

Section A. Executive Summary

Application Title: San Luis-Southwest Border Environment & Climate Justice Initiative

Lead Applicant: Regional Center for Border Health, Inc. (RCBH)

Statutory Partner: City of San Luis, Arizona (City of San Luis, Arizona)

Collaborators: Cocopah Indian Tribe, Yuma County Health Department, University of Arizona, San Luis-SLRC Binational Health & Environment Committee

Contact Information:

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Eligibility: The RCBH is a comprehensive, community-based, non-profit organization incorporated in 1987 as the Western Arizona Area Health Education Center (WAHEC). In 2003, the San Luis Walk-In Clinic, Inc. (SLWIC) was established as a RCBH subsidiary organization for the purpose of delivering fully integrated (primary, behavioral and specialty) health services to resident in western Arizona. Since establishing its first primary care clinic in San Luis, SLWIC now operates seventeen federally designated rural health clinics, including four mobile health programs and telemedicine sites, that serve residents throughout western Arizona. SLWIC's most advanced site is the San Luis Medical Mall, a 64,000 sq.ft. comprehensive service complex opened in 2021 to provide family care, women's health, behavioral health, and ambulatory surgery services. In addition to the WAHEC and SLWIC, the RCBH operates numerous community-based service programs, including the College of Health Careers, a fully accredited community college; the Transitional Living Center, for homeless and substance abuse; the Justice Reinvestment Program, to reduce criminogenic risk of individuals released from prison; the Refugee Center, established through cooperative agreement with the US Border Patrol and Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) to provide humanitarian assistance to undocumented individuals; and the Nuestros Ninos program, which includes community outreach worker services. The RCBH has managed the San Luis – San Luis Rio Colorado Binational Health and Environment Committee (BHEC) for the past twenty years.

As a not-for-profit organization, the RCBH is overseen by a Board of Directors who are members of, and representative of the local community service population. (Note: Refer to Attachment for IRS written determination of tax-exempt status). The RCBH operates seven offices and/or clinics in Yuma County, including three in the City of San Luis; all addressing the health and social service needs of San Luis community residents including farmworkers, displaced workers, children and adults with Asthma, and other vulnerable groups. SLWIC services are provided regardless of health insurance coverage and each SLWIC operates with a a sliding fee scale. The RCBH's main administrative office is located about 15 miles north of San Luis, in the City of Somerton, which is bounded to the east and west by the Cocopah Tribal nation. RCBH has longstanding program delivery arrangements with the Cocopah Tribal Nation.

The City of San Luis (CofSL) was founded in 1930 after opening of the U.S. San Luis Port of Entry. It became incorporated as an official town on September 4, 1979. In 1980, the CofSL had a population of 1,946 residents and then, between 2000-to-2020, grew from 15,342 to 35,770 (Source: U.S. Census, 2022), a 230% increase. CofSL's southern boundary is Mexico and, to the west, is the Colorado River, at the juncture where it enters Mexico. About 70 miles to the south is the Gulf of California (El Golfo de Santa Clara).

The CofSL uses a Council-Manager form of government; seven-member Council appoints a City Manager and other top city officials. The CofSL annexed over 16,000 acres (65 km²) of land between 2006 and 2012, and now has a total area of 26.5 square miles (68.63 km²). San Luis and surrounding communities are primarily Hispanic / Latino (88%); residents experience poverty 57% living below poverty (200%FPL), linguistic isolation (87% speak language other than English at-home), and are medically uninsured (20%). (Source: Arizona Department of Health Services, PCA Report, 2022).

Climate Action Strategy: The San Luis-Southwest Border Environment & Climate Justice Initiative will address four of EPA's Climate Action and three Pollution Reduction strategies. All grant-support activities will meaningfully engage disadvantaged community members who reside in, and are immediately impacted by, the region's environmental hazards. These efforts will improve the resilience of San Luis region's disadvantaged communities. The specific priority area proposed is the City of San Luis (CofSL), which is located on the U.S.-Mexico border. As described in the grant application, the project focus will benefit CofSL community residents while Initiative sub-components will engage indigenous, Cocopah / Cucupa Tribes that straddle the international border, and binational communities located in southern Arizona / northern Mexico communities (San Luis Rio Colorado and Mexicali). These unique, community dynamics create a "tri-national" region.

Selected Climate Action Strategies

✓ *EPA Strategy 1.3: Energy-Efficient, Healthy, and Resilient Housing and Buildings*

Construction of an energy efficient Community Health Complex: The hallmark for this application is the energy efficient construction of the San Luis Medical Campus, a small hospital adjacent to the existing San Luis Medical Mall. The Medical Campus has already received approval for CofSL bonding authority. Construction will include upgrades to enhance energy efficiency. When complete (expected 2026), the Medical Campus will become a regional model for energy efficient construction. The San Luis Medical Complex, including the City's only hospital, will have an immediate, positive impact on resident health through the provision of emergency, specialty, and inpatient care. The building will demonstrate environmentally friendly, energy- efficient, sustainable construction.

An important component of Medical Complex includes an extreme heat cooling site that will operate on days when extreme heat declaration is made. As described previously, the RCBH already operates four Cooling Centers and Water Sites in the City of San Luis, including one at the Medical Mall located on land owned by the RCBH, adjacent to the new Medical Complex.

- ✓ *EPA Strategy 1.2: Mobility and Transportation Options for Preventing Air Pollution and Improving Public Health and Climate Resilience*

Reduced vehicle transportation: Currently, there are no hospitals located in the City of San Luis. The closest hospitals that serve San Luis residents are in: (1) San Luis Rio Colorado, Mexico, across the border; and (2) in the City of Yuma, twenty-nine (29) miles to the north, at Yuma Regional Medical Center (YRMC). The primary provider of emergency medical services, the San Luis Fire Department reports that, on an annual basis, more than 4,000 EMS transfers (i.e., trips to-and-from) are completed from San Luis-to-Yuma. Just for ambulance transfers, the amount of travel required approaches 230,000 miles per year. Family members also must travel to YRMC which adds to the transportation burden. After patients are admitted, given the average length of stay at YRMC is 4.2 days and the average rate of readmission is 14%, the amount of transportation burden and environmental pollution is significant. (Note: Avg. Length of Stay reported for Medicare patients). Opening the Medical Campus in San Luis will eliminate significant transportation burden, reduce air pollution, and create significant efficiencies for San Luis residents.

- ✓ *EPA Strategy 1.7: Waste Reduction and Management to Support a Circular Economy*
Waste collection & recycling: The RCBH has collaborated previously with local NGOs and government agencies to reduce and manage waste, including efforts organized through the Binational Environment and Health Committee and coordination with the Cocopah Indian Tribal Nation. (Note: RCBH administrative offices and two clinics are surrounded by Cocopah Tribal lands and there has been ongoing coordination for environmental and physical health projects). The RCBH has managed since 19xx, the Binational Environment and Health Committee which has organized community clean-up projects, including “Don’t Trash La Frontera” and the school-based environmental calendar project. RCBH has previously been funded by EPA (1998, Pesticide Exposure in Children) and the Arizona Universities (via sub-contract) to produce environmental health training modules. One binational project concerned reduction of brick-burning for construction in San Luis Rio Colorado. As part of this EPA Environmental Justice Initiative, RCBH proposes to work with hospitals located in the City of Yuma and San Luis Rio Colorado (Sonora) to ensure they are informed about, and adopt, best practice standards for medical waste management.

I. Selected Pollution Reduction Strategies

- ✓ *EPA Strategy 2.2: Outdoor Air Quality and Community Health Improvements*

Air quality monitors: The SLBC-ECJCC Initiative, developed through coordination with the San Luis Bi-National Health and Environment Committee, will implement several strategies to improve outdoor air quality. These efforts will strengthen Yuma County Health Department’s (YCHD) and the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality’s (ADEQ) existing efforts and support the Commission for Ecology and Sustainable Development – State of Sonora capacity to monitor air quality in San Luis and S.L. Rio Colorado. Currently, air quality testing for particulate matter is uneven and equipment not always fully functional. With shared funding, air quality equipment will be purchased and placed at designated locations. Air quality information will continue to be monitored on a regular schedule by the YCHD and ADEQ, which

operates a “flag warning” system to advise local community members when air quality is poor. Recognizing the forecast of poor air quality will help local community residents prepare for days that have poor air quality forecasts and reduce risk exposure for individuals with respiratory diseases, including asthma, which is especially difficult for young children and youth.

Pollution reduction strategies will be coordinated with the San Luis – San Luis RC Binational Health & Environmental Committee (SL-SLRC BHEC), which has been supported by RCBH for more than 20 years. Included in BHEC’s history of health promotion and environmental health projects completed include the Gulf of Santa Clara (i.e., Gulf of California) remediation and Colorado River Clean-up (i.e., Don’t trash la Frontera” program, air quality improvement and monitoring in coordination with the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality and Commission of Ecology and Sustainable Development (CEDES, Sonora) along with a variety of public health (i.e., breast cancer awareness, youth behavioral health, etc.) campaigns, including sister-city initiatives implemented in cooperation with CDC and the U.S-Mexico Border Health Commission. With support of this EPA-ECJ initiative, a series of Trinational programs will focus of strengthening the San Luis-San Luis Rio Colorado Health & Environment Committee and supporting environmental justice programs organized in cooperation with the Cocopah / Cucupa Tribal Nations. In coordination with the RCBH’s Western Arizona Area Health Education Center (WAHEC), EPA resources will help expand environmental training for health professionals and community members, and completing air quality monitoring, in coordination with the Comision of Ecology and Sustainability of the State of Sonora (CEDES) and the Grupo Educativo de 16 de Septiembre (a post-secondary group of three institutions located in Mexicali, Baja CA).

✓ *EPA Strategy 4: Safe Management and Disposal of Solid and Hazardous Waste*

Biohazardous Medical Waste: The San Luis Medical Complex will adopt state-of-art procedures that exceed Arizona Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ) standards to dispose environmental and medical waste. Leveraging its core position within the Binational health and Environment Council, the RCBH will work with three hospitals located in SLRC to review existing Biohazardous Medical Waste management and provide regional training.

Grant Award Period and Completion: The entire project will span the three-year grant cycle. All related procurement will be responsive to APA and other federal and state requirements. Financial arrangements for the Medical Complex are expected to complete in November 2024 and ground-breaking is expected in January 2025. The entire construction project is expected to complete in June 2026. After equipment and furniture installation and licensure requirements are met, the Medical Complex is expected to open by December 2026. This timeline is consistent with previous construction projects completed by RCBH, including the 64,000 sq.ft. San Luis Medical Mall.

Amount of EPA Funding Requested: (\$TBD) is requested to support all six EPA strategies, spanning the three-year initiative. These dollars will be distributed among different collaborating organizations, including the City of San Luis, to ensure activities organized external to RCBH are completed according to specified agreements.

Target Investment Area: (TIA E: U.S. Southern Border Communities).

Disadvantaged Community to benefit from the projects: The SLBC-EPA-ECJCC will benefit vulnerable residents in south Yuma County, southwest Arizona, communities that are located adjacent to the U.S.-Mexico border. The City of San Luis (Statutory Partner) and adjacent communities including Gadsen, Somerton, and the Cocopah Tribe, are all located within a 15 mile radius and situated on the U.S.-Mexico border. CofSL is bounded to the south by its sister city, San Luis Rio Colorado (population 175,000) and to the west, by small towns and Mexican “ejidos”. (Note: an Ejido in Mexico are communally held lands and legal town, usually used for agriculture or ranching). Cocopah Tribal lands are situated to the north of San Luis; Cocopah Tribal lands “straddle” the City of Somerton to the west and east. Immediately to the west of Cocopah Tribal lands, across the U.S.-Mexico border, are Cucapa tribal communities. When the U.S.-Mexico border boundary was first negotiated, the border split the Cocopah and Cucapa into a distinct region.

Agriculture, the largest economic enterprise in Yuma County (where CofSL is located) generates about \$4billion in annual revenue. More than 90% of leafy, green vegetables produced in the winter come from Yuma County. The Civil Rights icon, Cesar Chavez, was born in the City of Yuma and died in the City of San Luis. Many farmworkers cross the border daily, during planting and harvesting season (Note: an actual census of farmworkers is currently underway however more than 27,000 essential workers cross the border every day, approximately 15% cite “work” as primary reason from crossing). Residents in the proposed service communities experience serious environmental hazards including poor air quality, pesticide / chemical exposures, extreme heat events, and waste management pollution.

Other Sources of Funding: This application does not duplicate any other federal, state, or private funding source. This application does complement loan support solicited from USDA Community & Facilities Direct Loan program to provide loan repayment guarantee to an eligible lender for the construction of the San Luis Medical Campus. Through its thirty-seven (37) year history, the RCBH has been awarded, and managed multiple federal and state grant programs, including funding from EPA to support binational health and environment work, pesticide-related research and air quality remediation (i.e, reducing industrial brick burning). Using federal and state funding as seed money, the RCBH has sustained some of the grant monies received for years and decades. For example, the CAPAZ project, initially funded in 2001- through 2004 by HRSA, continues to provide medical discount services twenty years after federal funding has completed. The Binational health and Environment Committee has been sustained since 1994, after initial grant support was finished. The RCBH has previously received USDA loan support and grant funding for the purchase and rehabilitation of low-cost housing that is now being used as transitional living centers (TLC) that have been fully sustained with Medicaid support. The majority of RCBH funding is derived from the provision of health services, including primary care and behavioral health; consequently, federal funding through Medicare and Medicaid is a primary funding source. However, RCBH has also received funding

from DHHS to organize border health programs, including binational sister city and community outreach events.

Resubmission Status: This application is a first submission.

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