American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Community Food Production Program
San Diego Foundation and County of San Diego, Public Health Services

Community Sessions Feedback Summary

10/24 Session: 105 registrants, 77 attendees, 5 breakout rooms (Spanish translation included)
11/1 Session: 129 registrants, 76 attendees, 6 breakout rooms (Spanish translation included)

Introduction

San Diego Foundation's (SDF) Community Food Production Grant Program (CFPP), in partnership with County of San Diego, Public Health Services (PHS), aims to support a wide range of community food production, processing, and distribution projects across San Diego County. These projects aim to support the region's most vulnerable communities, specifically those who have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, by addressing issues of food insecurity, improving nutrition, and supporting local agriculture in San Diego County.

Objectives

- The two community sessions were organized and conducted to accomplish the following objectives:
  - Create a space where community members could contribute ideas openly by having facilitated small break out rooms.
  - To obtain input on questions related to the Community Food Production Program funding opportunity and application.
  - To ensure that community feedback is woven throughout the process of funding and application development. While not every idea or suggestion can be reflected in the final application, it is not because of a lack of value and importance of the feedback but rather due to balancing requirements from funders at all levels.

Format

At the two virtual zoom meetings, held on 10/24/22 and 11/1/22, community members received an overview of the funding and participated in facilitator-led break out rooms to answer questions related to priorities for the funding. Community members were invited to share their responses either by open discussion and responses or via the chat function. Facilitators and note takers were selected from SDF and County of San Diego PHS staff, and from the Advisory Council for this funding, made up of key food system stakeholders.

Key Takeaways

- ✓ Prioritize projects that empower community choice of the food they want through localized production, processing, and distribution.

- ✓ Support community-based, grassroots organizations to build capacity and expand sustainably. Foster and encourage collaboration and provide technical assistance to build resiliency and ensure equitable access to resources and support for navigating regulations.
- ✓ Ensure accessibility for all community members through multilingual application materials and multiple formats for submission. Provide clear guidelines for intent of funding, eligibility, and assessment metrics.
- ✓ Potential projects span food production, processing, and distribution and a majority contain 2 or 3 of those categories. Many community members expressed interest in unrestricted funding related to project categories.

Feedback on Questions

This funding prioritizes projects for communities most impacted by COVID-19. What are your recommendations for projects that would address the priorities of food sovereignty* and equity? *According to La Vía Campesina food sovereignty is, "the right of people to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems."
Supporting projects that prioritize: o **Community Choice of the Food They Want** o Choice in what to purchase, what to eat o E.g., Community gardens ▪ Bring healthy food options, improve food access, and promote intergenerational gathering o **Localized Control Over Food Production, Processing, and Distribution** o Local control of the growing, distribution, manufacturing, sales vs. multinational out of state organizations. Support integration and partnership to re-localize food. ▪ Emphasis on expanding existing efforts including CSA, gleaning o Invest in residents of communities where the garden/micro-farm/resource/program is o **Food Education:** Providing resources & supplies to empower community members to cook and grow food, reduce food waste, and understand climate and economic impacts of food choices. o E.g., promoting healthy food systems in schools, projects that help community members grow foods in their backyards/immediate area o **Food Access** o Increasing access to fresh, affordable produce with specific focus on areas that have food deserts o Promote sustainability of CSA distributions, *Mas Fresco*, CalFresh o Focus on long-term, self-sustaining solutions o Focus on community members being able to afford culturally relevant, healthy food while managing high rent and underemployment o **Capital & Capacity Building for Sustainability** o Capacity building: working toward resiliency of our food system ▪ Build the capacity of residents to grow food, educate students, connect with local food pantries, and lead community efforts to engage more people in growing food locally and developing gardens as a community hub. ▪ Provide technical assistance to foster collaboration among smaller applicants to work together to apply. o Technical assistance to support growing and scaling small businesses and organizations o Projects that create wealth generation, promote wealth building/stop economic leakages ▪ Workforce development as a pathway to economic empowerment and ability to better afford culturally relevant food. o Providing capital for overhead costs

- E.g., Support for staffing, gas reimbursement, funds to buy/rent/long term lease land

How can we ensure that the application process is equitable and accessible?

Ensure accessibility for all, including people with disabilities, people without internet access, and non-English speakers.

- Provide all application and reporting materials in multiple languages.
- Consider multiple formats to complete the application (e.g., accessible on smartphone, hard copies, video).
- Provide proposal and report forms in alternative formats, including accessible formats for people with disabilities.
- Define key terms in application materials.

Account for limited capacity of smaller organizations.

- Prioritize simple and streamlined application that takes less than an hour to complete.
- Provide clear timeframe for application with >1 months' notice of due date, plus when organizations can expect to receive funds.
- Accept alternative media (e.g., video) to answer grant prompts to reduce the burden for organizations that may have limited personnel for or limited experience with writing grants.
- Outreach/ get the word out especially with smaller organizations. Organizations that are more plugged in are the first to access resources; we want to ensure organizations that usually do not have the opportunity to tap into resources have better access.
- Provide unrestricted funding, allowing for flexibility to ensure organizations can be responsive to needs as they arise.
- Encourage partnerships in grant proposals.
- Allow overhead costs not typically included in Program budgets (e.g., staff time, translation services, outreach).

Articulate clear expectations for intent and goal of funding.

- Provide clear, direct guidance regarding eligibility requirements.
- Articulate how applications will be assessed (e.g., smaller funds for smaller impact vs. large projects with large impact. Valuing impact or # of projects?)
- Post FAQs and answers online to be accessible to all applicants.

Technical Assistance

- Provide technical assistance to build capacity in small CBOs or community groups. Provide mentorship to help them through the process of application and reporting.
- Offer workshops on topics including program design and development, proposal development, and budgeting.
- Develop a coalition of grantees, allow for collaboration and learning among smaller groups who might otherwise be siloed.

If you were to apply for this grant funding, would your project fall within one of the categories below? If yes, please select the project area that most closely matches your project. If none of the project areas apply, please select "other" and write in your project area. If several apply, please select all that apply.

a. Food Production
   i. Farms (urban and rural) – (i.e., a place and/or land used to grow food.)
   ii. Fisheries – (i.e., a place where fish are raised.)
   iii. Community Gardens – (i.e., a piece of land gardened or cultivated by a group of people individually or collectively.)
b. Food Processing
   i. Commercial Kitchens – (i.e., a fully equipped prep kitchen that is rented out for shared use.)
   ii. Community Kitchens – (i.e., a group of people who meet on a regular basis to plan, cook and share meals.)

iii. Food Commissaries – (i.e., rentable commercial kitchens where food service operators can prepare and store their food.)

c. Food Distribution
   i. Distributors – (i.e., a company providing products to retailers, restaurants, and others that provide food to consumers.)
   ii. Small Retailers – (i.e., a person or small business that sells food and goods to the public who have less than $1M in annual sales.)
   iii. Small Restaurants – (i.e., a small business that serves prepared food to the public who have less than $1M in annual sales.)
   iv. Farmers Markets – (i.e., a food market at which local farmers sell fruit and vegetables and sometimes meat, cheese, and bakery products directly to consumers.)
   v. Schools/Institutions – (i.e., an institution for education.)

d. Other
   i. Please describe your project area here (in no more than two sentences)

Most of the answers we received were from people involved in food production. Participants were least involved in food processing. Most of the respondents work across several categories and hope to receive funding for projects that combine categories.

1. Key questions & considerations
   - Eligibility for projects that cross multiple categories
   - Revisiting definitions of:
     i. "food" (e.g. food seedlings),
     ii. "food distribution" (include the connecting and transporting), and
     iii. "small retailer"
2. Food Production
   - Food Production (small to medium size urban farm),
   - Farms, Farmers Markets collab, Community Kitchen, Community Garden
   - Aquaponics
   - Community gardens - collective
   - Educating about how to get and grow fruit trees.
   - Small learning / education gardens that produce food, but on a small scale
3. Food Distribution
   - Somewhere between Distributor and Farmer's Markets
   - Non-profits, Farmers Markets, Schools, Food Procession - Community kitchens & Community Kitchens
4. Other
   - Providing business technical assistance support services and helping to mobilize funding in these resources
   - Food education, increasing food literacy, cooking classes
   - Hydro small farm
   - Farming the forest (grazing herd and cultivating mushrooms and creating and milling wood products)
   - Forestry education institute, small retailer, education (forestry care)
   - Community health center – using food as medicine. Food access is part of addressing disparities in wellness in community. Touches several of the categories.
   - Community gardens advocacy
   - Gleaning
   - Regenerative agriculture and composting
   - Investment in training and operations for developing a co-op
   - Community education + engagement as it relates to regenerative agriculture and growing

If your potential project were approved, what would the estimated project cost be?

a. $1-$5,000
b. $5,001 - $50,000

c. $50,001 - $100,000
d. $100,001 - $150,000
e. $150,001 - $200,000
f. $200,001 - $250,000
g. $250,001 - $300,000
h. $300,001 - $350,000
i. $350,001 - $400,000
j. $400,001 - $450,000
k. $450,001 - $500,000
l. > $500,001
m. N/A

Most of the participants who responded stated their estimated project cost would be in the $100,001 - $150,000 range. The next two most chosen quantities were >$500,001 and $5,001 - $50,000.

We received feedback about refining this question, before it is added to the application, so that the intention for the funding is as clear as possible. The request was to clarify how big a potential request for funding could be, how proposals will be evaluated, and how many funding rounds will take place.

Are you considering requesting funds for purchases (i.e. land and/or vehicles, including long term land leases)? *Disclaimer eligible purchases are still being determined.

a. If yes, what type of purchase are you interested in?
b. If yes, what is the funding amount you would request for the purchase?
c. no

Feedback for this question spanned equipment, physical office space, vehicles, tools and long-term leases, with potential requests ranging from $150K to $1.5M+. Respondents requested additional guidelines to understand what a reasonable request might be.