

Fairfax County Human Services Council



Innovation Fund

May 2020 Update

*This update provides basic information about the emerging projects to be funded through the Human Services Innovation Fund. The actual work involved in these projects will be carried out by the office of the Fairfax County Chief Equity Officer.**

Recap

The ultimate, long term goal of the Human Services Innovation Challenge is to encourage the engagement of “social enterprises” [see below] in a collaborative effort with government, NFPs, NGOs and investors to find and implement novel ways of financing and delivering essential human services in Fairfax County.

The County Board of Supervisors has allocated a total of \$400,000 in seed money to launch this initiative. The first \$200,000 has been committed. * Recommendations for the allocation of the second \$200,000 will now be subject to deliberations among Council members. These deliberations will include active discussion with members of the Board of Supervisors and member of the Council who choose to engage.

Two of these projects were approved by the full Human Services Council; the third project is an emergency allocation to address aspects of the Covid-19 emergency that was approved by the HSC Executive Committee.

Evolving Understanding of Who (What) Will Help Us Achieve Our Goals

As a brief prelude, it may be informative to note here that as our understanding of the various phenomena involved in collective impact has evolved, so has our use of the terminology that best describes the ultimate achievement goal of the Innovation Challenge. We have come to understand that while such familiar terms as “collective impact” and social impact investing” refer conceptually to the search for innovative funding and service delivery of community services, the term social enterprise accurately reflects the specific type of organization we hope to create in pursuit of the mission.

Essentially, a social enterprise is an organization that addresses a basic unmet need or tackles a social or environmental problem *through a market-driven approach*.

In general, social enterprises have both business goals and social goals - with the social goals actually embedded in their business model. One simple example is the Bombas sock company, which donates to charity one pair of socks for each pair sold. A generic example of a social enterprise in our context would be a company that provides income generation opportunities to meet the basic needs of people who live in poverty.

Initial Innovation Challenge Projects

1. *A social enterprise project focused on Employment and Entrepreneurship*

The County will use Innovation Fund resources to meet the needs of people striving to overcome serious employment barriers by engaging non-profits and businesses to create jobs and reinvest earnings in skill development, training and services for employees.

2. *The “Richmond Highway Food Insecurity Project”*

This food systems improvement program will expand and improve the existing network of food system stakeholders to address food insecurity along the Richmond Highway corridor. The intent is to broaden the knowledge and understanding of food inequities, address cultural gaps, and to recognize diversity in the food system and gaps in service delivery to create a more equitable and just system.

3. *Covid-19 Food Insecurity Enterprise*

Despite extensive coordination efforts by county agencies, nonprofits and FCPS, to address food access and food insecurity for our most vulnerable residents, the foods made available through these efforts are not always reflective of the cultural, religious and health needs of our diverse community, or are in insufficient supply, and/or are not delivered in a timely fashion and/or to the proper location.

This challenge presents a unique opportunity for the Human Services Council to meet an emerging need of our food access system while also supporting small businesses such as restaurants, ethnic grocers and food trucks- who are also grappling with economic hardship due to Covid-19.

This is a pilot program. The County will engage with small businesses to supply and distribute culturally reflective and nutritious foods to meet the needs of the diverse communities we serve. This pilot will be implemented in all four county Human Services regions.