



THE LAKE COUNTY
COMMUNITY FOUNDATION
Growing Philanthropy. Building Community.

Coordinating Access to Affordable, Nutritious Food in Lake County, IL

AN IMPACT ANALYSIS OF LCCF'S 3-YEAR PROACTIVE GRANT MAKING PILOT (2017–2020)



In 2017, [The Lake County Community Foundation \(LCCF\)](#) launched a 3-year proactive grant making strategy to increase access to affordable, nutritious food across Lake County. This pilot marked the first time that LCCF had engaged in a multi-year, proactive grant making process. The program was designed to combine strategic community leadership with intentional organizational investment to build a framework to support systems change across Lake County.

[Liberty Prairie Foundation \(LPF\)](#) and [Northern Illinois Food Bank \(Food Bank\)](#) were selected as nonprofit partners. They worked collaboratively over the 3-year project to focus their efforts on fresh food distribution, education and building a more cohesive and coordinated local food system in Lake County.

Priority Communities: Antioch, Buffalo Grove, Highland, North Chicago, Waukegan and Zion.

PILOT PROGRAM DESIGN – KEY FINDINGS

This pilot provided a significant learning opportunity for LCCF’s partners, board and staff. Below is a list of key learnings that will inform the creation of future proactive grant making programs.

- **Removing Competition:** Inviting applicants to collaborate on the application process took the typically competitive nature of applying for grants out of the equation and drove innovation.
- **Cultivating Innovation:** LCCF committing to a multi-year investment cultivated trust and positioned the Food Bank and LPF to take risks with new programs that they may not have otherwise pursued.
- **Mutual Learning:** Both LPF and the Food Bank found considerable value in simply learning more about each other’s work, which allowed them to work more collaboratively and effectively.

LCCF defines food access as people having adequate income or other resources to purchase nutritious food to meet their dietary needs for a productive and healthy life. See page 6 of LCCF’s [Coordinating Access to Affordable, Nutritious Food in Lake County Impact Analysis](#) for a more comprehensive explanation.

CUMULATIVE KEY DATA POINTS AND OUTCOMES (2017-2020)

Food Distribution

- Almost 8 million pounds of nutritious food distributed to the community
- By the end of the project, the Food Bank achieved its goal to meet 75% of the meal gap in Lake County in all communities. The goal was set to 75%, because additional meals are provided in the county via SNAP benefits and other programs not tracked by the Food Bank.
- Almost 100,000 people served through the 3-year program
- 240 complete meal kits provided to local veterans

Building the System

- Creation of [Grow Lake County website](#) as a resource hub about Lake County's food system
- Almost \$75,000 reinvested in other food organizations via micro-grants, school garden grants and food pantry agency capacity building
- 45 teachers served through school garden grants and gardening tools and resources
- Launch of innovative programs, including Highwood Mobile Pantry, Rx Mobile Pantry in Round Lake, Midwest Veteran's Closet Program

Education

- Education focused on nutrition literacy, healthy cooking and gardening
- 83 educational opportunities offered; almost 750 people served through programming
- Outcomes included increased knowledge of how to make healthier food choices

RECOMMENDATIONS

Following a comprehensive review of the pilot grant program with our partners, LCCF is pleased with the outcomes of this 3-year initiative. Through this multi-year investment, we were able to infuse nearly 8 million pounds of fresh food into some of Lake County's most vulnerable communities! Key recommendations for future multi-year funding initiatives include:

- **Program Design:** Start the discussion and program design by taking a data-informed approach to specifically define end goals. Having a clear understanding of what we want to measure and how we measure progress will help to more clearly understand and articulate impact.
- **Outcomes and Measures:** In the future, grantees and LCCF staff should come to a consensus around outcomes and measures prior to the program launch so that data and outcomes are consistent across the entire duration of the multi-year program.
- **Workplan:** Staff will encourage grantees to submit a joint workplan with shared metrics that can be tracked over time to ensure that partners can identify both gaps and mutually reinforcing activities.
- **Collaboration:** Continue collaborative annual application process and quarterly updates to foster partnership opportunities and build trust.

Thank you to our incredible program and thought partners, Northern Illinois Food Bank and Liberty Prairie Foundation, who helped to shape and lead this initiative. The LCCF staff and board are grateful for their extensive knowledge, expertise and support.



Liberty Prairie Foundation 