

EXPLORING UNIVERSAL BASIC FOOD

2024 MASTERS OF THE ENVIRONMENT CAPSTONE PROJECT
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PURPOSE

Hunger is a market failure. The current market serves those who can afford to buy nutritious food – those unable to afford food are excluded from their most basic human right: access to food.

To move away from the industrial food system and remove barriers to food access, Metro Caring is advocating for a Universal Basic Food program that is distributed through a Community Food Utility. Universal Basic Food (or UBF) will provide free, nutritious, culturally responsive, and desired food to people regardless of age, income, gender, or socio-economic situation and sees food as a human right. UBF will be distributed through a Community Food Utility (or CFU), which is a public utility that will be established to provide services that the government and private companies fail to adequately provide, within a defined geographic boundary.

DELIVERABLES

1) PILOT PROJECT DESIGN

Sets out the 'Why, What, How' of the pilot project and details the implementation plan and timeline, and resource needs. Supports the development of the Pilot Project Evaluation Plan.

Includes:

- Cost & capacity analysis
- Operational process map
- System map

2) CFU LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Provides an overview of existing local, state, and federal policies and program structures. Supports UBF advocates to develop advocacy strategies and policy implementation.

Includes:

- Case studies
- Power map
- State policy analysis & interviews
- Comprehensive study of public utility structures

METHODS



Research



Case Studies



Community
Engagement



Mapping



Project Design



KEY TAKEAWAYS

PILOT PROJECT DESIGN:

- Total pilot project cost = ~\$580,000
- Existing operational capacity will be used to launch the pilot project
- Additional cold storage will be needed to handle the increase in food
- Important to ground in reality at the start of the project and remain flexible for rescoping
- Keep an eye on building upon existing systems and plan for long-term scalability
- Metro Caring is hoping to develop a blueprint for future pilots with other food access organizations

CFU LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS:

- Coalition building, policy advocacy, and political will-building are essential moving forward
- A local level initiative is the most feasible for a CFU at this stage
- A municipal utility could be a good structure if established at the state level
- A federal program could be incorporated into the Farm Bill or passed as a piece of separate legislation

IMPACT

Metro Caring now understands:



The format and scope of the UBF Pilot Project that will launch in 2025



The cost of a 16-week pilot, and the operational capacity needed to run it



The policy landscape that a future CFU would fit within



Model programs and case studies that can inform a future UBF program



Potential models for establishing a future CFU

NEXT STEPS



Initiate coalition building with city, state, and community partners



Secure funding and additional storage space for the pilot



Conduct additional research such as funding of local utilities and the adaptability of the project design to other communities