

Sugar Freedom Project
2021 Funding Proposal



Background

The Sugar Freedom Project (SFP) was first inspired by the 2016 Soda Tax and the need to broaden and deepen community engagement and leadership on issues that affect the lives of people in neighborhoods that have been the most impacted by the soda and sugar industries. In 2019 we launched a team of Resident Leaders from these neighborhoods to employ a community organizing approach with these goals:

- To create an infrastructure, mechanism, and container for consolidating a base of residents most affected by corporate sugar
- To develop the capacities of neighborhood residents as leaders
- To build cross-community solidarity

With this approach, SFP works to build a foundation of community leaders that expand and deepen their social networks within hard-to-reach populations to uplift healthy cultural and traditional alternatives to SSBs, build a supportive, inclusive network around healthy eating and drinking, and cultivate innovative partnerships to pilot community-led interventions on corporate sugar's ubiquity in low-income communities of color. The approach was tested this fall in partnership with Saba Grocers Initiative on their COVID Relief Food Access Project: our Resident Leaders identified 400+ high-need residents to receive \$250 Saba Food Cards. We are excited to continue this collaboration and build a robust grassroots infrastructure to reach and connect communities - providing not just temporary assistance but a network of belonging, mutual support, and a space to identify and advocate for a collective agenda to address the root causes of diabetes and obesity that a corporate-driven food system creates.

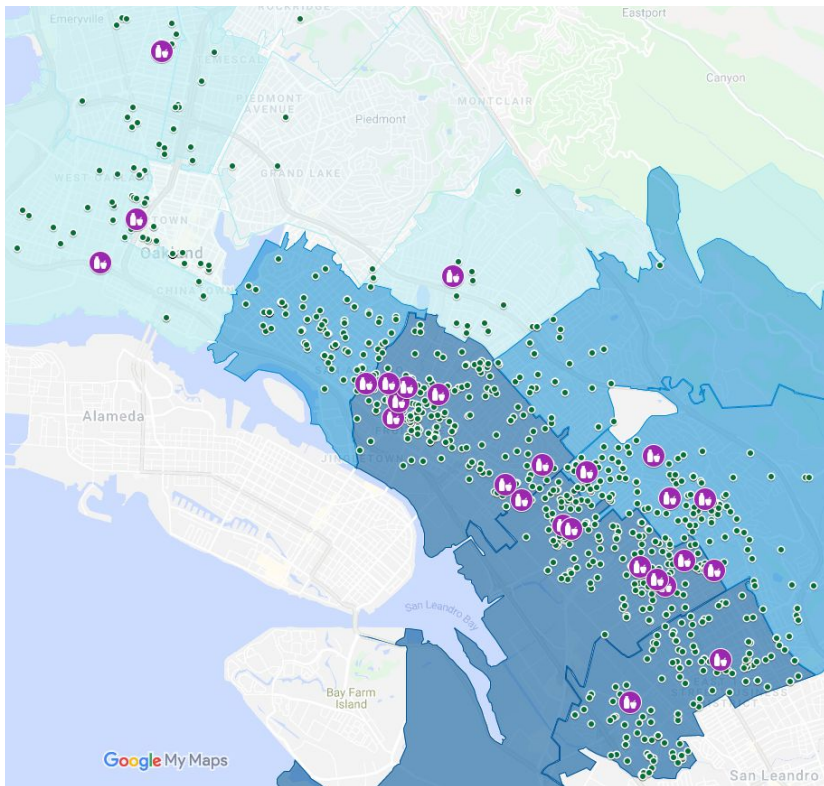
We see this grassroots infrastructure as complementary to and symbiotic with Saba's infrastructure of connected independently-owned local food businesses. These stores are the anchor of a transformation to a healthy food ecosystem that centers community priorities. Over the next 6 months our team of 10 Resident Leaders will be paired with 5 stores in high-need neighborhoods to make contact with 500 surrounding residents to promote the stores' growing ability to support healthy lifestyles, learn about their spectrum of food access needs, and engage them in developing an analysis of their local food ecosystem. By June, there will be 2500 residents identified and engaged who could then receive cards with additional investment.

Funding Request: \$150,000

- 33% Staffing
- 33% Community Organizers
- 17% Project-Related Expenses
- 17% Food Cards

When COVID-19 hit, our Resident Leader team stopped to consider how we could respond to the urgent needs of residents *and* address the root causes of food insecurity. We knew from our 2019 community engagement that one of the main barriers for people most impacted by obesity and diabetes to adopt healthier practices was their local food environment. We partnered with Saba Grocers Initiative to bring together store owners and SFP Resident Leaders to reimagine the local food ecosystem. Store owners and residents alike want more affordable healthy products and Oakland's established infrastructure of corner stores means that while low-income communities of color may not have access to a neighborhood grocery store, they can almost always walk to a corner store.

Over the summer, SFP resident leaders surveyed 200+ customers and neighbors of Jalisco Market, Q&S, and Mi Ranchito to learn what it would mean for stores to truly transform into community stores. During this time, Jalisco and Q&S launched fresh produce sections



through investments made by Saba, and SFP Resident Leaders continued to engage customers and neighbors. This new community network, coupled with SFP's 2019 direct base of 500+ individuals, was used to identify 400+ Saba Food Card recipients among those most in need: undocumented folks, day laborers, people experiencing homelessness, community elders, immigrants, refugees, families with young children, and un/under employed folks.

Map: COVID-19 cases by zip code, Saba participating stores, Saba Food Card recipients

SFP is currently led by a team of ten Resident Leaders: a Nepali leader who works with Southeast Asian immigrants and refugees, two Mam youth leaders who work with day laborers and young families, five Latinx leaders who work with families, day laborers, and community elders, and two African American leaders who work with families and community elders. All have connected with folks recently experiencing homelessness and job loss. In 2021 we will expand our team to include more representation from impacted communities - racially, ethnically, and geographically.

Our Resident Leaders have shared that there is tremendous excitement in seeing changes in their neighborhoods (ie produce fridges in their corner store stocked with affordable fresh produce, as well as Saba Food Cards) and desire to engage further in this collective work. This is critical for the goals of the SSB Tax as a health intervention, because “individual empowerment is a predictive variable to have a health-promoting lifestyle... [and] of dimensions of empowerment, seven dimensions of participation, motivation, critical thinking, intention, self-efficacy, perceived control and social support are positively and significantly related to health-promoting lifestyle. As the duration of membership increases, people’s empowerment also increases and they are more inclined to follow health promoting lifestyles” (Bakhshi, Fataneh et al., 2017). That one week after being asked directly what fresh produce they would want to buy and at what price, the store had a new fridge stocked with affordable produce ignited people’s imagination for their neighborhood.

Small, locally owned businesses help create communities that are more prosperous, connected, and generally better off; on a dollar-for-dollar basis, the local economic impact of independently owned businesses compared to national chains is often close to double, generating millions more in local economic activity and job creation (Mitchell, 2016).

Impact on the local economy: \$1 million investment

- (1) \$600,000+ stays in local community
- (2) \$1.5 million generated in local business activity
- (3) For every 10 jobs at a small business, another 7 supported in the local community

Using lessons learned from engaging folks who were not yet civically engaged, identifying those most in need for cards, and cultivating relationships between Resident Leaders and store owners, we are proposing to spend the next 6 months expanding and deepening the connection between stores and their surrounding neighborhoods as a food ecosystem. Corner stores are the anchor for this grassroots infrastructure to transform Oakland into a healthy food ecosystem that centers community priorities.

Program Plan:

- 100 residents will be identified to participate in a community leadership program and will be supplied with a \$250 card to track purchases, evaluate the card program, and inform analysis of food access landscape
- 5 stores will be selected from Saba’s project network of 26 stores using an equity criteria that focuses on COVID, diabetes, and obesity rates
- 10 Resident Leaders will be paired with those 5 stores to make contact with 500 surrounding residents to promote the store, learn about food access needs, and develop analysis of local food ecosystem
- Resident Leaders will facilitate workshops to uplift healthy cultural and traditional alternatives to SSBs
- By June, there will be 2500 residents identified who could then receive cards with additional investment