



The Power of Partnerships: A Food Bank and YMCA Model



Introduction

There is a well-known African proverb that says “it takes a village.” This sentiment certainly applies to many facets of life and is exemplified in the Mystic Community Market in Medford, Massachusetts, an initiative brought to life by The Greater Boston Food Bank (GBFB) and the Mystic Valley YMCA (formerly the Malden YMCA).

The role of the “village” and the importance of forging lasting and strategic partnerships with a diversity of stakeholders has been top of mind for the GBFB team, who has worked to create and sustain an impactful relationship for years with Community-Based Organizations across Eastern Massachusetts.

The partnership behind the Mystic Community Market, which arose from a chance encounter at a community leadership meeting, has been a catalyst for change in Medford, resulting in almost five and a half million pounds of food being distributed to people throughout the city and its surrounding neighbors within the first two years. Once one of the cities with the highest unmet gap in food security in Eastern Massachusetts (ranking in the top three for GBFB’s service area), Medford is now no longer even on the list.

The partnership that informed the development of the Mystic Community Market paved the way for two other successful GBFB/YMCA collaborations, which required the same kind of stakeholder involvement to make them successful.

A Chance Encounter

While this shift in Medford food insecurity rates took a village of stakeholders to realize, ranging from the internal staff at GBFB to a dedicated team at the YMCA to a range of civic actors, the seeds of this partnership were sown in the Fall of 2017 at a community gathering.

Carol Tienken, GBFB Chief Operating Officer, attended a breakfast for community leaders hosted by Wegman's (a local grocery store) in advance of the new Medford store's opening. Tienken was a frequent participant in such community events, unaware at the time that this day would ignite a multi-year effort. At the breakfast, she met Debbie Amaral, CEO, and President of the Mystic Valley YMCA.

Both there to represent their organizations, Tienken and Amaral, hit it off, discussing the potential of connecting the YMCA's Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) snack program to GBFB and more. Seeing a lot of synergies in their work and interests, the two agreed to stay in touch. As Tienken shares: "You know, oftentimes when you meet people, you have a conversation, you promise you're going to get together, and it never happens. And then you have the one or two that come along where it's clear; we are aligned." This was one such alignment.

YMCA

When Debbie attended the Wegman's breakfast, the YMCA was not heavily active in the food assistance space, aside from offering breakfast and lunch to its childcare programs, which had been running for 30+ years. The Mystic Valley YMCA had never done grocery distribution, and this was not something necessarily on the organization's radar.

One suggestion that came out of the meeting between Amaral and Tienken was that the YMCA use the CACFP program to source food from food banks for its programming. While Amaral was initially hesitant to take food from other deserving programs, she applied for the YMCA to receive food for its snack program and began distributing food to housing developments throughout Medford. These efforts were met with initial enthusiasm. Stakeholders wanting to see these efforts scaled up suggested that the YMCA do a home backpack program; however, Amaral was hesitant. She shared that most backpack programs included foods that at least her kids "would eat before they ever got home. You end up with yogurt, fruit, and maybe cereal," she said. "It's very little, and is meant for the child and doesn't help the whole family. If we can give people groceries, that's more meaningful and more substantial for families."

This thinking informed the YMCA's decision in January 2018 to begin distributing grocery items to other outlets in the area, and from there, Amaral said, "it just kept growing."

Addressing Food Insecurity in Medford

While Amaral and Tienken's meeting fueled the YMCA's focus on food distribution in Medford and the surrounding area, a larger movement was happening in Medford that had begun months prior. In 2017, Medford was third on the GBFB's list of most food insecure communities at only 36% of the organization's three meal a day goal (a deficit of 700K meals). As a resident of Medford and a leader within GBFB, Tienken had been looking at Medford and other high-need areas such as Fall River and Quincy with her team for some time. Using the data generated from her internal team, as well as the Map the Meal gap data from Feeding America, Medford was identified as a high-priority area.

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—Debbie Amaral,
CEO and President
of the Mystic Valley YMCA

In May and June of 2017, GBFB was afforded a meeting with the newly inaugurated mayor, Stephanie M. Burke, see the timeline in [Figure 1](#), to discuss the urgency of Medford's meal gap and the gravity of its findings.

Tienken shared that Mayor Burke just "got it," and agreed to further conversations, committing time and staff to explore hunger reduction in Medford. These conversations grew over the summer of 2017, and GBFB escorted Mayor Burke to the North Suburban WIC Program mobile market in Malden to encourage more Medford residents to participate in the programming and use the shuttle that would take them from Medford City Hall.

In parallel, GBFB was also visiting pantries throughout Medford to understand if there was an opportunity for expanding its distribution to meet Medford's growing need. While offering critical services, existing pantries in the area were unable to take on additional programming at the time.

As a result, GBFB began to explore the idea of starting its own pantry to then transition to a community partner. Tienken shares, "our original intent was to have a GBFB pantry in Medford that we would then transition to a community partner in Medford. But that got a lot of pushback from the community that said, 'no, it must be somebody already established in the community that is doing this.'"

At the same time, others recognized the need in Medford as well. Syrah McGivern, the coordinator for Mass in Motion, a statewide movement that promotes opportunities for healthy eating and active living, established the Medford Food Security Task Force to better understand food insecurity in the city and develop solutions for tackling it. The task force was volunteer-led and included local community members, and representatives from organizations that work on hunger and health-related services for Medford residents, including the Medford Housing Authority, Project Bread, Food Link, GBFB, Mystic Valley YMCA, Medford Public Schools, the Medford Farmers Market, and Community Gardens. The group began meeting in August 2017 to combine efforts on getting Medford residents better access to food. Several collaborations have been born as a result of the groups' formation, and in September 2019 they published Medford's first Food Security Plan.

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The Breakfast Club

The Food Security Task Force was not the only group to gather. In fact, Tienken, Burke, and Amaral, along with Mea Quinn Mustone from the Medford School Committee had established a meeting of their own over breakfast. Taking place every week at a local cash-only breakfast cafe in the heart of Medford, these informal meetings served as a mechanism to discuss ideas, share updates, and most importantly, build relationships.

As Tienken shared, "building trust with partners in the community was critical," as this work requires a huge amount of trust and transparency. Many people would join these breakfast meetings intermittently, and it was in one of these meetings that Amaral shared her interest in running a permanent food distribution operation at the YMCA.

As Tienken noted, "Debbie just stepped up and said, we can do this. I actually thought she was crazy... As you know, with any new and great idea, you have to have somebody who's crazy in leadership and who is just so talented that they don't let anything stop them. Those people who are really convinced that they can get things off the ground. Debbie is one of those people."

Passion meets Planning and Persistence

While the passion, motivation, and knowledge were all there to meet the meal gap in Medford, the question then became how to actually do it. As Jonathan Tetrault, GBFB's Vice President of Community Impact, shares, this partnership required bold and innovative thinking. While there were two other cities in greater need in the GBFB's service area, Medford was a partnership of both need and opportunity. Tetrault shares that you have to identify existing assets in the community and mobilize and support those already doing the work.

Even before Amaral expressed her interest in running a food distribution program, Tetrault and the larger GBFB team were conducting informal asset mapping, questioning who they knew and who could be mobilized within the communities of greatest need.

GBFB knew they wanted to help support a best-in-class pantry, and to identify the best location, they focused on partnerships and people. He shared: "Medford could have been number two or number four in need, but since the YMCA was the right partner and willing to engage, this is why we went with Medford."

Central to this decision was community involvement. As Tienken shared, the original idea of creating a GBFB-led pantry was met with skepticism because the effort would have been too top-down and led by people who do not necessarily live, work, and invest in the community.

Reiterating the importance of community, Tetrault said, "you have to have local involvement and local ownership. There are just so many examples where somebody from somewhere else tries to decide what's good for an area, with the best of intentions, with the most robust of resources, and it fails. If you're not grounded in community, your efforts to affect change are really going to be stunted."

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Vice President of Community Impact
at The Greater Boston Food Bank

The YMCA had this rapport in the community and was already embedded in Medford. They were also better positioned to include community voices than perhaps GBFB was as an outside food distribution organization with a much larger service area.

Importantly, the YMCA was also an established organization with back-of-the-house infrastructure, staffing, facilities, an HR team, a fundraising team, and brand awareness. All of this indicated that there would be a good chance that their team could sustain the effort long-term without GBFB being compelled to remain in an oversight capacity. The relationship was also clearly delineated in terms of expertise. GBFB brought the expertise in sourcing and moving high-quality food in large volumes, whereas the YMCA had local expertise and was already established and well trusted within the community. This meant The Greater Boston Food Bank was responsible for providing the high-quality food, while the YMCA's responsibility was to move food the last mile and ensure it got to people and families in Medford and its surrounding communities.

An Innovative Funding Proposal

Given GBFB's interest in supporting a strategic partnership, the GBFB team set aside funding for such an initiative in its budget under the umbrella of Capacity Building. At the time, GBFB had an already established Capacity Building Grant Program, which is now called the Community Investment Grant. However, even though the budget was allocated, significant internal work was needed to identify how this funding would be covered in the short term as well as how it would be sustained over time. Tetrault shared that the food bank had never made a multi-year funding commitment to a

food pantry before. “We had never funded operations before,” he said. “We had a grant program, but that was focused on capital goods. You buy a truck, you buy a refrigerator, you buy a shelf. It’s all a one-time purchase. And this was a much deeper level of commitment. And we were putting our brand on the line and our expertise on the line to say, we’re going to change the narrative in Medford. And we had never done that before.”

Despite the fact that it had never been done before and posed some initial challenges, internal support from leadership was present. As Tetrault shared, it’s critically important to have internal champions within leadership on board in order to make these bold moves, and both the GBFB CEO, Catherine D’Amato, and COO, Carol Tienken were staunch supporters.

Working closely with the YMCA, the GBFB team crafted a budget of what would be required for the facility, operating costs, and a structure for how to scale down GBFB’s overhead support over time. As Tienken shared, Tetrault and his team worked diligently to make sure the budget was as cost-effective as possible while still keeping the operation best in class. This planning required forecasting to determine how many clients could be served by the site. In December of 2019, an MOU was signed between the YMCA and GBFB which outlined a three-year funding commitment with increased investment from the YMCA and reduced support from GBFB year after year. The first year (2020) included \$250,000 to cover annual operating costs and initial start-up costs (operating costs made up \$180,000 while around \$50,000 was allocated for start-up costs). In year two (2021), this support decreased to \$130,000 (covering only a portion of operating costs) and was reduced to \$90,000 in year three (2022), covering only a portion of operating costs.

Once the budget and necessary support had been identified, a gift of \$100,000 came from the Sidney and Deanna Wolk Family Foundation to cover start-up costs and partial operating costs for year one. The remainder of the funding came from GBFB’s general funds that were raised and budgeted for this initiative.

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This funding structure was the first of its kind for GBFB and presents a unique example of how food banks can explore community partnerships in the future.

Identifying an Accessible Location

A core part of identifying the amount of funding required for the pantry and its operations was to determine the location and format of the site. Across a number of stakeholder conversations, finding the location was identified to be the most challenging aspect of the work.

Not only was a site needed that could host cold storage and meet food safe storage conditions, but it also needed to be accessible for large trucks that deliver food every week as well as the community. Community accessibility was the highest consideration.

As Tienken and Amaral shared, finding the right location goes well beyond finding a big building. It entailed, making sure that it was on a public transportation line, making sure that it had parking, being strategic about hours of operation to ensure the site was open during high traffic times and more. This was a job that everyone involved took part in. For example, former Medford Mayor Burke shared that everyone pitched in and her team watched real estate listings every week. She said, “It was on the calendar to check listings for 3000 square ft. buildings and try to find something in the city. We had our network of realtors trying to find us something. We knew it had to be a manageable program in order to get it off the ground. And at the time we were hoping somebody would donate space so that we could do this.”

While the Mayor's team was exploring real estate listings, Amaral was driving around in her car. She said, "I looked at our three [YMCA] service areas: Malden, Medford, and Everett, and I looked at where they fell on the list of The Greater Boston Food Bank's meal gap. I actually drove around different locations with Google maps up to see where there was a point where the three communities could kind of meet. A bus stop was important to me, and easy access from Everett and Malden."

For Tienken, these drives to find a location by whatever means possible were a core part of the effort's success. She said, "the biggest challenge was finding the brick and mortar location. If Debbie wasn't Debbie, I don't think we would have been nearly as successful."

It was on one of these drives in August of 2019 that Amaral passed the Walnut Street Center, a non-profit human services agency founded in 1970 that provides comprehensive supports to adults with intellectual disabilities. Recognizing the location was just off highway 93 and ideally located from a logistics perspective, she decided to go in and speak with the Executive Director, Carolyne Guffey.

Over a series of conversations, an agreement was formed with the Walnut Street Center for a three year lease. In addition to being an ideal location logistically, there was a nice synergy within the partnership that one wouldn't find in a stand-alone building. For example, Tienken shared that "the goal was for Walnut Street Center members to use the market as an opportunity for job training skills by packing bags, and then maybe graduate to get a part-time job at a grocery store, bagging groceries."

From the Walnut Street Center perspective, Guffey added that they saw this as an opportunity to become more involved in the Medford community and to support both their employees who may need to use the market's services as well as the individuals they support.

While these synergies provided an opportunity to service the community in ways that expanded beyond food, using a collaborative space always brings challenges. For example, Tienken, Amaral and Guffey all shared that keeping the Walnut Street members' needs a priority in the space and not disrupting their care required creative solutions given the public would need to enter a building with folks who are at risk. As Tienken shared, "it could be challenging to determine how to keep Walnut Street Center members in a safe and uninterrupted space while still being welcoming and open to the community." It can also be challenging to manage dual operations, given that one operation may restrict the other.

As a newcomer to food distribution operations, Guffey learned that there are many important questions to ask before deciding if you can host a food distribution operation, some of which she did not know to ask at the time.

A Mini Trader Joe's

In addition to physical location, how the experience felt to residents was supremely important. Research has shown that widespread stigma exists around accessing food assistance programs and many pantry experiences can traumatize clients accessing food. For Amaral and the entire team involved, combatting this stigma and creating a welcoming environment where people chose what foods they wanted was top of mind and a core priority. This was a huge driving factor in the naming of the distribution site, as well as in how products were displayed. Rather than call it a food pantry, Amaral vetted different names with community members before landing on the Mystic Community Market.

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The concept of the market extended well beyond the name. As Tienken said, before the pandemic, the Mystic Community Market “was like a baby Trader Joe’s, you know, the look and feel of it was much more like something someone would feel if they went into the front door of any grocery establishment. That kind of dignity was really important to Debbie. And we talked about it a lot.”

This dignity not only extended to the way produce was displayed on the shelves but also to the way information was collected from clients. Rather than gathering paper forms or asking for information repeatedly from residents, which can often trigger all of the negative experiences of accessing resources including embarrassment and shame, Amaral worked to digitize intake forms, utilizing Microsoft forms at first before working to develop a new online ordering platform called Your Market. Your Market is currently deployed and under continuous improvement with 15 agencies representing 38 pantries and markets in Massachusetts. This is part of a growing partnership to pilot the Your Market tool with GBFB’s partners and others interested in exploring the technology.

Amaral said, “Even now, we’re working on our ordering systems so that people can get what they want in a better way. To me, what is important is asking how people can have a dignified experience. How do I bring you in and not ask you the same question 20 times? When you come in, how many times should I ask you what city you’re from? How many kids you have and if you’ve been here before this date. And if you decide you have to use a different market, why should they ask you the same questions? With a scan tag, we can just scan your tag which shares this information. When I go shopping, I have a loyalty card. So why shouldn’t you have a loyalty card here?”

Another element Amaral has rolled out is registering in privacy from the comfort of one’s home. Eventually, she has dreams of making Your Market like Instacart and using the platform to measure and show impact. For the platform development, Amaral has raised over \$200,000 from United Way, GBFB, Brockton Area Hunger Network, an anonymous donor designated fund and ABCD. Bi-monthly user groups are also held to discuss bugs and modifications and continuously improve the platform.

The Opening

With everything in place, the Mystic Community Market had its soft opening on February 3rd, 2020 before the grand public opening on Valentine’s Day, February 14th.

In between the two, a joint resolution was signed by the newly elected Medford Mayor Breanna Lungo-Koehn, Medford City Council, and the Medford School Committee pledging to make Medford Hunger Free by 2028, which was aligned with GBFB’s campaign at the time. This pledge was the result of hundreds of hours and dedication from the Medford Food Security Task Force, including several GBFB team members who provided the group with the language that would later be adopted. At the time, GBFB had a strategic goal of working with communities in its service area to make hunger-free pledges, which was a core part of the work leading up to the Hunger Free pledge in Medford.

While the former Mayor, Stephanie Burke, had been a longtime breakfast club member, a dedicated supporter of the Mystic Community Market, and a strategic partner throughout its development, Mayor Breanna Lungo-Koehn took over as Medford’s 32nd Mayor in November 2019 and was Mayor of Medford at the time the resolution was established and the Mystic Community Market opened. While many political transitions often come with shifts in policy agendas, Lungo-Koehn

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understood the gravity of food insecurity in Medford and embraced and continued to support the Mystic Community Market initiative. That continuity of leadership in the Mayor's office during the transition was critical in continuing the community-led support the Market experienced.

The team at GBFB worked tirelessly to ensure the opening's success with Jonathan Tetrault and Daniel Taitelbaum, Director of Business and Data Analytics, lifting tables and chairs and stocking shelves well into the late hours of the night on the eve of its opening. The next day, elected officials and prominent government officials, including U.S. Congresswoman and now Assistant Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives Katherine Clark (D-MA 5th District), Medford residents, and leaders from all three organizations involved in the partnership were in attendance to celebrate the community's ability to identify and successfully address the unmet nutritional needs of its residents. In addition to Medford, the Mystic Community Market would serve the surrounding communities of Malden, Somerville and beyond.

Speaking from the opening Mayor Lugo-Koehn said, "the key to our City's success in ending hunger by 2028 can be summed up in one word: partnerships. Partnerships within our City, with individual residents, non-profit organizations, houses of worship, and city departments, as well as those with neighboring communities and regional organizations."

This was reiterated by U.S. Representative Katherine Clark whose office was very supportive of the market's development and an integral stakeholder in its success. As someone who was personally very invested in the Malden YMCA and the Walnut Street Center, she said, "Each of us has to be involved to truly put an end to hunger. Collective efforts like our new food pantry here in Medford, led by our incredible local leaders, are key to ensuring that no one in our community goes to bed hungry. By working together and leading with compassion, I know we can make Eastern Massachusetts hunger free...!"

The goal at the time of opening was to distribute 200,000 meals to community members in need in just the first year of operation; however, with the onset of the pandemic, over two million pounds of food were distributed in 2020 alone. Since the market opened its doors, they have served thousands of families struggling with food insecurity every month. Over their first two years of operations, they distributed approximately 6 million pounds of food to those seeking assistance.

A Serendipitous Situation

Despite being a partnership and initiative that took three years to build, it took a little over three weeks for everything to change with the onset of the coronavirus. As such, it is impossible to examine its impact without COVID playing a central role.

As Tienken shared, beyond the strength of the hunger-free pledge and the momentum generated at the market's opening, "the real strength came a month later when unemployment rates were suddenly at 17%. People weren't being able to get anything to eat, and Debbie and I kept looking at each other going, what would Medford do, if this market was not here? I mean, this was just complete serendipity that it was there, we could be there and that there was food."

By the end of March 2020, most businesses in Medford had paused operations, including local YMCAs who were forced to close much—if not all—of their programming. Because regular community programming was halted, there were both excess staff and time to run food programming.

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—Katherine Clark
U.S. Representative
MA 5th Congressional District

Tienken shared, “a lot of YMCAs suddenly picked up a food component because COVID shut down all the daycare programs very quickly. There was no more school. No kids learning how to fence or play basketball. So they needed something else to do. Debbie was already deep into feeding people, so she was able to keep some of her team employed by turning around and focusing on food. Several other YMCAs also decided that they didn’t have a focus on food, but they were going to have a focus on food because people needed to be fed. They didn’t have a reason for being, you know, none of their mission could be upheld at that point. So they could apply for PPP loans, and continue to engage some of their team and keep them employed by refocusing themselves on feeding people.” The YMCA branches that did this, primarily in the form of mobile markets, were in Boston, Southcoast, Lowell, and Methuen, and GBFB forged some kind of partnership with many YMCAs in its service area during the pandemic.

While many YMCAs were able to quickly pivot and meet the growing need for food in the hardest hit cities, the ability to focus on customer choice was close to impossible with the pandemic. As Amaral shared, as much as they worked and strived for the Mystic Community Market to be a market and not simply a pre-selected grocery distribution site, for safety reasons this was impossible with the pandemic. Starting in late March and in April 2020, operations shifted to a no-contact drive thru pick up model. As the pandemic months stretched on, however, the team was able to create a separate farmer’s market table where clients could supplement their pre-selected groceries with fresh items from local stores in a socially distanced manner.

Amaral said, “We’ve set up a system now where there’s choice outside too. So you have a basic box, but then you pull your car over, and you can go to like this little farmer’s market.” A swap table was also established where unwanted items could be left or exchanged.

This remains the format for the Mystic Community Market, however, Amaral reports that in-person, in-market appointments are slowly being added, and she plans to return to the market’s original format by late 2022. With the addition of the Your Market digital platform, she also hopes to begin exploring client-selected pre-orders online with drive-thru pick-up. Her longer-term dreams are to transition to be a one-stop-shop within a larger space that supports ancillary social services including cooking demonstrations and SNAP enrollment.

As with the rest of the world, Medford was hit hard by the pandemic, and the Mystic Community Market was what many have called serendipity.

As Tienken mused, “I don’t know what we would’ve done for Medford, if we had not had the Mystic Community Market when COVID hit. We would have been at a loss because we did not have the outlet in Medford to meet the need. Debbie and the Mystic Community Market went from zero to a hundred in less than a month.”

Catherine Lynn, GBFB Vice President of Communications and Public Affairs, added “I think people are under the impression that we’ve always worked with YMCAs or don’t necessarily realize how serendipitous that first partnership was for GBFB. That first YMCA partnership was critical for our ability to scale our operations with other Y’s during COVID and replicate these types of strategic partnerships.”

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The Greater Boston Food Bank

Why YMCA?

While a partnership in Medford with any stakeholder would have been essential prior to the pandemic, many involved stakeholders credit the YMCA specifically with the initiative's success.

For example, Tetrault said that what he's learned through working with the YMCA is that "their teams are just very can-do. There's no challenge that is a brick wall for them. They're very positive, very creative, and innovative and if there's a barrier, they figure out a way around it and just keep going. And there's never a question of if they're going to do it. The question is always how. That level of commitment has just been an incredible asset and really refreshing to work with a partner that works like that."

From a strategic point of view he added that the YMCA was able to scale operation in a way that would have overwhelmed any brand new organization or even an older organization with a brand new program. "I mean, it was three weeks old when COVID hit," he shared. "They had no time to get used to things. So that ability to pivot was really important, and it has caused us to seek out more of those types of partnerships and go to the organizations that have the infrastructure and have the trust in the community and find out what they're willing to do with us."

Lynn reiterated this sharing, "YMCAs are a great natural partner for food banks and a strategic one that food banks across the country should be really looking at as a sustainable model."

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—Jonathan Tetrault,
Vice President of Community Impact
at The Greater Boston Food Bank



Three Regions, Three Models

Seeing the synergies between the YMCA and GBFB and witnessing the success of the Mystic Community Market in Medford led to the development of two other GBFB and YMCA partnerships in the Southcoast region and in Boston in 2020, see [Figure 2](#), highlighting the critical importance of partnership. As Tetrault said, “Good partner relationships, beget, more good partner relationships.”

This was evidenced by the willingness of the Malden YMCA staff to make more internal YMCA connections. Tienken shared, “In the Flintstones, Fred, was the Grand Poohbah of the lodge, right? So I always referred to Debbie as the Grand Poohbah of the YMCA’s in Massachusetts. They have a statewide association and it just happened that she was moving into the presidential role, which she kept for an extra year because of COVID. This was really important because Debbie had been in the Y system for like 25 years, so she knew a lot of people in various roles, and it made a huge difference for the food bank to go knocking on a door when Debbie was introducing us. It made all the difference because we went from being, oh, that great big gorilla that hands out food to being well, Debbie doesn’t think these guys are so bad, so maybe they’re not so bad.”

While Debbie was integral in making other YMCA introductions, particularly to the Southcoast YMCA which would spearhead the Full Plate project, the two subsequent partnerships that followed were not replications of the Mystic Community Market model, but rather were unique and customized to the needs of each community they served.

While a brick and mortar location made sense in Medford given its high population density and its public transportation services, this was less ideal for communities on the Southcoast where there was a much lower population density and a much less robust public transportation system. In this instance, a hub and spoke system made more sense.

Tetrault said, “I think people have to have a willingness to let the context dictate what you hold onto and what you let go of in your model. If you think you found the silver bullet and it’s going to work everywhere, you need to challenge that assumption.”

Southcoast

Unlike the Mystic Community Market in Medford which began pre-pandemic, the Southcoast Full Plate project started as a response to COVID. The Full Plate Project is a mobile initiative in five participating YMCA branches (Dartmouth, Fall River, New Bedford, Swansea, and Wareham) that provides healthy food via weekly mobile markets to areas experiencing high food insecurity.

This initiative began with a mobile market and partnership with the YMCA in Fall River. GBFB had been interested in Fall River because it was a city with pre-pandemic high levels of food insecurity (one of the GBFB’s top 40 communities in need and the highest city in Bristol County). When the pandemic hit, rates of food insecurity worsened, affecting 32% of households and one of GBFB’s largest food pantries in Fall River closed due to a lack of volunteers needed to run the site, which widened the already existing meal gap.

With a successful partnership with the Malden YMCA already underway in Medford, GBFB had set aside more funding for transformational community investment to meet the growing need in their service area, and Fall River seemed like an ideal location to explore.

Conversations with the YMCA Southcoast (Fall River’s parent YMCA) started in April 2020 with an introduction by Amaral. By September, an MOU had been signed, a storage facility in Dartmouth was being constructed with ample refrigeration and freezer space to serve the community with fresh produce and perishable products, and GBFB had begun shipping food.

Christina Peretti, GBFB Assistant Director of Community Investment and one of the Full Plate Project leads said, “We had really great success with Mystic Community Market, and the connection to Southcoast came from our Mystic Community Market partners. Finding these other partnerships from a trusted partner helped ensure that it was successful, and we knew we were going with a partnership where they could make things happen quickly, and they were invested and excited.”

To act quickly amid the pandemic, GBFB and YMCA teams started a mobile market in the Fall River YMCA’s parking lot. The YMCA supplied the parking lot once a week, and GBFB supplied the truck and food. Many local officials, including the Fall River Mayor and local Senator Michael Rodrigues were engaged and supportive of this partnership and making it successful. However, they knew this one mobile market would not suffice and began to explore how to scale these efforts. From the initial introduction to the Southcoast, the GBFB team conducted site visits to all of the YMCA Southcoast locations with Robyn Branco, YMCA Southcoast’s Director of Mission Advancement, discussing size and space constraints and what would be needed to create a truly impactful program. It was in these conversations that they realized a hub and spoke model was preferable to creating a retail brick and mortar space, meaning that GBFB would ship foods in bulk to one central “hub,” which would later be distributed to the “spokes” (the mini-markets) that were being held at each of their branch locations. They

When the pandemic hit, rates of food insecurity worsened, affecting 32% of households.

quickly determined that the best place to put this hub was in Dartmouth given its larger space and access to land.

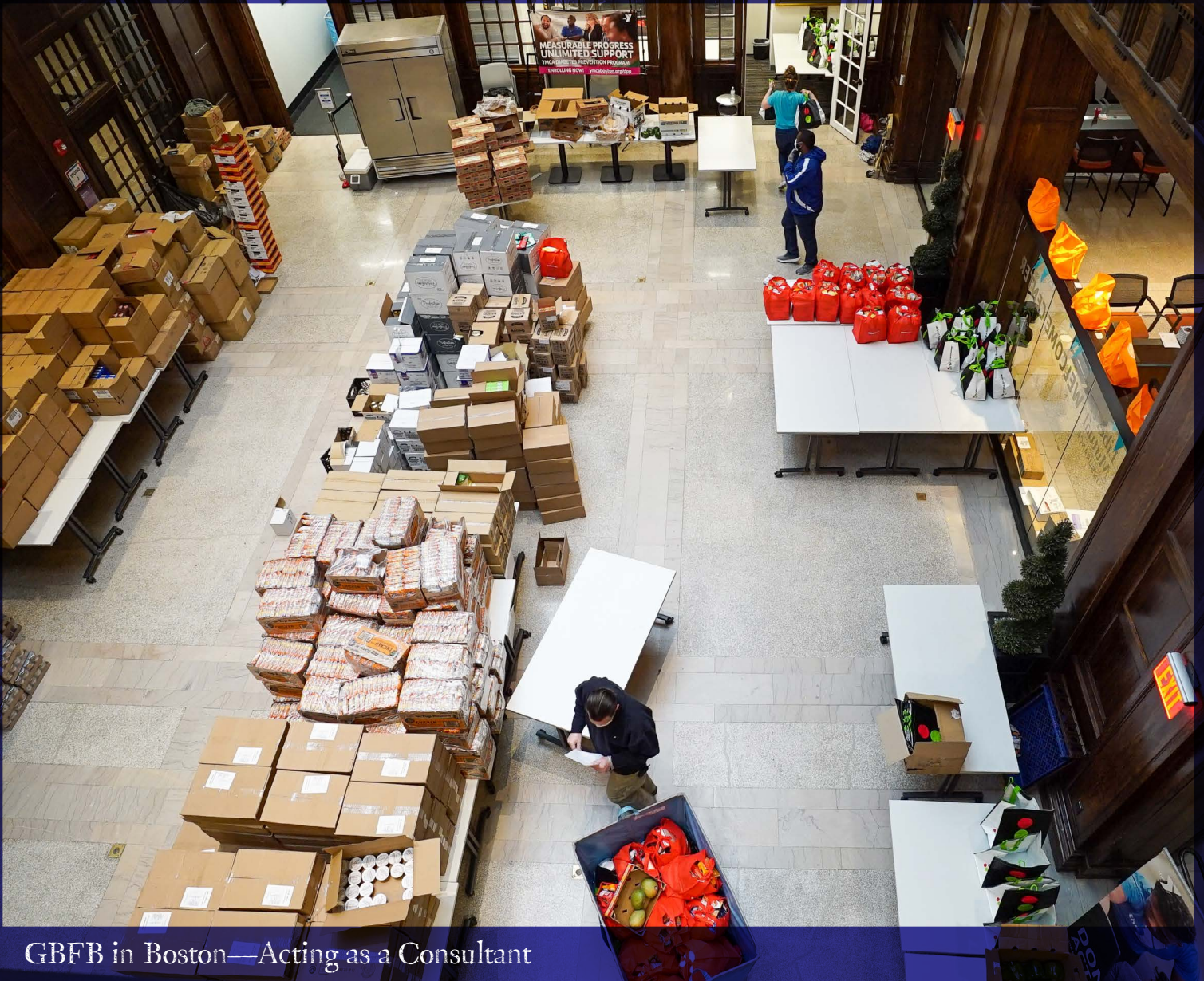
For this partnership and community, mobile markets seemed more effective given the low-population density. However, as Tetrault shared, “there’s a trade off when you go mobile. Yes, you can go directly to where the families and individuals are who need your assistance, but you’re only there when you’re there—as opposed to a brick and mortar where folks can go there whenever you’re open. If you’re there in the Fall River YMCA front lobby for two hours, it’s a much smaller window for that community, even though when you string all of your open markets together, there’s a lot of availability. It’s not a lot of availability within each of those communities. Part of identifying the right model is trying to assess those trade-offs and identify the best possible solution for that community.”

This model, which is replicated in other parts of the country, also made sense from a COVID perspective, as Peretti reflected “in the middle of COVID, starting a pantry with client shopping wasn’t really the most logical thing to do.”

While this is fundamentally a different program to the Mystic Community Market because of the distribution model, the partnership and funding paradigm are the same. As established in the MOU, funding from The Greater Boston Food Bank started in year one (2020) at a quarter of a million dollars before being reduced by approximately 28% in year two (2021) and another 70% from that in year three (2022). Donors which supported the initiative included Feeding America, the Yawkey Foundation, and others. In addition to increasing its financial commitment year after year, the YMCA Southcoast has already started to expand its reach as well, outreaching to surrounding communities in their service area to partner with other organizations and locations to do these mobile markets beyond their YMCA locations.

As with the Mystic Community Market, while these YMCAs are member organizations of GBFB and have certain metrics to use as guide posts, the goal is to be flexible to the needs of the local community. Peretti said, “there are metrics in place in the MOU but you’re not bound to that. If they feel like Wareham needs more services or a church in Dartmouth, it should certainly evolve based on the community’s need.”

The YMCA Southcoast
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GBFB in Boston—Acting as a Consultant

As with the YMCA Southcoast, the GBFB and YMCA partnership in Boston was a result of the pandemic and started with the city of Boston Mayor's Office and the Office of Food Access (now Office of Food Justice).

Amid soaring rates of hunger, particularly for senior Bostonians, the offices had started an effort to make home delivery for seniors and began to do mobile markets at low-income housing facilities. To meet the increasing need in Boston, the city dedicated substantial staff time and began looking for several different types of partners, reaching out to GBFB as a natural partner.

However, with the number of people in need continuing to skyrocket, it became clear that GBFB and their nine trucks couldn't be the only solution. While the GBFB team could direct truckloads of food to specific sites, they were not equipped to provide end-to-end service for the entire city of Boston, as Boston is just one of 190 cities and towns GBFB serves.

Around this time, the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) also reached out to GBFB to discuss options for keeping its Ride employees employed and driving. GBFB took this question to the city to explore ways of using the Ride drivers for last mile food delivery, and the city decided to engage the YMCA of Greater Boston for additional support. Similar to other YMCAs, they were

experiencing a major shift in purpose and operations in light of the pandemic and were excited to contribute.

After initial conversations, the YMCA of Greater Boston began to leverage their 13 branch locations throughout the city and set up mini food pantries in their lobbies that utilized YMCA childcare and exercise staff who were no longer working to run these programs and make home deliveries. This time around, rather than GBFB and the YMCA partnering directly, the partnership was requested by the city who asked if the GBFB would partner with the YMCA and provide food. At this point, with the positive results of the Mystic Community Market and early conversations with the YMCA Southcoast, it was clear to see how committed the YMCA team was to ending hunger. As in the case with the Malden and Southcoast YMCAs, the YMCA of Greater Boston was brought on as a GBFB member in March 2020 and started receiving food later that month, which would go on to exceed two million pounds in 2020 alone.

For this particular partnership, rather than spearhead the planning efforts, GBFB acted as a consultant, accompanying their team to different city spaces and buildings to find a warehouse space and recommend different layouts based on what they had seen work well across their Eastern Massachusetts network.

Also different than the previous two partnerships was the fundraising scheme. Instead of providing a multi-year funding commitment to make this partnership possible, the City of Boston secured more permanent funding due to the high population density, leaving GBFB to act as a consultant or expert on food distribution best practices without having to fund all efforts.

As in the Southcoast partnership, the YMCA of Greater Boston decided to utilize a hub and spoke model out of a warehouse in East Boston that was leant free of charge by a local CEO.

Wendy Zinn, Chief Partnerships & Social Responsibility Officer at the YMCA of Greater Boston shared that they “distribute to about 40 groups that are targeted in neighborhoods that really struggle with food insecurity, and it’s specifically churches and soup kitchens and other community-based groups and nonprofits and schools.” She says, “we added schools when schools came back online in the fall. So, it’s very targeted to us being the distribution center. We get the food. We pack the food, and we deliver out the food on a weekly basis.”

As of June 2022, the YMCA of Greater Boston distributed approximately 4,000 bags of groceries every week and have plans in the near future for creating a mechanism where families and individuals have more choice in the grocery selection process. As of now, that looks like a food bank on wheels, which will be filled at the distribution center with both fresh produce, perishable groceries, and shelf-stable items and then go out to two neighborhoods each day, so families can have a choice of what they get. Zinn said, “we’re super excited about the truck, but because everything grew so fast, we now also have to think about long-term strategy.”

Prior to the pandemic, Zinn reported that the YMCA of Greater Boston was providing 850,000 vended meals for kids 18 and under when school was out. However, with the new partnership, between March 2020–2021, they were able to serve over 13 million meals.

“Because everything grew so fast, we now also have to think about long-term strategy.”

—Wendy Zinn
Chief Partnerships & Social Responsibility Officer
YMCA of Greater Boston



The Power of Partnership

What these three models show is the power of partnership, persistence, and creativity. No single organization can end food insecurity alone, and the ongoing GBFB-YMCA partnership is a testament to what can happen when food banks partner with community-based organizations. While community-based organizations can help expand the reach of food banks, food banks can also help support and advocate for the work of community-based organizations, particularly those who are directly supporting their communities and intimately know their needs. As Lynn shared, the benefits are mutual and expand beyond solely food distribution. She said, “Some community partners may struggle to know about or access funding coming in from local, state, or federal governments, so there is a role that food banks can play in helping those community-based organizations access those additional resources.”

Partnerships can also be powerful tools in helping to attract more donor support. Lynn said, more and more funders are “looking to fund strategic partnerships and collaborations” and recommends leveraging those opportunities to garner more local support. While she acknowledged that joint grant applications and coordinated submissions are inherently more challenging and time-intensive, the pros can often outweigh the cons, and she said that “partnering with others can make you more attractive to a donor.”

One clear example of the power of partnerships was evidenced by the COVID stimulus package that MA Senator and Senate Ways and Means Chairman Michael Rodrigues (D- Westport) advocated for after meeting with the GBFB pre-pandemic and learning of their plans to partner with community-based organizations for local transformation.

In January 2020, just a few months before the pandemic started, GBFB met with MA Senator Michael Rodrigues, who had been appointed Chair of the Senate Committee on Ways and Means for the 2019–2020 legislative session. During the meeting, a list of the highest need communities was shared, as well as the GBFB’s strategy to expand partnerships like the ongoing one underpinning the Mystic Community Market.

Among the highest need cities was Fall River, Senator Rodrigues’s district. Together, the needs in Fall River and GBFB’s partnerships strategy helped motivate and contribute to Senator Rodrigues’s commitment to food access investments. A few months later when COVID hit, Fall River was a community in need. In summer of 2020, GBFB received \$9 million from a COVID-19 stimulus package designating funding to food banks from the state and then another \$10 million to increase its statewide food purchasing program, for a total of \$30 million. As Rodrigues shared during a GBFB event in the Spring of 2021, “Data drives investments,” and seeing the data GBFB provided and showcasing the need in his district motivated his desire to make investments in food assistance.

Lynn shared, “That was Senator Rodrigues’ leadership. He was committed and motivated by the strategy that we had put in front of him prior to the pandemic and his team was committed to working with us to identify what we needed to respond to the COVID crisis.” She added that it “all sort of fell into place because of these partnerships. In addition to filling a need, it’s important to recognize the advocacy implications of these partnerships as well.”

“It’s important to recognize the advocacy implications of these partnerships as well.”

—Catherine Lynn
Vice President of Communications
and Public Affairs,
The Greater Boston Food Bank

Applying Lessons Learned

While partnerships are challenging, Tetrault encourages other food banks to “be bold and do not underestimate the value of local partnerships and local expertise.”

While partnerships should be centered on the unique needs of each community and informed by community members and community-based organizations, there are some lessons learned in Massachusetts that may be useful to others interested in forging similar relationships.

1. A pre-requisite to partnership is that everyone has to buy into it.

Christina Peretti said: “You need buy-in from top to bottom. We do a lot of work with schools on the program side, and of course, the Principal has to be bought into it, but also the custodians, the School Nutrition staff, and the teachers. They all have to be bought into it, or else you’re going to get resistance. There has to be buy-in from top to bottom and everywhere in between.”

2. Do not try to reinvent the wheel and look for others who are already doing the work. Peretti said that it is important to “be flexible as what you go into it thinking might not be what you come out of it with, and that might be a good thing. Listen to community voices and be willing to hear what other people need, be flexible, and evolve.”

3. Find committed partners and work with them from the ground up.

Peretti said, “Often, we’re working with established pantries to try to help them with their expansion goals, so it was really special to be able to create something from the ground up. One of the challenges was working with folks who had a very limited experience with food distribution. There were a lot of unknowns on their side, so trying to help them with that was challenging, but it was special to be able to build that together.”

4. Adapt to the needs of the community. As both Tetrault and Peretti shared, success is a sustainable model that is ingrained in the community and has the flexibility to adapt based on current community events and changing needs.

5. Let go. Tetrault shared that one of his most essential pieces of advice is not to “hold any one idea too tightly, be willing to iterate, and be willing to let go.” He added, “once you learn not to hold ideas too tightly, it’s a lot of fun to see what happens.”

6. Ensure your community partners are recognized and are the ones in the limelight. There is an opportunity to use the food bank’s brand and regional leverage to let others shine. Both Tienken and Guffey shared that partnerships such as those outlined here provide great opportunities to showcase the critical work community-based organizations are leading and hopefully attract more resources to their mission.

7. Share! Collaborations form when people can work together, access greater information, and use that knowledge to meet a need. As Norma Milligan, GBFB Community Investment Associate, put it, “share your passion, share your data.”

8. Communicate, communicate, communicate! For partnerships to work and be sustained over time, frequent and open communication is key. Rachel Weil, Community Investment Associate, says, “it’s key to check in with each other and ensure you’re on the same page... Sometimes it involves extra communication, but understanding where someone’s coming from and listening is essential.”

“Be bold and do not underestimate the value of local partnerships and local expertise.”

—Jonathan Tetrault,
Vice President of Community Impact
at The Greater Boston Food Bank
and Public Affairs,
The Greater Boston Food Bank

Figure 1. Timeline

Summer 2017

- The GBFB team met with Mayor Burke to discuss food insecurity and making Medford “hunger free.”
- GBFB accompanied Mayor Burke to the Malden/WIC mobile market to encourage more Medford residents to participate
- GBFB visited pantries throughout Medford to understand if there is an opportunity for growth.

August 2017

- Mass in Motion coordinator, Syrah McGivern, created Medford Food Security Task Force which included individual residents and representatives from community-based organizations.

Fall 2017

- Carol Tienken and Debbie Amaral met at a Wegman’s community breakfast in advance of the store’s opening.

October 2017

- Malden YMCA became an agency member of GBFB.

January 2018

- GBFB met with Mayor Burke to review hunger in Medford and discuss possibility of a new pantry in Medford

February 2018

- Malden YMCA began distributing bags of fresh food at Medford High School; Malden YMCA opens a pantry within the YMCA and begins a pop-up program in Medford and Malden.

Spring 2018

- Food Security Task Force conducted a city-wide community food assessment survey

May 2018

- GBFB met with Medford and State Board of Health representatives to discuss GBFB Hunger-Free Checklist.

January 2019

- Mayor Burke, School Committee Members and GBFB met to discuss location of a potential new food pantry in Medford.

August 2019

- Malden YMCA met with Walnut Street Center to discuss possibility of leasing space at Mystic Avenue site.

September 2019

- Medford Food Plan introduced and published

November 2019

- Mayor Breanna Lungo-Koehn took over as Medford's 32nd Mayor

December 2019

- MOU signed between The Greater Boston Food Bank and the Mystic Valley YMCA

January 2020

- GBFB met with Senator Michael Rodrigues, who had been appointed Chair of the Senate Committee on Ways and Means to share the extent of food insecurity in Eastern Massachusetts and showcase its long-term partnership strategy.

February 2020

- Hunger Free Pledge presented and signed by Medford City Council and School Board
- On February 3rd, Mystic Community Market soft opened at Walnut Street Center with a goal of distributing 15,000 pounds of nutritious food per week. The official opening took place on February 14th.

March 2020

- On March 11th, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19, the disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2, a pandemic and businesses and organizations across the country close or moved remote.
- YMCA of Greater Boston joined GBFB as a member organization




September 2020

- MOU was signed with the YMCA Southcoast to establish the Full Plate Project

April 2021

- On April 20, 2021, the Full Plate Project kicked off with a special event.

Figure 2. Three Regions, Three Models

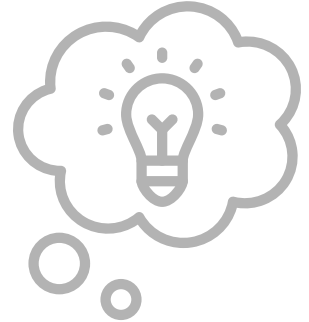
	 <p>MYSTIC COMMUNITY MARKET A Fresh Approach To A Hunger Free Community</p>	 <p>FULLPLATEPROJECT</p>	 <p>the YMCA</p>
Timeline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnership planning and preparation: August 2017 to February 2020, an official MoU was signed in December 2019. • Operational: Since February 3, 2020. Grand opening February 14, 2020 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnership planning and preparation: Spring 2020 to Spring 2021, an official MoU was signed in September 2020. • Operational: Official in person event launch on April 20, 2021 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnership planning and preparation: The YMCA of Greater Boston was brought on as a partner in March 2020 • Operational: Since March 2020
Partner	The Malden YMCA	The YMCA Southcoast	The YMCA of Greater Boston
Stakeholders	Former Medford Mayor Stephanie Burke and Current Mayor Breanna Lungo-Koehn, the Food Security Task force, the Medford School Board, and the Medford Health Department	The YMCA Southcoast	The YMCA of Greater Boston, the City of Boston Mayor's Office and the Office of Food Access
Model	One brick and mortar location focused on providing healthy food, increasing consumer choice and reducing stigma, located at 291 Mystic Ave. Medford, MA 02155.	A hub and spoke model that serves six YMCA Southcoast locations, including: Dartmouth (the Hub), Fall River, New Bedford, Swansea, Wareham, and Mattapoisett	A hub and spoke model out of a warehouse in East Boston that serves the YMCA of Greater Boston's 13 branches.
Budget	<p>Tiered funding from GBFB over 3 years that builds YMCA ownership over time:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2020: \$250,000 to cover annual operating costs (\$180,000 for operating costs and \$50,000 for start-up costs) • 2021: \$130,000 (covering only a portion of operating costs) • 2022: \$90,000 in year three 	<p>Tiered funding from GBFB that builds YMCA ownership over time:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2021: \$340,000 (startup costs (at around \$240,000 plus 100% of operating costs) • 2022: \$80,000 (covering 75% of operating costs) • 2023: \$53,000 (covering 50% of operating costs) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2021: \$40,000 startup costs for walk-in refrigeration at hub • 2022: \$15,000 mobile market equipment support
# of people served annually	12–13,000 people	9,700 on average monthly	17,000 on average monthly
Average lbs. of food distributed annually	2,804,493 pounds distributed annually (average)	960,547 pounds distributed annually (average)	7,895,126 meals distributed annually (average), including 4.8 million prepared meals 3 million pantry meals
Average households served (monthly)	Since the start of the Mystic Community Market, an average of 14,913 people have been served monthly through the Market in Medford	Since the start of the Full Plate Project, an average of 5,812 clients have been served monthly across its five locations	Since the start of the Project, an average of 16,464 clients have been served monthly across its thirteen locations

Sample Project Roadmap Checklist

There are many important considerations when starting a food distribution site! As many Mystic Community Market stakeholders shared, you don't know what you don't know. Below you can find a list of important considerations and key milestones to keep in mind as you develop your own partnership. This is by no means comprehensive of all facets of a partnership but covers some of the most important considerations to keep in mind.

Phase I—Preliminary Planning and Decisions

- Identify the community/underserved area(s)
- Identify partner(s) to manage the food distribution site
- Set up initial meetings with partner(s)
- Once on board, work with partner(s) to identify timeline and initiative scope
- Discuss and establish the scope of the new initiative and the role of your food bank (for example, will you act only as a consultant, will you provide funding, etc.?)
- Develop a working concept note with milestones (note this should be a living document that evolves over time). Milestones could include but are certainly not limited to: Distribution in pounds, delivery schedule, the number of markets and when each one will be established, distribution schedule, number of volunteers, volunteer recruitment strategy, PR schedule, estimated budget needed and more.
- Work with partner to identify space
- Explore infrastructure needs—storage space, access for trucks (paved floor, rolltop doors). Think about using truck for proposed other food pantries when truck is not in use
- Determine human resources needed including: paid staffing, volunteers, hours of operation. Compare hours of operation to other distribution sites in the area to avoid overlap.
- Identify renovations needed based on project concept
- Obtain quotes for renovation of current space and all necessary infrastructure
- Draft budget and jointly review and finalize
- Finalize budget
- Ensure buy in of deliverables and use milestones in concept note to draft a Memorandum of Understanding that is reviewed and signed by all parties



Phase II—Program Operations

- Draft vacancy announcements
- Hire staff to run pantry
- Design pantry flow and practices to be implemented
- Determine schedule of deliveries from food bank and other food sources
- Determine distribution schedule
- Plan for 3rd party services: SNAP, visiting nurses, dentists, etc.
- Purchase equipment for pantry (hand jack, refrigeration, etc.)
- Stock food pantry (place order/schedule delivery)
- Trial launch of food pantry (test distribution and coordination for minimum 2 weeks)
- Ensure all necessary staff receive food safety training
- Review food pantry best practices
- Set up necessary technology and ordering software
- Train pantry staff
- Establish delivery schedule



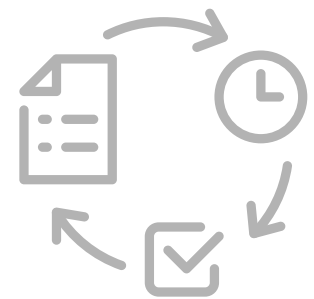
- Work with agency to establish funding streams in preparation for reduced food bank support
- Determine key performance indicators and how they will be measured and tracked over time
- Determine co-branding strategy and how each partner can support the other in outreach, awareness-raising and fundraising
- Plan for grand opening event

Phase III—Press and Launch

- Plan date for public launch and which stakeholders will need to be in attendance
- Invite speakers and plan run of show
- Develop press strategy and list of overall PR and marketing needs
- Take photos of areas for potential signage
- Determine other collateral needs (i.e. roll up banners, signage etc. with site visit)
- Design market/pantry logo and website for sharing information with clients
- Draft press release and create media list
- Plan virtual launch for spreading reach in addition to physical launch
- Send out invitation to guests and press and regularly track registration and plan follow up

Phase IV—Regular Operations

- Establish follow-up dates to assess efficiency or operations/workflow (recommend one at least in the first month of operation)
- Plan post opening press strategy and a plan for keeping press and community informed of progress
- Establish schedule and plan for routine maintenance and quality checks
- Ongoing site monitoring
- Measure, monitor and evolve goals



Partner Checklist

There are many community-based organizations that would make wonderful partners in a number of different contexts. The following list includes some elements to keep in mind when exploring if an organization would make the right partner for you.

- Have they developed good rapport and trust among residents and those they serve?
- Are they invested in the community and collaborative with other social service organizations?
- Are they well-known and do they have established brand recognition?
- How large is their operational team and do they have the necessary organizational systems in place?
- Are they missionally aligned with the food bank or would partnership be considered scope creep for their organization?
- Is there is a champion of this partnership that can create or ensure buy-in throughout the organization?
- What types of physical infrastructure do they have to operate programming ex: buildings, parking lots, trucks etc.
- What is their overall fundraising capacity? If fundraising capacity is low, are there opportunities to bolster and support this over time?



Contact

If you have questions or are interested in spearheading a similar partnership in your area, please feel free to reach out to the GBFB team at capacity@GBFB.org.

About this case study

Based on hours of interviews across The Greater Boston Food Bank and YMCA networks, this case study was developed between the Winter of 2021 and the Spring of 2022 by Cierra Martin in partnership with The Greater Boston Food Bank.

About Cierra

Cierra is a passionate designer and innovator working at the intersection of human-centered design, community, culture, and food justice. She believes redesigning our food systems and centering those with lived expertise is the only way to feed the world equitably and sustainably. Cierra holds a Master's of Science in Engineering and Management from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and a Bachelor of Arts in Commerce and Business from Rhodes College. You can learn more about her research and work at www.cierramartin.com.

About The Greater Boston Food Bank

The Greater Boston Food Bank (GBFB) is the largest hunger-relief organization in New England and among the largest food banks in the country. As the food bank for Eastern Massachusetts, GBFB is feeding people in 190 towns across the region, distributing the equivalent of nearly 100 million meals through a network of 600 dedicated food distribution partners and programs. A member of the national Feeding America network, GBFB's mission is to end hunger here. The organization remains committed to the belief that access to healthy food is a human right regardless of an individual's circumstances. Through policy, partnerships, and providing free, nutritious, and culturally responsive food, GBFB is committed to addressing the root causes of food insecurity while promoting racial, gender and economic equity in food access. For more information and to help us help others, visit us at GBFB.org, follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) (@gr8bosfoodbank) and [Instagram](#), or call us at 617.427.5200.



About the Mystic Valley YMCA

The Mystic Valley YMCA was founded in 1881 and serves Malden, Medford and Everett, MA. The Y's mission is to strengthen its communities with relevant, continually-evolving programs and services that enrich the lives of all people in spirit, mind and body. The Y is very proud of its over 140-year history of being a welcoming organization that adapts to meet the changing needs of youth, families and seniors in the communities we serve. The Y provides a wide range of healthy living and fitness programs, affordable Pre-K and school age child care, after school programs and youth community centers, food programs including markets (food pantries) and more to over 38,000 individuals annually. From 2021–2022, the Mystic Valley YMCA distributed over 50,000 free snacks and meals for youth and over 2.5 million pounds of food to over 28,000 individuals at the three markets they operate in Medford, Malden and Everett. Learn more at www.MV-YMCA.org and follow them on [Instagram @Mystic.Valley.Ymca](#) and on [Facebook @MysticValleyYMCA](#).



About the South Coast YMCA

The Y is the nation's leading nonprofit committed to strengthening communities through youth development, healthy living, and social responsibility. YMCA Southcoast's mission is to improve the spiritual, mental, social, educational, and physical conditions of all persons. The Y offers financial aid for all our programs—membership, camp, sports, and more. The Full Plate Project (FPP) is YMCA Southcoast's partnership with the Greater Boston Food Bank to reduce food insecurity in southeast Massachusetts.

About the Greater Boston YMCA

Founded in 1851 as America's first YMCA, the YMCA of Greater Boston is dedicated to improving the health of mind, body and spirit of individuals and families in our communities. We welcome people of all incomes, ages, faiths and cultures. The Y is a cause-driven organization that is for youth development, for healthy living, and for social responsibility. We believe that a strong community can only be achieved when we invest in our kids, our health, and our neighbors.