



Vision

For everyone in Northern Illinois to have the food they need to thrive.

Mission

To provide nutritious food and resources for our neighbors, with dignity, equity and convenience, through partnerships and innovation.

2021-2025

STRATEGIC PLAN UNITE

Uniting our neighbors and communities to ensure everyone has access to the food they need and want.

Introduction

When we began our planning process in late 2019, Northern Illinois Food Bank—in partnership with our network of 900 agencies and feeding programs—was distributing a notable 69 million meals, meeting the meal gap at 91% of our communities.

We are grateful to all our donors, volunteers and network who joined us in an intensive five-year journey to distribute meals equitably across our 13 counties.

However, in recent years it became evident that **we were not reaching all our neighbors who needed help.** These included neighbors unaware of our network and programs, those uncomfortable accessing help, neighbors whose work schedules conflicted with pantry hours, and those living in areas with limited resources.

Throughout our initial planning conversations, leaders and stakeholders expressed a commitment to identify innovative, neighbor-centric solutions to assist every person and family who may be struggling to have enough food. **Reaching all our neighbors with new approaches and providing access to the food they need and desire, emerged as the cornerstone of this plan.**

With the onset of 2020 came an unprecedented health and economic crisis. This year propelled us to create a road map to meet a quickly rising demand for food, design a better experience for neighbors and prioritize solutions for communities disproportionately impacted by hunger. **Through this plan we take responsibility to serve more neighbors, especially those neighbors we often miss.**

What do our neighbors need and want?

▶ **To stabilize their lives and help their families.**

"[The mobile pantry] helps because it gives us food when we don't have it, especially at the end of the month."

Up to 1 in 9 people in our communities are now food insecure.

▶ **To feel safe, welcomed and valued when they seek help.**

"I don't know what I would have done without [the pantry]. Things have been rough, but they treat me like I'm family."

Households of color are 2X more likely to be food insecure than white, non-Hispanic households.

▶ **To access food when and where it works for their life.**

"Stuff like this [Pop-Up Market]—we're so grateful for it because we have what we need."

Only 5% of individuals identified as low income utilize a food pantry.

▶ **To have what they want and need to be nourished.**

"When you know that you can at least have a full dinner table, then all has not fallen by the wayside."

77% of seniors buy the cheapest food possible, even if they know it's unhealthy.

Pathways



Empower our Neighbors

We are **designing with and for neighbors**, so they experience **more choice, better access, and less stigma**. This requires us to continue to **innovate in our food programs** and to find ways to respond to diverse needs.

Enhance Food Supply

We are providing **nutritious food, consistently and equitably** throughout all of our communities. This requires us to **understand our neighbors** needs and wants, invigorate **donor stewardship** and **invest funds in acquiring nutritious foods**.

Embrace Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion

We are **addressing inequalities** by raising awareness of the **disproportionate impact of food insecurity** on marginalized communities and adapting to become a more **diverse, equitable, and inclusive** organization.

Engage our Network

We are **growing stronger together** with our network of feeding programs to increase access and advance neighbor-centric practices. This requires us to **co-create and share leadership** with agency leaders, **invest in agency capacity**, and **welcome new partners** who extend our reach.

Evolve the Food Bank

We are becoming a **stronger and more adaptable** Food Bank. This requires us to **grow a community support and awareness** of food insecurity and promote the Food Bank as the solution to hunger. We are also **upgrading our technology and expanding our use of data** to better meet the needs of our network and neighbors.

Strategic Initiatives FY21-23

- Reach neighbors we often miss by enhancing direct-to-neighbor approaches including **mobile markets, SNAP outreach, and direct marketing.**
- Increase the number of neighbors we serve and improve the cost-efficiency of **My Pantry Express** through collaboration with agencies and retailers.
- Improve the experience of diverse neighbors and identify the Food Bank's best roles in **improving health**, through **intentional network collaboration.**
- Understand and **build agency capacity** to meet the evolving need.
- Meet community needs by **adding food distributions at South Suburban Center and relocating North Suburban Center** to improve volunteer capacity and experience.
- Strengthen food donor relationships and adopt a **strategic approach to food allocation.**
- Seek **feedback and input from neighbors** to drive food sourcing decisions.
- Advance matters of **diversity, equity, and inclusion** internally and externally, by systematically assessing and revising our beliefs, practices and actions.
- Increase the **Food Bank's resources and presence** through strategic philanthropy, volunteer recruitment, brand building and purposeful advocacy.
- **Implement new technology** to enhance our understanding of neighbors, improve our efficiency and accuracy and better inform our strategy.

How we'll measure our progress.

