

I. CHESTER COUNTY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION GRANT PROPOSAL SUMMARY SHEET

Date: 8/12/2021

Contact Information

Organization Name: Chester County Food Bank
Address: 650 Pennsylvania Drive, Exton, PA 19341

Phone: 610-873-6000

Website: chestercountyfoodbank.org

Year Incorporated: 2009

FEIN: 27-0887311

ED/CEO Name: Andrea Youndt

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Board Chair Name: Robert McNeil

Board Chair Approval (check here): x

Primary Contact Name: Patricia Campbell

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Organization Information:

Field/s of Interest:

Arts, Culture & Humanities

Environment/Animal Welfare

Education

Health

Human Services

Religion

Mission: We mobilize our community to ensure access to real, healthy food.

Geographic Area Served: All of Chester County

Describe Population Served & Annual Number of People Served:

We serve over 40,000 people experiencing food insecurity in Chester County.

Annual Budget \$7,011,565

84% of budget for program expenses

10% of budget for administrative expenses

6% of budget for fundraising expenses

33 Full-Time Equivalent Paid Staff

15 Board Volunteers

1175 of Active Non-Board Volunteers

12,068 Volunteer Hours

Top 3-5 funding sources:

Chester County Community Health Foundation, Cabot-Kjellerup Foundation, Department of Environmental Protection, Feeding America

Grant proposal for: General Operating

Grant Amount Requested from the Community Foundation: \$10,000

Proposal Summary:

As the central hunger relief organization in our county, Chester County Food Bank serves a network of 160 partners to meet emergency food and nutrition needs while exploring long term solutions to chronic food insecurity. Serving more than 40,000 residents through **food** distribution and **education, health, and wellness** programs, we provide diverse distribution outlets and varied forms of food access to maximize outreach in culturally appropriate ways. We prioritize nutritious and local foods by growing at partner farm sites and supporting raised bed gardens. We provide our partners with a variety of foods, ready-to-eat meals, and capacity support. Our programs include Fresh2You Mobile Market, Fruit and Vegetable Prescriptions, Seed to Super, EatFresh cooking classes, and FRESHSTART Kitchen workforce development program. Due to the unprecedented generosity of many during the pandemic, we increased our food output by 10%, increased fresh fruits and vegetables to nearly half of our total distribution, and enhanced programming to respond to a growing need. We are working diligently to sustain this increase in capacity to continue to address food insecurity with a holistic and sustainable approach.

II. CHESTER COUNTY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION: GRANT PROPOSAL NARRATIVE

1. Nonprofit's history, goals, key achievements and distinctiveness

Founded in 2009, Chester County Food Bank's (CCFB) mission is to *mobilize our community to ensure access to real, healthy food*. Despite our existence as a "young" organization, we have evolved to be a leading food bank in the areas of nutrition, locally sourced foods, and education. As the central hunger relief organization in our county, CCFB serves a network of 160 partners to meet emergency food needs while establishing long term solutions to chronic food insecurity. We serve over 40,000 residents through **food distribution and education, health, and wellness**. We prioritize nutritious and local foods by growing at partner farm sites and supporting raised bed gardens. Our programs are designed to improve healthy food access and education, as well as support community engagement to strengthen self-sufficiency and health. Throughout the pandemic, CCFB worked strategically to respond to a growing need. We collaborated with our partners to increase their capacity to provide not just more food but healthier food, establishing new partners along the way. Despite the limitations of rising food costs and the temporary lack of a volunteer force, we increased our food output by 10% and increased the proportion of fresh fruits and vegetables to half of our total distribution. This increase in healthy perishable foods required us to support our agencies in improving infrastructure needs with the addition of cold storage units to store more food and reduce waste. Additionally, we expanded our outreach and added new distribution partners to reach as many as possible. We successfully introduced Sunshine Meals, pre-made microwaveable meals provided to our distribution network. Our concentrated efforts on Sunshine Meals allowed us to increase our ready-to-eat meal output by five times, to provide nearly 100,000 meals annually. Our programs were skillfully adapted to accommodate safety guidelines and maintained their strong impact. We observed the significant impact our programs have in the lives of residents as we were told countless times that the community counted on us for more than nutritious food but also for social support and connection.

2. Funding request

Description of key initiatives

CCFB serves over 40,000 people through access to **real, healthy food** and **education and wellness**. We have cultivated a community-centered and holistic approach to not only address emergency needs but also the root causes of chronic food insecurity for households facing unique issues in Chester County (CC).

Real, Healthy Food

Growing Real, Healthy Food - Our **Agriculture Department** supports us in providing the freshest food for our programs with the help of an industrious volunteer base on the farm and in the processing kitchen. At our partner farm sites, Springton Manor Farm and Pete's Produce Farm, our staff and volunteers grow 100,000 pounds of vegetables seasonally. We also support our network of local farms and producers by purchasing additional fruits, vegetables and other goods, to offer our communities the best in seasonal produce. Approximately 20% of the 1.7 million pounds of produce distributed annually is grown here in CC. In addition to our production of real, healthy foods, we also support communities and organizations to grow their own food through our **Raised Bed Garden Program**. We provide growing education, thousands of seedlings, and construction support to 94 partner sites. We prioritize gardens frequented by those at risk of food insecurity and work to uplift community gardens to promote equitable access. Garden sites include schools, residences, community gardens, and food cupboards who collectively produce over 50,000 pounds of vegetables each year. Harvested produce is enjoyed by the gardeners, used in classroom education, and donated back to our food provider network.

Distributing Real, Healthy Food - Each year, we distribute 3.4 million pounds of food to over 160 organizations while prioritizing nutrition, local food, and a dignified experience as we address immediate

food needs. Alleviating hunger is the important first step to addressing the multifaceted issues of food insecurity. As we strengthen our food safety-net system and meet emergency needs, our community has the foundation to expand to complementary approaches that focus on root causes. Our network of partners is purposefully diverse and our strongest asset as a food bank including food pantries, hot meal sites, schools, senior centers, healthcare providers and other community-based organizations. Whether a partner needs fresh foods, non-perishable foods, pre-made meals, pre-boxed foods, or a combination, we work with each agency to provide the right type and quantity of food while accommodating cultural choices.

Our **Education, Health, and Wellness** programs include the following:

Fresh2You (F2Y) travels throughout CC providing fresh, high-quality foods from local farmers paired with education on healthy cooking and local agriculture. This “farm stand on wheels” serves over 2,000 people each season with a summer/fall and winter market. To make fresh local food accessible to all, *F2Y* accepts all forms of payment including SNAP (food stamps) and Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program (FMNP). Purchases made with SNAP or FMNP are matched with CCFB’s *Veggie Bucks*, a form of currency that can be used on future purchases of fruits and vegetables. We provide about 60,000 pounds of food each season with over 50 varieties of produce. A regular day at the market might include shoppers exchanging recipe ideas for kale, trying a sample of kohlrabi salad, and learning about our local food system. Trained Community Food Advocates help their communities navigate food issues and assist customers at each market. Our shoppers not only benefit from delicious farm fresh vegetables, they also report increased cooking skills and emotional connection. *F2Y* partners with 8 health clinics to provide **Fruit and Vegetable Prescriptions (FVRx)** to 150-200 individuals screening positive for food insecurity by their healthcare providers. These prescriptions can be redeemed at any *F2Y* mobile market location. We consistently see improvements in participants’ biometric data and other health indicators after participating in the program. For example, 46% of participants decreased their blood pressure and those who reported excellent health increased by three times.

EatFresh (EF) is a series of cooking classes available in English and Spanish that emphasize whole foods, local produce, and cultural traditions serving about 200 people each year. EF participants receive a 20 pound bag of fresh produce with each class. Our produce shares are all Pennsylvania grown with 60% coming from our own CCFB farm sites during the growing season. Our farm manager works closely with program staff to grow culturally relevant foods as many of our students have immigrated from other countries. EF instructors encourage students to pair their cultural traditions and family recipes with the food native to this area. For example, a student who immigrated from Mexico was excited to share her traditional holiday recipe for pozole with the addition of mustard greens grown at CCFB’s farm site. Sharing culture and food with one another creates a collaborative environment for students to make life-long friends and feel supported in making healthy lifestyle changes. In response to COVID, the class transitioned to a virtual format with produce available at the regular pick-up site. As we return to the “new normal,” EF will begin a hybrid model to maximize the benefits of both in person and virtual learning. The EF program was recently selected by the Gretchen Swanson Center for Nutrition to research the benefits of nutrition education hybrid learning.

Seed to Supper – In partnership with [Penn State Extension Master Gardeners of Chester County](#), CCFB offers Seed to Supper, a beginning gardening course for growing vegetables at home on a budget. Available in both English and Spanish, the free classes highlight practical, low-cost techniques for growing and celebrating the harvest of a successful vegetable garden. Classes include onetime 2-hour sessions on vegetable gardening for beginners and an in depth 6-week course. Teams of facilitators support participants as they learn about the gardening fundamentals of soil preparation, garden planning, planting, maintenance, and harvest. Classes are provided indoors and outdoors, making the most of hands-on activities and virtual learning. The course book and other supplies are provided to each student free of charge. The program improves participants’ access to fresh produce and overall food security. As we support individuals in home gardening, there are benefits for the family, community, and environment.

FRESHstart Kitchen™ is a culinary arts workforce development training program providing a pathway out of poverty. FRESH is an acronym for: *Focusing Resources on Employment, Self-Sufficiency and Health*. The program helps students gain confidence and skills to begin a career in the restaurant industry. We provide transportation and personalized support for each student based on their personal and professional goals. Establishing a career with a livable wage is the foundation to achieving self-sufficiency and food security. Many of the participants have faced extraordinary personal hardships and endured the challenges of generational poverty and systemic oppression. Our students experience barriers to employment such as having been previously incarcerated, recovering from addiction, mental illness, developmental disabilities, homelessness, among other difficulties. Through this program, we provide the necessary support for individuals who have not had the resources or opportunities to succeed. As a partner of National Restaurant Association's *Restaurant Ready* program, our curriculum is designed to meet the six core competency areas defined by the industry. In addition to culinary arts instruction and training, the program focuses on self-empowerment (value systems, time management, attitude, communication) and job readiness (resume building, mock interviewing, computer literacy, professional goal setting, interpersonal relationships). The class is concluded with an internship and job placement opportunity where students put their newly developed skills into action in the workplace.

• Specific needs and issues to be addressed

The households we serve are not only hungry but also lack the quality and diversity of nutritious foods needed to sustain a healthy lifestyle. CC residents are uniquely vulnerable residing in a county where the living wage for a family of four is \$87,817 and the eligibility threshold for SNAP (food stamps) for the same family is \$33,480. Due to this “benefits cliff,” many will forgo taking a promotion or working more hours because the loss of benefits would be detrimental. With the high cost of living in CC, many household incomes fall below the living wage but above the threshold for assistance. Because eligibility for SNAP (food stamps) does not consider local living costs, Feeding America estimates that 57% of the food insecure households in CC are ineligible for food assistance because their income is deemed “too high.” When compared to neighboring counties, food insecure CC residents are much less likely to receive government assistance making our programs more prominent and impactful.

• Why it is important to fund this now

Funding for our programs and services ensures that we continue to move our county's most vulnerable community members towards food security. Since the beginning of the pandemic, food insecurity has increased by 40% in our county. Now more than ever, it is a challenge to put food on the table. As we look to the future, we envision a food secure CC. We plan to continue our work guided by our core values of collaboration, dedication, service, and integrity. Due to the unprecedented generosity of many during uncertain times, we increased our food distribution capacity and enhanced programming. It is uncertain whether we will receive the same quantity of generous donations as we did during a time when hunger was a public focal point. Despite these uncertainties, we remain steadfast to sustaining the increased capacity and adapting to the needs of each community as we continue our holistic approach.

• How impact and results will be demonstrated

CCFB strives to positively impact food security status, health, and wellness through access to nutritious food and educational opportunities. Collecting data and consistently communicating with our partners allows us to measure the scope of our efforts. Direct feedback with those we serve is an integral part of our planning and evaluation process as well. Our programs incorporate both quantitative and qualitative methods to ensure we are providing services that are effective at alleviating hunger and show the improvement of health indicators. Using tracking software, participation counts, surveys, focus groups, testimonials, and observations we provide an in depth look at the effects of our work. Each of our programs has unique indicators to show its efficacy and uses metrics that align with our mission and strategic direction to ensure we are having the greatest impact possible.