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Community Based Approaches for Panhandling

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Community Based Approach to Panhandling

- Ordinances criminalizing panhandling have been found by the U.S. Supreme Court to violate First Amendment rights, and also are frequently unsuccessful at addressing the root causes of panhandling.
- Panhandling is often born out of a lack of resources and may be reduced by connecting those individuals to needed social services.
- The City of Gainesville has programs in place which could be expanded to treat individuals at risk of panhandling and help address the root cause of the issue, and several other cities have developed innovative programs to directly reduce panhandling which Gainesville could model.

Existing Programs in Gainesville

- The Gainesville Community Resource Paramedic (CRP) Program was established in 2014 to help residents with mobility, mental health, transportation, substance abuse, women's health, pediatric care, and chronic disease problems through case management. Patients are connected with a paramedic and a CRP coordinator, who visit the patient, identify their needs, and develop a plan to manage the patient's health. The patient is then connected to resources and regularly followed up with.
- This could be expanded to create a team that reaches out to panhandlers, assesses their social situation, and connects them to needed resources

Existing Programs in Gainesville (Continued)

- The Gainesville Police Department partners with Meridian Behavioral Healthcare with a mental health co-responder team, which jointly responds to calls involving mental illness, substance abuse, and emotionally charged situations. The program is designed to prevent unnecessary incarceration and to provide community support, follow up, and care coordination for individuals in crisis.
- Both the Co-Responder and CRP programs are designed to help residents suffering from health concerns, however panhandlers may not be suffering from any mental or physical health conditions. Thus, both programs could be expanded to address all residents in need of social services to connect them with resources in Gainesville.

Existing Programs in Gainesville (Continued)

- GRACE Marketplace is a one-stop homeless resource center serving Gainesville and Alachua County, which provides services and resources for anyone experiencing or at risk of homelessness.
- Services include emergency shelter, permanent housing, showers, hot meals, storage, case management, job training, and health care, domestic abuse, mental health, and financial services.
- Many programs which emphasize a preventative approach to reduce panhandling center around connecting individuals with programs such as GRACE, to leverage their resources and assist those individuals in getting help where needed.

Examples of Community Programs to Reduce Panhandling

- Fontana, California
- Albuquerque, New Mexico
- Lexington, Kentucky

Fontana, California

- The police department assembled community, business, and church leaders who opened an office where homeless individuals could be given counseling and processed for entry in various public and private programs, similar to Gainesville's GRACE Marketplace. When a police officer contacts a homeless person, they offer to voluntarily transport them to the facility.
- In order for this program to be successful in Gainesville, it would require a knowledge of why individuals are panhandling, and whether it is due to a lack of resources such as stable housing, unemployment, food insecurity, etc. If so, referrals to such a program in Gainesville could reduce the need for panhandling.

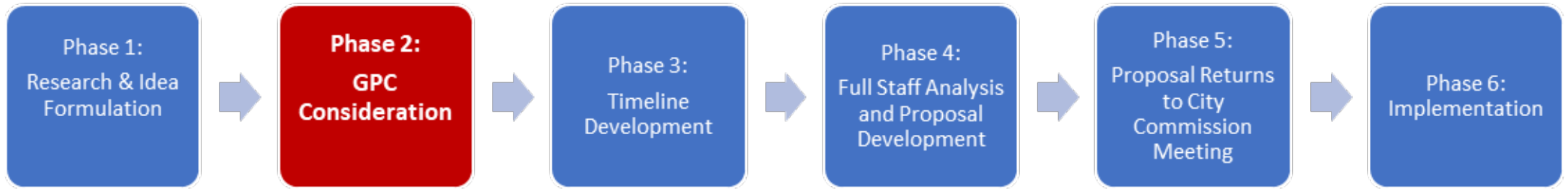
Albuquerque, New Mexico

- Twice a week, a city-owned van drives around the city to offer a day's work to any panhandlers. Panhandlers are offered \$9/hour, in addition to free lunch, to perform low skill labor needed by the Public Works Department. At the end of the day, participants are transported to a nearby shelter, where they are paid and can receive additional support and services, such as mental health or substance abuse counseling.
- The program began in 2015, and in 2017 reported that they had provided jobs to 1,575 individuals, helped 21 individuals find permanent housing, provided 355 individuals with mental health and substance abuse services, and connected 422 people with permanent employment. However, panhandling has not been eliminated in the city.

Lexington, Kentucky

- Three times a week, a city-owned van drives around the city to offer a day's work to any panhandlers. Individuals are offered \$9/hour, in addition to free lunch, to perform low skill labor needed by the city government or private businesses. At the end of the day, participants are transported to the New Life Day Center, a homeless shelter and connection point.
- The program began in 2017, and in 2020 reported a 90% reduction in active panhandlers. The city provides \$120,000 annually in funding, however the program is operated by the New Life Day Center.
- The program is currently on hold due to coronavirus.

Recommended Next Steps



We are here!

If the General Policy Committee wishes to proceed, the next step is to move this project to Phase 3 of the Policy Process.

Discussion?