

PUBLIC SOCIAL SERVICES - PROJECT DESCRIPTION

OUR NEIGHBORS' TABLE, INC.

Detailed scope:

The City of Amesbury seeks FY19 CDBG funding to expand the Our Neighbors' Table, Inc. *Meal Program* in support of LMI Amesbury households. ONT proposes to increase food assistance through its well-established grocery programs, which include: 1) *Market at the Jarvis –Taylor Center*, this location operates like a grocery store for LMI residents to access food free of charge. Residents are able to shop weekly at the market; 2) *Mobile Markets* that provide mobile distributions twice per month at the Amesbury Housing Authority's Heritage Towers. The mobile market program has been operating for nearly 10 years to reach residents who cannot access the Jarvis – Taylor Center market; 3) *Amesbury Home Delivery Program* which operates in partnership with the Amesbury Council on Aging and provides weekly home delivered hot meals and unprepared food goods to residents who are home-bound due to illness, disability and/or age; 4) *Summer Lunch Program* which provides groceries in July and August to families with school-age children who qualify for free or reduced lunches during the school year; and 5) *Holiday Assistance* which provides groceries and gift cards to local grocery stores during holidays. ONT's main location is the Jarvis –Taylor Center located at 194 Main Street and the main mobile market is located at the Housing Authority's Heritage Tower, 180 Main Street in Amesbury.

In 2019, Our Neighbors' Table will provide through its grocery programs approximately 1.3 million meals to over 4,000 individuals living in northeastern Essex County, including 654,259 meals to 2,100 residents of Amesbury. ONT distributes meals to Amesbury residents at a unit rate of \$1.00/meal.

While ONT serves eleven other towns in the region, Amesbury residents make up 50% of the individuals served by their grocery programs. Many residents use the food program weekly while others use it for holidays or on an as-needed basis. ONT's grocery programs break the mold of traditional food pantries with a focus on fresh foods, half of which is grown within 15 miles. ONT's grocery programs allow LMI households to focus their limited resources on other expenses such as rent, utilities, healthcare, childcare and transportation.

Non-CDBG funded components:

The requested Community Development Block Grant funding in the amount of \$45,000 constitutes approximately 4% of the funding for ONT's grocery programs. CDBG funds are supplementing a combination of funding from other grants (21%), ONT's unrestricted donations from private donors (21%) and in-kind food products (54%). ONT's annual operating budget is created by ONT's Executive Director and staff, is reviewed by its Finance Committee, and is approved by the Board of Directors. Budget projections are based on the previous year's program statistics and expenses, and account for anticipated program growth and an increase in costs for products and services using federal government inflation projections. ONT currently follows a budget of \$1 per meal provided to the community.

Project need and beneficiaries served:

Data compiled by Feeding America and the Greater Boston Food Bank estimates that 1,240 individuals in Amesbury are food insecure. More than 25% of Amesbury's seniors are *very* and/or *extremely low income*, living at or below 200% of the federal poverty level, with nearly 5% of all adults and 2.2% of children living below the poverty level. The Amesbury Superintendent's Office reported that 30% of Amesbury students qualified for free- or reduced-price meals in the 2017-18 school year.

Research clearly demonstrates that food insecurity negatively impacts the health of children, adults, and seniors causing health disparities and increased health care costs. Older adults who are food insecure are more likely to suffer from heart conditions such as heart attacks, chest pain, and coronary heart disease than food secure older adults. Lack of adequate healthy food can impair a child's ability to concentrate and perform well in school and is linked to higher levels of behavioral and emotional problems from preschool through adolescence (American Academy of Pediatrics). Food insecurity may be a temporary problem for some people struggling with

unexpected expenses, job loss or eviction, or it may be an everyday experience for others with limited incomes who are forced to choose between paying for bills, medication, or food. Seemingly small changes in income, expenses, or access to federal or state assistance programs may instantly reduce the ability to purchase healthy food and result in increased vulnerability to food insecurity.

Existing safety net programs are not meeting the need in the area. A survey of 250 ONT guests indicated that only 45% received Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits in the last year. Data published by the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts estimates over 1,500 individuals (adults, seniors, and children) living in Amesbury who are eligible to receive SNAP food subsidies are not enrolled (referred to as the “SNAP gap”). Anecdotal accounts from ONT guests point to a lack of access to Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) offices to process applications, difficulty reaching workers to resolve issues, prohibitive documentation requirements, and low benefit allowances as reasons local residents give up on accessing SNAP. School-based meal programs are effective in keeping children fed during the school day, but they offer no support for evenings, weekends, and school breaks. Residents in the area rely on a strong local network of private organizations to be a lifeline for keeping their families financially and nutritionally afloat.

Moderate-income, working households do not usually qualify for state or federal food assistance programs but can still struggle to feed their families. Thirty-three percent of the above survey respondents reported that they received no publicly-funded food assistance, including Meals on Wheels and school-based meals. The Greater Boston Food Bank estimates that 47% of people living in Eastern Massachusetts are at risk for hunger but earn too much to qualify for government food subsidy programs. These residents often face tough choices such as deciding whether to put food on the table, heat the house or pay the rent or mortgage. There are over 3,200 households in Amesbury earning less than the city’s median income, but only about 525 qualify for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).ⁱ Statistically, SNAP recipients who can work do so. Where SNAP households have at least one working-age, non-disabled adult, 58% work while receiving SNAP and 82% worked in the year before or after receiving SNAP.ⁱⁱ

How the Community Identified Need:

Our Neighbors’ Table has developed an impressive cohort of community partners and it is the feedback from these partners that helped Amesbury identify this need. Since 2009, ONT has coordinated the Amesbury Community Service Providers Meeting, a monthly meeting of more than 20 organizations (including the Amesbury Council on Aging) that provide various types of assistance and support to the community. The group meets to share resources and work collaboratively to make positive changes in the community. ONT’s relationship with the Amesbury Council on Aging is perhaps its strongest and most impactful collaborations to date. ONT partners with the Amesbury Council on Aging to deliver groceries to homebound seniors and people with disabilities each week. These groceries are fully customized according to each individual’s preferences and dietary restrictions, and include a variety of fresh fruits, vegetables, meats and dairy. ONT and the Amesbury COA frequently cross-refer individuals for food access, SNAP applications, volunteering, and other social services.

Every three years, ONT completes an extensive strategic plan. The goals of these plans are derived from feedback and data collected from local stakeholders – donors, volunteers, program guests, and the community-at-large. In 2016, ONT collected feedback from 250 current program beneficiaries that will directly inform the Board’s program priorities through 2020. ONT is continuously seeking feedback from its guests. The Summer Lunch Program includes a guest survey at the beginning and end of the program; the design of the Jardis-Taylor Center was driven by a Design Committee made up of ONT guests and volunteers.

The feedback the City has received from other community groups about the importance of ONT’s programs and the tremendous resource it is to the Council on Aging, Amesbury Public Schools, Amesbury Police and the City’s religious community are a major reason this activity was prioritized for funding. In addition, Community Action, Inc.’s FY18-20 Community Assessment Report and Strategic Plan corroborates the need for CDBG

funds to support emergency food assistance to LMI Amesbury households. The plan reports that food was rated the #2 need, out of 24 possible needs, in the agency's most recent Strategic Plan.ⁱⁱⁱ

Community volunteers are the backbone of ONT's programs. Volunteers collectively clock more than 550 hours of service each week and perform tasks from food transportation to answering phones, sorting food, and assisting program guests. Numerous ONT guests volunteer in ONT programs. ONT's mobile markets at Heritage Towers and Powow Villa are fully staffed by community residents and recipients of food assistance. The community-based approach allows ONT to build trust in the community and identify need that may not be visible to "outsiders."

Anticipated Outcomes:

ONT will provide approximately 654,259 meals to 2,100 LMI Amesbury residents. Anticipated outcomes include:

- Reduction and/or elimination of food insecurity. For the last three years, 50% of ONT beneficiaries report not having to worry about running out of food.
- Reduction of the health risks related to food insecurity that have been linked to poor health outcomes for children, as well as chronic disease, and poor physical and mental health for adults and seniors.
- Alleviation of financial hardship for the City's most vulnerable residents.
- Hundreds of volunteer hours leveraged each week thereby increasing the community nature of the program
- Improved nutrition for beneficiaries who are receiving locally grown, fresh produce.

How the Program will be Operated:

The City of Amesbury's Office of Community and Economic Development manages the CDBG program through contracted grant management services. The City will enter into a Memorandum of Understanding with ONT that will include reporting and monitoring requirements.

The *CD Director* will be responsible for preparing the Memorandums of Understanding, program compliance, quarterly monitoring of activities, overall performance, specific program policy matters, issues, etc. and will respond to grievances. The *CD Director* will also be responsible for reviewing and approving monthly invoices for payment. The *Program Manager* will be responsible for spot checking ONT's files including ensuring the data required for reporting purposes is being collected properly, reviewing income verification information, as applicable, and preparing quarterly and other reports required by DHCD, the Office of Community and Economic Development or the City Council.

ONT has a staff of 10 employees and benefits from hundreds of volunteer hours each week. ONT's grocery programs are carried out by a Program Director, Market Manager, Mobile Market Manager, Warehouse Manager, and Volunteer Coordinator. Per the USDA's guidelines, income and program participation are accepted on a self-declaration basis. Household status is confirmed with a client signature at each visit. ONT completes a comprehensive record update on all active households on an annual basis.

ⁱ 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table DP03

ⁱⁱ <http://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/house-2019-budget-plan-would-slash-snap-by-more-than-150-billion-over-ten>

ⁱⁱⁱ Community Action, Inc.'s FY18-20 Community Assessment Report and Strategic Plan, p. 29