

Statement of Activities

Housing Preservation Grant Program for Rural Areas of Troup County, GA

Groundswell, Inc. and West Georgia Star, Inc. propose to pursue a Housing Preservation Grant from the USDA Rural Development to provide repairs to at least 50 low-income, owner-occupied homes in rural areas of Troup County. The funding would create the **Better Homes Rural Troup (BHRT)** program.

1. Type of assistance & conditions for assistance:

- *Type of assistance:*
 - The BHRT program will provide grant funds for the following activities: repairing or replacing electrical wiring, foundations, roofs and water/waste disposal systems and adding handicap accessibility features to residential properties.
 - Grant assistance for HVACs and/or weatherization services will only be available as gap financing (up to 40% of the upgrade cost) for an existing program or source of funding, so as to prioritize critical repair services for which funding is harder to come by.
 - The maximum grant will be capped at \$15,000 per home. This limit is high, given that the program targets residents located in disadvantaged communities with extensive housing inequities.
- *Conditions for assistance:* eligible households must be owner-occupied homes with household income at or below the USDA Rural Development's low-income threshold. Income limits are presented in the table below.

Figure 1: Household income limits for program participation

# of People in Household	Annual Gross Income Limit
1-4	\$52,700
5-8	\$69,550

*For each person in excess of 8, add \$4,216 to the income limit.

2. General program processes

Selection process:

- *Income verification:* The first step in the selection process will be to ensure that a home is income eligible. Households must be at or below the low-income threshold. Income will be verified by requesting a copy of pay stubs to calculate annual income or a W2 and requesting that the participant attest that the income information they have provided is accurate. BHRT will follow any additional income verification guidelines as required by USDA Rural Development.
- Homes occupied by elderly and/or disabled residents, along with homes with children, will be prioritized for repairs.
- Referrals:
 - The program will accept referrals of homes who did not qualify for the Weatherization Assistance Program due to a need for repairs.
 - The program will also seek to collaborate with other home repair programs who are not able to provide all the services that a home needs.

Determining housing preservation needs

- *Pre-assessment:* prior to providing funding for the home, a pre-assessment will be conducted to identify the types of repairs needed and to determine if they will fall within the program cost caps. The pre-assessment will consist of a home walkthrough, inspection, and a discussion with the participant to understand critical repair needs.
- The pre-assessment will be conducted by an independent inspector, who will also prepare a scope of work based on the results of the assessment.
- Groundswell will seek the participant's approval for the proposed repairs prior to starting any work.

Performing the necessary work:

- A different entity than the one who performs the pre-assessment and the final inspection will conduct the actual work in each home. This separation ensures that the home only receives the repairs that it actually needs and produces a higher standard of quality assurance.
- West Georgia Star will serve as general contractor, overseeing all residential repairs, including subcontractors. West Georgia Star will seek to employ local contractors to complete the work.
- West Georgia Star will review and execute the scope of work provided by the independent inspector.

Monitoring and inspecting the work:

- After the work is completed, the independent inspector will conduct a post-inspection for quality assurance purposes. If the work is not fully completed, the contractors will need to perform the outstanding work.

- Groundswell will contact the participant to ensure customer satisfaction.

3. Process for coordinating with other public and private organizations and programs that provide assistance in rehabilitation of historic processes in accordance with 7 CFR 1944.673

BHRT does not anticipate working with any persons who own historic homes. Nonetheless, should the situation arise, BHRT will comply with the provisions of Stipulation I, A-G of the PMOA.

4. Development standards that the applicant will use for the housing preservation work

BHRT will follow the Rural Development’s standards for existing dwellings to perform the housing preservation work. These standards require that homes be: structurally sound, functionally adequate, be in good repair - or to be placed in good repair with program funds, and have adequate and safe electrical heating, plumbing, water and wastewater disposal.

5. Program Timeline:

BHRT will complete repairs on at least 50 homes across a 2-year time period. Upon grant execution, the project team will develop and execute work agreements with subcontractors. The team will then develop and implement program management systems which will support program operations and maintain relevant participant data. Program outreach will commence approximately three months in and will continue into the first quarter of the second grant year. Pre-assessments by the independent inspector will start by the third quarter of the first grant year, continuing through the third quarter of the second grant year. Repairs will start in Q3 of the first grant year, with 15 homes completed by the end of the first year. All 50 repairs will be completed by Q4 of the second year, with post-inspection quality control checks conducted as homes are finished.

Figure 2: Program Timeline

	YEAR 1				YEAR 2			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Subcontractor agreements	█							
Program management systems		█						
Outreach		█	█	█	█			
Pre-assessments & SOW development			█	█	█	█	█	
Repair work (# of homes completed)				15		35		50
Post-inspection QA/QC			█	█	█	█	█	█

6. Program Staffing

The BHRT program will be managed by Groundswell, Inc. in collaboration with West Georgia Star, Inc. Groundswell and West Georgia Star are both 501c3 nonprofit organizations. The two currently work in close collaboration serving low-income residents in LaGrange through the SOUL program, combining Groundswell's energy expertise with West Georgia Star's expertise in healthy affordable housing and resident services. To date, the team has delivered energy efficiency upgrades to 26 homes and collaborated with other programs to provide repairs services for 15 homes.

Key BHRT staff will include:

Program Director – David Wright, Groundswell: David will be responsible for program strategy and ensuring the program is adhering to the timeline and budget, as well as problem-solving and risk management. David has more than 12 years of experience in energy program implementation, including residential and commercial building efficiency, federal building efficiency, and LMI community solar and energy storage.

Project Manager – Nicole Sonderegger, Groundswell: Nicole will be responsible for day-to-day program management, coordinating with contractors and partners, tracking participant progress, and program reporting. She currently leads implementation of an energy efficiency program for low-income homes in LaGrange, GA (SOUL program) and has extensive experience working with numerous partners to provide repairs services to homes in Troup County.

Community Engagement – Leon Childs, Groundswell: Leon is a native of Troup County and will be responsible for community-based partnerships and resident outreach, enrollment, and customer support. Leon will report to the Project Manager and will work in close collaboration with the Construction Manager, supporting scheduling between customers and contractors.

Construction Management: Earnest Pickett, West Georgia Star (100%): The Construction Manager will oversee all repairs and contractors, provide technical input, and assist with questions and challenges. Mr. Pickett brings 25 years of experience managing challenging construction schedules, budgets and quality demands.

7. Estimated # of very low and low-income minority and non-minority persons the grant will assist

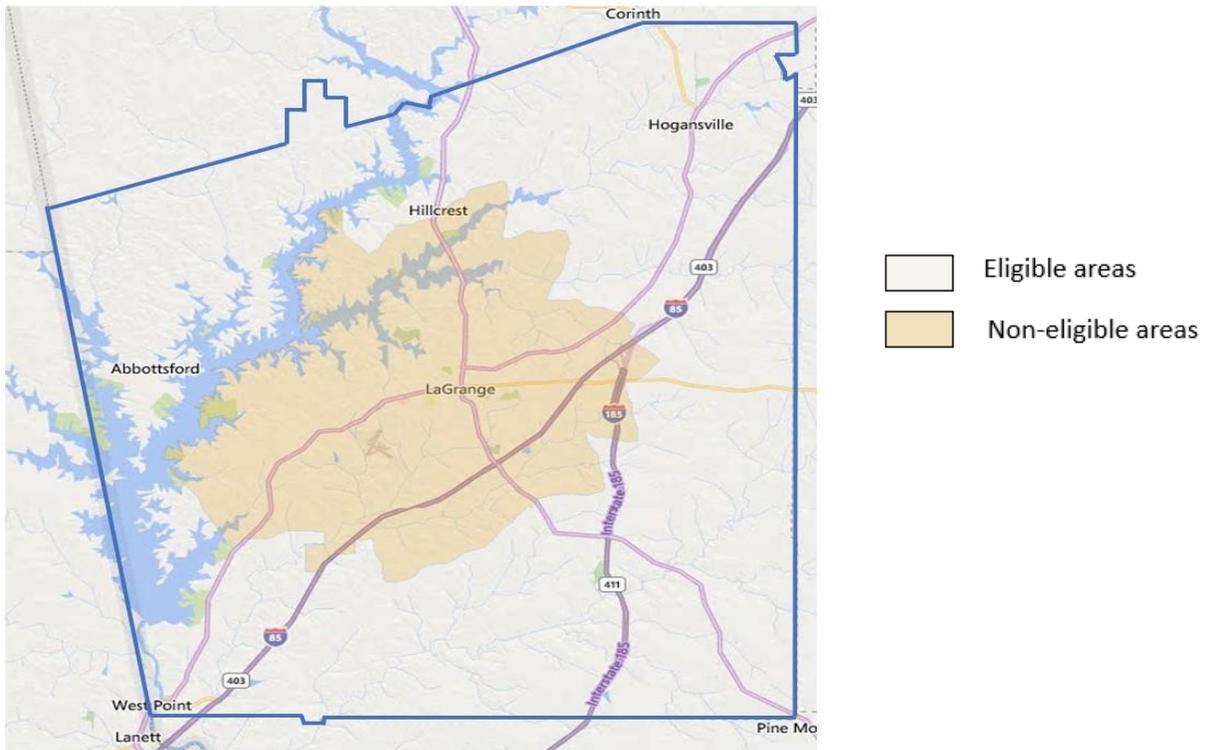
The BHRT program will serve at least 50 very-low to low-income owner-occupied homes. In the geographic areas eligible for this program (see Section 8 below), approximately 31% of inhabitants are minorities¹. The average household size is between 2-3 people. As such, we expect that the program will assist approximately 31-47 minority persons and 69-104 non-minority persons.

¹ Estimates derived from the U.S Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2020, 5-year

8. Geographic areas to be served

Rural areas of Troup County, GA, as defined by the USDA Rural Development, will be served by this program. Most areas of Troup County, except for the City of LaGrange and some surrounding areas, are considered rural. All areas in light gray on the map below are eligible. Addresses will be checked for eligibility using the [USDA Rural Development's eligibility map](#).

Figure 3: Eligibility Map for BHRT Program



9. Annual estimated budget

See *Appendix 1* for the estimated program budget.

Personnel and Fringe: The budget includes pro-rated salaries and benefits for seven full-time employees. Key program staff will dedicate between 10-40% of their time to BHRT. Additional support staff will dedicate between 1-5% of their time to the program. Employees receive health and dental insurance, as well as paid time off in their benefit package.

Travel and Supplies: The budget includes funds for five trips for project check-ins across the two-year grant period, since some key staff members are based in Washington, DC. Supplies in the budget include

printed fliers and applications as well as room rental and stipends for participants of the Community Advisory Council. (A description of the Community Advisory Council is in Section 12).

Contractual: Groundswell will serve as the lead grant application, with West Georgia Star as a subrecipient. The independent inspector will also be a subrecipient. West Georgia Star's construction budget assumes that 30% of homes will need "minor" repairs, at a maximum cost of \$8,000 each, while 70% of homes will need "major" repairs, at a maximum cost of \$15,000 each. The severe state of disrepair of many homes, coupled with high inflation which impacts the cost of supplies and labor, explains the high anticipated cost of repairs. West Georgia Star's contract also includes salaries and benefits for the Construction Manager, the Procurement Clerk, and the Bookkeeping Clerk.

The budget for the independent inspector includes fees for the pre-assessment and the post-inspection. Anticipating that some assessed homes may choose not to move forward with repairs and some homes may need repairs that exceed the budget per home, the budget for the independent inspector includes more assessments than the targeted number of completed homes.

10. Copy of indirect cost proposal/rate or direct cost policy

See *Appendix 2*.

11. Brief description of accounting system to be used

Groundswell uses a cloud-based accounting system called Sage Intacct. Sage Intacct has capabilities to track transactions in multiple dimensions which helps in managing and tracking funds and grants. Groundswell has significant expertise managing federal and state grants. Groundswell currently is the prime grantee for a 3-year Department of Energy Program-funded research program (LIFT Solar Everywhere) and has received four grants from the Maryland Energy Administration.

12. Monitoring and Evaluation:

Program objectives:

- At least 50 income-qualified owner-occupied homes receive repairs, producing increased safety and comfort for home occupants.
- Improved housing equity by leveraging funding for repairs which are often too costly to be addressed by other assistance programs. This approach helps preserve housing, enabling multigenerational residents to maintain their homes for the long-term, building wealth for their families.
- Increased repair program capacity in the region.

Program effectiveness will be monitored by adherence to the project timeline and by the percentage of homes that pass the final inspection the first time. The project team expects 90% of homes to pass the inspection the first time. A lower passing rate will indicate that the contractors performing repairs require additional training or may need to be replaced.

Members of the local community will be directly engaged in the implementation and evaluation of the program. The project team will build a Community Advisory Council composed of residents representing the community, including young and emerging leaders and elders, who will provide feedback on the program. This way, BHRT will be directly accountable to the residents it serves.

West Georgia Star provides training as part of its service delivery activities. Increased repair program capacity will be measured by the number of hours dedicated by local contractors to program work and by the number of individuals trained through program activities.

Finally, Groundswell will submit quarterly reports to Rural Development, detailing specific assistance granted to each home, progress towards stated objectives, description of any challenges or setbacks impacting program delivery timeline, and other requirements as stated in 7 CFR 1944.683(b).

13. Source and estimated amount of other financial resources to be obtained and used by applicant

Groundswell has applied to the Department of Energy's Weatherization Assistance Program Enhancement and Innovation grant (WAP E&I). If awarded, this funding will enable providing repairs and energy efficiency improvements to an additional 82-100 homes in Troup County (both rural and non-rural areas).

If funding permits, Groundswell will continue to partner with Habitat for Humanity, Troup County, Inc. to provide exterior repairs to homes, through their Brush With Kindness program. The Brush With Kindness program can provide exterior paint, roof repair support, replacement of exterior doors and windows, porch replacements, ramp and porch step installations, and repairing siding and wood.

Finally, Diverse Power is the utility provider for many of the homes in the eligible area. BHRT will seek to partner with Diverse Power to provide gap financing for applicants to the HomePlus Energy Improvement Loan Program. The loan program is for HVAC replacement, water heater replacement, and weatherization services. The BHRT will provide gap financing (as a grant) for income-eligible homeowners for services that cost more than the loan amounts that Diverse Power offers.

14. Program income:

Since the BHRT program will only provide grants, not loans, to participants, there will be no program income.

15. The applicant's plan for disposition of any security instruments held by them as a result of its HPG activities in the event of its loss of legal status.

Not applicable – BHRT will only provide grants, not loans.

16. Any other info necessary to explain proposed program

There is an extensive need for repair and maintenance services for low-income households in Troup County. Through the implementation of its existing energy efficiency program, Groundswell has completed initial assessments on 109 area homes, 53% of which required repairs before being able to receive even simple weatherization measures. While other nonprofit organizations that serve Troup County have some funding to provide repairs, it is severely lacking compared to the need. BHRT will help further program dollars by partnering with other repair and energy efficiency assistance programs to provide more comprehensive services to each home.

BHRT hopes to bring highly necessary funding to improve the safety and comfort of homes. By serving homeowners, the program will help individuals stay in their homes, providing stability and supporting wealth-building by preventing individuals from losing their homes due to disrepair.

17. Outreach efforts outlined in 7 CFR 1944.671(b)

The project team will conduct outreach activities to sufficiently reach the entire eligible area. Outreach activities will include community events, door-to-door flier distribution in areas of high concentration of poverty, outreach through utilities, the local Weatherization Assistance Program provider (CAFI), houses of worship and other local assistance programs. Per the requirements of 7 CFR 1944.671(b), Groundswell will maintain a list that includes:

- Community contacts to community organizations, community leaders, including minority leaders by name, race and date contacted;
- Copies of all advertising in local newspapers and any other media, as well as the name of the media used and the percentage of its patronage by race and national origin (if available)
- Copies of any other advertising or other printed material, including the application form used. The application form will include the nondiscrimination statement, "This is an equal opportunity program. Discrimination is prohibited by Federal Law."

Applicant Name: Groundswell

Award Number: _____

Budget Information - Non Construction Programs

OMB Approval No. 0348-0044

Section A - Budget Summary						
Grant Program Function or Activity (a)	Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Number (b)	Estimated Unobligated Funds		New or Revised Budget		
		Federal (c)	Non-Federal (d)	Federal (e)	Non-Federal (f)	Total (g)
1. Budget Period 1				\$570,585.00	\$0.00	\$570,585.00
2. Budget Period 2				\$780,079.00	\$0.00	\$780,079.00
3.				\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
4.						
5. Totals				\$1,350,664.00	\$0.00	\$1,350,664.00
Section B - Budget Categories						
6. Object Class Categories	Grant Program, Function or Activity				Total (5)	
	Budget Period 1	Budget Period 2				
a. Personnel	\$83,297.00	\$78,127.00			\$161,424.00	
b. Fringe Benefits	\$19,991.00	\$18,750.00			\$38,741.00	
c. Travel	\$4,509.00	\$3,006.00			\$7,515.00	
d. Equipment	\$0.00	\$0.00			\$0.00	
e. Supplies	\$1,240.00	\$1,240.00			\$2,480.00	
f. Contractual	\$404,631.00	\$623,136.00			\$1,027,767.00	
g. Construction	\$0.00	\$0.00			\$0.00	
h. Other	\$0.00	\$0.00			\$0.00	
i. Total Direct Charges (sum of 6a-6h)	\$513,668.00	\$724,259.00			\$1,237,927.00	
j. Indirect Charges	\$56,917.00	\$55,820.00			\$112,737.00	
k. Totals (sum of 6i-6j)	\$570,585.00	\$780,079.00			\$1,350,664.00	
7. Program Income					\$0	

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