

# NM CARES Health Disparities Center: Environmental Health Core

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## Overview of Project 1

### *Fiestas: Creating a Social Environment to Reduce Food Insecurity in an Urban New Mexico Community*

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A supportive social environment has been shown to be associated with decreased household food insecurity, especially with respect to social relationships between women. **We expect that this project will create tangible and sustainable improvements within Santa Barbara Martineztown by increasing the capacity of the individuals to mitigate food insecurity through the creation and strengthening of social ties.**

**Aim #1:** *To understand the local context, cultural meanings and social dynamics that define people's relationship to food and their experience of hunger and food insecurity in the SBMT neighborhood in Albuquerque.*

**Aim #2:** *To apply the findings from Aim 1 to develop strong interconnected social relationships in SBMT that will improve access to food, information about food, and support for families challenged by food insecurity and hunger.*

The Fiestas project develops and pilots a **collaborative community-based intervention to improve food security in Santa Barbara Martineztown**, an urban food desert community in Albuquerque.

**Fiestas targets women because they are keystone members of families, nutritional gatekeepers for children, potential role models for youth, and often the repositories of ethnic and cultural knowledge.** The social ties developed through participation in the *Fiestas* will allow women involved with this study to become fulcrums in the community for connecting people with information about food, food access and nutrition; with services related to food supports such as WIC or SNAP (Food Stamps); and with each other for social supports that undergird basic survival for low-income families.

Through improvements to the social environment that accrue through this project, **women and households within the SBMT community will be more intensively connected and empowered to confront the challenges presented by the shortcomings of the current food system.**

**Our research approach includes:**

**A Food Security Survey** administered in 150 households by UNM students enrolled in the new course "Methods in Community Research"

**Structured observation** of community meetings

**Ethnographic interviews** to investigate local meanings, experiences and relationships related to food, and how they find expression in individual lives in Santa Barbara Martineztown;

**"Fiestas"** – interactive gatherings designed and run by women from the community to encourage the development of social ties between women as community assets that will act to enhance food security;

The processes and outcomes of Fiestas will be evaluated by the investigators. The outcomes and creative community-developed ideas for improving food security will be shared with members of community beyond the Fiestas participants.