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Dane County Awards \$41,000 to 2024 Partners in Equity Food Grant Program Awardees

Grant Program Works to Advance Food Equity & Access in Dane County

Today, Dane County Executive Joe Parisi announced that 15 local agencies will receive the Tamara D. Grigsby Office of Equity and Inclusion's 2024 Partners in Equity (PIE) Food Grant. In 2019, the County Board approved the Food Council's recommendation that the Partners in Equity Program be expanded to address the challenges related to food insecurities within the county. In total, \$41,000 will be awarded to recipients of the 2024 PIE Food Grant.

"Many Dane County residents and families are still struggling to put healthy, nutritious food on the table due to inflation and economic pressures," said Dane County Executive Joe Parisi. "Through the PIE Food Grant Program, we are forming community partnerships to create a stronger local food system. We thank this year's PIE Food Grant recipients for building innovative food programs that strive to achieve greater equity in our community and help address food insecurity."

Vulnerable populations saw food insecurity and other needs rise during the COVID-19 pandemic and its subsequent inflationary pressures in the general economy and supply chain. While the Dane County community continues to respond and recover from these impacts on its local food system, Dane County government aims to support projects that will provide the greatest impacts in strengthening the community's food system and cultivating community engagement and access.

The PIE Food program encourages innovative development of projects that advance equity and access in local food systems through educational and outreach services. Recipients were selected based on proposals intended to address issues related to healthy food access, access to land for growing food, or issues related to food waste and recovery.

"The PIE Grants are among my very favorite projects in Dane County. I am grateful to our community for proposing so many creative projects that address food insecurity in our community. These project proposals are where creativity and community service meet with heart. I am so proud to be part of this work," said Supervisor Michele Ritt.

The 2024 grants fall in one of two categories: small grants (applicants requesting \$2,000 or less) and large grants (applicants requesting \$2,001 to \$4,000). The 2024 grant recipients are as follows:

Small Grants

CENTRO HISPANO OF DANE COUNTY – EL MERCADITO | \$2000

Centro Hispano of Dane County (Centro) is the largest nonprofit supporting the Latinx community, the county's second fastest growing population. Centro's at the epicenter of one of Madison's neighborhoods most affected by food insecurity. In the 53713 zip code, access to healthy foods is scarce. The south side is home to only one full-service grocer under threat of closure. El Mercadito is Dane County's first farmers' market to prioritize the engagement of vulnerable populations and support local food and craft businesses, particularly those of Latinx/Indigenous farmers and food entrepreneurs. Through weekly markets with various vendors, El Mercadito offers Madison's south side an opportunity to improve physical and mental health outcomes through expanded access to healthy foods and a strong sense of community.

DANE COUNTY FOOD COLLECTIVE (DCFC) – DANE COUNTY FOOD COLLECTIVE PODCAST | \$2000

DCFC will use funding to launch a podcast amplifying the diverse voices of small business owners, farmers, and food industry workers in Dane County, WI. The project prioritizes BIPOC and women's voices, offering a platform for underrepresented communities to share their experiences, challenges, and successes in the local food system. Through engaging interviews and storytelling, they aim to foster greater understanding, connection, and empowerment within our community. By highlighting the perspectives of those often marginalized in the industry, they will strive to promote wellness, equity, and resilience in the local food ecosystem. Each podcast will feature different voices and different topics to touch on themes like wellness in the food industry, economic viability, environmental impacts, policy advocacy, hopes for the future, etc.

EASTMORLAND COMMUNITY CENTER LTD. (ECC) – LOCAL PRODUCE FOR ECC FOOD PANTRY | \$2000

The ECC nutrition programs serve low-income families in the Schenk/Whitehorse attendance zone and support the work of The Linda and Gene Farley Center for Peace, Justice, and Sustainability in Verona, WI. The ECC plans to expand its pop-up food pantry with culturally relevant, local produce. Pre-purchasing seasonal vegetables from Lansing St. Veggies will allow the ECC to give the 100+ families using the pantry equitable access to the local food economy, as well as input into the types of produce that they want to see. As an added benefit, this program will help to reduce food waste for the farm that results from unsold or unharvested produce.

EAST MADISON COMMUNITY CENTER (EMCC) – SELF-SERVE REFRIGERATED FOOD PRODUCTS | \$2000

The majority of patrons are from the low-income north and east side neighborhoods of Madison. However, patrons also are from Cambridge, DeForest, McFarland, Oregon, Stoughton, Sun Prairie, Waunakee and Windsor. Currently, the regular food pantry distribution takes place once a week and averages assisting 90-100 households each week. The refrigerated products are gone within day or two. The refrigeration project will increase the variety and frequency of perishable food items available from 2 days to 6 days a week in the EMCC's self-serve pantry.

HERZING UNIVERSITY LTD. – EMPOWERING STUDENTS THROUGH HU CUPBOARD | \$1928

Although the Herzing University Madison Campus is located in Madison, it serves a large number of students who reside outside the Madison area but within Dane County. It primarily serves nontraditional students seeking their higher education degree who live in Belleville, Cottage Grove, Deerfield, Deforest, Fitchburg, Marshall, McFarland, Middleton, Mount Horeb, Stoughton, Sun Prairie, Verona, Waunakee, and Windsor. The Madison campus food pantry project aims to combat food insecurity among students pursuing higher education. Recognizing the financial strains these and many other students face, the pantry seeks to provide essential food support to those in need. The cupboard will provide a range of nutritious food options, available for students to take as needed. The aim will be to alleviate the stress and burden of food insecurity, allowing students to focus more effectively on their studies and overall wellbeing.

MADISON PUBLIC SCHOOLS FOUNDATION (MPSF) – NOURISHING FUTURES: FRESH PRODUCE FOR METRO-JAIL HIGH SCHOOL YOUTH | \$2000

This project is dedicated to serving the incarcerated youth at Metro-Jail High School in Madison, directly within the correctional facility. The project aims to provide fresh, locally-sourced produce to the youth at Metro-Jail High School, a unique educational environment for students involved in the criminal justice system. Currently serving a fluctuating enrollment with an average of 23 students yearly, these individuals face significant barriers, including limited access to healthy food options. This initiative not only supports their physical wellbeing but also serves as a critical educational tool, teaching the importance of nutrition and healthy lifestyle choices. This project aims to increase access to healthy, locally sourced, and culturally relevant food for incarcerated youth. By introducing fresh produce to the youths' diets, the program can address immediate nutritional needs and foster a connection to healthier lifestyle choices.

PURPOSE GROWN PROJECT – LOCAL PRODUCE DISTRIBUTION | \$1500

The Purpose Grown Project (PGP) will pay for the production of local vegetables from participating farms who agree to grow high quality, nutrient-dense and culturally relevant produce and deliver it to the Badger Prairie Needs Network, Rooted/Troy Farm, and the Neighborhood House Community Center. Food will be delivered weekly to these locations for 20 weeks, from June through November. An estimated 250 households will be served weekly for the duration of the local growing season.

VERONA DOWNTOWN FARMERS' MARKET – EBT/SNAP AVAILABILITY | \$1645

The project will mainly serve the Verona area, but it also reaches areas such as Fitchburg, Oregon, Cross Plains, and other nearby areas to the Verona Farmers' Market. This project will supply an EBT/credit card machine, signage, and an employee each day of the market. Providing EBT at the market will allow those who are in need access to healthy, local foods that they may not be able to find otherwise. This will impact the community, the market, and its vendors, as bringing in more customers will encourage more vendors to attend, which in turn will bring in more customers. At the end of each market day, said hired employee will take any extra products to Badger Prairie Needs Network. This will allow for a decrease in food waste and an increase in food access for those in need.

Large Grants

BAYVIEW FOUNDATION – BAYVIEW COMMUNITY GARDENS AND RAISED BEDS | \$4000

Bayview serves the old Greenbush neighborhood that transformed into an affordable housing community in the 1970s. The majority of residents are immigrants and refugees, most from sustenance growing cultures. In preparing for the redevelopment of the community, Bayview engaged residents in the planning efforts. Residents expressed a high priority for green space to grow food and teach traditional ways of gardening to pass the knowledge on to future generations. Thus, the redeveloped Bayview includes 30 10 x 10' garden plots with a cistern irrigation system and a shared tool shed. It also includes 16 raised community garden beds, with some reserved as accessible gardens, and others earmarked for the Giving Garden, a youth employment garden that contributes to the food pantry. PIE funds will be used to purchase critical infrastructure: soil, fencing, tools, mulch, and plants.

ELVER PARK NEIGHBORHOOD – PROVIDING HEALTHY AND CULTURALLY-RELEVANT FOOD TO MADISON'S SOUTHWEST SIDE | \$3000

Elver Park Neighborhood Center's food pantry serves families on Madison's southwest side. Funding from the PIE grant will allow Elver Park Neighborhood Center food pantry to remain open twice a week during varying times to accommodate the schedules of those who need the pantry, while providing filling, healthy, and culturally-relevant food options. As the need continues to grow with rising costs of living and inflation seen on grocery store shelves, it is vital that the pantry continues to meet the need to feed families in the community struggling with financial insecurity.

FAIRSHARE CSA COALITION – COOLBOT COOLER, AN ACCESSIBLE AND AFFORDABLE COOLING OPTION FOR HMOOB GROWERS | \$4000

The Fairshare CSA Coalition serves Madison, Waunakee, Verona, McFarland, Oregon, Sun Prairie, Burke, and Cottage Grove in Dane County. HMoob growers are in need of a cooling unit that is accessible, affordable, and easily buildable for vegetables. Having access to a vegetable cooler provides opportunities for growers to expand into wholesale markets, extend the shelf life of products, and grow culturally relevant produce that benefits the community. This project will focus on providing technical assistance, resource awareness building, and a hands-on construction workshop at Groundswell's Westport Farm for the growers.

FREEDOM INC. – CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE MEAL BASKETS | \$4000

Dane County residents (participants primarily live in Madison, Sun Prairie, Fitchburg, Cottage Grove, Middleton, and Monona) implement quarterly culturally specific meal kits for Black and Southeast Asian clients, members, and their families to offset some of their food insecurities. With the support of Dane County's PIE Food Project Fund, Freedom, Inc. will be able to fund 2 of their 4 quarterly meal kit events for 2024. Direct service staff members will purchase culturally relevant groceries, which will be packaged into meal kits. For each of the 2 meal kit events, they expect to hand out 25 meal kits. These meal kits are expected to last each family about 2 weeks to a month, depending on the size of each family.

MADISON CHILDREN'S MUSEUM – PAY-WHAT-YOU-CAN CAFÉ | \$4000

More than 80% of the museum’s total visitors (170,000 annually) live in Dane County and represent a majority of those using the cafe. Outside the city of Madison, other cities of residence include Stoughton, Monona, Cottage Grove, Middleton, Fitchburg, Waunakee, and Mount Horeb. MCM funding will be used to support one of their most ambitious and innovative projects: the pay-what-you-can Little John’s Lunchbox cafe. In partnership with Little John’s Kitchens & Restaurants (LJKR). Launched in 2022, the cafe provides healthy food made with fresh ingredients and sustainable practices—without exclusion, judgement, or financial barriers—and helps address alarming statistics around local food insecurity. Payment for food is not required. It is entirely up to the visitor to pay if they can and if so, to determine the right amount for them. The goal is to equalize access to food and improve quality of life for everyone from all walks of life and seek to eliminate assumptions about who may experience food insecurity.

RIVER FOOD PANTRY, INC. – GROCERY/MEAL DELIVERY PROGRAM | \$4000

River Delivers serves food-insecure households throughout Dane County, including households in Madison, Fitchburg, Monona Grove, Middleton, Oregon, Stoughton, Marshall, Sun Prairie, Verona, Cottage Grove, and DeForest, with the majority of orders being delivered to areas in or near underserved neighborhoods and identified as Food Access Focus Areas. River Delivers is The River Food Pantry’s contactless food delivery program, which works with volunteers to reliably deliver healthy groceries and meals to homebound residents of Dane County who are unable to access other food assistance programs. Many families have long struggled to reach affordable, healthy food due to transportation, mobility, or health issues. Delivery also enables The River to assist Dane County communities beyond Madison who may be unable to access services due to their distance from the pantry.

WAYFORWARD RESOURCES – WAYFORWARD RESOURCES HEALTHY & CULTURALLY RELEVANT FOOD PURCHASES | \$2927

The food pantry serves all of Dane County, with the majority of clients being from Middleton/Cross Plains. WayForward distributes the equivalent of more than 100,000 meals a month. The barriers to food security that people face in the community are part of state and national trends. More than 8% of employed adults in Wisconsin live in food insecure households and the need continues to increase. WayForward is committed to ensuring the pantry is stocked each week with fresh produce, dairy, protein, and culturally diverse foods on each menu. To bridge the gap between demand and donated food, the agency has been purchasing more food than ever before.

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