

OVERVIEW:

PURPOSE

The National Preparedness Goal under the **Presidential Policy Directive 8 (PPD- 8)** states:

“A secure and resilient nation with the capabilities required across the whole community to prevent, protect against, mitigate, respond to and recover from the threats and hazards that pose the greatest risk.”

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has established national standards from the PPD-8 and developed a vital framework for state, local, and tribal public health preparedness programs composed of 16 Capabilities which includes PUBLIC HEALTH LAB CAPACITY with the ability to implement and perform methods to detect, characterize, and confirm public health threats such as COVID-19.

Additionally, under the directive of Homeland Security Presidential Directive 5 (HSPD-5) which is the management of domestic incidents, the Threat and Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment (THIRA) tool is used to help communities understand the set of risks it faces. By identifying and prioritizing those threats, a community can then make smarter decisions. Leaders can manage the risks through appropriate planning, mitigation strategies and developing needed capabilities. The Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council Region 21 conducted the 2018 assessment documenting that needed equipment to conduct lifesaving services and related operations to avoid additional disease is a clinical lab.

SCOPE

Hidalgo County does not have a public health lab in order to support the current COVID-19 pandemic response. The Laboratory Response Network (LRN) which is located in Harlingen, Texas is the only public lab that serves the eight thousand square miles of the Lower Rio Grande region. This LRN has a limited capacity conducting 40 tests per day. Moreover, during this COVID-19 response the LRN ran out of the reagent in order to conduct lab tests forcing all labs to be sent to the LRN in Austin, Texas resulting in delayed lab reading results for our community.

The Texas Department of State Health Services estimates Hidalgo County’s population to be 1,005,539. With this large population, but limited lab testing capacity, the detection, mitigation, and response to COVID-19 has been largely impacted. Current public health directives emphasize the importance of public health testing in order to detect and prevent the spread of COVID -19.

With the establishment of a public health laboratory which would include the ***Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) Testing**, Hidalgo County would have the capacity to perform and coordinate laboratory testing in order to detect, characterize, confirm, and report COVID-19 cases and serve the lab capacity for our county. Currently, Hidalgo County relies on Texas DSHS and other entities to perform COVID-19 lab testing for the community which results in longer result times as compared to having its own lab capacity.

*PCR Detects RNA, Currently the Gold Standard for testing which uses a nasopharyngeal sample and has a True Positive Rate of 90-99.9%.

For COURT

Background:

In compliance to the national preparedness goal under the Presidential Policy Directive 8 (PPD-8), the Homeland Security Presidential Directive 5 (HSPD-5) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Public Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Capability 12 and pursuant to the Order of Continuance of Declaration of Local Disaster for Public Health Emergency that affirmed the activation of the Hidalgo County Emergency Management Plan and extends the Declaration of Local Disaster, requests the courts approval for the construction of **Hidalgo County Health Department Testing/Bio-Safety Laboratory** to address the ongoing COVID-19 public health emergency.

Agenda Sample for 6. Any other COVID-19-related expenses reasonably necessary to the function of government that satisfy Fund's eligibility criteria.

"Discussion, consideration, and action to approve a necessary CARES Act Relief Fund expenditure to cover cost not accounted for in the current budget and cannot be lawfully funded by line item, allotment or allocation, for the [Hidalgo County Health Department Testing Laboratory], in order to assist with County functions related to medical and public health measures addressing the ongoing COVID-19 public health emergency; the Court having reviewed the Agenda Item Briefing, herein finds that such expenditure is reasonable and necessary for the intended use."

Generator and Transfer Switch Capability

A generator and transfer switch capability are needed to be able to provide backup power to ensure critical procedures are not interrupted in the event of a utility outage, as well as maintain specimens and vaccine viability including patient safety and comfort. The current clinical infrastructure does not meet the needs of specimen and vaccine storage in the event of a power outage and/or inclement weather. During the current COVID-19 pandemic and public health emergency, collected specimens and vaccines are presented the risk of no longer being viable, and thus we are unable to provide the necessary services to the community.

IT Technology and Data Communications Enhancements –

Enable and Secure our Remote Workforce

COVID 19 forced Hidalgo County Health and Human Services Department to "go remote" in a very short window of time. Secure remote access and privilege management solutions are needed to help quickly enable and support remote workers without opening security gaps or compromising strict HIPAA and HB 300 compliance. The most pressing challenge is enabling a secure remote workforce and protect remote endpoints from malware and attacks while maintaining productivity and the services to county residents. The enhancement of our IT infrastructure will support the Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP), which would provide security compliance for all HIPAA confidential documentation and allow our workforce to have remote access from home, remain safe, and provide support to the COVID 19 public health emergency response initiatives.

Electronic Medical Records System

The establishment of a new EMR system would align with national standards and current public health priorities, which increases alignment to public health surveillance and data strategies, will emphasize data security and cybersecurity, and the need to decrease reporting time and increase the collaboration by expanding the use of an electronic information system, such as electronic COVID-19 laboratory reporting and syndromic surveillance systems. **This medical records system would enhance the current system by integrating all local hospitals and physicians which is currently not available, yet critical to managing accurate and updated data.**

Temporary Building and Infrastructure Support

Measures for protecting workers from exposure to, and infection with, SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), depend on the type of work being performed and exposure risk, including potential for interaction with people with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 and contamination of the work environment. **Temporary buildings are needed to support the necessary office space to house 18 new COVID 19 specific team members, including the epidemiological staff who are responding to the COVID-19 public health emergency initiatives.** The additional space would also be utilized to provide storage and space for Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) and additional all needed supplies. **This would promote social distancing and discourage any cross contamination and assure the safety and security of our staff.**

COVID-19 Testing and Public Health Support

In order to increase testing capacity for COVID-19, including specimen collection, Hidalgo County Health would need to procure machinery to perform faster analyses of laboratory results, and have the proper disinfecting equipment to keep public health responders safe. In addition, modern equipment is needed to keep specimens/vaccines viable at proper temperatures during the COVID-19 public health emergency.

Morgue Infectious Disease Prevention and Support Specialized equipment is needed to manage morgue facility operations and is necessary to provide health protection and safety to support incident management personnel, morgue facility personnel, and ensure the safest management procedures during the COVID-19 public health emergency. Specialized equipment supports the critical infection prevention practices within the morgue operations. Disinfection supplies, UV lighting, negative air pressure maintenance, autopsy table with downdraft, powered air-purifying respirators (PAPRs), and High Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) filtration which are all necessary requirements designed specifically to support morgue facility settings, and most importantly ensure fatality management partners safety during COVID 19.

Stackable 4-tier rolling mortuary racks are necessary to support the proper storage of human remains and personal effects.