Section 4 Case Study: Fifth Avenue Committee, New York

Enterprise is a leading advocate for the Section 4 Capacity Building for Community Development and Affordable Housing (Section 4) program. Over the past 10 years, Enterprise has distributed approximately $80 million in Section 4 grants and loans to more than 900 local nonprofit organizations across 48 states and Puerto Rico. These organizations develop affordable housing, finance small businesses, revitalize commercial corridors, and help address local health care, child care, education and safety needs.

Section 4 is the only federal program that is exclusively focused on increasing the effectiveness of these organizations. Through grants, loans, training and guidance, Section 4 provides local organizations with the staffing, program development and financial resources to maximize the impact of the services they provide and ensure the long-term sustainability of their investments.

With Section 4, organizations develop core skills that strengthen their ability to implement HUD programs, raise capital for community development and affordable housing, coordinate on cross-programmatic, place-based approaches, and facilitate knowledge sharing.

Spotlight on Section 4 Grantee: Fifth Avenue Committee

Fifth Avenue Committee, Inc. (FAC) is a community-based organization in south Brooklyn, New York. FAC advances economic and social justice by building vibrant, diverse communities. Established in 1978, FAC works to transform the lives of over 5,000 low- and moderate-income New Yorkers annually. To achieve its mission, FAC develops and manages affordable housing and community facilities, creates economic opportunities by promoting job training and access to affordable small business loans, organizes residents and workers, offers student-centered adult education, and combats displacement caused by gentrification.

To date, the organization has developed more than 800 units of affordable housing and revitalized more than two dozen commercial storefronts, representing over $350 million in direct investments.

Local challenge

Superstorm Sandy caused significant challenges for Fifth Avenue Committee and the communities it serves. Ten of its properties sustained extensive damage, including serious first-floor and basement flooding, damaged and destroyed electrical and HVAC systems and boilers, and exterior damage to walls, fences and roofing. Residents of FAC’s supportive housing developments – including many seniors, people with disabilities and those with special needs – faced displacement, health issues and the lack of basic housing services.

After addressing its immediate needs, FAC sought to make sustained changes to ensure that it – and other housing organizations – would be better prepared for future emergencies and disasters. While identifying the need for change may be easy, implementing change can pose a significant challenge. Innovative approaches to weatherproofing and resiliency often require regulatory changes or sustained investment beyond the temporary assistance that follows after a disaster. Without adequate coordination and communication among local governments, industries and organizations, recovery efforts can be duplicative, haphazard and inefficient.
How Section 4 funds were used

In 2013, FAC used $100,000 in Section 4 funds to directly address the challenges caused by Superstorm Sandy and the need for sustained, well-coordinated emergency and disaster responses. Section 4 funds were used to:

• Work with Enterprise to complete a Resiliency Capital Needs Assessment for six FAC multifamily housing properties and map out much-needed capital retrofits, including backup generators and emergency lights, creating retaining walls, elevating electrical systems to higher ground, and developing and communicating emergency evacuation plans with residents. The reports have aided FAC in mapping out their resilience priorities for their most vulnerable buildings, as well as informing their emergency planning efforts for the properties.

• Partner with Enterprise, New York University (NYU) and the American Institute of Architects (AIA) on a three-building pilot program to develop cost-effective retrofit options for multifamily housing in New York City.

• Create disaster kits with basic emergency supplies, including backup equipment, emergency contacts and critical information on each resident, and maps of each building and the surrounding area.

• Develop and implement disaster-readiness training programs for tenants and building superintendents.

• Support community efforts to increase resilience by participating in community-wide convenings, workshops and networks.

How Section 4 funds enhanced capacity of organization

Enterprise organized a learning collaborative of 12 affordable housing providers affected by Hurricane Sandy, such as FAC, to identify shared goals and challenges in an effort to develop guidelines for disaster preparedness. Ultimately, the partnership resulted in the creation of new tools that have been made available to affordable housing organizations across the nation.

The process of the Resiliency Capital Needs Assessment greatly increased FAC’s capacity to identify and develop plans to meet physical resiliency needs. Similarly, the process of creating disaster kits has bolstered FAC’s relationships with its tenants, providing a more precise knowledge of their specific needs. Adding to the organization’s sustainability, this increased awareness of both tenant and infrastructure needs will allow FAC to pursue tailored funding sources and leverage further implementation funds to support their continued resilience planning.

FAC leveraged this experience to apply for a grant from the KRESGE Foundation to develop a coalition of residents and organizations to address efforts to reduce the greenhouse gases that contribute to climate change, adapt to the changes already underway and foster social inclusion and cohesion.

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