



Outlook

18
6-14-25

Fw: [EXTERNAL]AFHS Independent Evaluation - Partner Comments by Edu-Futuro

From CouncilComment@alexandriava.gov <CouncilComment@alexandriava.gov>**Date** Sat 6/14/2025 11:18 AM**To** Sarah Bagley <sarah.bagley@alexandriava.gov>

From: Jorge Figueredo <executivedirector@edu-futuro.org>**Sent:** Friday, June 13, 2025 5:12 PM**To:** CouncilComment@alexandriava.gov <CouncilComment@alexandriava.gov>**Cc:** Jorge Figueredo <executivedirector@edu-futuro.org>**Subject:** [EXTERNAL]AFHS Independent Evaluation - Partner Comments by Edu-Futuro

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Dear City Council Members, and Alexandria Department of Community and Human Services,

On behalf of Edu-Futuro, thank you for the opportunity to share our feedback on the recent independent evaluation of the Alexandria Fund for Human Services conducted by Community Science. Edu-Futuro has been a grantee of the Fund for Human Services since July 2023, but has been working in the neighboring jurisdictions of Arlington and Fairfax County for much longer; as such, we believe that we have a valuable perspective to share about the evaluators' recommendations, particularly as compared to the funding mechanisms of other local governments in the region.

First, we support the evaluators' proposed definition of Essential Human Services as a continuum from "Surviving" to "Stabilizing" to "Thriving"; we also broadly agree with their recommendation to employ the AFHS competitive grant process primarily for those programs that "focus primarily on stabilizing and advancing long-term community well-being," while employing direct contracts for those service providers meeting essential needs on the "Surviving" end of the spectrum. It is important, however, that these changes are made carefully and intentionally: As a service provider working in multiple jurisdictions, we have experienced two very different approaches to this bifurcated funding structure. On the one hand, when Fairfax County recently expanded their Consolidated Community Funding Pool to add a separate category for emergency food and housing, the new process benefited the vast majority of organizations by minimizing competition between providers of "Surviving" and "Stabilizing/Thriving" services. On the other hand, the "legacy" procurement process used in Arlington County has had the negative effect of reducing innovation and improvement among service providers that aren't obligated to compete for funding. Even worse, Arlington's recent FY2025 funding cycle for the RACE to Rebuilding Trust and Community grant program allowed organizations with direct "legacy" contracts to compete for grant funds: creating a space where some organizations were able to receive additional funding on top of what they are already receiving through their "legacy" contracts, while significantly reducing the pool of available funding for organizations without reliable contracts with the County.

If the City Council adopts these recommendations, we thus strongly recommend that as much as possible of the \$1.9 million currently assigned to the Alexandria Fund is still made available in an equitable manner to service providers in the "Stabilizing" and "Thriving" categories, similar to the Fairfax County model. Direct funding for "Surviving" services

must not come at the cost of depleting the grant funds available to organizations working to create longer-term, systemic change that actually succeeds in breaking the cycle of poverty for Alexandria families.

Additionally, if the Department of Community and Human Services does restructure its funding mechanism around the “Surviving, Stabilizing, and Thriving” continuum, we feel strongly that Alexandria must treat these service types as a true spectrum, rather than a hierarchy with (for example) “Stabilizing” services prioritized over “Thriving.” As the evaluation notes, Essential Human Services “depend on contextual factors such as geography, culture, and societal conditions” – and what might be considered a “Thriving”-level need for one population may be more accurately categorized as “Stabilizing” for the most vulnerable. To use our own services as an example, Edu-Futuro mostly works across the “Stabilizing” and “Thriving” sections of the continuum, but also provides critical access to “Survival”-level services that our beneficiaries may never otherwise have received – either because they did not know about them due to communication barriers, or because of the (justified) lack of trust in government services among immigrant populations. When the COVID pandemic hit in early 2020, for example, “legacy” human service providers in Arlington and Fairfax Counties received the lion’s share of public emergency assistance funding; yet it was organizations like Edu-Futuro that were providing the largely unpaid service of working with eligible families who had been turned away by “legacy” providers that did not have the language or cultural capability to help beneficiaries translate documents, interpret telephone calls, or teach fundamental skills needed to scan and upload documents.

In fact, we are worried that, despite the fact that the evaluators identified immigrant populations as one of the top three “Groups in Need,” and that immigrant populations and individuals with limited English proficiency were highlighted as part of the report’s “Seven Focus Populations,” the graphic detailing the Dimensions of Essential Human Services on Page 23 does not include such terms as “language access,” “bilingual capability,” “cultural competence,” or “immigrant population.” Especially in light of the acute challenges currently facing immigrant communities, we suggest that the Alexandria Fund recognize that organizations with the linguistic and cultural competency to reach these and other vulnerable populations must be allotted the resources they need to work effectively.

Along these lines, we are concerned by the evaluators’ recommendation to prioritize “one or two community needs” in each funding cycle, and urge caution in adopting this approach. While we understand the desire to maximize the Fund’s limited resources, it is not only community members themselves who need stability; nonprofit organizations serving vulnerable communities also need to know that they can rely on stable funding to ensure uninterrupted services from year to year. Even with the mitigating factor of the Fund retaining its three-year grant cycle, we can foresee a situation where an effective, high-performing organization that secured a contract one year would be shut out of renewed funding three years later, simply because the community needs identified as a “top priority” had changed. This roulette-like approach would be a major blow not only to service providers but also to the populations that rely on them, whose persistent needs and challenges do not go away simply due to the results of a new needs assessment.

Further, the interconnected nature of many human service needs, as well as the rapidly shifting current social and political environment, mean that in many cases, service providers don’t have the luxury of making decisions based on the “data-driven assessment” the evaluators recommend. For example, there is a high probability that the results of a community needs assessment conducted today would reflect the explosion of emerging needs caused by immigrant families being forcibly separated due to mass detention and deportation. Today, more than ever, service providers need the flexibility to respond to the needs of our communities as they emerge, and not only after they have been sanctioned by official gatekeepers.

Finally, we would like to request more clarity about the proposed requirement for AFHS recipients to propose service delivery in partnership with another community partner. While we are sympathetic to the argument that collaboration between service providers is necessary, in some instances to close gaps in services and reduce duplicative efforts, it

is important to underline that, as observed in the evaluation, competition between nonprofit organizations is driven by the "scarcity of funding opportunities." Simply mandating collaboration between grantees, without making the corresponding effort to ensure that these partners are all sustainably funded, will accomplish little more than exacerbating the "culture of competition" the evaluators describe.

Thank you again for this opportunity for feedback. We look forward to hearing more about AFHS' funding structure and process as it continues to evolve.

Best regards,

Jorge E. Figueredo, MPP
Executive Director, Edu-Futuro

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March 20, 2026, 6 pm - 12 am

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