county's homeless housing system and it is even worse for families with children.

This shortage is further exacerbated by the local housing market conditions. The *Out of Reach 2021* Report identifies Somerset County as one of the most expensive counties in NJ, where the housing wage (the amount a household must earn per hour working 40 hours per week, 52 weeks a year in order to pay less than 30% of their income on rent) is \$31.96 per hour. The report goes on to mention that in NJ, one person must work 107 hours per week at minimum wage to afford a 2-bedroom apartment at the Fair Market Rent (FMR) of \$1,662. This number is even higher in Somerset County, where the FMR for the same unit is \$1,753. A recent survey of listings from Apartments.com found that the average rent listed for a 2-bedroom apartment in the southern portion of Somerset County is \$2,562. This figure is based on listings for over 100 apartments located in Bound Brook, Branchburg, Bridgewater, Franklin, Hillsborough, Montgomery, Raritan, Somerville, and South Bound Brook.

The affordability issue is so pervasive here in Somerset County and across the state of NJ that the NJ Department of Community Affairs has extended the amount of time Emergency Housing Voucher recipients have to find a unit from 90 to 180 days, is offering landlords a \$1,000 incentive to accept vouchers, and will consider paying 120% of the FMR on a case-by-case basis. Therefore, the application of Somerset County's preference to use HOME-ARP funds for the creation of affordable rental housing for persons experiencing homelessness will address a significant unmet need of affordable rental housing for people experiencing homelessness that is detailed in the needs assessment and gaps analysis.

The addition of 23 HOME-ARP rental units, which will add a total of 71 beds, will help to ease the burden of housing costs for residents of Somerset County that are experiencing homelessness and seeking opportunities for housing stability. These units will offer the additional advantage of being more accessible than traditional affordable housing units which typically require a credit score of 650 and a higher income. In addition to self-referrals, providers will make referrals for these units and Community Development staff will maintain the wait list, so there is support and assistance to applicants during the application process. In addition, all of these units will have supportive services on-site, which will help to ensure permanency and a better quality of life for residents that go into these units.

If a preference was identified, describe how the PJ will use HOME-ARP funds to address the unmet needs or gaps in benefits and services of the other qualifying populations that are not included in the preference:

Somerset County will address the unmet needs and gaps in benefits and services of the other qualifying populations that are not included in the preferences through:

1. Use of other dedicated affordable housing funding including the Community Development Block Grant, the HOME Investment Partnership Program, the Continuum of Care grant and the Somerset County Homelessness Trust Fund.
2. Use of county funding through the Somerset County Non-Profit Purchase of Service and the American Rescue Plan.
3. Encouraging and supporting collaboration and innovative public and private partnerships that will lead to the creation of additional affordable housing.
4. Endorsing and providing letters of support for affordable housing projects that are under consideration in Somerset County.
5. Educating the public about the need and advocating for the creation of additional affordable housing units.

HOME-ARP Refinancing Guidelines

Somerset County does not intend to use HOME-ARP funds to refinance existing debt secured by multifamily rental housing that is being rehabilitated with HOME-ARP funds.