



Greater Chicago Food Depository

COVID-19 Response

July 2020

More than four months into our COVID-19 response, the Greater Chicago Food Depository has quickly mobilized to support both emergency and long-term needs. This situation requires that we continue to be nimble to support community partners and the individuals they serve.

THE NEED FOR FOOD IS STILL GROWING

As the food bank serving Chicago and Cook County, Illinois, we reach more than 812,000 people annually – one in seven individuals – and distribute the equivalent of 197,000 meals each day through a network of 700 pantries, soup kitchens, homeless shelters and community programs. Food pantries in our network reported serving an average of 89 percent more individuals in the last three weeks compared to January 2020. We expect to see these numbers grow as the economic fallout of the pandemic continues, coupled with more than 1.3 million unemployment claims in Illinois since March.



OUR EVOLVING RESPONSE

The pandemic has presented unique challenges to distributing food through our partner food pantries, many of which are staffed by volunteers who are older and who may be more at risk of the virus. In the early days of the pandemic, when schools and businesses were ordered to close, the Food Depository moved swiftly to help our partners serve a growing number of people facing hunger. Throughout the crisis, about 70 percent of the Food Depository's network of food pantries, soup kitchens and shelters has remained operational.

The Food Depository's response to the pandemic has continued to evolve. Here are some steps we have taken to meet a dramatic rise in need for food assistance.

- The Food Depository is co-leading an effort with the City of Chicago and other local nonprofits and government entities to provide food for anyone in need during the coronavirus pandemic.
- Since early March, the Food Depository has provided guidance to our network of community partners on how to continue operating while reducing risk. Today, our partners are largely distributing pre-packed bags and boxes of food or meals to-go.
- To keep our partners strong and operational, the Food Depository launched a \$1 million grant program in early April. All of our partners are eligible to receive funding. Grant sizes were determined based on equity, with attention on communities with large populations of African American and Latinx residents, who already faced higher risks of poverty and food insecurity.
- To best serve these communities, predominantly on the city's South and West sides, the Food Depository launched new pop-up distributions in partnership with faith and community partners. Each distribution serves between 500 to 1,000 households in need. Families receive bags of fresh produce, protein and a box filled with 20 to 30 pounds of nonperishable goods.
- The Food Depository has mobilized its many committed volunteers to produce thousands of those boxes of nonperishable food, which include items like canned fruits and vegetables, rice and beans, pasta and pasta sauce, peanut butter and more. To ensure safety of volunteer projects in our warehouse, our volunteer engagement and operations staff have implemented additional safety precautions. These new measures include requiring face masks, organizing projects to adhere to social distancing guidelines, and increased cleanings of our facility.