



Rhode Island Community Food Bank

Strategic Plan 2013-2015

2013-2015 Strategic Planning Committee

John Muggeridge – Chair

Mary Flynn

Susan Gustaitis

Lisa Madsen

Manny Murray

Persi Sanclemente

William Walter

The Food Bank’s Mission, Values and Principles:

Our Mission: The Rhode Island Community Food Bank provides food to people in need and promotes long-term solutions to the problem of hunger.

Our Vision: The Food Bank is an innovative leader in solving the problem of hunger. In partnership with our Member Agencies, as well as government and community leaders, we build the public will to ensure that no one in Rhode Island goes hungry. We envision a day when everyone in Rhode Island has access to nutritious food through an efficient and sustainable acquisition and distribution network.

Our Core Values:

- Dignity: Treating others with respect, fairness and an understanding of our differences
- Accountability: Serving the community in a responsible manner, using resources wisely and acting with integrity
- Responsiveness: Delivering programs and services efficiently, ensuring access to food and other resources for people in need, even in the face of a changing environment
- Collaboration: Encouraging teamwork, cooperation and community partnerships

Our Guiding Principles:

Community: The Food Bank is successful because of broad public support and a sturdy network of Member Agencies. We can never take the public trust for granted, and we have to ensure the network remains strong, even in tough economic times.

Quality: The Food Bank must feed people well because good nutrition is critical to good health. We strive to offer the most nutritious food possible to those in need. Helping people obtain access to the federal nutrition programs and encouraging them to shop and cook wisely will have positive long-term consequences on public health, well-being and quality of life.

Sustainability: The crucial work of the Food Bank will go on far beyond the three years mapped out by this strategic plan. We have to operate the Food Bank as efficiently as possible and build on-going support for all of our programs. This means attracting new donors, new volunteers and advocates to our cause, even as we deepen the commitment of our current supporters.

Introduction

The Food Bank's Board of Directors and senior staff approached the strategic planning process with an appreciation for our unique value. We are the only Food Bank in Rhode Island and the only organization that receives donations of food from national corporations through Feeding America. We provide efficient distribution of donated and purchased food to our statewide network of 180 Member Agencies. We promote cooperation and best practices among our Member Agencies and offer multiple programs that directly benefit clients. The Food Bank is also able to gather information about the problem of hunger in the state, inform public officials and advocate for public policies to address the unmet needs of low-income Rhode Islanders.

In the current environment, the work of the Food Bank is more important than ever. During the period of our last strategic plan, 2009-2012, the prevalence of food insecurity and hunger reached a ten-year high due to soaring unemployment and growing poverty. By the end of FY12, emergency food pantries in Rhode Island were serving over 60,000 people each month. This is an increase of 58 percent from four years ago. Meanwhile, the number of emergency food programs has not increased; the same agencies are serving many more people and straining to keep up with this high level of demand.

As the need for food assistance skyrocketed, available resources declined. Congress cut emergency food and shelter grants that go directly to our Member Agencies. The state of Rhode Island significantly reduced funding for the Food Bank. USDA commodity supplies were cut back and donations from local supermarkets to the Food Bank decreased by 20 percent due to competition and greater efficiency in the food industry.

The downturn in the economy also resulted in more Rhode Island families becoming eligible for federal nutrition programs. Enrollment in SNAP doubled to reach 95,000 households, and SNAP benefits became the primary source of meals for low-income families in the state. As part of a statewide initiative led by the SNAP Outreach Project at the University of Rhode Island, the Food Bank assisted eligible food pantry clients in applying for benefits.

Despite all these efforts, many Rhode Islanders still miss out on meals. Of the 198 million meals needed, based on three meals per day for every low-income Rhode Islander, 34 million meals (17 percent) are missed over the course of a year. At the individual level, that means missing 15 meals per month, an unacceptable number.

The best way to close the meal gap is through restored jobs and wages. Yet, we expect the economic recovery to be slow and gradual, so that the high demand for food assistance will persist. Therefore, we seek to reduce the meal gap primarily by increasing participation in the federal nutrition programs, while directing emergency food assistance to the most vulnerable in our community and keeping our distribution network strong. Our mission remains unchanged: to ensure that no one in Rhode Island goes hungry. We are confident that this strategic plan will help us accomplish this mission and guide us through these challenging times.

The Strategic Planning Process

The Strategic Planning Committee began its work on December 12, 2011 and met on three additional occasions in February, March and May of 2012. The Committee reviewed the Food Bank's progress on the previous strategic plan and decided to make a change in the framework of the FY13-FY15 plan. The Committee decided that the goals and objectives of the new plan would span the full three-year period, but that a one-year work plan would be developed at the beginning of *each* of the three years. The group felt that the current environment is too unpredictable to create a three-year work plan.

The Committee began by working with staff to put together a Strategic Planning Briefing Book which outlines the environmental trends anticipated for the next few years. The primary trends include: 1) the continued high need for food assistance, 2) less donated and more purchased food, 3) modest fundraising growth, and 4) decreasing agency capacity. All of the subsequent planning focused on ways to address these trends.

Several focus groups were conducted as we moved forward with our planning. Staff met with the following groups: Food Advisory group, Agency Advisory Committee, clients, RICFB managers and directors, and outside experts. Staff then reported out to the Planning Committee and the Board as we developed the overarching goals and objectives.

The full board met on February 23, 2012 to review the process and begin identifying some of the major issues that needed to be addressed in the plan. The Board met again and reviewed and approved the goals on April 3, 2012. A Board vote at the June 14, 2012 meeting gave final approval for the plan.

Once the goals and objectives of the plan were approved by the full Board of Directors, the Food Bank's senior staff prepared a detailed work plan for FY13. The Strategic Planning Committee will continue to meet every six months to review progress on the plan.

We are grateful for the expert facilitation by Judy Kaye throughout our planning process.

Goal One: Target assistance to those populations most vulnerable to hunger.

The number of people seeking assistance at emergency food pantries in Rhode Island grew by an unprecedented 58 percent over the last four years. However, during the same period, food donations decreased as part of a national trend of greater efficiency in the food industry leaving less surplus food available for donation. Donated food is now a precious and limited resource and must be supplemented by food purchasing. Therefore, we should ensure that food assistance is directed to those at high risk for hunger.

Objective 1A: Maintain annual distribution at 17 million meals through the Food Bank's network and increase the number of meals going to households with children and seniors to one-half of the total.

Children and seniors are two important high-risk populations. We will prioritize households with children and seniors for emergency food assistance and develop special initiatives for them. While the Food Bank's overall distribution will remain level, the percentage of meals provided to households with children and seniors will increase from 40 percent to 50 percent by 2015.

Objective 1B: Work with state agencies and other partners to increase participation in the federal nutrition programs by 10 percent to reduce the meal gap.

For the entire population of low-income Rhode Islanders, 34 million meals are missed over the course of a year. The best way to close this meal gap is to improve access to the federal nutrition programs. We will continue to coordinate outreach efforts with the Feinstein Center for a Hunger Free America at the University of Rhode Island. We will also cooperate with state agencies responsible for the SNAP, WIC, school breakfast and school lunch programs to improve enrollment and participation.

Objective 1C: Develop and implement a broad-based plan to provide assistance to seniors that includes emergency food, federal nutrition program outreach, improved access to social service programs and nutrition education.

Low-income seniors are under-served and face many barriers to adequate nutrition. We will tailor food distribution programs to better serve seniors and address their unique nutritional needs. We will also help seniors apply for SNAP and develop the expertise to refer them to other critical social services.

Objective 1D: Expand the Food Bank's overall nutrition education programming.

Building on the success of Raising the Bar on Nutrition, the Food Bank will create a comprehensive nutrition education program in cooperation with our Member Agencies. We want low-income families to have the tools to make healthy choices while preparing meals on a tight budget, particularly households with children and seniors.

Goal Two: Build on the reputation and history of the Food Bank to increase support through innovative campaigns for funds and food.

Objective 2A: Exceed the three-year revenue projection by 10 percent through new fundraising and marketing campaigns.

Increasingly, our donors want us to demonstrate the value of their financial contribution. We will hone our fundraising messages to highlight donor impact and create campaigns that communicate the Food Bank's ability to leverage each dollar donated. This effort will produce an additional \$530,000 by 2015.

Objective 2B: Conduct an innovative campaign to boost food drive donations to 1 million pounds.

As traditional sources of surplus food decline, the Food Bank must find new ways to promote local food donations. In cooperation with retail stores, corporate sponsors and community partners, we will establish a year-round campaign for food donations. Our goal is to increase annual food drive donations from 600,000 to one million pounds by 2015.

Objective 2C: Conduct a legislative campaign to significantly increase the state's annual commitment of funds for the Food Bank to acquire food.

In FY08, the Food Bank was allocated \$384,000 from the Rhode Island General Assembly. This amount was reduced to \$192,000 in FY09 and cut again in FY12 to \$173,000, even though every dollar of the state grant is used to acquire food. Other states provide much higher levels of funding to their food banks, overall and on a per capita basis, to increase the food supply:

State	Food Bank Funding (FY12)	Per Capita
New York	\$30,000,000	\$1.54
Massachusetts	\$11,000,000	\$1.67
New Jersey	\$3,900,000	\$0.44
Connecticut	\$ 600,000	\$0.17
Rhode Island	\$ 172,819	\$0.16

We will work with state legislators to achieve a greater annual commitment for food purchase.

Objective 2D: Increase Board engagement through an annual self-assessment and fundraising plan.

Board members play a central role in fundraising. We will develop an annual plan that sets specific goals for the Board in raising funds and assisting in our stewardship of major donors.

Goal Three: Ensure a sustainable statewide food distribution network.

Objective 3A: Create geographic contingency plans for maintaining the distribution system.

Many of our Member Agencies are facing difficult challenges with regard to funding, staffing and program leadership. We are concerned that key agencies may drastically reduce services or stop operating altogether. The Food Bank will assess the network's capacity to maintain distribution to all areas of the state, especially those serving high-need communities, and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of each individual Member Agency. Based on this evaluation, we will strengthen the network through financial assistance, capital improvements and joint planning sessions in each region of the state.

Objective 3B: Create an educational series that includes workshops, special training, peer training and one-on-one training for Member Agencies and agency personnel.

A recent Member Agency capacity survey demonstrated the need for education and training in multiple areas, including leadership development, succession planning, cultural competency and fundraising. We will expand our educational offerings and referral base in all of these areas. We will also create opportunities for network members to train each other in best practices.

Objective 3C: Expand the regional forum work to all high-need cities with a strong focus on Providence as the area with the highest concentration of agencies.

The Food Bank is in a unique position to convene our Member Agencies in order to strengthen connections and improve communication. Currently, some agencies participate in regional meetings or "forums" to coordinate services and share resources. We will increase participation in existing regional meetings and expand the forum model to high-need areas that would benefit from similar coordination and collective action.