

FY 2024 One-Time Request – Cougar Cupboard Operational Funds

Cougar Cupboard opened in January 2020 serving close to 70 students a week prior to COVID-19. The Cupboard has grown exponentially since then, and in Spring 2023, the program distributed over 5,000 pounds of free food through over 800 students visits per week. The Cougar Cupboard will be relocating to a larger space in the University Lofts this Spring and expects to continue to grow from there in order to address increases in student need.

It is our goal to be a nationally recognized pantry for our ability to adequately meet our student needs, alleviate food insecurity as a barrier for student success and to support our diverse student population by providing service to our students with dignity which includes offering practical, healthy, culturally responsive, food options. We aim to accommodate a variety of preferences and dietary needs of our students. When students visit the cupboard each week, we hope that they feel supported and empowered to persist in their degree attainment.

The Cupboard is able to help meet the campus-wide need through the support of a second location, Cougar Cupboard 2, operated by PEEPS, is experiencing a similar growth trajectory. In 2021, the PEEPS Pantry had 175 visits, while in the first 9 months 2023 the location has already seen 988 visits. The small pantry, which provides only non-perishable items, has been spending roughly \$1,000 per week in attempt to meet the need. The smaller cupboard has had difficulty meeting the level of need and is currently temporarily closed until it can be restocked through food drives and other efforts.

Research data suggests that over 1 in 3 college students experience food insecurity; at UH, this is 15,000 students. So far, the Cougar Cupboard has enrolled 6,700 students. This is less than half of the number of students who could greatly benefit from the program. Given this data, coupled with rising food costs, the Cupboard is expected to continue its exponential growth in the coming semesters. **The exponential trends in the utilization of this program necessitate a robust base funding that can meet the current needs of students as well as support future growth for the Cougar Cupboard.**

While the Cougar Cupboard is supported by the Houston Bank, which provides free food deliveries of primarily fresh produce, and the Cupboard has received a large grant from TDECU providing \$20,000 annually, the student need outweighs what these partners are able to provide. The Houston Food Bank is not able to regularly provide certain staples of a healthy diet, including milk and bread. Limited nonperishable items that can be provided by the Food Bank also limits options for a consistent healthy diet. Furthermore, about ¼ of students who use the Cupboard are international students. These students have frequently requested that the Cupboard provide food that they eat in their own cultures, and the Houston Food Bank is very rarely able to provide these foods for the Cupboard. Since food insecurity is defined as not only a lack of access to food, but rather a lack of consistent access to foods that support a healthy diet, it is imperative for the Cougar Cupboard to provide student with options for a well-rounded diet.

Currently, we are projecting an average of over 800 visits per week to the Cougar Cupboard once it is settled in its new location in Spring 2024. Considering this level of utilization, as well as the costs associated with the move, a review of **anticipated costs is as follows:**

Operational Costs	
Rent	\$10,000
MetroClean services	TBD
Supplies	
78" Wire Racks (5)	\$1500
Hand held shopping baskets	\$105
65 gallon trash can with wheels	\$135
21 gallon trash can for lobby	\$65
Additional staff aprons	\$400
Food service gloves (10)	\$150
Computer	\$1000
Miscellaneous	\$200-700
Equipment	
Three-Door Refrigerator	\$5,000-7,000
Three-Door Freezer	\$15,000
Food	
Milk	\$1355 per month (including products and delivery)
Bread	\$800 per month (including products and delivery)
Cultural Foods	Cultural Foods- \$1,000 per month
Non-Perishables	\$2,000 per week
Total Anticipated Costs for Spring 2024	\$85,830

Meeting students’ essential needs is directly tied to student success. Students experiencing basic needs insecurities are more likely to miss, fail and/or drop classes, are less likely to purchase needed textbooks, and more likely to leave their university altogether. In fact, over 35% of students who enrolled in the Cougar Cupboard reported had considered dropping out of the university due to financial concerns. Support to this program will make a huge impact to hundreds of Cougars by helping them have what they need so that they can focus on their education.

DSA Strategic Initiative:

Student Success: Champion exceptional opportunities and services to support all UH students.

- SS2: Expand **diverse experiences** on exploration and education while identifying and meeting the needs of our student population through supportive, inclusive environments.
- SS3: Foster the **holistic well-being** of all students through coordinated, intentional services and processes.

Division Cohesion: Create and foster a cohesive division identity, culture, and community.

- DC4: Foster **collaborative divisional processes and support** focused on common goals for enhancing the student experience.
- DC5: Promote and create initiatives that support a **healthy work environment while contributing to divisional shared goals** for student retention and success.

Resources: Evaluate, actively pursue, and leverage resources to enhance the UH experience.

- R1: Evaluate resources to **identify opportunities** for efficiency, improvement, and transformation for all students.
- R2: Pursue and **develop resources** to address identified gaps and needs of students.
- R3: Leverage and adapt resources in innovative ways to increase **effective utilization**.

Partnerships: Forge and strengthen partnerships to expand our reach into the university and greater community.

- P1: Educate and empower **campus partners** to be our advocates and connect with local resources.
- P2: Enhance students' educational experience by expanding partnerships with **academic affairs**.
- P5: Promote **alumni** engagement and support for division initiatives in cooperation with Advancement.
- P6: Raise the profile of the division through **regional, national, and international** involvement.

Funding Request- FY2024

Cougar Cupboard Base Funding	\$28,301.89
<u>Admin Fee</u>	<u>\$1,698.11</u>
Total	\$30,000