

Build Back Better - Emergency Food System in Montgomery County, PA

Vision Team Strategic Overview



The Big Picture

We commit to improving the emergency food system in Montgomery County. We recognize this system is not only used for temporary, emergency situations, but as a primary source of food for too many of our residents. This is a result of systemic racism, inequity, and a lack of value that our society has for women, children, seniors, people of color, and other marginalized populations. We look forward to a day when no one needs to rely on an emergency food system to meet the most basic, universal, human need that there is; food.

Accessible, healthy food is a basic human right. People should not have to rely on charity to stay fed!

Executive Summary

BBB-EFSMC is an important collaboration defining the future course of Montgomery County's Emergency Food System based on lessons learned and opportunities realized during the COVID-19 pandemic. The project goal is to stimulate ongoing collaborative action across the system that enables people struggling with hunger to feed themselves and their families more securely.

Our county's lead emergency food organizations -- MontCo Anti-Hunger Network, Montgomery County Government, Philabundance, and Share Food Program -- agreed the time was right to do something bold, just, human centered, and called for in these times.

They therefore formed a "Vision Team" comprising thought leaders from emergency food distributors, front-line providers, and consumers. The Vision Team worked to holistically understand current state and changes needed to equitably meet the needs of people experiencing food insecurity in Montgomery County, PA. The resulting strategic vision is documented herein.

This work was generously supported by HealthSpark Foundation

Our Process

The work was accomplished by 35 individuals (Vision Team) engaged in Montgomery County PA's emergency food space. Contributing experts included food distributors, service providers, consumers, representatives of key human services agencies, and agents of county government.

We used MIT's Theory U framework to explore how other emergency food distributors and providers continue to evolve while addressing critical questions and challenges. Theory U methods include:

- ❖ Co-Initiating - building the “container” and making sense of background information
- ❖ Co-Sensing - observe; continuing to explore the key questions
- ❖ Co-Presencing - landing together - aligning
- ❖ Co-Creating - stepping into the new with confidence
- ❖ Co-Realizing - making it happen together

Through this process, we learned from each other and the broader nonprofit, government and philanthropic communities. Our next steps will include prototype refinement and launching, and continued development of methods that make the system more just, sustainable, consistent, and coordinated.

Strategic Pillars



*Serving more people
& each person better
through collaboration in
the Montgomery County
Emergency Food System*

Our Strategic Pillars:

In service of all people experiencing food insecurity

- ❖ Just and Human Centered Design: Commit to consumer informed & empowering practices; Shift the driving force behind our work from charity to justice; Destigmatize the system & elevate dignity
- ❖ Consistency & Coordination: Improve communication, processes, and technology to reduce duplication of effort, increase efficiency & service coverage, and ensure continuity of equitable service to all consumers
- ❖ Funding the Work: Achieve the right mix of funding to maintain sustainability of individual agencies and the entire system over the long run
- ❖ Advocacy: Unify our voices to create greater equity within our system and influence food policy
- ❖ New Pathways to Success: Develop tactics/processes to ensure equitable access to food support that meets consumers where they are in the community

Statement of Intent: Just & Human Centered Design

Commit to consumer informed & empowering practices; Shift the driving force behind our work from charity to justice; Destigmatize the system & elevate dignity

Strategies for Just & Human Centered Design

- ❖ Center all decisions impacting consumers on their voices engaging marginalized communities that include people of color, documented & undocumented immigrants, people with disabilities, LGBTQ+ population, and people experiencing homelessness with a focus on intersectionality
- ❖ Commit to and invest in inclusive and equitable programming and practices that rectify what is unjust in our system.
- ❖ Develop cultural competence that improves our understanding of, respect for, and responsiveness to the diverse consumers we serve
- ❖ Increase consumer choice and ease of access for consumers including communicating about available food resources

Statement of Intent: Consistency & Coordination

Improve communication, processes, and technology to reduce duplication of effort, increase efficiency & service coverage, and ensure continuity of equitable service to all consumers

Strategies for Consistency & Coordination

- ❖ Serve everyone in need by collaborating across the nonprofit sector (senior & community centers, schools, home delivered meal programs, churches, etc.) to identify people experiencing food insecurity and homelessness, at-risk veterans, immigrants, seniors, people with disabilities, and others with accessibility issues
- ❖ Ensure consumer access to language translation, transportation, & wrap around services (including housing, counseling) so they can fully respond to the range of consumer needs
- ❖ Eliminate barriers to good service from distributor/provider relationships by creating needed logistical support and strong feedback loops that mitigate the distributor/provider power imbalance and address concerns:
 - adequate storage and transportation of food
 - timeliness of food deliveries relative to distribution
 - spoiled food management
 - redundancy in regulatory training
- *NOTE: Distributors include Philabundance/Share Food Program, Providers include pantries.*

Strategies for Consistency & Coordination Cont.

- ❖ Mitigate competition between distributors, and between providers to increase efficiency, expand customer service: more food, more times to more people
- ❖ Identify and develop best practices in providing excellent consumer service
- ❖ Create easily accessible spaces for information & knowledge sharing between county, food distributors, providers, and consumers to:
 - share network knowledge of food pantry operations/best practices
 - enable timely sharing of food and other resources as they come available
 - share recipes and nutritional information
 - keep service providers and consumers aware of county programs/benefits
 - track consumer use of pantries across the county
- *NOTE: Distributors include Philabundance/Share Food Program, Providers include pantries.*

Statement of Intent: Funding the Work

Achieve the right mix of funding to maintain sustainability of individual agencies and the entire system over the long run

Strategies for Funding the Work

- ❖ Align goals of funders and providers by discussing, and agreeing on best practices, placing as much value on quality of service rendered as number of people served with funders contributing to the full expense of programming including staff.
- ❖ Unpack what collaboration looks like with funders defining their expectations of funded collaborations exploring the benefits and challenges of collaborative funding that engages partners from the same sector and across different sectors.
- ❖ Restructure metrics educating service providers on the elements of program design (particularly the differences between outputs, outcomes, impact); discuss and address the disconnect between funders' requests for program data and the agency's ability to collect it.
- ❖ Diversify funding sources creating a plan to engage foundations, businesses, civic /faith-based organizations, and all levels of government

Statement of Intent: Advocacy

Unify our voices to create greater equity within our system and influence food policy

Strategies for Advocacy

- ❖ Develop service provider capacity to advocate by helping them understand their legal rights, and the value in elevating stories and voices of people with lived experience.
- ❖ Educate elected officials on what hunger looks like in their districts
- ❖ Advocate to/with elected officials on policy addressing equitable food access
- ❖ Address how our beliefs and organizational cultures contribute to an unjust system
- ❖ Leverage network influence to obtain data on county hunger by engaging county and state government officials.

Statement of Intent: New Pathways to Success

Develop tactics/processes ensuring equitable access to food support that meets consumers where they are in the community

Strategies for New Pathways to Success I

Prototypes Being Tested:

- ❖ Establish mechanisms for ongoing consumer feedback
- ❖ Reduce language/cultural barriers through shared approaches and services
- ❖ Deliver food to organizations convening people in need of food assistance
- ❖ Share recipes/nutritional information system-wide
- ❖ Develop platform(s) for sharing information about county services

Strategies for New Pathways to Success II

Additional Prototypes Suggested by Vision Team but not yet taken up:

- ❖ No wrong door connection to wrap around services
- ❖ Co-operated pantries (nearby pantries sharing resources to increase hours/access)
- ❖ Co-located food pantry and support services in one stop, grocery store format
- ❖ Centralized fulfillment center for vulnerable groups such as isolated seniors and at-risk veterans
- ❖ Platform for sharing network knowledge and information about county services
- ❖ County funding for council to look at county needs/policies, etc.
- ❖ Take a step back and get more consumer input. Who Are Customers?

Strategies for New Pathways to Success III

Existing/Launching Programs Supporting Strategic Pillars [Contact]:

- ❖ Racial Equity Learning Community [BMC/TCN/ICN: Kristyn DiDominick]
- ❖ St. Gabriel's Warehouse and Community Farm [CSS, Audubon: Patrick Walsh]
- ❖ Philly Food Rescue App-Connecting volunteers to food distribution [SFP: Pat Druhan]
- ❖ Food Lockers for better access [Salem Baptist/PHLB: Pastor Marshall Mitchell/Loree Jones]
- ❖ Online/Phone ordering with pickup or delivery [e.g., The Open Link: Stu Bush]
- ❖ Student Basic Needs Consortium [GMU, MCCC, Manna, PCRC: Betsy Plummer]
- ❖ Social Enterprise: Common Grounds Food Service Training [Manna: Suzan Gould]
- ❖ Food Bank Manager-database that tracks consumer use [SFP: Pat Druhan]

Just & Human Centered Design Definitions

Start with Common Understandings:

- ❖ Equity: understanding and giving people what they need to enjoy full, healthy lives; focus is on equal outcomes
- ❖ Equality: ensuring that everyone gets the same things in order to enjoy full, healthy lives; focus is on equal resources
- ❖ Racial Justice: systematic fair treatment of people of all races that results in equitable opportunities and outcomes for everyone
- ❖ Inclusion: action or state of including or of being included within a group or structure involving authentic and empowered participation and a true sense of belonging

The Annie E. Casey Foundation, Race Equity and Inclusion Action Guide



PHILABUNDANCE

