



## **Northwest Regional Planning Commission Healthy Roots Collaborative VCDP, CDBG-CV Funding Request**

### **Overview**

The Northwest Healthy Roots Collaborative is seeking support from the City of St. Albans in submitting an application to the VT Community Development Program, Community Block Grant Covid funds. Funding would support the increased gleaning and food access services that Healthy Roots provided during the 2020 pandemic, continuing into 2021 and 2022. Healthy Roots is a program of Northwest Regional Planning Commission and has been supporting access to local foods in Franklin and Grand Isle counties since 2014. With the only established distribution service for charitable food sites, Healthy Roots increased the amount and variety of foods being delivered to charitable foods sites and health organizations across the region.

### **How has Covid 19 impacted food security?**

According to a study completed by the University of Vermont, 1 in 3 Vermonters has experienced food insecurity since the beginning of the pandemic. In our own community, food shelves and congregate meal sites have seen this impact, reporting increased demand and new faces visiting their food shelves since the pandemic began. Some sites have seen huge increases such as Martha's Kitchen that was serving 50 to 70 meals a day, grew to 250 during the height of the pandemic. Richford sites have seen a 50% increase in clients and CIDER has grown from 250 meals a month to 650. Not only did the charitable food system see an increase in demand but there was also a huge increase in the amount of food available to address the need, yet someone needed to get this food out to charitable food sites across the region.

### **Healthy Roots Role in Charitable Foods**

Since 2016, Healthy Roots has managed a gleaning program, where we harvest produce from farm fields that would not otherwise make it to market and distribute it to charitable food sites and health organizations across Franklin and Grand Isle. In 2019, Healthy Roots partnered with Franklin Grand Isle Community Action to raise funds and purchase a shared cargo van that would allow us to continue our gleaning services. This van and Healthy Roots distribution route proved to be vital as we began to see the impacts of Covid 19 in March 2020. Between 2019 and 2020, Healthy Roots increased the amount of food distributed to their charitable food sites by 275%, distributing more than 92,000 pounds of food to food shelves, congregate meals site, and health organizations. Not only did Healthy Roots increase the total poundage of food distributed but moved beyond distributing just gleaned produce to include mixed produce and dairy boxes, milk and prepared meals. As Robert Ostermeyer, Director of Franklin/Grand Isle Community Action, states, "At the beginning, we didn't know what was going to happen and how we were going to respond, as more food was coming in, we just made a call to Healthy Roots and everything was taken care of. They played and continue to play a vital role in responding to this pandemic."



### **Healthy Roots and the City of St. Albans**

The City of St. Albans has been a vital partner to Healthy Roots since their inception. During normal years, Healthy Roots holds In Good Taste, a local foods tasting event that highlights 30 farm and food producers from the region and attracts more than 350 attendants. This event has been held annually at City Hall and the City staff has been an active member of the planning committee for the event which also includes Franklin County Industrial Development Corp, The Chamber, and Northwest Regional Planning Commission. Partnership goes far beyond events and into planning for a resilient food system. In 2019, The City and Healthy Roots were awarded an EPA, Local Foods, Local Places grant to address local food access in St. Albans City. This project brought together more than 70 community members, local organizations and state and federal partners. This three day process developed an action plan that is still guiding Healthy Roots work today.

In addition to direct City partnership, Healthy Roots serves many organizations and businesses within the City. As part of our gleaning work and expanded pandemic services, Healthy Roots serves NorthWest Family Foods, Martha's Kitchen, St. Albans NOTCH, Northwestern Medical Center, and Four Winds. In 2021, we will be working on how to increase services to Tim's House and begin serving Spectrum. Healthy Roots has also provided business development support and local food matchmaking for Rail City Market, Red House Sweets, The Main Squeeze, and Evelyne's on Center prior to their closing. During the Pandemic, Healthy Roots has supported City restaurants by including them in the Everyone Eats initiative that pays restaurants to provide charitable prepared meals. Our Everyone Eats restaurants include The Drake, The Main Squeeze, Santini Catering and Grazers.

### **The Ask**

Healthy Roots has asked the City of St. Albans to be the applying agency to the VT Community Development Program, Block Grant – Covid 19 funds. The Healthy Root request is approximately \$70,000 to reimburse increased services in 2020 and for work moving forward in 2021 and to provide \$1,000 for legal fees incurred by the City of St. Albans. Healthy Roots will use this funding to cover reimbursement of services provided from July 2020 through June 2021 and meeting the ongoing demand between July 2021 and June 2022. Reimbursement costs would cover the administration, distribution and mileage costs associated with providing gleaned produce and other charitable food donations to the identified communities. The remaining funding will be used to maintain increased services for the identified sites in St. Albans City, Richford, as well as the elderly populations served through CIDER and Island in the Sun in the Champlain Islands. In addition to services to traditional charitable food sites Healthy Roots will use funding to continue to support expanded services to migrant farm workers through our partnership with Bridges to Health and NOTCH clinics in Franklin County.