Boxing Up Hunger

Funding Request and Rationale for the Program

According to the US Environmental Protection Agency, leftover food is America’s second largest source of waste, exceeded only by paper. It is further estimated that food waste is the largest element in municipal landfills and comprises between 30-40% of the US food supply. These statistics are particularly alarming at a time when more than 41 million Americans experience hunger. Similar issues exist at the University of Arizona, as leftover food is frequently disposed of across campus, while 20% of the UA student body reported often or always skipping meals or eating less because they did not have enough money for food. While the UA Campus Pantry distributes over 3,080 pounds of food per week to approximately 700 students, it is clear that this primarily volunteer-led resource cannot singlehandedly serve the nearly 10,000 UA students experiencing food insecurity. It is imperative that the institution continue to think of creative ways to assist food insecure students.

Arizona Student Unions and the UA Campus Pantry requests a total of $158,100 over the next 3 fiscal years to support the Boxing Up Hunger initiative. The Boxing Up Hunger initiative has proven itself to be an incredibly innovative partnership to divert leftover food to students in need. In previous years, food was diverted from various catering events and Arizona Student Unions’ dining locations to support the Boxing Up Hunger initiative. Although, the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has halted all large scale events on campus, the Student Unions still made a concerted effort to divert food from various dining locations into leftovers for this program. We strive to compost or repurpose leftovers during food production, however inevitably some food finds its way into the trash can. The Boxing Up Hunger initiative will allow the Arizona Student Unions to strategically identify overproduction at a dining location, and safely box up the leftover food to be used as a Campus Pantry donation. Leftover meals packaged within 24 hours, will be available within 48 hours within via the Campus Pantry.

Supporting the SAEM Mission

Student Affairs and Enrollment Management mission is to support the UA mission and values by delivering exemplary programs, services, resources and facilities that have a measurable and positive impact on the development and retention of students and contribute to the well-being and advancement of our community. A study performed at Emory University in 2019 showed that food insecurity was associated with poorer psychosocial health, and a significantly lower GPA. Merely stated, securing consistent and adequate food sources for University of Arizona students in need is essential to their comprehensive success at our institution, and in direct alignment with the stated mission and values of SAEM. The success demonstrated by the Boxing Up Hunger initiative since its 2018 pilot have greatly exceeded our expectations.

Direct Impact and Assessment of Success

During the 2018 pilot, the Unions diverted a total of 1,297 meals for use at Campus Pantry distribution days. In 2019, we were able to divert a total of 3,200 meals- resulting in a 60 percent increase in demand over the previous year. With Student Services Fee assistance, the purchase of a blast chiller enabled the Unions to divert 11,771 meals in 2020 resulting in a 73 percent increase in demand over the previous year. The UA Campus Pantry increased their ability to store food, the frequency and length of their distribution events, and as a result they have almost tripled their weekly patron counts. After surveying our target base, we found that food insecure members of our campus community don’t
always have access to kitchens or areas where they can prepare a meal using ingredients from the Pantry. Unfortunately, University of Arizona students experiencing food insecurity are often housing insecure or homeless as well, and without adequate access to a kitchen. The Boxing up Hunger initiative has become an integral part of combatting food insecurity at the University of Arizona, because it provides students with the ability to quickly reheat a meal- from the comfort of their homes or from any microwave within the Student Unions. Continued success for the Boxing Up Hunger program would be defined as growth of the program in tandem with expansion of the UA Campus Pantry. Currently, our goal is to divert 20,000 meals in 2022- a 59 percent increase over year; 22,000 meals in 2023- a 10 percent increase over year; and 24,200 meals in 2024- a 10 percent increase over year. Our estimate of 20,000 meals in 2022 is in response to both, an increased student presence on campus during this fiscal year, as well as a large number of food insecure University of Arizona students.

**Longevity of Program**

The expansion and development of the Boxing Up Hunger program is a critical resource to the UArizona community. In a 2018 Commencement Speech, the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences Senior Speaker stated, “The campus food pantry fed me when I ran out of money one month and chose rent over a full fridge... In summation, my time at University of Arizona has shown me that redemption is possible”. Her brief statement succinctly summarizes the impact and need for the Boxing Up Hunger initiative on campus. From University of Arizona students that consistently struggle with food insecurity, to ones that newly find themselves in a season of need, our institution has a responsibility to support them along their journey to academic success. The end goal of this program is to not just divert food waste from Arizona Student Unions’ dining locations, but to reduce our food waste and helping drive back food insecurity at the University of Arizona. Nearly 10,000 students at the UA experience food insecurity every year, and our initiative sets out to support them during their Wildcat Journey.