

*The National Affinity Group on Jewish Poverty presents*

## **COVID-19 Funder Briefs (1 of 6)** **Food Insecurity**

Those facing food insecurity come from all walks of life.

The pandemic is further exacerbating an already difficult situation as people struggle with limitations on transportation, closure of community spaces, and most importantly, extreme financial hardship caused by job loss, underemployment, and emergency childcare. Some people are seeing an increase in existing financial challenges. Others are experiencing new and unexpected hardship for the very first time.

Jewish social service agencies already on the frontlines, have been forced to work differently while ramping up programs and services to address new and growing needs.

The National Affinity Group on Jewish Poverty is highlighting these efforts, looking at concrete opportunities to partner and invest in this work.

### **Needs**

**Many individuals and families are struggling to afford meals and groceries.** Organizations addressing these needs are facing challenges with accessing food supply, providing efficient and safe meal distribution, protecting staff on the ground, and leveraging technology in a socially distant environment—all while facing loss of revenue during the pandemic.

**Many people who are living alone, sheltering in place, or have limited or no transportation options, are unable to get to food pantries or other distribution locations, hindering access to free or low-cost food even where it is available.** This has been a particularly acute challenge for those with disabilities and older adults, particularly Holocaust Survivors.

**For those who rely on others to prepare their meals,** less assistance at home during the pandemic often means they are not eating. **There is a new and increased need for prepared meals.**

*Pantry stock has been uniquely impacted during the pandemic by loss of donations of food and supplies that would typically be made by hotels, restaurants, and grocery stores.*

*A Federation in a mid-size city shares that its meal delivery program for seniors has needed to serve about 50 percent more clients in the past few months. An agency in a large metro area has not only doubled their home delivered meals program but also created a grocery delivery service.*

### **Investment Opportunities: First Response**

Food pantries and nonprofits have ramped up provision of food, prepared meals, and groceries by increasing capacity, providing direct financial assistance, adding grab and go options, setting up new food distribution sites, and innovating and scaling delivery services. Funding is needed to support all of these activities.

### **Investment Opportunities: Supporting and Sustaining Organizations**

Agencies need support to increase stock and expand their physical operations, including adding ramps, refrigeration, and storage at warehouses and food pantries.

In some locations there is a need to open new warehouses, food distribution sites, or mobile pantries.

Organizations need to hire and onboard new staff, grow their volunteer base, and provide additional support for existing staff.

Organizations need robust technology infrastructure, devices, Wi-Fi, and tech support to effectively increase capacity, work remotely where needed, and deliver virtual services or programs.

To help plan for long-term impact, organizations need funds to assess, scale, and replicate programs, and manage agency coordination such as colocation of food distribution with wraparound social services.

Emergency funds continue to be critical in these challenging times. They allow for needed flexibility to address unexpected and rapidly growing client needs and help organizations manage increased costs and make critical pivots even as they face significant loss of revenue.

### **Addressing Needs: New Directions**

- A national clearinghouse or food purchasing group could add value and save costs over time.
- Food program initiatives such as integrating programming with reduced cost groceries and subsidizing products at food markets could allow for food distribution in an open and accessible manner with reduced stigma.
- Partnering with home delivery services, Uber, Arro, volunteer corps, and others, to ensure those who are most isolated still get the assistance they need.

### **Innovative Systems: Cutting Edge Digital Tools**

With support from UJA-Federation of NY, new technology is transforming the food pantry system. Met Council's new Digital Food Pantry System is the first of its kind for a kosher food network to be integrated with a central warehouse inventory system to allow online ordering. The system serves a wide-ranging, heterogenous clientele.

The online ordering system allows clients to order food either at a participating pantry site, or from the convenience of their own home. Clients are also able to select a pick-up time for their food package, making the system work best for them.

While taking the client's choices and preferences into consideration, the food package orders are also based on the nutritional requirements mandated by New York State and on household size.

The Digital Food Pantry System is currently operational at six sites, which together serve 11 satellite locations.

<https://www.metcouncil.org/kosher-food-network>

### **Philanthropic Response**

Foundations and donors are invited to reach out and join in this work within the framework of the National Affinity Group on Jewish Poverty.

Please contact **Deena Fuchs, Executive Vice President of Jewish Funders Network**, at [Deena@jfunders.org](mailto:Deena@jfunders.org) to learn more.

Data, quotes, and other insights included in this brief are sourced from convenings, webinars, and work-group meetings hosted by the National Affinity Group on Jewish Poverty; JFN COVID-19 response surveys; and organizational websites.