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Vice President, Community Impact

Amy Schwabenlender leads Valley of the Sun United Way's (United Way) Community Objective to End Hunger and Homelessness. She oversees United Way's Project Connect monthly events that connect residents Valley-wide to more than 30 health and human services providers in one central location to prevent and end homelessness. She builds community-wide partnerships to develop 1,000 permanent supportive housing units to end chronic homelessness in Maricopa County and is nearly three-fourths to reaching that goal. In addition, Amy leads United Way's strategic plan to end chronic hunger in Maricopa County and ensure families and individuals have access to nutritious meals.

Amy joined United Way in 2005. She holds a Master's degree in Business Administration from Marquette University and a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration and Communication from Trinity University. Prior to coming to United Way, Amy was Development Director for Girls Ranch and operated Verve Marketing, among other community outreach roles. Amy serves on several community boards including the Maricopa County Continuum of Care, as a Board Trustee for the Alliance of Arizona Nonprofits, and as Chair of Maricopa County Community Services Commission.

Significant Progress in Phoenix on Ending Homelessness

In 2009 United Way shifted its resources to end homelessness—not just ‘manage’ it. Supported by consulting services from the Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH), United Way brought together business leaders, elected officials, municipal and state government leaders, and nonprofits to create an Ending Homelessness Advisory Council and launch an initiative for 1,000 units of permanent supportive housing (PSH). The Advisory Council also aligned its priorities with the Federal goals in *Opening Doors*. Through partnerships across sectors, nearly 790 units of PSH are now operating and/or in development.

United Way and Arizona Department of Veterans Services have aligned efforts and plans, committing at least 25 percent of the 1,000 units to Veterans. Local partners, including the Arizona Coalition to End Homelessness, have worked closely with VA and HUD to ensure the effective, prioritized targeting of HUD-VASH. Recently the community announced that all Veterans experiencing chronic homelessness had obtained permanent housing or were sheltered and on a clear, rapid path toward permanent housing, an important milestone toward ending chronic and Veterans homelessness. Governor Jan Brewer and Phoenix Mayor Greg Stanton have made strong commitments to ending all homelessness.

Phoenix also is pursuing additional strategies including the development of a coordinated entry system; reducing demand for overflow shelter through increased exits from shelter to permanent housing; working with Siemer Institute to pilot efforts to keep families stable in housing and to improve their academic performance; creation of a Funder Collaborative; testing the feasibility of a social impact bond for sustainable funding in permanent supportive housing; utilizing Project Connect and Veterans Stand Down events to link people to services including prevention services, seeking to reduce entries into homelessness and lengths of time homeless; and strengthening our street outreach collaborative.

Impact of Federal Engagement

United Way and our partners have driven progress through strong local leadership and collaborations, and Federal initiatives and activities have supported our progress in several ways. Two community teams participated in Rapid Results Boot Camps. The Dedicating Opportunities to End Homelessness (DOEH) initiative has fostered more unified planning and decision-making across systems through use of the Strategic Planning Guide. Our region used HUD technical assistance (TA) to begin to develop a coordinated assessment system for individuals and families, and we are now participating in the VA-led 25 Cities effort which will help us to expand our coordinated assessment system across the County.

Community Objectives Needing Increased Focus, Federal Activities and/or Policy Direction

Overall, we encourage the Administration to set clear priorities and to align efforts that are often in play locally at the same time. In prioritizing chronic homelessness, tremendous progress has been made without any significant provision of new resources for non-Veterans. HUD, VA, and USICH have established population-specific strategies and priorities. If all Federal partners used their resources and influence in alignment with the same priorities, communities would accelerate the end of homelessness. We have identified the following specific areas in which expanded Federal assistance would be helpful:

- **Employment:** Our community seeks best practices on connecting people who were formerly chronically homeless, are episodically homeless, or are at-risk of homelessness with workforce development programs that will help them to attain their “personal best.”

- *What ability does the Department of Labor have to help us prioritize resources for these populations?*
- **Local discretion in HUD CoC grants.** The new approach to the CoC competition allows communities to rank CoC projects into two tiers, the second of which puts funding at risk. CoCs also have the option to re-allocate existing programs, but it is not clear how communities can use this authority to reward high-performing programs, to right-size interventions, or to reduce funding to underperforming programs.
 - *Can HUD provide greater clarity regarding processes for CoCs to implement such changes?*
 - *Can HUD clarify how the Unified Funding Agency option under the CoC program would allow CoC funds to be managed in conjunction with other state and local resources, such as through a community funder collaborative?*
- **Funding for coordinated assessment systems:** Implementing coordinated assessment systems have financial costs for communities, especially staffing costs associated with implementing and maintaining such systems.
 - *Can HUD or other Federal agencies help to identify the resources needed to cover such costs?*
- **Role of Public Housing Authorities:** Expanding partnerships with PHAs is a key strategy being implemented in Phoenix and Maricopa County.
 - *What clarification can HUD provide regarding the relationship between coordinated assessment systems and housing authorities' wait lists?*
 - *Would HUD consider encouraging and providing resources to support PHAs having a 'homeless coordinator' on staff and to coordinate with CoC?*
- **Access to SSI/SSDI.** SOAR and SAMHSA's technical assistance connects individuals to benefits faster and provides quicker stability in housing.
 - *Can SSA and HHS provide stronger guidance to the local Social Security Administration Offices, which regard their participation as 'optional'?*
- **Connections to School Liaisons.** Currently the CoC lacks access to frequent and meaningful data from the Arizona Department of Education as related to homeless children and youth.
 - *Can ED encourage data sharing and engagement with the CoC?*
 - *Could HUD and ED collaborate on a pilot that would demonstrate decreased family homelessness?*
 - *Could Federal partners also encourage the prioritization of Community Action Partnership funding (such as rental assistance or the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program) for prioritized vulnerable families to increase housing stability and children's academic success?*
- **Leveraging Medicaid Resources.** To effectively understand what services PSH tenants could receive funded through Medicaid, PSH community partners need clear guidance and descriptions of eligible services. CSH is working with Arizona Department of Health Services on a crosswalk to capture this information, which will need state approval before implementing with providers.
 - *Can Federal agencies help address our community's need for technical assistance and direction on how to seize this opportunity, including training providers to become eligible for Medicaid funding and expediting the credentialing process for entities serving chronically homeless individuals and vulnerable families?*