



Food and Basic Needs Security and Distribution  
Needs Assessment and Design Recommendations

April 17, 2020



## Executive Summary

In March 2020, Ramsey County convened a Policy Action Group (PAG) subcommittee to address the food and basic needs security of residents during the COVID-19 pandemic. Chaired by Commissioner Rafael Ortega, the subcommittee brought together leaders from the county, cities, state, school districts, and others to guide and advise on Ramsey County’s response to ensure that the food and basic needs for county residents are met. The purpose and policy direction of the subcommittee are:

*Purpose:* Develop a unified food and basic needs supply and distribution system that is prepared to meet community needs, prioritizing our most vulnerable communities.

*Policy Direction:* Determine the need more specifically and identify the populations and geographic areas most at-risk of food insecurity and lack of access to basic needs, including:

1. Individuals/households in isolation or quarantine
2. Youth
3. Community – focus on individuals/households with limited abilities, financially vulnerable, racial and ethnic communities, and elders

This executive summary provides recommended strategies to address food and basic needs security in Ramsey County. It is based on a variety of data sources including vulnerability maps using American Community Survey (ACS) data; surveys of service providers, community groups, and food truck operators; an inventory of food resources including non-profit providers, restaurants, grocery stores, and others; interviews with service providers and state and Ramsey County partners. The full report describes current food distribution infrastructure, identifies vulnerable populations and geographic areas, state and federal policies and programs; and funding and other resources.

Based upon the purpose and policy direction of the subcommittee and informed by the needs assessment completed by the Data, Planning, and Design and Engagement Workgroups, the following approaches and recommendations were developed to achieve the goals of the subcommittee:

- **All approaches to meet our community’s needs must consider and include:**
  - Two-way communication with community;
  - Racial equity;
  - Culturally specific responses;
  - Multiple language needs; and
  - Access with and without technology and internet.



### Isolation or Quarantine

- Saint Paul - Ramsey County Department of Public Health (PH) is responsible for providing essential services to residents of the County who have been tested and diagnosed with COVID-19, and have been referred by the Minnesota Department of Health.
- Planning is underway for how to continue to provide essential services as the number of households/individuals in isolation increases, using the PH incident command structure. PH will continue to provide essential medical services, and if needed will leverage this group's structure to provide food and basic needs.

### **Priorities to Guide Ramsey County's Response**

- 1. Amplify and connect community to school food programs to feed the whole family.**  
Build and support capacity of school districts to provide food and basic needs for the entire household, seven days a week.
- 2. Connect community to financial assistance and benefits.**  
Encourage and assist residents to access existing food support programs (e.g. SNAP, WIC), and for the State to leverage all existing federal waivers to maximize benefit and use.
- 3. Connect community to existing and new food and essential services.**  
Provide a single-entry point for access to food, basic needs, and essential services, and implement a broad communications strategy that considers all abilities, access restraints, and languages, and includes continuous feedback and improvement.
- 4. Ensure individuals/households who are homebound have access to food and essential services.**  
Amplify existing food programs that deliver food and prepared meals to homes, with a focus on individuals and communities who are homebound.
- 5. Amplify food and basic needs distribution sites and alternatives.**  
Partner with food shelves, farmer's markets, and other trusted partners to increase food supply and distribution. Focus on communities most at-risk for food insecurity.
- 6. Provide a centralized location and administrative coordination of community and business efforts, communications, donations, and volunteers.**  
Coordinate with corporate and nonprofit partners for basic needs supply – donations and in-kind. Track funding opportunities and leverage county resources where appropriate.
- 7. Increase capacity and access to public gardens, including equipment and materials.**



Partner with cities, state, and private land owners, along with community and corporate partners.

**8. Partner with community and county partners to meet food needs of individuals who are homeless.**

**9. Increase transportation options for community**

In line with public health guidance, increase opportunities for safe transportation for necessary activities outside home.

**10. Throughout response track usage, anticipate demand, provide continuous improvement recommendations, and performance metrics in partnership with community.**



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## Introduction

In March 2020, Ramsey County convened a Policy Action Group (PAG) subcommittee to address the food and basic security of residents during the COVID-19 pandemic. Chaired by Commissioner Rafael Ortega, the subcommittee brought together leaders from the county, cities, state, school districts, and others to guide and advise on Ramsey County’s response to ensure that the food and basic needs for county residents are met. The purpose and policy direction of the subcommittee are:

*Purpose:* Develop a unified food and basic needs supply and distribution system that is prepared to meet community needs, prioritizing our most vulnerable communities.

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1. Individuals/households in isolation or quarantine.
2. Youth.
3. Community – focus on individuals/households with limited abilities, financially vulnerable, racial and ethnic communities, and elders.

The PAG subcommittee advised on the development of a framework to support this work and created three workgroups: Data, Planning, and Design; Community Engagement; and Supply and Distribution. The Data, Planning, and Design Workgroup is responsible for conducting this needs assessment, developing a plan, recommending strategies, and on-going monitoring and process improvement. The Community Engagement Workgroup is responsible for identifying, building, and maintaining relationships with partners; engaging communities to confirm needs; identifying resources; and ensuring race equity and culturally specific services and options. Finally, the Supply and Distribution Workgroup is responsible for confirming resources, rolling out services as they develop, and monitoring and adjusting services as needed. See Appendix A for the full description and policy guidance document.

This report describes the current food distribution system in Ramsey County including how people accessed food resources prior to the pandemic and service and demand changes due to the pandemic, identifies vulnerable populations and geographic areas most at-risk for food insecurity, state and federal policy and programs that provide food access, and funding and resources. It outlines gaps in the system, programs, and funding – some of which existed prior to the pandemic and others that have emerged due to the pandemic. It identifies community-specific gaps in food security. Finally, it recommends strategies and provides a prioritized action plan for Ramsey County and its partners.



### **Data Sources**

Many data sources and types were used to inform the needs assessment. Vulnerability maps were created using Census and American Community Survey data. Surveys were conducted of food security and basic needs providers; community groups and organizations; and food truck operators. Survey data on food bank and food shelf capacity and operations were shared with Ramsey County by the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO). A list of all corner stores, farmers markets, grocery stores, delivery services, congregate dining sites, Fare for All and Youth Summer Meals sites, food shelves, and licensed restaurants in the county with addresses was provided by Public Health. Interviews were conducted with many organizations including Ramsey County Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), Second Harvest, Meals on Wheels, Saint Paul Public Schools, suburban school districts, homeless services, Ramsey County Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) managers, and the Department of Human Services OEO. An inventory of policy waivers and funding sources was also gathered.

The Community Engagement Workgroup had two meetings with about 90 community groups and residents that informed the needs and gaps analysis, were prioritized in the recommended strategies, and are fully listed in Appendix B.

## **Current Situation**

### **Food Access and Distribution System**

Across Ramsey County, the food access and distribution system consists of retail stores, food shelves, farmers markets, community gardens, delivery services, food trucks, and restaurants. There are 81 grocery stores, 75 convenience stores, and 27 farmers markets located throughout the county. In addition to these retail sellers, there are 651 licensed establishments that serve food across the county. Some restaurants have offered to provide food for children currently out of school during the pandemic, although many are running out of resources to continue doing so. More than 40 food trucks have also expressed interest in serving hot meals at sites such as homeless camps or apartment buildings according to a survey administered by Public Health. Many farmer markets accept SNAP and the Market Bucks program offers a dollar for dollar match up to \$10 for people using SNAP. The Data, Planning, and Design Workgroup is mapping these commercial resources to identify food deserts, including gaps in stores that accept SNAP or WIC.

There are a variety of existing food security programs and services. There are 28 food shelves in Ramsey County. Food shelves have changed their delivery models to maximize social distancing. Some have increased or changed their hours. Most are offering drive-through or pick-up of boxes of food rather than having users come inside the building.

The largest meal delivery service is Meals on Wheels which offers services to seniors and people with disabilities through eight organizations. There are other smaller delivery programs. Meals on



Wheels typically charges \$5 to \$8 per meal, depending on income, and is currently not turning anyone away due to inability to pay. They have also transitioned as many people as possible to frozen meals to allow meals to be delivered weekly. They are also no longer visiting with people when they drop off the meals. Instead volunteers and staff are calling recipients daily for a wellness check and to decrease social isolation.

Metro Mobility and Transit Link are delivering groceries from stores that offer online shopping and local pick-up. Customers are responsible for planning their orders. Metro Mobility has expressed interest in expanding delivery services. The Sheriff's Office has also expressed interest in food delivery.

Schools are required to provide food and/or meals to children to replace meals that would have been served at school (two meals per day, five days a week). The Saint Paul Public Schools and the suburban districts are providing food using different models.

- White Bear Lake Public Schools is serving 10,000 meals weekly through distribution sites and 200 children are receiving home deliveries. Teachers are reaching out to families and asking about their food needs. They currently have enough food and the capacity to double their services.
- The North Saint Paul-Maplewood-Oakdale Schools are providing meals weekly at three locations, plus using school buses to deliver to high need areas. They are serving 73,000 meals per week. They are partnering with Sheridan Story for meals and coordination. They currently have enough food overall and, with assistance with staffing, transportation, and cooler space, could double their capacity.
- Roseville Schools have three pick-up sites and 22 bus stops serving high need areas. They are serving about 1,500 meals per week (300 per day) and providing home drop-off to 20 families. They are also partnering with Meals on Wheels to serve seniors. The high school offers a food shelf and they are also partnering with Sheridan Story. They have capacity to continue through the school year.
- Saint Paul Public Schools is serving 180,000 meals per week and is expecting to increase to 360,000 meals per week. They had been using bus routes and distribution sites but are transitioning to curbside pick-up and home delivery rather than using bus routes. They currently run out of food daily and are facing funding shortages. They are exploring partnerships with Youthprise and commercial kitchens to fill these gaps.
- The Workgroup is still reaching out to Mounds View Public Schools.

### **Vulnerable Populations**

Populations and geographic areas at risk for food and basic needs insecurity were identified in two ways. First, a [vulnerability map](#) was created using American Community Survey (ACS) data. It overlays data on race/ethnicity, sex and age, poverty and access to health insurance, disability,



language, access to a motor vehicle, and households with a birth in the last 12 months. Each census tract was assigned a vulnerability risk score which is calculated by the Centers for Disease Control using data from the ACS and refers to the resilience of communities when confronted by external stresses on human health. It uses factors like poverty, lack of transportation access, and crowded housing that may weaken a community's ability to prevent human suffering and financial loss. Keep in mind, the risk score identifies geographies. Each community has resiliency factors that mitigate risk and individual people within that community have unique strengths and needs as well.

Second, the Community Engagement Workgroup surveyed providers and community organizations and two workgroup meetings to identify groups who are more vulnerable for food and basic needs insecurity. While overall strategies may address the needs of many people, there are groups with unique needs or higher levels of vulnerability that need to be addressed outside of the larger strategies and should have ongoing monitoring.

Geographic areas with risk scores of 0.76 and higher include:

- West Side of Saint Paul;
- Lower Highland (Sibley Manor area) of Saint Paul;
- Dayton's Bluff neighborhood of Saint Paul;
- North End neighborhood of Saint Paul;
- Greater East Side neighborhood of Saint Paul;
- Frogtown neighborhood of Saint Paul;
- Battle Creek neighborhood of Saint Paul;
- Portions of Little Canada;
- Portions of Mounds View;
- Portions of New Brighton; and
- Portions of Maplewood.

Groups identified by the Community Engagement Workgroup include:

- Racial, ethnic, and cultural groups, particularly American Indian, Black, Asian, and Latinx communities;
- Low-income households;
- Non-English-speaking people;
- People experiencing homelessness;
- Undocumented immigrants;
- Seniors, in particular homebound and socially isolated seniors;
- People with disabilities, in particular people who are deaf, blind, or hard of hearing;
- People without bank accounts or access to credit cards; and
- People without internet access.

People who are in more than one of these groups may face critical food and basic needs insecurity.



### **Policy and Program Resources**

Food and basic needs insecurity existed before the pandemic and there are existing programs supporting affordability and access to food. Many of these have waivers that impact program services and eligibility during the pandemic.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as food stamps, provides financial resources to purchase food. SNAP does not allow the purchase of prepared foods or hygiene items. In Minnesota, the income limit is 165 percent of the Federal Poverty Guideline, or \$2,146 per month for a family of four. The maximum benefit for one person is \$194. A family of four can receive up to \$646 per month. In February 2020, 31,976 households and 66,074 people in Ramsey County were receiving SNAP benefits. Prior to a waiver, Able Bodied Adults without Dependents (ABAWD) were subject to a time limit of three months of eligibility in a 36-month period unless they were working at least 20 hours a week or were exempt from work due a variety of reasons including disability. That requirement has been waived. Additionally, the state is automatically renewing benefits without additional verifications which will help existing SNAP participations maintain eligibility. There have also been waivers from rules requiring signatures and in-person interviews.

Pandemic EBT has provisions that have not been fully implemented in Minnesota. It allows states to request issuance of emergency allotments and allows states/counties to use temporary workers to administer benefits. Under normal SNAP rules, only employees in a merit-based hiring system may administer SNAP. This allows flexibility in staffing that was not available before. Finally, Minnesota has pursued a waiver for P-EBT that allows children who would receive free or reduced priced meals under the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act to receive SNAP.

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) provides federal grants to states for supplemental foods, health care referrals, and nutrition education for low-income pregnant, breastfeeding, and non-breastfeeding postpartum women, and to infants and children up to age five. There are currently 16,000 WIC participants in Ramsey County. People receiving Medical Assistance, SNAP, the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP), fuel assistance, free or reduced-price lunch, Head Start, or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) are automatically eligible for WIC. The income limits are higher than SNAP. A family of four can be earning up to \$70,812 and qualify for WIC. Ramsey County has six WIC clinics that offer breastfeeding/chest-feeding support and education and nutrition education in addition to vouchers for food purchases. Waivers in place allow participants to not be physically present to receive services, waive lab requirements for nutritional risk assessment, and allowing substations for some milk. Ramsey County WIC is exploring ways to provide breast/chest-feeding support via video or the internet.

There are four Child Nutrition Programs: the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), National School Lunch Program (NSLP), the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), and the School Breakfast Program (SBP). The SFSP, NSLP, and SBP reimburses schools and others who serve children meals primarily in schools. The CACFP reimburses childcare centers, day care home providers, and adult



day care centers for meals as well as meals served to youth in afterschool care programs, children in emergency shelters, and adults over the age of 60 or living with a disability and enrolled in day care facilities. Waivers allow meals to be served in non-congregate settings, meal service time requirements, allows afterschool meals and snacks to be served outside a structured environment and without an educational or enrichment purpose. The state has submitted an application to waive the 50 percent free or reduced-price meal eligibility requirement for the SFSP and the Minnesota Department of Health has submitted questions to the United States Department of Agriculture for further guidance on waivers to CACFIP.

**Funding and Resource Opportunities**

There are many sources of funding, competitive and otherwise, for local governments, non-profit organizations, agencies, small businesses, and individuals, to address shortages of food, and to a lesser extent, non-food basic needs. There are several deadlines for funding applications in the last week of April. Appendix D summarizes these opportunities, but is not an exhaustive list of all funding sources—for example, there are many federal programs available through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act), and parsing through all the funding programs will take more time (it does include the two major components of the CARES Act, the Coronavirus Relief Fund which provides direct payments from the Treasury Department to local governments and the Disaster Relief Fund administered by FEMA).

Furthermore, the local philanthropic sector is stepping up and providing significant resources, and new funding opportunities are opening up every day. Some corporations have not yet determined how they will support community and local governments during this crisis, while other corporations are contributing to a funding pool administered by the Minnesota Council on Foundations (Minnesota Disaster Recovery Fund for Coronavirus). Therefore, the research should be viewed as a work in progress. More detail is provided in an Excel spreadsheet that can be provided upon request.

General Funding for COVID-19-Related Needs

The Coronavirus Relief Fund provides direct payment to local governments for expenses incurred due to the COVID-19 emergency. Governments must have submitted their completed payment materials by April 17.

FEMA has expanded the eligible use of its Public Assistance funding to local governments and certain nonprofit organizations to cover “emergency protective measures necessary to save lives and protect public health and safety, including the purchase and distribution of food.”

Nonprofit organizations are eligible to apply for several foundation grants that help mitigate the impact of COVID-19—food and basic needs are not always specified, nor are they excluded. These include Otto Bremer Trust, Bush Foundation, Greater Twin Cities United Way, Open Road Foundation, and others.



Local community foundations, community development financial institutions, coalitions, networks, associations, and other intermediaries who are familiar with the specific needs in their communities are eligible to apply for grants from the Minnesota Disaster Recovery Fund for Coronavirus, which is funded by a consortium that includes Target, Best Buy, Cargill, and other major corporations and local foundations.

#### Food Security

Several grants address food security specifically, including food and/or prepared meals for people experiencing homelessness, support for food shelves and banks, food for schools and care centers, and more. These include Blue Cross Blue Shield, Open Your Heart to the Hungry and Homeless, the MDE’s Child and Adult Care Food Programs, and the Minnesota Food Shelf Program’s COVID-19 Food Shelf Funding and MDRF COVID-19 Immediate Food Needs programs.

#### Supplies/Basic Needs

The Minnesota Food Shelf Program (MFSP), administered by Hunger Solutions on behalf of the MN Department of Human Services, is distributing small grants to food shelves that can be used for “food, diapers, toilet paper, and other necessary supplies” in its COVID-19 Food Shelf Funding program. Applications are due April 30.

#### Distribution and Storage

FEMA Public Assistance funds (see above) may be used for the purchase and distribution of food during the COVID-19 pandemic. This may include leasing distribution and storage space, vehicles, and necessary equipment.

The Minnesota Food Shelf Program is awarding at least \$2.64 million in grant funds to support a transportation network for the distribution of food and supplies under its COVID-19 Transportation Funding program. Both nonprofit agencies and local governments are eligible to apply.

The Blue Cross Blue Shield grant can be used for food delivery for vulnerable people.

## **Gaps Between Goal and Current Situation**

### **Infrastructure Gaps**

Overall, Ramsey County has strong existing food infrastructure system and many strengths to build on. Traditional food security providers have made service adjustments to meet increased demand. Many community organizations, groups, and individuals have stepped up in creative ways to fill needs across the community. There are some significant gaps, however.

First, according to DHS Office of Economic Opportunity’s surveys of food banks and food shelves, currently have sufficient supplies and volunteers but are anticipating shortages in the next few weeks without further assistance. Emergency grant funding for food shelves has been released from the state through Hunger Solutions which will help with these needs. DHS will be sharing their



surveys publicly and we will continue to monitor these data to understand where and if critical gaps emerge.

Second, transportation is a multifaceted gap. Some people have limited transportation options to get to stores, food shelves, or food distribution sites. Cuts to Metro Transit and safety fears regarding taking transit have limited the options of people who are dependent upon transit. People with decreased income who are dependent upon cars can no longer afford gasoline. People lack childcare necessary to shop or go to food shelves.

There are also people who need food delivered to their homes and there are stressors on the ability to provide home delivery. There are people, like seniors, who were previously homebound and need to continue receive prepared meals and food delivered. Others are newly homebound. Seniors who are in high risk categories for COVID-19 are now home. Asian people are staying home due to experiences of or fear of attacks. People experiencing homelessness who were staying in shelters are being moved to hotels and may need delivery of prepared foods.

Finally, while there is a strong base infrastructure with many partners and providers, the system is disjointed. Depending on who someone is (family with children, senior, homeless, etc.), there are many ways to access food and basic needs. A person seeking help may need to access more than one resource and make several calls or inquiries to get their needs met. In addition, community-based, individual, and community-organized efforts have been created to address needs. There is a gap in organization and communication across the system and a lack of coordination of efforts.

### **Population Specific Gaps**

Certain populations have been identified as having unique needs or challenges or population-specific gaps that need to be addressed.

- DHS' Office of Economic Opportunity reports that food shelves in tribal nations are in critical need of supplies and staffing. While Ramsey County does not have tribal nations within its boundaries, particular outreach to urban American Indians is a need.
- Immigrants may face challenges depending on their immigration status. Immigrants without documents are not eligible for many programs and may be afraid to enroll or register for government programs. Immigrants with documents may be concerned about public charge laws that may prevent them from achieving citizenship or impact their immigration status. It is important to note that WIC is not covered by public charge laws.
- The deaf, blind, and hard of hearing community may face additional challenges accessing information and food.
- People without access to the internet who cannot order groceries online or access online resources.
- People who are newly food insecure may not know about programs or how to access them and may be embarrassed about needing these services.
- Schools are currently providing food for school-aged children only; not their entire family or children younger than school age.



- People experiencing homelessness who are living in camps or moving from a shelter to a hotel or camp. This is a highly mobile population that does not fit neatly into a “sheltered” or “unsheltered” category.
- People who lack transportation.
- Asian people who are homebound due to experience of or fear of racist attacks.

### **Policy and Program Gaps**

The Financial Assistance Services (FAS) Department has seen a doubling of applications compared to last year at the same time. FAS has made internal changes in staffing and prioritization to meet the demand. While some waivers reduce workload for financial workers, the number of new applications is overwhelming and will continue to increase the FAS workload. FAS has re-deployed training staff, quality control reviewers, and financial workers who normally work on Emergency Assistance applications to processing SNAP applications. They have not interrupted hiring new financial workers and will have new staff starting April 20.

Applications for SNAP are part of the Combined Application Form which includes all cash and food benefit programs administered by FAS. Each application must consider all programs a household is potentially eligible, so applications require specialized knowledge about many programs. Even if FAS were able to hire new employees or temporary staff, the regular financial assistance worker training takes nearly six months of full-time training to achieve proficiency and carry an independent caseload. Part of this training is required training by the Department of Human Services. There is currently a backlog at DHS in training availability which impacts Ramsey County’s ability to onboard new employees. Additionally, FAS has existing vacancies for which it is hard to attract employees due to the salary level and workload.

Ramsey County WIC is currently about to keep up with applications and ongoing support to participants. They are looking at increasing staffing and how to provide training. If their caseload doubled, they would need additional support. The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) requires that WIC staff have degrees in nutrition so that is a potential barrier to hiring new staff. WIC is required to have contact with families at least every three months and some families want and need additional contact and support. WIC is required to verify families are receiving Medical Assistance through Mn-its. Only five staff currently have access to this system, and it creates bottlenecks in determining eligibility. Eligibility could also be determined by verifying SNAP eligibility, but there is no easy way to do that currently.

In addition to staff capacity, WIC policy limits the quantity of a single item and types of items that can be purchased. Community members report that stores are sometimes out of WIC allowed items and people cannot make substitutions. There are limits on quantities that can be purchased at one time which means people have to make multiple trips to the store.

Neither SNAP nor WIC can be used online. If this were possible many people who lack transportation or are homebound would have much of their food need met.



### **Funding Gaps**

Most funding opportunities are for non-profits and food shelves. Ramsey County cannot apply directly. Staying abreast of what partners are applying for and receiving will help fill many gaps and provide a more complete picture of the overall funding landscape. The county can play a role in encouraging organizations to apply, sharing funding opportunities, and providing technical assistance in grant-writing and grants management to community organizations.

The largest unknown gap is for adults without children who are not seniors or disabled. This has long been an area with few financial or social supports and this gap continues. It is also unknown how many of these people will need assistance. The waiver from the SNAP Able Bodied Adults without Dependents time limit will help this group so long as they are able to access grocery stores and farmers markets that accept SNAP.

Schools are also reporting funding gaps and will need financial support to expand services to the entire household and more than two meals per school day.

While there are some programs that fund basic needs and logistical expenses (transportation, storage), the programs are limited. The only funding specifically for basic needs (non-food supplies) is in the form of small grants for food shelves. Otherwise, there is general COVID-response funding from philanthropic sources for nonprofits that may cover these kinds of supplies. Nonprofit organizations should take advantage of the unrestricted/general COVID-19 grant opportunities that exist to fund basic needs programs. The County should also develop a proposal for the Bush Foundation on an innovative solution to this problem.

Several major corporations are contributing to the MCN collaborative fund, but it is difficult to contact anyone in the corporations' foundations to learn more about how much they are contributing or whether they would consider in-kind donations (e.g., Target, General Mills).

## **Plan and Priorities**

Each recommended priority has a combination of short-term, medium-term, and long-term recommendations. Short-term refers to strategies to be implemented within the next three weeks. Medium-term refers to May 2020. Long-term strategies have a recommended implementation time frame of late May to summer 2020.

These priorities incorporate the recommendations of the Data, Planning and Design and Community Engagement Workgroups.

- 1) Amplify and connect community to school food programs to feed the whole family.**



Build and support capacity of school districts to provide food and basic needs for the entire household, seven days a week.

Short-term

Currently, school districts are providing food for two meals a day, five days a week to children in the household. Some districts are providing this through distribution sites, while others are providing food through a combination of distributions sites and home delivery. Ramsey County should develop partnerships with schools and others to expand this to all members of the family and cover more meals per week than just those normally served at school. Schools are in a unique position of trust in the community and already have much of the infrastructure in place to provide delivery, staffing, and food preparation. They would need money for more food, increased capacity to deliver meals, greater capacity to provide prepared meals, and some districts would need greater staffing. Idle staff like paraprofessionals, educational assistants, and interpreters may be available to help fill these gaps. Implementation will look different in each school district, given their current capacities. Schools already have partnerships with community groups and cultural liaisons to support Ramsey County’s goals of race equity and culturally appropriate food and services.

Long-Term

Over the summer, Ramsey County should continue its partnership with the schools, but engage summer meals programs. This is offered in Saint Paul through its Parks and Recreation Department, but more information would need to be gathered about suburban programs.

Internal Incident Management Team (IMT) Staffing Needs

One full-time School Food Services Coordinator to maintain regular communication with schools, help schools problem-solve, identify needs and resources to meet them, and assist with coordination of and amplification of summer meals programs.

**2) Connect community to financial assistance and benefits.**

Encourage and assist residents to access existing food support programs (e.g. SNAP, WIC), and for the State to leverage all existing federal waivers to maximize benefit and use.

Short-term

These programs are bedrock supports to increase access to food and are well-situated to serve those experiencing food insecurity for the first time. These programs have funding and encouraging people to apply for and maintain eligibility meet many people’s food needs without additional resources. There are waivers to program rules in place that help people maintain eligibility and reduce face-to-face contact that is normally required. Appendix C provides a table that outlines waivers currently in place and those that could be sought. Ramsey County should ensure that current recipients are aware of the waivers that may benefit them, such as the suspended time limit for Able Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWD) for SNAP and adjusted deadlines for annual recertification. Ramsey County should advocate with the Department of Human Services to encourage the state to take advantage of all available waivers.



People receiving Medical Assistance, SNAP, and the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) are automatically eligible for WIC if they are pregnant and/or have a child ages five and under. While there are currently 16,000 people receiving WIC in Ramsey County, in February 2020 there were 2,294 pregnant women and 20,159 children under the age of six receiving Medical Assistance. All of these people are WIC eligible. Letters to recipients of these programs should alert them of their eligibility so they can take advantage of both programs.

Additionally, WIC is not a program covered by public charge legislation that could potentially impact an immigrant’s status or ability to apply for citizenship. Outreach should be done through community partners to help immigrant communities understand that receiving WIC would not impact their future status in the United States.

Medium-term

The Food and Basic Needs Workgroup should continue to discuss with FAS ways to address its increased capacity and worker shortage. Explore offering hiring bonuses or other financial incentives to attract skilled financial workers, such as recent retirees. Another option is to identify tasks that do not require full financial worker training and hire temporary workers to do those tasks. Advocate with DHS to streamline its financial worker training to ensure counties can hire in a timely fashion and explore alternative training options provided by the county.

Continue to work with WIC to find ways to increase staff capacity. Seek alternative ways to verify SNAP or MA eligibility by partnering with FAS or management analyst staff in the Health and Wellness Administrative Division’s Office of Management Analysts.

Long-term

SNAP cannot be used for online ordering and some neighborhoods lack stores that accept Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) cards. While being able to use SNAP online is a federal decision, Ramsey County can support state efforts around this advocacy. DHS processes and approves which stores accept SNAP, but Ramsey County can use mapping of which stores currently accept EBT and encourage grocers, and in particular ethnic groceries, farmers markets, and corner stores, to apply.

**3) Connect community to existing and new food and essential services.**

Provide a single-entry point for access to food, basic needs, and essential services, and implement a broad communications strategy that considers all abilities, access restraints, and languages, and includes continuous feedback and improvement.

Short-term

Currently, people seeking food and other basic needs resources face a multi-layered, disjointed system with no clear entry point. For people seeking food, there should be a single place that connects them to the appropriate services that they are eligible for. Many people just need information and will then have their own transportation and other resources, such as internet access to obtain services. To start, Ramsey County should create a website that provides a GIS map



of food distribution sites where people can enter their address and receive information about food shelf and school distribution sites and programs. The site should also include links to sign up for home delivery through Meals on Wheels, links to other basic needs resources, and links to apply for SNAP and WIC. The site needs to be available in English, Somali, Hmong, Karen, and Spanish or have a clear way for people with those language to access information.

In addition to the website, Ramsey County should partner with a community non-profit to provide telephone information and referral and enrollment screening. Potential partners are United Way's 211 which already handles family emergency shelter intake screening for the county or Hunger Solutions who provides SNAP screening and application assistance. This telephone line would provide the same information as the website, but for those who lack internet access or are uncomfortable using the internet. Services would need to be available in languages other than English.

#### Internal IMT Staffing Needs

One full-time Gateway Coordinator is needed to coordinate resource updates on the website, ensure accuracy of information, maintain awareness of emerging community initiatives, and ensure resource and referral/enrollment telephone partners have the information they need.

#### **4) Ensure individuals/households who are homebound have access to food and essential services.**

Amplify existing food programs that deliver food and prepared meals to homes, with a focus on individuals and communities who are homebound.

#### Short-Term

Currently, the Senior Services Consortium of Ramsey County helps to administer and coordinate the eight Meals on Wheels programs in partnership with Metro Meals on Wheels. They report that they do not currently have a waiting list and still have the volunteer capacity to meet their current clients' needs, although requests have increased by 20 percent in recent weeks. They have made changes to their services to increase their capacity, such as converting most clients to frozen meals that can be delivered weekly rather than daily which increases volunteer capacity. About half of their current clients have their fees waived. Fees range from \$5 to \$8 per meal and are sliding based on income.

Ramsey County should provide resources to increase capacity of Meals on Wheels and other prepared food delivery organizations to deliver to all homebound adults without children who are unable to prepare their own meals. This would cover people with disabilities, those homebound due to illness, those afraid of leaving the house, and seniors. Increasing capacity would potentially include administrative help to screen and enroll clients, interpreter services, partnerships with Metro Mobility to assist in delivery, and partnerships with meal providers to enhance capacity of Metro Meals on Wheels to provide not only more meals, but hot meals for those who cannot heat frozen meals and culturally-appropriate meals. These partnerships could be with a large commercial kitchen and ethnic restaurants.



Internal IMT Staffing Needs

One Homebound Delivery Coordinator to support delivery partners, coordinate transportation needs and providers, administer enrollments. Coordinate with Community Engagement Partners to ensure culturally appropriate food is available.

**5) Amplify food and basic needs distribution sites and alternatives.**

Partner with food shelves, farmer’s markets, and other trusted partners to increase food supply and distribution. Focus on communities most at-risk for food insecurity.

Short-Term

According to surveys by the Department of Human Services (DHS) Office of Economic Opportunity and the University of Minnesota Extension Office, food shelves for the most part have supplies to meet current demands. The state and DHS have a priority to bolster food shelves to meet increased demand and Ramsey County should rely on the state to coordinate and fund these efforts. Most food shelves have changed their service strategy to minimize physical contact and providing boxes of food on-site rather than having users enter their buildings.

Ramsey County should utilize the vulnerability index map and input from the Community Engagement Workgroup’s input to fill gaps in distribution sites prioritizing those areas most at risk. Utilizing partners like the Sheriff’s Office and volunteers, bring boxes of food to weekly distribution sites in targeted neighborhoods. Census tracts with a vulnerability index of 0.76 or greater and sites identified by the Community Engagement Workgroup should be the first to be developed. Sites should build on community assets and trusted institutions.

Encourage and assist food shelves with applications to the Minnesota Food Shelf Program COVID-19 Food Shelf Funding Grants which provides a base grant of \$2,000 and the remainder by allocation shared among grantees.

Long-Term

Monitor demand and usage of food distribution sites in the most vulnerable areas and maintain communication with community groups to understand if additional sites are needed. The network of food distribution sites should be flexible and be able to pivot to meet changing demand. Regular monitoring and communication with community groups will determine whether to expand the number of sites or change locations.

Internal IMT Staffing Needs

One full-time Food Shelf Coordinator to serve as a liaison between the county and food shelves, monitor food shelf supply and staffing, assist with volunteer coordination, oversee distribution sites, and identify and stand-up additional or different distribution sites as needs change.

**6) Provide a centralized location and administrative coordination of community and business efforts, communications, donations, and volunteers.**



Coordinate with corporate and nonprofit partners for basic needs supply – donations and in-kind. Track funding opportunities and leverage county resources where appropriate.

Short-term

The community needs surveys and interviews with service providers indicate that households need help with items beyond food. Most in needs are cleaning supplies, personal hygiene items, and baby supplies, like formula, diapers, and wipes. Each food box and all meal deliveries should include cleaning supplies and items like soap, toothpaste, and dish and laundry detergent. Baby items, as well as adult diapers, should be made available to those who need them. Another option would be to provide gift cards with food boxes that enable people to make these purchases online or shop.

Seek corporate donations for these items and support and coordinate community level drives to gather these items. Encourage and assist food shelves with applications to the Minnesota Food Shelf Program COVID-19 Food Shelf Funding Grants which covers toilet paper, diapers, and sanitation and hygiene supplies.

Medium Term

There are a myriad of small group, individual, business, and community group efforts happening. The Ramsey County community is truly leaning in and supporting each other. However, these efforts are not as effective as they could be due to a lack of coordination and duplication of effort. There are people who want to help, but do not know what is needed or how to help. Ramsey County should provide a resource, such as a website, that is kept up to date with volunteer opportunities, gaps in resources, and information on how to help. It would be a database where community organizers could share what they are doing and what they need, centralized support for food or basic needs items drives by religious institutions, cultural groups, and community and district councils. It would provide a place for restaurants and other businesses to connect on how to provide meals or donations.

Long-term

Longer term food stability can be increased through localizing food supply. Ramsey County needs to support community efforts that increase the capacity of community gardens and farms and local agriculture programs. A subgroup of this effort should be formed to support these efforts and examine the feasibility of using county owned property for gardens.

**7) Increase capacity and access to public gardens, including equipment and materials.**

Partner with cities, state, and private land owners, along with community and corporate partners.

**8) Partner with community and county partners to meet food needs of individuals who are homeless.**

Short-term



There are currently four locations in Saint Paul where people experiencing unsheltered homelessness are able to access sanitary services, medical care, outreach workers, and food. There are currently an estimated 50 camps with more than 110 occupants. These services are under-funded, only provide cold foods, and lack the ability to offer food choices. The county moved at-risk adults and youth ages 16 to 24 from shelters to hotels and is moving an additional 400 people to hotels to increase social distancing at shelters. The Housing Workgroup has defined people in shelters and hotels as Tier 1 and will include providing food in its contracts with hotel providers. This group should coordinate with the Housing Workgroup to ensure food needs are met for this group.

The food needs of the unsheltered should be met through coordination of volunteers, outreach workers, and food suppliers like food trucks, ethnic restaurants, and other meal providers to serve hot meals at the four distribution sites and at camps. It may be supplemented with Meals Ready to Eat (MRE). Rotating food trucks and restaurants could fulfill these needs while supporting local small businesses. The county should provide administration and coordination of meal providers to provide hot meals to at homeless distribution sites and camps. Continue to coordinate with the Housing Workgroup.

Consider applying for Minnesota Disaster Recovery Funds from the Saint Paul and Minnesota Foundations for this effort. The focus of these funds is not only basic needs, but small businesses and ideas that partner with non-traditional organizations.

Medium-term

The county should seek a contracted vendor to coordinate and monitor this work. This vendor would schedule food providers, work with people experiencing homelessness to ensure the variety and types of food are meeting their needs and engage additional food truck and restaurant providers to ensure we maintain capacity as shelter-in-place rules change.

**9) Increase transportation options for community**

In line with public health guidance, increase opportunities for safe transportation for necessary activities outside home.

Short-term

Assist in getting residents to food distribution sites and delivering food to residents in need, and in the community. Partner with medical transportation providers (i.e. metro mobility and other transportation providers) to offer “health promotion” trips to the grocery store, food shelf, or pharmacy.

**10) Throughout response track usage, anticipate demand, provide continuous improvement recommendations, and performance metrics in partnership with community.**

Short Term



Contracts and agreements with partners should include the expectation that they will track enrollment and usage. Aggregate numbers of users will be the minimum expectation, but if possible, enrollment information should include basic demographics and zip code. As agreements are developed, ensure tracking mechanisms and reporting tools are provided to facilitate data tracking.

#### Medium Term

Work with the Data, Planning, and Design Workgroup and Ramsey County evaluation staff to develop performance measures and continuous improvement plans. A critical component is the creation of feedback loops and regular opportunities to hear directly from community members how the system is or is not meeting people’s needs. Utilize the open data portal to provide transparency and accountability to the community and partners.

## **Communication Plan**

### **Introduction**

This document was developed by a subgroup of members from the Data, Planning and Design and Community Engagement workgroups of Ramsey County’s Food and Basic Needs Security and Distribution planning efforts during COVID-19. The document was developed between April 13 and 15 and is intended to be a “working document” that can be added to and revised as more information becomes available.

### **Objectives:**

- All audiences will know that Ramsey County has a coordinated effort to promote food security during COVID-19 and where to go to get information about this response effort.
- Persons with food insecurity know about Ramsey County public benefits and how to access/apply for them and where to go to get help with food resources (SNAP), including those who are undocumented and places they can go for help.
- Persons and organizations in a position to help with food support or distribution will know how to identify gaps and opportunities and to offer help
- A “one stop shop” website and phone number will be developed that provide information about the various food and basic need resources and how to access them. Information provided will be up to date and provided in a timely manner. This can include SNAP eligibility, where to receive prepared meals, delivered meals, gardening information, unprocessed free food, and culturally specific foods.
- Maximize the use of existing communication channels (both formal and informal) and prioritize areas where new and innovative communication strategies are needed. In particular, we should rely on key partners and cultural communities with trusted leaders and kinship communities, including Ramsey County staff who live in or have relationships with these communities.
- Carry out a racial equity approach that prioritizes and address inequities that are faced by many of our communities; including having multiple languages, no access to the internet, and addressing culturally-specific needs.



### Four Key Information Strategies

Ramsey County will create and maintain four key information resources related to Food and Basic Needs.

- 1) Telephone information and referral and enrollment screening will be an alternative for those who don't want to or can't access the website directly (see below). This service may be provided by a community non-profit (potential partners are United Way 211, Hunger Solutions, Minnesotahelp.info.)
  - a. Also, will be capable to provide services those who speak languages other than English, are deaf and hard of hearing, blind or with disabilities.
- 2) Food and Basic Needs website
  - a. Will have GIS map of food distributions sites and way to search for resources by address
  - b. Will include links to sign up for home delivery through partners, links to other basic needs resources, and links to apply for SNAP and WIC.
  - c. The site needs to be available in English, Somali, Hmong, Karen, and Spanish or have a clear way for people with those language to access information.
- 3) Website for those helping with the coordinated response, including volunteer opportunities
  - a. Kept up-to-date with volunteer opportunities, gaps in resources, and information on how to help.
  - b. Provide a database where public health community liaisons and community organizers could share what they are doing and what they need from each other, centralized support for food or basic needs items drives by religious institutions, cultural groups, and St. Paul district councils and school districts, and others.
  - c. Provide a place for restaurants and other businesses to connect on how to provide meals or donations.
  - d. Provide a place for community groups to ask for specific things from Ramsey County (flyers, brochures, community liaisons to help with an initiative etc...)
- 4) One-page flyer/brochure on COVID-19 resources that can be customized and distributed to various audiences in multiple languages; signs of same that can be posted on doors.

### Anticipated Barriers

- Residents without internet access
- Resources for written language translation, oral interpretation and bilingual staff support
- Residents who cannot read/write
- Residents who are afraid of receiving public services or resources
- Many residents with food insecurity are homebound and/or do not have transportation to food distribution locations Staff who are afraid to go into community to assist communication efforts without PPE or at all
- Capacity of small community-based organizations who are doing additional work without additional resources/funding/PPE
- Mitigating misinformation that may be distributed by other sources



- Tendency of food supply to be traditional American fare and not appropriate for all cultural groups.

**Key Roles for Communication**

- Someone to lead and coordinate overall communications effort, who can ensure it is in alignment with operations and communication efforts for other COVID-19 related matters.
- Someone to maintain both website and keep them up to date.
- A team or organization to staff call center.
- Need for a centralized point person/communications team who can respond to communication-related questions.

**Other Considerations**

- Racial equity and health equity strategies should be prioritized as part of communications. Communication strategies should prioritize most at risk residents. Strategies should acknowledge discrimination against Asian Americans during the current pandemic and racial disparities that are affecting COVID-19 outcomes for African Americans and other groups.
- There is need to efficiently communicate across many COVID-19-related topics and concerns. For example, residents who seek food resources will also have other questions and concerns (COVID-19 in general, unemployment, stay home order, etc.).
- Every communication should include a reminder about the census which is the greatest racial equity issue we are facing. This will require more education amid chaotic time.
- Community-based organizations need to be asked how they are navigating this crisis. Many are already doing a lot and receiving referrals from other sources, such as schools. These are often small organizations that are committed to help but may face strain. These organizations often will help to call county call centers on client behalf but face long wait times. There should be a way for these calls to be expedited.
- Website and phone line will not be enough to provide culturally responsive care. How can we better support community organizations to provide culturally appropriate support to their communities? At least one organization (Isuroon) has its own crisis line.



## Appendix A: Food and Basic Needs Security and Distribution Workgroups Description

Under the Policy Action Group Food and Basic Needs Security and Distribution Committee, the following workgroups will move forward logistics and planning in alignment with policy direction set by the committee.

### Policy Direction:

Language below represents the greater direction set by the PAG committee. This direction will guide all workgroups.

### Determine the need more specifically and identify the populations and geographic areas most at-risk of food insecurity and lack of access to basic needs, including:

- In Individuals/households in isolation or quarantine
- Youth
- Community:
  - Racial, ethnic, cultural, and immigrant communities
  - Whole family
  - Financially vulnerable and low-income/wealth households
  - Individuals/families that are experiencing homelessness (sheltered and unsheltered)

### Affirm the design of a system for food and basic needs supply and distribution so that resources are available to those in need throughout Ramsey County:

- Engages racial, ethnic and cultural groups in design and implementation
- Builds on existing networks of community sites, including idled resources for food preparation, access, distribution
- Meets existing state and local public health guidelines
- Includes capability to distribute meals to the doorstep of housebound residents
- Meets the need of 40% to 60% of the county's population
- Is resilient so that we can ensure service throughout the emergency

### Workgroups:

#### Data, Planning, and Design

Mission: Identify needs, determine geography of need, identify partner resources and capabilities, design system, monitoring process and activities, reporting, and continuous improvement of the system.

#### Suggested Action Steps:

- Identify key elements/providers/resources/gaps of the food distribution system
- Use qualitative and quantitative methods to assess:



- Gather and summarize information about (1) the capacity of providers, (2) gaps in food security (e.g. food/access point deserts), (3) needs of subpopulations and the broader community
- Work with engagement team to gather this information
- Financing data: availability of federal, state and foundation money for implementing systems to meet basic needs, describe funding sources, eligible entities, amounts available, how to acquire funds, restrictions on funding
- Vulnerable populations based on social and economic factors (I.e. race, ethnicity, citizenship status, disabled, youth, elderly, etc...)
- Geographic distribution of need based on available data
- Determine estimated timeline for basic needs, assuming different rates of spread of COVID-19 and corresponding restrictions on businesses and individuals
- Use mapping to determine and monitor census tracts where there are high concentrations of isolated individuals.

Lead: Dana DeMaster

### **Community Engagement**

Mission: Identify, build, and maintain relationships with partners; engage communities to confirm needs; identify resources; and ensure racial equity and culturally-specific services and options

Suggested Action Steps:

- Establish relationships with businesses and communities and collect information on their resource needs.
- Consult with daycare providers about the limitations they face while accessing food in the quantities they need to serve children effectively
- Engage and assess senior and disability care facilities who may require assistance obtaining food quantities they require
- Develop communications strategies to inform partners on service design, other resources, and important access points
- Determine access/information points for community (social media, hotline #, online, app, communications, etc.)
- Identify additional community resources with whom to partner
- Recommend service models designed to identify and reach vulnerable populations, census tracts, and cultural-specific communities

Lead: Sara Hollie

### **Food and Basic Needs Supply and Distribution**

Mission: Confirm resources, rollout services as they develop, monitor and adjust as needed



Suggested Action Steps:

- After initial plan developed, operationalize design
- Staff/Units specializing in community engagement

Lead: Jared Shypulski



## Appendix B: Community Engagement Recommendations

### 1. Financial Assistance and Benefits

#### Immediate/Short Term Recommendations

- Encourage and assist residents to apply for SNAP online.
  - Ensure people without internet access can apply and get application assistance.
  - Provide application assistance to immigrants and those with limited English.
- Increase SNAP benefits amount and expand eligibility.
- Enable people to use SNAP to purchase groceries through online delivery apps.
- Improve communications so people know what resources are available.

#### Longer-Term Recommendations

- Expand SNAP/WIC to prepared foods, Meals on Wheels options, and CSAs.
- Establish/support mobile food trucks and meal delivery options that accept SNAP; encourage farmer's markets to provide delivery.
- Widely communicate changes in how SNAP and WIC can be used.
- Elders, people with disabilities, and racial, ethnic and cultural groups have special needs and must be involved in planning.
- Replicate SPPS model; address problems that some have experienced with SPPS distribution, like meals running out, lack of transportation to pick-up sites, bus stop delivery times.
- Help undocumented immigrants and documented immigrants with sponsors, who cannot apply for government benefits.

### 2. Food Storage, Distribution and Alternatives

#### Immediate/Short Term Recommendations

- Utilize places of worship, community sites, parks, and empty community storefronts Work with municipalities, UMN Extension, and other partners to make public and home gardening sites and supplies available. Widely promote, provide clear guidelines of legality, liability, and timing for use".
- Work with culturally-specific agencies and ethnic grocers to serve as distribution sites, resource and referral hubs, and trusted messengers.
- Provide access to ethnic foods, dry goods, food for people with religious dietary restrictions (e.g., kosher/halal/other health related dietary needs).
- Utilize places of worship, community sites, parks, and empty community storefronts as distribution sites, in addition to existing food shelves. Include suburban sites.
- Find options for people who lack transportation and are unable to accept meal delivery because of need for physical distancing due to health-related conditions.
- Accommodate special needs of seniors and disabled people during food distribution. Some disabilities make ordering or shopping for food difficult.



Longer-Term Recommendations

- Set-up a county team to work with corporate partnerships to assist with donations, in-kind help, etc.
- Identify food trucks, restaurants and other food caterers to be “all-in” with incentives to participate.
- Provide free storage options of food supplies until their time of delivery.

3. Information and Resource Sharing and Referrals

Immediate/Short Term Recommendations

- Work with partner agencies and community leaders on specific support and guidance, and focused communications, for:
  - Racial, cultural, and ethnic communities
  - Elders
  - Persons diagnosed with mental and physical disabilities
  - Deaf, blind and hard of hearing
  - Those without internet access and devices
- Use USPS to provide information to all households on how to get FBNS support
- Develop a comprehensive communications plan to communities on resources, food access guidelines (SNAP, WIC), our distribution plan, etc.

Longer-Term Recommendations

- Increase access to public computers/devices and the internet.

4. Language and Interpreter Services & Culturally-Specific Needs

Immediate/Short Term Recommendations

- Increase the number of interpreters at foodbanks; ensure that they are present at distribution sites.
- Rely on key partners in cultural communities as trusted messengers; use kinship networks.
- Be innovative to reach people (for example, use social media creatively, and other forms of communications).

Longer-Term Recommendations

- Partner with culturally specific and human service agencies to reach the most vulnerable populations.

5. In-Kind/Donations/Volunteers

Immediate/Short Term Recommendations

- Engage partners that want to give back – seek donations, grant opportunities, and in-kind resources
- Safety is a big concern for volunteers—provide resources/equipment to those who are afraid of community spread that want to be involved.



Longer-Term Recommendations

- Some would-be volunteers fear being held liable for spreading CV-19. Address liability concerns by clarifying existing limits on liability; explore ways to mitigate liability.

6. Transportation

Immediate/Short Term Recommendations

- Assist in getting residents food distribution sites and delivering food to residents in need, and in the community.
- Partner with medical transportation providers (i.e. metro mobility and other transportation providers) to offer “health promotion” trips to the grocery store, food shelf, or pharmacy.

Longer-Term Recommendations

- None yet.



## Appendix C: Data, Planning, and Design Workgroup Recommendations

- 1) Provide a single-entry point for access to food, whether through schools, Meals on Wheels home delivery, distribution sites, and other food and basic needs related resources.
- 2) Connect people to existing food programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program; Women, Infants, and Children; and the Nutrition Assistance Program for Seniors.
- 3) Develop partnerships with school districts in Ramsey County to provide food to families with children under age 18.
- 4) Increase the capacity of organizations that deliver prepared meals to provide prepared meals and foods to all single adults, not just seniors and people with disabilities.
- 5) Partner with Second Harvest and local food shelves and farmers markets to increase food distribution sites in neighborhoods that are most at-risk for food and basic needs insecurity.
- 6) Partner with food trucks, restaurants, and caterers to provide on-site meals to the four homeless outreach locations and camps.
- 7) Seek corporate and community donations to provide other basic needs items with all food boxes and prepared meal deliveries.
- 8) Provide a centralized location and administrative coordination of community and business efforts.
- 9) Develop a plan to track usage and anticipate demand, as well as provide continuous improvement recommendations and performance metrics.

## Appendix D: Food Stability State and Federal Program Waivers

Program	What is it?	What's Different	Opportunities
<p>The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)</p>	<p>Provides federal grants to states for supplemental foods, health care referrals, and nutrition education for low-income pregnant, breastfeeding, and non-breastfeeding postpartum women, and to infants and children up to age five who are found to be at nutritional risk.</p> <p>WIC is a Federal grant program for which Congress authorizes a specific amount of funds each year for the program.<sup>1</sup></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants and applicants don't need to be physically present (Through 5/31, extension can be requested)</li> <li>• Mid-certifications can be delayed if lab measurements can't be completed.</li> <li>• Lab requirements to determine nutritional risk are waived</li> <li>• Substitutions are allowed for the types and amounts of certain WIC-prescribed foods if availability is limited (MN has requested this waiver for Milk only)</li> <li>• Separation of duties requirement waived if this presents a barrier or delays to service provision. Local agency must have procedure in place for determining when SOD would not be done</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FFCRA providing WIC with additional funds to address increases in program participation. Will work with individual states that require additional funding based on enrollment.</li> <li>• Recommendation for use of Video platforms to conduct visits with participants (does Ramsey have this capacity?)</li> <li>• Other administrative waivers can be requested</li> </ul>
<p>Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)</p>	<p>SNAP is targeted toward our most at-risk citizens, predominantly serving households with children, elderly or disabled members.</p> <p>Federal eligibility for SNAP is limited to people with gross incomes up to 130% of the federal poverty line — meaning a family of four can make no more than \$2,633 a month to receive benefits. Able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWD) can traditionally only receive three months of benefits during any three-year period if they're not working a minimum of 20 hours per week or participating in a training program. SNAP benefits are delivered monthly through electronic debit (EBT) cards. Law requires states to use merit system employees to certify applicant households.</p>	<p>DHS has yet to issue bulletin for SNAP</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suspends time limit for ABAWDs (no work requirement)</li> <li>• Flexibility to adjust deadlines for participants to re-enroll (recertify) to continue receiving benefits</li> <li>• Phone applications and interviews allowed (March-May)</li> <li>• Telephonic signature of applications Verbal attestation to correct information</li> <li>• Optional extension on QC case reviews in April, May and June</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pandemic EBT- The State proposes to provide P-EBT benefits to SNAP and non-SNAP households with children.<sup>2</sup> Children who would receive free or reduced-price meals under the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act if not for the school closure are eligible under this provision</li> <li>• State can request waiver to allow for the issuance of emergency allotments</li> <li>• States are allowed to make use of contracted workers to help with administrated tasks contemplated by this guidance.<sup>3</sup></li> </ul>



Program	What is it?	What's Different	Opportunities
Child Nutrition Programs	Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) National School Lunch Program (NSLP) Seamless Summer Option (SSO) Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meals can be served in a non-congregate setting</li> <li>• Waives meal service time requirements</li> <li>• Requirements can be met through approved pick-up schedules or delivery plans with designated times for distribution</li> <li>• Afterschool meals and snacks can be served outside a structured environment and without an educational or enrichment purpose</li> <li>• Sponsors can distribute meals under this waiver in two ways: 1) pick-up of meal(s), or 2) home delivery (home delivery requires written parent consent).</li> <li>• SFAs in State must apply for this waiver from MDE</li> <li>• (Submitted) SFSP- Waive the 50% free or reduced-price meal eligibility requirement to operate an open site</li> <li>• CACFP- MDH has submitted questions to USDA for further guidance</li> </ul>	
Other Child Nutrition Programs	School Breakfast Program (SBP) Special Milk Program	No reference to changes but may be implied?	
The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)	Federal program that helps supplement the diets of low-income Americans by providing them with emergency food assistance at no cost. USDA provides 100% American-grown USDA Foods and administrative funds to states to operate TEFAP.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• States may adjust income eligibility guidelines or categorical income eligibly procedures (such as SNAP automatically eligible)</li> <li>• If signature normally required, can amend to permit self-attestation in lieu of signatures</li> <li>• Allow use of drive-through model for food pick up</li> </ul>	Additional funding available
Disaster Household Distribution (DHD) program	Enables FNS to approve state agencies' requests for USDA's DHD program for targeted areas to meet specific needs when traditional channels of food are unavailable and not being replenished on a regular	State agencies who have a high-need area with disrupted access to food located in their state should contact their USDA FNS regional office to receive	



	basis. DHD provides boxes of foods to households using existing inventories of USDA-purchased foods.	information about how to apply for a DHD. It is expected that state agencies will also continue the operation of USDA’s existing food assistance programs, including The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) and the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR). <sup>4</sup>	
Senior nutrition- Older American’s Act	Disaster relief authority in the Older Americans Act (OAA)	Flexibility to shift funding from congregate site meals to home delivery	
Nutrition Services Incentive Program	Provides grants to states, territories, and eligible Tribal organizations to support the OAA Congregate and Home-Delivered Nutrition Programs by providing an incentive to serve more meals. Grantees can choose to receive their grant as cash, commodities (food) from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), or a combination of cash and commodities.	TBD- Need more information on what MN Board on Aging is doing	

**Child Nutrition Program Descriptions**

Summer Food Service Program (SFSP)- Rreimburses program operators who serve free healthy meals and snacks to children and teens in low-income areas.

National School Lunch Program (NSLP)- Federally assisted meal program operating in public and nonprofit private schools and residential child care institutions. It provides nutritionally balanced, low-cost or free lunches to children each school day.

Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)- provides reimbursements for nutritious meals and snacks to eligible children and adults who are enrolled for care at participating child care centers, day care homes, and adult day care centers. CACFP also provides reimbursements for meals served to children and youth participating in afterschool care programs, children residing in emergency shelters, and adults over the age of 60 or living with a disability and enrolled in day care facilities.

School Breakfast Program - The School Breakfast Program (SBP) provides reimbursement to states to operate nonprofit breakfast programs in schools and residential childcare institutions. The Food and Nutrition Service administers the SBP at the federal level. State education agencies administer the SBP at the state level, and local school food authorities operate the program in schools.

Special Milk Program (SMP)- provides milk to children in schools and childcare institutions who do not participate in other federal meal service programs. The program reimburses schools for the milk they serve. Schools in the National School Lunch or School Breakfast Programs may also participate in the Special Milk Program to provide milk to children in half-day pre-kindergarten and kindergarten programs where children do not have access to the school meal programs.



All USDA COVID-19 Waivers and Flexibilities for

Minnesota: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/disaster/pandemic/covid-19/minnesota>



### Appendix E: Summary of Potential Funding Sources

Funding Source	Program/Grant Title	Timeframe/Deadline/Duration	Target/Purpose	Eligibility
US Treasury Department	Coronavirus Relief Fund (CARES Act)	County must submit materials by April 17	Direct payments to states and eligible local governments to mitigate impact of COVID-19 emergency.	Eligible recipients of direct payment include counties with population over 500,000.
FEMA Public Assistance	Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic: Purchase and Distribution of Food Eligible for Public Assistance	FEMA may provide funding for an initial 30-day time period. A 30-day time extension may be possible.	Emergency protective measures necessary to save lives and protect public health and safety, including the purchase and distribution of food, may be reimbursed.	Includes local governments and nonprofits. Eligible work related to the purchase and distribution of food in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including: * Purchasing, packaging, and/or preparing food * Delivering food, including hot and cold meals if necessary, to distribution points and/or individuals * Leasing distribution and storage space, vehicles, and necessary equipment
US Small Business Administration	Paycheck Protection Program		Loan to help businesses keep workforce employed during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis.	
US Social Security Administration	Supplemental Security Income	Ongoing	Provides cash to meet basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter. For aged, blind, & disabled people, who have little or no income.	See website.
MN DEED	Small Business Emergency Loans		Help for restaurants, other businesses affected by governor's executive orders/shut-down.	Minnesota businesses that directly and adversely affected by Executive Orders 20-04 and 20-08 (shutting down restaurants, bars, etc.). Non-profits not eligible.
Minnesota Department of Education on behalf of USDA	Child and Adult Care Food Programs		Several programs that provide payments for meals and snacks served at Adult Care Centers, Child Care Centers, Day Care Homes, At-Risk After School Care Centers and Emergency Shelters.	At Risk Afterschool Meals: Public, private nonprofit or for-profit organizations that operate an eligible afterschool care program  CACFP for Family Child Care: reimburses day care homes for meals and snacks.  Child and Adult Care Food Program for Centers: Child care centers, afterschool programs, emergency shelters, children of



				migrant workers, childrens' group homes, seniors in non-residential day care.
Minnesota Food Shelf Program (administered by Hunger Solutions on behalf of DHS)	Minnesota Food Shelf Program (MFSP) COVID-19 Transportation Funding	Rolling basis	\$2.64 million in grant funds will be awarded to support a network of transportation organizations in the distribution of food and supplies to clients. May include mobile food shelves, meal programs, and other support services that get free or low-cost food assistance to people in need.	Tribal Governments, Nonprofit Agencies, or Local Units of Government.
Minnesota Food Shelf Program (administered by Hunger Solutions on behalf of DHS)	Minnesota Food Shelf Program (MFSP) COVID-19 Food Shelf Funding	Applications must be sent to Joe Walker by April 30.	For food, <b>diapers, toilet paper and other necessary supplies.</b>	Applicants must be * A food shelf receiving TEFAP * A 501(c)(3) or (c)(5) * In compliance with ADA standards
Hunger Solutions in partnership with MCF, and MN and STP Foundations	MDRF COVID-19 Immediate Food Needs	Two due dates have passed. Additional grant application due dates will be announced based on available remaining funds.	Emergency funds available to food shelves and community-based hunger relief partners to support new projects or service expansions that address emerging community food needs and service gaps due to the COVID-19 crisis.	Food shelves and community-based hunger relief partners
Hunger Solutions on behalf of MDH	The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)	Hunger Solutions doesn't yet know when additional funds for TEFAP will be available under the Families First Act?	TEFAP distributes food to food shelves on normal basis; additional funds for more food purchases for food shelves will become available.	Food banks and food shelves
DHS on behalf of USDA	Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)	Ongoing	Food assistance to pregnant women, children at nutritional risk	Extensive eligibility guidelines; see website; see Appendix 2 for waivers
DHS	Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)	Ongoing	Provide assistance with buying food to low-income households	Extensive eligibility guidelines; see website; see Appendix 2 for waivers
DHS	General Assistance	Ongoing	Monthly cash grant to those with little or no income meet their basic needs. For people with serious illnesses, disabilities or other circumstances that limit their ability to work. Interim aid.	Must have low income, low wealth, have applied for assistance from another program.
DHS	Emergency General Assistance	Ongoing	For people in crisis like not having food, shelter, or utilities. You do not have to receive GA to get emergency help, but must have a low income. EGA is limited to once a year and only while there are funds available.	Must have low income
DHS	Minnesota Supplemental Aid (MSA)	Ongoing	Small extra monthly cash payment. It helps adults who are eligible for federal SSI. A SSA program.	People who have low income and few resources, and are * Age 65 or older or * Blind or * Disabled



DHS	Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP)	Ongoing	Cash assistance program for families with low incomes and pregnant women. The program is for: * Families w/one or more children under 19; * Women who are pregnant"	Low income, etc.
DHS	Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA)	Ongoing	Monthly cash payment for refugees and asylees. RCA is for people who: * Have been in the United States eight months or less, and * Have refugee or asylee status	Persons with eligible status who are ineligible for SSI or MFIP for up to 8 months after arrival in the United States. * Admitted as refugees * Paroled as refugees or asylees * Granted asylum * Cuban and Haitian entrants
DHS	Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) (aka TANF)	Ongoing	Helps families with children meet basic needs.	Families that meet income and asset limits; maximum of 60 months.
MN Dept of Veterans Affairs	COVID-19 Disaster Relief Grant	Depends on length of emergency and availability of funding.	For individuals. To mitigate the impact COVID-19 has had on veterans with a one-time grant of \$1,000.	1. A veteran or the surviving spouse of a deceased veteran, and 2. A Minnesota Resident, and 3. Must demonstrate negative financial impact by COVID-19.
MN Dept of Veterans Affairs	Subsistence Assistance (Short Term Disability)	Available year-round, for 30-day periods for up to 6 periods.	Financial assistance for a veteran or surviving spouse when disabled and prevented from working for at least 30 days...(see more)	Veterans who are MN residents
Minnesota Council on Foundations	Minnesota Disaster Recovery Fund for Coronavirus	Applications due every Wednesday, with the goal of getting funds out the door on Fridays. <b>Rounds 1 and 2 are past. Round 3 review on April 17.</b>	Addressing needs that arise for individuals and families due to economic impact of coronavirus; addressing needs nonprofits are experiencing due to increased demand for services or social distancing recommendations and closures; and addressing needs small businesses are experiencing due to interrupted operations.	Community intermediaries, such as local community foundations, tribal nations, community development financial institutions, coalitions, networks, associations, etc. who understand the specific needs in their communities... Organizations must have an existing grant-making or fund distribution process in place to get funds to individuals and families, nonprofit organizations, and/or small businesses.
Minneapolis Foundation/ OneMPLS Fund	Navigating the COVID-19 Pandemic	<b>Applications accepted starting on March 30. Grant decisions will be made on a rolling basis during the coming weeks.</b>	To help support local nonprofits that: * Provide services to address the economic impact on individuals whose employment has been reduced or eliminated as a result of the pandemic, particularly the most vulnerable segments of the workforce. * Meet <b>basic needs</b> for vulnerable populations, particularly older adults and youth.	Nonprofit organizations. Twin Cities metro area, with preference given to Minneapolis.
Open Your Heart to the Hungry and Homeless	(1) Hunger and Homeless grants (2) Emergency grants	(1) Hunger and Homeless grants made on periodic basis. Next	(1) Hunger and Homeless grants: For hunger relief programs and emergency shelter providers	Nonprofit agencies that serve hungry or homeless Minnesotans as the agency's primary function.



		deadline June 1 for Aug 1 decision. (2) Emergency grant applications get a faster decision.	servicing people experiencing homelessness or domestic violence survivors. (2) Emergency grants: When a natural disaster or other unforeseen event might result in a shutdown of services.	Emergency grants are only available to agencies that have no other resources available and will require suspending services without immediate assistance.
Blue Cross Blue Shield	COVID-19 rapid response fund	Applications due April 22 and May 6; both at noon CT.	Grants between \$5,000–\$25,000 for immediate needs due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Priority focus areas include but are not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emergency food shelf and food delivery for vulnerable people</li> <li>• Homelessness or housing insecurity exacerbated by the crisis.</li> </ul>	Nongovernmental, community-based 501(c)(3) organizations.
Otto Bremer Trust	Community Benefit Financial Company Emergency Fund	Rolling basis	Small grants to qualified nonprofits and other community organizations impacted by and responding to the pandemic.	Nonprofits and other community organizations; emergency requests only.
Bush Foundation	Community Innovation Grants		Scope and issue are open--projects that address a community problem. "Will expedite consideration of any Community Innovation grant applications related to COVID-19."	Nonprofit public charities or government entities, including schools.
Greater Twin Cities United Way	Greater Twin Cities COVID 19 Response and Recovery Fund	The first wave will close on April 22, 2020 at 5:00 p.m.	For nonprofits expanding current services and/or finding new and creative ways to support their community's emergency needs. Priority: nonprofits with unique capabilities to serve vulnerable populations, including people under 200% of poverty line; more than 50% black/indigenous; work aligns with long-term outcomes of housing stability, food stability, early childhood education, economic opportunity...	Nonprofit organizations and partnerships
Open Road Foundation	Direct COVID-19 Response	For organizations engaging in direct COVID-19 response; activities that have a clear and direct role in 'flattening the curve' and thus limiting, shortening, or minimizing the economic and social, as well as health effects of the pandemic.		

## Appendix F: Crosswalk of Priorities and Workgroup Recommendations

All approaches to meet our community’s needs must consider and include:

- Two-way communication with community;
- Racial equity;
- Culturally specific responses;
- Multiple language needs; and
- Access with and without technology and internet.

	Priority	Engagement Recommendation	Data Recommendation
1	Amplify and connect community to school food programs to feed the whole family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Replicate SPPS model; address problems that some have experienced with SPPS distribution, like meals running out, lack of transportation to pick-up sites, bus stop delivery times</li> <li>– Provide free storage options of food supplies until their time of delivery</li> </ul>	Develop partnerships with school districts in Ramsey County to provide food to families with children under age 18.
2	Connect community to financial assistance and benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Financial Assistance and Benefits (<i>main topic area</i>)</li> <li>– Encourage and assist residents to apply for SNAP online</li> <li>– Increase SNAP benefits amount and expand eligibility</li> <li>– Enable people to use SNAP to purchase groceries through online delivery apps</li> <li>– Improve communications so people know what resources are available</li> <li>– Expand SNAP/WIC to prepared foods, meals on wheels options, and CSAs</li> <li>– Establish/support mobile food trucks and meal delivery options that accept SNAP; encourage farmer’s markets to provide delivery</li> <li>– Widely communicate changes in how SNAP and WIC can be used</li> <li>– Help undocumented immigrants and documented immigrants with sponsors, who cannot apply for government benefits</li> </ul>	Connect people to existing food programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program; Women, Infants, and Children; and the Nutrition Assistance Program for Seniors.

3	<p>Connect community to existing and new food and essential services (includes overall communication plan and website)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Ensure people without internet access can apply and get application assistance</li> <li>– Provide application assistance to immigrants &amp; those with limited English</li> <li>– Elders, people with disabilities, and racial, ethnic and cultural groups have special needs and must be involved in planning</li> <li>– Information and Resource Sharing and Referrals (<i>main topic area</i>)</li> <li>– Work with partner agencies and community leaders on specific support and guidance, and focused communications</li> <li>– Use USPS to provide information to all households on how to get FBNS support</li> <li>– Develop a comprehensive communications plan to communities on resources, food access guidelines (SNAP, WIC), our distribution plan, etc.</li> <li>– Increase access to public computers/devices and the internet</li> <li>– Language and Interpreter Services &amp; Culturally-Specific Needs (<i>main topic area</i>)</li> <li>– Be innovative to reach people (for example, use social media creatively, and other forms of communications)</li> <li>– Partner with culturally specific and human service agencies to reach the most vulnerable populations.</li> </ul>	<p>Provide a single-entry point for access to food, whether through schools, Meals on Wheels home delivery, distribution sites, and other food and basic needs related resources.</p>
4	<p>Ensure individuals/households who are homebound have access to food and essential services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Food Storage, Distribution and Alternatives (<i>main topic area</i>)</li> <li>– Find options for people who lack transportation and are unable to accept meal delivery because of need for physical distancing due to health-related conditions</li> <li>– Accommodate special needs of seniors and disabled people during food distribution. Some disabilities</li> </ul>	<p>Increase the capacity of organizations that deliver prepared meals to provide prepared meals and foods to all single adults, not just seniors and people with disabilities.</p>

		<p>make ordering or shopping for food difficult</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Provide free storage options of food supplies until their time of delivery</li> <li>– Increase the number of interpreters at foodbanks; ensure that they are present at distribution sites</li> <li>– Rely on key partners in cultural communities as trusted messengers; use kinship networks</li> <li>– Partner with culturally specific and human service agencies to reach the most vulnerable populations.</li> </ul>	
5	Amplify food and basic needs distribution sites and alternatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Food Storage, Distribution and Alternatives (<i>main topic area</i>)</li> <li>– Work with culturally-specific agencies and ethnic grocers to serve as distribution sites, resource and referral hubs, and trusted messengers</li> <li>– Provide access to ethnic foods, dry goods, food for people with religious dietary restrictions (e.g., kosher/halal/other health related dietary needs)</li> <li>– Utilize places of worship, community sites, parks, and empty community storefronts as distribution sites, in addition to existing food shelves. Include suburban sites</li> <li>– Identify food trucks, restaurants and other food caterers to be “all-in” with incentives to participate</li> <li>– Provide free storage options of food supplies until their time of delivery</li> <li>– Increase the number of interpreters at foodbanks; ensure that they are present at distribution sites</li> <li>– Rely on key partners in cultural communities as trusted messengers; use kinship networks</li> <li>– Partner with culturally specific and human service agencies to reach the most vulnerable populations.</li> </ul>	Partner with Second Harvest and local food shelves and farmers markets to increase food distribution sites in neighborhoods that are most at-risk for food and basic needs insecurity.

6	Provide a centralized location and administrative coordination of community and business efforts, communications, donations, and volunteers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Set-up a county team to work with corporate partnerships to assist with donations, in-kind help, etc.</li> <li>– Engage partners that want to give back – seek donations, grant opportunities, and in-kind resources</li> <li>– Safety is a big concern for volunteers—provide resources/equipment to those who are afraid of community spread that want to be involved</li> </ul>	<p>Seek corporate and community donations to provide other basic needs items with all food boxes and prepared meal deliveries.</p> <p>Provide a centralized location and administrative coordination of community and business efforts.</p>
7	Increase capacity and access to public gardens, including equipment and materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Utilize places of worship, community sites, parks, and empty community storefronts Work with municipalities, UMN Extension, and other partners to make public and home gardening sites and supplies available. Widely promote, provide clear guidelines of legality, liability, and timing for us</li> </ul>	
8	Partner with community and county partners to meet food needs of individuals who are homeless		Partner with food trucks, restaurants, and caterers to provide on-site meals to the four homeless outreach locations and camps.
9	Increase transportation options for community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Assist in getting residents to food distribution sites and delivering food to residents in need, and in the community</li> <li>– Partner with medical transportation providers (i.e. metro mobility and other transportation providers) to offer “health promotion” trips to the grocery store, food shelf, or pharmacy</li> </ul>	
10	Throughout response track usage, anticipate demand, provide continuous improvement recommendations, and performance metrics in partnership with community		Develop a plan to track usage and anticipate demand, as well as provide continuous improvement recommendations and performance metrics.