

Toward an End to Hunger in Alexandria

Prepared for the
Alexandria Childhood Obesity Action Network (A-COAN)
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Executive Summary

The foods available to us at home, at school, and in our neighborhoods significantly influence our wellbeing and healthcare costs. Unfortunately, many households experience difficulties accessing healthy foods due to low incomes, disabilities, transportation, or other obstacles.

Concerns about food access problems in Alexandria, particularly as they relate to health outcomes, spurred a working group of the Alexandria Childhood Obesity Action Network (A-COAN) to contract for and oversee an analysis of food hardship in the city. That analysis, which resulted in this report, looked at (1) the emergency food system, (2) access to and utilization of government food assistance programs, and (3) the role of the private sector in food access. A-COAN, a work group of the Partnership for a Healthier Alexandria, received financial support from Kaiser Permanente for this project.

Alexandria is one of the wealthiest communities in the nation; however, the report estimates that **as many as one in five Alexandrians, disproportionately children, are living in households struggling to make ends meet.*** These households are at risk for the harms associated with “food hardship”—that is, irregular access to affordable, healthy meals. Also, **Alexandria lags behind some neighboring jurisdictions in organizing improved access to food assistance by both area nonprofits and the local government.**

Specifically, the report finds that many Alexandrians eligible for SNAP (food stamps) are not using this important food assistance program. As a result, **Alexandria is leaving on the table thousands of federal dollars—in food-related benefits for low-income households each year.** Also, in response to a survey of emergency food providers, several barriers to providing food assistance to Alexandrians were identified. They include insufficient storage, shelving and food preparation space and limited refrigeration capacity. Additionally, the report found that greater coordination and collaboration are needed among emergency food providers, the City government and regional organizations.

To ensure that all residents have access to affordable, healthy foods, this report suggests that officials, advocates, and others in Alexandria should work toward three broad goals:

* The one-in-five estimate is discussed in the report and reflects the income distribution as well as the high cost of living in the City of Alexandria.

1. Increasing collaborations among the Emergency Food Providers and developing new relationships with other area institutions and leaders (including anti-hunger leaders in Washington, DC) to address food hardship in Alexandria.
2. Developing a policy agenda on food hardship for the City and raising the awareness of the public, city officials, and other leaders about food hardship as a local problem and about potential solutions.
3. Prioritizing a multi-year plan to expand federally-funded food assistance programs in Alexandria.

While barriers to program expansion and other improvements exist, these obstacles have been faced by organizations and governments in many parts of the country. Fortunately, advice and lessons from successful efforts elsewhere are available through conferences, reports, online trainings, and other forms of technical assistance. Moreover, the city has a strong cadre of advocates, charities, and administrators interested both in expanding food assistance programs and improving the role nonprofits can play as safety net providers and agents of policy change.

By using these local and national resources, and developing a more comprehensive and planned approach to improving and expanding food assistance programs, Alexandria can take great strides towards an end to hunger and a healthier city for all its residents.

Introduction

From the prenatal period onward, our diets are one of the most important determinants of health and healthcare costs. Long before many health problems become apparent, the foods available to us at home, at school, and in our neighborhoods have already influenced our wellbeing.

Unfortunately, many households experience difficulties accessing healthy foods due to low incomes, disabilities, complex work and family schedules, transportation difficulties, special dietary needs, or other obstacles.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) labels households lacking access “at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life” as food insecure.¹ Food insecurity has serious, negative consequences for physical and mental health.² Obesity, for instance, has been found to be associated with food insecurity in several studies. Other health problems connected to even a marginal lack of food security include low-birth weight, birth defects, anemia, diabetes (including gestational diabetes), heart disease, and depression.

In addition, poor school performance and child developmental problems are associated with food insecurity. These are particularly troubling outcomes because they can lead to additional negative consequences in the long term.

In the last few years, health researchers, public officials, philanthropic organizations, and anti-poverty advocates have been paying greater attention to the availability of healthy, affordable food to vulnerable populations in specific communities. Locally, members of the Alexandria Council of Human Services Organization (ACHSO) have been concerned with the need for better planning and collaboration among organizations in all sectors—government, nonprofit, and private—that provide food assistance to those in need.

Concerns about food access, particularly as it relates to health outcomes, spurred the Alexandria Childhood Obesity Action Network (A-COAN), a working group of the Partnership for a Healthier Alexandria, with financial support from Kaiser Permanente, to convene a working group to contract for and oversee an analysis of food hardship in the city, resulting in this report.

Food insecure households lack consistent, affordable, and normal access to enough food for an active, healthy life.

Food insecurity has serious, negative consequences for physical and mental health, as well as for education.

The working group comprised representatives from:

- A-COAN,
- ACT for Alexandria,
- the Alexandria Department of Community and Human Services,
- the Alexandria Health Department,
- ALIVE!,
- the Northern Virginia Health Foundation,
- the Partnership for a Healthier Alexandria, and
- Volunteer Alexandria.

This report concludes that a key policy goal for the City of Alexandria should be to ensure that all residents have access to affordable, healthy foods, regardless of characteristics such as age, income, location of residence, race, or ethnicity.

It is difficult to measure household food insecurity at the local level and food insecurity is a technical term with a specific meaning. Therefore, in this report we use the more general phrase “food hardship” to refer to households or persons who, as a consequence of struggling to make ends meet, may be experiencing disrupted or unhealthy diets.

It is important to note that food hardship is not restricted to those with incomes below either the federal poverty threshold or the income-eligibility guidelines for food assistance programs. In fact, many households that are not poor by government standards face food access problems due to physical limitations, sudden shocks to their income or household budget (e.g., sudden job loss, family dissolution, or unexpected and expensive medical costs), or for other reasons.

The next section of the report is a profile of the level of need in Alexandria. The three sections following the profile discuss the status of nonprofits engaged in providing emergency food, government food and nutrition programs, and efforts related to the private sector. The final section of the report offers recommendations.

This report concludes that a key policy goal for the City of Alexandria should be to ensure that all residents have access to affordable, healthy foods, regardless of characteristics such as age, income, location of residence, race, or ethnicity.

In this report we use the phrase “food hardship” to refer generally to households or persons struggling to make ends meet who, consequently, experience or are at risk for experiencing disrupted or unhealthy diets.

Community Profile

Overview

The City of Alexandria is one of the wealthiest jurisdictions in the nation. Nonetheless, there are significant numbers of children and adults in the city experiencing or at risk for the harms associated with irregular access to affordable, healthy meals. We estimate that as many as one in five Alexandrians, disproportionately children, are living in households struggling to make ends meet.³

Alexandria lags behind some neighboring jurisdictions in organizing improved access to food assistance by both area nonprofits and the government.

Unfortunately, Alexandria lags behind some neighboring jurisdictions in organizing improved access to food assistance by both area nonprofits and the local government. Specifically:

- Compared to neighboring jurisdictions, the City of Alexandria could be more engaged with the work of local food assistance organizations and more innovative in expanding participation in federal food assistance programs.
- Alexandria is leaving on the table hundreds of thousands of federal dollars in food-related benefits for low-income households each year.
- Local agencies, funders, providers, and officials need to develop stronger ties among their various efforts and make expansion plans for food programs by drawing more frequently on the resources of nearby regional and national organizations with expertise in food access.

Of course, barriers to program expansion and improvement exist. However, they have been faced by organizations and governments in many parts of the country. Fortunately, advice and lessons from successful efforts elsewhere are available through conferences, reports, online trainings, and other forms of technical assistance.

By utilizing such resources and developing a more comprehensive and planned approach to improving and growing food programs, Alexandria can take great strides towards a healthier city for all its residents.

Hardship in Alexandria

Regarding the size of the population struggling to make ends meet in Alexandria, there were approximately 12,000 persons, including 3,300 children, living at or below the federal government's threshold for poverty in 2010.⁴ The average poverty rate for this period was 8.6% for all persons and 13.8% for children.⁵ See Table 1: Basic Demographics. (Demographic data for Alexandria, unless otherwise noted, are three-year averages from 2009 to 2011, from the Census Bureau's American Community Survey. For simplicity, we refer to the results of these averages as "in 2010." All tables are in Appendix A.)

It is worth noting, as shown in the Table 1, that employment is not a guarantee against poverty in Alexandria. Of persons living below poverty and in the civilian labor force, more than 70% were employed. In other words, work alone does not guarantee security, and, of course, many of those in low-income households are children, disabled, or past the age of retirement.

Of persons living below poverty and in the civilian labor force, more than 70% were employed. In other words, work alone does not guarantee financial security, and, of course, many of those in low-income households are children, disabled, or past the age of retirement.

Moreover, the high cost of living in Alexandria means that the official poverty numbers can obscure a great deal of hardship and need. For instance, the Economic Security Institute at Wider Opportunities for Women estimated that a family in Alexandria with two working parents, a preschooler, and child in elementary school would need an income of nearly \$9,000 a month in 2010 to meet basic needs and budget for savings.⁶ As shown in Table 2: Self-Sufficiency Budget, the largest expenses, excluding taxes, were child care, transportation, and housing. The Institute estimated that such a family needed to budget more than \$800 a month for food.

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High housing costs in Alexandria are a significant barrier for many families, including those with incomes above the official poverty threshold. Approximately 80% of both renters and homeowners in Alexandria with incomes below \$35,000 are paying more than 30% of their income for housing (a standard definition of unaffordable housing). Altogether, about 9,000 households fall into this category. See Table 3: Housing Affordability.⁷

Comparisons of price estimates find food more expensive in Alexandria and the region than in the rest of the country.⁸ In addition, part of the cost to shop for food in Alexandria is due to Virginia's grocery tax, a regressive tax that

disproportionately affects low-income shoppers. Virginia is one of only a few states to tax groceries. Although a grocery tax may seem small, researchers believe such taxes may cause real harm.⁹

Because the official poverty rates are based on a nationwide threshold that does not take into account the local cost of living, we should ask how many Alexandrians live below income levels that more realistically represent hardship in an expensive city. Doing so gives us a more complete picture of need in Alexandria.

For instance, twice the federal poverty threshold for a family of three (with either one or two children) was about \$35,000 in 2010. Approximately 29,000 persons, including nearly 5,000 children, lived below two times the poverty threshold in Alexandria at that time. Note that twice the poverty level is still well below the self-sufficiency budget mentioned earlier. Also, this number does not include families that may have experienced sharp declines in income or increases in their budget for short periods of time (e.g., during a health crisis).

Thus, conservatively, there were 12,000 Alexandrians living below the official poverty threshold and another 17,000 living near poverty (i.e., well below a sufficiency budget) in 2010. This total of 29,000 represents approximately 20% of the city's population.¹⁰ See Table 4: Poverty.

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The bottom line is that thousands of Alexandrians, perhaps as many as one in five, live in households struggling to make ends meet. Unfortunately, when it comes to deciding what bills to pay, some of these families are forced to reduce what they spend on food. This, in turn, increases the probability that the household is food insecure, bringing with it the risk of negative health and developmental outcomes.

The Emergency Food System

The Emergency Food System (EFS) refers to the collection of organizations that provides groceries or meals directly to persons needing immediate assistance. The EFS includes a variety of efforts, such as food banks, food pantries, soup kitchens, meals served outside to the homeless, and meals served at shelters. The institutions making up the EFS play a vital role in the community by filling in the gaps for people who have fallen between the cracks of government food assistance programs, who need assistance more rapidly than that provided by government programs, or who ran out of benefits at the end of the month.

Before discussing the EFS in Alexandria, we should explain a few terms as we use them in this report:

- **Food banks** are nonprofit organizations that distribute food (from USDA and other sources) to charities in a region. These local charities, in turn, distribute this food, along with other food they acquire, to residents. The charities receiving the food often pay fees to offset some of the food banks' operating costs. In addition, food banks in some areas provide food directly to clients. Many of the larger food banks in the country offer a variety of food-related services (such as afterschool meal programs) either directly or in conjunction with other providers. Some food banks also engage in advocacy work on poverty issues and assist low-income residents with applications for government food programs. For the metropolitan region, the institution serving in this role is the Capital Area Food Bank (CAFB), although not all Emergency Food Providers (EFPs) in the area rely on it.
- **Food pantries** distribute bags or boxes of groceries directly to individuals and households onsite. Although these organizations are nonprofits, many of them, particularly the larger ones, depend on USDA programs, as well as donations from individual contributors and food retailers, to serve their clients. In many cases, these programs supplement these sources with foods they purchase.
- **Emergency food kitchens** are programs that provide prepared meals (complete "hot meals" or cold sandwiches and juice, etc.). In this report, we use the term generically to cover operations serving meals as takeaway food, or via delivery to homes, or as congregate meals. Thus, we also include in this category shelters which provide sit-down meals to residents in emergency need (e.g., the homeless or those fleeing domestic violence). Like pantries, these programs vary in size and the frequency of services.

Alexandria's Emergency Food System

To develop a general profile of Alexandria's EFS, a survey was distributed to EFPs in January 2013. The survey covered the services, resources, and needs of the providers. Out of the 13 contacted, 10 organizations completed the survey. A list of the EFPs that responded, with a short description of their services, is in Appendix B.

In addition to the surveys, we visited and interviewed several EFP managers and reviewed additional data they provided. Several meetings with members of the working group—both as a group and in one-on-one interviews—were also held. To further understand how Alexandria's EFS compared to that in other places, we also reviewed research reports on emergency food systems around the nation, visited the Arlington Food Assistance Center (AFAC), and spoke with the CAFB.

While this report provides a comprehensive overview of Alexandria's EFS, there are some limitations to this profile. First, analysis of Alexandria's EFS is limited by the lack of data kept by some organizations. Second, the data available are not easily compared across organizations because both services and methods of categorizing data vary. Third, while the largest EFPs within Alexandria were surveyed, it is unlikely that all EFPs serving residents of the City of Alexandria received a survey. Finally, some families may travel outside the city for emergency food assistance. (Among those EFPs, we only surveyed Food for Others.)

Number of Clients and Frequency of Services

All of the food pantries in Alexandria surveyed restrict eligibility by residency and all pantries, except for Food for Others' community sites, restrict frequency of service. All pantries, except the Last Saturday program operated by ALIVE!, served fewer households in 2012 than 2011. The number of clients served, as estimated by the organizations, is given in Appendix B.

There is some evidence that the frequency of using EFPs varies between clients. Table 5 displays data from ALIVE!'s Last Saturday program at the Church of the Resurrection for July 2012 to February 2013 (excluding November because programming differs that month). Of the 158 households that visited in July 2012, about a quarter (25%) returned only one time or not all in the next six months (i.e., for a total of one or two visits over the period). This is similar to AFAC's experience and to research findings in other parts of the country.¹¹ Analysts and program managers suspect this temporary use is due to families relying on emergency food before government food assistance benefits become available or before the family is made aware of such benefits.

As for the other clients of the Last Saturday program, another 26% of them made a total of three to four visits over this period. Finally, about half (49%) of the 158 July client households came to the Last Saturday program nearly every, if not every, month. This variation in frequency of services suggests that there is diversity in the severity of needs among clients of EFPs.

Organizational Health of EFS

Overall, the survey responses and interviews suggest that EFS organizations in Alexandria are not straining to meet demand. Organizations reported some recent fluctuation in budgets for food programs due to changes in donations or demand for services. However, no alarming trends in budgets or reports of future closings appeared in the surveys. Nonetheless, there is occasional need for additional food supplies and some need for specific skills from volunteers. Additionally, organizations reported need for additional storage space.

EFPs obtain supplies from a range of sources and the percentage of food received from food banks, in-kind donations, purchases, etc. vary greatly from organization to organization. Small pantries and food kitchens serving Alexandria are supplied solely or primarily from in-kind donations. The larger food pantries serving Alexandria have more diverse and varied sources of food: Between 10% and 65% of food comes from a food bank (or USDA commodities), between 10% and 50% comes from in-kind donations, and between 3% and 50% is purchased by the organization. A smaller amount comes from gleaning or food rescue.

Many of the organizations stated they could serve a 10% increase in the number of clients without reducing quality or quantity of food provided. (ALIVE!, the largest program in the city, estimated that they could serve 10%-25% more clients.) Moreover, only one organization reported that they “sometimes” have had to reduce days or hours of services and one other organization reported this “seldom” happened. However, five organizations reported that they have had to reduce meal portions because of a lack of food: one reported this was “often” a problem, two reported “sometimes” a problem, and two more “seldom” a problem.¹² (The seeming contradictions in these responses are discussed in footnote 16.)

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Staff and Volunteers

There are few paid staff members at these organizations. Of the seven organizations located in Alexandria, excluding city-run shelters, three have no paid staff positions. Four organizations have one or two paid part- or full-time staff positions per food-related program.

All of the pantries heavily rely on volunteers. ALIVE! alone reports about 150 volunteers working roughly 675 hours a month for their Last Saturday food program. The reliance on volunteers and the limited number of paid staff is similar to EFP organizations nationwide. (Food banks are the exception. They often have significant budgets and larger numbers of staff).

While all but one EFP had enough volunteers to meet demands in 2012, five organizations expressed needs for additional volunteers with specific skills. The skills that three or more organizations mentioned needing are:

- Fundraising (4 organizations)
- Grant Writing (3 organizations)
- Physical Ability, such as lifting (3 organizations)
- Program Management Skills (3 organizations)
- Translation (3 organizations)

Barriers to Services

According to survey responses, only half of the EFPs within Alexandria have sufficient storage space. Two organizations reported a need for 500 or more additional square feet of storage space. Other than insufficient storage space, the most commonly reported problems were a lack of the following: parking, refrigeration, delivery vehicles, food preparation space, accessibility for clients with disabilities, and shelving (each was mentioned by one-fourth or more of the organizations). Five organizations reported three or more barriers to their services. Other organizations reported only one barrier, no barriers, or skipped the question.

It is important to note that two EFPs in the region—one in Fairfax County and one in Arlington—each receive well over \$250,000 annually in funds and in-kind rent from their local governments. (Indeed, one provider received \$400,000 in local government support in 2012 alone.). In addition, Fairfax County has outreach workers assisting potential participants in government food programs at Food for Others. In Arlington, AFAC and the local Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) office are connected via a sophisticated data-sharing program that allows both organizations to provide more complete services to AFAC clients. Unfortunately, the EFPs in Alexandria (other than some serving congregate meals) currently receive much less support from the local government.

Food Quality in the EFS

Describing the food in the EFS in Alexandria is not a simple matter because of the diversity of charities providing food assistance. For instance, using their own resources, or in tandem with government food security efforts, local charities may provide sandwiches to homeless men, hot meals at a shelter, or bagged groceries. Nonetheless, below is a summary of some observations from the survey.

Grains: Most of the food pantries surveyed (85%) regularly distribute non-bread grains (e.g., cereal, pasta, etc.).¹³ However, only about a quarter of food pantries regularly distribute whole-grain bread and only a little more than half regularly distribute bread at all.

Fresh Dairy and Meat: ALIVE! and Food for Others, two of the largest EFPs, are the only pantries that regularly distribute fresh eggs. Only Food for Others reports regularly providing fresh milk, and no pantries regularly have fresh dairy other than milk. A little less than half of the food pantries surveyed distribute fresh meat regularly and only two distribute fresh fish regularly.

Fresh and Frozen Produce: About two-thirds of the pantries stated that they regularly distribute both fresh fruit and vegetables. However, likely due to a lack of freezer space, frozen foods are rarely offered. This is unfortunate, because frozen fruits and vegetables can last a long time and be portioned out as needed (i.e., a single serving can be defrosted for one person and then later for two persons, etc., without spoiling).

Canned Foods: Not surprisingly, all of the food pantries regularly distribute canned or jarred goods (including canned fruit and vegetables, canned meat, canned fish, canned soups, and pasta sauce).

Other: Other foods regularly carried include peanut butter (85%) and mac and cheese (100%).

Organizations reported that they are most often in need of the following (these are items that were mentioned three or more times):

- Canned fish or other canned meat
- Tomatoes (canned or tomato paste/sauce)
- Meat (chicken and lunchmeat were mentioned)
- Peanut butter

Finally, many respondents expressed concerns about the healthfulness of the foods donated to pantries by the public or cooked by volunteers for congregate meals. The most common concerns were a lack of low-sodium foods and too many sugary foods and sugary drinks. The majority of providers mentioned both of these concerns.

In addition, half of the organizations expressed concern about the lack of fresh foods. Less frequent concerns were:

- Not enough diversity of foods
- Foods close to their expiration date
- Not enough staple food items

Overall, pantries appear to need assistance increasing the availability of whole-grain breads, eggs, low-fat milk, and low-sodium foods. For organizations that rely on purchasing food or receiving food from donors (e.g., food drives), plans need to be made to improve the quality of those purchases and in-kind donations. We address these concerns in the final section of the report.

Among the organizations surveyed, the most common concerns about the food or meals provided were a lack of low-sodium foods and too many sugary foods or drinks.

The majority of providers mentioned both of these concerns.

Coordination and Collaboration

The survey responses suggest that there is some collaboration between EFPs within Alexandria, most often through (1) sharing information with other organizations regarding services, resources, and needs and (2) referring clients to other organizations. In addition, more than half of the organizations reported sharing resources with other EFPs, but the majority was uncertain about increasing this type of collaboration.

The types of collaboration that require more planning and structure are pursued less often. These less frequent types of collaboration include policy advocacy and raising awareness of food hardship in Alexandria. Nonetheless, survey respondents indicated an interest in increasing collaborative work in these two areas, suggesting a need for dialogue about what advocacy work and a public education campaign could look like in Alexandria and what it could achieve.

In discussions with EFPs and working group members, there was strong support for strengthening relationships (1) among the providers, (2) between the providers and local government, and (3) with regional and national organizations that address food hardship in the United States. As with other issues raised in this section, we address these concerns in the recommendation section.

Government Food Assistance Programs

Over a dozen national programs addressing food security, nutrition, and food access are managed by the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) of USDA. These programs make up the nation's main safety net for preventing food hardship.¹⁴ Altogether, about 1 in 4 people in the country will participate in one or more of the USDA's food assistance programs in a year.

In this section we discuss the largest of these programs and in the final section of the report we focus our recommendations on those that seem to have the most potential for expansion in Alexandria. This does not mean that other programs could not also be expanded.

Benefits from these programs are paid for by the federal government. In general, the cost of the administration of these programs is shared between the state and federal government, with local governments sometimes contributing to certain programs for expansion or to cover shortfalls. In addition to the vital role these programs play in child and adult nutrition, they also are important contributors to the local economy.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly the Food Stamp Program) is the nation's main line of defense against hunger. Research has found that receipt of a significant amount in SNAP benefits has a much greater impact on the chance that a household attains a basic, nutritious diet than the receipt of assistance from charitable sources.¹⁵

In the 2012 State Fiscal Year, participation in SNAP in Alexandria totaled 14,793 residents (a bit more than 10% of Alexandria's total population). The number of participants in 2012 included 6,118 recipients under the age of 18 (approximately 41% of all recipients) and 1,000 who were over the age of 64 (about 7% of all recipients). In other words, of the population participating in SNAP, nearly half were children or elderly.

SNAP benefits are paid 100% by the federal government. In January 2013 alone, \$1.14 million in benefits for 8,961 low-income residents came into the city through SNAP. This represents roughly \$125 in benefits per person which comes to approximately \$1.40 per meal (e.g., 30 days times three meals a day).

In addition to the benefits to the individual, USDA estimates that for every five dollars of SNAP benefits spent, the economy benefits by a total of approximately nine dollars.¹⁶ Thus, adding in this economic multiplier, the local economy benefited by approximately \$2.1 million from SNAP participation in January 2013 alone.

(Because SNAP participants may shop outside the city, we cannot know precisely how much the multiplier effect benefits Alexandria, but certainly much of it would.)

To look at the economic benefit another way, stores in Alexandria in 2011 received an average of \$185,447 in SNAP redemptions (i.e., purchases made with SNAP benefits).¹⁷ Because many grocery stores operate on a small profit margin, SNAP redemptions can play an important role in their survival.

Could Alexandria be doing better at reaching eligible families? Estimates for how many people are eligible for SNAP are hard to come by for local jurisdictions. But we know that about 17,000 persons lived below 125% of the poverty threshold in Alexandria in 2010. This provides a conservative estimate of the number eligible for SNAP for that year.¹⁸ The unduplicated count of residents benefiting from SNAP in the city for the 2010 fiscal year was 12,442 persons, considerably less than our estimated number of eligible persons. (Representing 73% of the number eligible, this is not far from the USDA's estimate that Virginia overall reached 70% of the SNAP-eligible population in 2010).

How much difference would enrolling additional eligible households make?

Using January 2013 participation data as an example, a 10% increase in participation—which represents an ambitious but not unthinkable goal for SNAP expansion—would mean that approximately 900 additional persons would have been assisted. This would have brought in approximately \$114,000 in federal benefits to households facing food hardship in one month. (An additional \$91,327 in economic stimulus would have been generated, too, for a total of approximately \$200,000.)

Considering that Alexandrians participating in SNAP received an average of \$125 a month in benefits, each eligible household that does not apply for SNAP presents a serious loss to these households and the economy. The loss of eligible families in the SNAP program can also translate into additional stress placed on EFPs, which are to provide emergency services, not the sustained, more flexible, and more significant support that SNAP can provide.

In short, whenever eligible families are not enrolled in SNAP, federal money has been left on the table. Fortunately, innovative possibilities for expanding SNAP participation are being used around the country, including in Virginia, and the City

Alexandria is leaving money on the table by not launching a campaign to reach out to more eligible families.

Fortunately, innovative possibilities for expanding SNAP participation are being used around the country, including in Virginia, and the city should investigate implementing these.

should investigate implementing these. For instance, Fairfax County has a SNAP outreach worker at Food for Others' programs approximately 20 hours a week.

The bottom line is that serious consideration should be given to redirecting or realigning resources to increasing participation in SNAP and the flow of benefits that would bring to the community. Of the money spent on outreach efforts by state and local governments, 50% can be charged to the federal government as a shared administrative cost. Donations raised by a nonprofit and expended on outreach as a subcontractor for the government can also be used and reimbursed partially by the federal government through the state.¹⁹

Unfortunately, although there are some SNAP outreach funds targeting Alexandria through the CAFB, they are spread across several communities and not sufficient to significantly impact participation rates. Nonetheless, Department of Community and Human Services staff hope that a recently developed online screening and initial application process for SNAP (called CommonHelp), along with a new outreach plan, to include stationing outreach workers at Alexandria EFPs, may increase participation in the future. A more robust plan, however, will require Virginia to include local efforts in the state outreach plan and funds from local government or local organizations to draw down additional matching funds from the USDA.

Women, Infants, and Children Program (WIC)

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) provides foods specific to the needs of pregnant women, new mothers, infants, and children up to age five. WIC participants shop at grocery stores authorized by WIC to accept vouchers as payment for WIC-approved foods. In 2011, the average store in Alexandria participating in the WIC program received \$163,980 in redemptions (sales reimbursed by WIC).

WIC also affords participants increased access to nutrition education and healthcare. Compared to neighboring jurisdictions, Alexandria has a relatively high rate of low-weight births (8.0% in 2008).²⁰ Fortunately, research shows that participation in WIC can reduce low-weight births.²¹ Thus, an effort to ensure participation and retention in WIC could be essential for reducing this health indicator. In addition to benefiting WIC families, when stores participate in WIC there is evidence that nearby stores improve the foods they offer, too.²²

Currently, there are 10 WIC-approved stores in Alexandria where participants can shop. Disconcertingly, three of these stores closed recently and it is uncertain when they will re-open and if they will remain WIC-approved stores.

In the 2012 Federal Fiscal Year, 3,277 Alexandrians were enrolled in WIC, while there were approximately 5,634 adults and children in Alexandria eligible, for an overall participation rate of 58% (see Table 6). As Table 6 shows, about one-third of expecting mothers who are eligible for WIC are not participating. Additional research would be needed to learn more about who is not participating and why. We encourage such work to focus on immigrant populations. Alexandria is home to many households where no adult reports speaking English well. In addition, recent changes to the foods made available by WIC increase the programs cultural sensitivity. The WIC program should ensure that immigrant families are aware of these changes and that stores stock these items.

Participation among families with children is by far the lowest (for WIC, children are those older than one, but younger than five). A drop-off in participation when children turn one is common in other parts of the country and is believed to be due to changes that occur in the food package WIC offers families after the child turns one. Unfortunately, this problem may be difficult to address. Possibilities include ensuring that families find the program easy to use and that stores receive sufficient training to stay in the program. Outreach campaigns at EFPs are also recommended, as well as through other community institutions where low-income mothers may gather (markets, child care centers, laundromats, etc.).

School Breakfast Program

The importance of a healthy breakfast for children's physical and mental wellbeing, as well as school performance, is well documented.²³ Indeed, one study stated that expanding access to school meals "may be the most effective tool to combat childhood obesity for poor children."²⁴

To ensure access to a healthy breakfast, the USDA's School Breakfast Program (SBP) reimburses participating schools per breakfast served. As with the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), all students in a participating school may enroll in SBP. Those students living in households with low incomes are qualified to receive free or reduced-priced (FRP) breakfasts. Due to the myriad benefits of SBP, expanding this program is a priority of several corporate foundations and national education and food policy organizations.

Alexandria is fortunate to have a well-organized and forward-thinking School Nutrition Service Program. During the 2011-2012 school year Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) served 601,410 breakfasts, including 428,969 free, 95,741 reduced-priced, and 76,700 paid.²⁵

However, during the 2011-2012 school year ACPS served twice as many free and reduced-price lunches as FRP breakfasts. While these rates are close to national

participation rates, there remains tremendous opportunity to increase participation in breakfast programming. Furthermore, much of the participation in SBP occurs at a subset of ACPS schools.²⁶

Table 7 shows the percentage of children eligible for FRP meals in the previous school year. It also gives the number of FRP breakfasts served as a percentage of FRP lunches at each school in the system for October 2011.²⁷ Finally, it also shows how many *additional* breakfasts could be served if all schools performed at a level just below that of the top performing schools. In short, roughly 1,600 more students (i.e., 31,800 breakfasts divided by 20 days) could be served each month if the breakfast program at all schools reached at least 75% of the number of FRP lunches served.

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Common barriers to participation in school breakfast include transportation timing, how breakfast service is organized within a school building, and the stigma of participation.²⁸ At ACPS, how transportation affects the time available for breakfast may be the most significant barrier to participation.

There are a variety of methods for increasing participation in SBP. Options include eliminating fees for reduced-priced meals or providing all students with free meals regardless of income (Universal Free Breakfast). Schools using Universal Free Breakfast are reimbursed using a modified formula.

In schools with high rates of FRP eligibility, Universal Free Breakfast may be a viable option as it reduces paperwork and administrative costs by eliminating eligibility categories. In addition, the increase in participation may bring down the per meal production costs, increasing the net value of the per meal reimbursements by USDA. This economy of scale benefit may offset, or partially offset, possible reductions in total federal reimbursements brought by the modified reimbursement formula.

ACPS has already eliminated fees for reduced-priced breakfasts at all schools and currently provides Universal Free Breakfast at four schools (Jefferson-Houston, Patrick Henry, Cora Kelly, and William Ramsay). Expanding the Universal Free Breakfast to more schools would likely further increase SBP participation rates.

Another option for increasing participation in school breakfast is to adopt an alternative method of breakfast delivery. Possibilities include serving Breakfast in the Classroom (BIC) after the first bell, providing “second chance” breakfast for students arriving to school too late to eat before the first bell, and distributing breakfast through food carts (“grab n’ go”).²⁹ These alternative methods of breakfast

delivery help overcome transportation and time barriers to participation in school breakfast. BIC is particularly effective at increasing participation. Two ACPS schools currently offer BIC.

In addition, as shown in Table 7, some schools seem to be able to involve more children in breakfast than others even though they have fewer FRP eligible children. At these schools, one interviewee told us, the principals are “out there” (i.e., more involved) in encouraging participation among the children in their school.

With support from the community and local government, ACPS can build on its success by expanding Universal Free Breakfast, BIC, and other methods of breakfast delivery to more schools.

Summer Food Service Program

The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) provides meals—which are often accompanied by educational or recreational activities—to children during the summer break who receive free and reduced-price meals at school during the academic year. These programs not only provide healthy meals that meet standards set by the USDA, but can keep students connected to safe and supervised programming during the summer months.

For the past several years the City has set aside \$112,000 for summer food programming. This summer there are 13 summer sites, but five of the sites only operate for one week (another two sites operate for just two and three weeks). Overall, it seems that the SFSP in Alexandria has hit a plateau and remained there for some time.

Unfortunately, growing the program does not seem to be a priority on anyone’s radar. In fact, starting several years ago, the City began to require that students enroll in youth programs and pay the related fees to access summer meals. Although the fees can be waived for low-income families, it is an unusual barrier to place in the way of SFSP programming. In short, an important way to expand SFSP participation is to operate sites with minimal enrollment procedures.

In addition, based on interviews, we note that more work could be done to advertise the program to youth and there also is a need to provide additional technical assistance to sponsoring organizations. (The paperwork required can be a deterrent to organizations running a program site unless assistance is provided.)

Virginia is one of a handful of states that are being targeted for program expansion by the USDA’s Food and Nutrition Service.

In addition, another Virginia City is involved this summer in a leadership development project with National League of Cities and the Food Research and Action Center to improve how city officials and advocates plan summer food programming.

Fortunately, national organizations can provide technical assistance on all of these matters and cities elsewhere in the state (e.g., Richmond) may also provide important lessons for growing this important summer program for low-income youth.

In fact, Virginia is one of a handful of states targeted for SFSP expansion by the USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS). Moreover, Richmond is involved in a leadership development project with the National League of Cities and the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) to improve how city officials and advocates plan summer food programming. Alexandria could work with USDA and hold conversations with leaders in Richmond and technical advisors at FRAC to learn how to expand SFSP in the city.

Private Sector

This section looks at food access via the private for-profit sector (e.g., grocery stores) and private nonprofits that can provide or facilitate market-based access to food (e.g., farmers' markets or produce markets) for low-income populations.

Transportation is a significant factor in the costs of accessing food, both in the cost and the time it takes to travel. According to the USDA's latest Food Access Research Atlas, about 32,000 Alexandrians (23%) lived more than one-half mile from a supermarket (although all Alexandrians lived within a mile of a supermarket). This includes about 6,000 children and 3,000 residents over the age of 64. About 4,000 of these residents lived in low-income households. In addition, the USDA estimated about 1,000 households without a vehicle lived more than one-half mile, but less than one mile, from a supermarket.³⁰ (A total of approximately 6,000 households do not have vehicles in Alexandria.)

It is important to note, however, that the USDA analysis was conducted before recent store closures, so it likely understates the problem.

Proximity and access to healthy, affordable foods is associated with obesity and other nutrition-related outcomes. This report does not include an extensive study of food access problems associated with distances and transportation to food retailers (i.e., the "food desert" problem). However, the ability of the elderly, disabled, and others to shop—especially households with children and without cars—should be considered explicitly in development efforts, including planning documents and studies. From the data reviewed above, it appears that distance and transportation could be a problem for a few thousand residents. Although the vast majority of stores accept SNAP, only ten stores participate in WIC. Because three of those ten

have closed, there is some concern that this could reduce participation in WIC because using the benefits would become less convenient.

There is also evidence that fresh fruits and vegetables could be made more readily available in some areas of Alexandria. For instance, the ad hoc fruit and vegetable vendor who does brisk business on weekends near the Southern Towers apartment complex demonstrates an otherwise unmet need in that area. This need could be met by nonprofits if the margins are too slim for retailers (without subsidies).

Currently, three of Alexandria's farmers' markets accept SNAP benefits as payments, including a bonus for produce purchases, thus increasing access to fresh fruits and vegetables. Other, similar, programs for WIC and the elderly should be investigated by working with the USDA and local or state WIC officials.

A more promising solution worth exploring—one that is being used in several communities around the country—is the use of mobile markets. These are modified school buses or moving trucks that can quickly set up a temporary fresh produce market in neighborhoods where markets are not readily available or for populations that cannot travel to a market easily, such as housing for the elderly.

Other locations that can be successful for mobile markets or small produce stands include schools, hospitals, and clinics. These are places where consumers can conveniently purchase healthy snacks or produce to bring home in lieu of an extra trip to the store. In the case of schools, this can provide an alternative to afterschool snacking on junk food. At clinics and hospitals this can also afford a memorable opportunity for clinicians to discuss nutrition and diet with patients.

Arcadia Farms, a non-profit located just outside the City of Alexandria, is anxious to use its mobile market program in the City. However, mobile markets face some obstacles under the current permit policies. Solutions to this project are currently being explored with some members of the task force and the City. (See the final section of the report for some details.)

There is some interest in expanding gleaning and food rescue programs in Alexandria. Gleaning is the harvesting of food that farmers do not wish to harvest themselves (e.g., crops that mature after the initial harvest but are not worth a second harvest for the owner). Food rescue programs receive edible food that is to be discarded from stores, markets, and, sometimes, restaurants. The food is then used by pantries, kitchens, and shelters.

AFAC has experience with both kinds of programs and would likely be willing to provide coaching on establishing such programs in Alexandria. Such efforts do have their drawbacks, however. They require a very consistent volunteer force and some

skill in food handling (as well as sufficient refrigeration). Vendors at the farmers' market reported that they do not mind donating food (which can be written off on their taxes), but they do not like to wait around to see if volunteers are coming or not. Thus, consistency is the key factor in making food rescue work and would require additional volunteer and resource (e.g., vehicles) management.

Goals and Recommendations

Alexandria is behind many communities locally and around the nation in tackling food hardship. Fortunately, technical help and mentoring from national organizations, as well as models from other communities, are available.

Moreover, interest in food access is growing in Northern Virginia as a whole, as it is across the nation. Funding for addressing food-related determinants of health and school performance is increasingly available. In short, this is an issue of fundamental importance, and one with staying power, that Alexandria should feel comfortable addressing with greater drive and focus than it has to date.

Expanding Capacity and Vision

Overall, developing a more comprehensive approach to the problem entails improving communication and increasing the capacity of a variety of organizations that currently exist, while also expanding who is involved in tackling food hardship in Alexandria. This will take time and perseverance, as would any serious effort in a complex policy area.

The recommendations below are designed to take Alexandria's current efforts to reduce food hardship and bring them up to the level of that in communities with substantial and diverse anti-hunger activities. The recommendation section is split into two sub-sections. The first sub-section lists three broad goals. These are followed, in the second sub-section, by initiatives advancing one or more of these goals.

Of course, many more initiatives can be recommended or discussed, but the **key point is to increase Alexandria's capacity for**

Initiatives for the Near Future

- Meet with officials involved in USDA's special effort to expand summer food programming in Virginia
- Recruit and train volunteers to help clients at EFPs with SNAP applications and promote SNAP
- Plan a Hunger Free Alexandria conference to raise public awareness of food hardship and develop closer ties with city leaders
- Ask local advocates, providers, and officials to attend the annual National Anti-Hunger Conference in DC to learn about successful practices in Virginia and beyond
- Sponsor six to eight workshops a year with national or area leaders and trainers on food assistance programs and campaigns to learn about innovations
- Expand who is involved in food access and food security issues
- Develop a citywide message on food access and hunger issues
- Recruit a registered dietician to make annual visits to EFPs for advice on improving services
- Develop educational material for a joint campaign to improve the foods donated to EFPs
- Strengthen relations with Capital Area Food Bank

eliminating food hardship, starting with building on what exists. The initiatives listed were chosen with that underlying principle in mind. Of course, to some degree, any such recommendations must be viewed as “grist for the mill.” Any ongoing project has to adjust to changing circumstances, lessons from program results, and new opportunities as they arise.

Three Broad Goals

The first goal is to **increase collaborations among the Emergency Food Providers and develop new connections with institutions and leaders.**

Although we did not find many significant weaknesses among the EFPs, there is little communication among them to address problems they do face and little connection to the broader community that would allow them to take anti-hunger work to a higher level. In addition, many in the emergency food community do not have the time, resources, or leverage to engage in more complex food security work. To create more significant change, additional community leaders need to be engaged. Thus, developing stronger relationships among the extant groups and broadening who is involved should be a priority for these groups, their funders, or other anti-poverty and health initiatives in Alexandria.

The second broad goal is to **develop an agenda on food hardship and raise the awareness of the public, city officials, and other leaders about hunger as a local problem and potential solutions.** As discussed below, this may require finding sufficient funds to hire a professional with a moderate or greater amount of experience in social policy advocacy and locate them at one of local non-governmental institutions.

The third goal is to **make a multi-year plan to expand federally funded food assistance programs in Alexandria.** Although this goal is part of an agenda for the City, the ability of these programs to leverage large amounts of resources for a significant population, and the evidence of their effectiveness, justifies giving them priority attention.

The emergency food system, as the providers themselves acknowledge, are a vital but insufficient means of protecting vulnerable Alexandrians from food

Three Broad Goals

- 1. Increase collaborations among the Emergency Food Providers and develop new connections with institutions and leaders.*
- 2. Develop an agenda on food hardship and raise the awareness of the public, City officials, and other leaders about hunger as a local problem and potential solutions.*
- 3. Prioritize on the agenda a multi-year plan to expand federally-funded food assistance programs in Alexandria.*

hardship. As discussed above, helping low-income households to access benefits for which they qualify helps not only the program participants but also the EFPs and the wider community.

Because other communities around the nation have been expanding these programs for so long, most barriers to expansion have been dealt with effectively elsewhere. Alexandria needs to tap into the training that comes from those experiences and use it to develop more leaders who understand these possibilities as well as to draft a campaign for program expansion.

Initiatives to Support the Above Goals

1. **Connect more often to national and regional organizations.** Efforts to develop and run a more active anti-hunger campaign in Alexandria are hampered, to some degree, by not having a statewide or regional anti-hunger organization with which to work. Across the country, such “intermediary” organizations or networks provide technical assistance in a variety of areas, connections to other organizations, and additional resources that have proved essential to expanding and improving food assistance programming of all kinds.³¹

Fortunately, the location of Alexandria next to Washington, DC provides it with an excellent opportunity to seek advice from and participate in the national anti-hunger network. We encourage as many Alexandrians as possible to participate in the National Anti-Hunger Conference which FRAC and Feeding America, among others, organize each year in DC. At the conference, hundreds of food advocates from around the country share ideas and hear about food access and food security initiatives from local and national leaders, as well as from federal officials. The conference is an eye-opening and inspiring event and could play an important role in developing local leadership.

2. **Place food access on the agenda of the City Council and various departments.** The EFPs, anti-poverty advocates, and broader community interested in food hardship need to develop an integrated vision of food accessibility for special populations. Internally, organizations should approach this goal through other initiatives mentioned in this section: local meetings and workshops, attending national conferences, and receiving technical assistance. In addition, city officials need to be educated about the need for resources from

city for EFPs (e.g., storage) and about maximizing access to federal funds for SNAP and the child nutrition programs discussed above.

3. **Develop multi-year plan to increase access to SNAP and Child Nutrition Programs.** As many communities around the country have done, Alexandria should develop a several-year effort to expand federally funded food and nutrition assistance programs. This would include educating (perhaps through the conference, but also one on one) local leaders (government, business, church, etc.) on the potential of these programs, the barriers that exist, and how other communities have overcome them.

As a part of this process, concrete goals should be established, as well as specific initiatives to reach them. For instance, set a number for increases in Summer Food sites and attendance or support the addition of Breakfast in the Classroom at a few additional schools each year. Likewise, it is important to make sure that area pediatricians and other medical providers are educated about the WIC program and regularly informed of assistance available to families who wish to apply or stay involved. Thus, a concrete goal for WIC program expansion would be to create an annual, or more frequent, outreach plan to medical providers and similar professionals.

To develop just one example: SNAP outreach could target specific populations that commonly misunderstand how SNAP works or the amount of benefits for which they may qualify. Populations that are commonly targeted include the elderly, working families who are unaware of their eligibility and parents who are ineligible due to their immigration status, but who have children who are eligible. (ALIVE! staff reported that, when SNAP outreach workers were stationed at the Last Saturday program, many low-income families wrongly assumed that their children were ineligible for SNAP benefits if the adults were ineligible.)

4. Ultimately, an effective, broad, and multi-year campaign to expand and improve food access for low-income families requires **funding a position to be filled by a committed professional with at least a moderate amount of experience in advocacy, social services, and leadership.** Relying on staff members at organizations that are already committed to several projects will not allow for the depth of work that needs to be done. Funding for a new position may prove beneficial for the community.

5. **The City Code (or zoning ordinances) should be changed to allow mobile markets greater access to populations lacking convenient access to healthy foods.** The City should consider the following ways, among others, to make mobile markets available where they are needed:
 - i. Add multi-family residential zones to those that permit outdoor food markets by administrative special-use permits.
 - ii. Provide a definition of mobile markets in the zoning ordinances and add this use to the list of permitted or special uses.
 - iii. Identify mobile markets as a recognized accessory use at large apartment or condominium complexes when the market can primarily serve the residents of the complex.
 - iv. Make mobile markets an acceptable use (with an administrative special use permit) at churches, schools, and other locations in zones that do not otherwise permit outdoor food markets.
6. **Encourage the EFPs to meet regularly** to increase the sharing of ideas, consider the launching of collaborative projects, and engage in deepening local leaders' understanding of anti-hunger work and programs. Depending on interest and the amount of support needed, it may be desirable to develop a coalition organization, even if its structure is loose, with a name, such as Hunger Free Alexandria, that would sponsor these meetings. A list of possible activities can be found in Appendix C.
7. In addition to strengthening the bonds between providers, the working group should **expand the pool of who is seen as potential collaborators in anti-hunger planning and work** (school principals, business leaders, etc.). Possibilities include local branches of large grocery chains and banks, the Chamber of Commerce, area hospitals and clinics, and local colleges and universities in the city (such as Virginia Tech's public administration program and the Episcopal Church's Virginia Theological Seminary.)

Relations with the Capital Area Food Bank should also be strengthened, and the recent arrival of a new president at CAFB makes this the ideal time to do so. Finding leadership from the language-minority populations in town should also be a priority. Alexandria is a diverse community and this should be reflected in anti-hunger efforts. All of this could be accomplished if conducted as part of a public education campaign about food hardship in the community.

8. **Engage with funders interested in food access in Alexandria.** Through the Washington Regional Association of Grantmakers' Health Working Group, funders have established a partnership to mobilize and influence the philanthropic community to develop an equitable regional food system.

Alexandria should actively engage with this project by recruiting other funders to participate in this work, sharing information about food-related programming and funding, and participating in projects across the region to develop solutions to increase access to healthy and affordable food. Even without, or in addition to, this collaborative project, funders in Alexandria should meet to discuss funding a more comprehensive and informed plan to address food hardship in the city. In particular (see below), local grantmakers should look into supporting SNAP, WIC, Summer Food, and School Breakfast expansion programs.

9. **Have a trained professional or volunteer visit the EFPs to address concerns about the quality of food EFPs receive and provide.** A registered dietician (or qualified volunteer from the Virginia Cooperative Extension Master Food program) could help each provider evaluate the food they offer and make plans regarding what foods they purchase or glean, the meals they prepare, or foods they request from donors. Ideally, the same person could assist with this effort over several years to see which strategies work or do not.
10. **Hire a part-time “Volunteer and Resource Coordinator” (or recruit a skilled volunteer with a stable volunteering schedule)** to advance the work of EFPs through increasing the number of volunteers, particularly skilled volunteers. Because it is easier to identify “simple” improvements than to make those improvements, there is a need for a coordinator who can help EFPs make better use of volunteers, vehicles, educational material, and other resources to improve the quality of food donated through food drives, find and send volunteers where they are most needed (including volunteers with special skills recruited through Volunteer Alexandria), coordinate resources for gleaning or produce pickup from farmers’ markets, etc. A significant project for the coordinator could be the training of volunteers to help EFP clients with online SNAP applications.
11. **Collect better data on EFP activities** to better understand what they do, make the case for supporting them, and educate the public about food hardship in the city. Even if the EFPs can only collect data for a short period (three to six months) with a simple Excel file or paper form that is submitted weekly to a person for data entry, this would go a long way to better understanding who is being served. In the future, EFPs and the City should look into imitating or possible licensing AFAC’s software for developing a client database that allows government and private case workers to better understand clients and connect them more comprehensively to resources.

Table of Abbreviations

ACPS	Alexandria City Public Schools
AFAC	Arlington Food Assistance Center
BIC	Breakfast in the classroom
CAFB	Capital Area Food Bank
EFP	Emergency Food Providers
EFS	Emergency Food System
FNS	Food and Nutrition Service, United States Department of Agriculture
FRAC	Food Research and Action Center
FRP	Free and reduced-price (referring to school meal programs)
NSLP	National School Lunch Program
SBP	School Breakfast Program
SFSP	Summer Food Service Program
SNAP	Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (formerly the Food Stamp Program)
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
VDSS	Virginia Department of Social Services
WIC	Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children

Appendix A: Tables

Table 1

Demographics, 2009-2011 Three-year Average

	Persons	%	Below Poverty	%
Population	139,294		11,945	8.6%
under 18 years old	23,982	17.2%	3,317	13.8%
18 to 61 years old	102,994	73.9%	7,883	7.7%
65 years old and over	12,318	8.8%	745	6.0%
Percent below poverty that are children	27.8%			
Civilian labor force	91,250		4,632	5.1%
Employed	86,315		3,335	3.9%
Unemployed	4,935		1,297	26.3%
Percent below poverty that are employed	72.0%			

Source: American Community Survey, US Census Bureau

Table 2**Self-Sufficiency Budget in 2010 for City of Alexandria for Selected Family Compositions**

	1 Working Adult	1 Working Adult, 1 preschooler, and 1	2 Working Adults, 1 preschooler, and 1 schoolchild
Housing	\$1,168	\$1,323	\$1,323
Utilities	\$117	\$133	\$133
Food	\$288	\$625	\$836
Transportation	\$501	\$540	\$1,030
Child Care	\$0	\$2,067	\$2,067
Personal & Household Items	\$403	\$533	\$587
Health Care	\$157	\$496	\$557
Emergency Savings	\$117	\$297	\$282
Retirement Savings	\$139	\$139	\$292
Taxes	\$803	\$2,065	\$2,021
Tax Credits	0	-267	-267
Monthly Income Required	\$3,693	\$7,951	\$8,861
Annual Total	\$44,316	\$95,412	\$106,332
Hourly Wage (per worker)	\$20.98	\$45.18	\$25.18

Source: Wider Opportunities for Women, Economic Security Institute. Data shown assumes workplace has benefits. <http://www.wowonline.org/economic-security-institute/>

Table 3**Housing Affordability, 2009-2011 Three-year Average**

	Units	%
Occupied housing units	64,626	
Renter-occupied units	36,581	56.6%
Owner-occupied units	28,045	43.4%
Renters, household income less than \$35,000	9,086	
Housing costs = or > 30% of income	7,262	79.9%
Housing costs < 30% of income	950	10.5%
Data not available	874	9.6%
Owners, household income less than \$35,000	2,164	
Housing costs = or > 30% of income	1,739	80.4%
Housing costs < 30% of income	386	17.8%
Data not available	39	1.8%

Source: American Community Survey, US Census Bureau

Table 4
Population at Various Income to Poverty Ratios, 2009-2011 Three-year Average

Income to Poverty Threshold Ratio	Persons	%	Cummulative # of Persons	Cummulative %
< 100% poverty	11,945	8.6%	11,945	8.6%
100% to 149%	8,721	6.3%	20,666	14.8%
150% to 199%	8,510	6.1%	29,176	20.9%
200% and over	110,118	79.1%	139,294	100.0%

Source: American Community Survey, US Census Bureau

Table 5
Number of Visits to the Last Saturday Food Program over Seven Months by the Same Households that Visited in July 2012

Total Visits	Households	Percent
1	24	15%
2	16	10%
3	17	11%
4	24	15%
5	24	15%
6	22	14%
7	31	20%
Total	158	100%

Source: ALIVE!'s Last Saturday program at Church of the Resurrection for July 2012 to February 2013 (excluding November).

Note: Maximum of one visit per month possible per household.

Table 6
WIC Eligibility and Enrollment for
Alexandria, Federal Fiscal Year 2012

Category	Eligible	Enrolled	%
Infants	914	747	82%
Children	3,374	1,631	48%
Pregnant	653	398	61%
Breastfeeding	420	328	78%
Postpartum	274	165	60%
Total	5,635	3,269	58%

Source: Virginia Department of Health

Table 7:**Free and Reduce-Price School Breakfast Program Participation Compared to Lunch**

	% of Students FRP Eligible	#FRP Breakfasts Served (Oct 2011)	# FRP Lunches Served (Oct 2011)	Breakfasts as % of Lunches	Additional Breakfasts per Month at 75% of Lunches	Approximate Number of Additional Children Reached†
William Ramsay Elementary*	83%	8,276	10,348	80%		-
Cora Kelly Magnet Elementary*	80%	2,960	4,734	63%	591	30
Francis C Hammond 2 Middle**	71%	857	4,710	18%	2,676	134
Patrick Henry Elementary*	70%	5,449	6,159	88%		-
Jefferson-Houston Elementary*	68%	3,009	3,870	78%		-
Francis C Hammond 3 Middle	65%	953	4,326	22%	2,292	115
John Adam Elementary	65%	2,682	8,149	33%	3,430	171
Francis C Hammond Middle	64%	737	4,481	16%	2,624	131
James K Polk Elementary	64%	2,193	6,492	34%	2,676	134
Mount Vernon Elementary	59%	2,593	6,689	39%	2,424	121
TC Williams High-Minnie Howard	59%	2,214	6,453	34%	2,626	131
TC Williams High	55%	7,504	18,605	40%	6,450	322
Samuel W Tucker Elementary	54%	2,773	6,051	46%	1,765	88
George Washington 2 Middle	48%	972	3,619	27%	1,742	87
George Washington Middle	47%	1,263	3,605	35%	1,441	72
George Mason Elementary	31%	1,988	2,387	83%		-
Maury Elementary	31%	1,538	2,033	76%		-
Charles Barrett Elementary	30%	1,061	1,830	58%	312	16
Lyles-Crouch Elementary	26%	1,052	1,787	59%	288	14
Douglas MacCarthur Elementary	25%	1,404	2,600	54%	546	27
Total		51,478	108,928	47%	31,880	1,594

* Had universal breakfast program.

† Approximation adjusted for number of days.

Appendix B: Short Description of Local EFPs

- ALIVE!'s Last Saturday food program distributes bags of groceries on the last Saturday of the month (except November) to eligible Alexandria residents at three sites: Cora Kelly Recreation Center at 25 West Reed Avenue; Church of Resurrection at 2280 N. Beauregard; and Ladrey Senior Residence at 300 Wythe Street.

ALIVE! is, by far, the largest provider of emergency food within the City of Alexandria. In FY 2012 Last Saturday distributed food to an average of approximately 2,000 persons per month (about 600 households per month).

ALIVE! also runs the Family Emergency Food Program (FEP). FEP delivers groceries to ill, disabled, and others with limited mobility. In FY 2012, the program delivered food to an average of approximately 200 persons per month (about 80 households per month). Together ALIVE's programs distribute between 30,000 and 40,000 pounds of food per month.

- Food for Others runs a food warehouse in Fairfax County that provides (1) short-term (3-5 days) emergency food to eligible persons (limited to six times per year) and (2) supplemental food from USDA to eligible persons (limited to once per month). The warehouse is open Monday through Friday, 9:30 am to 5:00 pm. The warehouse is open to eligible persons residing in parts of Northern Virginia including residents of Alexandria. Food for Others also runs neighborhood distribution sites in Arlington, Fairfax, and Falls Church, all of which are open to residents of Alexandria. Each of these sites is open, on average, one to two evenings during the work week. Data on the number of Alexandria residents using the neighborhood food distribution sites are not available.
- Christ Church Lazarus Ministry's food pantry is at 118 North Washington Street. Eligible persons may select food from the food pantry once per week. The food pantry is open on Wednesday and Thursday from 9:00 am to 11:30 am. In 2012, the pantry served an estimated average of 676 persons per month (266 households)

- Grace Episcopal Church's food pantry at 3601 Russell Road is open Monday and Tuesday 1:00 pm to 3:00 pm and Friday 6:30 pm to 7:30 pm. In 2012, the food pantry served an estimated average of 310 persons (91 households) per month.
- Catholic Charities of Northern Virginia operates food pantries throughout the Catholic Diocese of Arlington (which consists of 21 counties and three independent cities). Within the City of Alexandria, Catholic Charities runs the Christ House Emergency Assistance food pantry at 131 S. West Street Alexandria, VA. The pantry is open on Wednesday and Thursday from 9:00 am to 1:00 pm. In 2012 the food pantry distributed food to an average of 225 persons (94 households) per month.

Catholic Charities also runs the Christ House emergency food kitchen at 131 S. West Street. They provide a daily dinner from 5:00 pm - 6:30 pm. They serve an average of 420 meals during a typical week. In 2011 they served nearly 140 people (unduplicated count); in 2012 they served nearly 160 people (unduplicated count).

- Washington Street United Methodist Church/Sara's Open Table provides breakfast once a week to approximately two dozen people. During a given year, they estimate they serve about 75 people (unduplicated count).
- Carpenter's Shelter provides daily meals (breakfast, lunch, dinner and evening snack) for shelter residents. During a typical week they serve 540 meals. Carpenter's Shelter also runs a food pantry for former residents of the shelter. The food pantry is open Monday through Friday from 8:00 am-9:00 pm. The food pantry serves an average of six clients per week.
- The Salvation Army has a food pantry at 107 East Bellefonte Avenue. The food pantry is open Monday through Friday 9:30 am through 4:00 pm. , excluding Thursdays. Food assistance is provided by appointment only; no walk-ins. Eligible Alexandrians can visit the food pantry once every six months. During a typical week the food pantry serves about ten clients. The Salvation Army also runs a bag lunch program every other week, Monday through Friday. During a typical week the bag lunch program distributes about 100 bagged lunches.
- The City of Alexandria provides emergency food through the Alexandria Domestic Violence Program and the Alexandria Community Shelter and Detox and Substance Abuse Services. Both of these programs serve congregate meals to shelter residents.

Appendix C: Possible Collaboration Activities

These ideas could involve not only EFPs but other health and anti-poverty advocates.

1. Sharing strategies for improving the food that donors give.
2. Annual plans for making comments on the city budget and its impact on food hardship. (Likewise for development planning.)
3. Hearing from guest speakers about efforts elsewhere in the region or nation.
4. Meet with the new leader at CAFB to discuss current projects and needs, areas for additional collaboration and growth, and how to improve communication and relationships.
5. Make and discuss the results of plans to expand who is involved in anti-hunger work and identifying how they can benefit.
6. Organize city staff or volunteers to assist EFP clients with the state's new web-based applications for assistance.
7. Meet with USDA about their new summer food expansion plans targeting Virginia. Help identify future sites for expanding summer food programming.
8. Meet with FRAC to discuss ideas for funding the expansion of programming in child nutrition (School Breakfast and Summer Food) and other areas of technical assistance.
9. Collaborate on gleaning projects with Mid-Atlantic Gleaners or AFAC.
10. Develop a low-volume and moderated list-serv for announcements and communication among groups and interested advocates.
11. Develop a strategy for approaching the Council on specific requests (seed money for staffing; providing leadership when meeting with the business community; space needs, etc.).

Footnotes

¹ USDA. (September 04, 2012). Food Security in the U.S.: Overview. Available at: <http://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us.aspx> Accessed on July 12, 2013.

² For a summary of research on the negative health consequences of food insecurity see FRAC. "Fight Hunger and Obesity." Available at: <http://frac.org/initiatives/hunger-and-obesity/>. See also Partnership for America's Economic Success. (2008). Reading, Writing and Hungry: The consequences of food insecurity on children, and on our nation's economic success. Available at: http://frac.org/newsite/wp-content/uploads/2010/03/reading_writing_hungry_report.pdf All were accessed on July 12, 2013.

³ The one-in-five estimate is discussed in the next section and reflects the income distribution as well as Alexandria's high cost of living.

⁴ Children are over-represented among Alexandria's poor. Although the number of people under 18 made up 17% of the total population, they made up 28% of Alexandrians living in poverty.

⁵ The federal poverty threshold, used to measure the number of persons poor, for 2010 was \$22,113 for a family with two adults and two children. For poverty thresholds by year, see Census Bureau. "Poverty Thresholds." Available at: <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/data/threshld/index.html>. For poverty guidelines, used to determine benefit eligibility, see Department of Health and Human Services. "Prior HHS Poverty Guidelines and Federal Register References." Available at: <http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/figures-fed-reg.cfm> For a distinction between poverty thresholds and guidelines, see Institute for Research and Poverty. "What are Poverty Thresholds and Poverty Guidelines?" Available at: <http://www.irp.wisc.edu/faqs/faq1.htm> All were accessed on August 26, 2013.

⁶ The data in the table are from the Wider Opportunities for Women BEST Index. <http://www.wowonline.org/economic-security-institute/> From their website: "The BEST Index measures the income a working adult requires to meet his or her basic needs—without public or private assistance. The BEST also includes basic savings, ... monthly emergency savings, ... and retirement savings Each BEST Index component is a conservative estimate of need, and the BEST does not include any "extras" such as vacations, entertainment, electronics, gifts or meals out. As a result, those living below an economically secure income may go without, make difficult choices among basic needs, or forgo economic security by not fully developing savings." See also the Virginia's Department of Social Services. (2006). Self-Sufficiency Standard for Virginia for 2006. Available at: <http://www.wowonline.org/economic-security-in-the-states/virginia/> Accessed on August 26, 2013.

⁷ See also the City's draft master plan for more details on the loss of affordable housing in the area.

⁸ On the regional cost of food see: USDA. "Food Environment Atlas." Available at: <http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-environment-atlas.aspx#.UhyphushcY> Accessed on July 12, 2013. See also cost of meal estimates at by Feeding America. Feeding America. "Map the Meal Gap." Available at: <http://feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/hunger-studies/map-the-meal-gap.aspx> Accessed on July 12, 2013.

⁹ Newman, K.S., & O'Brien, R.L. (2011). *Taxing the poor: Doing damage to the truly disadvantaged*. Berkeley, CA: University of California.

¹⁰ An income level that is twice the poverty line is close to one-half the city's median household income. One-half the median household income is a standard measure of relative poverty (a way to take into account geographic differences in the cost of living). Alexandria's median household income was \$81,573 for the three-year average, and half of that is roughly \$40,000. This boosts our confidence that the population below twice the poverty threshold is a rough, conservative estimate of the size of the population that is struggling with self-sufficiency in Alexandria. In addition, a recent study by the University of Virginia's Weldon Cooper Center found that a poverty line adjusted for cost of living would increase poverty in Northern Virginia, excluding Fairfax County, by approximately 66 percent. See Cable, D.A. (May 2013). "The Virginia Poverty Measure: An Alternative Poverty Measure for the Commonwealth." Available at: <http://www.coopercenter.org/demographics/VPM>. Accessed on July 12, 2013.

¹¹ Thiehn, L. (June 2004). Emergency providers help poor households put food on the table. *Amber Waves*, 2, 22-29. Washington, DC: ERS, USDA. Available at: <http://purl.umn.edu/129604> Accessed on July 12, 2013.

¹² Reconciling this to the frequent statement that providers could serve more clients without reducing quality or quantity of food is difficult. This seeming contradiction could arise because cutting back on services is disturbing to charity providers and those instances when they did have to cut back stands out in their memory. Likewise, when asked if they can do more, charities may respond overly optimistically. Thus, these responses may indicate that serving an increased number of clients is possible for short periods or that a “seldom” or “sometimes” lack of sufficient food at the charities is rarer than those terms would indicate.

¹³ When referring to the survey, “regularly” is the sum of “every time or most times” and “often” responses.

¹⁴ USDA. (2013). The Food Assistance Landscape. Economic Information Bulletin No. 109. Available at http://www.ers.usda.gov/media/1060737/eib-109_single-pages.pdf Accessed on July 12, 2013.

¹⁵ Daponte, B. O. (2002). To What Degree Does Food Assistance Help Poor Households Acquire Enough Food? Available at <http://www.heinz.cmu.edu/research/7full.pdf> Accessed on July 12, 2013.

¹⁶ USDA. (2012). “Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Linkages with the General Economy.” Available at [http://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-\(snap\)/economic-linkages.aspx](http://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-(snap)/economic-linkages.aspx) Access on July 12, 2013.

¹⁷ Data available for download from the USDA’s Food Atlas at <http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-environment-atlas/data-access-and-documentation-downloads.aspx>

¹⁸ Generally, households need to have a gross monthly income below 130% of the poverty guidelines to qualify for SNAP, thus this is a conservative estimate, which also does not count those temporarily poor enough to qualify due to income shocks.

¹⁹ See p.13 of: USDA, FNS. (2009). SNAP State Outreach Plan Guidance. Available at: http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/outreach/guidance/Outreach_Plan_Guidance.pdf Accessed on July 12, 2013.

²⁰ Alexandria’s rate is about that of the state (which was 8.3%) and higher than Arlington (7.0%) and Fairfax (6.8%). Data from the CDC’s National Vital Statistics System “2008 Birth Data - County Detail.” Available at <http://205.207.175.93/Vitalstats/Common/Login/Login.aspx> Accessed July 12, 2013.

²¹ See FRAC’s various publications summarizing the benefits of participation in WIC, available at : <http://frac.org/reports-and-resources/publications-archives/#wic> Accessed July 12, 2013.

²² Andreyeva, T., Luedicke, J., Middleton, A. E., Long, M. W., & Schwartz, M. B. (2012). Positive influence of the revised special supplemental nutrition program for women, infants, and children food packages on access to healthy foods. *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*, 112, 850-858.

²³ Share Our Strength. (2013). “Ending Childhood Hunger: A Social Impact Analysis.” Presentation at National Anti-Hunger Conference. See also: FRAC. (2011). “Breakfast for Learning.” Available at: <http://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/breakfastforlearning.pdf> and FRAC. (2011). “Breakfast for Health.” Available at: <http://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/breakfastforhealth.pdf> All accessed July 12, 2013.

²⁴ Kimbro, R., & Rigby, E. (2010). Federal food policy and childhood obesity: A solution or part of the problem? *Health Affairs*, 29, 411-418.

²⁵ Students not eligible for free or reduced-priced meals can purchase breakfasts and lunches at a price that is also subsidized by the federal government (although they are often called “paid” meals for simplicity). However, as described later in this section, schools may elect to serve all students breakfast for free through “universal breakfast.”

²⁶ FRAC. (2013). School Breakfast Scorecard School Year 2011-2012. Available at: <http://frac.org/reports-and-resources/publications-archives/#breakfast> Accessed July 12, 2013.

²⁷ October is often used as a representative month in such analyses when complete data is not available in an easily accessible format.

²⁸ FRAC. Expanding School Breakfast Participation. Available at: <http://frac.org/federal-foodnutrition-programs/school-breakfast-program/breakfast-in-the-classroom/> Accessed July 12, 2013.

²⁹ FRAC. Expanding School Breakfast Participation. Available at: <http://frac.org/federal-foodnutrition-programs/school-breakfast-program/breakfast-in-the-classroom/> Accessed July 12, 2013.

³⁰ USDA. Food Access Research Atlas. Available at: <http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-access-research-atlas.aspx#.Uhyxfhushca> Accessed July 12, 2013.
