

FOODSHARE

Strategic Roadmap 2019 - 2021

We will lead an informed, coordinated response to hunger in our community.

Foodshare's Board of Directors approved a Strategic Guide in 2012 that provided a vision and focus for creating a hunger-free Greater Hartford. Foodshare has used the tactics and strategies set forth in that Guide to engage our community, build local and state-wide coalitions, and procure and distribute millions of pounds of food to those in need. Looking forward, we will build on our 35+ years of food banking experience and on our strong reputation to help ensure that everyone in Greater Hartford has access to enough healthy food. To chart our future, it's important to understand our history.

Background

Historically, food banks and food pantries were designed to treat short-term hardships when households did not have enough money for food. Beginning in the early 1980s, in response to major cuts to federal food assistance programs, food banks, food pantries and community kitchens were established in communities nationwide. Foodshare was part of that history and was created in 1982. Nationally, food banks and the programs they serve have grown in number, scope and size for nearly 40 years.

There are approximately 200 regional food banks across the country that distribute food to approximately 60,000 local food pantries and meal programs such as community kitchens. **The majority of food banks are members of Feeding America**, the nation's largest anti-hunger organization. Foodshare is a part of this network. Feeding America serves as a resource for data, best practices, national advocacy, and funding opportunities, and they broker relationships with the food industry and other producers who provide surplus food to food banks. While food banks and food pantries are often called "emergency" programs, it is clear that they are treating a chronic problem with complex causes. Research shows that people receiving food from food pantries do so on a regular basis as an ongoing strategy to make ends meet. To address the chronic nature of food insecurity, some agencies are now developing creative strategies to move away from an emphasis on serving more pounds of food to more people, and from short-term charity approaches to long-term solutions.

The Problem of Food Insecurity and Hunger

Food insecurity occurs when households are not able to access enough food due to limited financial resources. Hunger is a more severe level of food insecurity when adults and even children skip meals or cut the size of their meals because there isn't enough money for food. Every year since 1995, the US Census Bureau measures food insecurity and hunger among a large sample of Americans, so there is valid national data on the problem.¹ Feeding America also conducts national surveys among food banks and the clients they serve, and their last survey results were reported in 2014.²

Based on national research, we know that chronic food insecurity is a significant problem in the United States, and also Greater Hartford. Consider these facts:

- 41 million people or 12.9% of all Americans are food insecure and worry about getting enough food for their families.¹
- One out of seven Americans go to food pantries regularly to provide food for their families.²
- African American households experience food insecurity at a rate more than twice that of white, non-Hispanic households.³
- The need for charitable food has become a chronic problem, with people visiting pantries often on a monthly basis.³
- For those who use food pantries, many visit one or more pantries as often as they can, yet they remain food insecure.⁴
- In Hartford and Tolland counties, one out of every eight people is food insecure. That amounts to 121,000 people, including more than 34,000 children.⁵

Connection between Hunger and Health

The people we serve often have a double burden of food insecurity and chronic diseases. According to a national survey by Feeding America, over half (58%) of food pantry clients have a household member with high blood pressure, and one third (33%) have a household member with diabetes.² In another large national study, food insecure adults had a 21% higher risk of hypertension, and were about 50% more likely to have diabetes symptoms than food secure adults.⁶ A recent study of food pantry clients in Hartford found similar disease rates: 65% had a household member with high blood pressure, and 26% had a household member with diabetes.⁷

Due to the strong association between hunger and health, it is imperative that the food collected and distributed through the current charitable food system be of high nutritional quality. Many food banks and pantries are developing creative policies and programs to promote healthy food. A large study with three food banks in TX, CA and MI provided a diabetes prevention program in multiple food pantries and found significant reductions in disease risk.⁸

Root Causes

The way we define a problem defines our solution to the problem. When we define the problem of hunger as a lack of food, then the solution focuses entirely on providing more food. Yet distributing billions of pounds of food to millions of Americans has not solved the problem. When we define the underlying causes of hunger and food insecurity as rooted in poverty and income inequality, then our solutions become more complex. There are many reasons why people might be food insecure in Connecticut, including:⁹

- High cost of living, and especially the cost of housing
- Limited employment opportunities
- Lack of access to affordable, healthy food (few supermarkets in low-income areas)
- Loss of income due to divorce, job loss, or health reasons
- Disability issues, including mental or physical health and addictions
- Lack of access to affordable health care, child care, and other resources
- Systemic inequalities that make it difficult for some groups (especially those based on race, ethnicity and gender) to get ahead

In addition to distributing food today as a short-term safety net, we know that we need to look for long-term solutions, and work with multiple community partners to address these root causes of hunger.

“Because it takes more than food to end hunger.”

Mission, Values and Vision

The following Mission, Values and Vision statements were approved by the Foodshare Board of Directors in 2017. These statements will serve as a foundation to guide the way in which Foodshare will approach all aspects of our work moving forward. These principles have been used to shape the direction of the 2019 - 2021 organizational Priorities and Strategies outlined later in this document.

FOODSHARE’S MISSION:

Foodshare will lead an informed, coordinated response to hunger in our community.

OUR VALUES:

- Act with empathy and respect
- Make the best use of every resource
- Be open, candid and accountable
- Confront the hard questions

OUR VISION:

- Inspire and engage our community in a meaningful way by:
 - Including and amplifying the voices of people who have experienced hunger
 - Creating volunteer and donor experiences that energize commitment to our cause
 - Seeking out new avenues of support and collaboration to create the greatest possible impact
- Maximize access to resources that support food security by:
 - Acquiring, storing and distributing food in a thoughtful and efficient manner
 - Prioritizing nutritious food and encouraging healthy choices
 - Establishing relationships with partner agencies where we are essential to each other's success
- Gather, apply and communicate relevant, substantive information by:
 - Creating an environment that welcomes everyone's perspective and contribution
 - Investing in data collection and analysis
 - Create a proactive policy agenda for lasting change

OUR PROMISE:

As we fulfill our Mission, live by our Values, and achieve our Vision, we will create:

Smart, systemic solutions to hunger

SMART

Use data and evidence to inform our work

SYSTEMIC

Collaborate with multiple community partners for collective impact

SOLUTIONS

Address not just symptoms, but root causes of hunger

Our Three-Year Approach:

Food for Today, Food Security for the Future

Foodshare is changing what it means to be a food bank.

Foodshare distributes food to help people today, but also addresses root causes to help build long-term food security for the future. We are focused on mobilizing the Greater Hartford community toward a future in which people who struggle to make ends meet will not struggle to find help. In partnership with our extensive network and including the voices of those we serve, Foodshare will lead the conversation, sparking community innovation, passion, and collaboration with one end goal — securing a hunger-free Greater Hartford as our legacy to future generations.

Below are our organizational Priorities over the next three years for how we will fulfill our mission with specific Strategies. Using information and shared learning as a tool, Foodshare will actively engage a coalition of anti-hunger partners and individual citizens to achieve the following priorities, while continuing our other core activities focused on providing a wide range of food to those in need.

Our 2019 - 2021 Priorities:

1. Increase access to nutritious food
2. Build collective action to address root causes
3. Raise awareness and advocate for long-term solutions

Priority #1:

Increase access to nutritious food through food collection, distribution and network capacity

As a food bank, a large part of our day-to-day work involves acquiring and distributing food. We recognize the strong connection between hunger and health, and that the people we serve are at high risk for developing chronic diseases. Therefore, we will create strategies to increase the supply and demand for healthy food in our network. This will require a commitment to quality over quantity, and new metrics for success.

Strategies:

- Implement a nutrition tracking system, SWAP (Supporting Wellness at Pantries), to cultivate a culture of nutrition literacy and as a metric to rank foods nutritionally. Measure the percentage of our inventory that is green (choose often), yellow (choose sometimes) and red (choose rarely) and set benchmarks to increase the supply of green and yellow food items.
- Recruit food pantries to use the SWAP system to promote healthy food items.
- Assess and address the implications of increasing nutritious food on Foodshare's food donations, donor relations and operations.
- Fulfill 3-year commitment made to Partnership for a Healthier America to improve the nutritional quality of food distributed, and increase demand for healthier food in Foodshare's network.
- Build capacity within our partner programs to ensure that people can choose their food with dignity and respect (client choice model), like they would in a grocery store.
- Develop and implement a Nutrition Policy through a Health and Nutrition Advisory Council.
- Serve as a national model for other food banks and pantries to increase access to healthy food.

Inspired by: Capital Area Food Bank in Washington, DC, the Vermont Fresh program from VT Food Bank, MAZON, and Partnership for a Healthier America

Priority #2:

Build collective action with community partners to address root causes of hunger

As a food bank, our goal is to reduce the risk of food insecurity and to help prevent hunger in the long run. We recognize that hunger is rooted in poverty and inequalities. Therefore, we will address root causes to help build long-term food security for people in Greater Hartford. We will take a leadership role in creating coordinated and comprehensive service delivery systems at the local level to assist clients with both food and non-food needs. We will advocate for systemic solutions and will partner with existing community organizations that address root causes (see page 3 above). We understand that it takes more than food to end hunger.

Strategies:

- Measure capacity of our partner programs to address root causes of hunger; actively engage these programs and provide technical assistance to build capacity.
- Serve as a resource for our partner programs so they can connect their clients to existing community resources that go beyond food assistance, to help build household stability to make ends meet.
- Collaborate with multiple community organizations and agencies involved with anti-poverty work to build collective action to address root causes of hunger.
- Train Mobile site coordinators and partner program staff to implement Resource Centers to provide information about programs such as SNAP, health insurance, and job training classes.
- Conduct outreach to increase participation in core nutrition programs as a first response to hunger, emphasizing school meals, summer meals and SNAP program.
- Facilitate a paradigm shift to move our partner programs from a focus on charity to empowerment. Provide resources and technical assistance to help our partner programs foster a culture that is person-centered to help people help themselves.
- Build our network capacity by providing regular opportunities to link partner programs to Hunger Action Teams so the community is working collaboratively to address hunger and poverty.

Inspired by: [The Stop](#) by N. Saul and A. Curtis in Toronto, and Community Food Centres Canada, and the Collaborating for Clients (C4C) initiative of Feeding America

Priority #3:

Raise awareness about hunger and advocate for policies that support food security

Beyond our food distribution and our work with partner programs, ending hunger will require a greater community understanding of the problem, and will require policy changes at the local, state and federal level. We recognize that it takes political will to end hunger. Therefore, we will leverage

our network to become civically engaged to support strong anti-hunger policies. Foodshare will play a leadership role in various coalitions, advocacy efforts, and outreach campaigns to leverage the safety net of government nutrition programs and policies that support the food security of our community.

Strategies:

- Raise awareness about food insecurity and its root causes throughout our community so more people are mobilized to take action (whether they volunteer, advocate, or donate).
- Build community support of key constituencies through Hunger 101 and Ambassador Programs, including youth participation through education and activism opportunities.
- Advocate for policy changes and legislation that will increase food security in Greater Hartford.
- Build community coalitions through Hunger Action Teams and outreach to raise awareness and civic engagement.
- Share voices of our neighbors who have experienced food insecurity to increase awareness of the problem and to support strong policies and legislation that will promote food security.
- Partner with CT Food Bank, End Hunger CT!, other food banks and agencies to develop and promote an advocacy agenda.

Inspired by: Oregon Food Bank, and the Food Research and Action Center

Conclusion

Foodshare is committed to creating smart, systemic solutions to hunger. This holistic approach to hunger requires systems thinking and multiple community agencies working together for collective impact. It also requires us to try new approaches and learn from our successes and our failures. Accomplishing these Strategic Priorities will require strong organizational infrastructure, including use of technology and data, engagement of community members to support and participate in these initiatives, and creativity from employees, and funding. We will seek new sources of private and public funding to support these new activities. We will confront the hard question of why millions of Americans are food insecure despite a national network of food banks distributing billions of pounds of food. We will use evidence and data to inform our work.

For over 35 years, Foodshare has built a strong, positive reputation as the stop-gap measure for hunger in Greater Hartford. Accomplishing our new priorities will require strong leadership, starting at the top but fostered throughout Foodshare. We will build upon this strong reputation with our bold initiatives to not only provide food for today, but to ensure food security for tomorrow. Hunger is big and complex. We believe our community is bigger and ready to tackle this preventable problem.

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