

# Final Project

Engaging Citizens: A Game Changer for Development?

Sponsored by Coursera and created by the World Bank

Our Food, a community nutrition network

Food insecurity is a frequent companion of low-income neighborhoods. While I work with a group called Food Commons that is building a community food system, I manage the trust and am not directly involved with operations, other than fund development, asset acquisition and stewardship. Moving through the first three weeks of this course got me to thinking about a grass roots effort that could rise up to meet what we are doing, similar to the peer-to-peer work improving education through the Uwezo Initiative, one that would activate women in their homes to help their households become more sustainable.

“Our Food” is a citizen’s movement that might be sponsored by Food Commons Fresno. The goal is to increase awareness and use of simple practices to improve nutrition in food deserts and areas of food insecurity. While others, including Food Commons Fresno, work to increase access to fresh and healthy food, Our Food would engender a spirit of healthy food awareness through existing community connections as well as newly established relationships that include simple steps individuals can take to better feed their families.

The sponsoring organization, possibly Food Commons, would hire initial staff from within the neighborhood, fund materials and supplies, and troubleshoot obstacles that occur relating to meeting and community garden space, and coordination with schools and churches.

Initial participants would be identified through their churches, community centers or community organizations – public gathering spots. But the contact would begin as individual, in the participant’s home or a similar comfortable environment. Participants, peers of the initial staff, would volunteer to learn, and eventually to share what they know. There are four steps to participating. Each phase includes general nutrition information along with tips and recipes for the seeds/plants provided, and introduces awareness of the local food landscape.

1. UNO (IB) consists of accepting the learning opportunity. It comes with native-language reading material, a supporting website and seed packages for carrots and radishes. Once a comfort level with this information is reached, they move on.
2. DOS (OB) includes occasional neighborhood gatherings to discuss gardening (indoor and outdoor) and use of fresh vegetables in cooking. DOS participants can distribute the UNO supplies and answer questions. Additional materials on nutrition and tomato plants are distributed.
3. TRES (PEB) brings in community resources including cooking demonstrations and community gardening. Sunflower seeds and cabbage plants are included for the participants.
4. CUATRO (PLAUB) participants have become community resources themselves by assisting neighbors, and organizing food events at church and in schools. They are educated in raising strawberries and herbs.

The biggest challenge is finding a natural fit within the community. Use of native language (primary non-English languages in this region are Spanish and Hmong) is essential, as is making contact through

established social organizations. It is crucial to analyze similar local activity prior to launch in order to partner with existing programs and learn from their successes and mistakes. Our Food is not intended to solve economic problems, directly address health issues or subsidize food resources. It is intended to instill a spirit of control through understanding healthy choices for family eating.

Success of Our Food, a community nutrition network, will be measured family by family. The number of participants, their path to more responsibility in the network, and their willingness to share within their community, will mark success.