

# FHLB SAN FRANCISCO

## Building the American Dream by Hand from the Ground Up

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By: FHLB SF



In a quiet neighborhood in Fresno, California, 22 families are preparing for a moment they've dreamed of their entire lives. They're moving into their own homes in a new community that they built with their own hands with the help of their neighbors. It is the culmination of over a year of hard work, fueled by their own determination to build not just homes, but a better future.

"This is a real work program," said Tom Collishaw, President and CEO of Self-Help Enterprises, the nonprofit organization leading the development of the new community. "These families poured their own concrete, finished the slabs. They've done all the framing on their homes. They've done all of the electrical work. They've done all of the flat work outside and all the finished work, including flooring and paint. These families have built these beautiful homes for over 12 months. They've shared labor to do it. They all started building the same day, and they will all move in on the same day."

Located in the Annadale neighborhood of southwest Fresno, the new community is a testament to what's possible when the dream of homeownership is supported by strong local partnerships. The City of Fresno made key contributions to help make the community a reality, but Self-Help Enterprises led the initiative, guiding and empowering the families throughout the entire building process. Financing for the new homes was arranged by Tri Counties Bank, with downpayment assistance provided by the Federal Home Loan Bank of San Francisco's WISH Program.

"With the WISH Program, we were able to layer into the financing that keeps this affordable for these 22 families, all of whom are considered low-income, as defined by the federal government," explained Collishaw.

For the Vang family, building their home marks a new chapter for them after renting for three decades.

At the heart of this development of first-time homeowners is sweat equity. Each family invested a least 40 hours a week, or more than 1500 hours in total, to learn construction skills to construct their own homes and the homes of their new neighbors, as well. These labor hours, or "sweat equity," are considered part of the downpayment on their new homes. Tri Counties Bank facilitated the Federal Home Loan Bank of San Francisco's WISH Program matching grants to supplement the new homeowners sweat equity, adding to their overall downpayment, and strengthening the families' financial foundation.

With all the hard work, time, and personal investment from these new homeowners, it is more than a house — it is the fulfillment of a dream that once seemed out of reach.

"You talk about being in California and trying to buy a home in today's market, and it's tough," said Dyke Mundy, Vice President of Home Mortgage Sales at Tri Counties Bank. "Being a homeowner is one thing. First-time homebuyer, another. But building your own home, I mean, that's pretty amazing."

In 2025, the [WISH Program provided up to \\$32,099](#) in downpayment assistance for eligible first-time homebuyers earning 80% or below the local area median income. By partnering with participating [community-based financial institutions](#) like Tri Counties Bank, FHLBank San Francisco's WISH Program grants help make homeownership more affordable. Of the 22 new homeowners, 21 received WISH grants.

"We leverage the WISH Program through the Federal Home Loan Bank of San Francisco. It's an incredible program that helps a homeowner bridge that affordability gap because the struggle is trying to bring enough of a downpayment to keep the monthly mortgage payment low enough that they can afford it," said Mundy.

Esmeralda built her home with her two siblings and mom, and where she's now excited to host family gatherings.

For Esmeralda Melecio Lopez — a new homeowner who will share the house with her two siblings and her mother, all of whom helped build it — it is not just about having a roof over her head. It was about building a foundation for her family.

"I honestly wanted this for my family. That was my main reason," Melecio Lopez said. "It's a house that, for me and my brother, we wanted to give that to my mom."

She already has a favorite room in their new house. “I love the kitchen. I like cooking, I like baking ... I get excited when I have family over. I’m always going to be cooking something for them,” gleamed Melecio Lopez.

For Mai Vang, her parents are becoming first-time homeowners after decades of renting. The home they built marks a new chapter for them and the entire family.

First-time homebuyers in southeast Fresno contributed 1500 hours of sweat equity as a part of their downpayment, building their own homes together from the ground up.

“My parents, they have been renting for 30 years,” Vang said. “And when they found out about this program — that you put in 40 hours a week and get some kind of sweat equity downpayment towards your house — they were really interested.”

“This is very important for them. It’s a milestone for our family,” she added. “It’s hopefully going to change our generational poverty and create wealth for the new generations to come.”

With the help of FHLBank San Francisco’s WISH Program grants and community-based financial institutions like Tri Counties Bank, belief in the American Dream is being restored one home at time.

“When we can layer in a downpayment assistance like the Federal Home Loan Bank of San Francisco’s WISH grants and work with Self-Help and other partners, you give people some hope that they can actually buy a home,” said Mundy.

In this new community of 22 homes, dreams have been built from the ground up with the support of many hands. As the families prepare to move in, their joy is about more than just homeownership — it is about community, dignity, and hope for a better future.

21 of the 22 new homes received WISH Program grants facilitated by Tri Counties Bank, a member of FHLBank San Francisco.