



San Diego Rapid Response Network Migrant Shelter Services | Funding

The following is an excerpt from Jewish Family Service of San Diego's upcoming white paper on San Diego Rapid Response Network Migrant Shelter Services. The full white paper will be linked here when available, as well as published on www.rapidresponsesd.org and www.jfssd.org.

When the San Diego Rapid Response Network (SDRRN) took action to provide respite shelter support, it did so without secured funding in place or established monies to draw from. A grassroots operation, SDRRN Migrant Shelter Services began staffing operations with individuals from SDRRN organizations – all in new roles at the shelter – and community volunteers. Various faith institutions and community organizations generously offered buildings to serve as short-term congregate shelter sites (See Timeline).

JFSSD took the helm of shelter operations with the full support of its board. The JFSSD development team began rallying support from private funders – from its established base and new donors across the country. It started by reaching out to funders who had shown interest in immigration issues and humanitarian response, including JFSSD's long-time work as a [refugee resettlement agency](#) and its [immigration legal services](#). JFSSD acted quickly when it realized the situation would continue into the future and permanent staff were needed, including those with shelter and emergency response experience.

From the beginning and continuing today, individual donors were moved to action by hearing the stories of individuals fleeing persecution and violence. They greatly responded to SDRRN's commitment to welcome asylum seekers with safety and security, and emphasis on doing so with dignity and compassion. With a tempestuous political climate, the development team avoided being overtly political or focusing on the overwhelming and negative narrative of the broken immigration system, instead focusing on the issue's bipartisan nature and the desire (or in some cases faith or moral obligation) to help humankind and the Jewish maxim of "Welcoming the Stranger."

The JFS team provided donors with regular updates via email and virtual information sessions to keep them engaged, without explicitly asking for money in every interaction. These updates shared donations' impact and also positioned JFS as experts in its field, leading to new donor and partner opportunities.

JFS discovered that the explanation of the systems change work was what resonated for foundations that wanted to know the latest on Title 42, how arrivals shifted over time and how JFS was making an impact at the local level and its national work to better respite sheltering and immigration policies. For

these organizations, having the latest in-depth information on these complex issues and updates from the front lines led to increased engagement and buy-in. Donation asks were also impactful when JFS partnered with multiple organizations across the border region to show the larger need, and as a result, potential impact.

Through connections and referrals from SDRRN partners, a wave of local and national media coverage – both about the border situation in general and SDRRN’s specific work – and a [GoFundMe page](#), donations of all sizes came in from across the country to fund the work. However, cross-country donors tended to provide short-term support and were not interested in long-term or renewed commitments.

In the beginning, in-kind support was also critical to provide clothing for incoming asylum seekers. JFSSD maintained an [Amazon wish list](#) to request ongoing new items, such as shoelaces (which are all taken away during immigration custody), underwear, socks, feminine hygiene products, baby formula and food, diapers, car seats, luggage, phone chargers and soccer balls (a child favorite!).

Diversified Funding Sources

On Wednesday, Feb. 13, 2019, California Governor Gavin Newsom signed a bill for early action budget allocation – AB 72 – which included \$5 million in emergency state funding to support qualified community-based organizations and nonprofit entities providing services to asylum-seeking families released by federal immigration authorities into San Diego.

As the only short-term shelter for migrant families in San Diego at the time, the SDRRN Migrant Shelter Services received \$2.2 million of this funding to support shelter operations through June 2019. This was critical funding, although \$500,000 more was needed through private donations to fully fund the operation at the time, with a monthly operating budget of about \$450,000 per month. These expenses included retrofitting the County-owned facility that the organization moved into in early 2019.

This marked the first time that the State of California had funded respite shelter work, in large part based on the integrated advocacy of SDRRN. Funding is provided through the California Department of Social Services, Immigration Service Branch, which has traditionally funded legal services.

Later in 2019, federal funding via Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)’s Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP) became available to assist with staffing, healthcare, food and other needs. In 2023, federal funding changed to the new Shelter and Services Program (SSP), operated by CBP.

Fundamental to JFSSD’s shelter program is its public-private partnership model, relying on a mix of federal SPP funds, support from the State of California and private philanthropy. As of April 2023, about 75% of the budget is from the federal government, 10% from the State of California and 15% from private sources, including foundations and individuals.

Public funding covers much of the operation expenses, although the reimbursement format can be restrictive in usage; cumbersome for budgeting, resource management and sustaining existing infrastructure; and can hinder expansion opportunities. Private funding allows for the flexibility the organization needs to assist with onward travel expenses, petty cash, upfront and/or custom services and more. These diversified funding streams also strengthen JFSSD’s fundraising ability by demonstrating to funders who else is participating and how they can be part of this collaborative effort.

One of the biggest challenges is continually determining the level of funding and service needed, especially with constantly changing migration patterns, and federal policy changes.

The federal and state funding are not long-term commitments, consistently keeping SDRRN Migrant Shelter Services on the precipice of not knowing how many it can serve and for how long, as well as what future staffing needs may be.

Outstanding Needs

Unfortunately, the current government funding level has failed to allow for a meaningful and sustainable investment to maintain and grow the infrastructure built in the long term. All levels of government have a stake in maintaining public health and humanitarian needs. However, JFSSD has found uncertainty in funding from all levels of government. It is clear that city, county, state and federal levels of government possess different goals and objectives in responding to immigration issues that often hinder collaboration.

San Diego is a border region where it will always be at the center of immigration. The region's needs will always exist, regardless of government leadership changes, and should have a long-term, sustainable plan to have the needed capacity. The necessary infrastructure includes additional government and/or non-governmental support to accomplish the work and be at-the-ready for future needs, as well as physical congregate spaces to provide respite and ideally longer-term care for migrants.

SDRRN Migrant Shelter Services is committed to dignified, trauma-informed care, and more infrastructure, resources and support are needed to serve all incoming asylum seekers. Many asylum seekers are extremely vulnerable and immediately need trauma-informed care. At a minimum, SDRRN Migrant Shelter Services is committed to welcoming those most in need with dignity.

SDRRN Migrant Shelter Services looks toward the day when all asylum seekers can be welcomed into safety with the dignity and care they deserve.