

SUCCESS STORY

South Texas Communities look to kick start PSE efforts despite impacts of COVID-19



Why apply for the WOW-E Community Challenge?

Now is the time to work towards making meaningful policy, system, or environmental changes in your community!



With Covid-19 impacting efforts in South Texas, the Working on Wellness Environments program supported communities in kick starting smaller, but impactful projects. This entailed the Community Challenge, a process to invigorate local groups who were ready to initiate PSE efforts to create healthier environments. The initiative has jumpstarted proposals for 4 local projects in Starr and Zapata Counties.



Working on Wellness Environments is a program of Texas A&M Agrilife Extension made possible with funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

PUBLIC HEALTH CHALLENGE

Hudspeth, Maverick, Starr, Zapata and Webb counties are predominantly Hispanic, and many communities within them are often described as underserved with respect to access to resources that can promote health and reduce disease risk. All counties were affected by Covid-19 with high number of cases appearing in the region. All five counties have a growing population and their geographic spread, makes it challenging to address these issues. Their combined population is 394,601. Of the 242 Texas counties that have been ranked, Hudspeth, Maverick, Starr, Zapata, and Webb currently rank 233rd, 234th, 236th, 242nd, and 240th in targeted health factors.



APPROACH

The Texas A&M Agrilife WOW-E team developed a Community Challenge, an initiative to jump-start community efforts utilizing policy, system, and environmental changes. The program included a three-part webinar series for interested local leaders. As well as an application process encouraging advocates to assess their readiness and identify a local issue, key partners, a PSE response and the associated maps, budgets, and communication plan necessary to implement a quick action project.

These projects will support local advocates toward building and/or strengthening larger system, environmental plans, and, or policy changes. Technical assistance is provided by WOW-E experts throughout the durations of the process, from selecting projects ideas through project evaluation. Seed funding will be awarded to organizations who submit applications demonstrating community readiness and clear, relevant quick-action projects.



July 22:
-Application Opens
(Application technical assistance is available upon request until

July 27:
Webinar 2
(Physical Activity & Nutrition Project

July 29:
Webinar 3
(Evaluation & Readiness Assessment)

August 20:
Application Due
by 11:59 pm

August 27:
Notice of Award to Applicants via Email

September 15 - November 8:
Community Projects

November 8:
Project Completion Deadline

November 12:
After-Action Report Deadline

- 15 people registered for the webinar series.
- 3 project advocates (2 school and 1 church) decided not to participate in this Community Challenge round due to the most recent COVID-19 surge.
- 2 local advocates submitted full applications needed minimal technical assistance
 - Rio Grande City connectivity project linking residential use to a park and a school
 - Rio Grande City historic site connectivity and site enhancement project
- 2 local groups submitted intents to participate with a need for considerable technical assistance in the initial planning phases.
 - Zapata school SHAC looking at out-of-school time access to healthy vending and concessions
 - Zapata Youth Ambassadors plan to address connectivity to and safety within Romeo T Flores Park

RESULTS

SUSTAINING SUCCESS

The Community Challenge was designed to support local, quick action, smaller but impactful projects. Shortened timelines and small wins should help improve likelihood for success as well as garner excitement for future action. Specifically, advocates are employing key tools and processes including readiness assessments, partnership identification and collaboration, evidence based planning, communication templates, and evaluation. Technical assistance from WOW-E experts and partners will also be available to guide groups through the culmination of the proposed local efforts.

