

Moise Memorial Library (Santa Rosa, NM)

Library type: Public library (community size: <4,999)

Topic: Food insecurity

Funds used for: Staff time, project-relates supplies (meal kits, cookbooks, coolers, etc.)

What the reviewers liked about this proposal: Applicant's use of data and conversations with community stakeholders to identify topic

Community and Library Information

Describe your library and the community it serves, including demographics, dynamics and key issues or challenges it faces. What should reviewers know about your library and community in order to understand your proposed community engagement project?

Moise Memorial Library is a public library based in the small, rural community of Santa Rosa, New Mexico serving the entire county of Guadalupe. The population is less than five thousand. Moise Memorial Library serves as a main gathering place for our community. We strive to provide our resources to everybody to enrich knowledge and wellness. Many patrons come to our library seeking help with e-mails, faxes, copies, books, general information, paperwork, genealogy, and even internet access. We provide a safe place for children to study and complete schoolwork. During the summer months, Moise Memorial Library hosts a summer reading program that encourages all children and teens to learn and read, we also host numerous activities and events. Statistics show New Mexico is the second highest in overall poverty and highest in child poverty nationwide. Santa Rosa has a lower median income than the rest of the state and a higher poverty rate. The poverty rate of Guadalupe County is 24.3% versus 21% in the State of New Mexico. Many people cannot afford access to internet at home and they count on us to access our free wi-fi and computers. New Mexico ranks eighth in the United States in overall food insecurity. Santa Rosa suffers from food insecurity and our community is considered a food desert. Even though the City of Santa Rosa is served by a small local grocery store, a Dollar General, a Family Dollar, the nearest supermarket is a 140-mile round trip away. Many families travel out of town to purchase their groceries because they find cheaper prices and healthier, fresher foods at the larger supermarkets. COVID-19 has also caused an increase of food insecurity in our community. Ever since the pandemic began, the unemployment rate in New Mexico dramatically increased. In turn, numerous food pantries saw a major increase in people seeking assistance. Reports ran by Roadrunner Food Bank projected that in New Mexico, one in five people may be affected by food insecurity due to the pandemic, while one in three children may be affected by food insecurity due to the pandemic. Moise Memorial Library staff met with the Community Schools Coordinator and made the decision to partner up together to provide outreach, and to gain input, to help the citizens of our community. Together we will initiate discussions about food insecurity, nutrition, and ways that we may help alleviate hunger. Together we will create a successful food pantry, garden, and greenhouse that will greatly benefit our community.

Conversation Topic or Issue*

Describe the topic or issue that your community engagement project will focus on. Why is it important for your library or community to discuss this particular issue/topic? How did you arrive at this particular topic/subject (e.g. did you talk with library patrons, reach out to other area organizations?)

Dig into data about your community)? How will your library and/or community benefit from having this/these discussion(s)?

Our rural community suffers from food insecurity due to its socio-economic status and is considered a food desert. The most recent published statistics (2018) by the federal government shows a 6.7% decrease in population from 2000. Median household income in Guadalupe County is \$24, 085 compared to State of New Mexico at 48,059. The poverty rate is 24.3% versus 21 percent in the State of New Mexico. In the year of 2017, 21% of population received SNAP benefits in Congressional District 2. According to the Food Empowerment Project, a food desert is a geographic area where access to affordable, healthy food is restricted due to the absence of grocery stores within convenient traveling distance. Although the City of Santa Rosa is served by a small local grocery store, a Dollar General, a Family Dollar and several convenient/truck stop stores, the nearest supermarket is a 140-mile round trip away. As the FEP reports, smaller stores have fewer fresh options and higher prices compared to supermarkets. According to New Mexico Voices, New Mexico is the second highest in overall poverty and highest in child poverty nationwide. Guadalupe County has a lower median income than the rest of the state and a higher poverty rate. New Mexico ranks eighth in the US in overall food insecurity. Food insecurity caused by poverty and lack of access to fresh, healthy food causes obesity and chronic conditions, such as diabetes and cardiovascular illness.

References: <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/guadalupecountynewmexico>
<https://foodispower.org/access-health/fooddeserts/#:~:text=Food%20deserts%20can%20be%20described,stores%20within%20convenient%20traveling%20distance> <https://www.nmvoices.org/archives/5499>

As part of our discussion, we are partnering with the Community School Coordinator, located at Santa Rosa High School. One of the Community Schools initiatives is setting up a food pantry and school garden at the high school. Moises Memorial Public Library will partner with the Community Schools Coordinator to initiate discussions on food insecurity, nutrition and ways our community, schools and libraries can partner to help understand the underlying causes and how to alleviate hunger to those in the community. These discussions will bring in community members, including students and parents to guide the growth of the school garden and food pantry. Although the garden, greenhouse and food pantry are located at the Santa Rosa High School, its resources are available to all community members. The Community Schools strategy involves schools partnering with “community agencies and local governments to provide an integrated focus on academics, health and social services, youth and community development, and community engagement (Learning Policy Institute). Our specific discussion topics will be food insecurity, nutrition, budgeting, food deserts, and access to food.

Conversation Goals*

Describe the library’s goal or purpose of your project plan. What are you aiming to accomplish? (e.g. enhance library resources based on community input; explore a topic and/or build understanding of others’ experiences; generate ideas, explore options, and make a decision; discuss an issue and collaboratively determine next steps, etc.)

The purpose of our project plan is to increase community participation in our library while bringing awareness to food insecurity, nutrition, and budgeting. Raising awareness that our library is a resource for the public, not just a place to check out books to read. Bringing community members into the library helps people understand how businesses, schools, organizations, and libraries can work together to address common social issues, while strengthening our community ties. Another important goal of

facilitating these discussions is training library staff on how to raise awareness on other important topics. The skills learned through these discussions will be carried forward to other important community partnerships. Community members will look to the library as a place of discussion, reflection, and action. Based on the Harwood Institute Turning Outward Together model, our goal is to instigate local and regional dialogue about issues that directly affect our community, including students. Along with supplying resources and discussion to important social issues, this project provides a link to the community food pantry and garden, located at the high school. Bringing high school students into the discussion prepares them for the time when they'll be responsible for meeting their own nutritional needs as adults. Bringing awareness to our community's status as a food desert with food insecurity for a large percentage of the population can help them formulate ways to help their community with its food needs as they become leaders. Engaging the community by partnering with the Community Schools initiative brings in school staff and students, parents, business, and community leaders to look for solutions to food insecurity. The overall goal of the conversation is exploration of an important issue in our community – food insecurity.

Conversation Planning*

How do you envision your conversation taking place? (e.g. virtual book club discussion, socially-distanced conversation outdoors at the library using the National Issues Forum Model, etc.) Do you feel you are able to describe how you envision your conversation(s) will take place? Or are you new to this and planning to learn these skills through the online course? What kind of marketing/outreach do you plan to do for the conversation? How are you planning to share the content/outcomes of the conversation? (e.g. writing an article for the local newspaper, creating a video about what was discussed for the library's social media, etc.)

In compliance with current COVID-19 restrictions, discussions will be split up into two or more groups, depending on the number of people who sign up. Sites will be at the Moises Memorial Library, the Santa Rosa High School, and if needed, a third site will be held at a local restaurant or the Blue Hole Convention Center. Zach Campos, Project Director, will explore the Harwood Institute Turning Outward Together model using the toolkit and other resources available through this model. Through this process, he will learn facilitation skills, such as asking relevant questions to spur discussion and maintain the flow of the conversation. As well, he will practice skills such as defusing tension, making sure all participants have a voice by making sure no one person dominates and keeping on topic. The project director is new to this type of discussion facilitation and will be using this opportunity to explore various ways to encourage discussion. Participants will be encouraged to volunteer to act as timekeeper, write ideas out on whiteboard, take notes, or any other helpful tasks. Should no one volunteer, the community school coordinator will take on these tasks. The Harwood Turning Outward Together approach was selected as the five concepts it's based on, fit our needs. These five concepts are community ownership, strategies that fit the community, sustainability, focusing on impact and belief, and stories that communities tell themselves. These concepts best serve the needs of a small, rural, family-oriented community like Santa Rosa, New Mexico. By focusing on this conversation model, Moises Memorial Library and its staff will continue the discussion and work on making sustainable impacts as a community hub. As part of the discussion, food kits, dietary information and other resources will be distributed to participants. This provides an incentive to participate and provide ways to encourage discussion about dietary concerns, food insecurity and ways to alleviate hunger. Food will be purchased from local sources, which will facilitate discussions about cost and access to healthy food. Refreshments will be served. An attempt will be made to purchase refreshments from a local restaurant.

Marketing and outreach will be accomplished through the library's Facebook page, fliers, individual invitations (for example, students and their parents will be personally invited). A newspaper ad will be placed in the local weekly community paper for the two weeks prior to the project. The content and outcomes will be shared via social media, an article to the local newspaper and through Santa Rosa High School channels, including to the school board.

Budget*

Describe your plans for the grant funds. What will you use the funding to purchase or support? Please be specific (e.g. \$1,000 will be spent on staff time to support the development and implementation of the project, \$200 will be used to purchase a Zoom Business license in order for us to virtually host our conversation). The total amount of your proposed budget plan should add up to \$3,000. Note: If you are unable to spend the entire grant down by July 31, 2021, you may accrue funds to spend through February 28, 2022. If you anticipate needing to accrue funds, please note this in your response and include your plans for spending it down.

The budget we have planned out is as follows:

\$1,000 - to Project Director (Zach)

\$600.00 - for Newspaper Ads

\$115.00 - Refreshments – Mr. B's drink/muffin

\$690.00 - Meal Food Kits for participants – One meal for four people

\$138.00 - Insulated Cooler Bags

\$115.00 - Individual ice packs

\$322.00 - USDA Cookbooks (copies/binding)

\$20.00 - Misc

Total - \$3,000.00