Dear Network Partners,

Below is an important update from the Foodbank:

Here are a few recently released resources that might be helpful in continuing your critical operations.

- Vermont Department of Health has released these Health and Safety Tips for Essential Businesses.
- The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has released these Best Practices that could apply to many of your operations.
- Feeding America has provided the attached document, Workplace Health and Safety Practices.

The Foodbank remains committed to our mission to ensure that no one in Vermont goes hungry.

The Foodbank’s vision of a Vermont where everyone has access to enough food every day; everyone is healthy and everyone takes action to eliminate hunger and poverty is more important now than ever.

It’s inspiring to see the role that everyone across the state is playing in trying to achieve that vision.

The need for food assistance is increasing rapidly

- School closures, rising unemployment and rising poverty due to quarantine and stay-at-home orders will disproportionately impact people already at risk of hunger.
- This pandemic is creating a food assistance emergency unlike anything we’ve ever seen in the 40-year life of food banking.
- According to projections from Feeding America, this could result in an additional 46% increase in the number of people experiencing food insecurity.
  - In Vermont, that could mean 34,279 more people facing food insecurity, for total of 108,800 (up from 74,520).
- Across our network of partner food shelves and meal sites and at our food distributions, we have seen increases between 30% and 100% in the number of people looking for food assistance.
- The state of Vermont is seeing a 6 fold increase in people applying for 3SquaresVT (SNAP) benefits.
  - The Foodbank’s 3SquaresVT outreach staff has seen a significant increase as well. Between March 16 and April 8, 152 people reached out for help applying for 3SquaresVT through our website. In the same period last year, it was 24.

We are shifting our operations to accommodate the increasing and changing community needs.

- Our cross-departmental COVID-19 Task Force continues to meet daily to address the emerging needs associated with the coronavirus.
- We are working on a toolkit to provide to network partners in case of COVID-19 exposure or a positive test. Stay tuned for more.
- We are shifting and increasing our food distribution to ensure we can meet the need while mitigating the spread of the virus. Here are a few of the many additional measures we’ve taken to address the crisis:
  - We distributed an extra 370,000 pounds of food in March to meet the increased need caused by this pandemic.
  - In the first week of April we distributed 62% more food than we did in the same period last year.
  - We’ve leased two additional trucks (one for Barre and one for Brattleboro), to increase our distribution and storage capacity.
We are immediately spending an extra $75,000 to purchase local produce from Vermont growers to share with people facing hunger. We know that this crisis is impacting our farmers as well and we want to do what we can to support them while fighting hunger. This will be followed by an additional $200,000 to be spent on extra local produce in the coming months to address the crisis.

- We will be regularly updating this website with the latest information about the Foodbank’s coronavirus response: vtfoodbank.org/coronavirus
  - Specific information for network partners is available here: vtfoodbank.org/network-partner-resources/covid-19-resources-for-network-partners
  - Specific information for individuals looking for food assistance is available here: vtfoodbank.org/gethelp

**Government support**

- We are working closely with the State Emergency Operations Center and the legislature to ensure that the needs of people facing hunger is a key part of the state’s response efforts.
- We are working with FEMA to distribute more than 160,000 MREs (Meals Ready to Eat). More details will be available next week.
- The federal stimulus bills do include funds for food assistance through the Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP). But it will take time for that food to reach us (likely not until June or July). And what is currently legislated will not come close to meeting the need, particularly given the timing and the restrictions on distribution.
- We are working closely with our federal delegation to advocate for more support for people facing hunger in their next bill.

**The safety and wellbeing of our clients, partners, volunteers and staff is a top priority**

We are in ongoing communication with our partners, staff and volunteers to maintain safe practices and institute additional safety measures that will ensure nutritious food continues to flow into the community. This includes:

- Maintaining safe practices we adhere to as a normal course of operations 365 days a year
- Following recommendations regarding cleaning of high touch surfaces, including counters, tabletops, doorknobs, bathroom fixtures, toilets, phones, keyboards, etc.
- Taking necessary measures to ensure all employees, visitors, and persons served who are experiencing any symptoms of illness stay home and avoid contact
- Social distancing
- Personal protection measures outlined by health organizations including keeping hands clean by washing them frequently
- Providing masks to staff
- Limiting volunteers to group size to ensure they can be 6ft apart while working
- All staff who are able to, are working remotely

**We are ensuring that the food we distribute is safe to eat and will not spread the virus**

- All food has been packed by VF staff or volunteers who are not showing any signs of illness, have washed their hands, and are wearing gloves.
- Studies show that the virus can survive for up to 3 days on surfaces, so we are ensuring that packed food sits in our warehouse for at least three days before being distributed to ensure that there are no live virus particles on food when it reaches our clients.
- Be sure to fully wash and dry all produce before consuming.