



ENDING PERIOD POVERTY IN YOUR COMMUNITY:

Lessons Learned from *Project Local Access*

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WELCOME

The United State of Women (USOW) believes that reproductive freedom means fighting for equitable access to the full spectrum of reproductive healthcare, including menstrual products. We're excited to partner with **The Flow Initiative**, a national organization committed to ending period poverty and achieving menstrual equity, to bring awareness to the issue of period poverty and activate organizers in their local communities.

Period poverty is defined as inadequate access to menstrual hygiene tools and education (including, but not limited to, menstrual hygiene products, washing facilities, and waste management). This issue currently impacts an estimated 16.9 million people who menstruate in the United States, creating barriers to menstruating individuals' complete autonomy to decide what is best for their own bodies, livelihoods, and futures.

To address period poverty, we must start in our communities by educating our neighbors, families, and friends, and providing those most in need with menstrual products. In this toolkit, you'll learn how to partner with your local library or other community spaces with The Flow Initiative's Project Local Access. Use this toolkit as a guide to increase access to menstrual products in a sustainable way that will impact the lives of many.

—The United State of Women Team

A Note from The Flow Initiative

I am Eiko La Boria, Founder and CEO of **The Flow Initiative** and USOW Ambassador in New Jersey. I started The Flow Initiative in 2019 and have since elevated awareness about period poverty and menstrual equity through education, programs, policy, and menstrual product distributions.

Along the way, I have been fortunate to work with some outstanding individuals who made Project Local Access possible, including: **Sabrina N. Browne, an award-winning BCW-Global Executive and Partner at The Flow Initiative; Cynthia Vazquez, a community activist and rotarian; Rachel Paulus, the LGBTQ Librarian at the Jersey City Free Public Library; McKenzie Maurent, The Flow Initiative Youth Ambassador; and Jennifer Gaines, Manager of National Engagement at the Alliance for Period Supplies.** They have amplified our voice, mission, and vision for a more menstrual equitable future where all girls, women, and menstruating individuals have access to products, regardless of socio-economic status.

In this toolkit, you'll learn more about period poverty, my initiative *Project Local Access*, and how to replicate this work in your community. *Project Local Access* was born during the pandemic when I worked at multiple weekly food distribution sites and gave away thousands of menstrual products. Most of these distributions took place on the weekend or on a bi-weekly basis, and I wondered what happens when someone gets their period, can't afford menstrual products, and needs access right away. What do they do? Where do they go? That's when the idea of libraries as menstrual product access hubs first came to me.

The journey you're about to embark on will have a powerful and lasting impact on the people that suffer in silence from period poverty. By ensuring access to menstrual products in library bathrooms, you are adding another building block to the menstrual equity movement, which calls for access to menstrual products wherever there are community spaces. It's important to remember that the smallest gestures can have the biggest impact. When you think of the needs of others, the answers will appear, but it is up to us to do the work and provide tangible results.

Thank you for taking this bold step toward ensuring access to menstrual products for girls, women, and all menstruating people. I can't wait to see all the great things you will accomplish. Take lots of pictures and don't forget to tag **@theflowinitiative** when posting!

Eiko La Boria
Founder and CEO, The Flow Initiative and USOW New Jersey Ambassador

PERIOD POVERTY BY THE NUMBERS

Menstruation is a natural biological function, yet it is often shrouded in silence, stigma, and shame. Wherever there is poverty, there is also period poverty. The global menstrual equity movement is strong and growing. Around the world, girls, women, and menstruating people are realizing that access to menstrual products is not only the hygienic thing to do, but also the right thing to do. If we have everything that we need when we use the bathroom – paper, water, soap, and hand dryers – why do we accept a lack of consistent and reliable access to menstrual products? Simply put, while we were not talking about our periods openly before, times changed.

16.9
MILLION

people who
menstruate in the U.S.
are living in poverty.

A recent survey by U by Kotex
reported that

MORE THAN
2 IN 5 PEOPLE

with periods say they have
struggled to purchase period
products due to lack of income
at some point in their life.

Black and Latinx people who
menstruate are

35 AND 36%
MORE LIKELY,

respectively, to say they've
struggled to afford period products
in the past year.

1 IN 5
GIRLS

has missed school
due to a lack of access
to menstrual
hygiene products.

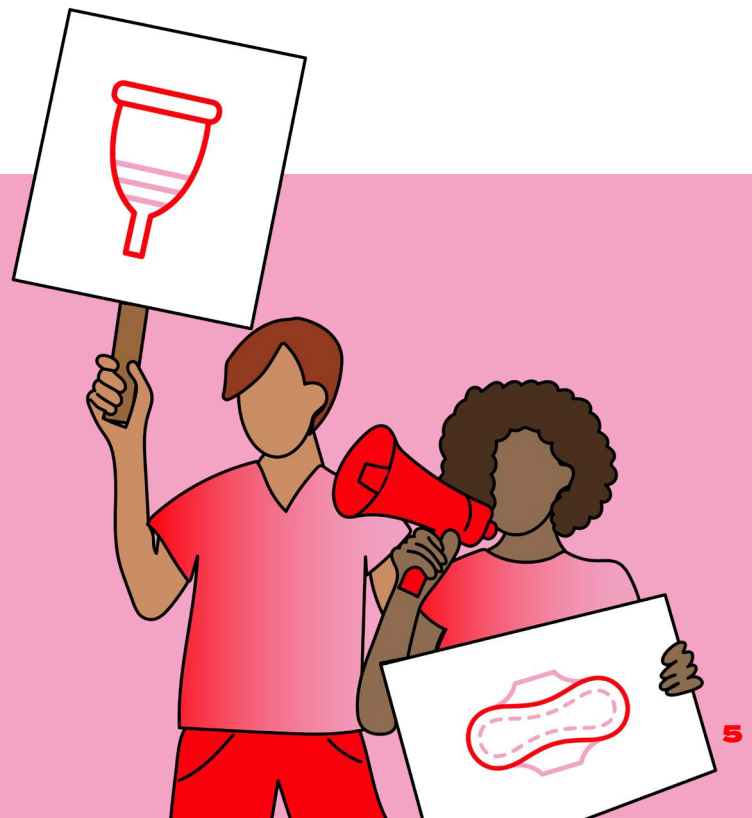
LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE FLOW INITIATIVE'S PROJECT LOCAL ACCESS

The Flow Initiative's *Project Local Access* identifies and collaborates with social infrastructures to create menstrual product access hubs. Social infrastructures are typically pillars of everyday life – from transportation to housing – where people congregate to fulfill a need, or multiple needs. We define access hubs as places that not only provide menstrual products in their bathrooms, but go beyond the expected to provide access to these products by creating period care packages. Period care packages consist of 20-25 different size pads and tampons to help individuals manage their menstrual cycles. Period care packages should be easily attained by asking a library staff member for one, no questions asked. In this toolkit, you'll learn specifically about libraries, but these best practices can be applied to other community spaces.

In the case of *Project Local Access*, libraries serve as our social infrastructure. Libraries provide a number of resources, including education, access to the internet, and access to social services. They are also safe spaces for the unhoused, students, displaced LGBTQ+ youth, or anyone who needs to find respite during the heat of summer and bitterness of winter. Moreover, libraries are free to enter and most are open six days a week, which offers an incredible opportunity to not only provide access to menstrual products, but also education on menstruation, period poverty, and menstrual equity. Through *Project Local Access*, Jersey City is the first city in the United States to distribute menstrual products in every single library in the city.

Learn more about *Project Local Access* [here](#).

- [American Libraries Magazine](#)
- [Take The Lead Women](#)
- [New Jersey State Legislature](#)



TAKING ACTION: ENDING PERIOD POVERTY IN YOUR LOCAL COMMUNITY

Step 1: Innovation and Creation

- 1. Identify the areas in your community most in need and find your pilot library or other community space (i.e. recreation center).**

Pick a specific area or neighborhood within your community that is in need of access to menstrual products. Use community assessments, like the Census, or speak to community leaders and stakeholders on the ground to determine the right location.

It's important to have evidence that there is a need for this project, so ensure that you have data ready and available for discussion.

One of the most efficient ways to obtain trusted and clear data is by visiting data.census.gov. On the landing page, you can make a specific search like “poverty in (name of your town) in 2020,” for example. This query will lead to a detailed breakdown of your town, including but not limited to population and people, languages spoken, income and poverty, and education. All of this data will provide key information on your town's demographics and assist you in identifying where to find the highest concentrations of people suffering from period poverty and in need of support.

To learn more about the state of period poverty in the state you live in, **[check out Alliance for Period Supplies's fact sheets on period poverty by state.](#)**

Step 2: Collaboration and Implementation

- 1. Engage with your local library.**

Reach out to the library director or community engagement coordinator and request a meeting. To find contact information, visit the library's website.

Promising practices for engaging with your local library:

- Introduce yourself as an advocate who is addressing period poverty.
- Define period poverty – a lot of people have not heard of it, and that's okay. You're there to educate them, share examples of how girls, women, and all menstruating people in your community experience period poverty, and help them understand how to be a part of the solution.
- Reinforce the philosophy that libraries and community spaces are social infrastructures for the betterment of society. Remind them that the notion of sharing Wi-Fi access for free was once thought to be outrageous and is now the norm. Access to menstrual products should be no different.

Sample Language:

Hello [Name of Library Director],

*My name is [YOUR NAME], and I would like to meet with you to discuss period poverty and menstrual equity in [NAME OF YOUR CITY]. Right now in [NAME OF YOUR CITY] there are girls, women, and menstruating people who do not have access to essential menstrual products, which often prohibits them from going to school, work, or running daily errands. In our state, [insert at least two facts about your state here from an Alliance for Period Supplies **fact sheet**]. Period poverty is shrouded in silence, stigma, and shame; however, [NAME OF LIBRARY] can offer relief to those in need and shed light on an issue oftentimes only spoken of in whispers and thriving in the shadows by providing access to menstrual products.*

If you're open to this conversation, please let me know some days and times in the coming weeks that I could stop by [NAME OF LIBRARY] to share more detail about this project. Should you have any questions in the meantime, please feel free to reach me directly at [add your preferred method of contacting you].

I am looking forward to the potential of collaborating with [NAME OF LIBRARY] and to your positive response.

Best,

[YOUR NAME]

2. Build a coalition.

It may take several meetings before the library will agree to implement a project like *Project Local Access*. Use the time in between meetings to build a coalition to demonstrate community need and widespread support. Engage with a local organization, such as a rotary club, girl scouts, or junior league, and share your mission. Reach out to domestic abuse shelters, shelters for unhoused people, youth organizations, LGBTQ+ resource centers, and local clinics, and ask for their support.

Having allies in the community will help give your project credibility and help conduct period product drives to create packages for donation on an ongoing basis.

To determine who may be your best ally in this project, **use this power mapping activity worksheet**.

Pro Tips:

Folks are busy: do not be disappointed if people do not reply to your request to meet or schedule any follow-up meetings right away. Be persistent, polite, and professional, and keep engaging them.

Also, be sure to build a good rapport with their administrative/executive assistant(s), who can be very helpful throughout a project.

3. Funding for the project.

This initiative is volunteer/donation-based, but that shouldn't stop you from asking the library if they have funds allocated for special projects that could be used to create a menstrual product access hub.

4. Secure your partnership with your library.

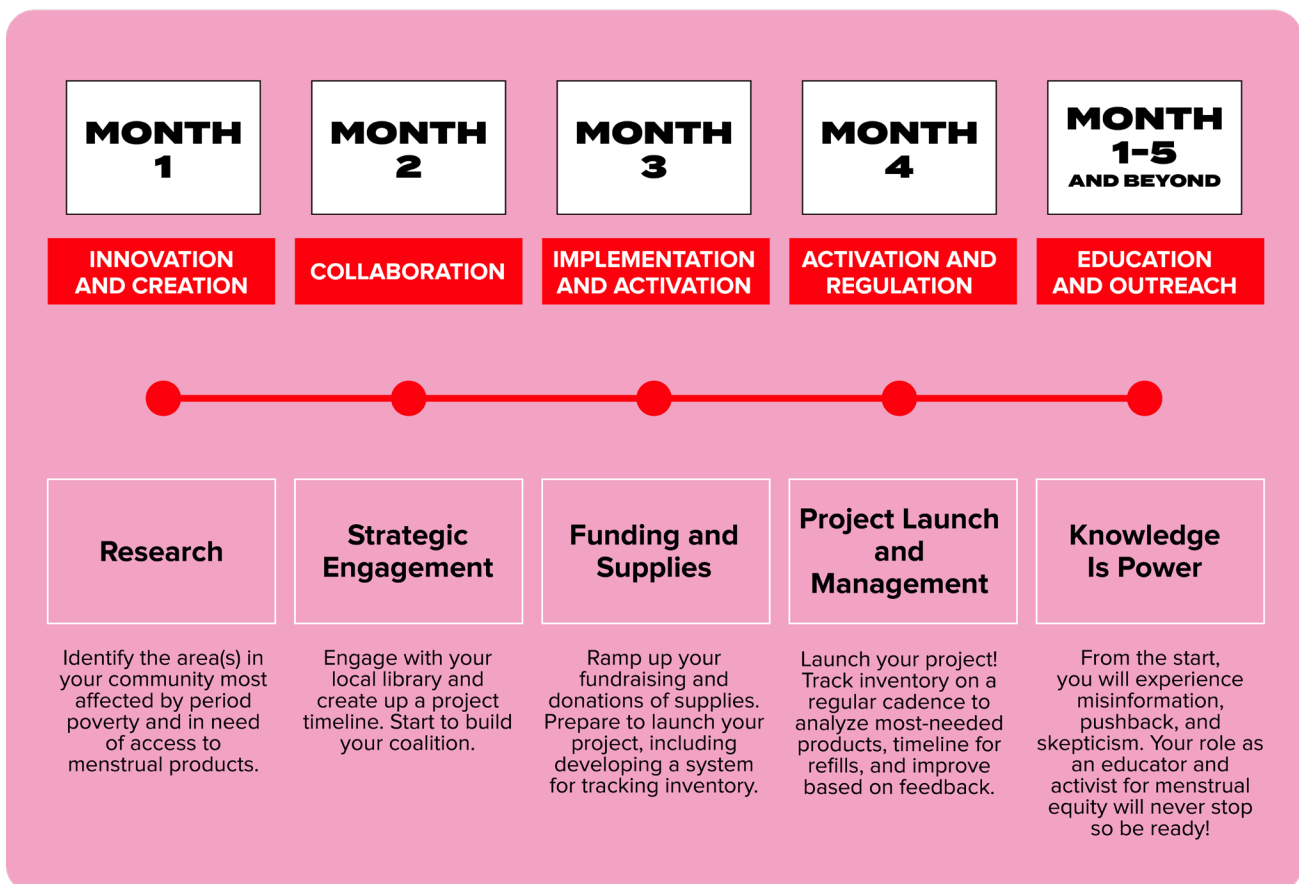
If you get the green light, it's good practice to have a memorandum of understanding (MOU) prepared. This document will clearly outline and solidify your agreement with the library. Please note: the sample linked below is included as an example and should not be taken as legal advice.

[Sample MOU](#)

5. Develop a timeline for implementation.

Creating a timeline should include soliciting and obtaining donations (if libraries cannot afford to buy products), creating and distributing packages, and providing an educational overview on the project to library staff. You should also think about the cadence of how often you will check back in with the library to see how supplies are lasting.

[Sample Timeline](#)



Step 3: Activation and Regulation

1. Collect Donations & Prepare Packages

What's in a package?

Period care packages are typically packages in a plastic bag with various products reflective of the actual flow of menstruation. Menstrual products include sanitary pads, tampons, and/or menstrual cups/discs. Products also come in sizes – ranging from light to ultra heavy – to accommodate the flow of one's cycle. Make sure to have a range of sizes in one package. You should aim to have a minimum of 10 menstrual products in each package, with the goal of 25.

Donations

The volume of donations you need to collect and number of packages you need to prepare is dependent on the need in your community. You should aim to prepare a surplus to ensure there is enough product. Remember to request all different types and sizes for the menstrual products.

Pro Tip:

You will have to adjust the contents of your period care packages depending on the number and type of products you have on hand. Do your best and be patient with yourself and the process.

How to Obtain Corporate Donations

You can also solicit donations from corporate donors. Here's a guide from donorbox.org:

1. Create a shortlist of companies
2. Identify the best contact
3. Contact past donors or supporters
4. Personalize your donation request
5. Explain the impact of the donation
6. Provide different donation options
7. Explain what you can offer in return
8. Always follow up
9. Always say “thank you”
10. Send updates and nurture relationships

2. Launch your Project

Once you have the donations ready to go, work with the library staff to schedule a launch event. A launch event can be something as simple as an educational workshop, movie screening, or a packaging party to get the community invested and involved.

3. Maintain your Project and Measure Success

The launch event will be how you introduce the program to the libraries and community, but you must sustain access to these products through continued period product donation drives, solicitations for donations from big stores like Target and Walmart, fundraising, and commitments from service-driven organizations like those in your coalition.

Although the idea of the project is that it is free and no documentation is required to obtain a package, you should maintain some type of system that tracks your inventory and measures your impact. You may want to track the types of products you have, the size of products, and how often you need to distribute a particular type of product. Ways to quantify how many people you are helping will be important to have as you continue soliciting donations.

Step 4: Education and Outreach

1. Education

When The Flow Initiative first implemented *Project Local Access* in Jersey City, some library workers didn't understand why libraries should provide menstrual products for the community. It is highly likely that you will also experience some sort of pushback, giving you an opportunity to educate library staff about period poverty and menstrual equity. Remind them that libraries are resources for individuals, and you can even invite them to an educational workshop where they can more deeply understand the need for this work. Do not take it personally if someone has questions – look at this as an opportunity to gain an ally instead of battling an opponent.

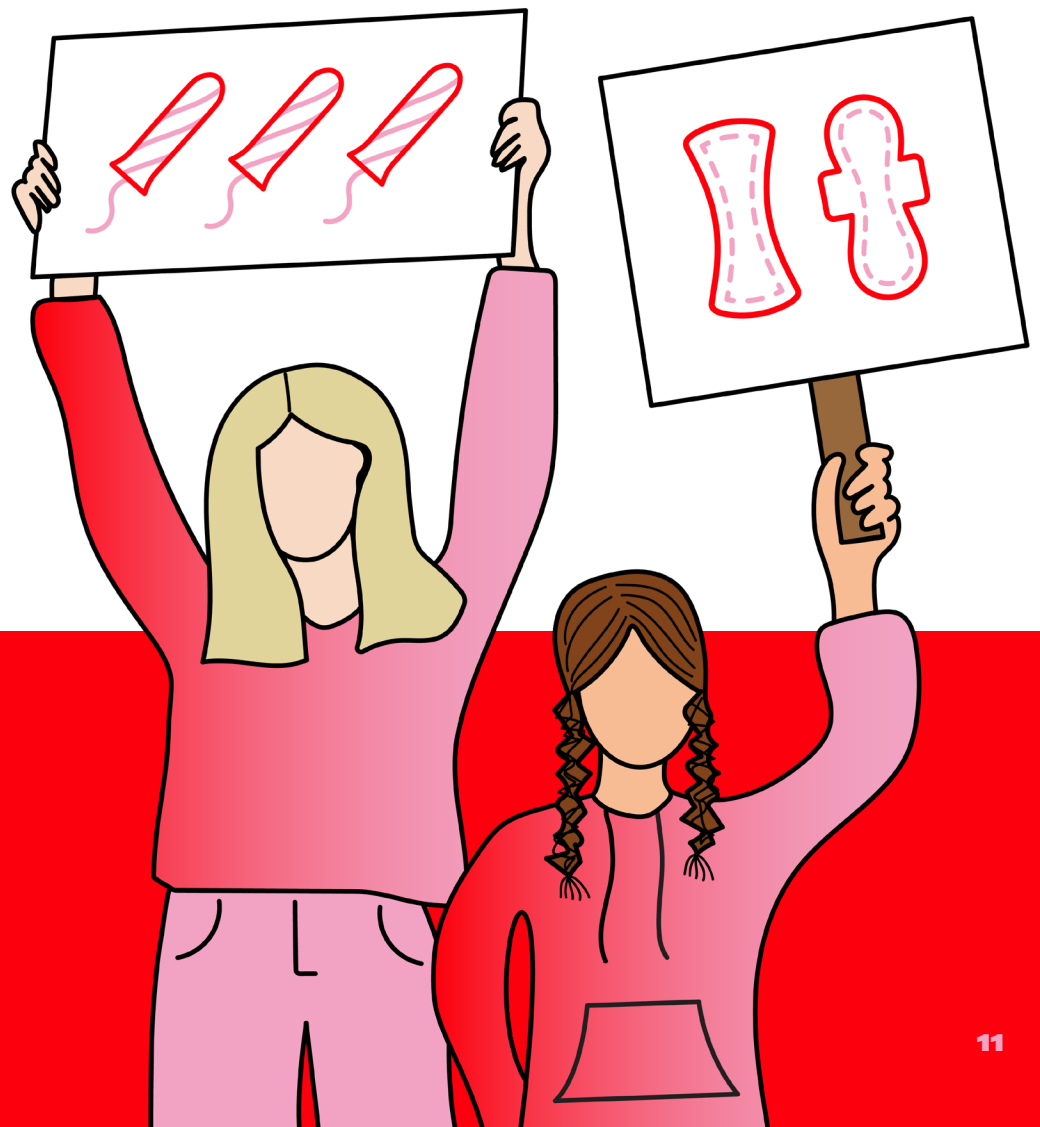
Sample talking points

- Pads, tampons, menstrual cups, and other products people need to continue going to work and school can be expensive, and thousands of people across the country can't afford them.
- Did you know that someone you know or love could be experiencing period poverty?
- Period poverty is the inability to properly manage your menstrual cycle because of affordability and your socio-economic status.
- Menstrual equity is access to menstrual products wherever there are bathrooms for girls, women, and menstruating people, regardless of socio-economic status.

- If you saw someone with a nose bleed but without any tissues or napkins, while you had some in your pocket, would you offer them one?
- Periods are a natural biological function, and neither menstruation nor period poverty is anything to be ashamed of. This project is about providing people in your community with what they need to manage their menstrual cycle.

2. Outreach

Outreach will be crucial to the success of your new endeavor. Spread the word to those closest to you, like your family and friends. You should also use social media to let your community know about the project. For members of your community who may not have access to the internet, make fliers and ask for permission to leave them at strategic locations, like laundromats, local stores, health clinics, churches, food pantries, parks, shelters, and other public spaces.



STAY CONNECTED WITH THE FLOW INITIATIVE

Eiko La Boria, Founder and USOW Ambassador and Sabrina N. Browne, Partner:

- Email Address: projectlocalaccess@gmail.com
- Website: www.theflowinitiativefoundation.org
- [Instagram](#)
- [Facebook](#)

SHARE FEEDBACK

Successfully completed your own *Project Local Access*? Tell us about it. Please also let us know how helpful this resource was to you! [**Share feedback here.**](#)

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