



Channel One  
Regional  
**Food  
Bank**

MEMBER OF  
**FEEDING®  
AMERICA**



*2020*  
**COMMUNITY REPORT**

# Dear Friends and Neighbors,

As Channel One reflects on 2020, of course the pandemic is top of mind. This time last year we were rapidly packing our dry food into boxes and ordering as much non-perishable food as we could get our hands on. We made the difficult decision to close our food shelf for client choice shopping and were serving our neighbors with prepacked boxes. We were also anxiously looking down the nose of a \$200,000 deficit each month – with the projected increase in need, the increased cost of serving food in boxes, and the soaring food prices and disrupted supply chains.



Wow – what a difference a year can make! A majority of Channel One's partners across the region have modified their operations to safely offer client shoppers the ability to select their food. The Channel One food shelf is back open for shopping – expanded with the help of CARES Act funding. It has also been transformed into a "Supershelf" – prioritizing healthy food options and inclusivity. Channel One is also financially healthy because of the generous support of the community and thoughtful partnerships with State and local governments.

This time last year, I never would have imagined that the pandemic – the most intense time in Channel One's history in terms of increased need and obstacles to safe food delivery – would present Channel One with the opportunity to try innovative approaches to serving our neighbors. Channel One served prepared meals for the first time in our history. We are proud to not only have served prepared meals, but also have subcontracted with BIPOC owned businesses to provide culturally relevant food to communities of color and we delivered the food directly to communities in high need of food support. Channel One also partnered with the Rochester Public Library to screen callers to the COVID-19 hotline for food insecurity and deliver groceries to the homes of homebound people or people lacking transportation. COVID-19 specific funding and partnerships allowed us to test the concept and get an idea of the demand, and we learned that we do have the capacity to offer delivery. We will continue to test innovative ideas as we transition from the pandemic emergency to the new normal.

*"The Channel One food shelf is back open for shopping... It has also been transformed into a 'Supershelf' – prioritizing healthy food options and inclusivity."*

Channel One is officially halfway through our three-year strategic plan. The pandemic affirmed our mission: it is not just about having food available, but ensuring that all of our neighbors have access to it – food is the cornerstone of a healthy community. As Channel One looks to the future, we know the need will continue to be great long after most of the population is inoculated and it is safe to share meals together again. Pre-pandemic, 1 in 11 Minnesotans were facing hunger – now it is 1 in 9. We also know that our BIPOC neighbors are twice as likely as white families to experience hunger.

Through funding available through Feeding America, Channel One has begun work to educate ourselves and our agency partners, purchase culturally relevant food, and engage with underserved communities in high needs areas in the region to fund projects that make sure that everyone has access to the food they need to lead healthy lives.

2020 was certainly a tough year with the growing demand, challenges in safely serving our neighbors, and constant diligence required to keep our staff and volunteers safe and healthy. But we're taking the opportunities that the pandemic presented us and charging ahead into a 2021 where the need is great but our ability to meet it, with the support of the community, is greater!



# Strategic Plan Overview

## Vision

Every community in our region is food secure

## Mission

Channel One Regional Food Bank  
strengthens food access  
and builds healthy communities

## Values

People experiencing food insecurity are at the center of everything we do.

We create an inclusive culture that welcomes and respects the diversity of the people we serve, employees and volunteers and honors the fundamental value and dignity of all individuals.

We build and foster a culture of continuous improvement and innovation.

We work in partnership with local communities and our peers to improve nutrition and promote food security.

## Core Strategies

1.  
Advocate for those experiencing food insecurity

2.  
Implement and support sustainable programs

3.  
Address food insecurity as a health issue

4.  
Leverage and grow partnerships to expand resources

5.  
Make data-driven decisions supported by outcome metrics

In 2019, Channel One Regional Food Bank introduced a three-year strategic plan which was conceived alongside valued partners in an effort to refine its vision, establish future goals, identify its strengths and imagine opportunities to not only nourish, but improve the lives of those we serve. Halfway through the work towards achieving this three-year plan, Channel One, alongside the rest of the world, was impacted by a global pandemic. The affects that the pandemic has had on our communities has further solidified the need to continue this strategic work, and Channel One is thrilled to share its efforts with you from this past year.

# 1. Advocate for Those Experiencing Food Insecurity

Channel One and its agency partners were awarded a grant from Feeding America in order to deepen our connections with community resources providing culturally appropriate services in our region and to develop additional programs and training for Channel One staff and our agency partners that focuses on cultural inclusion.

We have been working closely with the Intercultural Mutual Assistance Association (IMAA) and the Diversity Council of Rochester in order to better inform our decisions regarding cultural inclusion and culturally appropriate food resources.

According to data from Feeding America, Latinx and African-American populations in the US are facing greater economic hardship due to the pandemic and are more vulnerable to food insecurity and hunger.



Even before the pandemic, Latinos were almost twice as likely to face food insecurity than non-Hispanic, white individuals. Additionally, 21.6% of the black population in the US may have experienced hunger in 2020 as a direct result of the pandemic.

One of Channel One's values is to create an inclusive culture that welcomes and respects the diversity of the people we serve. One way that Channel One honors the fundamental value and dignity of the diverse populations in our region is by providing culturally appropriate food options for those facing food insecurity.

Channel One and our agency partners have also been meeting monthly with representatives from IMAA and the Diversity Council in cohorts to learn more about the populations each of our agencies serves and to implement sustainable diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) practices amongst all of the programs in our 14-county region.



Jennifer Belisle, Program and Agency Services Director at Channel One, attended several of these conversations, noting, “a takeaway for me, personally, was how many of our cultural consultants talked about feeding their extended family and the community. We’ve stopped asking ‘who is in your household’ and started asking ‘how many people are you feeding’ instead. Small changes in our approach make a large impact on those we serve.”

In 2021, we will be continuing to work closely with our partners and consultants on a food system transformation project to ensure that all people, regardless of background, are welcome in our food shelves and programs.





## 2. Implement and Support Sustainable Programs

In April of 2020, staff re-evaluated the distribution model at Channel One and determined they needed to create a safer, more inclusive and consistent experience at its food shelf serving Olmsted County.

In October, Channel One was able to complete a remodel with consultants from SuperShelf and our food security partners that focused on access to nutritional options and an inclusive environment for the growing number of individuals facing food insecurity due to the pandemic.

“For individuals to be able to have a pleasant experience and a human touchpoint during this isolating time is so necessary for a mental well-being. And for healthy foods to be prioritized, also critical for the physical well-being of families,” explained Kate Burggraff, executive director of FFEN, a Channel One partner.



Kate continued, “What a critical change that [Channel One has] been able to make for the client experience and the health of the food that you are offering. [Channel One staff] are making change at one of the largest food shelves in the state! That is incredible and hasn’t been done before. ”

One of the goals of the recent remodel was to develop a blueprint that can be replicated at agency food shelves and programs in order to provide healthy options for those facing food insecurity throughout the fourteen-county region.

While the Channel One food shelf has the advantage of being connected directly to the food bank warehouse, many food shelves in our region do not have the ability to refrigerate or otherwise store fresh fruits and vegetables en masse. The SuperShelf-informed model allows for greater distribution of these items while also keeping food safety a priority.

By adopting the SuperShelf model and growing partnerships with food retailers, the Channel One food shelf is providing more healthy and culturally appropriate food options for shoppers than before.

The new way in which Channel One sources, displays, and distributes food means shoppers are also better able to find ingredients that align with both diet restrictions (due to allergy or personal preference) as well as focusing on cultural inclusivity.

The new model also enables the food bank to distribute nutritious food options to food shelves throughout our region because our warehouse is continually working with partners to source these healthy options.



### 3. Address Food Insecurity as a Health Issue

In both 2019 and 2020, Channel One worked with the Foundation for Essential Needs and our over 200 agency and food program partners to survey clients and shoppers on what types of food they are most looking for when they use one of our programs.

The top five foods that shoppers request (in no particular order) are: Meat, Fish, and Poultry; Dairy; Fruits and Vegetables; Eggs; and Cooking Items (oils, flour, sugar). All of the items identified are necessary to prepare healthy and nutritious meals and often are unable to be donated in a food drive setting.

We also learned that many of our agency partners are unable to store fresh fruits and vegetables safely for a long period of time.

As a direct result of this data, Channel One Food Bank added an additional produce route, enabling our partners (and thus their clients and shoppers) to have access to more of the fresh fruits and vegetables that shoppers are requesting.



*She loves seeing healthy options at the food shelf because preparing meals with those items makes her family feel better and have more energy.*



Clients and shoppers request these items for a variety of reasons: they are expensive to purchase, expire more quickly than other items, and are necessary for healthy and nutritious meals.

For example, we met with a shopper named Julie, who is the only financial supporter in her family after her husband lost his job due to COVID. She stated that while her family has never gone hungry, they are currently at a point where they need to cut costs because they don't quite have enough to make it through the month. She explained that she loves seeing healthy options at the food shelf because preparing meals with those items makes her family feel better and have more energy. They love all of the fresh fruit and vegetables available.

Adding an additional route enables our partners to order produce from the food bank more often and not only reduce food waste, but also provide more nutritious resources to shoppers like Julie.



## 4. Leverage and Grow Partnerships to Expand Resources

In 2020, Channel One worked closely with the United States Department of Agriculture and partner organizations from rural communities throughout our region to host “Truck to Trunk” pop-up pantry events, where boxes of food from the “Farmers to Families” program are distributed.

Erin Haag, Executive Director of the United Way of Freeborn County, which has held several pop-up pantries since the start of the pandemic, explained, “Drive-through Pop-Up Events can be a logistical challenge for any organization. However, once we had the first one under our belt, we found our rhythm. Additionally, we were able to develop stronger relationships at the county level. With the strong support at our county and partnerships with our local companies we were able to expand our capacity and formats of these Pop-Up Pantries, reaching populations that are often unable to access food services.

Channel One has greatly expanded our capacity and ability to serve clients. We have the boots on the ground volunteers, but needed the infrastructure and food sourcing. Together, we’ve brought in over 65,440 lbs of food into our county.”



These partnerships have not only allowed Channel One to expand resources and efficiently distribute more food to more people, but also have given us great insight in how people facing food insecurity in rural communities prefer to receive these resources.

Participants in the Truck to Trunk pop-up events, as well as those who have attended Channel One’s mobile pantries, have noted that the way in which food is distributed at these events (directly from a refrigerated truck into participants’ vehicles) allows for a greater level of anonymity than their local food pantry.

It also allows for contactless delivery, which has been incredibly important for our shoppers and clients during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Erin continued, “Community members are becoming aware of how much need there is. When 600 boxes of food can be gone in a couple of hours, when there is a line of cars well ahead of the opening time, that puts a very real face on food insecurity.”

### *Corporate Donors 2020*

Affinity Plus Credit Union	Fresh Thyme Market	McNeilus Truck & Manufacturing	Pohlad Family Foundation
Assisi Heights	Fox47	Midwest Dairy Association	Post Consumer Brands
Bethel Lutheran Church	Gloria Dei Lutheran Church	Minnesota Twins	Prairie Star Wind Farm
Broker Exchange Network	Greater Minneapolis Community Connections	Mount Olive Lutheran Church	Real Hope for the Hungry
Canadian Pacific	J. A. Wedum Foundation	National Association of Letter Carriers	Rochester Area Foundation
Cardinal of Minnesota	Knutson Construction	Olmsted County	Rochester Athletic Club
Casey’s (Here for Good)	KTTC-TV	Olmsted Medical Center	Rotary District 5960
City of Rochester	Kwik Trip, Inc.	Otto Bremer Foundation	RSM US
Compeer Financial	Macy’s Foundation	Pharmaceutical Specialties	Shavlik Family Foundation
Enterprise Holdings	Mardag Foundation		Sommerby Golf Club, LLC
First Alliance Credit Union	Mayo Clinic		Think Mutual Bank
First Presbyterian Church			Western Digital Foundation

# 5. Make Data-driven Decisions Supported with Outcome Metrics

It has been about a year since Channel One stopped holding food drives for the safety of our shoppers and volunteers. At first, this was a difficult change. The blue collection barrels calling for community support were well-known in our area. We also knew that the need for food security was increasing due to the pandemic. However, staff weren't certain if the community support that we received through food drives would translate to a fund drive-only model.

Channel One staff are happy to announce that we have received more community support from individuals and businesses than ever before.

At Channel One, \$1 provides 3.5 meals to those facing food insecurity in our region. However, that took on new meaning this year as we sought out additional donations and new partnerships with food retailers in order to fill the gap that the former food drives left behind.



*Channel One staff are happy to announce that we have received more community support from individuals and businesses than ever before.*



The support we've received from community members has allowed Channel One to not only provide more perishable items to clients that can't be donated in a food drive, but also has allowed us to remove our monthly limit on food shelf visits.

Channel One staff reached out to one of our shoppers, Ashley, a mother of two, to learn why increased access to perishable food items like meat and dairy is so important for her family.

She explained, "whenever I visit the food shelf, I am always glad to see milk available. Milk never used to mean so much to me, but now I know that my kids need it to be healthy. Visiting more than once a month means I know the items in my fridge will not expire or run out before I can visit the food shelf again. Plus, when I see healthy options available, I know that my kids will not go without and that they will be able to do well in school. That means the world to me."

While we are uncertain if the blue barrels for food donations will ever make a comeback, we are grateful for the support from our community, our staff and volunteers that are working to increase food access every day.



# In 2020, Channel One...



held **70** mobile  
pantries supplying food  
to rural communities



delivered  
**899,975**  
pounds of produce to  
those without access to  
fresh food



drove  
**113,668**  
miles in Southern  
Minnesota & Western  
Wisconsin



distributed  
**8,765,387**  
pounds of food to those  
facing food insecurity

**Giving to Channel One Regional Food Bank means giving  
directly to those facing food insecurity in our community**



in Minnesota,  
**633,490**  
people may face  
hunger in 2021



Food insecurity  
could increase to  
**11.3%**  
of the population  
in Minnesota



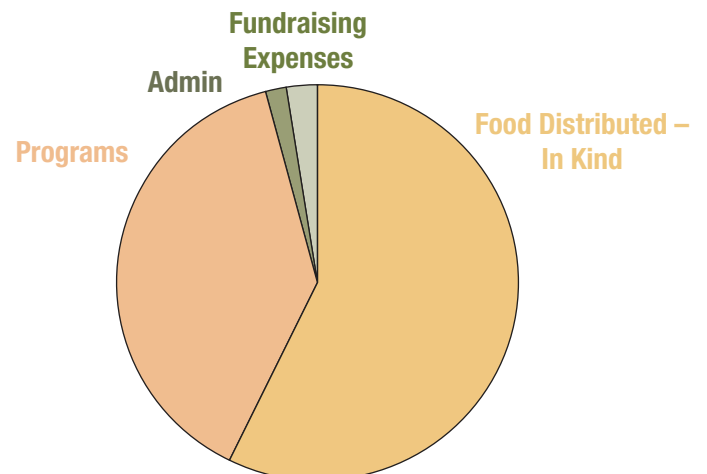
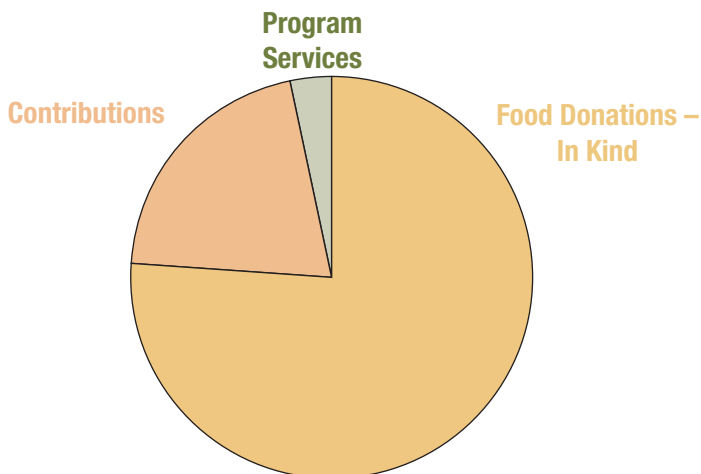
In Wisconsin,  
**723,500**  
people may face  
hunger in 2021



Food insecurity  
could increase to  
**12.4%**  
of the population  
in Wisconsin

Every day, the Feeding America network  
of **200** food banks and  
**60,000** food pantries & programs  
work on the front lines to support  
families without enough to eat.

## 2020 Financials



# Prepared Meals Program

*October to December, 2020*

The Minnesota Department of Education provided Channel One with a grant, using funds from the Coronavirus Relief Fund (CRF), in order to create and implement a 12-week program to address the widespread impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on food security in Olmsted County.

Using this funding, Channel One and its community partners developed the prepared meals program, which took place from October to December, 2020.

"This project provided supplementary support to our existing meal programs by creating culturally-specific menus and delivery to low-access communities, which filled gaps in our current scope of service," explained Virginia Merritt, Executive Director of Channel One Regional Food Bank.



**4** Communities

**11** Distribution Sites

**41,915** People Served

**83,830** Meals Provided

**100,596** Pounds of Food Distributed

## In Partnership With:

Boys & Girls Club of Rochester  
Byron Public Schools  
City of Rochester  
Dover-Eyota School District  
Families First  
Family Service Rochester  
Graham Park  
Hope Summit Church  
IMAA  
Olmsted County  
Rochester Public Library  
Rochester Public Schools  
Stewartville School District  
Zion Lutheran Church  
Zumbro Lutheran Church

Using the same to-go format as its mobile pantries, this was the first time in Channel One's 40-year history that it provided prepared meals.

Food needs have multiplied due to continued unemployment, a wave of evictions, and other economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Additionally, food programs serving youth are currently only reaching about 40% of students who are eligible for free and reduced meals.

The prepared meals program not only provided another opportunity for children to have access to food while distance learning, but also provided nutritious meals to adults and seniors with barriers to food access.





# Agency Food Shelf in Winona Receives Praise from Community Member

A gentleman called Channel One to express how he was thankful to Channel One for providing food security during the pandemic. He explained that he had previously experienced food insecurity due to unemployment and used one of our agency partner food shelves in Winona, Minnesota.

When we asked him more about his experience, he said that although he had qualified for unemployment and had support from family members, he appreciated the ability to get food that he wouldn't otherwise be able to afford— especially meat and dairy.

He specifically said that the Winona food shelf was a “godsend.” Volunteers and staff not only made the challenges of being unemployed less daunting by connecting him with essential resources, but also introduced him to a support network of people going through similar experiences.

Throughout the conversation, he reiterated how welcome he felt at the food shelf, explaining that it was a great feeling to visit and pick out items in a store, even though the items were free.

At first, he worried that seeking resources would be dehumanizing, but he was so glad to find that everyone treated him with respect.



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131 35th Street SE  
Rochester, MN 55904



“I try to put myself in other people’s shoes. If I needed someone to help me get back on my feet, I’d want them to assist with no judgement.

I could have easily lost my income due to the pandemic and needed the food shelf’s services to get by.

But I have enough right now, so I’m doing what I can to give back to others in my community.”

Sharing the thoughts of our supporters is one of the ways that Channel One can encourage donations, advocate for food resources and continue to provide healthy choices for our neighbors.

**Share your story at**  
**[helpingfeedpeople.org/tell-us-your-story](https://helpingfeedpeople.org/tell-us-your-story)**

