

# HUNGER RELIEF NOW!

A PLAN TO REDUCE HUNGER  
IN KING COUNTY

APRIL 2009



United Way of King County

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## Introduction

In 2008, representatives from a number of local food banks, meal programs and food distributors came to United Way of King County to request assistance. They shared that local food programs were seeing unprecedented increases in demand and that the emergency food system was having a difficult time keeping up.

United Way of King County held a community forum to try to further understand the full extent of the problem and begin a discussion of some of the solutions. It quickly became clear that we required both an immediate response to meet the needs of people who were hungry in our community now and a longer term, significantly more strategic response to address the systemic and structural issues that are perpetuating hunger.

Looking back, we now realize that we were seeing the initial impact of the recession on this community. While hunger has been an issue of great concern for United Way of King County, local governments, other funders, non-profit organizations, and community advocates for some time, the recession has added urgency to our response.



The plan that you hold in your hands is a culmination of these efforts and new understanding. The plan outlines 12 action steps, both short- and long-term, that are required to address hunger in this community, reduce it, and decrease the risk of it in the future.

This plan is built on a foundation of work by the existing network of providers, non-profits, advocacy organizations, and government and private funders who work tirelessly to help ensure that no one in our community goes hungry. This document would not have been possible without the contributions of many of the people in the field of hunger relief in our community.

Members of the emergency food distribution system (food banks, meal programs, and food distributors) on the front-line of the fight against hunger discussed the strengths and limitations of their system at length and with great candor. Local government representatives provided in-depth analysis of local and federal programs. Advocates helped inform the creation of the plan by pointing out legislative actions that could help make the system work better and more efficiently for the people and families striving to access food assistance.



The good news is that progress is already being made. Building on the foundation of the existing food distribution system, United Way of King County and other funders have begun to make targeted investments to help increase the capacity of the system to respond to the needs of the most vulnerable members of our community (e.g. older adults, very low-income families and those with chronic health issues) who are hurt by the recession.



The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS), the key state agency helping people access the Basic Food Program (food stamps), has shown a remarkable willingness to streamline access to benefits. While DSHS has sometimes been viewed as an impediment to connecting people to food benefits in the past,



the current leadership has taken the time to meet with community leaders to discuss how system improvements might be made.

Food Lifeline and Northwest Harvest, two food distributors serving food banks and meal programs across western Washington, are demonstrating unprecedented levels of cooperation and collaboration. This helps ensure that no duplication of services exists and that scarce resources are used efficiently.

Our region is fortunate to be one of the national leaders in understanding the relationship between quality food and local agriculture. The prevalence of farmer's markets, community gardens, and community-supported agriculture demonstrates a commitment on the part of this region's citizens to seek out quality, local foods. Everyone in this community, including low-income families, should have the ability to access quality food. We also want to guide the next generation of young children and teens struggling with compromised health because of a lack of nutrition.

The advocacy community continues to be an important voice locally and with state and federal officials to help ensure that those people and families who struggle with hunger are not forgotten. In particular, the Children's Alliance has been an important voice on behalf of children and families in our state. Their 10-year plan to end childhood hunger played a vital role in informing the strategies in this plan.

Many organizations in our community and across Washington state have been working tirelessly to address hunger. We are stronger when we work together toward a common goal, execute agreed upon strategies, and engage the broader community in action. That

kind of communal commitment is the purpose of this plan. Our collective goal as providers, governments, funders, and private citizens is to ensure that no family should have to choose between food, rent and health in King County.

Perhaps the most important component of this plan is YOU. People throughout this community need to join together to insist that is unacceptable for anyone to even be at risk of going hungry. If each of us commits to speak up, act, volunteer, and support those organizations working to reduce hunger in our community, we will succeed.

## Taking Action

Everyone has a role to play in reducing hunger. Below are a few ways for people across King County to get involved in their everyday lives. For more ways to take action, visit [unitedwayofkingcounty.org/hunger](https://unitedwayofkingcounty.org/hunger).

**1**

### Volunteer: Your time and talents can help reduce hunger

- Visit [unitedwayofkingcounty.org/volunteer](https://unitedwayofkingcounty.org/volunteer) to find volunteer opportunities at local food banks, food distributors, meal programs and community gardens.
- Volunteer to help families access public benefits.

**2**

### Speak up: Join the movement to address hunger

- Make a point of discussing hunger with your friends, family and the people in your neighborhood.
- Inform your elected officials that you care about the issue of hunger.

**3**

### Educate: Knowledge drives action to reduce hunger

- Tell friends, family members and neighbors they may be eligible for the Basic Food Program, Free and Reduced School Breakfast and Lunch, the Earned Income Tax Credit and other benefits.
- Visit the web sites of hunger-relief organizations to learn what they do and how you can help.
- Invite friends to “virtual lunch.” Estimate the cost and donate that amount to your favorite hunger-relief organization.
- Energize your book group around a book that focuses on the issues of hunger.

**4**

### Give: Support community organizations working to reduce hunger

- One of the most powerful ways you can help is to give financial gifts to organizations that are dedicated to reducing hunger.
- Plan a food drive with your school, neighborhood, place of worship, or after-school group.
- Donate the free items from “buy one, get one free” grocery store campaigns.
- Help grow healthy food for families in need through the P-Patch Community Gardens or Solid Ground’s Lettuce Link program and donate extra vegetables to a local food bank.

**5**

### For Funders:

- Participate in Hunger Funders Group.
- Develop funding opportunities that support one or more of the Hunger Relief Now! Strategies.
- Support both immediate and long term strategies to reduce hunger.
- Be an advocate for policy changes that reduce hunger.

## Understanding the Nature and Scope of the Problem

Even during generally good economic times, people in almost every neighborhood in King County struggle with having enough food on a regular basis. Many more do not know where their next meal is coming from.

### Invisible Hunger Moves Front and Center with Recession

Much of this hunger is invisible, although teachers and employers across the county regularly see children and adults who are not able to function to their full ability because they do not get enough food. Some severe pockets of hunger exist, such as among seniors and people with disabilities, but they are out of sight and out of mind for most of us.

When the current recession struck hard in 2008, the tremendous increase in calls for help with food, the well-publicized pressure on food banks, and the surge in the number of first-time food bank clients, revealed the depth and breadth of hunger problems in King County. It also revealed that we do not have the capacity, even during good times, to respond to the level of need in King County.

There has been a large outpouring of support and a growing awareness of the scale of the problem in recent months. United Way of King County has provided substantial new funding to meet emergency needs, as have other individuals and organizations. Many of those who want to help have approached United Way of King County to ask for guidance on how they can help in smart and strategic ways.

### Responding to Urgent Needs While Starting Needed System Improvements

This plan responds to those requests and provides United Way of King County and the broader community with an updated map for its short- and long-term investments in reducing hunger.

The *Hunger Relief Now!* plan builds on considerable data, a great deal of research, decades of experience and expertise, and plans developed by other groups concerned about reducing hunger.

Requests for help with food continue to grow and there is no indication they will slow down in the near future. It is neither necessary nor prudent to wait until much-needed system improvements are made to get food into the hands of our children and adults. This plan proposes that investments are needed now, and that they can be made in ways that start or accelerate some of the needed improvements.

#### This plan:

- Tells us what we are up against, who needs help, and what we can do in King County starting today.
- Identifies strengths and challenges in the processes for reducing hunger.
- Tells us what we need to know to act now to respond to urgent needs and identifies the long-term efforts that must get underway.

### Hunger creates health and economic problems for everyone

People and organizations throughout King County hold a shared commitment to creating a community of healthy and productive adults, thriving children, stable families, and strong community organizations and employers.

**Hunger is a serious threat to living in a stable, thriving community.** For more than a decade, dozens of studies have shown that even low levels of hunger have detrimental effects.<sup>1</sup> There is substantial and conclusive

evidence that hunger has a number of serious and damaging effects on the health, quality of life and productivity of people of all ages.<sup>2</sup>

**Poor developmental outcomes for kids.** Babies and children who live in households without enough food:<sup>3 4 5 6</sup>

- Are at risk for low-birth weight and birth defects such as cleft palate, spina bifida, and brain defects
- Are sick more frequently
- Are more likely to be absent from school, fail, be suspended, repeat a grade, and drop out
- Are more likely to require special education services
- Are more susceptible to cognitive impairment (mental dysfunction)
- Need more medical, dental and mental health treatments
- Engage in more anti-social behaviors
- Are more likely to be obese

**Decreased well-being and productivity among adults.** People who go without enough to eat:<sup>7</sup>

- Are sick more often
- Miss work more frequently and show diminished work performance
- Need more care for chronic health conditions

**Compromised health of seniors:** Hungry seniors have:<sup>8</sup>

- More than twice the likelihood of having fair or poor health status
- Increased disability
- Decreased resistance to infection
- Extended hospital stays
- Increased health care costs

**Financial cost to communities.** An exhaustive study of the costs of hunger estimated that the United States pays more than \$90 billion annually for the direct and indirect costs of health, productivity and quality of life effects described above.<sup>9</sup>

## Why do we have so much hunger?

Poverty is the major and chronic cause of hunger. Households with very low incomes simply cannot afford what it costs to provide basic needs, especially in areas such as King County where housing costs are so high and require a very high proportion of income. Public benefits, such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and Basic Food (food stamps), are far from adequate to cover even meager basic needs. Workers in King County who earn low wages or work part-time simply do not earn enough money to pay for housing, transportation, utilities, and health care and have enough money left to buy food.

Households typically do not go hungry due to poor choices or bad habits. The single fastest growing group of people having to rely on food banks and emergency feeding programs is the working poor: households where both parents may be working, or where one is holding down one or more low-wage jobs. The pay they receive for their hard work is inadequate to meet household needs.<sup>10</sup>

### Food Stamps is the Common Name for the Basic Food Program

In the late 1930s, the idea of providing a basic safety net for feeding people was created and it was called the Federal Food Stamp Program. In 2008, Congress re-named the program again, calling it the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Some states have developed their own name for the program. In Washington state the program is called the Washington Basic Food Program (commonly called Basic Food).

In Washington, Basic Food is a program of the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS), and provides money to buy food. Instead of using paper “food stamps” the program now issues an Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card. EBT cards work like debit cards and participants can spend their monthly benefits in participating grocery stores and other food retailers, including some farmers markets.

Focus group participants interviewed by Northwest Harvest, and many other sources, conclude that high rents in King County, low paying jobs, the mandatory nature of utility bills and medical costs, and high food costs were the strongest reasons why people did not have enough money for food.<sup>11</sup>

**Racial disparities reflected in hunger levels.** People of color have higher rates of hunger, consistent with the pattern of income, health and education disparities they experience.

**Food may be at the end of the list of untenable tradeoffs.** Expenses like rent, utilities and medical care are fixed, but food purchases are elastic or expendable. The rent and utilities must be paid but for food, families “choose” to do without.

**Families often start a downward spiral with loss of a job or a major medical problem.** Lack of food often becomes a problem if employment income is lost or reduced, or if a medical problem interferes with the ability to work or creates substantial debt.

### Two main ways people get help with food

Efforts in King County and elsewhere around the country range from very bureaucratic, government-administered programs to the smallest of volunteer efforts run with paper and pencil. Each has strengths, yet sometimes it seems like a miracle that any of them work effectively. The two major routes to combat hunger are federal nutrition programs and a mix of large and small front-line community organizations traditionally known as the emergency food system, but known as community-based food programs for this report.

1. **Public benefits.** The federal government provides funding for the food stamp program, as well as for school lunches and breakfasts, meals at summer programs, food at child care centers and other programs. Food stamps are one of the most effective anti-hunger strategies in the country, and millions of school meals reach children from low-income families every year. However, some of these programs are governed by complex and confusing regulations, and people seeking help often run into bureaucratic roadblocks.
2. **Community-based food programs.** These include food banks, meal programs, and grocery and meal delivery programs mostly operated by nonprofit organizations. For years, the common name for this collection of programs has been the “emergency food system,” even though it has evolved from that early purpose to be a regular source of food for a substantial portion of its customers. Participants in focus groups organized by Northwest Harvest report that most people visit more than one food bank each month and rely on food banks for 25-80 percent of their food.

Many people need and use both systems and still may not have enough food.

**Connections to community food production and sustainable food systems.** Seattle and other communities across the country have a growing interest in linking anti-hunger efforts to broader community issues such as sustainable urban agriculture, community gardens, supporting local farms, community development, and environmental issues. The result is that more people grow their own food and that there is more nutritious food at food banks and for meal programs. Some projects with those goals are currently underway in King County, although on a relatively small scale at this time.

While this plan largely focuses on the emergency food system, we recognize the value and importance of addressing larger food policy issues. United Way supports the work of the Acting Food Policy Council, the group largely responsible for food policy work.

Many groups in the Seattle and King County region do work on aspects of food policy, from farmland preservation to nutrition education, food policy and policy for environmental sustainability, land use planning and transportation. The most important function for the Food Policy Council is to serve as a bridge between all of the local governments—city, county and state—and all of the topic areas for a more comprehensive and coordinated approach to food policy. One prime example is helping to make the links between public transit and access to healthy foods in grocery stores, farmers markets and community gardens, a topic that spans multiple jurisdictions, businesses, community groups and government, something that is not easily accomplished by only one agency alone.

## Barriers to getting help

There are major barriers to and difficulties that contribute to people in need not getting the necessary food.

**People think they are not eligible for food stamps.** When Food Lifeline food bank customers were asked if they had applied for food stamps, 72 percent said yes. Of those that did not, 56 percent said the reason they had not applied is that they believed they were ineligible.<sup>14</sup> Many individuals think they are ineligible because of assets they own, although those beliefs are outdated because of changes in the program.

**Families do not think they can or should use public benefits.** Some people are aware of public benefits and their eligibility to receive them, but research shows that they forgo benefits because they believe they are not eligible, will only get a small amount of help, want to “get by” without them, or do not want to be reliant on welfare.<sup>15</sup>

**Lack of information and public awareness.** Some households, especially immigrant and refugee populations, do not know they are eligible for food benefits or where to get help.

**Difficulties in using food banks.** Barriers, such as transportation and limited hours of operation, continue to be a problem for people who could use help from a food bank, especially for seniors, people with disabilities, and working people.<sup>16</sup> Some people need meals or groceries delivered to their homes because they are homebound or cannot cook for themselves. Others have specific dietary restrictions. In addition, there may be language or cultural food needs that present barriers to accessing food banks for some people. Finally, some people want to avoid the indignity of standing outside in line for a food bank.

**Complicated regulations and documentation to sign up for food stamps and other public benefits.** Some families complain that the forms they are required to fill out to get food stamps are too complicated, the process is time consuming, they are treated disrespectfully by staff, and the amount of benefits they receive are not worth the hassle. They choose to avoid the multi-step process altogether. Schools, child care providers, and nonprofit agencies also voice frustrations with the complexity of paperwork required to participate in federal food programs.

## Definitions: “Food insecurity” is more specific than “hunger”

“Hunger” means different things within the disciplines of medicine, social services, economics, etc. The U.S. Department of Agriculture does not measure hunger or the number of hungry people. It has moved away from that terminology, because hunger includes a broad continuum of conditions related to food shortages.<sup>17</sup> To add specificity to its measurements, the Department of Agriculture now uses the concept of “food insecurity.”

### Defining food security and insecurity<sup>18</sup>

**Food security** means that households have no problems or anxiety about consistently accessing adequate food. All members of the household at all times have access to enough food for an active, healthy life.

**Food insecurity** means that households have limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, and have limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways (that is, without resorting to emergency food supplies, scavenging, stealing or other coping strategies). People who are food insecure have either low food security or, if their situation is especially dire, very low food security.

### What does food insecurity feel like?

If you are an adult who is food insecure, you experience several of these conditions:

- You are worried whether your food will run out before you have money to buy more.
- The food that you bought just didn't last and you don't have money to get more.
- You can't afford to eat balanced meals.
- Because there is not enough money for food,
  - ◊ You or other adults in the household cut the size of your meals or skip meals.
  - ◊ You eat less than you feel you should.
  - ◊ You are hungry, but don't eat.
  - ◊ You are losing weight unintentionally.
  - ◊ You or other adults in your household do not eat for a whole day.

If you are food insecure and also a parent trying to feed your children, you struggle because:

- You rely on only a few kinds of low-cost food to feed your children because you are running out of money to buy food.
- Because there is not enough money for food:
  - ◊ You can't feed your children a balanced meal.
  - ◊ You cut the size of any of the children's meals.
  - ◊ Your children go hungry.
  - ◊ Your children skip a meal.
  - ◊ Your children do not eat for a whole day.

**Terminology in this report.** This report will use the more common term of “hunger” to refer to the condition experienced by people who do not have enough food or worry regularly about not being able to get enough to eat, except when referring to specific measures of food insecurity.

## How serious is food insecurity in our region?

### Food insecurity rates prior to recession

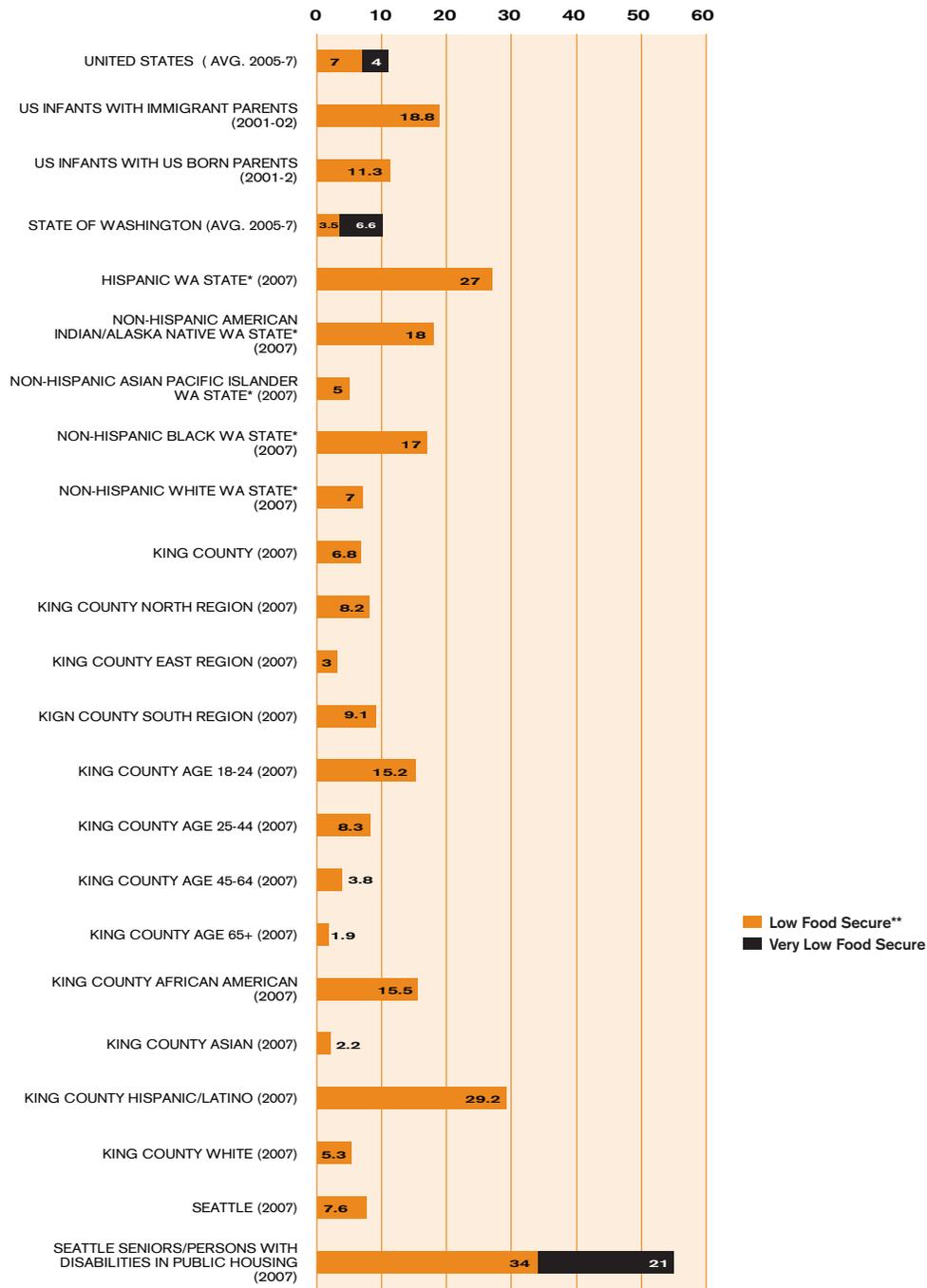
- **Nationwide**, about 11 percent of households were food insecure in 2007.<sup>19</sup>
- **Washington state** had an average 10.1 percent food insecurity rate between 2005-2007. This means that about 255,000 households across the state were financially stretched to the point where they could not be certain that all of their household members would not go hungry.<sup>20</sup>
- **King County** had a 6.8 percent food insecurity rate in 2007.<sup>21</sup> The Communities Count report released in 2008 estimated that King County food banks served 215,941 people in 2007, almost 80,000 of them children.

**Vulnerable people and people of color suffer the most.** About 55 percent of seniors and people with disabilities in public housing in Seattle are food insecure or hungry. Poverty, disability, limited mobility and inability to access grocery stores and food banks are identified as primary contributing factors.

Hispanic people in Washington State had a rate of food insecurity almost three times as high as that of the state's white population. Black and American Indian/Alaska Native people in Washington also have elevated food insecurity rates – more than twice the rate for white people.<sup>22</sup>

The following chart, *Comparison of Food Insecurity Status by Percent*, shows food insecurity rates for a number of populations for which this indicator has been measured.

## Comparison of Food Insecurity Status by Percent



\*King County estimates presented are age-adjusted for comparability with a confidence interval from 3-10 percent.

\*\* Where low food security and very low food security were not reported separately, they are reported as Low Food Secure on this graph.

Sources: Economic Research Service, United States Department of Agriculture, Data from the Current Population Survey Food Security Supplements (2005-07); Children's Alliance. (2008) Hunger in Washington: Challenges and Tools, King County Hunger Forum. Presented July 24, 2008; Washington Behavioral Risk Factor Survey (2007). Capp, R. (2001-02) Early Childhood Longitudinal Study Birth cohort, 9 Month Survey; Nord, M., Andres, M, Carlson, S. (2007) Household insecurity in the United States 2006. Economic Research Service, USDA. November 2007.

## Not just numbers: the faces of hunger

Hunger enters people's lives in a variety of ways, causes hardships most of us could not endure, and is not easily relieved.<sup>23</sup>

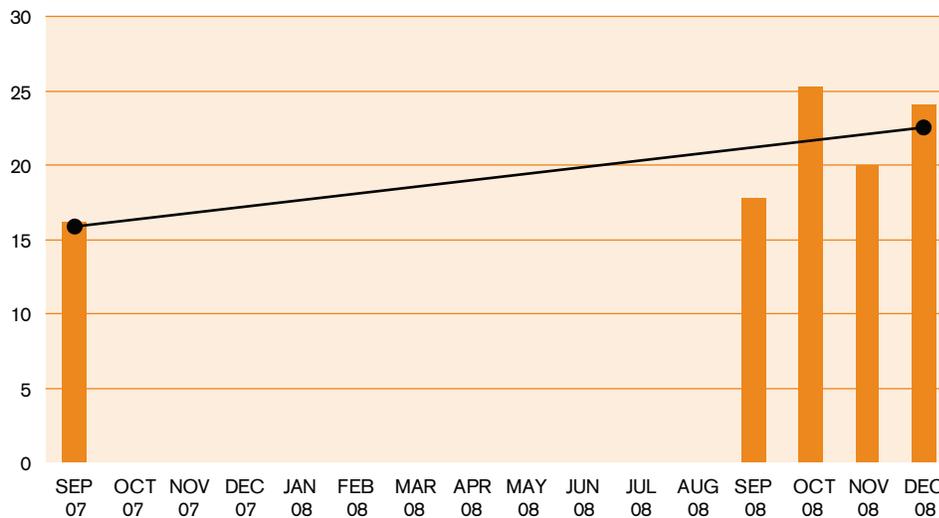
**Jennifer says:** *I was a young, uneducated single mother who waited tables to support myself and my son. I got sick and could not make work for two shifts. Because of that, I could afford my rent but no groceries. I called around and found a local food bank. I was embarrassed and humbled.*

**Beau says:** *Seventeen years ago, I was a food bank client. I had chronic seizures and was too ill to keep a job. I was living on the streets and in shelters, had no money, no job, and no family or friends around for support. At some point, someone introduced me to the notion of food banks. And while the food bank didn't solve all my problems, it was a very critical piece that sustained me while I climbed out of the hole I was in.*

**Grace says:** *While my family has not seen it all, we have seen a lot. I remember standing in line at the food bank. Although my father worked full-time we needed the food bank in order to stretch out the food we were able to afford. With four children ranging in age from two months to 10 years, there was a lot of stretching to do. We did experience a season of "middle class" but with my father's death in 1998 we plunged back to low income. Once again, food, one of the most basic needs, was not always accessible to us.*

**A growing number of people in King County need help with food.** The daily number of calls asking for help with food received by the King County 2-1-1 community information referral line increased 53 percent from September 2007 to December 2008. At that rate, 690 calls asking for help with food come in per month.

### Average Daily Calls to King County 211 for Food Help



Source: Crisis line, King County (2008). Current as of January 30, 2009.

**Food banks are stretched.** Washington, King County, and Seattle have seen a substantial increase in the number of families accessing food banks. The Washington state food distribution system experienced a 15 percent increase in new clients during the first quarter of 2008 and a 28 percent increase in new clients during the second quarter.<sup>24</sup> Annual reports from City of Seattle funded programs indicate that one-quarter of individuals served by food banks in the city were children under the age of 18.<sup>25</sup>

**Gaps in the emergency food system hinder response to increasing need.** Along with increased demand, food bank and meal programs are struggling with steep and sustained increases in food prices and diminished donations.

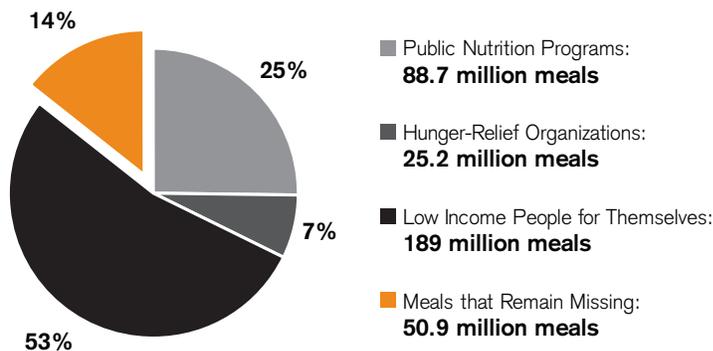
**Food stamps and other public benefits are going unused.** According to the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services, as of January 2009, more than 130,000 people in King County received food benefits, although the food stamp program is still not reaching 40 percent of eligible people.

### Missing meals in King County and how we can close the gap

Being able to convert measures of food insecurity to an estimated number of meals that are missing gives us a more concrete picture of the magnitude of the problem for people in King County. This information allows us to broadly estimate the cost and the number of pounds of food it would take to fill the existing gap.

Food Lifeline has estimated the gap between the total number of meals needed for low income people in King County (185 percent of federal poverty level or below) to be food secure and the number of meals currently available. The Missing Meals report shows that 50.9 million more meals were needed in 2008 in King County to ensure that all low income families and individuals have three nutritious meals a day. That means that another 137,000 meals are needed each day.

### Percentage of Total Meals in King County



Source: Food Lifeline, 2008. Note: In this chart, "Hunger Relief Organizations" refers to food banks and meal programs

For some of the strategies described in the later sections of this plan, we can estimate the number of additional meals that could be provided if the strategies are successfully implemented. In addition, for some strategies, success will also mean that additional federal dollars are coming into King County, which will help support the local economy. Estimates for the yield of both aspects of success are shown in the following table.

An illustration of how several of the strategies could provide about a third of the missing meals is provided below, using conservative estimates.

TARGETS FOR SELECTED STRATEGIES	ESTIMATED MEALS ADDED ANNUALLY	ESTIMATED ADDITIONAL FEDERAL DOLLARS COMING TO KING COUNTY <sup>28</sup>
Increase enrollment in food stamps to 80% of eligible households	9,977,000	\$29,931,000
Increase participation in school breakfast program to 60% of students who participate in school lunch program	3,481,700	\$4,456,576
Increase participation of low-income children in summer food programs to 40% of students who qualify for free or reduced lunch during school year	644,488	\$1,791,677
Add 20% more licensed family child care homes to those participating in federal child care meal program	783,000	\$783,000
Add 20% more licensed child care centers to those participating in federal child care meal program	1,344,060	\$1,344,060
Double the number of people served in Seattle who receive home delivered meals	592,800	0
Distribute an additional 1,000,000 pounds of food to food banks	781,250	0
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>17,604,298</b>	<b>\$38,306,313</b>

### Much can be done and now is the time to act

Thousands of children, adults, and seniors were suffering from hunger in King County before the recession; those numbers are growing at an alarming pace due to the recession.

**Growing public awareness and concern.** There is increased recognition of the breadth and effects of hunger among community leaders, public and private funders, and the general community, accompanied by increased desire and commitment to act quickly and strategically to improve the situation.

**Federal funds yet to be claimed.** Federal funding for food stamps, school meals and other programs are not being fully tapped, representing missed opportunities to bring millions of dollars in food funding to King County.

**Leveraging dollars helps the county.** Food stamp spending provides effective economic stimulus. Each dollar in federal food stamp benefits generates nearly double that in economic activity.<sup>29</sup>

# STRATEGIES

## Choosing effective strategies to reduce hunger in King County

**Challenges in developing “ideal” strategies.** The strategies developed for this plan are selected and designed for action on the county level in the context of the current recession. This approach requires adroit navigating of a system driven largely by categorical federal funding and policies at one end and independent pockets of dedicated volunteers at the other, which lacks strong coordination at the state and local levels.

In addition, the development of the “best” strategies is hampered by:

- The relative lack of outcome studies and best practices in this field. While many cities and states have appealing plans, there is little documentation of whether or how they were implemented and with what success.
- The lack of infrastructure for coordinated action on a county level.
- Federal policy controls a very large part of the public sector resources and programs available to reduce hunger. Ensuring that states and localities maximize opportunities in federal policy – as well as changing federal policy itself – can be a complicated and slow process.
- The difficulty of identifying which nonprofit or funding organization or organizations can or should take the lead on some change strategies. For example, few community-based organizations currently have experience executing strategies that depend on new or enhanced coordination between public and nonprofit organizations, or that require them to be on-the-ground catalysts for changes in government functions, individual schools or community-based organizations.
- The presence of several reports and considerable data indicating that parts of the current system are flawed due to duplication, lack of coordination, bureaucratic constraints due to legislative and administrative policies, and turf battles.
- Insufficient strategic planning and strategic investments in this field at the state or local levels prior to the current economic crisis.
- The urgency and short time frame in which this plan was developed, which precluded comprehensive research and stakeholder input and involvement.

**Weighing the need for immediate relief with uncomfortable awareness of system flaws.** In the short term, investors must weigh meeting the current high need to get more food to more people already in crisis with their likely frustration with aspects of the current situation that clearly warrant improvements that may take many months if not years to effect.

**The first set of strategies laid out below takes a middle ground.** They are practical and will get more food to people who need it now in ways that move toward the larger changes that will take much more time. The second set of strategies identifies longer-term efforts that, along with policy changes for which community leaders must advocate, could substantially improve how King County effectively addresses hunger.

**Effectively reaching varied population groups based on common principles.** Strategies to reduce hunger in King County must acknowledge that hunger affects many types of people: infants, toddlers, school-age children, teens, vulnerable adults, new mothers, seniors, people with disabilities, adult refugees and immigrants and their children, and those individuals and families without enough money for or access to food. Reaching each population effectively requires a range of strategies, each of which should incorporate these key principles:

- Focus on the most vulnerable and underserved populations, using available data and mapping of areas of high need.
- Reach all people in respectful, culturally appropriate and effective ways.
- Build on existing infrastructures and experience in the field.
- Understand and overcome logistical or bureaucratic barriers to food access.
- Provide nutritious food, especially to children and vulnerable adults.
- Begin needed system-level improvements while quickly getting more food to people on the ground.

**Outcomes.** By devoting considerable resources and employing these strategies, United Way of King County and others who join in to implement this plan can:

- Reduce the rate of food insecurity in King County, especially for populations with the highest rates of hunger.
- Increase participation in federally funded food programs that provide a stable ongoing source of funding.
- Increase the nutritional value of food provided.

### **A Range of Strategies Needed to Reach Different Population Groups**

Different strategies are needed to reach different population groups experiencing hunger. Often, each group needs to use more than one strategy to meet their food needs. To better understand who will be helped by the strategies in this plan, the strategies in this plan are first identified by the populations of people they will help.

The table below, Hungry Populations in King County and Strategies to Reduce Their Hunger, provides an overview of the recommended strategies and which populations they will serve.

## Hungry Populations in King County and Strategies to Reduce Their Hunger

STRATEGIES	Infants	Toddlers	School-age children	Teens	New Mothers	Vulnerable adults	Seniors	People with Disabilities	Adult Refugees and Immigrants	Children of Refugees and Immigrants	Low-Income
	<b>SECTION 1: JUMP START RELIEF</b>										
1. Immediate outreach effort to enroll the lowest income and most vulnerable people into the food stamp program and other public benefits	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	*	x	x
2. Feed hungry seniors, people with disabilities, people experiencing homelessness and homebound people via meal programs and home delivery of groceries and meals						x	x	x	x		x
3. Serve more meals to low-income children this summer through summer meal programs			x	x						x	
4. Meet critical equipment, staffing, and transportation needs of food banks, meal programs and home delivery of groceries and meals	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
5. Increase enrollment of pregnant women, infants and young children in the WIC nutrition program	x	x			x					x	x
<b>SECTION 1: MAKE LONG-TERM IMPROVEMENTS</b>											
6. Strengthen marketing, outreach, technology and state processing for food stamp program and other benefits	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x
7. Strengthen and coordinate the community-based food system	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
8. Increase the number of low-income students who eat a healthy breakfast and lunch at school			x	x						x	
9. Sign up more child care providers for federal child care food program	x	x	x							x	
10. Increase nutritional value of food for all strategies in this plan	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
11. Form a King County Hunger Relief Council to reach shared goals and measure progress	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
12. Engage community leaders in advocacy efforts to increase resources and effect policy changes	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x

\*Washington State has an Immigrant Food Stamp program that provides benefits to adults, although the federal food stamp program no longer does.

# SECTION 1: JUMP START RELIEF

**Strategies presented in this section bring food to hungry people now.**

While many hunger reduction strategies require a great deal of commitment, large financial investments, and up to several years, the strategies presented here can be employed relatively quickly to get food out to people in a matter of months.

## WHO IS HUNGRY? ALL HUNGRY POPULATIONS

1

**Immediate outreach effort to enroll the lowest income and most vulnerable people into the food stamp program and other public benefits**

### Context

While many low-income King County families qualify for food stamps, the participation rate among eligible households in King County in January 2009 was 59 percent, compared to 72 percent for Washington State. Reasons for this low rate include the lack of effective and sufficient outreach, misunderstandings about who can apply, reluctance to accept “welfare,” and complexities and frustrations in the enrollment process administered by the state Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS).

New leadership at DSHS has begun to explore building partnerships with social service organizations, state, local, and county agencies, and interested parties in the business community to create more welcoming access points where people can apply for Basic Food benefits in a more streamlined way. In addition to the support necessary to equip community partners with the tools to connect families to Basic Food benefits, DSHS plans to build additional capacity in human and technology resources.

DSHS has initiated an effort by Community Services Offices across Washington (including the ten in King County) to partner with local community-based organizations to engage in varying degrees of increasing the number of access points for people to apply for food stamps. The levels will range from simply adding a Basic Food icon to their publicly accessible computers to helping people gather the information for their income verification. Community-based agencies who want to become partners may need equipment and may require some technical assistance so they can effectively assist people who want to apply.

DSHS has released an RFP from community-based organizations conducting community outreach. The department plans to continue a pay-for-performance model, rewarding successful Basic Food application completion and approval. The outreach pay-for-performance model is designed to reimburse half of the cost of providing outreach services, and the outreach agencies are expected to provide the other half as matching funds.

Organizations who want to respond to the RFP, either as a primary contractor or subcontractor, will need to secure matching funds and have adequate capacity to participate. This may be challenging as community-based organizations have limited flexible funding.

The average household Basic Food Program benefit in Washington State in January 2009 was \$209 and the average household size was two people.<sup>30</sup> The food stamp program brought \$120 million into King County in 2006.<sup>31</sup>

Characteristics of households using food stamps in Washington in fiscal year 2007:

- 39.7 percent were children
- 17.5 percent were elderly
- 25.5 percent were disabled
- 23.6 percent were single adults with children

Of all participants, 13.8 percent were preschool age children and 27.8 were school-age children.<sup>32</sup>

As it would be expensive to pay staff enough to undertake the necessary level of outreach, volunteers could substantially increase outreach efforts.

## Community Voice

Food stamp applicants in a focus group said they appreciated the choice in food selection and shopping flexibility that food stamps offer, but expressed concerns with the application process and with customer service at local offices.<sup>33</sup> They mentioned poor treatment by program workers, lost paperwork, and time needed for appointments as deterrents to program participation.<sup>34</sup>

## Target

Increase food stamp participation to 80 percent among eligible King County residents.

## Rationale

- Food stamps represent an ongoing resource to obtain food, and primarily use federal funds rather than local resources.
- Newly broadened gross income eligibility criteria for food stamps present opportunities for greater participation. Changes in the recent Farm Bill increases benefit levels, and the recent federal stimulus package increases the amount of benefits by 13 or 14 percent.
- Increasing the participation rate would generate substantial amounts of federal funds to buy food, which benefits the local economy. Reaching the target 80 percent participation rate would bring an estimated \$30 million annually to King County.<sup>35</sup>

## Key Features for Success

- Place emphasis on very low income and underserved populations; use maps showing density of populations likely to be hungry (see Appendices A and B).
- Identify and borrow best practices from other communities.
- Begin extensive educational and outreach campaign.
  - ◇ Engage agencies with prior experience in food stamp outreach as well as agencies that have not traditionally participated in food stamp outreach, such as financial aid offices at colleges, libraries, and retail locations.
  - ◇ Engage all King County Community Service Offices in a collaborative outreach approach.
  - ◇ Recruit and train outreach volunteers and equip them with laptop computers.
  - ◇ Provide thorough training to those performing outreach, especially about pre-screening of applicants.
  - ◇ Provide flexible funding to outreach agencies so they can address barriers quickly.
  - ◇ Facilitate broad understanding of food stamp eligibility, benefits and application options to overcome incorrect assumptions about eligibility or reluctance to use public benefits.
  - ◇ Decrease the fear and stigma associated with accessing and participating in the food stamp program.
  - ◇ Provide assistance in filling out applications.
  - ◇ Target contacts to food bank and meal program clients.
  - ◇ Target contacts to free tax preparation sites designed to assist households with low incomes.
- Provide information about and linkages to other low-income support programs, such as health benefits; rental, utility and child care assistance; and the Earned Income Tax Credit.
- Support opportunities for information-sharing and feedback among outreach providers and DSHS about barriers and best practices in local communities.

### Examples of Success

- A combination of strategies by the Department of Social and Health Services and community-based organizations, along with higher unemployment rates, increased food stamp participation rates in Washington from 54 percent in 2001 to 72 percent in January 2009.<sup>36</sup>
- Between 1999 and 2004, Oregon was the only state in the country to see its hunger rate fall, due to an aggressive outreach effort. The outreach effort, along with expanded eligibility criteria:
  - ◊ Increased participation in the pilot area by 22 percent in six months
  - ◊ Reduced very low food insecurity from 5.8 percent to 3.8 percent
  - ◊ Increased the food stamp participation rate 86 percent (FY 2005)
  - ◊ Brought in an additional \$23 million a month to Oregon's families and economy.

### Necessary Leaders

- DSHS at the state, regional and local office level to commit to a strong partnership yielding improved quality and streamlined customer service.
- Public and private funding organizations to influence effective approaches and provide resources.
- Experienced outreach organizations.
- United Way of King County to recruit and train volunteers and develop marketing and outreach.
- City of Seattle PeoplePoint program.

## WHO IS HUNGRY? SENIORS AND PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

2

**Feed hungry seniors, people with disabilities, people experiencing homelessness and homebound people via meal programs and home delivery of groceries and meals**

### Context

King County meal providers are in the front lines defending against hunger in King County. When a food bank client has already gone to the food bank for their one visit, and has run out of food stamps for their family of five, they will turn to open meal programs to meet their nutritional needs. As the recession deepens meal providers are beginning to see increased demand for free meals. Meals Partnership Coalition believes that this increased need for prepared free meals at open meal sites will only increase. While food stamps, home delivery, and food banks work well for housed hungry residents, these resources are not appropriate for people experiencing homelessness, are living within motels, or do not have working kitchens. Food stamps may be used to purchase cold foods only under State guidelines. This leaves many people who are homeless or without adequate kitchen facilities to use this resource for highly processed/low-nutritional foods. As a group, MPC members feel that meals must be of the highest nutritional value; especially for populations with compromised autoimmune systems due to chronic malnourishment and poverty.

Many seniors and people with disabilities have significant barriers to accessing food. These populations, along with people with restricted transportation, are unable to go to food banks or carry their groceries home. People who are ill or living with severe disabilities may be unable to cook for themselves, making them dependent on the delivery of prepared meals.

There is no federal or state funding for meal programs through the U.S. Department of Agriculture or the Washington State Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development. Meal programs receive some federal surplus food items but lower levels of private donations.

However, Aging and Disability Services, the Area Agency on Aging for Seattle and King County, receives \$2.9M a year, primarily from the federal Older Americans Act, for senior lunch programs and home delivered meals for home-bound seniors. The City of Seattle contributes additional funds to provide ethnic-specific services in Seattle. This system is not currently coordinated with the community-based food system described in other strategies.

Seniors and people with disabilities living in Seattle public housing have been identified as disproportionately food insecure. In 2007, 34 percent were low food secure and 21 percent were very low food secure.<sup>37</sup>

Reaching the county's diverse population, including many immigrant and refugee populations, would likely require bilingual and bicultural staff who speak the home languages of customers, in order to ensure good communication and an understanding of their nutrition needs, cultural norms and culturally appropriate or appealing foods.

In 2000, 12 percent of Seattle residents were 65 or older. This number is expected to increase dramatically over the next several decades. In addition, the number of "very old" residents – those 85 and older – has been climbing since 1990, and is expected to do so for the remainder of the decade.<sup>38</sup>

Although rates of disability in King County are higher among adults 65 and older, increasing numbers of adults with disabilities are in the 21-64 range.<sup>39</sup>

The number of older adults living in poverty has also increased. Census Bureau estimates for 2005 show the 8.9 percent of King County residents 65 and older are living below the federal poverty level, up 2 percent from 1990.<sup>40</sup>

## Community Voice

*"We now have a four-month waiting list [for home delivery]. We have 20-25 people on a waiting list for meals, and additional people who are currently getting meals (one per day) who are on a waiting list for more services, such as groceries in addition to meal delivery."* -Meal delivery provider<sup>41</sup>

## Target

Decrease rate of food insecurity for these populations by at least half by funding better coordination efforts for meal programs and home delivery programs.

## Rationale

Seniors who experience hunger are at risk for serious health problems. Hunger increases their risk for stroke, exacerbates pre-existing ill health conditions, limits the effectiveness of many prescription drugs, and may affect brain chemistry increasing the incidence of depression and isolation.<sup>42</sup>

Insufficient nutrition accounts for a disproportionate amount of health care costs among low-income elderly individuals, unrelated to the aging process.

While food stamps, home delivery, and food banks work well for housed hungry residents, these resources are not as helpful for people experiencing homelessness, living within motels, or do not have working kitchens. Food stamps may be used to purchase cold foods only under state guidelines. This leaves many people who are homeless or without adequate kitchen facilities to use this resource for highly processed/low-nutritional foods.

## Key Features for Success

- Place emphasis on underserved seniors and people with disabilities.
- Increase resources for meal programs and home delivery programs, especially outside City of Seattle.
- Reach large numbers of high-need people in areas with a high density of people in need, such as public housing complexes.
- Coordinate existing mechanisms for intake, meal preparation and delivery.
- Ensure the food and nutrition needs of different cultural and ethnic groups.
- Link frail elders and people with disabilities to other support services.
- Increase coordination among meal and grocery delivery programs and neighborhood food banks.
- Encourage food banks to refer customers to appropriate home delivery services.
- Regularly review changes in the characteristics, circumstances and location of hungry seniors and people with disabilities, as shifts occur over time.

## Examples of Success

The Hartford Food System in Connecticut partners with Geissler's Supermarket to provide phone order grocery service for seniors.

The Emergency Feeding Program of Seattle & King County (EFP) works in collaboration with over 200 social service agencies to alleviate hunger while linking people to resources that provide longer-term assistance. EFP distributes 14 different varieties of high-quality, nutritionally-balanced emergency food bags to address individual nutritional needs and food preferences. These include bags that feature low-sugar foods, low-sodium foods,

Latino foods, Asian foods, vegan foods, no-cook foods for homeless people, baby formula and baby foods, and a “snack pack” developed for and with the help of homeless teens.<sup>43</sup>

### **Necessary Leaders**

- Food distributors and food banks.
- Meals partnership coalition, meal programs and home delivery programs.
- Low-income housing facilities serving elderly and disabled residents.
- Public and private funders.

## WHO IS HUNGRY? CHILDREN AND TEENS DURING THE SUMMER

3

**Serve more meals to low-income children this summer through summer meal programs**

### Context

Many children who rely on eating breakfast and lunch at school during the school year must do without those meals in the summer. However, only 10 percent of students in King County who qualified for free or reduced-price meals were served by the summer meal program in July 2006.<sup>44</sup>

Many schools and summer recreation programs are not aware that federal funds are available to provide free meals and snacks to children in needy areas during the summer months.

Sponsors receive payments for serving healthy meals and snacks to children and teenagers, 18 years and younger, at approved sites. Most sites are eligible because they are located in low-income areas. Schools, public agencies, and private nonprofit organizations may sponsor the program, and sponsors may have multiple sites. Sites may be in school or non-school settings. Schools can offer meals in the summer through a program called the Seamless Summer Feeding Program, which allows school districts to run a summer program under similar guidelines as their year-round meal programs.

Summer meal program participation in 2008 brought \$3,397,669 in federal funds to Washington State and \$1,434,029 to King County.

### Community Voice

In their shady nook at Auburn Square apartments, Eric Leota, 11, and his brother, E.J., 12, are the first in line when district staff hop from the back door of the bus to feed the kids. The brothers say the 15 minutes they spent in line was worth the wait. "It's good food," E.J. says as he bites into a cheeseburger dripping with ketchup.<sup>45</sup>

### Target

Increase participation in summer food programs to 40 percent of students who qualify for free and reduced-price lunches during the school year.

### Rationale

More children than in previous years who depend on free or reduced price school lunches and breakfasts are likely to have less food this summer.

Federal funds will pay food costs, but funding is needed for site operation and start-up costs; if target is reached, an additional 16,000 low-income children would be served,<sup>46</sup> and \$1.8M in federal funds would be obtained.

### Key Features for Success

- Engage effective recruiters for new sites.
- Conduct outreach and training for program providers that can move quickly to set up summer meal programs—including schools and youth serving programs as well as anti-hunger programs—to promote participation in communities with significant service gaps.

- Increase resources for site start-up, expansion outreach and accompanying educational, recreational and enrichment activities.

### Examples of Success

The *Feed Your Brain Partnership* is a summer literacy and meals model, coordinated by School's Out Washington, that supports ongoing technical assistance to rural sites and provides training on effective outreach practices, enrichment activities or curriculum, and improving the nutritional quality of meals in high-need rural sites.

Each weekday during the summer, two dozen children in a north Auburn apartment complex wait in line for the lunch bus, a mustard-colored cafeteria on wheels run by the Auburn School District. The summer-food program, started in 2005, costs about \$130,000 to run. Meals are prepped at four sites in the district and are delivered to 35 to 40 locations in about an hour-and-a-half each day throughout the summer.

In 2007, the End Hunger Connecticut coalition provided a grant for summer meal programs in Middletown. The sponsor partnered with local advocates and volunteers to increase participation. The sponsor achieved a 136 percent increase in total meals. The next year was even more successful—the sponsor served 97 percent more meals than the previous summer.<sup>47</sup>

### Necessary Leaders

- Sponsors and sites for summer programs.
- Food banks and food distributors.
- School's Out Washington, which has links to many summer programs.
- Public and private funders.

## WHO IS HUNGRY? ALL HUNGRY POPULATIONS

### 4

#### Meet critical equipment, staffing, and transportation needs of food banks, meal programs and home delivery of groceries and meals

##### Context

Food banks and meal programs are able to distribute an enormous amount of food with the help of thousands of dedicated volunteers. Some food banks and meal programs are hampered by operating funds; lack of staff; and lack of storage, vehicles for transportation, and refrigeration. Most have to coordinate delivery schedules with two distributors. Both staff and volunteers are overwhelmed by the increased demand generated by the current recession, and the shortage of high-protein foods and quality produce. Needs change frequently, so that an inventory of needs can quickly become out of date.

The food system is also straining to meet the varying demands of different customer groups, including more food for infants, culturally appropriate foods for diverse populations, and more flexible and expanded hours of operation and access.

Forty-three percent of food bank programs and 42 percent of meal programs served by Food Lifeline in 2006 relied entirely on volunteers.<sup>48</sup>

Federal funding to support food banks has recently been significantly increased in the 2008 Farm Bill and the economic stimulus package, which will help increase the amount of food available to food banks.<sup>49</sup>

##### Community Voice

*"More fresh food is a real need. We rely mainly on donations. We have a van that goes out and stops at 15 or 16 different grocery stores and we get fresh produce through them and also from Northwest Harvest and Food Lifeline. But it is not enough, and sometimes we need to purchase produce."* -Neighborhood food bank<sup>50</sup>

##### Target

Resolve specific, concrete roadblocks to get food to the most vulnerable and underserved people

##### Rationale

Relatively low-cost equipment purchases and help with staff costs can greatly increase amount, quality, and timeliness of food distributed by food banks and meal programs.

Modest grant amounts can provide immediate solutions.

##### Key Features for Success

- Reach most vulnerable and underserved populations. Use maps showing density of populations likely to be hungry.
- Invite innovative and sustainable improvements, including new collaborative working relationships
- Favor grant applicants who are effectively involved in food stamp outreach and linkage to other resources for economically disadvantaged people.
- Favor opportunities where customers have ample nutritious choices and can make their own food choices; can be served at convenient times; and receive respectful service.
- Grantees should provide quarterly reports showing expanded or improved service to customers.

### Examples of Success

As part of its emergency response to the recession, United Way of King County distributed Food System Capacity Grants to local providers in the emergency food system. The awards ranged from about \$3,700 to \$10,000 to be used on equipment (refrigerators, freezers, shelving), meal and grocery delivery (cargo vans and refrigerated trucks) and facility improvements (plumbing and electrical repairs) to greatly increase the agencies' capacity to serve more families.

### Necessary Leaders

- Food distribution programs, food banks, grocery and meal delivery programs willing to work together and capable of reaching most vulnerable populations and effectively linking clients to other resources.
- Private and public funders.

## WHO IS HUNGRY? PREGNANT WOMEN, NEW MOTHERS, BABIES, AND TODDLERS

5

### Increase enrollment of pregnant women, infants and young children in the WIC nutrition program

#### Context

The federally-funded Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children, popularly known as WIC, provides food, nutrition counseling, and access to health services to low-income pregnant, breastfeeding, and non-breastfeeding postpartum women, and to infants and children up to age 5 in low-income families who are found to be at nutritional risk.<sup>51</sup> WIC services in King County are provided by county health departments, hospitals, community clinics, and at public housing sites.

During October 2007 to September 2008, WIC served 50 percent of all babies in Washington and 36 percent of all babies born in King County. During that same time period, WIC served 19,677 pregnant, breastfeeding, and postpartum women and 42,578 babies and children under age 5 in King County. Participation is on the rise.

State funding to local WIC providers is \$123 per client/per year. WIC programs brought \$39 million in federal funding into King County in 2006.<sup>52</sup>

While WIC funding for food and program administration comes from the federal level to the state Department of Health, WIC is not an entitlement program. Instead, funding for the state is determined by the previous year's WIC outputs. The Department of Health disburses service delivery monies to WIC providers and a "checkbook" from the statewide "account" for distributing checks to WIC participants to spend at local grocery stores on WIC approved foods. In King County, WIC checks are valued at approximately \$56 per month with additional funding provided for more children.

The majority of WIC clinics in King County serve more women and children than their service delivery allotments allow when there is still food money to be disbursed from the statewide account. Local agencies receive service delivery dollars from the Department of Health yet they often must cover at least 20-50 percent of their service delivery costs from local funders.

WIC is not reaching everyone who needs it and would qualify, and many families stop using WIC services while they are still eligible, especially when one of their children outgrows the program but other children are still eligible.<sup>53</sup>

#### Community Voice

*Parents with children at a focus group spoke of gratitude for the WIC program and called the ability to access vegetables, vouchers for farmers markets, funds for eggs and milk "wonderful."<sup>54</sup>*

*"All of the agencies want to do WIC. It is just whether they can they afford to do it."*

- Shirley Hutchison, Program Analyst, Parent/Child Health Program, King County<sup>55</sup>.

#### Target

Increase enrollment and nutrition education of mothers in WIC by increasing service delivery funding so providers can meet demand.

### Key Features for Success

- Attract more funders to supplement service delivery costs for local WIC providers.
- Continue statewide outreach coordination, which allows centralizing outreach services while still allowing local providers to do their own outreach.

### Rationale

- The WIC Program has a positive impact on improving the health of program participants.<sup>56</sup> Pregnant women who participate in the WIC program have:
  - ◇ More full term pregnancies
  - ◇ Fewer low birth weight babies
  - ◇ Fewer fetal and infant deaths
- Children who participate in WIC have:
  - ◇ Improved growth
  - ◇ Lower rates of anemia
  - ◇ Increased immunization rates
  - ◇ Better access to health care
  - ◇ Improved consumption of key nutrients
  - ◇ Enhanced cognitive abilities

### Examples of Success

- WIC providers are so dedicated to the mission of WIC that they are rising to the occasion and meeting demand beyond their service delivery funding allotments.
- WIC participants consistently share positive feedback about the way they are treated during the WIC enrollment process.

### Necessary Leaders

- Department of Health.
- WithinReach.
- Washington Association of Local WIC Agencies (WALWICA).
- Food banks that promote WIC.
- WALWICA - Washington Association of Local WIC Agencies.

## SECTION 2: MAKE LONG-TERM SYSTEM IMPROVEMENTS

**Strategies in this section aim for permanent changes that result in low hunger levels**

The strategies presented here are meant to provide a sustainable, culturally appropriate, effective, and responsive hunger reduction approach for King County. The strategies will require collaboration and investment among leaders and is built on expertise in the field.

## WHO IS HUNGRY? ALL HUNGRY POPULATIONS

### 6

#### Strengthen marketing, outreach, technology and state processing for food stamp program and other public benefits

##### Context

As noted in Strategy 1, the participation rate among eligible households in King County for the Basic Food Program in 2008 was only 49 percent, compared to 68 percent for Washington State and 86 percent in Oregon. Reasons for this low rate include the lack of effective and sufficient outreach, misunderstandings about who can apply, reluctance to accept “welfare,” and complexities and frustrations in the enrollment process administered by the state Department of Social and Health Services. Federal funding for food stamps in King County in 2006 was \$120 million.<sup>57</sup>

More people are able to qualify for food stamps than in prior years, but many people still incorrectly carry the belief that they will only receive \$10 a month; that they cannot get food stamps if they own a car or have a savings account, and that they must apply in person. Effective messages and messengers are needed to counter these misunderstandings.

Many people report being treated rudely or disrespectfully when applying for food stamps. Currently there is no systematic way to gather that information and provide feedback to DSHS in the context of a shared desire to provide all applicants with a dignified and efficient experience.

Existing systems that help applicants begin the application process online are not linked to the computer system at the Department of Social and Health Services, so a state employee has to re-enter all of the information – which delays the application process and is an inefficient use of resources.

##### Target

Increase food stamp participation to 80 percent among eligible King County residents.

##### Key Features for Success

Place emphasis on very low income and underserved populations; use maps showing density of populations likely to be hungry (see Appendices A and B).

- Develop a coordinated, multi-tiered culturally relevant marketing and outreach campaign to promote the use of food stamps (called Basic Food in Washington) and other public benefits.
- Include and coordinate grassroots outreach with faith-based communities, food banks and meal programs, schools, community-based organizations and community centers.
- Utilize highly-trained volunteers, coordinated by United Way of King County, to assist with outreach.
- Engage Department of Social and Health Services in a cooperative effort that maximizes resources:
  - ◇ Ensure effective communication between outreach workers and DSHS employees at Community Service Offices to remove barriers.
  - ◇ Simplify enrollment process and renewal requirements.
  - ◇ Provide food stamp customers with a positive, accommodating, and dignified experience.
  - ◇ Prepare administrators to address program barriers experienced by their customers.
  - ◇ Encourage and support efforts of DSHS to upgrade computer systems and make additional capacity improvements.

- Support policy changes at the federal and state levels that will assist in increasing enrollment in the food stamp program
- Promote comprehensive benefits screening and application tools (especially online tools) that allow people to understand and apply for benefits for which they are eligible<sup>58</sup>
- Increase the number of food retailers, including farmers markets, which accept EBT payment<sup>59</sup> (Grocery stores and markets need to apply to the U.S. Department of Agriculture for certification.)
- Evaluate the effectiveness of various outreach strategies on program participation.

### Rationale

Food stamps represent an ongoing resource to obtain food, and use federal funds rather than local resources.

- Newly broadened eligibility criteria for food stamps present opportunities for greater participation. The recent federal stimulus package increases the amount of benefits by 13 or 14 percent.
- Increasing the participation rate would generate substantial amounts of federal funds to buy food, which benefits the local economy. Reaching the target 80 percent participation rate would bring an estimated additional \$30 million annually to King County.<sup>60</sup>

### Examples of Success

A five-time winner of local, national and international technology awards, the Oregon Helps website provides a screening tool in several different languages for 28 programs in the areas of food and nutrition, health care, housing, children, and family resources, financial benefits, and veteran's services. By answering a few questions at the beginning of the screening tool, the website directs individuals to more specific questions depending on age, disability, household composition, and county of residence. The product of an extensive collaboration between several government agencies, non-profit organizations, and a private consultant, Oregon Helps keeps tool maintenance costs under \$10,000 per year by utilizing non-proprietary computer programming languages.

### Necessary Leaders

- DSHS, local funders and community organizations committed to working together to coordinate outreach efforts and improve the quality and efficiency of service delivery.
- Public and private funding organizations to influence effective approaches and provide resources.
- Broad range of community organizations committed to outreach and engagement.
- United Way of King County to manage volunteer effort and develop marketing and outreach campaign.
- City of Seattle's PeoplePoint program.

## WHO IS HUNGRY? ALL HUNGRY POPULATIONS

### 7

#### Strengthen and coordinate the community-based food system

##### Context

Emergency food programs began decades ago as volunteer-led local responses to the failures of the nation's food system to help hungry people. Because national solutions fall far short of actual need and have declined in today's dollars, the emergency food system is no longer just for emergencies; it is an ongoing and integral part of how thousands of families in King County make ends meet every month. In this report, the term "community-based food system" is used to acknowledge the current permanent role it plays in anti-hunger efforts.

These programs are now part of an extremely complex network of national, state and local organizations raising millions of dollars and pounds of food. Food Lifeline, one of two major food distributors in King County, lists 55 food banks and 77 meal programs in King County among its customers. Northwest Harvest, the other major food distributor, lists 41 food banks and 30 meal programs in King County on its web site. At least 31 of the food banks and 20 of the meal programs receive food from both distributors.

The challenges of managing the process of gathering (by purchase or donation), transporting and distributing healthy, nutritious foods to a diverse community are significant. Within the City of Seattle, there are several coordinating mechanisms, including a coalition of food banks, one of meal programs, and a shared delivery service. South King County has a Food Committee. It appears the balance of King County has limited coordination mechanisms available.

A map of the federal food assistance programs and the related distribution and consumption elements is included as Appendix C. A (perhaps less than perfect) map of the community-based food system in Seattle in 2006, included as Appendix D, illustrates some elements of the complex process for just a portion of King County.

An assessment of the barriers, gaps and limitations on the local, regional and state levels of the emergency food system and strategies to address those challenges was conducted by the Washington Food Coalition in 2006-2007.<sup>61</sup> An overview of the current emergency food system in Washington State and the "chokepoints" that disrupt the flow of food at distribution centers, redistributors and community agencies is set forth in a 2006 report which identified investment opportunities to reduce hunger in Washington.<sup>62</sup>

Coordination is also needed among funders and with public benefits programs, as their actions affect the community-based system. The federal and state governments, the City of Seattle, private foundations and individual donors make substantial investments in food distributors, food banks, congregate meal providers, and individual meal and grocery delivery programs. Some government or quasi-governmental organizations (e.g., public health for the WIC program, Area Agency on Aging for meal delivery to frail elders, etc.) are also part of the system. The large government and private investments require more accountability into the system—with an expectation that community-based food programs should provide an equitable, accessible, efficient distribution of healthy food to King County's hungry families, especially the most vulnerable populations.

In fiscal year 2009, The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) brought \$1.6 million of federal funds into King County to support food banks and the Emergency Food and Shelter Program (sometimes incorrectly referred to as Federal Emergency Management Agency or FEMA), will provide over \$500,000 in 2008-2009. The state-funded Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP) supported 1,822,476 visits to food banks in King County for 255,425 unduplicated individuals.<sup>63</sup>

However, the melding of complex and inflexible government regulations and the dependence on organizations that are shaped by and supported by many independent local organizations is very challenging.

A broad and necessary assessment about these challenges is essential for the future of the community-based food system and the ability to reduce food insecurity in King County.<sup>64</sup>

Characteristics of clients of food banks and meal programs served by Food Lifeline in 2006:<sup>65</sup>

- 40% of client households are receiving food stamps
- 32% of members of households served are children under age 18; 9% are age 0 to 5.
- 42% of households include at least one employed adult
- 60% have incomes below the official poverty line
- 16% are homeless
- Among households with children, 87% are food insecure and 45% are experiencing hunger
- 40% had to choose between paying for food and paying their rent
- 26% of households have at least one member with poor health
- 31% had no health insurance
- 55% had unpaid medical or hospital bills

### Community Voice

*“We have no ability to reach homebound seniors. Seniors regularly go to the food bank. But if there’s a medical emergency or some instance that prevents them from going out, there is no way to get food to them. In many cases, they are able to cook for themselves but can’t get out to get groceries. We can’t do anything here. We don’t have transportation for home delivery. Sometimes we can find a volunteer or case manager to deliver something, but this is only on a case-by-case basis. We don’t have the means to do regular home delivery.”*

– Emergency food provider <sup>66</sup>

### Target

Design and implement a regionally coordinated system that reduces food insecurity in equitable, accessible, efficient and healthy ways and ensures that the most vulnerable populations are prioritized.

### Key Features for Success

- Current public and private funders, individually and collectively, examine and readjust their investment strategies to encourage equitable, accessible, efficient and healthy distribution of food in King County, with an emphasis on the most vulnerable populations.
- Other stakeholders, including food distributors, food banks, and meal programs, and provider and policy coalitions, individually and collectively examine how their operations could support larger anti-hunger efforts in a coordinated and efficient manner

### Rationale

Although the current community-based food system (traditionally called the “emergency food system”) feeds thousands of people in King County week after week, largely through the help of volunteers, it is not adequately coordinated nor systematic and the alleviation of hunger for those most in need is not ensured.

Duplication exists in food distribution, and various components of the system do not see themselves as part of a larger effort to reduce hunger through maximizing resources. The Seattle Food Committee, South King County Food Committee and Meals Partnership Coalition are examples of coordination that are working and could be built upon.

### **Examples of Success**

Northwest Harvest has developed a program called Three Squares that provides kid-friendly, nutritious and shelf-stable food for elementary school children who school staff identifies as showing signs that they do not get an adequate amount of food at home. Food is available either for snacks at school or to take home. The program is currently operating in 19 schools in the Seattle School District, two in Highline and one in Kent. The program costs \$5,000 per school per year.<sup>67</sup>

Feeding America, the national domestic hunger-relief charity of which Food Lifeline is a member, is developing a technology platform that could increase efficiencies in reporting, managing inventory and addressing recalls for the programs served by Food Lifeline.

### **Necessary Leaders**

- Public and private funding organizations to influence effective approaches and provide resources.
- Coalitions and organizations in the community-based food system.

## WHO IS HUNGRY? CHILDREN AND TEENS DURING THE SCHOOL DAY

### 8

#### Increase the number of low-income students who eat a healthy breakfast and lunch at school

##### Context

Federally reimbursed school meals can combat hunger and fight childhood obesity with nutritionally balanced and healthy food. Any student is eligible to eat school meals and can receive discounts up to 100 percent depending on family income. The more students who participate in the school meals programs, the more federal money flows into each district. During the 2006-07 school year, the average daily student participation in the national school lunch program in King County was 109,650 students; of that total about 51 percent were full-price students and 49 percent were low-income students who qualify for free or reduced-price school meals.<sup>68</sup>

Many students who qualify for free and reduced-price meals do not participate in the breakfast and school meal programs. During the 2006-07 school year, of all students who qualified for free or reduced-price school meals, only 24 percent participated in school breakfast.<sup>69</sup>

This lack of participation may be influenced by logistical issues such as transportation schedules and the additional cleaning cost to have janitors respond to students eating in classrooms. In addition, low-income students may want to avoid the stigma of eating school meals and may go without. School meals also often compete with other food vendors, such as vending machines and student stores on school grounds.

##### Community Voice

*“A very smart person once told me that the key to engage students is to feed them. I was unaware that this advice would be the best advice I ever received. I have fed students who did not eat breakfast for various reasons; fed students who I was sure did not eat dinner the night before and continue to feed those children who are not even in my class. I have had breakfast club with my first period class on several occasions and watched them come to life after a pack of crackers fed their hunger.” –Teacher<sup>70</sup>*

Parents at a focus group said they had a good experience with school meal programs and said that having two meals a day at school was a huge relief to their families.<sup>71</sup>

##### Target

Increase participation in school meals program, especially breakfast.

- Increase participation in the school breakfast program to the national target level of 60 percent of students who participate in the school lunch program<sup>72</sup>

##### Rationale

- Students who do not get enough to eat are more likely to:
  - ◇ Fail, be suspended, repeat a grade, and drop out
  - ◇ Require special education services
  - ◇ Engage in more anti-social behaviors
  - ◇ Get sick and miss school

- Federal funds are available for reimbursement of increased meals for low-income students.
- Funds to help schools replace or obtain school meal equipment is included in the recent economic stimulus package.

### **Key Features for Success**

- Identify best practices from schools with high breakfast participation.
- Develop and distribute materials to encourage districts to increase meal participation, especially breakfast.
- Eliminate food and beverages sold outside the school meal program that reduces participation in the federal meal programs.<sup>73</sup>
- Improve nutrition by aligning nutritional quality of school meals with Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

### **Examples of Success**

A school in Florida eliminated competitive food (vending machines and the student store) and encouraged all students to participate in the school meal programs. The school quickly raised enough money to buy nutritious foods and remodel its cafeteria because it was able to claim substantially more federal reimbursement dollars.<sup>74</sup>

### **Necessary Leaders**

- Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction.
- School districts.
- Principals and custodial staff at individual schools.
- Parents.
- Students.

## WHO IS HUNGRY? YOUNG CHILDREN AND SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN IN CHILD CARE PROGRAMS

9

### Sign up more child care providers for federal child care food program

#### Context

The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) provides federally funded reimbursement to for-profit and non-profit child care providers for the meals they serve to low-income children in their care. Child care centers work directly with the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, which administers the program, to receive funds. Family child care home programs work through sponsoring organizations that reduce paperwork demands on individual providers.<sup>75</sup> License-exempt providers (family, friends and neighbor caregivers) who are receiving a state child care subsidy are also eligible to participate, but very few do so. For all participating providers, a substantial amount of recordkeeping and reporting is required.

In King County, the City of Seattle is the sponsoring organization for family child care homes in most of the county and has six staff people involved.

To obtain reimbursement, providers must submit menus that meet USDA guidelines, attendance records, and a count of meals per child per day for the month. The current rate for licensed family care homes who are eligible for the higher reimbursement rate receive \$1.17 for breakfast; \$2.18 for lunch and \$.65 for a snack, or a total of \$4.00 if a child is there all day.

There are currently 199 centers participating in CACFP in King County, which includes child care centers, Head Start and ECEAP programs. Of this total, about 150 are child care centers, which represent about 24 percent of the total 626 licensed in the county at the end of 2007.<sup>76</sup> Currently, 508 family child care homes are registered (of the 1,250 total licensed at the end of 2007), but they may not all be participating at the same time. There may be only about a dozen license-exempt providers participating currently.<sup>77 78</sup>

Relatively few child care providers – home-based or center-based, licensed or license-exempt – take advantage of the federal child care food program,<sup>79</sup> although this may change with the recession. Reasons cited for not participating include the heavy paperwork burden and resistance to unannounced visits and oversight by government agencies. In addition, if a provider is not serving a large proportion of children from low-income families or operating in a low-income neighborhood or the provider's own income level is not low, the reimbursement rates may be relatively low.

Over the past 10 years in Washington, participation by family home child care providers in the federal child care food program has declined 9 percent.<sup>80</sup>

#### Community Voice

*"Providers may be reluctant in the beginning. But over time they recognize what a better job they are doing for kids. Children get more nutritious meals, less sugar and processed foods and more fruit and vegetables."*

– City of Seattle staff

### Target

- Increase the number of child care centers and family home child care providers serving low-income families participating in CACFP
- Increase the number of license-exempt providers participating in CACFP

### Rationale

- Adequate food and good nutrition are essential for child development and learning.
- Healthy food and building healthy eating habits can help reduce troubling childhood obesity rates.
- The CACFP helps reduce the operational costs for providers, who often struggle to survive financially.

### Key Features for Success

- Assist providers so they comply with paperwork requirements
- Use peer-to-peer recruiting to communicate benefits of the program
- Develop outreach materials tailored to license-exempt providers to increase awareness of and participation in CACFP

### Examples of Success

Participating providers enjoy the reimbursements from this program (when they have an effective sponsor to handle the complex paperwork and regulations) to help them reduce their food costs.

City of Seattle staff report that child care center providers may be reluctant to follow the guidelines in the beginning, but over time they recognize what a better job they are doing for the kids because they get more nutritious food.

### Necessary Leaders

- Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction.
- Department of Early Learning.
- Sponsors of programs.
- Child care centers and early learning centers.
- Child Care Resources.
- Associations of directors of center-based and home-based programs.
- SEIU, which represents licensed child care homes and license-exempt providers who receive subsidies.

## WHO IS HUNGRY? ALL HUNGRY POPULATIONS, ESPECIALLY THOSE WITH COMPROMISED HEALTH

10

Increase nutritional value of food for all strategies in this plan

### Context

Most people living with food insecurity do not eat the recommended daily servings of fruits and vegetables, and may not be getting sufficient protein or iron in their diets.

People living with food insecurity often already have compromised health. Some food banks cannot afford to buy nor handle fresh produce and high protein foods that require refrigeration. Some food bank and meal program clients receive donated foods that are high in starch, sugar, and preservatives. This contributes to higher rates of diabetes and obesity, which raises clients' cost of living and medical costs for the community.

Food bank clients are well aware their diets lack nutritious foods and variety. People understand they are consuming lower cost foods higher in fat, sugar, and salt but they cannot afford to buy the more healthful foods—particularly fresh fruits, vegetables and lean sources of protein.<sup>81</sup>

Per-meal reimbursement for school meals is insufficient to fully implement current USDA and Institute of Medicine dietary guidelines.<sup>82</sup>

### Community Voice

A focus group participant said, *"I'm diabetic. When I go to food banks I have to take what they give me, which is a lot of carbohydrates. But what can I do? I'm hungry!"*<sup>83</sup>

Another participant pointed out that in the last year, her 8- and 10-year-old children were sick more often and gained weight due to inadequate nutrition and more starchy food.<sup>84</sup>

### Target

- Increase the daily servings of fresh fruit, vegetables and protein available to all hungry people.
- Improve the nutritional quality and appeal of delivered meals and groceries, school breakfasts and lunches, of food served at summer meal sites, and of food provided through the child care federally funded meal reimbursement program.

### Key Features for Success

- Use the power of bulk purchasing where possible to reduce cost.
- Encourage programs like farmers market nutrition coupons, fresh fruits and vegetables in schools, and farm to school initiatives.

### Rationale

People who consume more fruits and vegetables as part of a healthy diet have a reduced risk of chronic disease including: stroke, cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, cancers of the oral cavity, pharynx, larynx, lung, esophagus stomach, and colon-rectum.<sup>85</sup>

### Examples of Success

In October 2009, the WIC program will modify its allowed foods to represent more nutritious and culturally attractive foods including fresh fruits and vegetables; baby foods including fruits, vegetables and meat; whole wheat bread and tortillas, brown rice, bulgar, and oatmeal; and tofu as an option instead of some milk.

In Florida, the Child and Adult Care Food Program aligned its nutrition guidelines for children to mirror the new WIC food package: less juice, sugars and processed meats and more fruits, vegetables, whole grains and low-fat dairy products.

### Necessary Leaders

- Food distributors.
- Food banks.
- Meal programs.
- Public and private funders.
- Schools.

## WHO IS HUNGRY? ALL HUNGRY POPULATIONS

11

**Form a King County Hunger Reduction Council to reach shared goals and measure progress**

### Context

King County currently has insufficient capacity to coordinate hunger issues with other local governments, businesses, schools, other agencies, as well as larger systems that impact food distribution such as transportation and agriculture. There is no single body overseeing system level improvements for the local hunger system in King County. Food-related business is spread out among many different departments and agencies that have their own priorities for food system enhancements. Without a formal structure to respond to barriers in the local food system, policy can only be discussed and recommended to staff without formal authority.

Some cities and counties have developed a multi-disciplinary coordinating body. These groups typically have diverse members representing different groups involved in some way with hunger reduction. Members include anti-hunger advocates, school system representatives, community and religious leaders, scholars, concerned citizens, and local and state government.

United Way of King County is willing to convene and provide staff support for two groups that could perform some of these functions:

- Funders Group: charged with mapping funding, aligning funding, participating in joint funding projects where possible, and inviting other funders to the table over time.
- Steering Committee/Stakeholders Group: charged with overseeing implementation of the *Hunger Relief Now!* plan. This group will work closely with the Acting Food Policy Council and over time, decide if both groups are necessary.

If these groups are formed and effective, they could perhaps begin the process of forming a broad-based hunger reduction council.

Limited evaluation is conducted of anti-hunger initiatives, so little data exists about the relative effectiveness of various strategies.

### Community Voice

*We found it difficult to find strategic ways to invest in reducing hunger. There seems to be an atmosphere of scarcity that leads to competitiveness rather than coordination and cooperation. And it is difficult to determine who can take action in the community to improve the situation.* –Private foundation representative

### Target

Establish an ongoing coordinating body that keeps all parts of the food spectrum engaged and communicative rather than “siloes” or forced to compete.

### Rationale

Funders, policymakers and some community organizations often think of the community-based food system, food stamps, school meals, meal programs, and other programs as separate, even though they are all part of the overall effort to reduce hunger and improve nutrition.

- New opportunities and connections can arise when there is an appropriate forum for system-wide thinking that focuses on the needs of community members and what is needed to respond to those needs.
- Establishing a formative and outcome evaluation system through a coordinating body would help determine the effectiveness of combined efforts as well as individual ones.

### Key Features for Success

- Identify a neutral, credible convener familiar with the range of anti-hunger programs and policy-change efforts and provide resources for staff support.
- Engage public and private funders.
- Ensure a forum for discussion of and decision-making about significant access, equity, efficiency and nutrition issues.
- Build on models of effective local and regional anti-hunger coalitions.
- Provide funding for ongoing staffing.
- Develop goals such as:
  - ◊ Members share and communicate common vision and priorities to proactively reduce barriers to access, increase efficiencies in service delivery, and maximize resources from the state and federal levels.
  - ◊ Provide leadership, policy consistency, and equitable resource sufficiency throughout King County to improve food security for all.
  - ◊ Improve efficiency and effectiveness of program delivery through cooperation and innovation.
  - ◊ Improve information flow among members and between providers and constituents.
  - ◊ Support the Anti-Hunger and Nutrition Coalition, which advocates for administrative and legislative changes to address hunger and nutrition.
- Issue an annual report to describe, quantify and track progress toward goals.

### Examples of Success

The Food Bank of Delaware launched a statewide anti-hunger coalition in February 2009. The Coalition includes representatives from agriculture, business, financial, educational, faith-based and nonprofit organizations as well as federal, state and county government. The Delaware Community Foundation is funding the coalition with \$117,000.

The Washington Food Coalition (WFC) serves as the collective voice of more than 300 members across the state, including food banks, meal programs, distribution systems and tribal food voucher programs. Partners include the Children's Alliance and the state departments of General Administration and Community, Trade & Economic Development. WFC's staffing includes one full-time staff person and an administrative assistant. WFC services include information about issues at the state and federal levels, training and resources, networking, and advocacy.

### Necessary Leaders

- Community leaders.
- Anti-hunger organizations and coalitions.
- Public and private funders.
- Children's Alliance.
- Local and state governments.
- United Way of King County.

## WHO IS HUNGRY? ALL HUNGRY POPULATIONS

12

Engage community leaders in advocacy efforts to increase resources and effect meaningful policy changes

### Context

By far the greatest proportion of funding to fight hunger is federal funding, which is administered through several different departments at the state level. The state provides some funding for school meals and food banks, but not for meal programs. The legislative and administrative requirements of the various programs are very complex. The amount of funding provided for school meals, the child care food program and other programs is not sufficient for the purpose intended, leaving a constant shortfall on the local level.

There are strong statewide advocacy groups that have accomplished significant improvements in policy and resources at the state level. They need support to continue their efforts and other voices to join them in seeking further improvements. For example, items on the 2009 Legislative Agenda for the Anti-Hunger & Nutrition Coalition, staffed by the Children's Alliance, include:

- Protect funding for free breakfast for all low-income children (eliminate co-pay for reduced-price breakfast).
- Provide free lunch for low-income kids in elementary school by eliminating the co-pay for reduced-price lunch.
- Increase state funding and flexibility in Meals for Kids grants to summer food programs to stabilize food options for low-income families during critical out-of-school months.
- Increase funding for food banks and meal programs.
- Protect funding for Medical Nutrition Therapy, diet-specific meal delivery services for chronically ill people.

Long-term stable investments are needed to substantially reduce hunger in King County and to maintain the very lowest possible ongoing levels of food insecurity.

Strategic resource development is needed at the federal, state and local government levels, as well as within the private sector. The City of Seattle has provided substantial funding to support food banks and meal programs for many years, and has recently increased its level of funding.

### Community Voice

*"Elected officials are the most influential decision-makers for eliminating childhood hunger. Participants cited the importance of engaging the Governor and legislative leaders in support of the plan to end childhood hunger in Washington. They articulated the belief that multi-year public policy campaigns, supported by coordinated coalitions of supporters, produce results". –End Childhood Hunger in Washington Strategic Plan<sup>86</sup>*

### Target

- King County community leaders develop a coordinated effort to urge that:
  - ◇ Washington's congressional delegation advocates for policies that promote program access and benefits that meet the needs of hungry families.<sup>87</sup>
  - ◇ The State Legislature takes full advantage of state options for federally-funded anti-hunger programs, and provides adequate administrative funding and direction to ensure the prompt delivery of benefits and excellent customer service.<sup>88</sup>
  - ◇ Local public and private funders develop a strategic and coordinated funding approach to reduce hunger in King County.

### Key Features for Success

- Build on and support existing advocacy efforts.
- Look for mutually beneficial solutions with other sectors, such as health, agriculture, community development and business that could bring additional options and resources to the table.

### Rationale

This coordinating body could support advocacy organizations on the state and national levels, influencing policy and bringing funds back to King County.

Advocacy efforts need to include economic security and stability for low income populations, which is the most effective permanent solution to hunger. Opportunities such as the Earned Income Tax Credit, Individual Development Accounts, bolstering Temporary Aid to Needy Families and increasing child care subsidy rates are important tools for struggling individuals and families.<sup>89</sup>

### Examples of Success

The Washington State Legislature invested \$4.2 million in 2005-2007 to eliminate the parent co-pay for school meals to insure that all low-income children would have access to school breakfast and that K-3 students would receive free lunch without a co-pay as well. Eliminating the co-pay translates directly into more kids getting nutritious meals at school – so they can stay healthy, alert and ready to learn and grow. Elimination of the breakfast co-pay resulted in significant increases in the number of kids receiving nutritious school breakfasts

Local Farms, Healthy Kids Act passed in 2008 with broad support from anti-hunger and children's advocates, environmentalists, farmers and public health advocates. The bill expanded existing state programs and introduced national models to bring more fresh and locally-grown food to Washington's low-income children and families through schools, food banks and farmers markets.

### Necessary Leaders

- Community leaders.
- Advocacy organizations.
- Public and private funders.

## Evaluation Needed to Guide Long-Term Improvements

As noted earlier, there is a lack of process and outcome studies and best practices in regard to reducing hunger. Several cities and states have prepared plans, but there is little information available about whether or how they were implemented and with what success.

On the policy level, advocates are able to report changes in regulations or funding, but have not conducted studies about how they contributed to the change or what approaches were most effective.

Locally, on the program level, it appears that most public and private funders only track outputs. They may collect information about the number of people who received meal deliveries or visited a food bank, but do not ask contractors or grantees to report on the effectiveness of their outreach strategies, their food collection methods, or overall operations.

Some food banks ask for feedback on customer satisfaction, and Northwest Harvest holds focus groups annually to ask customers what is working well and what is not.

Both process and outcome evaluations help successfully guide planning and prioritize activities to reach the desired results, and identify opportunities to adjust strategies and tactics to increase effectiveness. They also document success to help ensure long-term investment.

This plan calls on many organizations and individuals to engage in a coordinated and strategic effort to reduce hunger in King County and to devote substantial resources to do so. Investing in both a process and outcome evaluation would not only yield valuable information on a local level, it would be a valuable contribution to other parts of the state and country.

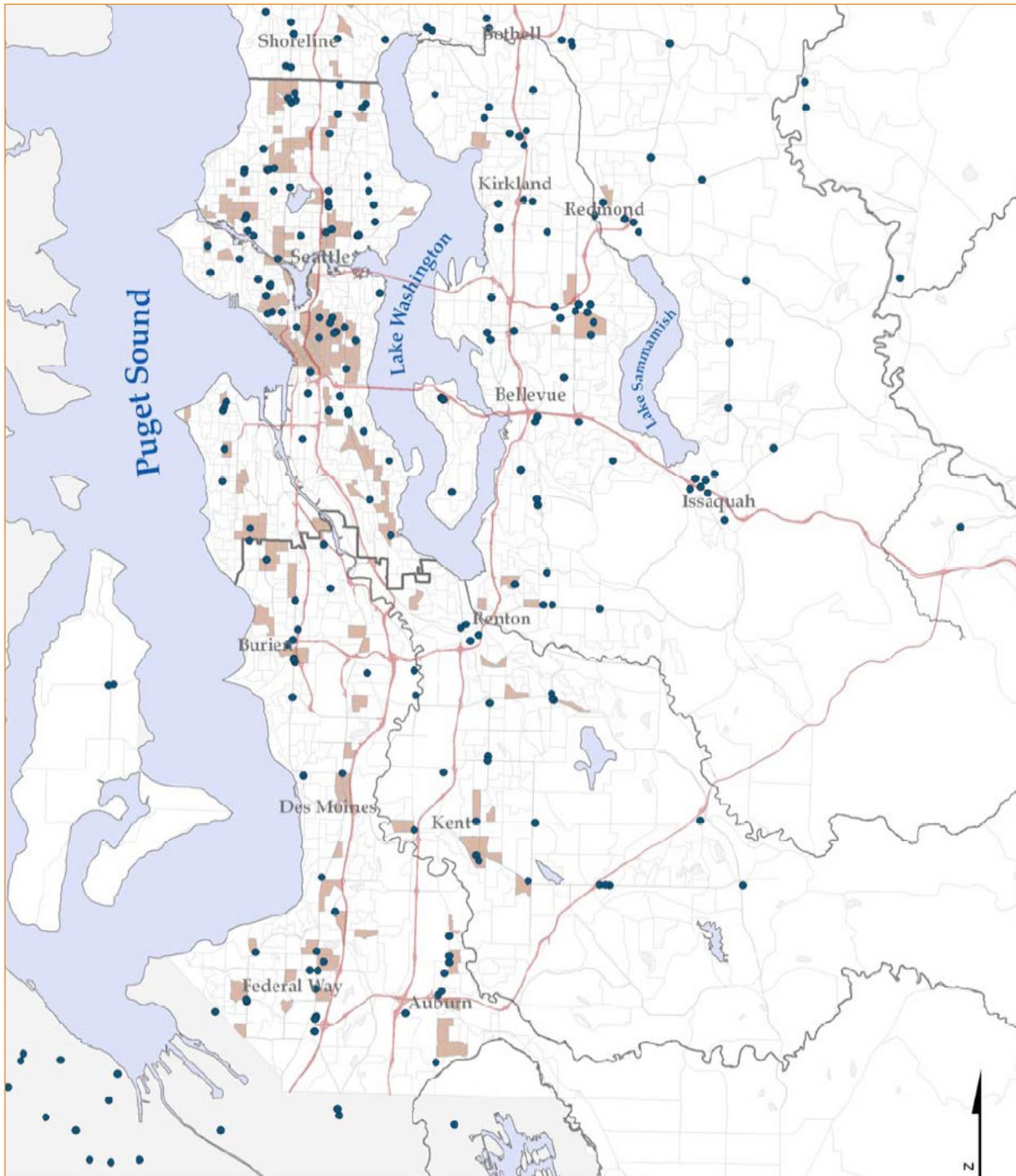
This plan also sets benchmarks that can only be met by the combined efforts of multiple players. All stakeholders will benefit from a system that tracks that the community is meeting benchmarks such as these:

- Increase enrollment in food stamps to 80percent of eligible households.
- Increase participation in school breakfast program to 60percent of students who participate in school lunch program.
- Increase participation of low-income children in summer food programs to 40percent of students who qualify for free or reduced lunch during the school year.
- Add 20percent more licensed family child care homes to those participating in federal child care meal program.
- Add 20percent more licensed child care centers to those participating in federal child care meal program.
- Double the number of people served in Seattle who receive home delivered meals.
- Distribute an additional 1,000,000 pounds of food to food banks.

If community leaders launch a concerted effort to reduce hunger in King County, they are likely to benefit greatly from an evaluation design that looks not only at individual components of hunger reduction efforts, but that can also gauge the level and type of coordination, and the synergistic effects of better connecting organizations with similar goals.

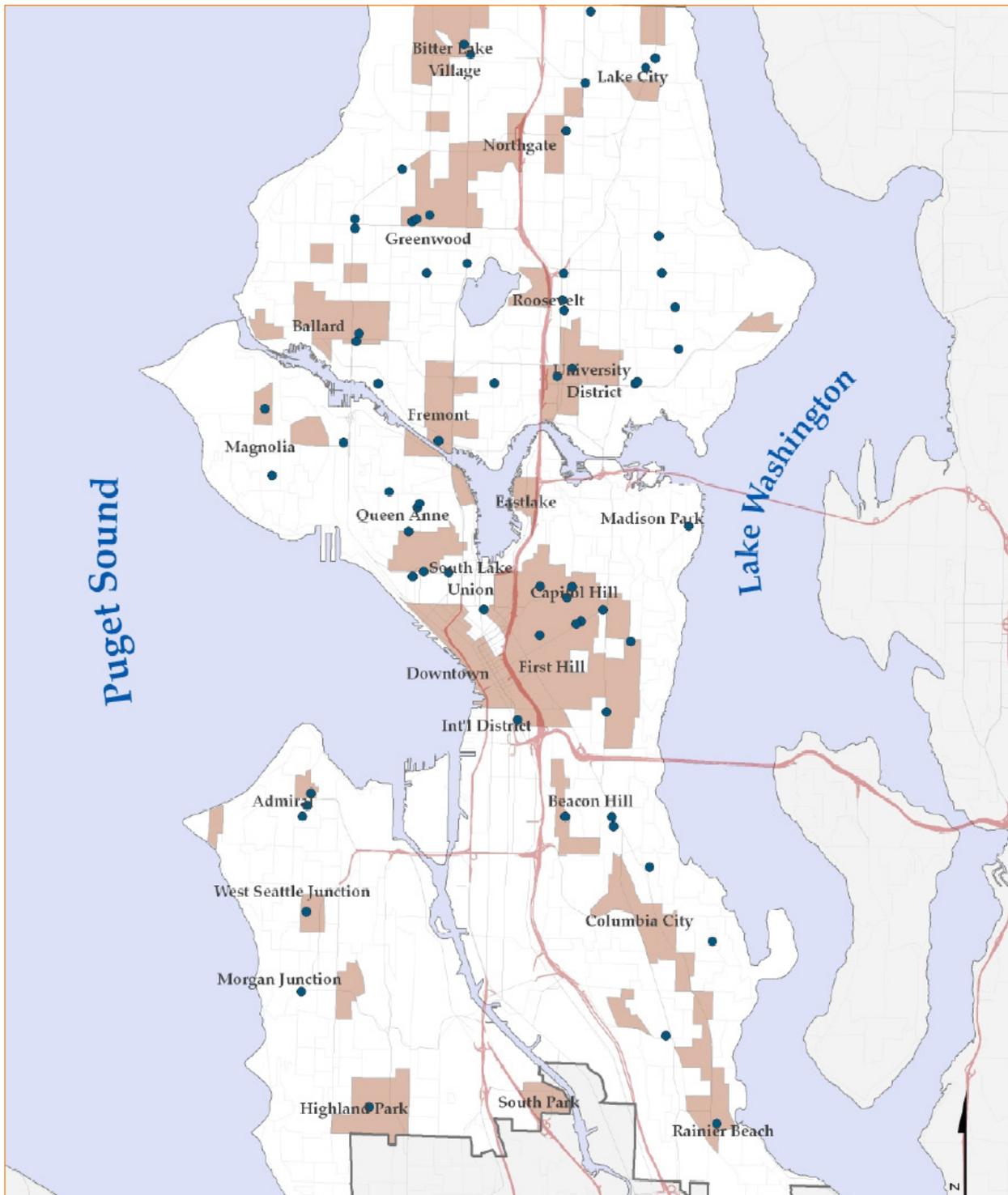
# APPENDICES

**Map 1: Areas in King County at risk for food insecurity**



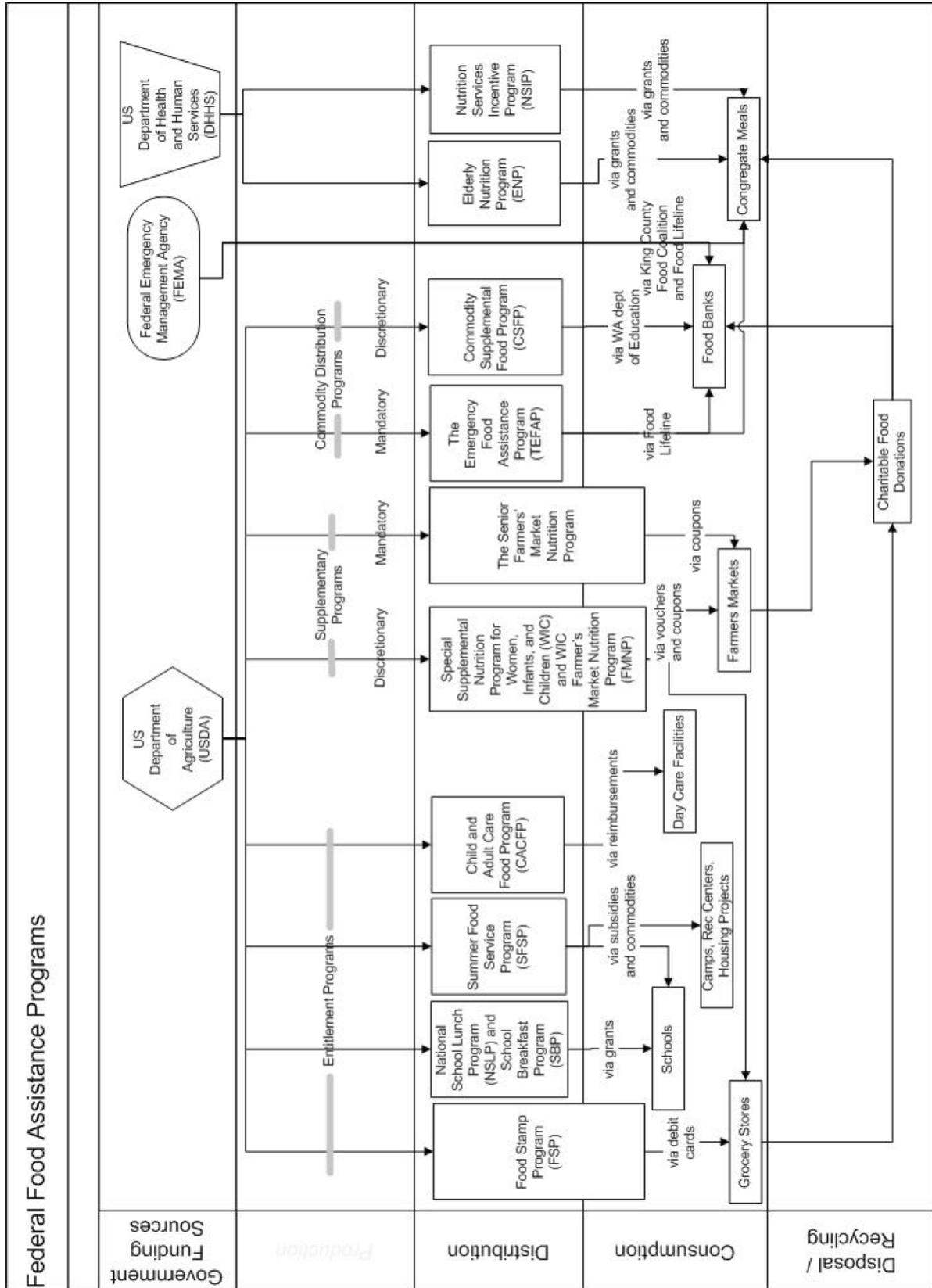
- Location of major grocery store
- Block groups with greater than 50 food insecure persons per sq. km.

**Map 2: Areas in the City of Seattle at risk for food insecurity**

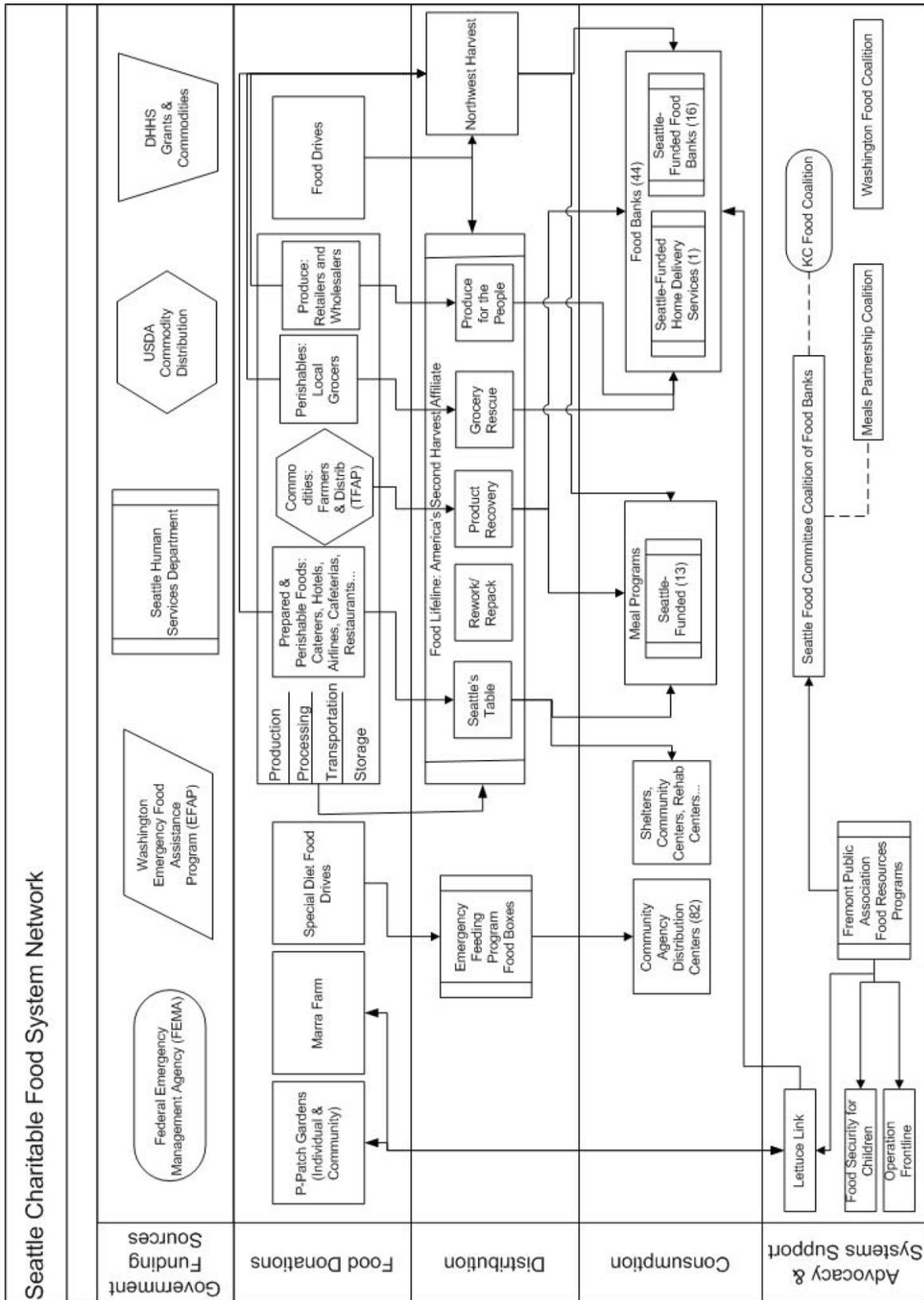


- Location of major grocery store
- Block groups with greater than 50 food insecure persons per sq. km.

# Federal Food Assistance Programs



# Seattle Emergency Food System Network



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## Acknowledgements

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United Way of King County

**Note: Incorporation of Strategies from *End Childhood Hunger in Washington* report**

A great deal of analysis and planning has recently been done on the state level to produce a 2007 report entitled *End Childhood Hunger in Washington*. The report is a strategic plan for a statewide campaign to end childhood hunger. The Children's Alliance, a statewide children's advocacy organization, teamed with Share Our Strength, a national organization working to make sure no child in America grows up hungry. The organizations engaged over 80 people to develop the plan.

Several goals in this plan rely on increasing participation in federally funded child nutrition programs that are underutilized. Although the plan calls for statewide action, portions of its strategies for maximizing federal funding streams to decrease childhood hunger are applicable to King County. Therefore, rather than develop separate strategies in King County to reduce childhood hunger, United Way of King County has embraced and adopted those approaches as they apply on a county level.

### Interviewees

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## Methodology

United Way of King County engaged Heliotrope, a Seattle consulting firm, to develop a “fast track” plan to reduce hunger in King County by drawing on several recent plans with similar goals prepared in Washington State and around the country. The urgency was driven by the current recession which is resulting in dramatic increases in calls for help with food and visits to food banks. In addition to drawing on existing plans, United Way furnished the consultants with research and data to assist in their work; convened a planning team to provide advice and guidance; arranged a number of personal interviews (see lists above); and provided guidance and direction through staff members Vince Matulionis and Lauren McGowan.

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