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## Center for Population Studies and Partners Host Hunger Summit

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## Center for Population Studies and Partners Host Hunger Summit

Summit helps nonprofits respond to COVID-19 and food insecurity in Mississippi

DECEMBER 1, 2020 BY ELIZABETH SWEENEY



The final meeting of the 2020 Hunger Summit, a joint effort of the University of Mississippi's Center for Population Studies, Delta Directions Consortium and the Community Foundation of Northwest Mississippi, is set for Thursday (Dec. 3) via Zoom. The summit provides a way for food pantries and other community organizations to share information and support during the pandemic. Adobe Stock photo

OXFORD, Miss. – The **University of Mississippi's Center for Population Studies** has partnered with two regional community organizations to launch the 2020 Hunger Summit, which provides a venue for community organizations and their partners to share information and support during the pandemic.

Partners in the effort are the **Delta Directions Consortium** and the **Community Foundation of Northwest Mississippi**. Starting in September, the Hunger Summit has convened the first Thursday of each month via Zoom.

"The Hunger Summit has been a great success," said Terrence Hunter, fellow of the Delta Directions Consortium and alumnus of the Ole Miss School of Law who has moderated each of the sessions. "It is amazing seeing so many food pantries and food banks come together with a unified mission: combating food insecurity in the Mississippi Delta in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic."

The concept for the Hunger Summit stems from a previous collaboration between the Community Foundation of Northwest Mississippi and the Center for Population Studies. The first Desoto County Hunger Summit was held in Hernando in 2017.

This year's summit was born out of a broader initiative between foundations and university entities to find out how food pantries and nonprofits were operating in the midst of the pandemic. The **Maddox Foundation**, Community Foundation of Northwest Mississippi, partners within the Delta Directions Consortium and the UM Community First Research Center for Wellbeing and Creative Achievement joined forces to conduct social science, public health and legal research that would help pantries and other organizations providing food assistance to Mississippi families.

Before the pandemic, the Center for Population Studies, the Maddox Foundation and the Community Foundation of Northwest Mississippi were already collaborating to identify challenges and opportunities in several north Mississippi communities, with the goal of building capacity and promoting community health and well-being.

With the onset of the pandemic, the focus narrowed to the critical and time-sensitive issues of addressing food insecurity and hunger in these communities.

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"What began as a project for the future really turned out to be extremely impactful in the present," said Robin Hurdle, president and CEO of the Maddox Foundation. "As schools and businesses closed, emergency resources and critical funding were desperately needed, and the homework done by so many for our original proposal laid the groundwork necessary to make the FEED Fund possible."

The FEED Northwest Mississippi Fund was established at the Community Foundation to enable pantries and nonprofits to become self-sustaining.

Through the fund, the Maddox Foundation and the Community Foundation of Northwest Mississippi have worked to raise and distribute money to allow food pantries and other organizations to serve more Mississippians in need and invest in their future. The fund has granted nearly \$800,000 to nonprofits that are working to meet the academic, educational and nutritional needs of children.

With the Hunger Summit, the Community Foundation of Northwest Mississippi and the Delta Directions Consortium have been able to bring donors and nonprofits together to find innovative ways to meet the needs that Mississippians are experiencing as a result of the pandemic.

"The Hunger Summit has brought synergy to the foundation's efforts to address the food insecurity needs in our region," said Keith Fulcher, president of the Community Foundation of Northwest Mississippi. "Partnerships have been formed with state, national and even international organizations whose mission is to feed the hungry. We could not have made these connections without the leadership of Delta Directions."

The Community Foundation serves 11 counties in northwest Mississippi, assisting and connecting donors and nonprofit organizations and charitable causes.

The Delta Directions Consortium is an alliance of individuals, academic institutions, nonprofit organizations and foundations committed to creating positive social change in the Mississippi Delta region. John Green, senior research associate at the Center for Population Studies, serves as a coordinator for this multi-institutional consortium.

Each 2020 Hunger Summit meeting presents relevant information or data to community partners, while providing a space for them to share challenges and successes. Participants have learned about the CARES Act reimbursement grant for food pantries and nonprofits, the USDA Farmers to Families Food Box Program, and federal and state food donation policies.

Hunger Summit and FEED Northwest Mississippi Fund research has included both the Center for Population Studies and the Harvard Law School's Food Law and Policy Clinic – also a Delta Directions partner – with faculty, staff and students involved in presentations.

The final meeting of the 2020 Hunger Summit is set for 12:30 p.m. Thursday (Dec. 3). The summit is open to all who have an interest in best practices for meeting food assistance needs during these challenging times.

For information on how to join, contact Lynn Woo, interim director of the Center for Population Studies at [lcwoo@olemiss.edu](mailto:lcwoo@olemiss.edu).

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