

EL PASO COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: [Marcos Duran](#)
915-546-2177

County Approves First Round of Healthy Food Financing Grants

Court votes to award HFFI funds to three projects totaling \$232,000

EL PASO, TX: The El Paso County Commissioner's Court voted unanimously to approve Healthy Food Financing Initiative (HFFI) grant funds to three local organizations during a regular meeting on Feb. 24, 2020. Awards range from \$18,600 to \$150,000 and represent diverse business plans and benefits to the community.

In 2019, El Paso County set aside \$500,000 to fund projects aimed at expanding access to healthy foods in areas of the community where healthy, affordable food options are scarce. This came after the "Food for Every Child" report identified areas across El Paso County where low-income residents lacked access to food retail and suffered high deaths due to diet-related illnesses. HFFI programs in different parts of the country have been an effective tool for state and local governments to bring new supermarkets, grocery stores, and other food retail models to underserved communities.

"As the first projects to receive HFFI funds, these awards will help shape our distribution systems, creating a more healthy and robust community," said Andrea Hutchins, Economic Development Director.

Nationally, HFFI programs have been replicated in major communities for years, but El Paso County represents the first such program operated by a county government. Modeled after other community programs, the County utilizes local partnerships for technical and administrative assistance through The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston (UTHealth) School of Public Health in El Paso and People Fund. UTHealth acts as a vital food access partner

and helps the Economic Development Department identify and vet projects that meet the goals of the HFFI program. People Fund allows the County to expand low-interest loan programs and technical assistance opportunities to awardees.

“Access to healthy and affordable food is essential for people to lead healthy lives. HFFI is a great way to increase access to healthy and affordable food for people in our county. We are excited to partner with the County to provide nutrition and food access expertise for this new program,” said Dr. Leah Whigham, Director of UTHealth’s Center for Community Health Impact in El Paso.

“We at PeopleFund applaud El Paso County efforts to increase access to healthy foods in their community, particularly in low and moderate income areas, and we are immensely proud of having been selected to participate in this initiative. PeopleFund has committed \$500,000 to provide affordable capital combined with technical assistance to qualified businesses under this program,” said CEO Gustavo Lasala.

The El Paso County HFFI program serves as an example to communities across the country looking to diminish food scarcity while increasing access to healthy foods. The Economic Development Department is currently accepting applications for the next round of financing. More information about funding opportunities and how to qualify can be found [here](#).

[The El Paso County Economic Development Department](#) administers programs which seek to enhance the business operating climate and promote heritage tourism throughout El Paso County. These efforts serve to enhance the quality of life for all residents.

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 [@epcountyecon](#)

500 E. SAN ANTONIO, ROOM 312, EL PASO, TEXAS 79901-2427, PHONE: (915) 546-2177,
FAX: (915) 546-2217, EMAIL: economicdevelopment@epcounty.com