

Foodlink, Inc. - Alexandra Cicero

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Organization Profile

Organization Name	Mail Address
Foodlink, Inc.	1999 Mt. Read Blvd., Rochester, NY 14615

Exec. Name	Contact Name	Phone	Email
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Mission/Vision Mission: To leverage the power of food to end hunger and build healthier communities.

Vision: We believe that the fight against hunger and the fight against poverty are one and the same. We envision a future in which food is recognized as a human right and every person is able to feed themselves and their families in dignity. Together, we work to create a more nourished, prosperous region.

Receive County Funds? no

Div. of Corp. N/A? no

Proposal Information

Project Name Expanding Food Access for Monroe County Families

Summary The COVID-19 pandemic proved the importance of Federal Nutrition Programs (FNPs), but also revealed several gaps in how many families still face food insecurity. Since the onset of COVID, Foodlink's Community Kitchen has served approximately 9,000 meals and snacks per day to schools, community programs, and recreation centers. Children and adults throughout the county depend on external meals such as these for support. Most of these meals are reimbursed through FNPs, but because of strict, archaic regulations we were unable to serve everyone who sought access. This proposal aims to address two of the biggest barriers in FNP's: limiting geographies and age.

Currently, FNPs are categorically eligible in the City of Rochester, but programs located in other parts of Monroe County must meet strict income qualifications. This is a barrier to serve the growing need in towns like Gates, Greece, and Irondequoit. Additionally, FNPs only pay for meals for children (5-18) or seniors but offer no opportunities for multi-generational programs. This is problematic, as research proves that children are more likely to try new foods when they are eating with adults.

This proposal will allow us to serve quality, nutritious meals to multi-generational families throughout Monroe County via innovative community programs like Foodlink's "meal delivery truck," YMCA's Center for Equity, and Open Door Mission's Coldwater House. The result will be a benefit to public health for Monroe County residents, and an opportunity for Foodlink to lead efforts to partner with the Federal government to adapt FNPs to a post-pandemic environment.

Workforce/Economic?	Health/Safety?	Infrastructure/Sustainability?
no	yes	no

Description The proposed project will support food insecure families throughout Monroe County by providing nutritious meals to households that may have previously struggled to participate in Federal Nutrition Programs (FNPs). Specifically, Foodlink will address two main gaps created by the strict regulations of FNPs; limits on eligible geographies and ages.

Currently, FNPs are categorically eligible in the City of Rochester, but programs located in other parts of Monroe County must meet income qualifications. This is a barrier to serve the growing need in towns like Gates, Greece, and Irondequoit. Additionally, FNPs only pay for meals for children (5-18) or seniors but offer no opportunities for multi-generational programs. This is problematic, as research proves that children are more likely to try new foods when they are eating with adults.

Foodlink will address these gaps by providing quality, nutritious meals to innovative community programs that serve multi-generational households in various parts of Monroe County. We will leverage our existing infrastructure and effective distribution methods. Our team of nutritionists, chefs, and drivers will prepare and distribute hot/cold meals to community members with a focus on two different models:

(1) Foodlink's "delivery truck" model features our staff driving through underserved neighborhoods and serving anyone in need of a nutritious meal. Like an ice cream truck, we will seek out neighborhoods and develop relationships with families who need this service. Due to temporary waivers from the federal government, we have been able to pilot this model of distribution in targeted city neighborhoods during the last two summers. It has been incredibly successful, as we have served hundreds of meals per day during these pilot periods. With support from Monroe County, we will be able to expand this model and incorporate additional neighborhoods as well as high-need areas in towns like Gates, Greece, and Irondequoit.

(2) Partnering with organizations who work with low-income families in Monroe County and offer opportunities for multi-generational, congregate meals. We will start by serving the YMCA Center for Equity (Rochester) and Open Door Mission's Coldwater House (Gates). Both programs aim to serve whole families and currently struggle to find quality, affordable meals. We hope to start with these programs, and eventually expand into additional YMCA sites and partner with Monroe County via Libraries, Human Services and Office of the Aging.

The proposed program activities will advance two Bring Monroe Back goals - Economic Recovery and Public Health. Hunger, poverty, and public health are linked to one another. Assuring families have enough food is both an economic and health issue. Foodlink's kitchen produced 930,000 meals last year. This proposed project will provide an estimated 168,200 meals to additional community members who we were previously unable to serve. The program will have a significant impact on the lives of individuals being fed immediately and beyond the grant period. This program directly reduces barriers to food and health, while indirectly reducing barriers to employment, economic mobility, and intergenerational wealth. When individuals don't have to worry about their next meal, they can focus on their health, families, education, and careers.

In addition to supporting the distribution of meals through innovative channels, this proposal will help bolster Foodlink's role in leading advocacy efforts to modernize Federal Nutrition Programs for a post-pandemic society. While we are already working with Hunger Solutions NY and Common Ground Health to make continuous improvements to the way the USDA and NYS administer these programs, we will be able to exert more influence and leadership with our new Advocacy and Government Relations Specialist. This is the right time to advocate for new guidelines to FNPs, as the White House has continuously asked for innovative ideas.

Foodlink will measure our impact through both quantitative and qualitative evaluation. We are able to see and measure success through the number of meals distributed, and we conduct regular surveys and interviews with clients to get feedback on how to improve our programming. We welcome the opportunity to work with Monroe County on various evaluation opportunities, especially as they connect with other existing initiatives. We will utilize these evaluations over the next several years to demonstrate to the Federal government the importance of being more expansive in eligibility guidelines based on both geography and age. We will work with our network, partners, and peer groups to establish an advocacy framework that will be leveraged for change to create a future where all families are included in nutrition programs.

We anticipate that the proposed program will be able to serve 380-680 additional individuals on a daily basis. Without ARPA funding, this project is not possible. Foodlink's services are made possible by a diverse portfolio of incomes from private and government grants, fee-for-service programs, and fundraising. Like the restrictions mentioned above, many of the funds we receive are only eligible for services directed at specific populations, settings, and programs. This funding is an opportunity to work outside of traditional restrictions using a variety of developed and historically successful service models. We are confident that this proposal will help Monroe County achieve its goals, and that we will be able to sustain these programs in the long-term after this grant is completed.

Company Strengths Since Foodlink's founding in 1978, we've evolved into one of the most innovative food banks in the national Feeding America network with a warehouse, industrial coolers/freezers, Urban Farm, fleet of refrigerated vehicles, and a NYS Certified Apprenticeship. Over the course of 44 years, we've distributed hundreds of millions of pounds of food and stewarded millions of dollars of assets and infrastructure to serve our community. We have served as fiduciaries for NYS for 35 years as recipients of pass-through/direct funding annually through the Department of Health. Foodlink is able to do this because of our dedicated staff of 118 employees and network of 400+ partners, including schools, nonprofits, churches, food pantries, and other grassroots organizations.

Foodlink ensures best practices in service by partnering with community-based organizations. By centering the experience of our stakeholders and consistently seeking community feedback, we are able to develop and adapt programming to address community needs. Our programs are created with detailed, thoughtful planning by staff with expertise. Many employees are local and have relevant lived experience such as food insecurity or poverty. Foodlink ensures programs are implemented with adequate time during a planning period to assure staff are prepared with the knowledge and materials to serve their participants.

This program builds upon the capacity and training of existing infrastructure and staff members, with no need for new methodology. Our mobile distribution methods have served the community for several years. Foodlink has provided mobile distributions through our pop-up pantries, curbside market, and community kitchen. We have provided meals daily to various organizations in the Rochester area, and every summer through the ice cream truck model. In the past year, Foodlink distributed 25 million pounds of food and over 900,000 prepared meals. We have the assets and infrastructure necessary to make this proposal come to fruition.

Community Resources Foodlink will draw upon our 44 years of experience, community collaboration, and strategic programmatic and capital investments to provide the program. We are a membership-based organization with hundreds of partners in Monroe County, and we will leverage those relationships throughout this project.

We will work closely with specific partners like YMCA Center for Equity and Open Door Mission's Coldwater House. These organizations serve a diverse clientele and have a proven track record of reaching the most vulnerable in our community. The successful methodology of the program allows easily duplicable services with great potential to serve other community based organizations. Our membership network is diverse and includes many MWBE and Veteran led businesses like Beyond the Sanctuary (BTS) and Veterans Outreach Center (VOC). In the program proposed here, we will work with our network to ensure the success of our delivery model. Places like BTS and VOC will help refer people to this program.

Foodlink has served meals to the YMCA for close to a decade, mostly through their after-school programming, our nutrition education classes, and the Curbside Market. The Lewis Street YMCA, now 'YMCA Center for Equity' has evolved beyond youth programming and childcare to meet the growing needs of the community, including food/internet access, and programming for seniors and migrants. This switch to multi-generational programming in our community is greatly needed, and we look forward to providing meals for them. Open Door Mission has been a long-term partner of ours, we regularly provide food to their meal program and emergency shelter. We have not been able to serve their Coldwater House yet because there is no Federal or State program that reimburses for multigenerational programming such as the one posed. They are eager for the opportunity to work with us on delivering quality meals for their clients.

Foodlink utilizes our vast network of community collaborators with varying focuses to ensure we are working efficiently to reduce barriers to equity. Through our collaboration we are actively working to reduce silos, avoid duplication of services, and utilize existing infrastructure. Our community kitchen has an operating budget of \$6,420,870, which serves as the core of our in-kind resources for this grant. This includes occupancy costs, a state-of-the-art commercial kitchen, 17 chefs, 10 drivers and a dietician on staff. In addition, we have a Development team that capable of fundraising if there are additional needs that arise for this project.

Audience The proposed project will support food insecure individuals throughout Monroe County by providing nutritious, prepared meals through mobile distributions in the group and family setting. This method fills the gap of service for individuals who are left out of traditional supportive services due to unrealistic income standards, living situation, or family status.

This identified group to serve includes various populations but will focus entirely on low-income, underserved communities experiencing food insecurity. The majority of these communities have substantial populations of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). BIPOC are historically disinvested in and have faced racial inequities and discrimination leading to lack of generational wealth, lack of homeownership, poverty, and in turn, increased dependence on supportive services. According to data from Feeding America's Map the Meal Gap, in Monroe County, there is a food insecurity rate of 11.6%, and of those food-insecure individuals, 31% are above the threshold to receive SNAP and other nutrition benefits.

In order to effectively provide nutritional support, the program will have no cost to individuals that participate. Foodlink will provide meals centered in the community, in identified high-need neighborhoods and at community-based organizations that are high-traffic and engage residents most in need of supportive services.

<i>Cost 1st Year</i>	<i>Cost All Years</i>	<i>Residents 1st Year</i>	<i>Residents All Years</i>	<i>FT Employees</i>	<i>PT Employees</i>
\$276,909.00	\$1,430,745.00	34,700	168,200	39	3

Volunteers

5

Staffing The program will be supported by members of our kitchen, delivery, and administrative teams in order to ensure success. Key staff members to the program will include our Community Meals Distribution Manager, Executive Chef, Sous Chef, drivers, and our Advocacy and Government Relations Specialist.

Kenneth Hohenbeck is our current Executive Chef. He joined Foodlink in January of 2018 as the organization's first Executive Chef, bringing more than 20 years of experience in the culinary industry as a chef, small-business owner, and caterer. Chef Hohenbeck coordinates Foodlink's kitchen and meal preparation with Sous Chef Andrae Leneer. Chef Leneer has been with Foodlink since 2015, bringing a variety of experience from both hospital meal production and cooking at country clubs. Meals are coordinated with external organizations for distribution in the community by our Community Meals Distribution Manager, Macie McGowan. McGowan has worked here since 2016, with significant customer service and coordination experience. The two drivers that will operate the routes are Robert Johnson and Kaleaf Ball who have been with the organization since 2012 and 2021 respectively.

The program's impact will be evaluated by our Advocacy and Government Relations Specialist, with support from BRI Consultancy, LLC (f.k.a. Brockport Research Institute). Because the program is targeted to support groups who are not eligible for traditional nutrition programs, data collection is pertinent to our advocacy efforts. Our emphasis on dignity and stigma reduction are key to ensuring utilized services. Collaboration will play an important role in developing trust and engaging the community for feedback.