



BUILDING ON OUR FOUNDATION

**Strategic Planning
2017 – 2020**

**Approved by the Board of Directors
April 17, 2017**

BACKGROUND

Introduction to Loaves & Fishes

Loaves & Fishes Food Pantry, Inc. was founded in 1983 as a hot meal program and served 50 families during that first year of operation. Within a few years, the model was changed to a food pantry in order to reach more of our neighbors in need. As a pantry, Loaves & Fishes is available to all residents of Ayer, Devens, Groton, Harvard, Littleton and Shirley regardless of age, sex, ethnicity, income or religion. There are no income requirements – simply a proof of residency.

Today, Loaves & Fishes is the largest food pantry in North Central Massachusetts.

Strategic Planning Process

Loaves & Fishes has had tremendous success, serving thousands of people who might otherwise not have access to food. Indeed, this strategic plan is a product of that very success. And the purpose of this strategic plan is to propel Loaves & Fishes to even greater success; consistently providing nutritious food to the residents in our region.

The strategic planning process began with the formation of a strategic planning committee and the selection of Tamasin Foote to facilitate the process. Committee members were chosen to represent various stakeholder and community perspectives and interests. The committee was comprised of:

Board of Directors

Lily Baddour
Joe Harrington, Committee Chair
Aleta Manugian

Community

Betsy Bohling
Carrie Medley
Jim Nickerson

Staff

Patricia Stern, Executive Director

The planning process took place between February and April, 2017. The strategic planning committee in collaboration with the Board of Directors, staff, volunteers, clients and the community undertook a variety of activities to assess the current state of Loaves & Fishes as well as its future direction.

Activities included:

- Facilitated meetings with the Board of Directors, staff, and community members.
- Surveys of clients, volunteers, the community, staff and the Board of Directors
- Interviews of selected stakeholders
- Review of data from sources including: Greater Boston Food Bank, Project Bread, and Feeding America
- A total of more than 355 people were involved in the strategic planning process

Implementation and Monitoring

The planning process resulted in this strategic plan which has been approved by the Loaves & Fishes Board of Directors. To implement this plan, the staff, in consultation with the Board of Directors and volunteers, will develop a three year implementation plan. The Executive Director will report regularly to the full board on the status of implementation, including progress toward each of the strategic goals.

STRATEGIC ANALYSIS

Needs Assessment

Hunger affects all populations. Locally, food insecurity affects 1 out of every 16 people, 1 out of 6 children and 1 out of 5 seniors.

The poverty level for a family of four is \$24,600. Public assistance such as SNAP and reduced cost school lunches cut off at 150 – 200% of poverty. Cost of living for a family of four is approx \$75,000. In Ayer, the median household income is \$74,659 and the poverty rate is 12%. In Shirley, the median household income is \$67,896 and the poverty rate is 12.3%

As the youngest of the baby boomer generation reaches age 60, the number of food insecure seniors is projected to increase by 50%. 1 out of 9 children in Massachusetts face hunger daily. Not only are they are more likely than adults to experience hunger but its impact can leave lasting damage which affects children's health and school performance. One third of the children in Ayer and Shirley and 1 out of 10 children in Littleton participate in the free and reduced cost school meal programs. Further, an additional 9% of children experience food insecurity and do not qualify for assistance through SNAP, WIC or the free or reduced cost school meal program because their family income is too high.

Although Loaves & Fishes is centrally located in the communities in our service area, the facility is remote and there is very limited public transportation available. The Devens Shuttle Service, a pilot program targeted to commuters, is scheduled to begin late in April, 2017. If the shuttle is successful and expands service to support Loaves & Fishes' pantry hours, it may result in a significant increase in the number of clients coming to Loaves & Fishes.

The concept of "food is medicine, food is health" is gaining traction in Massachusetts. Food insecurity is linked to chronic disease in both adults and children. As our outreach efforts increase and the word spreads that we have a good supply of fresh produce, we expect our client numbers will grow.

At this time, there is tremendous uncertainty as to the current president's administration and what impact its policies and approach to governmental support will have on Loaves & Fishes. If federal programs currently providing access to food, such as SNAP, are cut back, this will significantly increase the demand for Loaves & Fishes' programs.

Food insecurity is a significant problem for residents in our service area today. Considering all the factors mentioned above, it is clear that not only will food security remain a challenge, it is most likely there will be increased need for access to food over the years ahead. It is inevitable that Loaves & Fishes will remain an important resource in our community for the foreseeable future.

Current State of Loaves & Fishes

In FY 2016 Loaves & Fishes:

- Served approximately 2,000 individuals (800 families)
- Distributed 34,000 bags of groceries

The committee looked at the strengths and areas for growth and improvement for Loaves & Fishes keeping in mind the unique challenges and opportunities at this stage of organizational development. The highlights of this current state assessment are shared below in the form of a SWOT analysis.

Strengths

- Good reputation
- Dedicated and talented staff and volunteers
- Financially stable
- Welcoming atmosphere
 - Non judgmental
 - Kindness and respect
- Quantity, quality and variety of food
 - Nutritious options
 - Free choice pantry
- Partnerships with businesses
- Community support

Weaknesses

- Space
- Refrigeration
- Inefficient layout
- Extended waiting times
- Inadequate parking
- So much going on: confusion, lack of focus
- Security
- Client emotional, mental and behavioral issues
- Clients would like more choice in foods
- Lack of awareness in community
- Client outreach
- Data collection, usage and access

Opportunities

- Partnerships with businesses
- Public transit being developed

Threats

- Uncertain government policies and support
- Changing demographics

ENVISIONING THE FUTURE AND SETTING DIRECTION

Mission Statement: Loaves & Fishes' mission is to provide nutritious food, in an atmosphere of kindness and respect, to individuals in need who reside in Ayer, Devens, Groton, Harvard, Littleton and Shirley.

Goals and Objectives

These goals were selected as being the highest priority at this time for Loaves & Fishes to achieve its mission. The first goal increases access to food. The second goal raises awareness of Loaves & Fishes and the work it is doing. The third goal, investing in the organization, is fundamental to sustained success. Addressing infrastructure issues and developing and supporting Loaves & Fishes' people is what will propel Loaves & Fishes to creating access to food consistently over time.

Goal 1: Increase access to food

Objective 1.1 Increase the number of Loaves & Fishes clients to 1,000 families by expanding client outreach focusing particularly on seniors and families who have children in free and reduced cost school meal programs.

Objective 1.2 Improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the pantry by expanding and reconfiguring the available space

Objective 1.3 Shorten client visits to a maximum of sixty minutes

Objective 1.4 Clarify our focus on the mission by removing from Loaves & Fishes any special programs which do not directly support the mission including Shop for Kids, Shop for Parents, Backpacks and the Clothing Room

Objective 1.5 Expand the Neighborhood Food Project to bring in 6,000 pounds in food donations monthly

Goal 2: Build awareness of Loaves & Fishes and its work in the community

Objective 2.1 Expand the Ambassador program to actively represent Loaves & Fishes at local speaking opportunities and community events

Objective 2.2 Increase awareness so community leaders and local residents understand the meaning of “food insecurity,” the level of need in the region, Loaves & Fishes’ work, and the community’s role in addressing the issue

Objective 2.3 Establish partnerships with more businesses.

Goal 3: Strengthen Loaves & Fishes’ organizational systems and infrastructure to support current operations and future growth.

Objective 3.1 Establish a Code of Conduct for everyone coming to Loaves & Fishes including clients, volunteers, staff and board

Objective 3.2 Implement board development including establishing a succession plan, clarifying roles and responsibilities, instituting a program of strategic board recruitment and orientation, and moving towards a best practices model of board performance.

Objective 3.3 Improve or replace the client data base including implementation of an entry security system

Objective 3.4 Train all staff and selected volunteers on effective client management.

Objective 3.5 Establish an annual event which builds awareness of Loaves & Fishes and brings together the Loaves & Fishes community.

Objective 3.6 Establish communication and activities that support partnership between the board, staff and volunteers

With these goals and objectives, Loaves & Fishes is moving boldly to achieve its mission.