



Moving the needle towards brighter futures

CAFB Strategic Direction 2020 – 2025

The Challenge: Hunger and Inequity in Our Region

Hunger affects individuals the world over, on every continent and in every country. The capital region of the United States is no exception. Despite our vibrant economy, there are nearly half a million people in the Washington, DC metropolitan area who face hunger or food insecurity, and may not always know where their next meal is coming from.

When people lack the good food they need, everything becomes harder. Adults struggle to focus, and finding or retaining work becomes more challenging. Children and teens can't concentrate in school, and academic performance often suffers. Seniors are at increased risk for health problems that impact quality and length of life. In these ways and many more, hunger and food insecurity prevent thousands of people in our community from realizing their potential — undermining the strength of our economy and our society.

When hunger robs human potential, it also perpetuates the inequity that characterizes our region. Consider: greater Washington is one of the most educated and most affluent metropolitan areas in the US, yet DC also has one of the highest rates of childhood food insecurity in the country. Within DC, we serve a ward where the maternal and infant mortality rates rival those found in developing nations.

While unemployment is below the national average in one part of our region, it is five times the national average a few miles down the road. And across one 10-mile stretch in our service region, there is a difference in life expectancy of 30 years.

The Opportunity: Bring New Solutions to An Old Problem

Since 1980, the Capital Area Food Bank has existed to help solve the problem of hunger in our region. Working with hundreds of retail grocers, manufacturers, and local growers, along with thousands of donors, we distribute over 30 million meals worth of food to those in need each year through a network of over 450 regional nonprofit partners.

Over four decades, we have consistently increased the quantity of the food we provide for our neighbors in need, and in more recent years, have also worked to improve the nutritional quality of the food we distribute. We have improved our efficiency year over year, becoming increasingly innovative in how we deliver food and specific in how we target areas most in need.

But even as we have improved upon our model, a gnawing issue remains: hunger continues to be with us. As we look to the next phase of our evolution, we have been asking hard questions: how can we continue to deliver the food that is critical today while also contributing to an end of food insecurity tomorrow? How can we help to prevent the child who attends our after-school meals program at 10 from still needing our services when she is a 30-year-old mother or a 70-year-old grandmother? And how can we use food as a tool to remove some of the barriers that she might face, knowing that her potential, if realized, could make her the next star employee or groundbreaking entrepreneur to add fuel to our economy?

It is with these questions at the top of our minds that we are now beginning to work in earnest on “shortening the line” — addressing hunger longer term through innovative new service models and partnerships — even as we continue the essential daily activities of addressing hunger today through food distribution that is smarter, faster, healthier, and more tailored to the needs of those we serve.

Food can be a powerful catalyst for change and more inclusive economic growth that begins to address our region’s inequities, and our next stage of work will seek to harness that power. By bundling food with other partner-provided services — like workforce development, financial literacy, and other key tools of economic empowerment — we will focus on enabling people to move from reliance on food that is free, to accessing food that is lower cost and subsidized, to shopping for food at regular prices in the marketplace. The sustainable outcomes towards which we are driving — children who can better focus in school; a stronger, healthier adult workforce; seniors aging with dignity, among many others — benefit every member of our region and our broader society.

Building the Future: Our Approach

The food bank’s strategic direction is built upon two main pillars, both of which have food at the core:

- ◆ Provide food to those who need it today, in ways that are smarter, faster, healthier, and more tailored to the needs of those we serve.
- ◆ Work with organizations that provide services like job training and health care to introduce food as part of what they offer, increasing the likelihood that their programs will be effective at helping people build permanent pathways out of hunger.

Our strategic direction also includes a plan for continuing to strengthen and grow our organization’s infrastructure, systems, and outreach — all of which are essential for fulfilling our mission.

CUSTOMIZE

Better address client needs by providing more foods that are tailored to age and culture, in the form of both ingredients for cooking and prepared meals.

- ◆ Increase the volume and variety of foods for specific populations, strategically sourcing food for people based on age, health, and cultural appropriateness.
- ◆ Over the next five years, add several more varieties of culturally appropriate foods at each of our distribution locations; continue to grow protein distribution and consumption by 30%, and distribute enough produce to allow 50% of our clients' plates to be composed of fruits and vegetables.
- ◆ Pilot and then scale the safe handling and distribution of prepared foods with a focus on the needs of college students, seniors, and those who don't have consistent access to cooking facilities.
- ◆ Develop, pilot, and then potentially scale medically tailored food boxes to support more customized dietary needs and reduce risks of poor health outcomes.
- ◆ Through our own data and technology tools, as well as research partners, track the proportion of foods we distribute that are targeted to age, health, and culture, and measure consumption of better quality food and the impact on people's lives.

BROADEN

Expand access to food for clients in every community of our region through innovative distribution and delivery models.

- ◆ Bring good food to people who need it by doing the following:
 - Pilot affordable, mobile food delivery formats, like a Grocery Van, in food desert communities. We will first start in DC's Wards 7 and 8 and then expand to parts of Prince George's and Prince William counties, targeting communities that aren't close to full-service grocery stores.
 - Take advantage of prepared food and other "emerging retail" donations through use of the "MealConnect" app; recruit donors and volunteers to assist with pickup of food donations; and help our nonprofit partners build capacity to accept new donation streams.
 - Create fresh food sections or aisles in highly-trafficked retail locations within low-income communities, including dollar stores and Goodwill shops.
 - Use our purchasing power and economies of scale to help small brick and mortar stores that are providing nutritious food to source and sell their items at affordable prices.
- ◆ Bring people to good food by doing the following:
 - Engage ride sharing companies in a pilot to make rides to the grocery store efficient and low cost.
 - Provide input into the development of a regional technology platform that will allow users to view multiple transportation options in one place (overlying public transit, ride sharing, etc.); ensure that the needs of our clients — such as cost efficiency per trip, proximity to grocery stores, etc. — are raised and considered as part of the technology design process.

ACCELERATE

Pair food with other basic partner-provided support services that address root causes of hunger to accelerate clients' progress toward greater food, health and financial sustainability.

- ◆ Identify 2-3 new pilot partners working in each of several areas that are factors in food security and play a key role, directly or indirectly, in financial empowerment: health, skills, education, financial literacy, and housing.
- ◆ Engage with other development, corporate and public sector experts across our region to share our model of using food to create a path to greater opportunity for those we serve, and inform joint planning and initiatives that create bridges to participation in the region's economic growth for our clients.
- ◆ Partner with research institutions for each new pilot so that we create a base of data and evidence that can be used both to inform which partnerships are scaled and to support advocacy efforts as we engage policymakers.
- ◆ Over approximately 3 years, design and pilot partnerships that pair food with social services, tracking data and measuring changes that indicate where food is most effective in helping our clients move from strong reliance on assistance to greater food and financial sustainability.
- ◆ Over the remaining years of the strategic plan, scale the most effective pilot concepts by working with the same and/or additional partners to ramp up the number of people reached.

STREAMLINE

Enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of our supply chain and technology to minimize food waste, ensure alignment of supply to need, and reduce time from source to table.

- ◆ Expand options for the kinds of food we accept and distribute by outfitting a commercial kitchen on site, where we can break down bulk quantities of food, including prepared foods, into smaller portions appropriate to the partner or client receiving it.
- ◆ Through the rollout of a new Enterprise Resource Management platform and other systems integrations, create more efficiencies through our technology systems; more accurately manage inventory; and enable faster handling of a wider array of food types.
- ◆ Improve our ability to adapt to and navigate in congested urban environments by diversifying our fleet of vehicles and exploring new software and other tools for logistics and route planning.
- ◆ Continue to grow participation in our Partner Direct program, which reduces food waste and creates an efficient pickup model for both the food bank and its partners by linking partners directly with grocery stores.
- ◆ Improve the efficiency of our volunteer tracking and opportunity creation, creating more varied ways for volunteers to engage and matching volunteer availability and skills with those most needed to serve our clients effectively.

ENGAGE

Engage with policy makers and potential supporters to elevate awareness about hunger, the role we can all play in reducing it, and ways to contribute to the solution.

- ◆ Using our 40th anniversary as a hook, connect with new audiences and deepen engagement with existing ones to generate awareness and \$20 million in additional support over the next 5 years.
- ◆ Host bi-annual Food Security Summit to share the latest data and information about the need in our region, changes over time, gap areas to be addressed, and effective approaches that may be accelerated through joint planning and collective impact.
- ◆ Expand the number of volunteer opportunities that include support for sorting food in the warehouse; education about herbs, fruits and vegetables in demonstration gardens around the region; and direct engagement with clients in our distributions around the region.
- ◆ Use the evidence base created through pilot programming to inform public policy and to support scale and expansion via local government funding and impact investors; and create platforms for councilmembers to influence public policy through giving voice to their own experience.
- ◆ Build the pipeline for a future generation of leaders in hunger and food security by hosting a Youth Advocacy Day that harnesses the energy and concerns of students and gives them a platform to communicate student insights to local representatives.

GET INVOLVED: Give. Learn. Volunteer.



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