



February 14, 2022

To:

Kim Corbin, Senior Advisor

Chair James P. McGovern, House Committee on Rules

[Kim.Corbin@mail.house.gov](mailto:Kim.Corbin@mail.house.gov)

From:

Jonathan Forgash, Co-founder and Executive Director

Queens Together

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Kim, thank you for your interest. We look forward to meeting with you and Representative James McGovern on February 22 to discuss the Anti-Hunger initiative. Here is an outline of our work and proposed ideas for future work.

Queens together is a nonprofit association of restaurants supporting each other in business and feeding communities in crisis. The Queens Economic Development Corp is our fiscal sponsor and support organization for this work. We hope to become a permanent department in their organization by summer 2022.

Small business restaurants are essential assets in our communities. They provide culturally appropriate fresh made meals, employment opportunities, public meeting places and inject income into our neighborhoods. Through educational opportunities, they can offer inspiration for neighbors to eat well and learn skills to improve healthy eating, address food insecurity, reduce generational debilitating illnesses and increase the overall health and wealth of their families.

Community based organizations work with Queens Together to be the “last mile” connector of information, resources and food. They are the familiar and trusted faces who can distribute resources to businesses and residents, very often in appropriate languages and cultural settings.

History: Queens Together began when COVID19 shut down NYC in March 2020. We built an organization to support restaurants with resources, mutual aid and a novel food relief program called “Plate it Forward” to provide meals to frontline workers and people facing hunger. Community organizations and volunteers partnered with us to deliver meals and run pop-up food pantries. We continue to build our network of businesses and CBOs.



Since the start of COVID19, Queens Together has: Created a social media fundraising program that raised over \$225,000 to pay restaurants for meals and help keep their doors open. Delivered meals, groceries and fresh produce for over 275,000 people. Provided funding to 67 restaurants and other food businesses. Built relationships with 60+ community based organizations and sponsors. Partnered with hundreds of volunteers to get this work done. Provided resources and mutual support to hundreds of restaurants and food businesses.

Examples of our work:

During the USDA “Farm to family program”, May to October 2020, we created a network of seven community based pop-up food pantries that served 8,000+ people every Thursday. The Boys and Girls Club of Astoria donated space to be our hub. We set up one food pantry at that site and community groups would arrive to pick up produce for their own sites.

Fundraising on social media funded our “Plate it forward” program. We were able to pay restaurants to prepare fresh made culturally appropriate meals delivered to frontline workers, pantries, shelters or people at home. This was accomplished with the support of volunteers and CBO partners. This is a self sustaining community approach to food relief efforts.

When the Restaurant Recovery grant was announced by the Small Business Administration, we discovered that food businesses in underserved communities were not aware of this opportunity. Queens Together worked with the Queens Economic Development Corp. to connect this information to these businesses. We did this by utilizing our CBO volunteers to canvas their own neighborhoods and hand out grant information in eight languages. By distributing the information in a familiar language, by a known friendly face, the food businesses were able to learn about, and apply for funding.

After Hurricane Ida we utilized our networks to pinpoint restaurants and neighborhoods devastated by flooding. QT was able to get elected officials, Small Business Services and media coverage to some restaurants. This brought relief and attention to the devastation. We also worked with elected officials and local restaurants to provide dozens of families across Queens whose homes were damaged in the storm.

With funding and support from local, state and federal officials, Queens Together can continue this work and be an integral part of our community.



Additional Queens Together ideas for the Anti-hunger initiative

Cut down on food waste and feed millions of people every day. Have markets donate foods, with dead dates, to community kitchens and food pantries, rather than sending it to landfills.

Allow SNAP benefits to be used at contracted or licensed small business restaurants in communities. This program provides local culturally appropriate foods for the residents and an additional income stream to the restaurants.


Make permanent the “Plate it Forward” food relief system built by Queens Together. With proper government funding we can build out the infrastructure and continue this program to pay restaurants to provide the fresh made meals and groceries to neighbors facing food and economic insecurity. The money comes into the community through the restaurants and stays in the community.

Contract with restaurants and markets in school zones to offer a student meals program. This is a win-win for the families and restaurants in a community.

Contract with locally known, culturally appropriate restaurants to teach “Food as medicine”. This program promotes health and wealth in low income communities. Benefits of this program include: A decrease in disease, better health for individuals and generational living. Reduced medicine and healthcare costs lead to more generational savings and prosperity, better health leads to less sick days from school and work.

Expand these programs to other communities across the country.

Sincerely,

  
Jonathan Forgash  
Queens Together