

I. CHESTER COUNTY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION GRANT PROPOSAL SUMMARY SHEET

Date 10/23/23

Contact Information

Organization Name: Upper Merion Area Community Cupboard
Address: 191Town Center Road, King of Prussia, PA 19406
Phone: (833) 877-7100
Website: www.umacc.org
Year Incorporated: 2018
FEIN: 83-2432151

ED/CEO Name: Alice Budno Hope
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Board Chair Name: Alice Budno Hope
Board Chair Approval: Yes
Primary Contact Name: Kathy Knoebel
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Organization Information:

Field of Interest: Human Services (Food Insecurity)

Mission: The Upper Merion Area Community Cupboard (UMACC)'s primary mission is to improve the health and wellbeing of families struggling with food insecurity in the Upper Merion Area School District (UMASD) through weekly in person and home delivery grocery distribution free of charge. Our secondary mission is to raise greater awareness of food insecurity and nurture the values of empathy and compassion within our community.

Geographic Area Served: UMASD (Upper Merion Township, Bridgeport Borough & West Conshohocken Borough)

Describe Population Served & Annual Number of People Served: TEFAP eligible families (<=185% of the Federal poverty level) residing in UMASD. We serve 1,700 people annually (50% adults, 40% children, and 10% seniors).

Annual Budget \$798,350

99% of budget for program expenses

1% of budget for administrative expenses

0% of budget for fundraising expenses

1 Full-Time Equivalent Paid Staff

8 Board Volunteers

100 Active Non-Board Volunteers

7,000 Total Volunteer Hours/Year

Top 3-5 funding sources: Our funding comes from Individuals (36%), Foundations (27%), Corporations (26%), and Government (11%). The top 5 individual funders in 2023 are The Arcadia Foundation (\$34,000), Leo & Peggy Pierce Family Foundation (\$20,000), The Gordon Charter Foundation (\$15,000), Upper Merion Township Board of Community Assistance (\$11,000), and Genuardi Family Foundation (\$10,000).

This grant proposal is for: General Operating (Purchase of Patron Supplies)

Grant Amount Requested from the Community Foundation: \$7,500

Proposal Summary:

Every week the UMACC provides free groceries to 150-175 UMASD families (615-750 individuals). Our guests either come onsite on Tuesday to select their items in our Full Choice Pantry or they request home delivery if they are not able to come to our facility in person. We are still the only food pantry serving the less fortunate residents of the UMASD. Recent events have both increased the demand for our services and increased the cost of purchasing these groceries. It now costs a total of \$24,000/month in financial donations to operate the UMACC, \$16,000/month of which is used to purchase patron supplies at local stores. Every week we provide our guests with nonperishable food items, milk, bread, meat, eggs, cheese, yogurt, fresh fruits & vegetables, paper goods, cleaning supplies, personal care items, feminine hygiene products, and baby supplies. We are requesting \$7,500 to purchase these groceries for several weeks.

II. CHESTER COUNTY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION GRANT PROPOSAL NARRATIVE

Organizational Background, History, and Achievements

The Upper Merion Area Community Cupboard (UMACC) was conceived in 2017 as an empathetic response to hunger within our local community through the collaboration of local Upper Merion Area School District (UMASD) social workers and school board members as well as members of Upper Merion Emergency Aid, Upper Merion Township Economic and Community Development Committee, Upper Merion Clergy, and Upper Merion Township Board of Supervisors. We officially opened our doors in June 2018, operating in a space donated by the Valley Forge Presbyterian Church in King of Prussia. We received our 501(c)3 status in November 2018 and became a Philabundance agency in May 2021. Today, we provide food and other essential items free of charge to 1,700+ food insecure residents of Upper Merion Township, Bridgeport Borough, and West Conshohocken Borough each year. We utilize a walk-in Full Choice Pantry at our physical site on Tuesdays as well as provide home delivered groceries for those who are unable to reach our location.

Despite being a young organization, the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 thrust UMACC into a period of fast and challenging growth. In the last 5 years, we have grown exponentially. We now have 200+ volunteers donating 7,000+ hours of service per year, a paid full time Pantry Manager, and serve 150-175 families (615-750 individuals) each week in 2023. Our volunteer recruitment, donor solicitation, food purchasing, and distribution capacity have all increased to accommodate the 300% rise in food-insecure neighbors looking for help. We also changed our food distribution model and its policies so that households receive groceries weekly, rather than the pre-pandemic policy of two food distributions per household per month, which further increased the demand for our services. We have continued to grow our programs through enhanced infrastructure, including the addition of a delivery van, a walk-in freezer/refrigerator unit that increases our capacity for distributing perishable food items, and securing 5,000 square feet of rent-free space to operate in.

Our most rewarding achievement was when we provided a wealth of services to those affected by Hurricane Ida in September 2021. We inspired the community to care for their displaced neighbors by raising just under \$340,000 in relief funds that provided 1,805 nights of immediate emergency shelter in hotels for 82 households (144 adults and 126 children) weeks before FEMA and the county could take over financial support, thereby keeping our neighbors off the streets and out of cars. These funds also provided 16 low-cost automobiles to households that lost their only transportation to the flood, delivered food to families in hotels, paid many utility and storage cost fees, as well as provided grants for rent and security deposits to those prepared to transition from hotels to new homes. Most importantly, we deepened our relationships with our patrons and strengthened our reputation within the local community as an organization of action and care.

Our most recent achievement was in September 2023, when we transitioned to a Full Choice Pantry to better serve our guests. This change has increased our capacity to serve more patrons, improved our guest experience, and integrated racial and social justice into our service. This new system is a more Patron-Focused Approach, as follows:

- It helps eliminate language barriers, illiteracy barriers, and misunderstandings surrounding food selection.
- It increases the dignity of patrons since they select their own foods (just like they would at a grocery store, but without the checkout line).
- Emphasis is on what we do have on the shelves, not what is crossed off the menu (minimizing the stress of seeing items crossed off the menu for families who are waiting in the car line).
- This system helps eliminate barriers between volunteers and patrons, since everyone will share most of the pantry space instead of keeping patrons “in the front.”

UMACC Goals and Strategic Objectives

The UMACC's ongoing primary goal is to serve the hundreds of food-insufficient individuals and families who reside in UMASD, particularly targeting seniors on fixed-incomes and low-wage and/or single-parent households with children. The UMACC works towards the following program objectives to achieve this overarching goal:

- Provide Free On-Site Food Distribution on Tuesdays using a Full Choice Pantry.
- Provide Free Home Delivery Food Distribution for those who are unable to come in person.
- Provide Special/Holiday Food Offerings at Thanksgiving, Christmas, and during the summer (when schools are closed, and free school breakfast/lunch programs are not available).

Although we do not have a formalized Strategic Plan, our Board has identified the following strategic objectives for the next three years:

- Expand programs to meet community need through weekly patron supplies for all food-insecure residents who visit UMACC.
- Expand offerings in our full choice pantry model through increased selections and access to fresh, healthy foods.
- Increase our partnership network to expand UMACC's reach.
- Increase community engagement through local food drives and financial support to increase community buy-in and achieve long-term financial sustainability.
- Increase patron feedback survey frequency to respond to patron needs more effectively in a timely manner and use feedback to continuously improve program operations.

Statement of Need

Despite the progress we've made as a society to address hunger, a significant number of individuals and families in our community still struggle to access adequate and nutritious food. This issue is particularly acute among vulnerable populations such as low-income families, single-parent households, the elderly, and children. High living costs, low wages, and inadequate access to fresh and affordable food sources have contributed to this situation.

Recent data indicates that a concerning percentage of households in UMASD lack reliable access to sufficient food, although they may not qualify for federal or state food access programs based on financial need. According to Feeding America's "Map the Meal Gap" project, Montgomery County, PA has the state's lowest percentage of food insecure persons who qualify for state food support programs, leaving these families with limited options necessary for survival. Addressing food insecurity in UMASD is therefore a pressing and escalating issue for the entire community, not just for those facing hunger directly.

The UMACC is currently the only food pantry/cupboard within the bounds of the UMASD that serves district residents. UMACC's efforts complement those of other food pantries within Montgomery County, utilizing both home delivery and full choice pantry models to more effectively serve high risk populations that face additional barriers, such as seniors and families with children.

Project Request and Immediate Importance

The UMACC currently requires \$24,000 each month in financial support to run our total operation, **\$16,000/month of which is used to purchase the groceries that we distribute free of charge** to over 250 unique families (1,000 individuals). These expenditures are in addition to what we receive from in-kind donations from Philabundance, SHARE Food Program, Montgomery County Anti-Hunger Network (MAHN), Mitzvah Circle, LeBus Bakery, Wawa, Chick-Fil-A, BJ's, Red Loster, and local individual and organization food drives. We distribute nonperishable food items, milk, bread, multiple meat selections, eggs, cheese, yogurt, fresh fruits & vegetables, paper goods, cleaning supplies, personal care items, feminine hygiene products, and baby supplies.

UMACC currently faces challenges funding our operation as financial and in-kind donations are at a low point, grant funding for food purchases is sporadic, grocery costs have skyrocketed, SNAP Extra Benefits are no longer available, and our weekly number of families served continues to rise. **We are requesting \$7,500 to purchase groceries**, which would relieve this financial pressure for several weeks of our operation.

Project Impact and Results

The UMACC plays a critical role in addressing food insecurity in UMASD and has significant impacts on our community, including:

- Immediate Hunger Relief. The essential food items we offer help alleviate hunger and ensure that people have access to basic nutrition.
- Improved Nutrition. We supply a variety of food items, including fresh produce, dairy, canned goods, grains, and proteins. This diverse range of food helps improve the nutritional intake of patrons who might otherwise have limited access to balanced meals due to limited financial resources and/or barriers to accessing healthy foods.
- Enhanced Health Outcomes. By providing access to nutritious food, we contribute to better health outcomes for our patrons, especially for individuals who may have previously been malnourished. In turn, this supports their physical and mental health, cognitive development (especially in children), and overall well-being.
- Financial Relief. UMACC provides no cost supplies for individuals and families which helps them save money on groceries, allowing them to allocate their limited financial resources to other critical needs such as housing, healthcare, utilities, transportation, and education. When choosing between buying food and paying other bills is not an issue, our families experience increased stability, and our wider community becomes more resilient.
- Supporting Vulnerable Populations. UMACC tailors its pantry offerings and program operations to meet the specific needs of vulnerable populations such as seniors, children, individuals with disabilities, and those experiencing homelessness. This targeted support is crucial for addressing diverse challenges for historically disadvantaged and marginalized communities.

Project Measurement and Evaluation

The UMACC primarily defines project success using quantitative measurements, including: (1) weekly total number of households visiting the UMACC, (2) weekly household composition (number of adults, children, and seniors), (3) monthly number of new households served, (4) monthly number of unique households served, tabulated separately by single and multiple visits during the month, (5) monthly number of unique individuals served, (6) monthly total weight of food distributed, and (7) annual total unique households and individuals served. Our Board Treasurer also uses Quicken to track and record all purchases made by the organization at the date, vendor, item purchased, and payment method levels.

Regular qualitative feedback from our patrons is also essential to monitoring overall program success to ensure that our services are efficient and effectively meeting community needs. We obtain feedback from patrons' weekly conversations with the Pantry Manager and volunteers to accurately adjust weekly supply offerings to provide the most relevant food options for our neighbors (e.g., gluten free offerings, baby supplies, ready-made foods, and high protein options for those experiencing homelessness). From this valuable feedback over the years, we have learned that patrons need additional items such as cleaning, personal hygiene, and infant supplies that can't be purchased with SNAP money, and now we offer these supplies in our pantry.

We also issue regular patron surveys that elicit feedback on several operational aspects of UMACC. This has been essential to improving our program operations. For example, in the summer of 2021, our patron surveys found that patrons overwhelmingly wanted to return to an indoor choice pantry rather than the "COVID-safe" car-line drive through model, so we did.