

Rental Assistance Pop-Up Playbook

*Developed by the Child Poverty Action Lab,
United Way of Metropolitan Dallas,
and Dallas-area partners*

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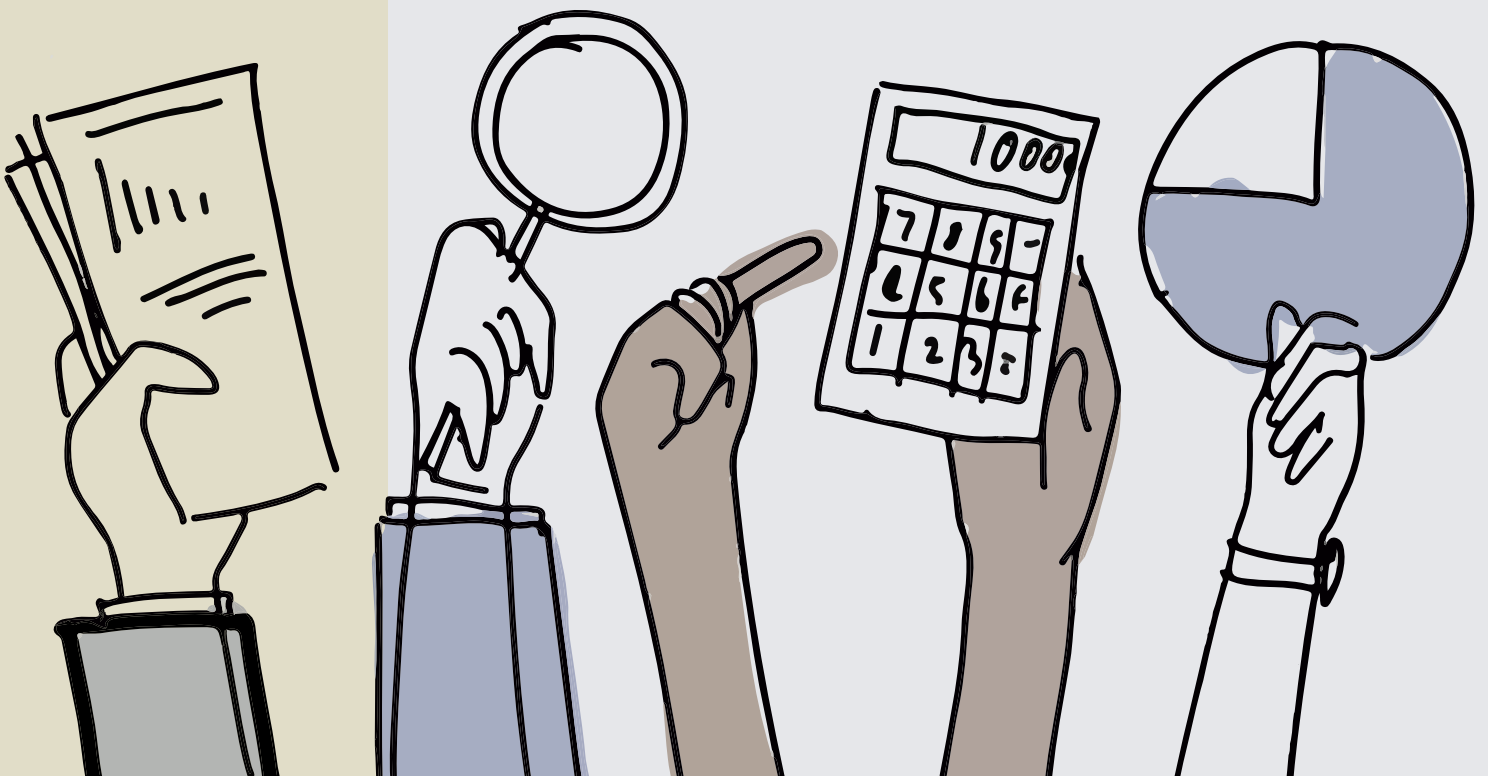


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Context

COVID-19 has gravely impacted the financial and housing stability of thousands of families in Dallas. As of August 27, 2021, 12,640 evictions have been filed in Dallas County this year, despite a national moratorium intended to halt evictions due to nonpayment of rent. According to the most recent Household Pulse Survey administered by the Census Bureau (Week 35: August 4-16, 2021), 8% (115K) of renter households in the Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington MSA expressed no confidence in their ability to make next month's rent, and 28% (388K) of renter households expressed no or slight confidence in their ability to make next month's rent. Millions of dollars in rental assistance have been made available to Dallas through federal COVID relief programs, but it's critical that we administer available funding quickly and to those most vulnerable. Rental assistance applications can be challenging to complete for renters -- applications require extensive documentation, digital literacy to navigate an online portal, and an understanding of what, exactly, is needed to qualify. Consequently, rental assistance pop-up events can be an effective tool to provide hands-on support to renters attempting to submit applications.

Vickery Meadow Case Study

United Way of Metropolitan Dallas, Catholic Charities, Faith Forward Dallas, Unite, Child Poverty Action Lab, Literacy Achieves, and Vickery Meadow Youth Development Foundation collaborated to plan and facilitate two rental assistance pop-up events in the Vickery Meadow neighborhood of northeast Dallas on Saturday, June 5th and Saturday, June 12th, 2021. Across the two Saturdays, volunteers supported 70 clients to complete rental assistance applications with Catholic Charities. The pop-up playbook that follows represents lessons learned and illustrative examples taken directly from the Vickery Meadow events.

Pre Pop-Up

Planning for a rental assistance pop-up should begin 4-6 weeks in advance of the day you plan to hold the pop-up. Key action items include:

1

Select a neighborhood to host the pop-up. Use the [Dallas County Eviction Filing Dashboard](#) (Eviction Map or Zip Code Summary tab) to identify a neighborhood where many evictions have historically been filed. You can adjust the date slider next to the map to look at eviction filing patterns during COVID only. When selecting a neighborhood, you might also consider: population density (are there many renters and apartment complexes in the area?), walkability (can clients easily walk to a pop-up location or would they have to take a bus/drive?), and potential partners (are there nonprofits, faith-based institutions, etc. in the neighborhood that you can collaborate with?). In our Vickery Meadow case study, the Vickery Meadow neighborhood and nearby Forest/Audelia intersection stood out as an eviction filing hotspot in the Dashboard.

2

Recruit/identify the following partners:



Project Management/Event Planning Partner: There are many moving parts to a rental assistance pop-up, so you'll need at least one person or organization dedicated to logistics. This person will be responsible for confirming and staying in touch with other partners, developing a run-of-show, and ensuring that all requirements are met, e.g., volunteer background checks, WiFi and technology needs, etc. In our Vickery Meadow case study, United Way of Metropolitan Dallas played this role.



Location Partner: Once you've identified a neighborhood, you'll need a partner who can host the pop-up at their facilities/grounds. An ideal location will have strong WiFi (rental assistance applications are submitted online), tables and chairs for volunteers and clients to work together on applications, indoor and outdoor space (indoor space with A/C to complete applications, and outdoor space to welcome, register, and queue clients), and ample parking for volunteers and some clients who might drive. Although not necessary, a location with computers or laptops that can be used to submit applications is a plus. In our Vickery Meadow case study, Literacy Achieves offered their property to host the pop-up, and outdoor and indoor space was used.

Also consider: some potential location partners may already have plans for a community event, like a back-to-school fair, that you could tack rental assistance support on to (instead of creating a separate, distinct event). Collaborating with another event would reduce some burden around marketing.



Rental Assistance Partner: The Rental Assistance Partner is a nonprofit, agency, government, or faith-based institution that has a rental assistance fund and application process. This partner will run the application process during the pop-up and will ultimately be responsible for reviewing applications and administering funds accordingly. The Rental Assistance Partner is invaluable during the event: staff can help troubleshoot with the application, verify which forms of documentation meet application requirements, and advise clients on next steps. For ideas on potential rental assistance partners, see the list of participating organizations in the Dallas Rental Assistance Collaborative [here](#). In our Vickery Meadow case study, Catholic Charities was the rental assistance partner.



Neighborhood Partner(s): In addition to a location partner, you may also want to recruit additional partners that are based in the neighborhood who can assist in spreading the word about the pop-up and recruiting clients to attend. Neighborhood partners might include local nonprofit organizations, faith-based institutions, and neighborhood associations — i.e., organizations or people who are trusted in the community and who have relationships with residents. In the Vickery Meadow case study, Vickery Meadow Youth Development Foundation was a neighborhood partner who helped spread the word about the pop-up and recruit clients to attend.



Volunteer Partner(s): Although the rental assistance partner will oversee the application process, they might not have enough staff capacity to support the many clients who may attend the pop-up. Volunteers will be critical in expanding the bandwidth of the rental assistance partner, and so you'll need someone who can take the lead on volunteer recruitment and training. In the Vickery Meadow case study, Faith Forward Dallas and Unite were responsible for volunteer recruitment and training — volunteers came from among the faith communities they both serve.



3

Scout the location and check for technology needs. Once you've identified a location, you'll want to walk the property to map how the pop-up will flow. You'll need space for:

Welcome and registration: a place for clients to check-in and to be initially screened for rental assistance eligibility

Queue: a line for clients to wait, if needed. If you're planning an outside queue, you might need a **tent/canopy** to shield clients from the sun or possible rain. Chairs, water, and snacks are nice touches if you think the wait will be long.

Rental assistance application station: where clients and volunteers work together to submit online applications; ideally, this is an indoor space with strong WiFi or WiFi hotspots, A/C, ample electrical outlets/extension cords/power strips to plug in laptops.

- If the partner location does not have computers, laptops, or tablets onsite, you will need to (1) ask volunteers to bring their own devices or (2) borrow devices from another partner. In our Vickery Meadow case study, United Way of Metropolitan Dallas provided Surfaces for volunteers.
- If the partner location does not have WiFi, you may be able to check-out hotspots from the local public library.
- A note on technology: due to the sensitive nature of the information that will be scanned and uploaded to the rental assistance application portal, documentation should be (1) wiped clean from all devices following the event or (2) saved to the Cloud by volunteers and then deleted after the event or (3) saved to a thumb drive that is either given to the client to keep or returned to the rental assistance partner and wiped clean after the event. Volunteers working with client information should also be background checked in advance of the event. Partners planning the pop-up should have a plan for protecting client information and ensuring that sensitive documents are not saved to devices beyond the duration of the event.

4

Determine pop-up basics. Schedule the day and time for the pop-up. Weekends are often very convenient, but you might also consider alternative days and times, such as a weekday evening, for clients who work on Saturday and Sunday. The pop-up should be at least 3 hours long, as each application can take up to an hour to complete with the client. It can also be helpful to hold two consecutive pop-up events in the same location a week apart so that clients with incomplete documentation can return to finish their application and spread the word among their friends and family that help is available. In our Vickery Meadow case study, we held two pop-ups on back-to-back Saturdays in early June 2021. Each day, the event ran from 10 AM to 3 PM.

5

Create marketing collateral. Make a basic flyer that can be disseminated to residents in the neighborhood. The flyer should provide date, time, and location of the pop-up as well as a list of required documents that a client should bring in order to complete the application (to determine the list of required documents, ask the rental assistance partner). In our Vickery Meadow case study, see sample flyer [here](#) in English and [here](#) in Spanish. You might also consider creating basic social media graphics that can be shared via Facebook, Instagram, etc. as well as yard signs (like campaign yard signs) that can be placed around the neighborhood so neighbors that are walking or driving can easily see the details.

6

Develop a detailed run-of-show. To keep partners and volunteers organized, the project management/event planning partner should create a schedule for the day of the pop-up, including partner arrival time for set-up, volunteer arrival time, client arrival time, volunteer shift change, lunch/mealtime, event end time, and breakdown time. See draft run-of-show developed by United Way of Metropolitan Dallas [here](#) that you can use for your event.

7

Spread the word about the pop-up. Post flyers about the pop-up in visible, trafficked places around the neighborhood, such as community centers, recreation centers, faith-based institutions, schools, clinics, and grocery stores. You should also contact apartment complexes in the neighborhood to let property managers know about the pop-up and to encourage them to send residents who might be falling behind on their rent. Property managers might also let you post flyers on apartment community bulletin boards. In our experience, word-of-mouth and face-to-face communication is very helpful in getting the word out about a pop-up event, so you can also call on trusted messengers in the community, such as local pastors and school principals, to help spread the word. You should begin spreading the word two weeks before the event, but plan to do a big push in the few days leading up to the event so that it's top-of-mind. In our Vickery Meadow case study, Literacy Achieves and Vickery Meadow Youth Development Foundation were instrumental in spreading the word in the neighborhood and recruiting families that they already had relationships with to attend the pop-up.

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Recruit volunteers and translators, if needed. The volunteer partner is responsible for finding volunteers who are eager and willing to work with clients to complete rental assistance applications during the pop-up. Completing one application can take up to an hour, so one volunteer during a three-hour shift might be able to help 3-5 clients. With that rate in mind, estimate the number of volunteers you might need. In the Vickery Meadow case study, Unite and Faith Forward Dallas recruited volunteers from among their member networks, and ~30 volunteers joined over the two Saturdays. Volunteers should be comfortable using technology and online applications.

- Depending on the language(s) spoken of residents in the neighborhood where you're hosting the pop-up, you may also need to recruit translators to assist volunteers. In the Vickery Meadow case study, there were several Spanish translators on-hand, and some volunteers even called friends to help translate in other languages.

- Additional volunteers will likely be needed for event support such as line management, assigning ticket numbers to clients, signing in, and directing late arrival volunteers and other various event-related tasks.

9

Run background checks on volunteers. Completing rental assistance applications requires submission of sensitive, personal information, such as identification cards, pay stubs, bank statements, etc., so volunteers should have a background check before being cleared to work with clients. In the Vickery Meadow case study, United Way of Metropolitan Dallas ran a national criminal background check with a social security number search and multi-county search for volunteers in advance of the event.

10

Train volunteers. Plan a virtual training session for volunteers the week before the pop-up event. Training can be asynchronous (meaning the volunteer completes the training by watching videos on their own time) or synchronous (meaning all the volunteers complete the training at the same time, via a Zoom meeting or other communication platform). Some asynchronous training videos you can use are listed below, but it's also a good idea to bring everyone together virtually so that the rental assistance partner can do a live demo of the application portal and take Q&A from volunteers.

- [Eviction Prevention Overview](#) (33 minutes)
- [Rental Assistance Process Overview](#) (26 minutes) —Note: your Rental Assistance Partner will likely have a specific process that volunteers will need to be trained on.
- [Helpfinder Training](#) (15 minutes) — This training will help volunteers address other needs that a client might have, e.g., food security, etc.

11

Identify alternative resources to direct a client to who doesn't qualify for rental assistance. The rental assistance that is currently being administered by local agencies and nonprofits comes from COVID-19 relief funding through the federal government and may require that the client have some COVID impact, e.g., job loss or income reduction due to COVID-19. Some clients who attend the pop-up might be behind on rent for reasons that are not connected to COVID-19, and, therefore, may not be eligible for rental assistance. With that in mind, you should consider alternative resources to direct the client to so that they don't leave the pop-up without some next steps. For example, many faith-based institutions have raised their own assistance funds to help people in need and can set their own criterion for administering the funds. Consequently, a faith-based institution might be able to assist a client with rental assistance who is not eligible for COVID-19 relief funds.

For clients who don't qualify for rental assistance at the pop-up, volunteers can also use online resource banks like [HelpFinder.org](#) to search for other resources that might be helpful to the client.

12

Create a confirmation coupon for clients to give to their landlords. During the pop-up, clients will (hopefully!) be able to complete and submit their rental assistance application. Once they have submitted their application, it will take five days to two weeks for the rental assistance partner to review the application and process payment to the landlord. Given the lag between application submission and payment, it's important to signal to the landlord that rental assistance is forthcoming so that they do not begin eviction proceedings against the client. With that in mind, work with the rental assistance partner to create a "confirmation coupon" or other official notification that the client can physically hand to their landlord that says something to the effect of, "(Name) has successfully submitted a rental assistance application to (rental assistance partner) in the amount of \$(amount). We are processing the application and will notify you and the tenant within X number of days as to the status of the application and payment. If you have any questions, please contact (name) at (phone number). Since rental assistance will be coming soon, we ask that you do not initiate eviction proceedings against the tenant at this time."

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Order food for volunteers, if needed. If volunteers are working all day or during a meal, you might order food/a boxed meal for them. If you don't have a budget for food, you might encourage volunteers to pack snacks or a meal so they have some sustenance, as a day-long pop-up can be quite demanding, especially in summer heat. At the very least, you should have water on-hand for volunteers and for clients, especially if they will be standing and/or waiting outside. In our Vickery Meadow case study, there were two shifts for volunteers, a morning shift and an afternoon shift, but some volunteers and partner staff were on-hand all day, and so lunch was ordered and provided by United Way of Metropolitan Dallas mid-day.



During Pop-Up

Arrive early to set-up. Plan to arrive 30-minutes to an hour before volunteers will arrive to situate the tables and chairs, check technology - WiFi, turn on devices and log in, etc., and place directional signage notifying clients of the event and where to go.

Refresh volunteers on how to assist clients. Once volunteers have arrived and checked-in, the rental assistance partner should remind volunteers about how to use the application portal and what documentation is required. This is also a good time to answer questions and point out common pitfalls/issues that volunteers might encounter.

Float to support volunteers and answer questions. Trained volunteers will sit one-on-one with clients to scan documents and complete applications, but the rental assistance partner staff should plan to float among volunteers/clients to answer questions, troubleshoot, and ensure that applications are being correctly completed and submitted. Navigating the application portal can be tricky and confusing, especially the first time or two, so partner staff should expect to be more hands-on at the outset of the event. As volunteers become increasingly comfortable with the application portal, they should need less support.



Post Pop-Up

Send a thank-you to all volunteers. Let your volunteers know you appreciate their time and energy! In the thank-you note, you can also share other upcoming rental assistance events that they might volunteer for -- now that they're trained and comfortable with the rental assistance application portal, they can continue putting their skills to use. If volunteers exchange personal contact information with the clients, they should follow-up with clients in the week or two after the pop-up to check-in on the status of their application and whether or not they need additional support to submit requirements for assistance.

Follow-up with clients and their landlords. This is a critical step for the rental assistance partner! A good turnout at a pop-up is encouraging, but what matters most is getting funds quickly to the landlord so that the client is current on rent and can stay safely and securely in their home. Applications should be reviewed as soon as possible after the pop-up so that partner staff can communicate to clients and landlords what additional documentation might be needed, if they qualify for assistance, and when to expect funds will be disseminated. In our Vickery Meadow case study, Catholic Charities reserved time for staff to process the applications in the days following the event.

Direct clients who didn't qualify for rental assistance to alternative resources. If a client doesn't qualify for rental assistance, partner staff or volunteers should follow-up with the client to let them know they didn't qualify and to direct them to another organization, faith-based institution, etc. that might be able to help. Staff and volunteers can also ask about and attempt to address other needs that might be able to free up a household's financial resources for rent, such as food/groceries, etc.



Contacts

For thought partnership as you're planning your pop-up event, feel free to reach out to the following:

Name	Organization	Email	Phone	Expertise
Almas Muscatwalla	Faith Forward Dallas	almasmuscatwalla13@gmail.com	214.448.8535	Recruiting volunteers, particularly from the faith community
Ashley Brundage	United Way of Metropolitan Dallas	abrundage@unitedwaydallas.org	214.978.0023	Leading a team of partners to plan and execute a pop-up; marshalling institutional resources to support a pop-up
Ashley Flores	Child Poverty Action Lab	ashley@childpovertyactionlab.org	469.767.2580	Using eviction data to identify a location for a pop-up
Cara Dudley	United Way of Metropolitan Dallas	cdudley@unitedwaydallas.org	972.533.9751	Event logistics; volunteer communication
Kaylee Janes	Catholic Charities	kjanes@ccdallas.org	972.246.6048	Rental assistance application, process, and qualifications
Martha Stowe	Vickery Meadow Youth Development Foundation	martha@vmydf.com	214.443.7985	Securing a location; getting the word out to residents
Paola Martinez	United Way of Metropolitan Dallas	pmartinez@unitedwaydallas.org	469.949.8510	Event logistics, recruiting rental assistance partner
Jonathan Walls	Unite	jonathan@unitethechurch.org	972.689.8005	Recruiting and training volunteers, particularly from the faith community; using VOMO and HelpFinder