

WHEAT Community Connections respectfully submits this application requesting \$10,000 to the Framingham State University Nonprofit Giving Course for the spring semester of 2020.

Organization Overview

WHEAT Community Connections (WHEAT) has a mission to help everyone meet their basic needs so our community thrives. WHEAT uses the United Way of Tri-County (EIN: 04-2104231) as a fiscal agent.

WHEAT's primary goal is to increase food security for all residents of Clinton, Berlin, Bolton, Lancaster, and Sterling Massachusetts. Clients are 29% children (0-17), 54% adults (18-64), and 17% older adults (65+). About one quarter of client families are new to WHEAT each year. WHEAT provides a food pantry that distributes monthly groceries and a Community Café that serves a hot meal five nights each week. WHEAT connects residents in need with healthy, fresh food on a regular basis. Food pantry clients receive shelf-stable pantry items along with frozen meat, fresh eggs, milk, and produce. In 2019 we provided groceries for 1,724 clients through 9,394 visits and served 10,904 meals. We distributed over 350,000 pounds of food through our food pantry.

Hunger is not just an issue for the homeless, disabled or those out of work. Most of the families we serve have at least one working adult or are older adults retired from their careers. Our clients are unemployed, underemployed, seasonal workers, new Americans, veterans and the elderly. Many turn to us for the first time because they are no longer able to support their families. Our clients make tough choices every day between paying for food and paying for housing, utilities, childcare, medical care, and transportation. We offer relief to people in times when finances are stretched thin. By helping everyone achieve food security and meet basic needs, individuals, families, and our communities thrive.

Beyond this, WHEAT helps clients access many other services in the local community. This includes offering support for applications for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as food stamps), offering nutrition education classes, bringing in partner agencies to provide information and help clients sign up for MassHealth and Senior Whole Health options, and helping clients sign up for heating fuel assistance. WHEAT offers case management services through which our case manager assesses clients' needs and helps arrange and coordinate services to meet their specific needs. WHEAT is working to expand partnerships to provide more job training programs for residents.

To support our work and our community, WHEAT runs the Hidden Treasures Thrift Store. WHEAT receives donations of gently used items including clothing, household items, and some furniture. These items are sold at low prices with funds used to support food security programs. When clients are in need, we provide these items at no cost to them.

WHEAT also runs several seasonal programs. Through the Tools for School program we provide hundreds of local children with new backpacks full of grade appropriate school supplies to have a strong start to the school year. Through the Hope for the Holidays program we provide hundreds of families with holiday gifts for their children to match their individual wish lists and provide a joyful holiday. From Thanksgiving through December holidays, we run a program called Feed a Family that provides a turkey and all the fixings for a Thanksgiving meal and special food for a holiday meal in December including turkey and ham and all side dishes and dessert. This is in addition to regular monthly groceries.

For what purpose do you plan to utilize these funds?

With Coronavirus continuing to spread and impacts being felt in Massachusetts, WHEAT has responded immediately. We follow all Department of Public Health guidelines for preventative measures to help

mitigate any threat from this virus. Due to the nature of our work providing food to those most in need in our communities, we are unable to close our doors and have already seen the need for food grow.

To continue to meet the need of our community we are: 1) Increasing cleaning efforts to have a safe space; 2) Limiting the number of people who can access our food pantry at one time; 3) Serving evening Café meals as takeout only, distributed to guests in line at our door; 4) Adding dinner deliveries to seniors and families in Clinton and Lancaster Housing Authorities; 6) Any staff member presenting signs of illness is to stay home until they have been cleared by a doctor to return to work.

We are requesting funds which will support the demand for more food and supplies to continue providing a high level of service to anyone in need, including those who have not previously needed to access hunger relief programs. Funds will be used to cover additional fuel costs, takeout containers, cleaning supplies, and for overtime costs for hourly staff as a result of our volunteer pool shrinking tremendously during this time of uncertainty.

The majority of our food is donated by the Worcester County Food Bank and local grocery stores. At this time, some donations are decreasing because of current demand and concerns about food access in the coming weeks. We have collaborated with the Clinton and Wachusett Public School systems and local restaurants to access additional food they have on hand to distribute to our clients. During “normal” times, we operate our Hidden Treasures Thrift Store to subsidize the cost of our food programs. We have had to close our store for health and safety reasons and are losing a revenue stream as a result.

We have already had a 15% increase in new families registering for the food pantry and are serving almost 300 evening meals per day, Monday through Friday. We are delivering over 200 meals per day and are serving meals in our Café (pickup for to-go only) with about 60 meals served per evening. Previously we would have served an average of 250 meals per week and are now serving more meals than that daily. Meal delivery to Housing Authorities in Clinton (three elderly and disabled housing and one family housing) and Lancaster (one elderly and disabled housing) is a new program we are offering during this time when people are staying at home. We anticipate the need for food will continue as more people are out of work and may not be able to work from home or earn a paycheck. This is especially true for people who work for hourly wages in retail settings, trades, manufacturing, seasonal workers, hospitality, beauty, and food service industries. The demand for food has grown at an unprecedented rate during the COVID-19 pandemic. We are also getting inundated with requests to help people apply for unemployment benefits and food stamps. We are working to set up hours and safe procedures to continue offering this service.

Specific Use of Funds

Funding will be spent over a 10-week period with \$1,000 allocated for each week to be used as follows:

Item	Cost/Week	Weeks	Total
Additional food resources (food pantry and Café)	\$200	10	\$2,000
Fuel costs (additional donation pickup, daily local meal delivery)	\$100	10	\$1,000
Takeout meal containers for Café meals and delivery	\$75	10	\$750
Additional cleaning supplies and safety precautions	\$75	10	\$750
Overtime expense for hourly staff (truck drivers, food pantry staff) due to decrease in volunteers	\$550	10	\$5,500
Total Request			\$10,000

What are your other sources of funding?

WHEAT receives funding from the following sources:

1. Corporate Gifts, typically as part of a local business' community relations/support program
 - a. Nypro Foundation
 - b. Darmann Abrasives Foundation
2. Business Support
 - a. Clinton Savings Bank
 - b. Clinton Hospital
 - c. Local small businesses throughout our communities
3. Community Foundations
 - a. Community Foundation of North Central MA
 - b. Worcester County Food Bank Fund to End Hunger (Greater Worcester Community Foundation)
 - c. Community Health Network Area 9
4. Private Foundations
 - a. Family foundations and local donors
5. United Way of Tri-County Community Care Fund
6. Allocations from each town WHEAT serves to provide services for their residents
 - a. Berlin, MA
 - b. Bolton, MA
 - c. Clinton, MA
 - d. Lancaster, MA
 - e. Sterling, MA
7. Individual Donors
 - a. Cash donations throughout the year
 - b. Feed a Family for \$50 Thanksgiving/holiday meal program
8. Fundraising Events
 - a. Reindeer Run 5k road race
9. WHEAT's Hidden Treasures Thrift Store (in Clinton, MA)
10. In-Kind Donations
 - a. Worcester County Food Bank
 - b. Grocery stores (primarily Hannaford and Shaw's)
 - c. Café meals with food provided by myriad local volunteer groups

What are your short-term and long-term goals?

In the short-term, WHEAT is working to ensure that everyone in the five towns we serve has access to enough food for three meals a day, every day. With regular access to healthy food, young children's brains develop during their early years. School age children concentrate on learning both academic and social-emotional skills. Adults focus during their workday or pursue education or training to progress in careers to support their families. Older adults maintain a healthy lifestyle for aging in place.

In the long-term, WHEAT provides services with a goal to meet the basic needs of every resident in the communities we serve. We are working toward a community where everyone is food secure (has access to enough food for three meals per day, every day), can access health care, has adequate housing (including heat), and can meet basic needs for things like clothing and school supplies. Over the last year the number of people we have served has remained relatively constant; however, in light of the Coronavirus pandemic, numbers have increased dramatically in the period of only a few weeks.

WHEAT has a continuous goal to increase the volume of food available to local residents in need through our food pantry and meal programs and help people access resources and support systems to meet basic needs. We provide services directly and build relationships with partners to make this possible.

Why are staff members passionate about the work they do?

We have a dedicated staff team of eight (full and part time) who support the work we do every day. Our team likes the variation in work day-to-day from balancing administrative work with providing client services to picking up donations from partners and building relationships. Everyone is passionate about supporting our neighbors and lending a helping hand to make a difference. Our team of staff and our tremendous volunteers operates like a family. While we have a small staff, we would never be able to accomplish our work without the support of our dedicated volunteers and are grateful for their support.

You can read more about some of our staff and volunteers in their own words at these links:

- Lee (staff profile): <https://bit.ly/33S0e2H>
- Jenny (staff profile): <https://bit.ly/2UHC076>
- Liz (volunteer profile): <https://bit.ly/33O57K9>
- Clinton Savings Bank (volunteer profile): <https://bit.ly/2QM0A5R>

What impacts have you made in the local community?

WHEAT opened in 1982 to serve residents of Clinton, Berlin, Bolton, Lancaster, and Sterling and has operated continuously ever since. For nearly 40 years, WHEAT has been a constant and a trusted place for people to turn during times of hardship and for extra support. Our staff get to know our clients on a personal level and greet everyone warmly. Clients regularly tell us they appreciate the help they get, without feeling any judgement. One single father of three children recently said, “the WHEAT program is a big help to me.” A mother shared that she doesn’t make enough money to provide for her child and WHEAT has been able to offer her the help she needs to make ends meet.

Beyond this, WHEAT brings our communities together through our extensive volunteer network. We have local residents who volunteer regularly at the food pantry, including retired individuals who look forward to giving back. Many businesses, civic organizations, schools, and church groups bring their teams together to supply and serve meals in our Café. Other organizations that support people with special needs get involved to help their students and clients build practical skills. Because we serve a tightly knit community, people know they can reach out and ask for help or offer help at any time.

You can read more about the impact WHEAT has had on some of our clients at these links:

- Ana (client): <https://bit.ly/2QN7tDT>
- Cassie (client): <https://bit.ly/2WKI7eI>

What makes your organization stand out as distinct?

WHEAT is the largest provider of food and social service support in the communities we serve. Because our communities are not well connected through public transit systems, it is vital that people can go to one location to get the most help and WHEAT is that place. WHEAT has been a trusted resource for decades. We continue to develop strong partnerships to provide resources and services to our clients, build relationships with community organizations for volunteer, financial, and in-kind support, and offer a range of options to help clients by lending a helping hand, rather than giving a hand out. WHEAT continues to assess and meet the emerging, existing, and changing needs of our community – using feedback from clients and stakeholders – through continuing and new programs and partnerships.

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