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Cultivating Stakeholder Support to Address the Growing Homelessness Crisis in Santa Fe

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Santa Fe City Council seeks to develop micro-communities — sites that provide temporary pallet shelters for unhoused individuals — to address the City's growing homelessness crisis. This project recommends that the City utilize a siting assessment tool and technology-enabled civic engagement program when selecting micro-communities' locations. These processes could help equip the City with a structured, replicable, and transparent way to prioritize sites and integrate Santa Feans' feedback. By pairing these steps with a proactive community engagement campaign, this project argues that the City could not only ensure a more efficient decisionmaking process but also foster trust with its residents.

PROBLEM

The City of Santa Fe has over 1,200 individuals in need of permanent housing, but only 150–200 emergency shelter beds. To address this gap, the City Council has approved funding to build up to 3 micro-communities, each with 20 to 30 pallet shelters. However, the City is struggling to get community buy-in to select and use the micro-communities' sites. Residents have expressed concerns, including the potential impact on property values and the lack of transparency in the government's site identification process. Without improved community engagement and trust in the micro-community model, Santa Fe cannot make use of its funds and implement the housing assistance.

By using a technology enabled civic engagement program, the City could ensure a more efficient decisionmaking process while also fostering trust with its residents.

SOLUTION

This project proposes that the City conduct a community and political readiness assessment of potential sites, while simultaneously launching communications initiatives and increasing implementation capacity. According to this plan, city officials would assess sites against standardized criteria, transparently share the results of their assessments, and then gather real-time feedback via a community-facing platform. The City would also lead a design competition for the first micro-community and an outreach campaign grounded in storytelling and education. In combination, these initiatives seek to provide Santa Feans with increased avenues for civic engagement while maintaining the assessment process's structure and efficiency.

For more information about this proposal, see: (1) [a policy memo expanding on this proposal](#); (2) [a community and political readiness assessment for evaluating sentiment toward a new micro-community](#); (3) [a project overview outlining how political leaders could integrate public input into affordable housing developments](#); and (4) [a toolkit offering guidance for communicating about micro-communities](#).

ABOUT THE POLICY ACADEMY

The Aspen Institute's Policy Academy helps community leaders and experts across the political spectrum elevate their voices, influence key decisions, and strengthen democracy from the ground up. Our innovative training programs and resources equip people across sectors – from tech to the environment, science to civic engagement – with the skills to shape critical policy efforts.