

# Forward Together: A Roadmap to Reduce Food Insecurity across the City of Chicago



For almost four decades, the City of Chicago and the Greater Chicago Food Depository have partnered in the vital mission of providing nutritious food to our neighbors facing hunger, an essential resource needed to ensure a healthy life. In every community and ward of Chicago, countless people – government employees, food bank staff, volunteers from community-based organizations, businesses and faith organizations, and many more – work daily to offer nourishing food, and opportunity, to those who are unsure where and when they will receive their next meal.

Chicago has a strong network of agencies and nonprofit organizations striving to ensure that every resident of the City of Chicago has equitable access to the resources and opportunities needed to maximize their health and well-being. At a time when barriers such as poverty and violence limit the potential of too many Chicagoans, core support services, like food assistance, can provide a much-needed stabilizing impact. So, now more than ever, it is important that all of us in Chicago’s anti-hunger community coordinate our efforts, to more effectively fight against food insecurity and bring resources directly to where they are most needed.

That is why the Chicago Department of Family & Support Services (DFSS) and the Mayor’s Office joined with the Food Depository to convene a task force. Together, we reviewed the work of each City agency involved in fighting hunger and identified opportunities to increase support and coordination. Working together, we can raise awareness of existing food assistance programs, establish and strengthen partnerships that break down silos of service, and expand access to nutritious food.

We are very pleased to share our vision and next steps to execute our plans. This document is a “roadmap” to achieve our objectives, outlining our plans for the City and Food Depository to more closely align our work – harnessing our collective talents, energy and resources to better serve our neighbors in need. This strengthened collaboration is guided by an overarching goal: to provide high-quality nourishment for food insecure residents of Chicago as effectively and efficiently as possible, every day of the year.

We are profoundly grateful to everyone – City employees, Food Depository staff and volunteers, agency partners, and so many more – who work tirelessly to keep every Chicagoan nourished.

Sincerely,



**Lisa Morrison Butler,**  
*Commissioner,*  
Department of Family & Support Services



**Kate Maehr,**  
*Executive Director & CEO,*  
Greater Chicago Food Depository

## The Reality of Hunger in Our Communities

There is no one face of food insecurity. The need varies across our Chicago neighbors including children, older adults, people with disabilities and working families. That is why we must work to understand the needs of all of our residents and the best ways to serve them.

### Children and Youth

Well-nourished children are better-positioned to thrive. But Chicago Public Schools data shows that an estimated 78% of CPS students enrolled in the 2017-2018 school year are economically disadvantaged, which may make students and their families vulnerable to hunger<sup>1</sup>.

According to the national No Kid Hungry campaign, students who regularly eat school breakfast score 17.5% higher on standardized math tests than those who do not have a regular breakfast<sup>2</sup>. Students who eat school breakfast are more likely to perform better on tests, attend more days of school, and graduate from high school. On the other hand, according to Feeding America, a leading national anti-hunger organization, hungry children are more likely to<sup>3</sup>:

- Experience a developmental delay or disability in language or other domain.
- Be at greater risk of truancy, school tardiness, and repeating a grade.
- Have social and behavioral problems.
- Require hospitalization.



<sup>1</sup>Chicago Public Schools, [http://cps.edu/About\\_CPS/At-a-glance/Pages/Stats\\_and\\_facts.aspx](http://cps.edu/About_CPS/At-a-glance/Pages/Stats_and_facts.aspx)

<sup>2</sup>“Ending Childhood Hunger: A Social Impact Analysis.” Share Our Strength No Kid Hungry Center for Best Practices & Deloitte; 2013. <https://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/sites/default/files/resources/Deloitte%20White%20Paper%20-%20Breakfast%20Final.pdf>

<sup>3</sup><http://www.feedingamerica.org/assets/pdfs/fact-sheets/child-hunger-fact-sheet.pdf>



### Older Adults

As Chicagoans live longer and healthier lives, it is important to ensure everyone can thrive as they age. But older adults are uniquely vulnerable as many live on a fixed income, and often must decide among basic living expenses, medical necessities and paying for food. While the national poverty rate for older adults is 10%, in Chicago that level is 17%<sup>4</sup>. Food-insecure older adults are at an increased risk for chronic health conditions compared to food-secure older adults<sup>5</sup>:

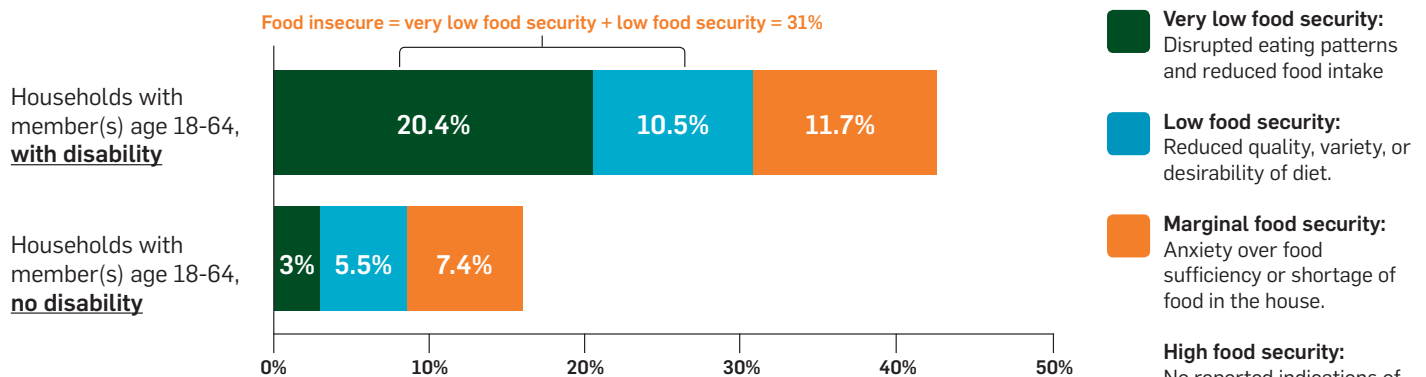
- 78% more likely to experience depression.
- 55% more likely to suffer from asthma.
- 41% more likely to experience congestive heart failure.
- 40% more likely to experience chest pain.

### People with Disabilities

Research published in 2017 by the Food Depository [ <https://www.chicagosfoodbank.org/disabilities-food-insecurity> ] demonstrated that low-income adults with disabilities live with a significantly increased risk of hunger. The study found:

- 31% of all households with a working-age adult with a disability are food insecure, compared with 8% of households with a working-age adult with no disability.
- Food insecure adults with disabilities are more likely to experience very low food security, defined by multiple indications of disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake.
- Adults with disabilities in Cook County are also more likely to live in poverty, face unemployment, and earn less per year than adults without a disability.

**Food security levels among households with and without adults with disabilities, age 18-64: Chicago metropolitan area**



<sup>4</sup> 2016 U.S. Census American Community Survey 1 year estimates.

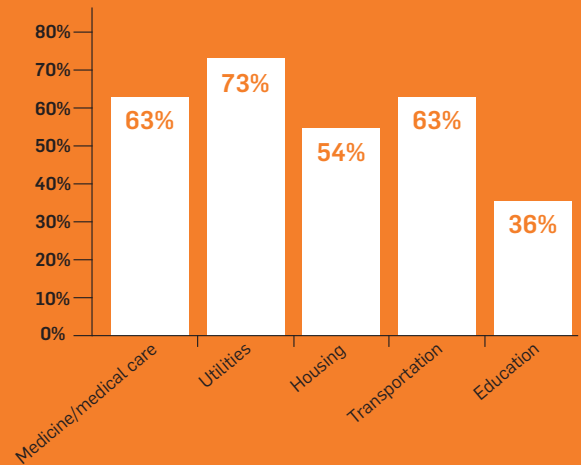
<sup>5</sup> Gundersen, Craig & Ziliak, James. The State of Senior Hunger & Health in America in 2015. Feeding America, 2017. <http://www.feedingamerica.org/research/senior-hunger-research/state-of-senior-hunger-and-health-2015.pdf>

## Unemployed and Low-Income Working Families

Many Chicagoans facing hunger are working, seeking employment, or had to leave the workforce to care for family members. Unstable, low-wage jobs without benefits create barriers to food security; many families are one lost paycheck or one big bill away from a crisis:

- 57% of Greater Chicago Food Depository clients report having at least one member who worked for pay in the past 12 months<sup>6</sup>.
- 23% of food insecure individuals have incomes above 185% of the poverty level, meaning they are not eligible for SNAP, WIC, or other vital programs<sup>7</sup>.

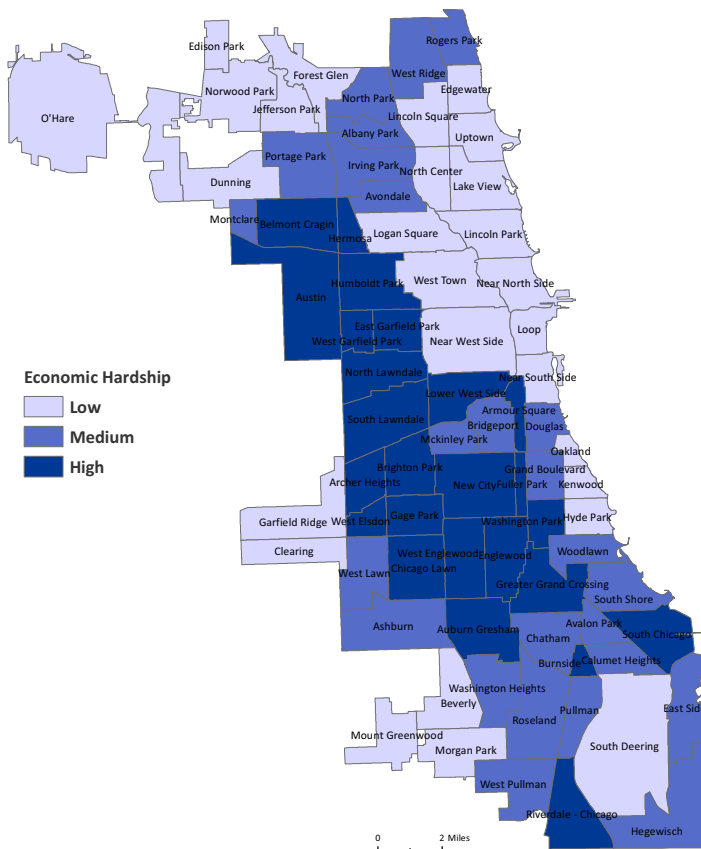
## The Food Depository's Chicago clients chose between paying for food and paying for:



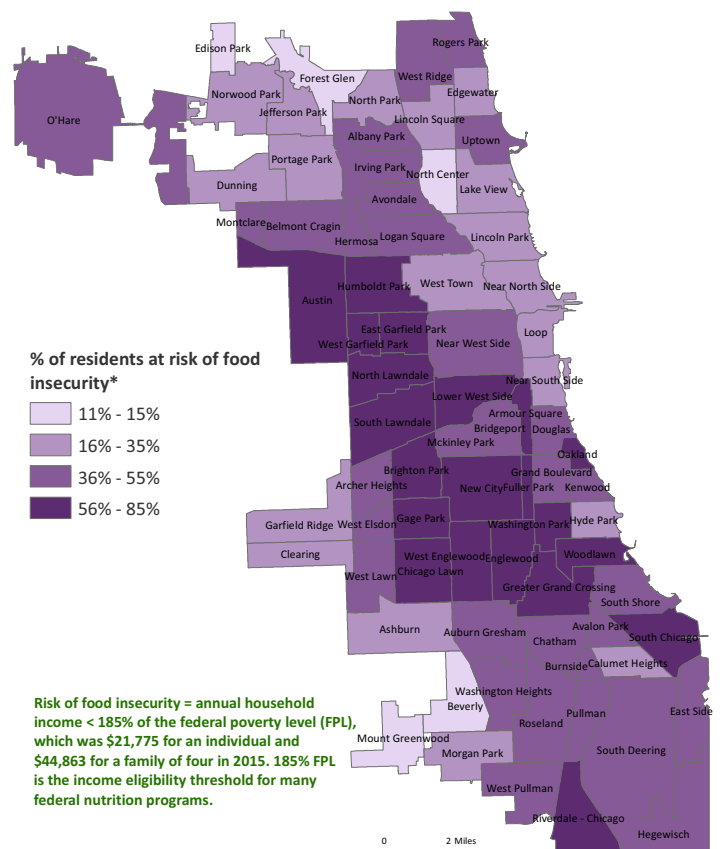
Source: 2014 Feeding America Hunger in America Study (Chicago report)

## Overlap between risk of food insecurity and Healthy Chicago 2.0's Economic Hardship Index

Economic Hardship Index as featured in Healthy Chicago 2.0<sup>8</sup>



% of Chicagoans At Risk of Food Insecurity<sup>9</sup>



**Risk of food insecurity = annual household income < 185% of the federal poverty level (FPL), which was \$21,775 for an individual and \$44,863 for a family of four in 2015. 185% FPL is the income eligibility threshold for many federal nutrition programs.**

<sup>6</sup>Hunger in America 2014: Custom Geographic Report for the City of Chicago. Feeding America, 2014.

<sup>7</sup>Gundersen, C., A. Dewey, A. Crumbaugh, M. Kato & E. Engelhard. *Map the Meal Gap 2017: A Report on County and Congressional District Food Insecurity and County Food Cost in the United States in 2015*. Feeding America, 2017.

<sup>8</sup>Healthy Chicago 2.0: Partnering to Improve Health Equity 2016-2020. City of Chicago Department of Public Health, 2016.

<sup>9</sup>2015 U.S. Census American Community Survey 5-year estimates.

## How we meet the need today

The partnership between the City and the Food Depository dates back to 1978, when six volunteers established the food bank and the City awarded a \$47,000 start-up grant. Distribution began in January 1979, and in its first year of operation, the Food Depository distributed 471,000 pounds of food. By 2017, that figure had risen to more than 71 million pounds of food.

With the unwavering support of the Mayor’s Office, an array of City agencies and entities work in collaboration with the Food Depository to provide healthy food through a wide range of efforts including: managing direct food responses in schools, colleges, senior centers and senior residential buildings; enrolling students and families in food and health benefits; operating and driving participation in breakfast, after-school and summer meal programs, and supporting efforts to offer fresh food in pantries and shelters throughout Chicago. City agencies engaged in these anti-hunger efforts include the Department of Family & Support Services, the Chicago Public Schools, the Chicago Housing Authority, the Chicago Police Department, the Chicago Public Library, the Chicago Department of Public Health, Chicago Park District, the Mayor’s Office for People with Disabilities, and the City Colleges of Chicago.

The team is making progress, but food insecurity remains a serious societal problem. With state budget uncertainty and federal-level threats to such vital anti-hunger programs as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as food stamps) – which provides 10 times as many meals as the Food Depository – Chicago will need to ramp up efforts to care for our most vulnerable citizens. The following comments highlight some of the challenges that people facing hunger have to cope with on a daily basis:

- “I could barely hold a job because of the health issues that came with my condition. If I didn’t have the money from SNAP, there would barely be anything to eat in my house.”
- “Getting to and from a food pantry or a grocery store regularly is far more than just financially challenging, it is physically challenging, putting it mildly.”
- “I rely on SNAP like so many other Americans, and still struggle. Taking away the small bit of help I receive would devastate me and may lead to homelessness.”

A responsive, seamless, nimble distribution system will help achieve our goal of *getting the right foods to clients, when and where they need it.*



## Roadmap to Innovation

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The City of Chicago Roadmap for Reducing Food Insecurity Steering Committee brings together eight City agencies and the Greater Chicago Food Depository to support improvement in systems and services. All members are committed to better serving Chicago by listening to residents, empowering communities, and partnering to execute the most promising innovations and improvements. Building on the success of the current service models and responding to feedback from those being served, the Task Force seeks to eliminate barriers by improving food access for high-need communities in Chicago. Here are some of the actions that will be explored as the Task Force begins partnering with Chicago's communities:



### **Build Awareness, Activate Communities**

We want to take advantage of this unique opportunity to strengthen community awareness of existing resources. Collectively, we commit to developing a City agency communications campaign that will focus on:

#### **Establishing unified marketing, messaging, a common service portal, and listservs**

Through targeted outreach, leveraging existing listservs and social media platforms, and designing a unified brand with consistent messaging, we can keep our neighbors better informed about existing support services available to them. This will foster stronger communication among City agencies, partners and the public. An initial example involves summer meals, a lifeline for students who depend on school lunches during the academic year. In 2017, City departments distributed more than 30,000 additional fliers in the community about summer meals than the previous year.

### **Modernizing the City's 3-1-1 system**

Modernization of the 3-1-1 system offers a unique opportunity to include health and human services information that will better connect residents to needed resources. The 3-1-1 system has the potential to be a vital communication tool to raise awareness about free meal programs, food pantry locations, and eligibility for food benefits. At the same time, the 3-1-1 system can offer citywide insights into current and evolving community needs and the impact of community interventions by being a critical entry point for Chicago's citizens with the greatest need for support.

## Engaging youth as summer meal “ambassadors”

Youth are our future, and peer-to-peer connections are highly effective. By partnering with young people to increase participation in the summer meal program, we also will help to create opportunities for them to gain meaningful experience through serving their communities.

## Meet Clients Where They Are

Traditional food access programs, such as pantries, soup kitchens and shelters, are sometimes limited in their ability to meet the needs of individuals and families who may not be able to access these locations. The task force is focusing on how innovation would not only transform the way individuals and families connect to food resources, but also how they learn about and receive other vital services that build healthier communities, including employment resources that lead to empowerment and stability through jobs. Following are some of the programs the Task Force identified as needed priorities for innovation and expansion over the next three years:

## Year-round Meals at Libraries & Parks: Chicago Public Library (CPL) & Chicago Park District (CPD)

More than 371,000 kids are enrolled in Chicago Public Schools (CPS) and 78% of them are economically disadvantaged<sup>10</sup>. All students are eligible to receive free breakfast and lunch through school. But during the summer, many do not have the same access to nutritious meals that they receive through their schools during the academic year. In fact, we know that only 12% of the kids utilizing free and reduced price lunch during the school year are also accessing summer meals<sup>11</sup>. We can reach exponentially more youth with free summer meals by adding more Chicago Public Library and Chicago Park District locations. With more than 80 library branches and 580 parks, we are committed to expanding nutritious meal access to children and youth. The goals for expansion are:

- Increase participation in summer meals by 20% in 2018 at Chicago Public Library locations.
- Increase participation in summer meals by providing open meal site access at three Park District locations in 2018.
- Pilot employing One Summer Chicago youth to raise awareness for summer meals and manage the distribution of meals at Library and Park District sites in 2018.
- Expand access points for after-school meals at city-led after-school programs to 50% of Park District program sites and 15% of Library program sites by 2020.

<sup>10</sup> Chicago Public Schools. [http://cps.edu/About\\_CPS/At-a-glance/Pages/Stats\\_and\\_facts.aspx](http://cps.edu/About_CPS/At-a-glance/Pages/Stats_and_facts.aspx)

<sup>11</sup> *Hunger Doesn't Take a Vacation: Summer Nutrition Status Report*. Food Research & Action Center, 2017. <http://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/2017-summer-nutrition-report-1.pdf>





### **School-Based Food Access: Chicago Public Schools (CPS), City Colleges (CCC) and the Department of Family & Support Services (DFSS)**

Children, youth and college students with limited economic resources all face the steep climb of balancing academic success against the harsh realities of food insecurity. Healthy Student Markets operating at Chicago Public Schools (CPS) and the City Colleges of Chicago (CCC) are a welcome alternative to a traditional pantry setting. Through this program families are provided free access to fresh fruits, vegetables and shelf stable food items. Schools with Healthy Student Markets have forged seamless community collaboration among students, parents, teachers and administrators.

CPS has long recognized the challenges of food insecurity among its students and recently enacted a resolution to ensure all schools implement “Breakfast After the Bell” – the recently passed state legislation that requires schools where 70% or more of students receive school lunch to serve breakfast in the classroom.

Building upon this success, we are committed to expanding this work in Chicago neighborhoods by:

- Strengthening the current food access response at CCC by transitioning one City College site to an on-site pantry for students, with the goal of transitioning all seven CCC access points to on-site pantries by 2020.
- Expanding food access to six new CPS schools by 2020.
- Increasing breakfast participation in CPS with the goal of reaching 60% participation by 2020.
- Ensure year round food access for all CPS students through the school meal programs as well as partnership with community organizations for extended out of school time periods including winter break, spring break and summer break.
- Piloting food access at three early childhood education sites.

### **Preschool Based Food Access: Department of Family and Support Services (DFSS), Chicago Public Library (CPL) and Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH)**

To address the critical nutritional needs of children 0-5 years old, DFSS in partnership with the Mayor’s Office on Early Learning will pilot offering the Healthy Student Market program, which will provide food access to parents with children enrolled in early learning programming. This innovative approach will offer food access during times when parents are dropping off and picking up their children from early childhood programs. In addition to piloting this model in a Chicago Early Learning community-based site, we will also explore developing a program at a CPL site that will combine food access with enrichment activities.

In addition, to ensure families are connected to other nutrition resources, CDPH will offer WIC education and services at the market locations. Access to fresh foods combined with opportunities to connect with other benefits that are pivotal to the growth and development of early learners will transform how the City provides benefits and nutrition support to families in need.

### **Health Clinics: Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH)**

CDPH’s flagship initiative [Healthy Chicago 2.0](#) recognizes that some Chicago neighborhoods are disproportionately impacted by economic hardship; posing serious challenges to children’s health and well-being. To help address this issue, CDPH will pilot screening patients for food insecurity and creating an appropriate food access response with the goal of screening all patients accessing CDPH health centers by 2020.

### **Community Service Centers: Department of Family & Support Services (DFSS)**

DFSS serves more than 300,000 residents annually, including those visiting community and senior service centers, for emergency assistance, housing supports, public benefits access, computer access, cooling/warming centers, and job training and placement services. Essentially a “one-stop shop” for City services, these centers are ideal locations to also serve as food access points for residents. To leverage the power of community service centers we will launch two new food access points within Chicago Community Service center locations by 2020, and raise awareness within Community Service Centers about federal support programs including WIC and SNAP.

### **Support for Older Adults and for people with disabilities: Mayor’s Office for People with Disabilities (MOPD)**

Older adults and people with disabilities often deal with the challenges of limited mobility and living below the poverty line, and are at high risk of being food insecure. The City and other partners work to provide prepared home-delivered meals but do not currently reach every person in need. To better serve this population we will:

- Launch a pilot program in partnership with MOPD that meets the unique needs of people with disabilities – from easy-to-open packaging to medically tailored meals – that can significantly reduce food insecurity among these populations.
- Work with MOPD to train existing food pantries on how to make their facilities more accessible.

### **Intergenerational Food Access: Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) and Department of Family & Support Services (DFSS)**

Bringing together individuals of different generations in ongoing, mutually beneficial, planned activities is another way to build healthy communities. The Chicago Housing Authority and DFSS have successful examples of offering intergenerational programs and services that benefit young and older alike. Most recently, the City announced plans to combine senior residential housing and libraries in the same physical spaces. This offers a great opportunity for intergenerational food access programs, with summer meals for youth at the library sites combined with pantry markets for older adults as a part of resident programming. We intend to expand food access to three new senior buildings in 2018 with the goal of providing food access in 60% of Chicago Housing Authority senior residential buildings by 2020. And we will explore the feasibility of developing and piloting an inter-generational food access response with the Chicago Housing Authority.

### **The Intersection Between Food and Safer Communities: Chicago Police Department (CPD)**

To help strengthen community relationships, the Chicago Police Department is effectively utilizing a creative dialogue process, where young people and law enforcement officials hope to understand each other better. Often during these conversations, youth and officers come together over food, which serves as a catalyst for authentic discussions about unmet challenges and unrealized opportunities. At times, food insecurity is the unmet need discussed during these conversations, and not all officers are equipped with the tools and information to appropriately respond. To build on the community dialogues and better train officers we will:

- Continue to foster positive youth and police interaction by providing meals at five events per year during peak violence periods.
- Educate police officers on food insecurity and how to support community through “roll call” education sessions at 10 police districts in the highest need communities in 2018.



### **Employment and Food Access: Department of Family & Support Services (DFSS)**

Limited access to nutritious meals often occurs when families' personal resources are insufficient to meet basic needs of shelter, clothing, medical care and utilities, creating a food budget shortfall. Emergency food programs offer some stability, but the opportunity that employment and training provides can be more empowering to many. One innovative way to connect residents to employment opportunities is to pilot mobile-based employment outreach programs where residents are offered employment services, training and immersion experiences that prepare them for work. Offering other services, including meals and special pantry access to participants enrolled in workforce training programs, can serve as incentives and supports to help participants on their employment journey.

### **Build Support for Community-Based Innovations**

The Steering Committee member agencies are committed to better serving Chicago: first by listening to residents, second by equipping residents to take action, and third by partnering to execute the most promising innovations. Testing and shaping these ideas requires significant community engagement across many stakeholders, including residents, community organizations and businesses. The Task Force believes that testing these innovations in one of the city's highest-need communities can serve as a model for how we dramatically reduce food insecurity, while keeping individuals and families engaged in the longer-term programming that will effectively address poverty, education and other economic challenges that form the root causes of hunger.

### **Forward Together, Impact Together**

This is an ambitious plan. And it should be. We can't, and won't, lose sight of our shared goal to end hunger in Chicago. Our power to reach that goal is magnified when each organization partner leverages its strengths. Together, we can provide better access to food resources for Chicago's youth, older adults, people with disabilities, and families. Although each city agency is accountable for its individual goals, the City's success will be driven by the commitment each agency has made to drive a collective impact that no one organization could achieve alone.

By 2020 we hope to:

- Raise awareness for food access programming through a unified cross-City Department communications plan.
- Launch 20 new food access sites in high-need communities, a 38% increase in City of Chicago food access locations.
- Ensure consistent SNAP enrollment support at City of Chicago food access locations.
- Pilot four new innovations that will transform how residents connect to food resources: Summer Meal Youth Ambassadors; prepared meal programs for people with disabilities; innovative approaches to food access programs for city-administered Chicago Early Learning sites; and the intergenerational needs of both youth and older adults.

Fulfilling these goals will demonstrate that we're more than ambitious. It will be a reflection of our unwavering commitment to reduce the burden food insecurity places on our neighbors through community partnership and collaboration.

## City of Chicago Roadmap for Reducing Food Insecurity Steering Committee

### Leadership

Kate Maehr, Executive Director and CEO, Greater Chicago Food Depository  
Lisa Morrison Butler, Commissioner, Department of Family Support & Services

### Committee Members

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Crystal Cooper, Chicago Public Schools  
Megan Cunningham, Chicago Department of Public Health  
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