

For more updates on the Greater Cleveland Food Bank's response to COVID-19, please visit www.greaterclevelandfoodbank.org/give-help/donate-food-funds/covid19

Greater Cleveland Food Bank
COVID-19 Update
March 18, 2020

At the Greater Cleveland Food Bank, we continue to be flexible, nimble and proactive as our entire team copes with the unknown. As one of our staff members so eloquently said today, “we need to get comfortable with the uncomfortable.”

Before we share our updates and the newest twists affecting our day-to-day operations, the latest numbers on unemployment filings in Ohio provide perspective on the enormity of the need for our services in the days to come: last Sunday, 536 claims were filed; this Sunday, 11,995 and as of Monday, 36,645.

March 19, we will hold our monthly produce distribution but with a twist – it will be a drive through event. We are expecting a large turnout and the Cleveland Police and County Sheriff are helping us with traffic control. We are implementing safety measures for our staff, volunteers and clients to ensure that this event runs smoothly and achieves its purpose – get food to families, seniors and individuals who need it. We are piloting a new app and we are hopeful that, since this distribution will be paperless, we can get food boxes into car trunks and send folks on their way with minimal disruption or endless waiting. In addition to fresh produce, emergency boxes containing seven days of nonperishable food will be provided, courtesy of CareSource. These will be the first of many emergency boxes we distribute.

We've been tracking agency closures to have a better idea of the gaps in service. Also, many of our agency partners have shifted their methods of operation and that too affects the people they serve as well as how we can help them.

Calls to our Help Center have tripled in volume since Monday and our staff is providing callers with updated information on where they can turn for food. **The Help Center's phone number is 216-738-2067.** Our Outreach team has been working in-house given the number of cancellations of external events and in regard to their health. The fact we have extra hands and hearts on a daily basis has provided to be so helpful.

The need for more and more shelf stable food for emergency food boxes has reminded us of the importance of our volunteers to fill those boxes. And, it has reinforced the fact that we are close to being out of space – in fact, we are bringing in a trailer to store product.

Of course, the purchase of lots and lots of shelf stable product as well as other expenses for more kids' backpacks means additional unexpected expenses on top of what is necessary for all of our regular distributions. The COVID-19 response efforts must take place so the need for additional funds can't be understated. Our estimate for one week is \$170,000 and that is in addition to our normal operating expenses of \$473,000. Because so many fundraising activities have been cancelled and employer events put on hold, we are concerned about a dip in our fundraising just at the time we need more funds. If you or someone you know would like to help, go to www.GreaterClevelandFoodBank.org/Give. Donors are beginning to step up and we were able to announce an online matching gift fund today. We are so grateful.

Of course, all of these changes have affected our kitchen operations and we've had to shift and adjust on the types of meals we make due to cut backs on congregate meals and the need for more frozen meals and bagged meals for "grab & go."

While large organized groups of volunteers have canceled, once we put the call out and explained our need, individual volunteers have shown up and done yeoman's work. We've been practicing social distancing and continue to work hard at it. We will be sharing on our website some additional guidance about volunteers – items to consider before signing up as well as things to think about in terms of risk profiles. Check it out here: www.Greaterclevelandfoodbank.org/volunteer

Today, during the Governor's press conference, he announced that the Ohio National Guard will be helping food banks among other emergency responders. The Ohio Association of Food Banks made the request earlier this week for each of the twelve food banks across the State, and we appreciate the Governor for providing this additional manpower. While the details are still being worked out, we expect that they will help us with packing boxes in our warehouse, directing traffic at drive through pantries, and food deliveries to our agencies and/or clients.

In closing, this bears repeating: raising money to help us do all of the above is more critical than ever. To help, please go to: www.GreaterClevelandFoodBank.org/Give

Another day of amazing work and effort by staff, volunteers and supporters.

Focus on possibility and who can help and how.