

Catalyzing the growth of a longstanding food distribution program



BACKGROUND

This case study illustrates how TCC funds enable existing community projects and partnerships to expand and to attract more funding from other sources. The story spotlights project partners at Saint Rest Baptist Church (St. Rest) and Fresno Metro Ministry, who leveraged \$1.5 million in TCC funds for food rescue and redistribution into over \$6 million. For more about Fresno's food rescue work, see [page 70](#).

Interviews for this story were conducted in December 2021 and October 2023.

Initial renderings of the Saint Rest Food to Share Hub. Photo credit: Paul Halajian Architects

BERNICE WILEY, the director of food ministries at St. Rest, grew up in “The Garden” neighborhood of Fresno. Her idyllic childhood inspires her work with St. Rest because she wants others to grow up in a family-oriented, healthy place as she did. A few years after taking over St. Rest’s 40-year-old food distribution program in 2009, Wiley expanded its reach by forging partnerships with Fresno Metro Ministry’s Food to Share program and the Central California Food Bank. The program rescues nutritious food that would otherwise be wasted and delivers it to partners, like St. Rest, to distribute to families in need.

Wiley is committed to serving the 100–200 people who come to the food giveaways three times a month; in 2023, St. Rest provided over 230,000 pounds of food. And the project is continuing to grow in capacity and reach. In 2020, an influx of \$1.5 million in funding from Fresno’s TCC grant kicked off a renovation and expansion of the St. Rest warehouse, including the addition of a commercial kitchen. “Since the renovation and new building, more and more people in the community are curious about what we’re doing here. I’m getting more folks wanting to come out and to volunteer. It’s absolutely amazing the transformation that we’ve seen on this corner.”

“The TCC funding has made all of this possible — the renovation, the new building, the walk-in refrigerator. Without the TCC grant, we would not be able to function at the capacity we are now.”

BERNICE WILEY



Bernice Wiley speaks at the groundbreaking event for the food hub in 2021. Photo credit: Edward Smith, The Business Journal

The expanding program has also led to personal growth for Wiley, who has developed stronger public speaking skills and new relationships. The project’s increased exposure has given her opportunities to become more comfortable speaking with partners, investors, and community members alike. “I’ve become much better at interviews. We’ve gotten to know a lot of people in the community who are interested in what we’re doing. This project has opened up a lot of avenues for progress for our food ministry.”

Most importantly, though, the increased capacity has empowered the food distribution program to serve many additional community members. “More and more folks are coming to take advantage of the food that we distribute. I think it’s really due to the curiosity about the building and the pride that the people in the community feel about it.”

KEITH BERGTHOLD, current CEO of Regenerate California Innovation (RCI) and the former executive director at Fresno Metro Ministry, was born in central Fresno and has a long history of serving the community. He works with many churches in southwest Fresno, including St. Rest, because of their commitment to food distribution.

To help St. Rest achieve its vision for expansion, Bergthold took the lead in obtaining funding to renovate and expand the food distribution program’s existing facilities. He submitted a TCC proposal in 2020, and the program was awarded \$1.5 million. With growing interest in the food provided, as well as educational opportunities offered, the St. Rest and Food to Share team decided to further expand the project with a new building that includes a commercial community kitchen and training area. Bergthold began to fundraise in earnest for the new building, reaching out to individual and corporate donors and quadrupling the TCC funds over several years.

“The TCC grant was the seed money — the foundational layer of what is now 30 funders. I advertise the \$1.5 million from TCC, and it gives other people confidence to give. Now, I’ve raised \$6.3 million [including TCC funds].”

KEITH BERGTHOLD



Keith Bergthold (right) presents visuals of the new building, to be constructed adjacent to the Food Hub. Photo credit: Build Healthy Places Network

Working on this project has also helped Bergthold to develop his already formidable skills as a fundraiser and community leader. He has become more savvy at navigating bureaucracy, such as the development entitlement process, and he has developed his professional network. “This work has given me the confidence to look at some bigger projects for Fresno — maybe a \$100 million or \$200 million project. I know a lot of people, and I feel like I’ve got a skill set now that I can use to do some other big things for Fresno.”



Ron Wiley and Bernice Wiley distribute food outside the food hub warehouse. Photo courtesy of Bernice Wiley

RON WILEY, a deacon at St. Rest, moved to Fresno to attend Fresno State University in 1971 and has been deeply engaged with the community ever since. Now retired, Wiley remains an active member of St. Rest and is a highly engaged volunteer with the food ministry. To counteract high levels of poverty and food insecurity in southwest Fresno, Wiley follows his wife Bernice’s lead – working with food banks and other partners to build community visibility and capacity.

Wiley described all the ways that the recent influx of funding from TCC and leveraged funding sources has helped the food distribution program expand. With a larger, modernized building, St. Rest is able to provide more food, as

well as to start new programs, like a cooking class. “We’ve been able to purchase equipment that we didn’t have prior to being a recipient of the TCC funds. We’re going to have a state-of-the-art kitchen where we can train entrepreneurs that want to go into food service operations. We’ll teach folks how to cook some of the produce that they receive in the food line.”

With more people participating in the food distribution program, Wiley credits increased visibility. He says people are more willing to donate when they see that a project is successful.

“The more financial resources, and the bigger we become, the more visible we become. With visibility comes more participation. People see the growth of our project and say, ‘I want to be a part of that.’”

RON WILEY

Wiley has benefited from the project’s expansion personally as well. He has become a better communicator and strengthened his network of engaged community members. “Working with the staff and volunteers has enhanced my communication skills as I coordinate their efforts. I’ve developed greater friendships with some of the workers that we see time after time.”