



FY25 – FY27 STRATEGIC PLAN
Adopted: March 28, 2024

CORE VALUES

Respect • Integrity • Responsibility • Justice • Equity

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☑ **Background and Context**

As the only state-wide food bank network, MFBN has been feeding Montana since 1983. MFBN works with the national hunger-fighting organization, Feeding America, and continues to develop programs designed specifically to address the unique challenges of accessing food in Montana that meet the needs and desires of its communities. In all realms, the organization has seen tremendous growth over the last decade. Ten years ago, we delivered seven million pounds of food annually compared with 24 million in 2021, 16.3 million pounds in 2022, and 16.7 million pounds in 2023, and the number of partner organizations and counties served has doubled. As we build partnerships and capacity, and move our services into new locations, the demand continues to meet those efforts.

☑ **Developing the Strategic Plan**

When developing the FY25-27 Strategic Plan, MFBN's Board and leadership were conscious of the fact that the organization will be experiencing many changes over the next three years. With the completion of a new facility anticipated in 2025 that will double our space, the planning process focused more on internal assessment, improvement and culture rather than external growth and expansion. Our intention was to be prepared for what could be historical changes in our service model and staffing levels by strengthening our team, processes and network partners.

Planning took place over a period of four months which included departmental focus groups, leadership discussion, gathering Board input and refining tactics with an all-staff retreat. The Board Executive Committee then reviewed to ensure that the plan included metrics and accountability from all levels of the organization.

☑ **What We Learned**

National Trends

Food banks across the US are evolving to improve the food they supply, improve the neighbor experience, and support broader initiatives to reduce hunger. They are evaluating how to balance continued immediate food assistance and efforts to help reduce hunger for good.

Changes being planned, piloted, and implemented in the food banking industry include:

- Increasing the availability of nutritious and culturally preferred food.
- Eliminating barriers to accessing food assistance and promoting a more convenient, welcoming, and dignified experience at food distribution sites (e.g. expanded hours, varied food choice, added convenience, and a more dignified neighbor experience).
- Providing or enabling access to "wraparound" social services at food assistance sites (e.g. housing support, benefit application assistance).

- Explicitly and actively focusing on racial equity in the network, in their operations and their partner programs.
- Using resources to invest in network partner capacity.
- Keeping people with lived experience at the forefront of decision-making.

Montana Trends

There are more than 93,000 food insecure Montanans with an annual “meal gap” of over 16 million meals, according to Feeding America estimates (Map the Meal Gap 2023). Montana Food Bank Network distributed over 19 million meals during the pandemic and continues to maintain, on average, over 13 million meals annually since then.

Montana food assistance is delivered through a statewide network of nonprofit community food banks, pantries, senior centers, shelters, and schools that vary widely in size, scope and resources. There are 340 organizations in the network distributing food assistance, ranging from volunteer-led groups handing out boxes of food monthly to sophisticated multi-service community agencies offering grocery store experiences and other social services. Due to the variability of capacity and complexity, there is an opportunity for MFBN to develop an array of support to strengthen the capacity, readiness, and interest of partner programs to make transformational changes to create a better experience for neighbors and to offer them more than food.

Organizational Opportunities

As demand on our network grows, we have identified a number of opportunities. They include:

- Addressing gaps and potential duplications in food distribution in key communities and rural towns and ensuring consistent distribution processes across the state.
- Strengthening external relationships and overall visibility of Montana Food Bank Network in key regions of the state, particularly those gap areas lacking adequate food access.
- Gathering more input from network partners and community members with lived experience and centering their voice in program decision-making.
- Revisiting and revising internal programs to improve efficiencies and impact.
- Addressing workplace improvements, including competitive wages, internal communication, and employee advancement opportunities.
- Building a unified culture among the Board and staff that embraces innovation and experimentation, centers its work on those it serves, and incorporates equity, diversity and inclusion into its internal culture and external relationships.

☑ **Mission, Vision, and Values**

Our Mission

To end hunger in Montana through food acquisition and distribution, education, and advocacy.

Our Vision

A Montana free from hunger where everyone has equal access to nutritious food.

Our Values

Respect	We interact with dignity, kindness, compassion, empathy, and trust with everyone
Integrity	We honor our commitments, acknowledge and address our mistakes, and actively live our mission
Responsibility	We strive for excellence and the biggest impact for everyone we serve, wisely and transparently using resources entrusted to us.
Justice	We recognize and seek to understand past and ongoing injustices that impact food security and consider lived expertise essential to identifying barriers and incorporating solutions into our work.
Equity	We provide support equitably and with respect to individual needs to encourage all to succeed.

How our work reflects our beliefs

- We can permanently reduce food insecurity in Montana through the combined efforts of our staff, network partners, supporters, Board members and volunteers.
- We will boldly lead the transformation of the food assistance system in Montana with ingenuity and perseverance. We embrace innovation and adaptation to achieve change.
- We will value and amplify the expertise of those experiencing food insecurity to inform our work and our decision-making.
- We will be a data-driven organization that uses technology and insights to measure outcomes, increase our impact, and make efficient use of resources.

☑ **Measuring Impact**

Establishing measurable targets for goals and strategies can be an important component of a strategic plan. There are elements of this plan that we can measure and set targets for, but many can be challenging until we improve our data collection and analytics.

- With the new Feeding America contract, many metrics that have been used in the past are being updated. For example, we are no longer measuring Meals Per Person in Need as a tool for impact in our service area and are now adopting Service Area Assessments and Operational Plans. This work is evolving and will help to strengthen our ways of measuring impact.
- We currently have very limited capabilities and capacity to collect data about the work of our partner programs. Becoming data-driven is a goal of this plan, but we need to build the tools and capacity – both internally and with our network partners – to collect data, measure outcomes and establish baselines for targets
- There are too many uncontrollable external factors affecting poverty and the level of food insecurity for us to set a realistic target for our stated goals to reduce food insecurity in the state. While the initiatives in this plan should contribute to a reduction in need and improve access, their impact could be countered by negative developments in the economy, employment or housing market. Conversely, increased government assistance, as seen during the pandemic, could quickly reduce food insecurity, again outside our control.

With these caveats in mind, we have included for each goal potential areas of measurement. In some cases, we can set targets now. In others, we will need to develop the measures and measurement tools first.

☑ **Strategic Goals**

Goal 1: Strengthen our network

We will strengthen our overall service delivery, programs and advocacy efforts through a networked, partnership-first model.

Goal 2: Evaluate and improve

We will develop and nurture productive internal evaluation, accountability and continuous improvement.

Goal 3: Cultivate organizational culture

We will build operational structure, team capacity and capabilities needed to achieve strategic objectives and evolve the culture to reflect MFBNs core values.

☑ Strategies and Methods

Goal 1: Strengthen our network

We will strengthen our overall service delivery, programs and advocacy efforts through a networked, partnership-first model.

Strategy 1: Provide network partners with resources to improve their ability to serve the community.

Methods:

- *Examine agency tiering to improve equity in ordering, capacity building, etc.*
- *Expand regional networking opportunities for network partners*
- *Engage neighbors when examining distribution models to ensure services best meet their needs.*
- *Work with network partners to identify barriers to food access and develop action plans to optimize capacity, coordinate distribution in underserved areas, and support network partner capacity.*
- *Source more nutritious, fresh and culturally preferred foods.*
- *Implement technology and process improvements to better network partner food sourcing experience.*
- *Explore and implement opportunities to improve equity, diversity and inclusion into neighbor experiences.*

Strategy 2: Revise and expand MFBN's direct service programs (Mail-A-Meal, BackPack, Hunters Against Hunger) to support increased access to food, improved neighbor experience, and increased cost efficiencies.

Methods:

- *Evaluate cost benefit of programs and services to improve efficiencies, targeted impact and cost effectiveness*
- *Engage lived experts when developing program and service modifications*

Strategy 3: Advocate and communicate for political, community, and philanthropic support to end hunger and destigmatize food insecurity.

Methods:

- *Engage and educate network partners, lived experts and other stakeholders to impact state and federal policy*
- *Inspire and motivate the general public and the philanthropic community to support our mission and sustain needed growth*
- *Ensure effective and efficient administrative, operational and governance capacity*

Goal 2: Evaluate and improve

We will develop and nurture productive internal evaluation, accountability and continuous improvement.

Strategy 1: Create standardized metrics that track our service area impact, financial and operational efficiencies, and philanthropic growth.

Methods:

- *Implement network-wide methods of data collection and sharing*
- *Develop method to assess needs in service area and implement operational response plan*
- *Identify and monitor key metrics quarterly and adjust as needed*
- *Integrate evaluation training and accountability at all staff levels*

Goal 3: Cultivate organizational culture

We will build operational structure, team capacity, and capabilities needed to achieve strategic objectives and evolve the culture to reflect MFBNs core values.

Strategy 1: We will unify staff and stakeholders around change, enabling MFBN to carry out the mission and navigate demands on the organization effectively.

Methods:

- *Processes, procedures and policies are value-based and shared with context and goals*
- *Decisions and system improvement efforts will be completed with impacted staff input*
- *Voices of lived experts will be considered in changes impacting services and programs.*

Strategy 3: We will strengthen the organization's overall capability to ensure a consistent presence across Montana.

Methods:

- *Staff will be cross-trained to increase flexibility and ensure consistency of services in the absence of a team member.*
- *Employees will have opportunities for professional development and internal promotional opportunities when available.*
- *Data, documents and other resources will be organized and maintained in a centralized location.*
- *Leadership will ensure adequate time and resources to encourage opportunities of professional development*