



## **2020 Grant Proposal for Fresno Unified School District and City of Fresno COVID-19 Community Meals Project**

### **Background**

Under federal, state, and local closures to mitigate spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), Fresno residents living in poverty have been experiencing a surge in food insecurity. The *shelter in place* order and business closures resulted in the immediate and widespread loss of local jobs leaving many families with reduced or no income to provide for their essential needs including food. According to *Feeding America*, individuals who experience food insecurity are more likely to have poorer health and diet-related conditions such as diabetes. Families were also affected by food shortages in local markets. On March 21, 2020, Fresno's local ABC News reported the Central California Food Bank faced severe shortages as the demand for food assistance increased 50% over normal food distributions.

Fresno Unified School District serves 74,155 pre-K to 12<sup>th</sup> grade students in 103 schools. Over 88% of our students live in poverty. The District's Food Services Department serves approximately 95,000 meals daily during the normal school year. Under the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Community Eligibility Provision program, all District students are eligible for free meals. On March 16, 2020, Fresno Unified closed schools to in-person instruction to minimize students, staff, and families' exposure to COVID-19. While creating new online educational programs, accelerating the deployment of technology devices to students, and expanding professional learning to teachers at all grade levels for the delivery of online instruction, the District also recognized and responded to the community emergency created by gaps in access to food for many Fresno families.

### **Project Need**

Immediately upon the closure of school campuses, the District transitioned to a grab-and-go model of breakfast and lunch distribution, to safely and efficiently provide student meals at accessible neighborhood school sites located throughout the city. It became immediately apparent that students were not the only ones in need of food, as families and adults also requested meals. The onset of the emergency was too rapid and widespread for community food programs to meet the urgent demand for food in our community. To meet the immediate need, the District provided meals to requesting adults in addition to serving student meals.

The cost of meals served to students is reimbursed to the District by the USDA and the California Department of Education. However, meals served to adults are not eligible for reimbursement; therefore, the District must support the cost of meals from its general fund. Over several months of economic hardship, the threat of food insecurity in our community remains significant. Even now, the *COVID-19 Community Meals Project* is filling the gap in providing nutritious meals to Fresno families. As a result, the District is incurring millions of dollars of non-budgeted expenses to provide essential meal services to our community.



The CARES Act passthrough funding allocated to the District is programmed to support student academic needs, professional learning for teachers, technology devices and enhancements including District intranet infrastructure, health services, safety supports such as PPE for staff and students, and cleaning/sanitizing supplies and equipment for school sites. These CARES Act funds may not be used for adult meals.

### **Project Objective**

The objective of the *COVID-19 Community Meals Project* is to fund the provision of daily nutritious meals to Fresno adults and non-enrolled children in the central, southeast and southwest regions of the District. By meeting the need for food for many Fresno families, Fresno Unified can help reduce the adverse impacts of COVID-19 to the Fresno community.

The *COVID-19 Community Meals Project* has been providing nutritious daily meals to adults in the community, as well as children. As of August 7, the District has served 3.75 million meals since the start of the COVID-19 emergency, and over 652,000 non-reimbursable meals through the *COVID-19 Community Meals Project*. Since March 16, Fresno Unified has operated under a USDA program that allows reimbursable meals to be provided to children 1-18, without regard to whether they are Fresno Unified students. That program is set to expire and when school starts on August 17, only meals provided to enrolled students will be reimbursed. Therefore, in addition to supporting the cost of adult meals, the District's general fund would need to also pay the cost of meals provided to non-enrolled children.

### **Project Work Plan and Impact**

With campuses located in neighborhood communities throughout the City's sphere, Fresno Unified provides immediate daily accessibility to breakfast and lunch meals to impoverished Fresno residents who are facing severe food insecurities. Through the *COVID-19 Community Meals Project*, the District will purchase, prepare and distribute breakfast and lunch meals to adults and non-enrolled children at locations accessible throughout the city. Currently, meals through the *Project* are served at 16 schools in the Edison, Fresno, McLane, Roosevelt and Sunnyside high school areas. Beginning with the start of the school year on August 17, the *Project* is planned to expand to 47 schools in the central, southeast and southwest regions.

The *COVID-19 Community Meals Project* emerged at a critical time to assist Fresno families during the pandemic and ensuing economic downturn. The *Project's* impact is to fill the gap by providing access to essential nutritious meals daily. If the City of Fresno is unable to support the *COVID-19 Community Meals Project*, the District will not have a funding source to provide meals to adults and non-enrolled children once the school year begins, and the service may be discontinued.

### **Project Funding Request**

Funding is requested for the *COVID-19 Community Meals Project* to support the cost of meals provided to adults at schools in the central, southeast and southwest regions of Fresno from August 17 to December 31, 2020, estimated at **\$2,324,300**.

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