

CUMBERLAND COUNTY COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

CDBG PLANNING GRANT PROGRAM APPLICATION -2010

Community(s): CUMBERLAND COUNTY

Contact Information: MARIN MAGAT

Tel: (207)252-9520

Address: 66 Quebec St., Portland, ME 04101

E-mail: marin.magat@gmail.com

Organizational Sponsor: Celebrating Human Creativity 501(c)3

Project Title: COUNTY-WIDE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PLAN

Amount of CDBG funds requested: \$11,925

Total estimated project cost: \$11,925

Name of authorized official: _____

Signature of authorized official: _____

COMMUNITY PLANNING GRANT APPLICATION

1. Problem: Challenging Times

a. Scope, magnitude, and severity of the problem

Maine is facing a number of problematic trends, some historic, others a result of the nation's economic downturn, including:

- *Historically high rates of unemployment and underemployment:* The rate of unemployment, according to Maine Department of Labor is 8.3%. The rate of underemployment, which gages those who are no longer actively seeking employment, is suspected to be much higher. These are often individuals who have given up on their job search. Underemployment is linked to cycles of chronic poverty in communities.
- *An aging population:* Maine has the highest median age of any state in the United States according to the U.S. Census. This trend is expected to continue.
- *High rates of depression and other mental health issues:* Maine ranks in the top 10 states in rates of depression (Thomson Healthcare). Teen suicide is a related issue that the state grapples with.
- *Local and state budget cuts:* Maine has a \$438 million gap in the state budget in 2010. Most of the budget supports education and social services in the state. Cuts will affect many service organizations.
- *Increasing demand on underfunded service organizations:* Unemployment and state budget cuts translate into increased demand on service organizations as new populations seek aid. For example, food pantries are now serving some middle class families as well as the chronically hungry.

a. Past efforts

How do all of the issues facing the state relate? They are connected in a common solution: *Community Engagement*. Volunteer and community engagement has been shown as an effective strategy to:

- Teach skills and build professional connections that help with job transitions
- Increase high school graduation, college attendance, and local retention of youth,
- Decrease depression rates and improvements in mental health
- Support for local organizations and businesses

Numerous studies expand on the value of community service. Research by the Corporation for National and Community Service has been used by health care providers, educational institutions, and career counselors to encourage volunteerism.

Although several organizations in Cumberland County are encouraging volunteerism, no one organization is looking systematically at the solution of service across the County. In other words, Southern Maine Agency on Aging is focusing on increasing service among retirees and United Way of Greater Portland is focusing on increasing service in the particular geographic location of Portland. No entity is identifying which populations are

most available and ready for service and which placements would make most sense—across the entire county. Furthermore, these organizations are loosely but not formerly connected with a common vision for the change they would like to see happen as a result of their combined efforts.

The work of the Maine Commission for Community Service will be a valuable asset in the work outlined in this proposal. However, the Commission's research focus is statewide and does not account for subpopulations of volunteers, information that is critical to know who to strategically target for engagement. Furthermore, the Commission does not have the staff to run local initiatives.

b. Impacts on low/moderate income communities

One of the “beauties” of community engagement is that it is beneficial across socio-economic backgrounds. Volunteers from all backgrounds have been shown to increase their mood, social connections, and overall experience of giving something that “feels good.”

On the recipient side, people who receive services offered by volunteers are often from low or moderate income households and neighborhoods. Increased community service would benefit the organizations serving these populations and therefore improve the ability of these organizations to meet the needs of low and moderate income communities.

c. CDBG funds are critical

Because this plan is to increase community service across the County and among many different demographic groups it makes sense for Cumberland County CDBG to fund the project. Although many organizational partners are very supportive of this plan, none have a vested interest in the well-being of the entire community as the County does. This became clear in the planning conversations leading up to submission of this grant. It will take the leadership of a regional entity, like Cumberland County, to bring the potential of a county-wide service plan to fruition.

2. Strategy: Community Engagement Plan

This proposal is to establish a plan for increasing community service and engagement across Cumberland County.

a. Planning tasks

- 1) **Establish a baseline for the level of community engagement in Cumberland County with a specific focus on three target populations: Students, Retirees, and the Unemployed.** These target populations have been chosen based on review of county demographic information and survey results from volunteer managers in Maine organizations. This baseline would be established through research, interviews, and

surveys. Establishing a baseline is the critical first step of any region-wide strategy. If one wants to know if future initiatives are making a difference, one has to have a baseline of comparison. Furthermore, a baseline that covers all demographic groups can give a better indicator of which populations to target first and how many resources will be required. This systematic view allows organizations and communities to band together to pursue larger funding sources.

2) **Create a network of organizations promoting community service in Cumberland County and develop a county-level vision and goals together.** Currently, several organizations are supporting community service engagement goals, including United Way of Greater Portland, Portland Hour Exchange, Southern Maine Agency on Aging, the Institute for Civic Leadership, and the Career Center. Many of these organizations have expressed interest in coming together to form a larger combined vision of the potential for community engagement across Cumberland County.

3) **Recommend first-stage community engagement promotion initiatives which offer a potential for the highest impact and least amount of resources.**

There are many opportunities that would seem to have great impact in the short term. For example, the Institute for Civic Leadership has a alumni base of 500 professionals who are trained and committed to community engagement. These alumni have expressed interest in further commitment if appropriate service opportunities were identified and presented to them.

At the same time, local municipalities which traditionally may not have made use of volunteers, are having to make drastic budget cuts. A first-stage plan could include placement in local government offices.

b. Schedule

The scope of work outlined above would take approximately six months by a half-time staff person. The budget details this schedule more thoroughly.

c. Community Partners

The major organizational partners to this plan have been approached, including United Way of Greater Portland, Portland Hour Exchange, Southern Maine Agency on Aging, the Institute for Civic Leadership, and the Career Center. Staff running these organization's community service initiatives have expressed support of the project. These organizations have not had the time or staff to create a baseline or common plan. Feedback was that the project would be helpful to their individual organizations and they would support it in any way they can.

In addition, other potential partners may include: Public and Private Schools, University Service Learning Offices, local governments offices, Maine Commission for Community Service, Points of Light (a national service affiliation), local Chambers of Commerce, and service organizations such as the Rotary Club.

3. Community Readiness

a) Project Conveyed

As described above, organizational partners promoting service are supportive of the project. In addition, there is a growing public appreciation of community service. Disney has been promoting their “Give a Day, Get a Day” campaign and President Obama’s Call to Service has been a key initiative of his administration. As a result, community readiness for service engagement initiatives is high.

b) Matching funds

To date matching funds from organizational partners have not been offered. What is clear is that each organizational partner has a commitment to service and that there is community-wide interest in service. Potential partners have offered staff support and commitment to participate in grant-related activities.

Results of disseminating a county-wide community engagement plan would include broader community support for related service initiatives, including the potential of foundation support. The plan’s emphasis on building a stronger evidence base is key for partner organizations, working individually or collaboratively, to make the case for funding.

c) Staff Availability

Staff is available to complete the project. Marin Magat would be the primary researcher and facilitator for the project. Ms. Magat has been promoting community engagement since she first came to Maine and started the Bates Community Service House while a student at Bates College. Her profession has taken her to the University of New England and United Way of York County in primary roles of encouraging service. As a result, she has relationships with nonprofit organizations across York and Cumberland County as well as connections to state and national service organizations. In addition, staff of organizational partners have expressed their time and support for this project.

MULTI-COMMUNITY APPLICATION QUESTIONS

What role will each community play in the planning project?

Please see sections: 2.c. Community Partners and 3.c. Staff Availability

How will each community benefit from the planning project?

Please see sections: 1.a. Past Efforts, 1.b. Impacts on low/moderate income communities, and 1.c. CDBG funds are critical

PLANNING GRANT APPLICATION—PROGRAM BUDGET

COST CATEGORY	CDBG FUNDS
Consultant Services (half-time for 6 months @ \$40k/year)	\$10,000
Advertising/Survey	\$200
Public Meetings (for organizational partners)	\$200
Printing	\$100
Mailings	N/A
Other: Office Space	\$425
Other: Organizational Sponsor Management	\$1,000
TOTAL COSTS	\$ 11,925