A background photograph showing a close-up of hands passing a metal can of food. A person in a brown sweater is handing the can to a person in a pink shirt. Other hands and a cardboard box are visible in the background.

# MONTGOMERY COUNTY COVID-19 EMERGENCY FOOD ACCESS GRANTS

## IMPACT SUMMARY SPRING 2021

MONTGOMERY COUNTY FOOD COUNCIL  
MONTGOMERY COUNTY GOVERNMENT  
HEALTHCARE INITIATIVE  
FOUNDATION



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# Executive Summary

This report summarizes the COVID-19 Emergency Food Access Grant funding, including impact, key findings, and metrics. This grant program was implemented through a partnership between Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), the Montgomery County Food Council (MCFC), and the Healthcare Initiative Foundation (HIF). The \$1.2 million in funding for the program was appropriated by the Montgomery County Council, as a component of the COVID-19 Food Security Response Strategy, to increase food access to County residents during the COVID-19 pandemic, including funding for partnerships with ethnic grocers to increase availability of culturally appropriate food assistance. Specifically, the Response Strategy is focused on increasing the volume of food in the food assistance system, while improving access to food by building the capacity of the food assistance network to store and strategically, safely, and efficiently distribute food to residents through home delivery and community pickup sites.

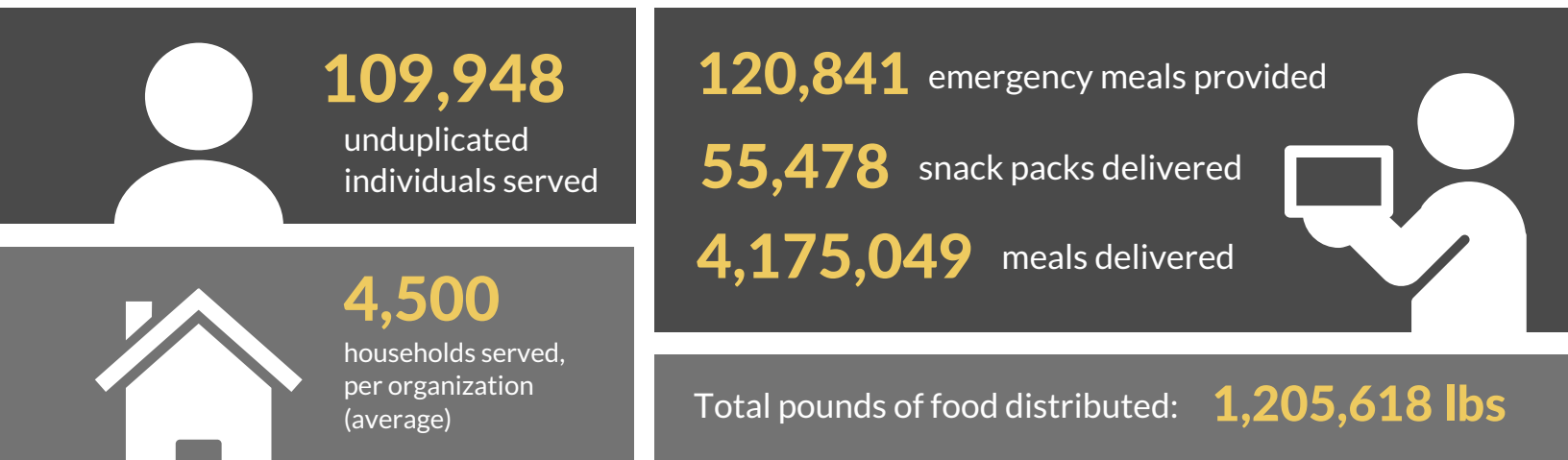
38 organizations were awarded grant funding. This grant cycle was initiated in May 2020, and concluded on September 30, 2020. The County's Food Security Task Force, formed by the Office of Emergency Management and Homeland Security (OEMHS), reviewed and determined all grant awards. The Healthcare Initiative Foundation served as the fiscal agent and assisted with facilitating the grant process. Grant applications were reviewed according to criteria that included population served, services tailored to meet language and cultural needs, impact on underserved and hard-to-reach communities, and the feasibility of implementation.



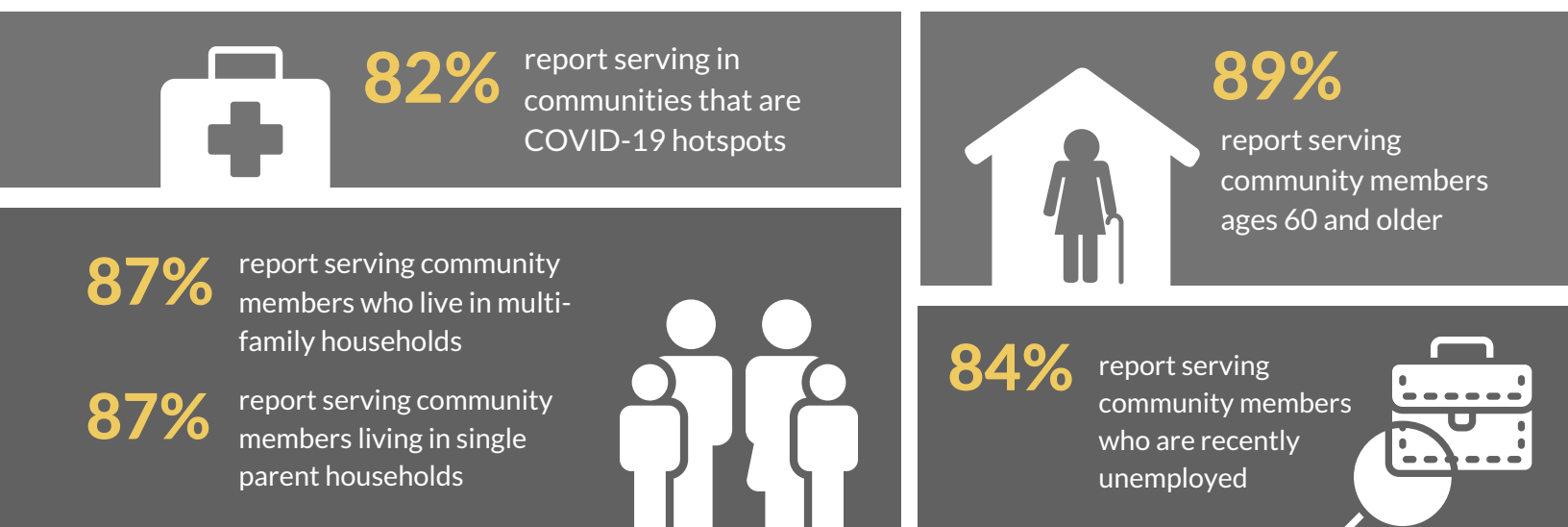
Starbucks team of Tennytown, Falls Church, Georgetown and Liberty Place volunteer for Shepherd's Table. (Left). Food distribution event. (Right). Photo credit: Shepherd's Table.

# Highlighted Metrics

Key impact metrics reported by grantees, May 14 to September 30, 2020:



Grantees reported offering programs designed to support specific community needs, including:



Please refer to page 7 to view the full list of grantees, and grant amount awarded to each organization.

# Key Accomplishments

## CLOSING SERVICE GAPS

- **Many residents experiencing food insecurity are relying on school meal programs to provide supplemental nutrition to children, throughout the week.** Over the weekend, some children are at higher risk for food insecurity, when school meals are not readily available. Women Who Care Ministries (WWCM) worked to close this gap through their Weekend Bag Program, which served over 6,900 unique individuals on weekends from May 12 to September 30, 2020. In order to make their efforts as responsive as possible, WWCM tracked participation data week to week, in order to estimate demand and inform program planning. Noting how tracking helped them understand trends, WWCM stated: “The project was successful because we were able to meet the needs of more than double the amount of students originally estimated. We were not ‘shocked,’ as we knew that the numbers of kids needing food would continue to [drastically increase each week]... A major key in running a successful weekend meal program such as ours is to stay abreast of the increases. We noted the increases weekly and prepared additional meals in advance.”
- **To support seniors who are experiencing food insecurity, several organizations expanded existing services and provided delivery programs.** For example, the Jewish Council for the Aging of Greater Washington (JCAGW) utilized a referral program to connect senior residents with their Senior HelpLine and Connect-A-Ride programs, targeting 20901, 20902, 20903, 20904 and 20906 zip codes—some of the areas hit hardest by COVID-19 cases. These programs delivered boxed kosher meals for seniors residents who were facing challenges in accessing food. JCAGW sourced for these programs via partnerships with local, kosher grocery stores and area synagogues.



Kingdom AME Fellowship event, in collaboration with the East County Regional Service Center team, and other local partners. (4 images above) Photo credit: East County Regional Service Center.

## IMPLEMENTING INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS AND STRATEGIES

- **Multiple organizations reported serving populations that speak languages other than the languages spoken primarily by their staff team.** This challenge was addressed by recruiting and training volunteers with language capabilities that were relevant to a specific population's needs. For example, Up 2 Us Foundation reported that over 60% of their clients speak languages other than English. In order to meet this need, the Foundation recruited "Spanish speaking volunteers on call to translate." Their team also recruited volunteers fluent in Arabic, Hindi, and Urdu.
- **Latin American Youth Center (LAYC) received frequent calls from residents who expressed an urgent need for food while in self-quarantine.** When the request was beyond the scope of staff and volunteer capacity, LAYC utilized some grant funds to provide safe, fast food delivery via Instacart, providing food in response to the request within 24 hours or less.

## ELEVATING COMMUNITY LEADERS

- **Islamic Community Center of Potomac (ICCP) distributed Community Food Packets.** These packets included supplies such as halal chicken, milk, juice, and a variety of shelf-stable foods, provided to families experiencing food insecurity, who may also be struggling to find culturally appropriate foods. Their programs also empowered youth volunteers, who gained exposure to community organizing and program management. These team members grew as a result of these leadership roles, learning and benefitting from the social service projects they led. Throughout the grant period, ICCP found a community of food assistance providers to network with: "We encouraged each other, learned from each other and networked for each other," they reported. Partners in this effort included Islamic Relief, Life & Relief, Dar Us Salaam, the IMAAM Center, Islamic Center of Maryland, and the Mohamed Reyal Islamic Community Center of Potomac.

## PROGRAMMING PIVOTS DURING COVID-19, TO MEET INCREASED COMMUNITY NEED

- **COVID-19 created unique challenges that reduced the accessibility of food assistance resources, in a time when demand for food assistance resources increased.** Many residents faced circumstances that required remaining at home, for a variety of reasons: managing a pre-existing medical condition; quarantining while experiencing symptoms consistent with COVID-19; and/or lacking vehicle access, and having safety concerns about taking mass transit during a pandemic. Manna Food Center's Stay Put Packs program sought to meet this need, providing boxes of frozen meat, fresh produce, and shelf stable items to individuals and families who may be unexpectedly home bound at this time—serving over 20,400 households during the grant period (May 12-September 30, 2020).



Rainbow Community Development Center prepares food for community members (2 images above). Photo credit: Rainbow Community Development Center.

- Several grantee organizations reported expanding their service offerings to include food assistance, during COVID-19. For example, The Living Legends Awards for Service to Humanity began conducting food assistance programming in April 2020, with a focus on supporting hard to reach communities. In partnership with Emmanuel Brinklow Seventh Day Adventist Church, Living Legends developed a collaborative “Grocery Grab & Go” project to support families who may be experiencing food insecurity during COVID-19. This partnership built on the Church’s established food assistance programs, while leveraging the volunteer base and organizational capacity of Living Legends.
- Kingdom Fellowship AME Church (KFAME) partnered with Montgomery County Public Schools, the East County Regional Services Center, Montgomery County Recreation Department, the Silver Spring/East County Food Security Network and Holy Cross Health. Through KFAME’s leadership, this network of partners developed a shared, consistent referral process whereby organizations identified families who were experiencing food insecurity, and provided referrals to specific resources at KFAME and other local organizations. These referrals included access to food delivery programs, for residents who may be unexpectedly homebound due to illness, quarantining, or other circumstances.
- Gaithersburg HELP pivoted, transitioning from a food pantry service delivery approach to serving the community through scheduled food pick-up appointments in order to maintain social distancing. To streamline operations on site, the Gaithersburg HELP team made phone calls throughout the week, connecting with participants to schedule pick-up days and times in advance. This process also facilitates delivery services when necessary, making it possible for participants to remain at home if necessary.

## LEVERAGING STRONG PARTNERSHIPS TO INCREASE IMPACT

- **AHC Inc. reported that during the course of their grant project, they developed partnerships that increased their capacity to provide food assistance.** Their new partnerships included collaborations with Manna Food Center, Meals on Wheels, The Senior Connection, and Capital Area Food Bank, and several local restaurants.
- **The YMCA Youth and Family Services reported partnering with regional food hub 4P Foods, in order to source and distribute nutritionally appropriate foods specifically for clients who may have certain dietary requirements in order to manage chronic diseases, such as diabetes.**

## PURCHASING AND DISTRIBUTING CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE FOODS

- **Kings and Priests Court International Ministries reported, “The majority of the funds were used to purchase culturally appropriate and varieties of ethnic food such as smoked fish, palm oil, cassava leaves, yoka, kenki, Gbanku, [and] Indian spices.”**
- **Bethel World Outreach Church reported, “One of our main goals was to supply cultural food for the hard to reach communities, and we realized that cultural food is more expensive than regular food therefore we had to find ways to be able to get donations of regular food so we could use the grant money to buy culturally appropriate food for our clients. We bought rice and beans, plantains, yucca, cornmeal flour, cassavas leaves, and vegetable oil, Fufu flour, collards green, potatoes green, smoke turkey meats, since most of the hard to reach community that we were serving are mainly, Latinos, [and] Caribbean and African immigrants.”**

## EXPANDING ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY, THROUGH STAFFING AND VOLUNTEER EFFORTS

- **So What Else, Inc.’s “Emergency Hunger Relief Task Force” project utilized grant funds to hire a staff member who is bilingual in Spanish and English, to improve client interactions and community outreach.**
- **Jewish Council for the Aging of Greater Washington (JCAGW) reported using grant funds to pay a staff member who effectively recruited volunteers.** Volunteers completed deliveries to community members, increasing capacity for food distribution. This strategy enabled JCAGW to allocate additional funds to other programs, in order to provide more meals to a greater number of residents than was initially anticipated, throughout the course of their grant project.

## GRANTS AWARDED

- AHC Inc. (\$7,238)
- Adventist Community Services of Greater Washington, Inc. (\$38,400)
- American Diversity Group (\$46,400)
- American Muslim Senior Society (\$13,876)
- Bethel World Outreach Church (\$17,100)
- CASA (\$59,200)
- Catholic Charities Archdiocese of Washington (\$60,000)
- Chinese Culture and Community Service Center, Inc. (\$60,000)
- Direct Support for Immigrants, Inc. (\$24,000)
- Gaithersburg HELP (\$6,684)
- Germantown Cultural Arts Center/BlackRock Center for the Arts (\$57,600)
- Goshen United Methodist Church (\$9,635)
- Hindu American Community Services Inc. (\$20,000)
- Hughes United Methodist Church (\$32,000)
- Humanity First USA (\$14,100)
- Help for Life Foundation (\$14,241)
- Indonesian American Association (\$19,975)
- International Cultural Athletic Exchange Foundation (\$60,000)
- Islamic Center of Maryland (\$35,250)
- Islamic Community Center of Potomac (\$23,500)
- Jewish Council for the Aging of Greater Washington (\$21,600)
- Kingdom Fellowship African Methodist Episcopal Church (\$60,000)
- Kings and Priests Court, International Ministries Inc. (\$14,400)
- Korean Community Service Center of Greater Washington (\$35,250)
- Latin American Youth Center (\$15,200)
- The Living Legends Awards for Service to Humanity (\$35,250)
- Manna Food Center (\$37,500)
- Nourish Now (\$60,000)
- Rainbow Community Development Center (\$60,000)
- The Salvation Army (\$56,000)
- Shepherd's Table (\$19,861)
- Silver Spring Christian Reformed Church (\$12,220)
- So What Else, Inc. (\$12,800)
- Up 2 Us Foundation (\$24,800)
- Vietnamese Americans Services, Inc. (\$51,200)
- Washington Youth Foundation Inc. (\$18,800)
- Women Who Care Ministries (\$37,500)
- YMCA Youth & Family Services (\$8,420)

# Challenges Identified

- **The need for specific, culturally appropriate foods varied.** In some cases, organizations learned about community needs while a program was up and running. One organization reported receiving feedback that certain food items were not preferable, among the groceries provided, so the organization set up an exchange table where individuals could leave food items as a donation, as needed.
- **Managing crowds, particularly at events that drew pedestrians as well as vehicles, was sometimes challenging.** Grantees reported challenges regarding managing logistics at food distribution events that engaged residents who arrived in a variety of transportation methods, in particular, events that were attended by residents arriving via personal vehicle, and on foot.
- **Lack of cold storage capacity was a challenge.** Several organizations reported a pressing need for more cold storage, particularly among organizations that initiated food assistance programs this year. For example, one grantee reported that meat and fresh produce were in high demand, and providing this service was challenging due to a lack of cold storage. “[We] needed refrigeration and storage capacities. As we didn't have either, we had to take delivery the same day from our local ethnic vendors. Sometimes we had to limit perishable food distribution because we weren't able to store properly and risked spoilage.”
- **Fluctuations in demand presented challenges.** As demand rose throughout the summer and fall, organizations needed to adapt. For example, challenges arose when organizations tried to manage their inventory and make it stretch as far as possible, while noting rising demand for services in the community. Specifically, one organization reported that it was common to witness multiple families traveling together to food assistance events in one shared vehicle. In this case, the apparent demand (for example, 20 cars waiting in line for a food distribution event) did not reflect the actual demand (more than 20 families were present, and in need of food that day). This presented logistical challenges and required adaptations in the moment, on behalf of staff and volunteers.

# Conclusion

The Montgomery County COVID-19 Emergency Food Access Grant Program supported the broader goals of the COVID-19 Food Security Response Strategy, to create pathways to connect more food, with more people, in Montgomery County MD. Grant-funded projects increased accessibility of response resources, while also supporting the County's goal of quickly and efficiently communicating information to residents on available resources, and ensuring residents are connected with available resources.



Islamic Center of Maryland receives food (Top left) and promotes a food distribution event (Top right). Photo credit: Islamic Center of Maryland. Peoples Community Baptist Church Food Distribution Event (Bottom left). Photo credit: Peoples Community Baptist Church. Shepherd's Table food distribution (Bottom right photoset). Photo credit: Shepherd's Table.