



Update on Wave Three of the Massachusetts COVID-19 Relief Fund

June 3, 2020

To our donors,

We hope this letter finds you and your families well. These are exceptionally difficult times, filled with new daunting problems and old pernicious injustices. Our hearts go out to all those suffering.

The team at the Massachusetts COVID-19 Relief Fund (the “Fund”) has been working diligently with partners across the state to ensure donations are serving those most in need. We are glad to report the Fund has raised \$29.5mm and has granted \$13.9mm to date. Wave 3 funding was completed May 27th providing a total of \$8.1mm in grants: \$4.7mm to community foundations and \$3.4mm to the four food banks that serve pantries and nonprofit agencies providing food and meals throughout Massachusetts.

The Fund is committed to serving those in need throughout the state and our community foundation partners have expanded outside their normal geographic area to further support their regions. Being locally informed by the community foundations has ensured grants serve the greatest needs each region is experiencing, ranging from food insecurity, homelessness, housing insecurity, and the growing need for mental health services, all in service to the most vulnerable of our neighbors including immigrants, people with disabilities, essential workers, the elderly and those struggling due to lost wages and mounting economic insecurity. Thank you so much for making this work possible.

As mentioned in the last letter, we will use these biweekly updates to provide a deeper dive into a portion of the MA COVID-19 Relief Fund grantmaking. This letter will focus on food insecurity and the statewide essential food organizations that have received substantial grants from the Fund.

Impact Spotlight: Wave 3

Before COVID-19, [food insecurity was the reality for 1 in 11 people and 1 in 10 children in Massachusetts](#). With the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, [Feeding America projects that these numbers will worsen to 1 in 7 people and 1 in 5 children facing food insecurity in Massachusetts](#). This is an [81% rise in child food insecurity, second highest in the country behind North Dakota](#). The [rate of SNAP applications has grown 360%](#), and to make matters worse, [the price of groceries grew 2.6% month over month – the highest monthly growth rate since 1974](#). The need for food across the Commonwealth is critical as the public health crisis continues.

Due to the severity of food insecurity, the MA COVID-19 Relief Fund provided direct grants to the four food banks that operate across the state: Merrimack Valley Food Bank, The Food Bank of Western MA, The Greater Boston Food Bank, and Worcester County Food Bank. Together, these four food banks play a critical role in servicing the needs of thousands of food-insecure children, families, individuals and seniors. The food banks source, store, package, and distribute food to 900+ local food agencies (including soup kitchens, food pantries, and after-school programs), which in turn provide those in need with healthy food. The MA COVID-19 Relief Fund has also supported many of these local food agencies who act as the last mile food distribution points with funding through our 10 community foundation partners.



The COVID-19 public health crisis has also created new challenges for food banks and local food agencies. These providers have reported increased competition and pricing on high-demand essentials, delivery delays, depletion of donation reserves, and increased cost of labor (due to factors including sanitation requirements, PPE costs, and a dearth of volunteers that requires them to use paid staff). Thanks to your generosity, the four state food banks will be able to purchase and distribute historic levels of food, while offsetting costs for local agencies. The MA COVID-19 Relief Fund also provided a statewide grant to Project Bread to expand its FoodSource HotLine to alert people across the Commonwealth to the location of their nearest local food provider.

Please read more about the important work of MA's four food banks and Project Bread below.

Merrimack Valley Food Bank:

Merrimack Valley Food Bank provides nutritious food and personal care items to emergency feeding programs in 31 communities in the Greater Lowell and Essex County area. The Food Bank typically distributes food to [more than 50,000 individuals per month in Massachusetts and southern New Hampshire](#).

Since the beginning of the pandemic, the Merrimack Valley Food Bank has experienced increases in demand, including a 14% increase in demand for its elderly food delivery service.

"We are astounded by the outpouring of support received from the MA COVID-19 Relief Fund, as well as other new and longtime donors. These contributions enable us to respond to the increasing need for emergency food for our neighbors. The Merrimack Valley Food Bank delivers food and comfort to the already isolated seniors who are homebound due to frailty or chronic disease, and to the newly quarantined families who fear their health and have never needed to access food at a pantry." -Amy L. Pessia, Executive Director

Learn more about the work of Merrimack Valley Food Bank [here](#).

The Food Bank of Western MA:

The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts feeds neighbors in need in the four counties of Western Massachusetts (Berkshire, Franklin, Hampden, and Hampshire). The Food Bank of Western MA supports 175 member agencies, 26 mobile food banks, and 51 Brown Bag: Food for Elders sites. The Food Bank has relationships with many of the region's farms, which makes it possible to provide fresh produce to food pantries and meal sites.

[With the emergence of COVID-19, the Food Bank of Western MA increased distribution of emergency food 19% year over year and is serving about 20% more people, about a quarter of which are seeking food assistance for the first time.](#)



“We are so very grateful to donors who have invested in The Food Bank to provide healthy food for thousands of food-insecure households during this critical moment. This support provides real sustenance and hope for our neighbors to persevere in pursuit of their dreams.” - Andrew Morehouse, Executive Director

Learn more about the work of The Food Bank of Western MA [here](#).

The Greater Boston Food Bank:

The Greater Boston Food Bank (“GBFB”) is the largest hunger-relief organization in New England and among the largest food banks in the country. [Last year, the GBFB distributed 68.5 million pounds of nutritious food to people who struggle to have enough to eat.](#) Prior to COVID-19, GBFB’s record for food distribution in a given month was 5.7 million pounds. Since the start of the pandemic, GBFB has had three [consecutive record months, distributing 8.1 million pounds of food in March, 9.5 million in April and 9.7 million in May.](#)

During the COVID-19 outbreak, The Greater Boston Food Bank has remained committed to its mission of providing healthy food and ending hunger across Eastern Massachusetts. [84% of the food distributed by GBFB meets the highest nutrition standards as defined by the Supporting Wellness at Pantries \(SWAP\) system. And, 34.5% of the food distributed is fresh produce, much of it sourced from local partner farms.](#)

GBFB supports more than 500 partner agencies in 190 cities and towns across Eastern MA’s nine counties (Barnstable, Bristol, Dukes, Essex, Middlesex, Nantucket, Norfolk, Plymouth and Suffolk).

“Unfortunately, these new food insecurity projections do not surprise us as we have seen a dramatic increase in the demand for food in our region. The emergency food network in Eastern Massachusetts, which includes 550 GBFB partner agencies, has shown incredible resiliency during this difficult time and continues to heroically adapt to the needs of an ever-increasing number of people, many of whom have never had to rely on a food pantry for assistance to feed their family.” -Catherine D’Amato, President and CEO

Learn more about the work of The Greater Boston Food Bank [here](#).

Worcester County Food Bank:

Worcester County Food Bank is dedicated to engaging, educating, and leading Worcester County in creating a hunger-free community. The Worcester County Food Bank distributes food to people in need across Worcester County’s 60 cities and towns. Last year, [the Worcester County Food bank and its network of 115 local pantries and community meal programs helped to distribute nearly 6.1mm pounds of donated food to 75,000 people.](#)



Compared to last year, the Worcester County Food Bank distributed 32% more in March and 21% more in April. They project they will need to distribute approximately 1 million more pounds of food this year compared to last year due to increased food insecurity amongst COVID - equivalent to nearly 114,000 meals per week.

"I have three children and was laid off [...] I'm scrambling to cover my bills while I wait for unemployment to be approved. Thank you for telling me how to apply for SNAP and where I can get take-out school meals for my kids. You welcomed me to the Food Bank to pick-up food because my local food pantry wasn't opened until the next day. I cried with relief when you brought the food to my car." – Recipient of food assistance from Worcester County Food Bank

Learn more about the work of Worcester County Food Bank [here](#).

Project Bread:

Project Bread's COVID-19 relief efforts are focused on ensuring that people across the state of Massachusetts have safe, equitable, and reliable access to food, through their FoodSource Hotline and collaborations with school districts and local organizations.

"I am on unpaid "family leave" from my job right now, so I don't know if I will qualify for SNAP benefits. Thank you for letting me know I am eligible for PEBT and updating my address. I have three children who go to public school and would normally be eating breakfast and lunch at school if the schools were open. My son has disabilities, so someone needs to take care of him while the school is closed and to keep my family safe from being exposed." – Caller to Project Bread's FoodSource Hotline

Learn more about the work of Project Bread [here](#).

Though shoring up the critical food bank partners in our state was a priority focus for Wave 3 funding, the MA COVID-19 Relief Fund also provided \$4.7mm in grants to community foundations working to combat homelessness and housing insecurity and provide critical mental health, disability, and childcare services. It is noteworthy that the leaders of the state's community foundations have benefited from collaborating with one another, sharing lessons learned and testing out new ideas on their bi-weekly virtual partner convening meetings. Although silver linings are hard to find these days, the extension of services beyond normal boundaries and the benefits of partnering across regions are acknowledged by all.

To view a current list of nonprofit organizations supported by the grantees of the Massachusetts COVID-19 Relief Fund click [here](#).



May you find peace, health and community in the days to come.

With great thanks,

Lauren Baker, First Lady of Massachusetts, Advisory Committee

Joanna Jacobson, One8 Foundation Trustee & President, Advisory Committee

Jonathan Raymond, Executive Director, MA COVID-19 Relief Fund