



How Non-Federal Entities Can Best Help the White House Conference on Food, Nutrition, Hunger, and Health Achieve Its Goals of Ending Hunger, Food Insecurity, and Nutrition Insecurity in the U.S.

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Executive Summary

Convincing Congress to fund, and the White House to agree to hold, the second-ever White House conference on food and nutrition has been a step long-championed by Hunger Free America and is a big victory for the anti-hunger movement. We are grateful that House Rules Committee Chair James McGovern, who fought tirelessly for this for years, finally achieved this crucial advance. Properly implemented, the conference will provide an historic opportunity to create and implement a comprehensive plan to, by 2030, end domestic hunger, food insecurity, and nutritional insecurity and ensure that nutritious food is affordable, convenient, and available for all Americans. Every sector in America has a role to play in ending hunger once and for all and we are providing here every idea we've had for what non-federal entities can do to contribute to this effort.

Introduction

Hunger Free America's [previous recommendations](#) related to the upcoming White House Conference on Food, Nutrition, Hunger, and Health have proposed that the top task of the conference – and the process leading up to it – be to get Congress, the President, and every domestic federal agency to commit to very specific, concrete actions to improve federal economic, scientific, and social policies related to those challenges. We have proposed detailed ways for the federal government to do so.

Only the federal government has the scope, resources, scale, and yes, legitimacy, to solve major domestic problems such as hunger, food insecurity, and nutrition insecurity. Only the federal government can implement solutions in all states and territories. Only the federal government can obtain the full revenues and carry out the full spending needed to tackle these problems, and only the federal government is overseen by people democratically elected by the majority of the American people. We also have a national economy, national scientific challenges, and national social problems that cross state lines, so we need national economic, scientific, and social policy improvements that cross state lines.

That's why only the federal government could create an interstate highway system, a space program, and a military. Social Security would only work as a national program since people often retire in different states than where they previously worked. For all those reasons, the role of the federal government in fighting hunger, food insecurity, and nutrition insecurity will continue to dwarf the roles of all other levels of government, civil society, and businesses combined.



We have previously proposed that any plan serious about tackling hunger, food insecurity, and nutrition insecurity will need to ensure that the federal government proposes and concretely implements comprehensive action items to: create living wage jobs; raise wages and expand tax credits; slash poverty and bolster economic opportunity; help low-income Americans develop assets and avoid benefits cliffs; ensure free health care and prescription drugs for all; make quality housing, childcare, utilities, broadband access, and public transportation affordable for all; significantly increase government safety net programs like SNAP, WIC, school meals, P-EBT, and home-delivered meals for older Americans; advance nutrition research; and help smaller farmers and strengthen food systems.

As the Greek scientist Archimedes said, “Give me a lever big enough and I can move the world.” Significant federal policy and economic improvements are, by far, the largest lever at our disposal. As the rest of this memo explains, non-federal entities – including all other levels of government, the private sector, the nonprofit sector, and civil society – **can** do much more to fight hunger, food insecurity, and nutrition insecurity – but it is a mistake to think that any of those entities – without significant federal improvements -- can make a serious impact. Thus, this paper makes the case that the best way for such entities to make the biggest difference is to influence federal and national economic policies and to leverage federal resources.

State, City, County, Tribal, Territorial Governments

- **As previously proposed by Hunger Free America CEO Joel Berg in [a paper](#) for the Center for American Progress, states should develop comprehensive “Food Action Plans” to detail and implement comprehensive policies on food, hunger, food insecurity, nutrition insecurity, and food systems – from “farm to fork” – with a special emphasis on increasing participation among eligible state residents in federal nutrition assistance programs.**

County, city, tribal, and territorial governments should also create and implement such plans.

- **State, county, city, tribal, and territorial governments should host their own local conferences on food, nutrition, hunger, and health as a lead up to the White House conference.**

They can use their conferences to create and/or release to their public their own state/county/city, tribal, or territorial food action.



- **State, county, city, tribal, and territorial governments that don't already have their own offices of food and hunger policy and directors of food and hunger policy should create them.**

Some states, counties, and cities already have such offices and/or directors, and they have already proven their effectiveness.

- **State, county, city, tribal, and territorial governments that don't already have their own food and hunger councils should create them.**

Such councils in many places have already been proven to be effective tools to bring together diverse stakeholders, but all must ensure they include focuses on fighting hunger and poverty, and making healthy food affordable to everyone - not just on boosting sustainable agriculture.

- **States – and all other non-federal levels of the government that have the legal ability to do so – should raise their minimum wages, and index future increases to inflation, and fully cover tipped workers and agricultural workers.**

Hunger Free America's [groundbreaking analysis of federal data](#) found that, in 2018-2020, 9.7% of employed adults – 14.9 million working adults -- in the U.S. lived in food insecure households. The states with the highest rates of food insecurity among employed adults were Oklahoma (14.8%), Mississippi (13.4%), Louisiana (12.7%), Alabama (12.6%), and West Virginia (12.6%). There was a strong correlation between state minimum wage rates and state rates of food insecurity.

- **Launch a statewide, multi-agency communications and outreach effort to enroll more eligible U.S. residents in federally funded nutrition assistance programs, including SNAP, WIC, P-EBT, school breakfasts, and summer meals.**

This could also be combined with vaccine outreach and/or rental assistance outreach.



- **Provide a dedicated funding stream for government agencies and nonprofit groups to conduct outreach for SNAP, WIC, summer meals, and other food programs.**

The SNAP portion of such outreach dollars can be matched 100 percent by the federal government.

- **Make it a top priority to enroll more eligible state residents in SNAP, but particularly those in underserved populations: older Americans, low-income working people, documented immigrants and mixed immigration status households, and college students.**

Fully 18 percent of all people eligible – and a whopping 26 percent of working people eligible and a stunning 58 percent of people 60 years and older eligible – fail to receive SNAP, losing out on billions of dollars of nutrition assistance.

- **Enable more states and counties to not only apply for and implement, but also communicate fully to the public, their adoption of The Elderly Simplified Application Project (ESAP), to make it easier for older Americans to access SNAP.**

They should also communicate clearly as to which older applicants (such as those with high medical expenses) should still use longer applications to obtain higher benefit amounts.

- **Offices/departments for the aging should better advertise SNAP.**

Most promote senior center meals and meals-on-wheels but ignore SNAP.

- **Better integrate SNAP enrollment with enrollment in federal-funded SSI and DI enrollment.**

Federal SNAP law has a requirement that the Social Security Administration (SSA) take SNAP applications from SSI applicants/participants as well as DI applicants/participants. USDA FNS reimburses SSA for this work. This hasn't been a particularly robust entry point for the past few decades, but USDA and SSA are hoping to make it better. Therefore, the more that other levels of local government engage with their regional SSA operations to ask about this, and the



more they set an expectation for service and lift up best practices and activities that require funding, the more it will help energize this shared national office effort.

- **More aggressively use state SNAP outreach dollars (including private foundation dollars on SNAP outreach) – all of which are matched one-to-one by USDA FNS out of entitlement federal funds – to conduct SNAP outreach in partnership with nonprofit organizations.**

Doing so is a “win-win” – maximizing both federal outreach dollars and federal benefits dollars.

- **Boost participation of pregnant women and children under five in WIC.**

According to USDA FNS, in the average month of 2018, WIC served an estimated 56.9 percent of those eligible for WIC, a decrease from the revised estimate for 2016 (58.9 percent). This is particularly problematic given that WIC is available to many immigrant households who are ineligible for SNAP, as well as to lower middle-class households who may earn slightly too much money to be eligible for SNAP. In response, HFA suggests that USDA:

- **Better utilize SNAP and Medicaid as passports to WIC enrollment without separate application to WIC.**

Enrollment in those two programs prequalifies households for WIC. The federal government is now pushing such cross enrollments, but here again, state and local governments can help drive better service by requesting cross enrollment rates. The standard for cross enrollment from SNAP to school meals is 95%. If it drops below 90%, USDA FNS requires a corrective action plan from the state. Also, states and local government should make it easier for people to apply for SNAP and WIC in the same application.



- **Work with the federal government to extend the pandemic flexibilities that enabled more WIC enrollment activities and program activities to be carried out remotely instead of in-person at WIC clinics.**

Provide technical assistance, funding, and policy support to WIC clinics to enable them to serve more families remotely by video and/or phone, instead of requiring them to come to WIC clinics in-person to receive service.

- **Work with state departments of education and school districts to promote WIC to public school parents.**

- **Work with federal government on a comprehensive outreach and communications plan aimed at helping immigrants understand the revised “public charge” regulations, to help more immigrants understand that obtaining WIC, SNAP, housing aid, and government health insurance will not negatively impact their immigration statuses.**

- **Work with the federal government to accelerate its planned efforts to help on-line only retailers; farmers markets and farm stands; and small grocery stores, bodegas, and corner stores to accept both SNAP and WIC online.**

Many retailers still find the current USDA system to apply to do so overly lengthy, costly, and non-transparent about the steps they need to get approved.

- **Work with the federal government to combine systems for SNAP and WIC online ordering.**

The current two-track system is overly burdensome for both program recipients and retailers.

- **Provide funding and/or technical assistance to pilot neighborhood/community SNAP and WIC delivery hubs to reduce shipping costs for food.**



Ask the state commission for National and Community Service to target some AmeriCorps funding for projects that deliver food from farmers markets and nonprofit food co-ops to SNAP and WIC recipients.

- **Enact and fund a SNAP-like program, to be funded by the State, to give extra grocery funds to immigrants and working poor US resident who are ineligible for federal SNAP benefits.**

California recently started such a program.

- **Enact and fund free school lunch for all students, with state funds supplementing federal funds, as California and Maine also recently enacted.**
- **Enact, fund, and implement a government-wide “Assets Empowerment/Middle Class Wealth Generation Agenda” to dramatically increase economic opportunity and mobility by enabling more families to transition from *owing* non-productive debts interest to *owning* assets such as first homes and small businesses.**

This work should be combined with initiatives to eliminate or at least reduce “benefits cliffs” in which workers who get raises or work more hours lose benefits - sometimes the value of lost benefits actually exceeds the increases in wages.

- **Work with the federal government to ensure free health care and prescription drugs for all; make quality housing, childcare, utilities, broadband access, and public transportation affordable for all.**

Helping struggling families pay other key costs of living is one of the best ways to ensure that they have more money left over food.

- **Launch a statewide, multi-agency communications and outreach effort to enroll more eligible U.S. residents in federally funded nutrition assistance programs, including SNAP, WIC, P-EBT, school breakfasts, and summer meals.**



This could also be combined with efforts at vaccine outreach and/or rental assistance outreach.

- **Apply to for the USDA SNAP Restaurant Meals program, then work with nonprofit groups to conduct outreach to residents who are homeless, have disabilities, and are elderly to help enroll them in SNAP and use their benefits, if they choose to do so, at participating restaurants.**
- **Better fight college student hunger by promoting college student SNAP enrollment, in close collaboration with state universities and community colleges.**
- **Work with USDA to enable SNAP recipients to digitally redeem their SNAP benefits (through a system like Apple Wallet or Google Pay) instead of using EBT cards, which have more stigma and are often lost in the mail.**
- **Provide more technical assistance and equipment to farmers markets and individual farmers to help them accept SNAP and WIC online.**
- **Do more to promote gleaning on farms and food donations by farmers by providing farmers with more information (including details of legal liability protections) and technical assistance, and by using state volunteerism commissions to recruit volunteers for gleaning activities.**
- **Provide more technical assistance and funding to CSAs and discount produce box programs in low-income communities/neighborhoods.**
- **Buy food from local farmers for distribution through food banks, food pantries, and soup kitchens.**
- **Develop a neighborhood-level “food access index” that incorporates both food prices and physical availability of food.**
- **Provide increased technical assistance and seed money for urban and suburban farms and gardens.**



- **Create a nutrition education smart phone app tied to market UPC codes for individual products.**
- **Include healthy food as an eligible expense in Medicaid 1115 Waiver. California and a number of other states are already doing so in some form.**
- **Help more schools, hospitals, and prisons purchase their food from local farmers and food processors.**
- **Increase participation statewide in federally funded school breakfast programs by mandating -- and providing - technical assistance and limited funding to support implementation of a policy mandating that breakfast be served in first period classrooms.**

This would also help fight the pandemic by increasing the social distancing of students by preventing them from needing to go into cafeterias for breakfast.

- **Provide more technical assistance to increase the participation of children in – and include more nonprofit groups to participate in the provision of— federally-funded summer meals. Enable more nonprofit soup kitchens to participate in this program.**
- **Provide more technical assistance to school districts, counties, cities, towns, villages, tribal governments and nonprofit groups to increase participation of children in federally funded after-school supper and after-school snack programs.**
- **Improve – and make more culturally sensitive – nutrition education curriculum used by schools statewide.**
- **Mandate that schools serve breakfasts and lunches at reasonable hours.**
- **Better harness citizen service and volunteerism to fight hunger**



Direct more federal AmeriCorps national service funds under the State's control to programs fighting hunger and improving nutrition. Promote the use of more skills-based, professional volunteers to aid hunger organizations. Develop a state anti-hunger service/volunteerism handbook.

- **When people apply for unemployment compensation, inform them how they may be eligible for SNAP and WIC.**
- **Launch a State “Good Jobs, Food Jobs” initiative by working together to provide more technical assistance and seed money to more food-related start-up companies (especially those focused on food processing), and particularly those owned by women and people of color.**

Ensure that food-related enterprises are a principal component of every economic development and business expansion plan in the state. Target more job trainings funds to food-related professions.

- **Offices/departments for the aging should develop and implement a comprehensive plan to help more older Americans access SNAP, senior center meals, and home delivered meals.**
- **Ensure all that nutrition education activities provided are culturally sensitive, hands on (using actually available, affordable foods), delivered by diverse staff and volunteers, and are practical, based on monetary and time constraints of clients.**

Businesses Overall

- **The top thing that all businesses – including food related businesses and farms – need to do is provide their employees (and employees of their top contractors and suppliers) living wage jobs, with regular cost of living increases tied to inflation – as well free health care, paid personal and family and medical leave, and other adequate benefits.**

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As noted above, in 2018-2020, 9.7% of employed adults – 14.9 million working adults -- in the U.S. lived in food insecure households. All businesses should also support national and state minimum wage increases and direct their trade associations to stop opposing them.

When Americans of means visualize U.S. hunger, they tend to think of homeless people panhandling on a sidewalk or at a highway off ramp, and then assume those people are substance abusing and/or mentally ill. Most homeless people are neither – they just are very poor. And the vast majority of people in America who are food insecure are not homeless, they simply don't earn enough money to always be able to pay for all their basic costs of living.

All companies should also embrace employee unions, and stop trying to bust them. Any business that pays its workers so little that they can't afford food and need to rely on government food assistance, and/or depend on food charities is actually increasing hunger, food insecurity, and nutrition insecurity in America, no matter how generously it donates food and/or money to anti-hunger organizations.

Most large companies can easily increase the pay of front-line workers simply by reducing bloated executive pay. In 1965, the average U.S. CEO earned 21 times their average worker; that ratio shot up to 61-1 in 1989 and [an astonishing 351-1 in 2020](#).

- **Companies should stop using loopholes to avoid paying their fair share of taxes.**

[55 of America's largest corporations paid no taxes last year](#) on billions of dollars of profits. That may all be legal, but it's wrong.

First of all, the wealthiest corporate leaders need to better come to terms with the reality that government spending almost certainly played a key role in making them rich – and still plays a crucial role in keeping them wealthy.

Even if they went to private schools themselves, most of their employees who enabled them to accumulate their wealth likely went to public schools. The goods they produce are distributed to consumers on government roads and through government ports. The internet they use was invented by the government, and broadband access is often subsidized by the government today. The services they provide are protected by government watchdogs who prevent their competitors from gaining unfair advantages. Their multiple homes and business properties are

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safeguarded and served by government police, fire, EMS, and sanitation departments.

If a wealthy person rides a private jet alone, they receive 700 times the help from the federal air traffic control system as does each of the 700 passengers of a commercial 747 flying at the time. Besides, both the private jet and commercial plan passengers receive infinitely more government help from government air traffic control than do the tens of millions of Americans who can't afford to regularly fly.

Moreover, *all* Americans – including the wealthiest – benefit from government programs that make our air and water cleaner, guard against foreign invasions, fund hospitals, bring us running water, preserve our national parks, help develop medical cures ... and on and on.

That's why my late father – a decorated WWII Veteran – told me that failing to pay your fair share of taxes isn't harming some amorphous idea of "government" – it's actually ripping off your neighbors.

As for domestic hunger, the hundreds of billions of dollars (or more) in taxes that the wealthy and their companies avoid paying each year could easily end domestic hunger many times over if that money were given to the government to help pay for vital safety net programs.

Federal food assistance alone dwarfs the impact of all food charities. To fund all this, all Americans – and especially the wealthiest people and corporations – need to pay their fair share of taxes. As Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. – a Republican! – wrote in 1927: "Taxes are what we pay for civilized society"

- **Support – and ensure that business trade associations effectively fight for – the enactment of public policies at the federal, state, and local levels that slash hunger by: raising wages; making quality health care, housing, prescription drugs, and child care more affordable; expanding the nutrition assistance safety net; and helping low-income Americans develop assets so they can enter and stay in the middle class.**
- **When businesses do fund anti-hunger charities, they should robustly fund effective organizations that engage in public policy work and help struggling Americans access SNAP and WIC.**



- Corporations should engage their employees not only in direct service volunteerism activities, but also in [skills-based and high impact volunteerism](#).

Food Processors and Manufacturers

- Food processors and manufacturers should donate more food – and healthier food – to food banks.
- Food processors and manufacturers should more clearly label the nutritional content of their products – and avoid false claims like “all natural” when that’s not really the case.

In particular, food labeling should be more honest about portion sizes and how they impact the overall nutritional content of any package.

- Food processors and manufacturers should place on their packaging the USDA Hunger Hotline number, 1-866-3-Hungry.
- Food processors and manufacturers should ensure safe working conditions for their employees.
- Food processors and manufacturers should pay the farmers, ranchers, and fisher people who supply them raw materials a fair price for that food.
- Food Processors and manufacturers should make healthier food more convenient to prepare and eat and cheaper for the public to buy.
- Food processors and manufacturers to stop marketing unhealthy food to kids and increase the marketing of healthy food to everyone.



Food Retailers

- **Food retailers should donate more food – and healthier food – to food banks.**
- **Food retailers should advertise in their stores the USDA Hunger Hotline number, 1-866-3-Hungry.**
- **Food retailers should pay the farmers and fishers people who supply them a fair price for that food.**
- **Food retailers should make healthier food more convenient to prepare and eat and cheaper for the public to buy.**
- **Food retailers should lobby Congress to change federal law to allow SNAP recipients to use such benefits for hot and prepared foods.**
- **Food retailers-- including farmers markets – should accelerate efforts to accept SNAP and WIC online and to deliver food to people’s homes or neighborhood delivery centers.**

Delivery fees should be eliminated or kept to absolute minimums. Retailers should work with state and other governments to pilot neighborhood and rural delivery hubs.

Restaurants and Fast Food Chains

- **Encourage states to apply to USDA to participate in the SNAP Restaurant Meals program, then work with nonprofit groups to conduct outreach to residents who are homeless, have disabilities, and are elderly to help enroll**



them in SNAP and use their benefits, if they choose to do so, at participating restaurants.

- Lobby Congress to enable the SNAP Restaurant Meals program to be able to serve all SNAP recipients in all states, no longer limiting it to select states and just those who are homeless, have disabilities, and / or are elderly.
- Make healthier food more affordable and convenient in low-income neighborhoods.
- Bolster home delivery for healthier, affordable foods.
- Create living wage jobs and earn some income through new programs to give out free or deeply discounted foods to economically struggling Americans.
- Provide clear and accurate calorie and nutrition information on all in-person and online menus.

Farmers and Ranchers

- Donate more fruits, vegetables, and meats to food banks, food pantries, and soup kitchens.
- Vegetable farms and orchards should partner with gleaning and food rescue groups to facilitate the donation of excess food.

Nonprofit Organizations and Civic Groups



- **First and foremost, nonprofit organizations and civic groups should lobby the government to enact the economic policies needed to end hunger, slash poverty, and enable all people to afford healthier foods.**
- **Nonprofit organizations and civic groups should create formal structures to empower low-income people with lived experience with poverty and hunger to 1) advise them on their internal policies and programs; 2) advise them on a policy advocacy agenda; and 3) help lead their public policy advocacy work.**
- **Nonprofit organizations should pay their own employees living wages, even if it means paying their own executives less.**
- **Nonprofit organizations and civic groups should develop new – or bolster existing – efforts to help eligible Americans receive SNAP, WIC, government summer meals, etc.**
- **Nonprofit organizations that distribute food should increase the nutritional value of the food they distribute, give recipients more choices about the food they receive; and refrain from giving the public the false impression that they are “ending” the hunger problem.**
- **Nonprofit organizations and civic groups should set up programs to directly give low-income people cash.**
- **Nonprofit organizations and civic groups should lobby for, fund, and implement “Assets Empowerment/Middle Class Wealth Generation” programs to dramatically increase economic opportunity and mobility by enabling more families to transition from owing non-productive debts interest to owning assets such as first homes and small businesses.**



This work should be combined with initiatives to eliminate or at least reduce “benefits cliffs” in which workers who get raises or work more hours lose benefits, and sometimes the value of lost benefits actually exceeds the increases in wages.

- **Ensure that all nutrition education activities provided are culturally sensitive, hands on (using actually available, affordable foods), delivered by diverse staff and volunteers, and are practical based on the monetary and time constraints of clients.**

Foundations and Philanthropists

- **Understand that the U.S. *can* (and must) end domestic hunger but, to do so, the wealthy will need to support systematic changes in our economic and public policies, not just support the distribution of charitable food.**

No other industrial Western nation has the level of poverty and hunger as the U.S. Why? Because those other societies make a conscious decision to guarantee all their citizens: living wage jobs; free health care and sick and parental leave; affordable housing, childcare, and public transportation; and an adequate government safety net for those who otherwise would have fallen through the cracks.

[The U.S. itself almost ended hunger entirely in the U.S. in the 1970's](#) because we had more living wage jobs, lower costs of living, and a more adequate safety net. The main reason we have so much hunger now is that, starting in the 1980's, we reversed the government and economic policies that were working by boosting economic opportunity and cutting poverty and its symptoms. History demonstrates that the only way to end U.S. hunger is to return our nation to the public policies that previously worked so well.

While food distribution charities get the most media attention (and the most donations from the wealthy), bolstered government programs and improved economic policies



have, by far, the biggest impact in making sure that all Americans can afford enough food. Despite the common public perception that the nonprofit sector is superior to the public sector, government food assistance programs are actually far more economically efficient than charitable programs, as is documented in [this book chapter](#). That's why supporting efforts that create jobs; raise wages; make housing, childcare, and health care more affordable; give struggling families tax credits; and provide nutrition assistance are far more effective than endeavors that simply support additional charitable food distribution.

- **Fund only the types of nonprofit groups that carry out the best practices detailed above.**
- **Fund effective public policy and community organizing work.**

Many wealthy donors believe that it's illegal for them to use their charitable foundations to fund policy advocacy work and/or that such work never achieves meaningful progress. Neither is true.

Federal law is crystal clear that private foundations [can indeed support work to improve governmental and economic policies](#).

Furthermore, the experience of the last two years proves that advocacy *can* lead to improved governmental policies that effectively slash domestic hunger. As Hunger Free America recently discussed [on the MSNBC show Morning Joe](#), and as detailed in [Hunger Free America's seminal research on this topic](#), the massive, historic increase in federal food and cash benefits during the last two years – successfully advocated for by Hunger Free America and others – significantly softened the blow of the hunger crisis during the pandemic. While tens of millions nationwide suffered mightily from food hardships during the pandemic – with countless numbers forced to skip meals, reduce portion sizes, and/or buy less nutritious but less expensive food – the nation didn't face an actual famine like in the developing world because the government rapidly and effectively expanded the safety net.

Even a single policy or economic improvement can make a massive impact on decreasing hunger. For example, if wages were increased by just two dollars per hour,



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that alone would provide a worker with an extra \$4,000 per year to feed her or his family. Alternatively, if the Child Tax Credit were made permanent, that alone would cut U.S. child poverty in half, thereby also slashing child hunger.

One representative of a foundation funded mostly by Wall Street and hedge fund money once told Hunger Free America that their foundation didn't fund advocacy work because their donors earned their money through the private sector and thus didn't immediately think of the importance of public policies. We responded that, on the contrary, those donors understood the importance of public policy very well, as evidenced by the fact that most of them had lobbyists working for them and/or had lobbyists working for trade associations to which they and/or their company belonged. Given that the wealthy certainly understand that government policies impact how much money *they* have, they should equally understand that government policies impact how much money *low-income Americans* have.

In contrast, Hunger Free America has calculated that if 50 million of the lowest income U.S. workers earned two dollars more per hour due to higher government minimum wages and were paid for 40 hours of work per week for 52 weeks in a year, that would equal \$208 billion in extra purchasing power for them for food and other basic costs of living. We also calculated that if the nation increased federal nutrition safety net funding by 20%, that would provide an extra \$33 billion extra in food for low-income Americans.

We further estimated that, if Feeding America (and its 200 affiliated food banks nationwide) were to increase the food they distributed by 20 percent, that would provide an extra \$2.0 billion extra in food for low-income Americans. Given that, in 2021, 38.2 million Americans, including 11.7 children, lived in food insecure homes, this is the latest proof that, in order to end domestic hunger, we need structural economic changes and a substantial boost to the safety net, and that merely increasing charitable and "grass-roots partnerships" can only play a relatively small role in denting the nation's massive hunger problem.

- **Help over a multi-year period, not just when hunger is in the headlines.**

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When U.S. hunger became front page news during the pandemic, many wealthy Americans donated to anti-hunger organizations for the first time – or dramatically increased their previous donations. Snark aside, that is really great, and we sincerely thank them on behalf of hungry Americans. Some of them made extraordinarily generous donations, and we know they could easily have spent that money instead buying a tenth house or a second yacht big enough to have its own helicopter landing pad. They followed their heart and their conscience and that's a good thing. Anyone who decides to give their own money to help struggling Americans rather than spend even more on themselves deserves sincere appreciation.

But such donations were significantly reduced in 2021, due, in large part, to the false perception that, because the pandemic ebbed slightly, America no longer had a domestic hunger crisis. That's just wrong.

Much of the pandemic-era narrative around U.S. hunger in the media implied that hunger was a brand-new problem due only to COVID-19. No wonder so many people assumed the hunger crisis would end simply because COVID-19 deaths were, at one point, decreasing.

It's vital to understand that U.S. hunger was a massive problem long *before* the pandemic, mostly because tens of millions of Americans didn't earn enough to be able to afford housing, childcare, transportation, health care, *and* food. In 2019, *before* the pandemic, when the economy was still theoretically in great shape, fully 35 million Americans, including 11 million children, lived in food insecure households, unable to afford enough food, [according to USDA](#).

Of course, the pandemic significantly increased U.S. food insecurity, taking people who were already impoverished and hungry and making them poorer and hungrier, and pushing people who were at the edge of poverty and hunger into poverty and food insecurity. In the early stages of the pandemic, food insecurity may have impacted upwards of 50 million Americans.

Even pre-pandemic, hunger and poor nutrition (because many Americans couldn't afford healthier foods) were one of the top causes of early death in the U.S., especially among low-income Americans and people of color. During the pandemic – because

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food insecurity compromises immune systems and increases co-morbidities like obesity, diabetes, hypertension, and heart disease – Americans who are malnourished are more likely to contract, transmit, and die from COVID-19. Thus, improving nutrition for all Americans is a prerequisite to both defeating the current pandemic and increasing the long-term life expectancy of Americans (and decreasing health care spending).

A massive infusion of federal food and cash for low-income Americans during 2021 softened the blow of the hunger crisis, but, make no mistake about it, today tens of millions of Americans, including more than ten million U.S. children – *still* struggle against hunger because household wages are *still* too low and the safety net is *still* too inadequate.

Hungry students can't study effectively. Hungry workers can't work productively. Hunger fuels civil unrest. People who can't afford enough food are more likely to be entrapped by the criminal justice system. Poor nutrition is the top reason potential recruits are rejected by the U.S. military. People of color and households headed by women disproportionately suffer from food insecurity. Ending domestic hunger is consequently also a prerequisite for virtually every other national priority: improving public education, rebuilding our economy, strengthening the middle class, defending the country from attack, improving health care while cutting its costs, reducing racial disparities, and enacting meaningful criminal justice reform.

Consequently, if philanthropy funds serious, multi-year efforts to reduce hunger, this support will have positive ripple effects throughout all aspects of American society. To top it off, every major religious and ethical tradition teaches us that making sure everyone is fed is a top moral imperative.

- **Empower low-income Americans to take charge of their own futures.**

Funders should seek out advice on fighting poverty and hunger from those who have experienced those maladies, not just from professional charitable advisors or nonprofit leaders who usually have little or no first-hand experience with deprivation.

In deciding on which organizations to fund, philanthropists should give preference to organizations that empower people with lived experience with hunger and poverty to



play leadership roles in advising those organizations on policy and helping them advocate for progress. After all, as is explained [in this column](#), any effective poor people's movement must have leadership from poor people. That's why Hunger Free America's pioneering [Food Action Board program](#) empowers low-income community members to develop the leadership, advocacy, and community organizing skills to stand up for their rights and speak out on their own behalf, as well as to conduct peer-to-peer benefits and vaccine outreach work.

- **Better leverage tens of billions of dollars in government safety net funding that goes unutilized.**

Because government benefits programs for low- and moderate-income Americans are often very difficult and time-consuming to access, tens of millions of those eligible for benefits don't enroll in and/or utilize such benefits, missing out of tens of billions of dollars annually in assistance.

That's why – other than policy advocacy work – benefits access work is the most effective way to fight hunger. It is counter-intuitive but true: funding direct food purchases is the least effective way to fight domestic hunger; conversely, leveraging government food program access is far more impactful. While many donors (and the nation as a whole) fixated on the compelling image of thousands of cars lined up outside a San Antonio food bank, they failed to understand that, at the same time, 294,000 people in Bexar County, Texas (where San Antonio is located) received SNAP, obtaining \$33.6 million worth of federal benefits just that month. Had donors supported efforts to further increase SNAP participation there, that would have accomplished far more to reduce hunger than had they donated extra money to fund more charitable food distributions.

In [September 2021 alone, the federal government spent \\$9.2 billion on SNAP benefits](#), which will equal at least \$100 billion over the next year. If the caseload were increased by even five percent, that would equal another five billion dollars in food benefits over the next year.

One of the most effective ways to the increase utilization of existing benefits programs is to fund nonprofit groups to help facilitate applications to such programs. For example, Hunger Free America now utilizes a few dozen professional staff to pre-screen people



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for food benefit eligibility, then submits applications online and scans and submits supporting documents online to the government agencies on behalf of eligible people. Because many of those who need this help the most are legal immigrants, we have staff that not only speak English but also Spanish, Cantonese, Mandarin, and Russian to enable people who speak those languages to get the help they need.

Every dollar our organization spends on SNAP outreach work generates \$30 worth of federal-funded SNAP benefits to fill the shopping carts of low-income families. That SNAP spending creates jobs and boosts income for those who grow, process, manufacture, transport, wholesale, and retail food that is purchased with SNAP. That's why every dollar spent by the federal government on SNAP generates \$1.67 in economic activity nationwide, [according to Mark Zandy, chief economist at Moody's Analytics](#). SNAP benefits can be used at 248,000 food retailers nationwide, including at thousands of farmers markets and farm stands, giving SNAP recipients the ability to obtain healthier foods.

Once people obtain SNAP benefits, they don't have to wait on multi-hour lines to use them. Also, unlike charitable food distributions – which usually deny recipients any choice in the foods they are given– SNAP benefits can be used by people who eat kosher, halal, vegetarian, or vegan diets. Not only does SNAP provide more value of food and more dignity in obtaining food than do charitable food distributions, but it also provides more choice.

- **Be serious about terms like “ROI,” “disruptive,” “DEI,” and “sustainable” – and bolster true economic opportunity for struggling Americans.**

Many entrepreneurs are very proud that their innovative business models disrupted the previous, less-efficient, status quos in their respective industries; yet, when it comes to their charitable endeavors, they are often very old-school, donating only to charitable food give- aways similar to those in the 19th Century. They should be equally disruptive in their charitable giving as well, supporting innovative nonprofits that effectively use modern communications tools to advocate and effectively utilize up-to-date technologies to help families access benefits.

Spending hundreds of thousands of dollars on effective advocacy and/or benefits outreach efforts can help struggling families obtain billions of dollars in increased



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wages, food benefits, and/or tax credit payments. The return on investment (ROI) for such activities leave the ROI for traditional charitable food distribution programs in the dust.

When funding for food distributions go away, the food generally goes away. In contrast, when advocacy efforts help people obtain higher wages and/or when benefits access projects enable families to access benefits, the wage hikes usually are permanent and their access to benefits generally lasts as long as the families remain low-income and thus financially eligible. Thus, such efforts are far more sustainable than traditional charitable food distribution projects.

While the largest number of people who are hungry in America are white, it's also true that BIPOC Americans suffer from food insecurity rates far higher than white Americans. Racial disparities in assets are even vaster than the disparities in food; BIPOC Americans are far more likely to be in debt and *pay interest* while white people are far more likely to own assets and *earn interest*. If you are truly serious about supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion, you should not only invest in advocacy and benefits access work to overcome the food disparities, but you should also fund policies and programs that close the assets gap by better enabling BIPOC and low-income people to earn, learn, save, and invest their way out of poverty. Merely distributing food does very little to advance true DEI.

Philanthropy should not just help people get by – it should help them get ahead.

- **Dig deeper – and do 't believe the hype – in selecting the charities that are funded.**

If it sounds too good to be true when a charity claims, let's say, that every dollar donated enables an organization to provide twenty meals, then that probably *is* too good to be true. Ask if they are counting the full costs of every step of the multi-step food distribution process in their calculations. If they are providing cost estimates for just their one step of a multi-step process, but implying that's the total cost of the meals, that's very misleading. Also, ask how they are determining what they claim constitutes a "meal" – if, for example, they are counting one muffin or one banana as a full "meal," that's misleading too.



In general, beware of any self-reported metrics of success. Many of even the most well-meaning charities face incredible temptations to exaggerate their successes or cost-effectiveness.

Here's another great question to ask a charity: are their exaggerated claims of what they can accomplish on their own undercutting the rationale for advocacy campaigns to raise wages and strengthen safety nets?

Also beware of fundraising gimmicks. Here's a nonprofit trade secret: most fundraising "deadlines" and donor "matches" (with wild claims like "each dollar you donate will be matched 10x") are either greatly exaggerated or entirely bogus. Sure, most nonprofit groups would marginally prefer you to donate, let's say, on December 31 rather than January 1, so the closing year shows more revenue on their books; but the reality is that a donated dollar spends exactly the same on January 1 as it did on December 31, so the distinction is mostly meaningless. As for the matching gift promises, most donors who promise those matching funds promise a set amount so they really don't increase the value of any individual gift.

Dig deeper when looking into an organization's finances. Don't believe in the facile "ratings" by self-appointed charity watchdogs, who often have very little expertise in the field. Don't fixate too much on overhead or fundraising costs, but don't ignore them entirely. If any given organization claims that such costs are absurdly low, be suspicious. For instance, some organizations claim in their financial reporting that their mass spending on fundraising ads isn't really spending on fundraising because they claim those ads are educational ads and thus "programming" and not fundraising. Again, apply your business skepticism to a healthy skepticism about certain nonprofit boasts.

Don't expect executives or staff of nonprofits to work for free or earn only poverty wages – they should earn at least solidly middle-class salaries. But neither should you buy the self-serving line (very popular in philanthropic circles these days) that absurdly exorbitant executive salaries at nonprofit groups are required to attract and retain the "best people." Many of the most competent and dedicated nonprofit leaders willingly earn relatively modest salaries because they are truly dedicated to public service.



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Conversely, some of the highest paid nonprofit executives are empty suits, charlatans, or crooks. If you want to enter the nonprofit sector because you want to get rich , you are going into the wrong line of work.

Many executives of large nonprofit organizations take home far more than the \$400,000 earned annually by the President of the United States. Nonprofit leaders may have tough jobs, but they don't have to decide whether to go to war or pardon someone on death row. Part of the reason that some nonprofit executives of well-funded organizations earn so much is that wealthy donors judge their compensation packages compared to their own wealth or to the wealth of other people in their social set. That's a mistake; such compensation should be considered in context of what is supposed to be a *public service* profession and should be considered in context of what *all* employees in an organization earn.

Funders should not only scrutinize what a nonprofit group's executives earn, but also how that compares to what their *average* employees and their *lowest paid* employees earn. The wage disparities at some nonprofits now rival that is of some of the most unequal corporations.

Don't assume that a charity is effective just because its well-funded; some groups are far more accomplished at marketing and fundraising than in delivering tangible results in advancing their missions. Conversely, don't assume that small groups are under-funded just because they are not well known: some groups are small because they aren't professionally run or can't make a compelling case they that are effective. The most important consideration in determining whether to donate shouldn't be how money and organization *already* has – it should how much money *they need* to make a true difference – and whether they will use that money effectively.



Four- and Two-Year Universities and Colleges

Internal Management Steps

- **First and foremost, pay your own workers – including graduate students – enough so they are not food insecure and/or don't need governmental or charitable food assistance.**
- **Fully build free meals at campus cafeterias and/or food vouchers for local food stores into financial aid packages for all low-income students and many moderate-income students.**
- **Create structured programs to help more eligible students sign up for SNAP and WIC.**
- **Create campus food pantries as a *last* resort only if all the above steps have been taken and they are not enough.**
- **Nutrition education should be fully built into the curriculum of medical schools and schools of public health.**

Higher Education Research Activities

While more data and more analysis are always useful in fine-tuning what we already know, and while we strongly encourage higher education research of these topics, at the same time we believe that it is vital for the academic community to make it clear that the nation does not need to wait for the results of further research before enacting interventions of proven effectiveness in reducing hunger, food insecurity and nutrition security.

More research on these issues can be vital in providing more nuance to what we already know, but it will not change our basic understanding of what causes these



problems and what are the most effective interventions to address them. We would make this analogy: we already know what causes COVID-19 and already know that vaccines are highly effective in combatting it; thus, while we rightfully continue to research topics such as how long the vaccines remain effective, which age groups need them most, how to minimize their unpleasant side effects, etc., it is imperative that we not obscure the most fundamental public message: “vaccines work!” Similarly, our laudable desire to learn even more about domestic hunger, food insecurity, and nutrition security should not obscure the most basic public message: “policies that make heather food more affordable, accessible, and convenient work!”

Consequently, the recommendations below for further research are *in addition to* our overriding recommendation to better utilize existing research and data.

- **Why hunger persists, including how limited opportunities for economic mobility and other inequities have contributed to hunger, along with research needed to address this.**
- **How the low national minimum wage (which hasn't been raised in 11 years) – and low minimum wages in most states (for example, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee have no state minimum wages and Georgia has one of \$5.15 per hour) – contribute to domestic hunger, food insecurity, and nutrition insecurity.**

Hunger Free America's original research found that, in 2016-2018, there was a direct correlation between low wages and high levels of food insecurity among working Americans, finding: “In states with a minimum wage set at \$10 or above, an average of 8.2 percent of employed adults were found to be food insecure, which is more than a full percentage point below the national average of 9.3 percent. In states with a minimum wage set at \$7.25 or below, an average of 9.5 percent of employed adults were food insecure, which is slightly above the national average. It would be helpful to further prove that this very strong correlation proves causation.

- **How the positive impact of minimum wage increases, and overall wage increases, on reducing poverty, hunger, food insecurity, and nutrition insecurity dwarf any negative impacts on slightly decreased employment levels and slightly increased inflation.**



- **How an increase in the federal minimum wage would both decrease hunger and reduce federal spending on programs like SNAP and WIC.**
- **How low wages overall (beyond just low minimum wages) contribute to domestic hunger, food insecurity, and nutrition insecurity. How low wages compare – nationwide and state-by-state – to the basic cost of living.**
- **How some increases in wages might reduce benefits eligibility and whether the dollar amount of such benefits reductions might sometimes be greater than the dollar amount of such wage increases.**
- **How the abrupt cut off from benefit programs could be revised to reduce or eliminate such “benefits cliffs,” which, as food secure Americans have repeatedly told Hunger Free America, are major barriers against getting them ahead economically and thus reducing their food insecurity. Could making more programs universal – without economic means-testing – effectively eliminate such cliffs?**
- **How enacting a national policy of Medicaid for All or a Single Payer Health Care System (like that in Canada) for all Americans would reduce hunger, food insecurity, and nutrition insecurity. This would build upon Feeding America’s research which has found that low-income Americans who are forced to rely upon charitable food programs have higher medical debts and are less likely to have health insurance than Americans who are food secure.**
- **How making prescription drugs free or more affordable would reduce hunger, food insecurity, and nutrition insecurity, particularly among older Americans.**
- **How making quality childcare free or more affordable would reduce hunger, food insecurity, and nutrition insecurity, particularly among families with children.**

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- **How making quality housing more affordable would reduce hunger, food insecurity, and nutrition insecurity. In 2021, according to the National Low-Income Housing Coalition, a full-time worker needed to earn \$24.90 per hour (considerably more than the minimum wage in any state) to afford a modest, two-bedroom apartment without spending more than 30% of income on rent.**
- **How the temporary expansion of the Child Tax Credit and the Earned Income Tax Credit during the pandemic reduced hunger, food insecurity, and nutrition insecurity. Specifically, did the extra cash help low-income Americans obtain more food and/or healthier food?**
- **How the nation's systemic racism, misogyny, homophobia, xenophobia, and transphobia increase hunger, food insecurity, and nutrition insecurity by bolstering public policies and programmatic implementations that make it harder for people in populations facing discrimination to earn more in wages, develop assets, obtain quality housing, advance educationally and economically, and obtain adequate government safety net benefits.**
- **How the massive racial gap in assets (according to the federal Reserve, the typical White family has eight times the wealth of the typical Black family and five times the wealth of the typical Hispanic family) contributes to racial disparities in hunger, food insecurity, and nutrition insecurity, because non-white families have fewer resources to fall back upon/draw down on during economic downturns.**
- **How enacting a comprehensive, federal government-wide agenda to help low-income Americans develop assets and generate wealth to help them enter and stay in the middle class could dramatically increase economic opportunity and mobility by enabling more families to transition from owing non-productive debts interest to owning assets such as first homes and small businesses and could, over time, reduce hunger, food insecurity, and nutrition insecurity.**



- **For Americans who do receive SNAP and WIC, how the inadequate size of benefits in those programs contribute to hunger, food insecurity, and nutrition insecurity.**
- **Why households headed by single women, households including BIPOC people, and households including people with disabilities have food security rates far greater than the average rates for households overall.**
- **Why some states, cities, and counties have food insecurity rates far higher – or far lower – than the national averages. How differences in wages, housing costs, racial composition of the population, safety net programs and other factors account for those differences.**
- **How some of the most food insecure populations – including immigrants, seniors, people with disabilities, and low-income working families – are legally excluded from SNAP eligibility or have lower participation rates than other populations – and how that contributes to their hunger, food insecurity, and nutrition insecurity. Conversely, how changing federal law and/or easing access to enroll more people from these populations in SNAP would reduce their hunger, food insecurity, and nutrition insecurity.**
- **How federally-imposed restrictions on access to certain government food benefits for immigrants – both those that are legally living in the United States and those that are undocumented – increase hunger, food insecurity, and nutrition insecurity among such immigrants, and whether those elevated problems cost our society more in the long-run on health care spending than it would cost to make those nutrition benefits available to those immigrants.**
- **How the very limited availability of – and meager benefit sizes of – cash benefits in the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program contributes to hunger, food insecurity, and nutrition insecurity.**



- **How eligibility and application barriers in obtaining Child Tax Credits and Earned Income Tax Credits deny for some of the most food insecure households' access to much-needed cash.**
- **How inequities of our tax system (including a full computation of income, sales, payroll, and property taxes) ensure that food-insecure Americans often pay a higher percentage of their income in taxes than do billionaires, which increases food insecurity in two ways: a) low-income families have less money left over for food and b) billionaires don't pay their fair share of taxes to support an adequate government nutrition safety net.**
- **How much money would it cost the federal government to entirely end domestic hunger, food insecurity, and nutrition insecurity versus how much those problems cost the federal government in terms of increased spending on health care, education, and institutionalized care for older Americans.**
- **How the built food environment (e.g., the physical food infrastructure, including an analysis of amount, nutrition quality, locations, products, and prices in retail, restaurant, and food service outlets in a town/neighborhood) influences these issues. How the growing proliferation of services that deliver both groceries and restaurant meals is (or is not) significantly reducing the influence of neighborhood-level built environments on these issues.**
- **How the federal government can develop a neighborhood-level "food access index" that incorporates food prices, food selection, and physical availability of food.**
- **How much do unclear or misleading nutrition labeling on products increase nutrition insecurity?**
- **What are the relative roles of food choices versus portion sizes in contributing to obesity. (For example, can someone become obese by eating too much of a "healthy food" such as almonds?)**



- **How the increases in benefit allotments for existing participants in SNAP and WIC during the pandemic contributes to reductions in hunger, food insecurity, and nutrition insecurity.**
- **How the counter-cyclical nature of SNAP – which enables it to expand the number of its participants during economic downturns – enabled the program to reduce hunger, food insecurity, and nutrition insecurity during both the 2009-2009 recession and the 2020-2021 pandemic.**
- **How the impact of federal safety net programs dwarfs the impact of charitable food distribution programs in reducing hunger, food insecurity, and nutrition insecurity. Hunger Free America calculated that, before the pandemic, federal food safety net programs (through both USDA and HHS) provided roughly 15 times the dollar amount of food as did food charities. Given the dramatic expansion of the federal safety net in 2020 and 2021, we believe that ratio is surely far higher now.**
- **How universal K-12 school meals – in schools that utilize federal Community Eligibility Provisions (CEP) – reduce food insecurity, hunger, and nutrition insecurity among children. It would be useful to also study whether these programs reduce food insecurity among the parents of such children since they reduce the amount of funds parents need to otherwise spend to buy breakfasts and lunches for their children.**
- **How the Pandemic-EBT (P-EBT) program reduced hunger, food insecurity, and nutrition insecurity among children. Why this program reached so many more children, and had a far bigger impact, than the normal Summer Food Service Program (SFSP). How making the P-EBT program permanent would reduce long-term hunger, food insecurity, and nutrition insecurity among children, and potentially reduce long-term spending on education and health care.**
- **What are the relative effectiveness of SNAP, congregate meals at senior centers, and home-delivered meals (meals on wheels) in addressing hunger, food insecurity, and nutrition insecurity among older adults?**



- **How do efforts funded by government – but carried out by nonprofit groups (such as Hunger Free America) – that conduct outreach and enrollment activities for SNAP and WIC aimed at underserved populations reduce hunger, food insecurity, and nutrition insecurity. How states maximize federal outreach dollars by including such efforts in their state SNAP outreach plans. How states boost their economies and reduce hunger, food insecurity, and nutrition insecurity by bringing these extra benefits dollars into their states.**
- **How do referral services for food aid that use phone hotlines, texting services, apps, and or web sites (such as the USDA National Hunger Clearinghouse/Hunger Hotline run by Hunger Free America on behalf of USDA) address hunger, food insecurity, and nutrition security among older adults.**
- **Why even the combined efforts of tens of thousands of charitable food pantries, soup kitchen, food banks, food rescue groups, and mutual aid societies cannot seriously reduce hunger, food insecurity, and nutrition insecurity.**

More research could further explain what sociologist Janet Poppendieck, in her seminal book about the emergency food system, *Sweet Charity*, calls the “Seven Deadly Sins” of the charitable food system:

1. Insufficiency (not enough food)
 2. Inappropriateness (people don’t get to pick what is best for their families)
 3. Nutritional inadequacy (too much high-sugar, high-sodium, high-fat junk food)
 4. Instability (feeding agencies can’t always predict when they will be open and when they will run out of food)
 5. Inaccessibility (agencies can be particularly hard to get to in rural areas, or for seniors, people with disabilities, or people with no car)
 6. Inefficiency (the agencies require a massive, three-tier system just to give out free food)
 7. Indignity (at even the best-run agencies, obtaining emergency food is usually a degrading experience)
- **Did recent federal changes that made it easier for college students to obtain SNAP reduce food insecurity and/or increase college completion among college students?**



- **How forcing low-income Americans to go to multiple offices and/or submit multiple applications online reduces their access to such programs and therefore increases hunger, food insecurity, and nutrition insecurity. Conversely, how the enactment into law of the pending HOPE Act of 2021 (H.R.2336/ S.1181) – which would authorize pilot projects to make combined applications for varied nutrition and anti-hunger benefits available digitally – could reduce food insecurity and nutrition insecurity.**
- **How nutrition incentives programs – many of which are often tied to farmers markets which are usually only open during part of the year – may marginally reduce food insecurity and nutrition insecurity. Conversely, how the limited seasons for such efforts (particularly outside of the deep South and Pacific West) limit their year-long effectiveness. How overall high prices for produce sold at farmers markets might limit the ability of incentives programs to bring prices down enough for such produce to be truly affordable to low-income Americans.**
- **How community gardening and urban agriculture projects – most of which are relatively small scale and seasonal – may marginally reduce food insecurity and nutrition insecurity. Conversely, how the limited scale and seasonality of such efforts limit their year-long effectiveness.**
- **Can urban agriculture projects – including those based on hydroponics, vertical agriculture, and aquaculture – be both financially self-sufficient and provide food at price points affordable for low-income people?**
- **How many nutrition education programs fail to change the food consumption behavior of their participants? Many of the programs are culturally insensitive, too theoretical and/or hands off, and too reliant on foods that are not commonly available or convenient to obtain in the neighborhoods in which the recipients of such education live. Conversely, how effective nutrition education programs that are culturally sensitive and hands on-using ingredients that are both affordable and convenient to obtain in the neighborhoods in which the recipients of such education live.**



- **How changing federal law to increase the age of WIC eligibility to age 6 would reduce hunger, food insecurity, and nutrition security of children during that challenging transition time in their lives**
- **How raising the minimum monthly benefit size for SNAP (now about only \$20 per month) would reduce hunger, food insecurity, and nutrition insecurity among the low-income Americans most likely to receive that minimum benefit size, and particularly among older adults and people with disabilities.**
- **How hunger, food security, and nutrition insecurity could be reduced if SNAP would be more widely used at restaurants, for prepared foods, and for foods eaten away from home.**
- **How it would be easy for low-income people to access SNAP if they were able to digitally redeem their SNAP benefits (through a system like Apple Wallet or Google Pay) instead of using EBT cards, which have more stigma and are often lost or never received.**
- **How it would reduce hunger, food insecurity, and nutrition insecurity if SNAP recipients could far more widely order food online at supermarkets, corner stores, farmers markets, and farm stands – and have that food delivered to their doors or a nearby community center.**
- **What low-income Americans – including those who are hungry, food insecure, and nutritionally insecure – believe are the top causes of – and top solutions to – hunger, food insecurity, and nutrition insecurity in America.**
- **How portion size of food consumed and frequency of food consumed impacts diet quality and health.**

In other words, research should focus not just on whether certain food are “healthy” or “unhealthy” but on the real world variables of how they are consumed.

- **Combined research of behavioral economics, psychology, sociology, anthropology to better understand not only how people eat, but what real life economic, messaging, lifestyle, education changes would be the most likely to actually improve dietary intakes.**



- **Support additional Research Priorities Suggested by the Tufts University Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy**

We also strongly support these research priorities previously proposed by Tufts:

1. Causal interrelationships between food and nutrition insecurity and diet-related chronic diseases like obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and certain cancers
 - 1.1. Influence of industry marketing, including through non-traditional media, advocacy and lobbying, pricing, globalized supply chains, and corporate “citizenship”
 - 1.2. Roles of past and current discriminatory policies and practices that alter housing, employment, income, and community development opportunities
 - 1.3. Effect of food production-focused policies and their influence on determinants of nutrition security and health, such as agricultural subsidies and political processes facilitating corporate consolidation
 - 1.4. Understanding characteristics of effective communication channels and enhancing nutrition science literacy for diverse audiences
2. Translational research on the roles and influence of the diverse federal investments in food and nutrition, including opportunities to better leverage these programs:
 - 2.1. Health and health equity effects — and approaches to advance these — of Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulatory issues including Nutrition Facts labeling, front-of-pack labeling, restaurant menu labeling, health claims, food category standards of identity, cellular agriculture, food additives, and dietary supplements
 - 2.2. Impact of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGAs) and Dietary Reference Intakes, including implementation of the DGAs across federal agencies and inclusion in federally funded nutrition education resources, programs, and interventions
3. Translational research on Food is Medicine and how to best integrate food and nutrition into health care systems, particularly in terms of underserved communities, including but not limited to populations that are low-income, nutritionally at-risk, and with inadequate access to health care:
 - 3.1. Medically Tailored Meals
 - 3.2. Produce Rx
 - 3.3. Nutrition education for health care providers
 - 3.4. Intersections between federal nutrition assistance programs and public and private healthcare coverage



4. Rigorous interventional studies to address major gaps in defining better nutrition and to reduce consumer confusion, as identified by ongoing scientific debates as well as Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee reports:

4.1. Comparative effects of different popular diet patterns, eating frequency, and diet quantity vs. quality weight loss and weight maintenance; and heterogeneity in these effects based on a person's characteristics

4.2. Optimal dietary recommendations for major disease conditions, such as hypertension, type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, specific cancers, infections, and autoimmune disease

4.3. Rigorous studies on food groups with unclear or controversial evidence, such as different types of dairy foods, red meats, tropical oils, and organic vs. nonorganic foods, ultra-processed foods, among others

5. Fundamental research to accelerate progress to understand and address hunger, food insecurity, and nutrition insecurity:

5.1. Molecular basis of nutritional needs across the lifespan, from the first 1,000 days to healthy aging

5.2. Reexamining characterizations of "obese" and "overweight" based on data from diverse populations and as useful indicators for diet-related disease across diverse populations

5.3. Comprehensive characterization of and molecular and health effects of trace bioactives and phenolics, such as in extra-virgin olive oil, cocoa, green tea, coffee, red wine, and blueberries, among others

5.4. Assessing the molecular and health impacts of additives, gluten, FODMAPS (fermentable oligo-, di-, monosaccharides and polyols), low-calorie sweeteners, and other food components of public interest and confusion

5.5. Assessing the health effects, modifying factors, controversies and confusion around food processing and processed foods

5.6. Interactions between hunger, food insecurity, nutrition insecurity, the gut microbiome, and health

6. Understanding the intersections and role of production agriculture in exacerbating or reducing hunger, food insecurity, and nutrition insecurity:

6.1. Interplay of livestock and farming practices on the joint nutritional quality and availability of foods, natural resource use, sustainability, and environmental impact

6.2. Implications of food and agricultural labor supply issues (e.g., wages, benefits and health care access, worker safety) for food and nutrition security among food chain workers and families

6.3. Nutritional innovations and collaborations for healthier crops and manufactured food products including novel regenerative agriculture approaches, ingredients, and biofortification Impacts of plant-based meat, dairy alternatives, and cellular agriculture on health and sustainability



6.4. Impacts of climate change on hunger, food insecurity, and nutrition insecurity

School Districts

- **Lobby Congress for universal, free, healthy school meals and summer-EBT for all, and full funding for after school snacks and suppers.**
- **Work with federal and state officials to implement – and fund -- universal, free, healthy school meals, summer meals, and after school snacks and suppers.**
- **Ensure all students get free breakfasts with breakfast in the classrooms and “grab and go” breakfasts.**
- **Serve all meals at reasonable times and comfortable, clean spaces.**
- **Whenever affordable and practical, purchase food directly from local and regional farmers.**

Hospitals, HMOS, and Insurers

- **Screen all inpatients for food insecurity.**
- **Help all food insecure and low-income patients receive SNAP and WIC.**
- **Provide free or discounted CSA memberships and/or vouchers for produce.**



- **Ensure all that nutrition education activities that provided are culturally sensitive, are hands on (using actually available, affordable foods), delivered by diverse staff and volunteers, and are practical based on the monetary and time constraints of clients.**
- **Make sure all your staff (are especially your doctors) are trained in hunger, food insecurity, and nutrition insecurity.**

Organizations That Serve Older Americans

- **Work with government offices/departments for the aging to develop and implement a comprehensive plan to help more older Americans access SNAP, senior center meals, and home delivered meals.**
- **Play leading roles in dispelling the stigmas/myths that deter older Americans from getting the help they need**

Religious Organizations and Congregations

- **First and foremost, religious organizations should lobby for the governmental and economic policies needed to end hunger, slash poverty, expand economic opportunity, and enable all people to afford healthier foods.**
- **Stress that your religious tradition means you must fight for justice, not just promote charitable aid.**
- **Denominations and congregations that run and/or fund service work should follow the best practices for nonprofit groups detailed above.**



Private Individuals

- **First and foremost, people should directly call on elected officials to support – and pay for -- governmental and economic policies needed to end hunger, slash poverty, expand economic opportunity, and enable all people to afford healthier foods.**
- **The public should vote against any candidates who fail to support such policies.**
- **When people donate to anti-hunger organizations, they should prioritize those that fight for improved public policies and help eligible people get SNAP and WIC and child nutrition programs.**
- **The public should volunteer not only for direct service volunteerism activities, but also in [skills-based and high impact volunteerism](#).**

Conclusion

Properly implemented, a White House Conference on Food, Nutrition, Hunger, and Health will make history by leading America towards finally ending domestic hunger and ensuring that nutritious food is affordable, convenient, and available for all America. We must seize the opportunity to enact bold, systemic changes to our federal and economic policy. While non-federal entities can do much more to fight hunger, food insecurity, and nutrition insecurity, federal policy is ultimately where we will have the greatest impact, and where we should focus the bulk of our efforts.