

## Mather Veterans Village: A Place to Call Home

City of Rancho Cordova, CA

*#Robust External Partnerships*

Population: 73,441

### Innovation

#### Criteria:

- Initiative fundamentally changed a process, product or service (fundamental)

OR

- Initiative builds upon existing knowledge to improve a product, process or service (incremental)
- The initiative substantially stretched the boundaries of ordinary governmental operations.

### Describe Your Innovation

*(When and how did this innovation get started? Do also detail how the program or policy innovative, how it has changed previous processes, products, or services, and how it has substantially stretched or improved the boundaries of ordinary governmental operations.)*

Mather Veterans Village (MVV), located on the former Mather Air Force Base in Rancho Cordova, California, is three phases of new, critically needed permanent supportive housing for homeless and/or disabled veterans. The first project of its kind in the greater Sacramento region, MVV is a landmark collaboration between the City of Rancho Cordova, the County of Sacramento, Mercy Housing California and Veterans Resource Centers of America – and one that was eight plus years in the making. In August 2016, 50 veterans and their families moved into the first phase. Phases II and III are currently under construction and are expected to be completed in Spring 2019. These phases will house another 50 veterans and their families, as well as 46 veterans who are in need of transitional housing.

Mather Veterans Village is located on 3.65 acres on the former Mather Air Force Base – just two blocks from the Northern California Veterans Administration Medical Center. MVV Phases I and III are new, three-story buildings with 44 one-bedroom and 6 two-bedroom permanent supportive homes. Phase II is the supportive services/transitional housing component of the overall project that includes 46 beds. In addition, Phase II will have a commercial kitchen and a chef to provide three healthy meals to residents. Located in the center of the Village, Phase II is the gathering place for the MVV community.

Over 92,000 veterans live in the Sacramento, CA region, and the area has the 10th highest number of homeless veterans in California counties. During a point-in-time count in January of 2015 in Sacramento County, 12% of the homeless population was veterans. This represents a 4% increase from the previous count in 2013. Despite this need, housing to support the unique needs of homeless and disabled veterans was virtually non-existent – until MVV went from idea to reality.

## Collaboration

### Criteria:

- Initiative demonstrated engaging stakeholders both internal and external.
- Initiative demonstrated high performance teaming, breaking down internal silos.
- Strategic partnerships and or community networks were developed as a result of the initiative

**In less than 200 words, what individuals or groups are considered the primary initiators of your program? How does the innovation engage stakeholders or demonstrate high performance teaming? What strategic partnerships and/or community networks, if any, were developed?**

Mather Veterans Village started as a seed of an idea in 2006 during a discussion between City of Rancho Cordova Council Members and staff who wondered why there was no housing for veterans who were struggling.

City staff was directed to explore the feasibility of creating a village dedicated to the care and housing of our nation's veterans, and this blossomed into a partnership between the City of Rancho Cordova, Mercy Housing California, Veterans Resource Centers of America, and the County of Sacramento.

It took eight plus years, four committed partners, creative funding, and persistence before this partnership could break ground and build a village where struggling veterans could lay down their heads at night and say they were home.

A project of this scope takes time, thought and resources. The City of Rancho Cordova was initially the project manager and then became the facilitator as well as a major partner in securing funding, using its support and influence to secure tens of millions in grant funding, as well as two State legislative amendments that created additional opportunities for funding. The City will continue to provide oversight and monitoring to ensure the project meets its full potential.

**If a private consultant was used please describe in detail their involvement, identify the consultant and/or firm and provide contact information. Maintain a 100 word maximum.**

No private consultant was used for this project. Instead, the City of Rancho Cordova forged partnerships with the County of Sacramento, Mercy Housing California, and Veterans Resource Centers of America. Each partner brought a unique skill set to the project. It took eight plus years and four committed partners before this partnership could break ground and build a village where struggling veterans could lay down their heads at night and say they were home.

## Significance

### Criteria:

- Initiative addresses an area of concern for the majority of local government organizations.
- Initiative can serve as a model and replicated in other jurisdictions.

Please describe the extent to which you believe your program or policy initiative is potentially replicable within other jurisdictions and why? To your knowledge, have any other jurisdictions or organizations established programs or implemented policies modeled specifically on this project? Please also provide verification of the replication.

A place like Mather Veterans Village could be replicated in other jurisdictions. It would take time, resources and a dedicated partnership, but it can be done. Other jurisdictions have similar projects, but to our knowledge, Mather Veterans Village is unique for three reasons: it repurposes land on a former military base, is located within one block of a VA Hospital, and provides both permanent supportive and transitional housing to veterans. Building on the site of the former Mather Air Force Base provides a familiar setting to veterans, and walking access to the nearby VA Hospital makes it easy for veterans to travel to medical appointments and access other supportive services.

## Effectiveness

### Criteria:

- Initiative addresses a community or organization need.
- Initiative has achieved tangible results.
- Initiative improved the organizational culture or the traditional approach to problem solving.
- Initiative has received recognition for its achievements, i.e. independent evaluation, national recognition, local press, etc.

Please describe the most significant obstacle(s) encountered thus far by your program. How have they been dealt with? Which ones remain?

Obtaining full funding for the project has been the most significant obstacle. The total cost of Mather Veterans Village will be approximately \$51.5 million and has been funded through a variety of traditional and creative sources that have required a Herculean effort from all partners involved to secure. State of California funding sources have come from five different grant programs totaling \$17.5 million. City of Rancho Cordova funding has come from staff time, fee reduction, grants and loans totaling over \$3 million. Sacramento County funding sources have included land donation, fee waivers, and grants totaling over \$2 million. Private funding sources have included private grants from nonprofits and private foundations, as well as developer funding, totaling about \$1 million. Finally, once these other sources of funding had been secured, the project was able to compete for, and secure, federal low-income housing tax credits totaling over \$28 million.

What outcomes did this program or policy have? Could you share one or two objective measures that demonstrate these outcomes? Ultimately, how did you measure the change based on the intervention, and why do you believe in the credibility of this assessment?

The outcome of this project is the housing of nearly 150 homeless and/or disabled veterans and their families who now have a place to call home. The main driver of this project was the vision of the project partners that no veteran should be left behind. Take, for example, George Thomas, who served in the U.S. Army from 1979-86 as a field radio repairman and earned the rank of E5 Sergeant. Six years ago, he lost his father who was his best friend. George became addicted to drugs to try and stop the pain, which led to him becoming homeless. He didn't know if he'd be alive the next day or where his next meal was coming from. He is now a resident at Mather Veterans Village. "We as Americans made a promise to these brave veterans," said Marc Deal, Executive Director of

Veterans Resource Centers of America, one of the four main partners of the project. “We said ‘fight our wars, keep the wolves at bay, stand the wall, and when your watch is done, we will take care of you.’ Often times we have not kept our part of the bargain. With Mather Veterans Village and this collaboration, we are. This is the finest example of not only keeping a promise but giving the best gift you can give a veteran: hope.” Mather Veterans Village was thoughtfully planned to provide homes for human beings. Knowing that housing alone might not be enough, comprehensive on-site supportive services are provided by partners, including health care and wellness programs, veterans benefits claims assistance, substance abuse counseling and support group, employment services, food bank deliveries and social activities. Through these services, as well as onsite supervision, veterans interact daily with a team that can assess and nurture where necessary.

**Has the program received any press or other media coverage to date? If yes, please list the sources and briefly describe relevant coverage.**

The project has been covered extensively in the media—locally, regionally, and nationally—with outlets providing (in most instances) multiple stories over time. Coverage includes announcement of federal funding in April 2016, opening of Phase I in August 2016, and the groundbreaking of Phases II and III in April 2018. Coverage appeared in these outlets and many others:

- The Sacramento Bee
- The Sacramento Business Journal
- Comstock’s Magazine
- Western City magazine
- The Grapevine Independent
- KCRA 3
- ABC 10
- CBS 13
- Fox 40
- KFBK radio
- Capital Public Radio (NPR affiliate)

## Presentation

### Criteria:

- Presentation will be delivered by a team.
- Presentation will be highly interactive and engaging.

### Example Social Media Post

- Mather Veterans Village at former Mather AFB in Rancho Cordova, CA gives homeless veterans a place to call home. 1st of its kind in region, unique 8-year+ partnership w/ @cityofrcordova, @saccountyca @mercyhousing and Veterans Resource Centers of America #MatherVeteransVillage

**Please write an abstract or short description for your innovation that would make conference attendees say "Well, I need to attend this session!"**

Lack of affordable housing is at the forefront of our national discourse, and housing for homeless and/or disabled veterans is not far behind. While the morass of red tape, funding challenges, and political issues make housing for our homeless vets seem like a daunting task, it can be done. In 2016, the first Phase of Mather Veterans Village opened, and now 50 homeless and/or disabled vets have a place to call home. In 2018, Phases II and III of this project broke ground and will open in Spring 2019 to house another approximately 100 homeless/disabled veterans. While some aspects of the project are unique to Rancho Cordova, CA where Mather Veterans Village is located, others are replicable and scalable. Learn how a monumental task was made possible.

**How will you make the session creative and unique?- How do you plan to be both entertaining and educational?- Include a description of how your session will facilitate group activities and/or interaction.- What will attendees be able to have as an actionable "takeaway" from the session?**

The session will provide both a visioning level and practical application of how Mather Veterans Village went from concept to reality. Using a chronological timeline, visuals of each step, stories of lessons learned and Q&A, the session will be informative, easy-to-follow, and engaging. Attendees will receive the press kit of the project, along with a copy of the ppt. at the end of the session.

**Anything else you would like to add?**

George and 49 other veterans now have a place to call home at Mather Veterans Village.

"I was living in my car and praying to God for the village to open one weekend. That Monday, I got the phone call that I could move in," said George. "I am now living in my new home, enrolled in a drug recovery program, and applying for a job. I have hope for the future and believe I can set a good example for my grandchildren."

Today, there are 50 formerly homeless veterans and their families living at Mather Veterans Village. We broke ground in April 2018 on Phases II and III, which will provide 46 transitional beds for veterans not yet ready to live independently, as well as an additional 50 permanent supportive homes in Spring 2019. All three phases will continue to operate, with comprehensive supportive services, for 55 years. We estimate the total number of homeless and disabled veterans who will be served through Mather Veterans Village to total 10,500!