



Impact

Bringing Solutions to the Table

As pandemic lockdown began, Stark County residents faced long lines and empty grocery store shelves. However, with businesses closed and jobs lost, many faced something even more daunting: unexpectedly having to rely on food pantries and hot meal sites. Even some pantry volunteers found themselves reaching out for food assistance.

Local food programs quickly recognized the need to adjust to meet the significantly increased demand while adopting the CDC guidelines to remain safe. Offering more frequent pick-up options and providing to-go meals became the norm. These critical changes greatly increased the cost of food and supplies.

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In mid-March, local funders had banded together to jointly meet escalating community needs. (That collaborative response is discussed in the *Pandemic Grantmaking* article on page 12.) As requests quickly poured in, it became clear that food would be a persistent need. Four food aid organizations requested support in the first week alone. Knowing that there are 108 food programs

in Stark County, Foundation staff expected many more requests.

Separate applications from each organization would have quickly overwhelmed the grantmaking process. Because all 108 Stark County food programs are partners of the Akron-Canton Regional Foodbank, staff members from the Sisters of Charity and Stark Community foundations recommended that the collaborating funders address the growing problem by leveraging the Foodbank's leadership and capacity.

Together, four funders awarded \$87,500 to the Foodbank to support Stark County pantries and hot meal sites at 50% above their normal need, based on the assumption that they would require at least that much funding to meet the need for 2.5 months. The Timken Foundation followed that up by providing a separate grant of \$100,000 to expand food support.

In the spring, demand for food doubled, then slowly decreased through summer and early fall. As winter approached, it began rising yet again as COVID cases increased and unemployment benefits decreased for many residents. Demand through the winter is expected to meet or exceed the original surge.

With a broad base of support from funders and the community, and with the Foodbank as a strong central partner, we are confident that Stark County's food programs can continue to respond in creative and committed ways. ✨



Game Changer: The Akron-Canton Regional Foodbank gave the Louisville City School District 1,580 bags of food for district families.