



Community Initiatives for Collective Impact (Ci4Ci)

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May 27, 2021

RE: AASHE Innovation Credit for Pop-Up People's Pantry

Dear AASHE Committee,

I am writing this letter to affirm the leadership of the University of California, Merced (UC Merced) in developing, implementing, and sustaining the Pop-Up People's Pantry in the City of Merced (<https://www.facebook.com/popuppeoplespantry>). Pop-Up People's Pantry is a community-based initiative to improve access to nutritious food, reduce food waste, and improve food security. increase front-yard public gardens as one means of urban food sovereignty.

The initiative began when the lead of UC Merced's Bobcat Eats Food Waste Awareness and Prevention Program reach out to the People's Garden in downtown Merced to see how they might food insecurity due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The innovative idea was to start small, easy pantries in trusted community locations like the People's Garden. The pantry would be run by collecting food that might otherwise be wasted. Fresh fruits and vegetables would be donated from unsold produce from Farmers' Market and flea market vendors, gleaned from local gardens and farms, and donated from the Food Bank. The pantry is small and easy to operate so that it could "pop-up" where it is most needed and avoid the costs associated with a formal store or building. On April 11, 2021, the Pop-Up People's Pantry began outdoors, in front of the garden, with a few small plastic folding tables of donated produce. The pantry has operated every Saturday since then, only missing three weekends. It is operated by a small team of staff and volunteers from campus and the community. Strict physical distancing, mask-wearing, gloves, and other pandemic protocols are followed. People take turns selecting what they wish. The pantry is unique among other free-food distribution programs during the pandemic because it is a walk-through (not high car-emissions drive thru) and because people get to shop for what they want (more dignified than getting a box with items chosen by others). Over 2,000 people have been served since April 2020. Thousands of pounds of produces have been kept out of landfills and provided much-needed food to families in need.

The Pop-Up People's Pantry complies with the criteria within the innovation credit by providing an innovative way to improve food security and reduce food waste. sovereignty in urban settings through a community-academic partnership. The Pop-Up People's Pantry:

1. Is an innovative program within California and the Central Valley.
2. Is an ongoing program.
3. Began April 11, 2020 in Merced County.
4. Serves as model for easily-implemented, community-based, free pantry which has not been widely adopted, and as such, is innovative.

We are grateful for the opportunity to partner with UC Merced to serve our community. Please feel free to contact me for more information.

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Director