



Rhode Island Community Food Bank

Strategic Plan 2009 2012

Strategic Planning Committee

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Introduction

The Rhode Island Community Food Bank must adjust to a rapidly changing environment and stay true to its mission: Ensuring that no one in Rhode Island goes hungry. After 27 years, the Food Bank is more important than ever as the economic recession has left thousands of Rhode Island families in financial crisis. While the demand for food assistance escalates, the Food Bank faces shortages of surplus food donations due to intense competition in the food industry and tighter inventory controls.

The political environment has also changed. The state's budget deficit has resulted in cuts to many social service programs, including state funding for the Food Bank. Yet, as state money constricts, the federal possibilities increase. The Obama Administration promises to expand the federal nutrition programs that are a crucial component of any long-term solution for the problem of hunger.

As we adjust to meet new goals and objectives with programs and activities reflective of these broad changes in our society, we keep certain principles in mind:

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.

The three principles stated above have guided us through the strategic planning process, and we have examined all of our programs and services in light of these tenets. The goals and objectives presented here are the product of this careful assessment and re-evaluation of our work. We believe this strategic plan gives us an exciting and useful map for the Food Bank through 2012.

The Strategic Planning Process

The Strategic Planning Committee began its work in January 2008 and has had six formal meetings. We began by looking at our progress in achieving the goals set in the last strategic plan and reviewing results from a consumer satisfaction survey completed by our Member Agencies and from a satisfaction survey of our employees. The committee agreed that our product should be a three-year plan, given the rapidly changing and unpredictable environment we face today.

In two initial meetings with the full Board, we reviewed our mission and vision. During the summer of 2008, the Food Bank's senior directors prepared reports on key areas: Acquisition and distribution, the Cooperative Purchase Program, Member Agencies, Food Bank programs, the federal nutrition programs, fundraising and financial trends. The senior directors also prepared a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis in collaboration with the Food Bank's managers. The full Board met again to review these staff reports in August and September 2008.

Also in the fall, the Food Bank's senior directors and managers worked on developing a set of core values. A focus group of Food Bank employees was convened to gain their input. There was consensus that the following values should guide our work everyday:

- 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

In order to set overarching goals for the next three years, we held a full day Board retreat in January 2009. The retreat led to agreement on four broad strategic goals to enhance the mission. The Food Bank's senior directors and managers were charged with establishing objectives under each goal. (We define a goal as a future state that we strive to achieve; an objective is a short-term target with measurable results.) The proposed goals and objectives were also reviewed with the Food

Bank s 'Agency Advisory Committee and committee members provided additional ideas and feedback.

After the goals and objectives were approved by the Board, the Food Bank s 'senior directors prepared a detailed work plan with specific activities and outcomes. The Strategic Planning Committee will continue to meet every six months to monitor our progress in achieving these outcomes.

We are grateful for the help that we received during the strategic planning process from two dedicated and talented consultants, Mary Cimini and the late Sharon Chancellor.

Mission and Vision

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

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.

Goal One

Optimize operations and systems to ensure maximum efficiency in product acquisition and distribution as well as in our direct service programs.

With less surplus food available for donation to the Food Bank, we have to use donated dollars to purchase food and ensure high quality goods efficiently reach people most in need.

- Objective 1A: Leverage food purchase in collaboration with other food banks and Feeding America to reduce cost per pound.

Over the next three years, we will develop programs with both regional and national partners to purchase more food at low-cost.

- Objective 1B: Utilize all available sources of food to maintain current high percentage of core food acquisition and distribution.

The Food Bank has already made a concerted effort to increase the percentage of core food that we acquire and distribute. Core food is nutritious canned food and fresh produce (including locally grown food from Rhode Island farms) that can be used to prepare healthy meals. We will strive to increase core food from 78 to 84 percent of all food acquired.

- Objective 1C: Invest in new inventory systems, increase efficiency in food transportation and decrease facility expenses.

The Food Bank's facility operations and transportation logistics are sophisticated and efficient, but we expect energy costs to rise, increasing the expense of warehousing and transporting food. In response to this trend, we will use technology and energy saving practices to reduce our operations, fuel and energy costs.

- Objective 1D: Focus distribution to ensure that Member Agencies can meet the growing demand for food assistance.

The greatest challenge facing the Food Bank is supplying enough food to meet the demand at emergency food programs. Through a careful evaluation of the reach and capacity of our Member Agencies, we will be able to direct a larger percentage of our food resources to those most in need.

- Objective 1E: Prepare for special hunger-relief efforts that will be necessary in response to a disaster or state emergency.

The Food Bank should be prepared to play a role in disaster relief. In the coming year, a generator will be installed in our facility so the Food Bank can operate during a black-out. We will partner with the Rhode Island Emergency Management Agency to establish a food distribution plan that can be implemented during an emergency.

- Objective 1F: Conduct cost-benefit analysis of each direct service program to achieve program goals at lowered cost.

In order to maximize efficiency, we have selected certain programs, such as the Cooperative Purchase Program, for growth. At the same time, we have to evaluate all of our other programs to determine whether costs can be reduced and services sustained over time.

Goal Two

Increase public awareness of the federal nutrition programs and increase utilization of these programs among eligible individuals.

In order to strengthen Rhode Island's nutrition safety net, we want to ensure that eligible households participate in federal nutrition programs. We should attempt to ease the stigma attached to food stamps and school breakfast and to educate the public about the far-reaching economic benefits of these programs for individuals, their neighborhoods and for the entire state of Rhode Island.

- Objective 2A: Sustain the Food Bank's current success in raising public awareness about the problem of hunger while forming new partnerships to promote the federal nutrition programs.

The Food Bank will promote the federal nutrition programs through broad public education and more targeted efforts to encourage eligible individuals to enroll.

- Objective 2B: Collaborate with the Food Stamp Outreach Project at the University of Rhode Island to conduct outreach and provide application assistance at Member Agencies.

The Food Stamp Program (recently renamed the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or SNAP) can boost the buying power of low-income families where they need it the most –in the supermarket. The Food Bank will hire staff and train volunteers to conduct outreach at our Member Agencies in order to increase SNAP participation.

- Objective 2C: Build collaboration between member agencies and local schools to increase participation in federal School Breakfast and School Lunch programs.

Nutritious school meals help children learn and help low-income families stretch their limited financial resources. The Food Bank will collaborate with food pantries to encourage parents to enroll their children in free school meals and promote participation at local schools.

Goal Three

Build on the reputation and history of the Food Bank to increase community participation and support.

Over the past 27 years, the Food Bank has built a loyal base made up of thousands of supporters. In the future, our success will depend on having a well-informed and involved Board of Directors, new donors and volunteers, and a renewed commitment from our most generous supporters.

- Objective 3A: Create a communications and development strategy to increase online donations.

The public is increasingly comfortable with donating online and some donors actually prefer to receive email rather than letters from us. Over the next three years, we want to become more adept at communicating with an online audience through our Web site, blogs and relevant social media.

- Objective 3B: Expand major donor, private foundation and planned giving programs.

In order to support all of the initiatives in this plan, the Food Bank must increase levels of overall giving and grants for specific programs. Our fundraising strategy is to reach out to individual donors and foundations to deepen their support for the Food Bank.

- Objective 3C: Recruit new donors and re-engage current major donors through a new capital campaign.

The Food Bank's roof will need to be replaced in three years. This gives us time to launch a well-planned capital campaign.

- Objective 3D: Enhance the Food Bank's ability to attract and retain a quality Board of Directors and engage the Board in public education and raising funds.

The Food Bank is fortunate to have a dedicated Board of Directors. Its 24 members bring a wide range of expertise and knowledge to the governance of the organization. Our goal is for Board members to become even more involved in promoting the Food Bank and seeking donations on our behalf.

- Objective 3E: Find new and innovative ways to engage volunteers in our advocacy efforts and programs.

The daily work of the Food Bank would not be possible without the dedication of hundreds of regular volunteers. Their time and effort is supplemented by volunteer groups and students. The Food Bank will add new volunteer opportunities particularly aimed at engaging children and teenagers in our work.

Goal Four

Support Member Agencies in their efforts to meet our shared mission and vision.

The Food Bank's most important stakeholders are its Member Agencies. Through better customer service and by promoting best practices, we hope to strengthen our entire network.

- Objective 4A: Offer the best customer service to each Member Agency and use qualitative and quantitative data from the network to improve Food Bank practices.

The Agency Advisory Committee has an important role in providing constructive criticism to Food Bank staff and Board members. Our hope is to continue to use feedback from the Committee and open more avenues of communication with the network in order to bring customer service to the next level.

- Objective 4B: Offer nutrition education at Member Agencies and conduct research to evaluate the effectiveness of this approach in changing diet and health.

Along with providing nutritious food, the Food Bank promotes healthy food choices. Emergency food programs are a natural venue for nutrition education. We want to pilot and test new approaches that take into account the reality of preparing meals on a tight budget.

- Objective 4C: Promote best practices across agencies that improve access to food resources and decrease the stigma associated with receiving food assistance.

Our Member Agencies are constantly coming up with new ideas and innovative approaches to meet the changing needs of their clients. We hope to increase collaboration and information sharing among Member Agencies to spread this wealth of knowledge and experience.