

A sunset scene with a bright sun in the center, casting a glow over a city and mountains. The sky transitions from yellow to orange to blue.

**LIFT TO RISE**

# **OUR COVID-19 RESPONSE REPORT**

**FROM EMERGENCY RESPONSE TO PERMANENT SOLUTIONS**

December 11, 2020

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## WORDS TO LIFT BY

Dear Friends,

In this time of tremendous uncertainty, we are honored and heartbroken to bear witness to the fortitude and persistence of community residents: women head of households, single parents, and families weathering the devastating downturn of what was always an inequitable economic structure. We are grateful for the continued collective will—the heart and grit—of local organizations that continue pushing forward solutions to address the disproportionate economic impacts of the public health and financial crises. We say often at Lift To Rise that this work feels like we are triaging oxygen. Our shared interventions have provided substantial relief, and for this we are incredibly grateful. But this is temporary and insufficient for the scope of the crisis, and more truthfully, the ongoing reality we face. It is our hope that the collective strength we have forged this year will give us the courage to face the coming months with an unrelenting commitment to a just and fair future for everyone who calls the Coachella Valley home. To further this vision, this report offers insight and a reflection point for readers looking to understand a small part of this continuing moment of precarity for our community, as well as an opportunity for greater collaboration and engagement in the difficult work ahead.

We remain committed to working, together, toward the highest horizon of belief: that radical transformation is not only possible, but swiftly underway.

With Love and belief,

Heather Vaikona & Araceli Palafox-Parks, Lift To Rise

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# I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since March 2020, Lift To Rise has convened and implemented two emergency assistance interventions to support the needs of Coachella Valley residents economically impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Our collective strategy was to ensure that all families had equal access to information and community resources, while simultaneously providing emergency relief to families and residents in our region. During this time, Lift To Rise has aggregated and disbursed more than \$12 million in regional resources in the form of direct cash and rental assistance, helping nearly 8,000 households in eastern Riverside County stay housed and pay for food, utilities, childcare, and other vital expenses. This level of regional impact was made possible by a core group of community institutions like the Desert Healthcare District, the Regional Access Project, First 5 Riverside, and Inland Empire Health Plan, who provided the initial funding to anchor our collaborative response.

Application data from both programs – the Economic Protection Plan (EPP) & Support Fund cash assistance program and the United Lift Rental Assistance Program – reveals that the economic crisis from the pandemic has been widespread and particularly devastating for low-income, Hispanic/Latino families who rent and workers in the hospitality/tourism and agriculture industries. At least 60% of assistance recipients from both programs are out of work due to the pandemic, jeopardizing their ability to pay for basic needs like housing and food. EPP Support Fund application data also suggests that a sizable share of cash assistance recipients are undocumented and thus have been excluded from other public assistance programs even during the unprecedented pandemic emergency.

The volume of applications for assistance highlights the underlying inadequate and inequitable availability of affordable housing and economic opportunity in the region that left residents unprepared for the economic shock of the pandemic. The success of our collaborative efforts speaks to the strength of our combined partnership and Lift To Rise's capacity in the Coachella Valley to convene and facilitate regional collaboration. This COVID-19 Response Report will describe Lift To Rise's collaborative emergency response, highlight notable data findings, and offer recommendations for permanent solutions to improve economic opportunity and increase the availability of affordable housing for Coachella Valley residents.

## II. BACKGROUND

The sudden spread of the COVID-19 infection, and subsequent economic shutdown, had devastating impacts on Coachella Valley workers and families. With the disruption of major economic drivers of our region, including the Coachella Valley Music and Arts festival, the Stagecoach festival, and tennis and golf sporting events, jobs, revenue, and business experienced significant losses. Approximately 34,000 jobs in the sales and retail, food service, and personal care and service sectors alone were lost, representing 69% of all projected job losses for the Coachella Valley.<sup>1</sup>



The Coachella Valley's service-based economy has created severe wealth inequality, with few investment vehicles to address this reality, and limited infrastructure to respond to economic shocks. Underemployment, seasonal and temporary part-time work, low and stagnant wages, inadequate transit, health, and affordable housing infrastructure are some of the factors that made Coachella Valley residents especially vulnerable to the immediate health and economic impacts of the pandemic. As the novel coronavirus spread in early March of 2020, existing social and economic divisions deepened and conditions for low-income residents quickly worsened.

Pre-COVID, nearly half of our residents lived in or near poverty and more than half of renter households were rent-burdened.<sup>2</sup> Widespread job losses as a result of the economic shutdown left many of these households in a more precarious financial situation, threatening the economic well-being of families across our valley.

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<sup>1</sup> Coachella Valley Economic Partnership (2020). "Employment Impact of COVID-19 Coachella Valley". Retrieved from: [https://gcvcc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/CVEP-Employment-Impact-Report\\_Final\\_05-04-20.pdf](https://gcvcc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/CVEP-Employment-Impact-Report_Final_05-04-20.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> United States Census Bureau (2018). American Community Survey, 2018-2013 5-Year Estimates, Tables B25070 and S1701



## ABOUT LIFT TO RISE

Lift To Rise formed to catalyze a regional collective impact model for which we serve as the backbone organization. In January of 2020, we formally announced our 2020-2022 Action Plan to radically increase housing stability and advance economic opportunity for all Coachella Valley families. As the backbone organization driving our regional collective impact strategy, Lift To Rise coordinates over 50 private, public, and nonprofit partners in two collaborative action networks (CANs), each the result of deep engagement with a broad base of Latino, low-income, and other marginalized residents who cited housing affordability and economic constriction as central forces of instability in their lives, supported by both extensive empirical data and the insight of established non-profit leaders. Lift to Rise builds and staffs the infrastructure and strategies necessary to drive the collective vision and mobilize resources so we and our partners can leverage and coordinate our respective strengths to make possible impacts we could not achieve separately.



### III. OUR COVID-19 RESPONSE

In the time of COVID-19, Lift To Rise has convened and operated a regional platform to establish the collaborative deployment of public and private resources, while simultaneously holding a community-driven process.

Across the last year, our community engagement strategy has evolved from informing, to engaging and participating, to now co-creating. In the early stage of our COVID-19 response, we successfully codified a valley-wide resident feedback loop to guide the design and implementation of our collaborative work. Through this process, residents shared key issues with which they need immediate and long-term support. Our work during this time has offered a window of opportunity to learn about the phenomenal sacrifices that residents are making to cope with their current and persistent housing and economic situations. By working with residents and actors in the system, we have been able to deliver more than \$12 million in resources to our community and other local community-based organizations. As we advance our work, we expect to continue to shift systems to better deliver resources in a more equitable manner.





**Figure 1. COVID-19 Response Summary**

	<b>Funds Disbursed and Households Assisted (as of December 2020)</b>	<b>Partners &amp; Contributors</b>
<b>Economic Protection Plan &amp; Support Fund</b>	<b>\$1,600,000</b> in emergency cash assistance to <b>5,050 households</b> across the Coachella Valley	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Riverside County</li> <li>• Riverside County Supervisor V. Manuel Perez, 4th District</li> <li>• Desert Healthcare District &amp; Foundation</li> <li>• The Regional Access Project Foundation</li> <li>• First 5 Riverside</li> <li>• United Way of the Desert</li> <li>• Wells Fargo</li> <li>• TODEC Legal Center</li> <li>• Visión y Compromiso</li> <li>• AT&amp;T</li> <li>• US Bank</li> <li>• Inland Empire Health Plan</li> <li>• First Republic Bank</li> <li>• Next Era Energy</li> <li>• Inland Empire Community Foundation</li> <li>• Mission Asset Fund</li> <li>• Leadership Counsel for Justice &amp; Accountability</li> <li>• Greater Palm Springs Convention &amp; Visitors Bureau</li> <li>• The Annie E. Casey Foundation</li> </ul>
<b>United Lift Rental Assistance Program</b>	<b>\$10,179,712</b> in rental assistance to <b>2,926 households</b> in Eastern Riverside County	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Riverside County</li> <li>• Riverside County Supervisor V. Manuel Perez, 4th District</li> <li>• Riverside County Department of Housing, Homelessness &amp; Workforce Solutions</li> <li>• Desert Healthcare District &amp; Foundation</li> <li>• The Regional Access Project Foundation</li> <li>• Consejo de Federaciones Mexicanas</li> <li>• Inland SoCal United Way</li> <li>• Coachella Valley Housing Coalition</li> <li>• National CORE &amp; Hope For Housing</li> </ul>
<b>Permanent Catalytic Investments</b>	<b>\$750,000</b> in seed funding for catalytic investments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low Income Investment Fund</li> <li>• Rural Community Assistance Corporation</li> <li>• Desert Healthcare District</li> <li>• The Center for Community Investment</li> <li>• Riverside County</li> </ul>

## ECONOMIC PROTECTION PLAN & SUPPORT FUND

The Coachella Valley Economic Protection Plan and Support Fund was a public-private coordinated strategy to address the short- and long-term challenges of COVID-19 and the ensuing economic shutdown. In the face of the pandemic, the Plan offered a framework for regional collaboration to support Coachella Valley families affected by COVID-19.

The goal of the plan was to connect all eligible Coachella Valley families and residents to every current available form of public assistance in order to keep our neighbors housed, fed, healthy, and secure. In a matter of days Lift to Rise developed a comprehensive resource platform with Spanish and English resources in the areas of housing, health, food, and employment. To address accessibility issues, we built off our existing telephone and text capabilities to establish a central phone and digital network supported by dozens of volunteers. With the help of more than 90 volunteers, we supported more than 3,000 households in getting connected to resources between March and June.

With many families living on the brink of economic collapse, the goal of the Support Fund was to distribute emergency cash relief to as many Coachella Valley households economically impacted by the outbreak of COVID-19 and the ensuing economic shutdown as possible. Resources were raised by Lift to Rise and disbursed to multiple organizations who put in hundreds of hours to provide direct support to residents, including the United Way of the Desert, Visión y Compromiso, and TODEC Legal Center.



## UNITED LIFT RENTAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

The United Lift Rental Assistance Program is a coordinated effort between Riverside County, Inland SoCal United Way, and Lift To Rise to keep Riverside County families and residents housed by providing one-time direct rental assistance to households that are unable to meet their rent obligations due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

The United Lift program launched in June of 2020, after a significant allocation of federal funds by Riverside County – \$22 million from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act and \$9 million from the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program – making it one of the most generous emergency rental assistance programs in the state in terms of funding per capita. With the additional CDBG funding made available by Riverside County, we expect to be able to support an additional 936 households in eastern Riverside County through the spring of 2021.

Other key community institutions such as the Desert Healthcare District and the Regional Access Project Foundation have contributed critical resources to support Lift To Rise’s efforts in eastern Riverside County; without these forms of support this work would not have been possible.

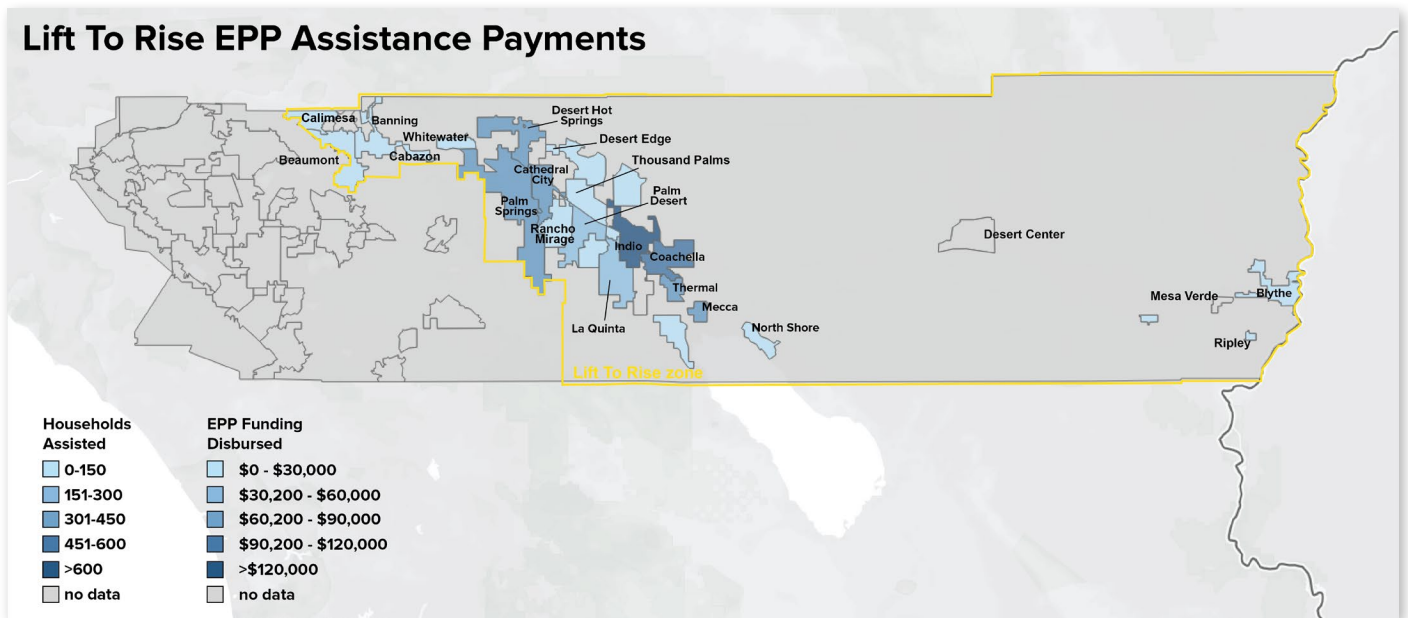


## IV. KEY FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

### ECONOMIC PROTECTION PLAN & SUPPORT FUND

Over the course of the EPP & Support Fund program, Lift To Rise and its partners disbursed \$200 direct cash payments to Coachella Valley households financially impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Data from the Support Fund reveals that the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic in late March and early April 2020 disproportionately impacted the Coachella Valley's low-income, Hispanic/Latino families and workers in the hospitality and agriculture industries. The map below shows the geographic distribution of the cash assistance payments throughout the Coachella Valley.

Figure 2. Geographic Distribution of Households Assisted

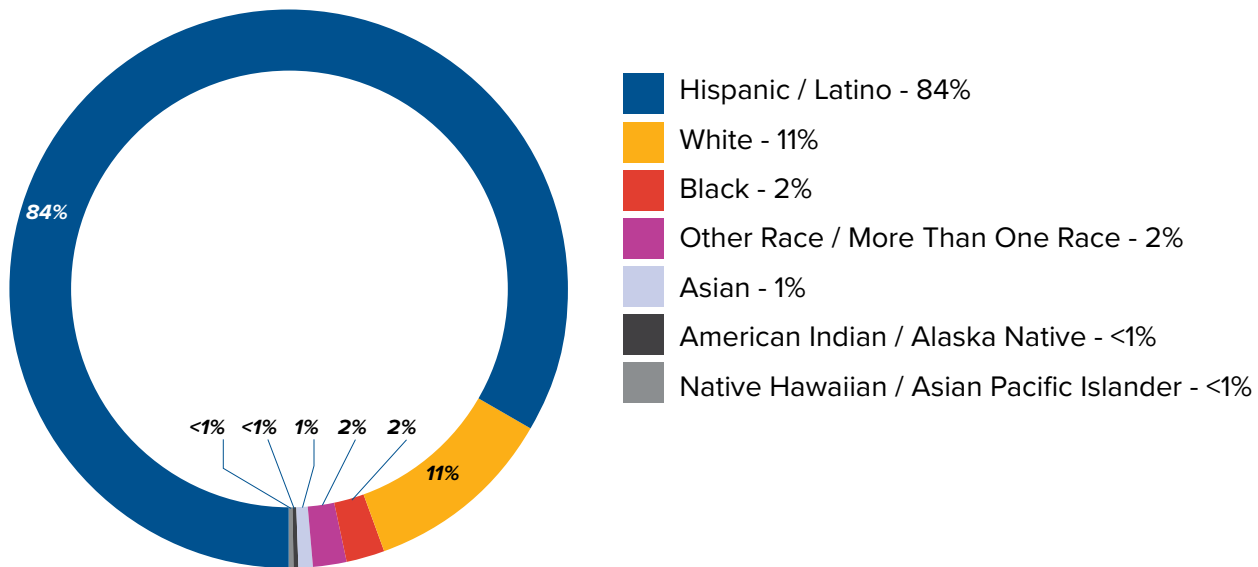


Nearly every (96%) recipient reported earning less than 80% of area median income (AMI), with 57% considered extremely low-income, or earning less than 30% of AMI. And while 51% of the Coachella Valley's residents identify as Hispanic/Latino, 84% of Support Fund cash assistance recipients identify as Hispanic/Latino. Families with young children appear to also be disproportionately impacted, with 39% of recipients living in a household with at least one child under the age of five.

**Figure 3. Income Levels of Funding Recipients**

Income Level	% of Funding Recipients
Extremely Low Income (Earning less than 30% Area Median Income)	57%
Very Low Income (Earning between 30% and 50% Area Median Income)	26%
Low Income (Earning between 50% and 80% Area Median Income)	13%
Not Low Income (Earning more than 80% Area Median Income)	4%

**Figure 4. Race/Ethnicity of Funding Recipients**



The data suggests that the pandemic severely disrupted the Coachella Valley economy, with 60% of recipients reporting being out of work due to COVID-19. Two of the Coachella Valley’s key economic sectors – the hospitality and agricultural industries – were disproportionately impacted, with one in four (27%) recipients reporting working in restaurants, bars, hotels, resorts, or casinos, and nearly one in five recipients (19%) reporting working in agricultural roles. Nearly three quarters (73%) of recipients said they have lost income either due to a business closure (28%), a temporary layoff/suspension (27%), or cut wages/hours (18%) as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Given the pandemic’s unexpectedly lengthy duration and continued economic toll, it is likely that many employers who originally intended to reduce hours or suspend employees temporarily have since permanently laid off those workers.

**Figure 5. Top Occupation Types of Funding Recipients**

Occupation Type	% Funding Recipients
Food Service / Hospitality / Hotel / Casino	27%
Agriculture	19%
Cleaning / Housekeeping / Gardening	9%
Sales / Retail	7%
Education / Legal / Community Service	5%

The Support Fund disbursements were unrestricted cash payments and the data shows that recipients generally planned to use the assistance for basic life expenses like food and housing. When asked about how they would use the \$200, nearly half (47%) of recipients included food-related responses, half (50%) mentioned utilities or other bills, and over a quarter (27%) cited rent or housing in their responses.

**Figure 6. Most Commonly Stated Words for Planned Use of EPP Funds**

Words	% of Funding Recipients
Utilities / Bills / Gas / Electric / Water / Internet	50%
Food / Groceries / Meals	47%
Rent / Housing / Landlord / Mortgage	27%
Child / Baby / Child / Daycare / Diapers / Formula / School Supplies	7%
Hygiene Products / Soap / Toothpaste / Shampoo / Cleaning Supplies	2%

While the Support Fund application did not ask applicants to provide their citizenship status, other data collected from the applications suggests that the program assisted hundreds of undocumented Coachella Valley residents. Approximately 550 recipients stated on the application that they had previously been denied federal funding due to their citizenship status, which, due to fear of deportation, is likely an undercount of the true number. Low rates of public assistance benefits receipt combined with high rates of poverty and unemployment also suggest the presence of undocumented residents, who are often ineligible for public benefits. For example, while 60% of funding recipients reported being unemployed, only 15% reported receiving Unemployment Insurance benefits. And, while 83% of recipients are considered either extremely or very low-income, only 24% reported receiving CalFresh food stamp benefits, which was the most common type of public assistance among recipients. This gap in public assistance is especially concerning given that almost half (47%) of recipients said they would use their emergency cash for food.

**Figure 7. Top Types of Public Assistance Received by Funding Recipients**

Type of Public Assistance	% of Funding Recipients
None	35%
CalFresh (EBT / SNAP)	24%
Free & Reduced Price School Meals	23%
Unemployment Insurance	15%
WIC	12%
CARE / FERA	9%
SSI	6%
CalWorks (TANF)	6%
LIHEAP	4%

In addition to low rates of public benefits receipt, the EPP Support Fund cash assistance grantees reported several past barriers to access to public assistance, which again reveals that the program is helping support undocumented residents who traditionally struggle to obtain benefits. For example, 23% percent of grantees said they have faced barriers meeting eligibility requirements, 19% cited a fear of being considered a public charge, 14% cited a language barrier, and 13% said they didn't feel safe sharing personal information. The fact that hundreds of such applicants were able to successfully apply for and receive cash assistance via EPP suggests that the program was particularly attuned to the circumstances and needs of this often-overlooked portion of Coachella Valley residents.

**Figure 8. Common Barriers to Receiving Public Assistance Among Funding Recipients**

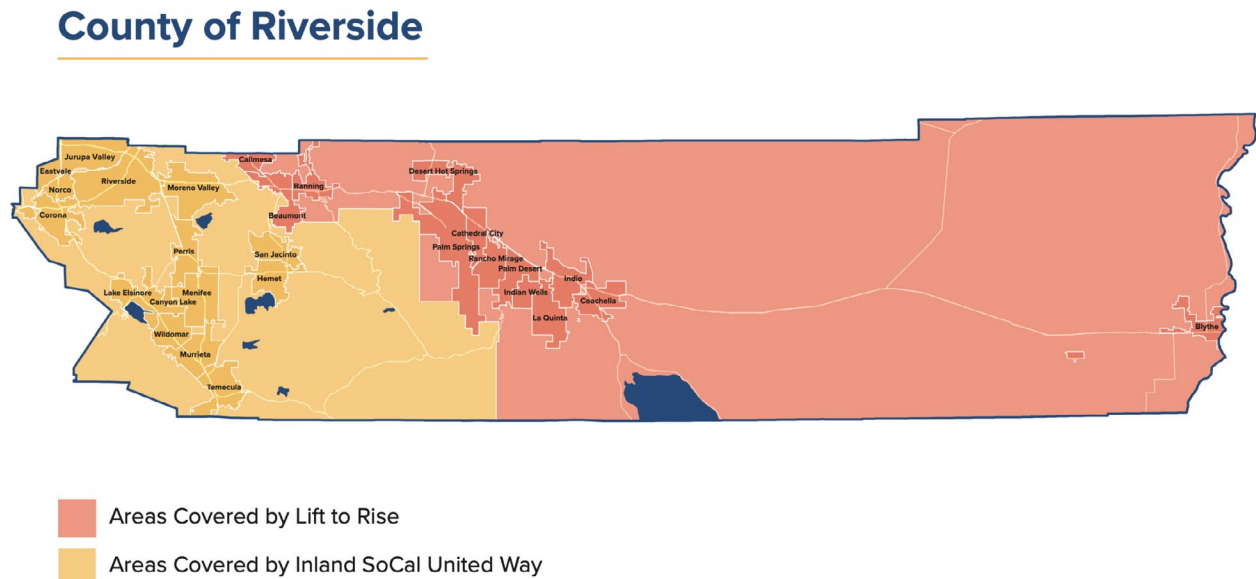
Past Barriers to Public Assistance	% of Funding Recipients
Did not meeting eligibility requirements	23%
Feared being considered a public charge	19%
Language barrier	14%
Did not feel safe sharing personal information	13%

## UNITED LIFT RENTAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Over the course of the United Lift Rental Assistance Program, Lift To Rise disbursed \$6,552,000 in CARES Act funding to 1,872 households in the Coachella Valley and eastern Riverside County.<sup>3</sup> The data collected from the rental assistance applications reveals that the COVID-19 pandemic has taken a severe economic toll on Coachella Valley renters, especially low-income Hispanic/Latino families, many of whom were already in precarious housing situations.

According to the data, 71% of approved applicants are considered either extremely or very low-income (earning less than 50% of AMI) based on their 2019 income, which means that even before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic these households were financially vulnerable. At the time of application, two-thirds (66%) of approved applicants said they were out of work due to COVID-19 and 78% said that they would not be able to pay the following month's rent, highlighting the urgency of the United Lift program.

**Figure 10.** Geographical Division of Implementing Organizations



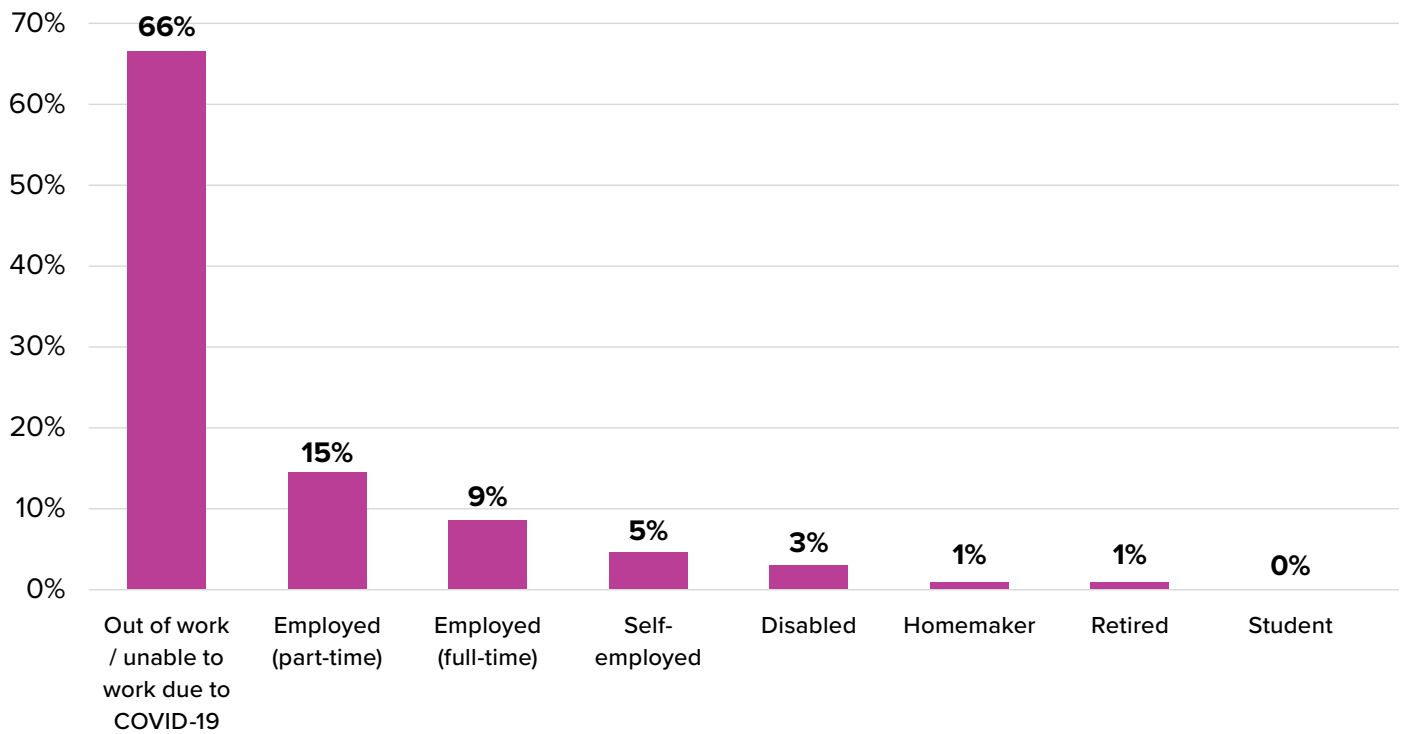
<sup>3</sup> The United Lift Rental Assistance Program also disbursed funding to households in western Riverside County via Inland SoCal United Way. This report refers only to households that received assistance within Lift to Rise's catchment zone. Each household assisted received assistance in the form of \$3,500 disbursed to their landlord or property owner to cover past, current, and future rent.



**Figure 10. Income Levels of Approved Applicants**

Income Level	% of Approved Applicants
Extremely Low Income (Earning less than 30% Area Median Income)	38%
Very Low Income (Earning between 30% and 50% Area Median Income)	33%
Low Income (Earning between 50% and 80% Area Median Income)	20%
Not Low Income (Earning more than 80% Area Median Income)	10%

**Figure 11. Employment Status of Approved Applicants**



United Lift provided relief to renter households with growing debt to their landlords and at risk of eviction – applicants who received rental assistance owed an average of \$1,585.54 of unpaid rent and over a quarter (26%) were at least three months behind on rent payments. Additionally, 9% of approved applicants stated that they had already received an eviction notice from their landlord in the past three months, which again highlights United Lift’s role in keeping Coachella Valley residents housed during the pandemic.

However, long-term solutions to keeping low-income Coachella Valley families housed must complement the United Lift program – among approved applicants, the average reported rent price is \$1,121.66 per month, which means that for the average approved applicant, the \$3,500 rental assistance payment will cover unpaid rent plus approximately two months of future rent. As the pandemic continues to spread, Coachella Valley renters will need additional support beyond the United Lift program.

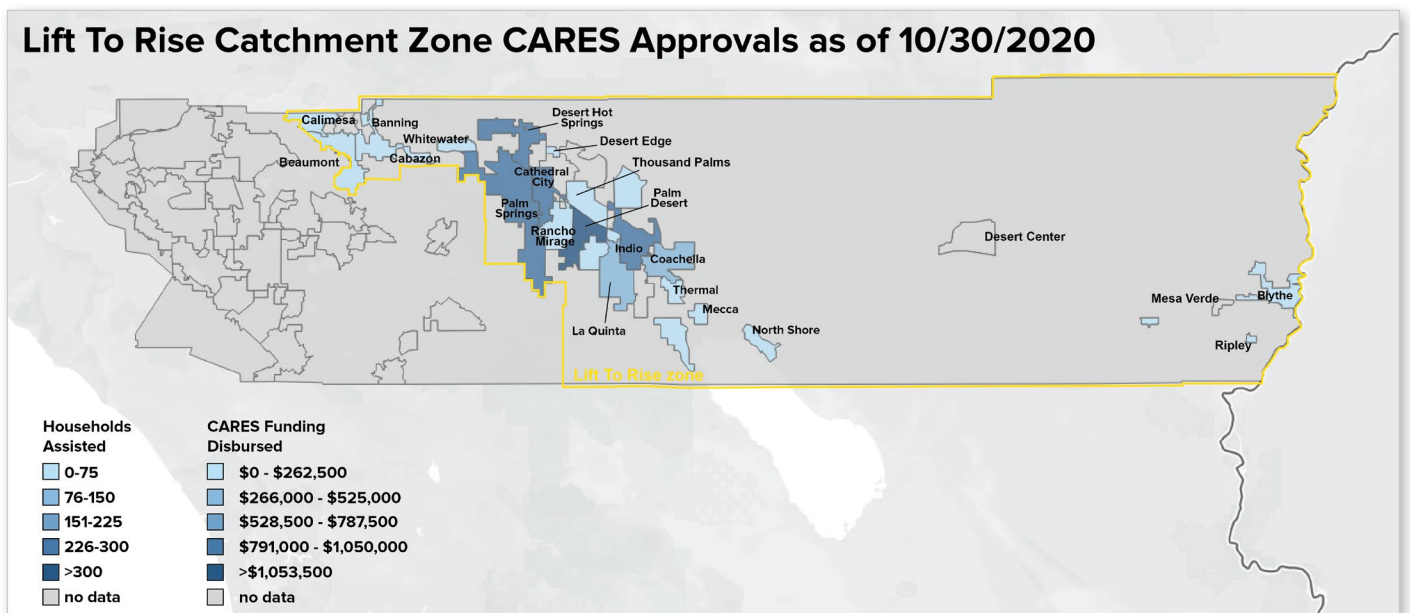
**Figure 12.** Average Rent Price, Unpaid Rent Balance, and Other Debt Among Approved Applicants

Average:	Dollars (\$)
Rent Price	\$1,121.66
Unpaid Rent Balance	\$1,585.54
Other Debt	\$6,048.73

The data also shows that applicants who received rental assistance disproportionately identify as Hispanic/Latino and as women. While 51% of the Coachella Valley’s population identifies as Hispanic/Latino, almost 60% of the applicants who received rental assistance in the Lift to Rise zone identify as such. Even more disproportional was the gender breakdown of approved applicants, 65% of which identify as women. The pandemic appears to have made it particularly difficult for Coachella Valley residents, especially families headed by single mothers, to pay their rent – the data shows that 57% of applicants have school-aged children in their households, 45% of approved applicants are single parents, and that 86% of those single parents are women.

Lift to Rise disbursed rental assistance payments to households in cities and unincorporated areas across the Coachella Valley. The places with the highest number of households assisted are Palm Desert (305), Palm Springs (286), Indio (273), Desert Hot Springs (260), and Cathedral City (239). The places with the highest amount of funding per capita are Thermal (\$141.65 per resident), Desert Hot Springs (\$31.51 per resident), Whitewater (\$21.52 per resident), Palm Springs (\$20.63 per resident), and Palm Desert (\$20.04 per resident).

**Figure 13.** Geographic Distribution of Households Assisted



**Figure 14.** Households Assisted by City / Census Designated Place

City/CDP	Households Assisted	CARES Funding Disbursed
Palm Desert	305	\$1,067,500
Palm Springs	286	\$1,001,000
Indio	273	\$955,500
Desert Hot Springs	260	\$910,000
Cathedral City	239	\$836,500
Coachella	137	\$479,500
La Quinta	113	\$395,500
Thermal	55	\$192,000
Banning	36	\$126,000
Mecca	31	\$108,500
Beaumont	30	\$105,000
Bermuda Dunes	29	\$101,500
Rancho Mirage	19	\$66,500
Blythe	18	\$63,000
Thousand Palms	8	\$28,000
Indian Wells	7	\$24,500
Whitewater	6	\$21,000
Cabazon	5	\$17,500
Calimesa	2	\$7,000
Indio Hills	2	\$7,000
Desert Edge	1	\$3,500
North Shore	1	\$3,500
Oasis	1	\$3,500
Ripley	1	\$3,500
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1872</b>	<b>\$6,552,000</b>

The United Lift data also reveals that nearly three in ten (29%) of those who received rental assistance work or worked in the service/hospitality industry including restaurants, bars, hotels, resorts, and casinos. This finding again highlights how the COVID-19 pandemic has severely disrupted the service/hospitality industry which is a major job source and economic driver in the Coachella Valley. Not only do workers in this industry generally earn low wages, making them more susceptible to housing insecurity, but the industry has largely been shut down due to restrictions aimed at preventing the spread of COVID-19. Furthermore, many workers from this industry have been deemed essential, along with healthcare workers and farm workers, who represent 9% and 4% of approved applicants, respectively. This suggests that a significant share of approved applicants are considered essential workers but cannot afford the basic expense of rent.

# V. CONCLUSION

## FROM EMERGENCY RESPONSE TO PERMANENT SOLUTIONS

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Lift To Rise and its partners have worked tirelessly to respond to the needs of Coachella Valley residents impacted by the crisis. With two emergency assistance programs, the Economic Protection Plan & Support Fund and the United Lift Rental Assistance Program, Lift To Rise disbursed more than \$12 million to nearly 8,000 households, including to undocumented residents excluded from other public assistance benefits.

However, while these efforts have helped keep families housed and provided economic relief during a period of record unemployment, they are by design short-term, emergency response efforts and thus will not ensure housing stability and economic opportunity for Coachella Valley residents in the long run. The pandemic has highlighted the urgency and importance of Lift To Rise’s long term goals and strategies for improving housing stability and economic opportunity for everyone in the Coachella Valley. These efforts include the creation and growth of a regional housing fund which has already started to facilitate the construction of 10,000 new affordable units over 10 years and seeks to reduce rent burden in the Coachella Valley by 30%. To date, Lift to Rise has seeded the resources necessary to make this permanent investment vehicle possible, and catalyze transformative change for our region. In addition, through economic stabilization strategies like affordable lending programs for un- or under-banked residents and utilities discounts programs, Lift To Rise and its partners are building new pathways for upward intergenerational economic mobility among Coachella Valley residents. Efforts like these are crucial to a smooth transition from emergency response to permanent solutions to the region’s underlying inequities that left so many Coachella Valley residents economically vulnerable during the COVID-19 pandemic.



# VI. APPENDIX

## APPENDIX A: PARTNERS

In Partnership with:

Riverside County  
Riverside County Supervisor V. Manuel Perez, 4th District  
Riverside County Department of Housing, Homelessness & Workforce Solutions  
Desert Healthcare District & Foundation  
The Regional Access Project Foundation  
First 5 Riverside  
United Way of the Desert  
Wells Fargo  
Consejo de Federaciones Mexicanas  
TODEC Legal Center  
Visión y Compromiso  
AT&T  
US Bank  
Inland Empire Health Plan  
First Republic Bank  
Next Era Energy  
Inland Empire Community Foundation  
Inland SoCal United Way  
Mission Asset Fund  
Leadership Counsel for Justice & Accountability  
Greater Palm Springs Convention & Visitors Bureau  
The Annie E. Casey Foundation  
Center for Community Investment

**LIFT TO RISE**

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