



## MEETING SUMMARY & NOTES: RI Hunger Elimination Task Force Q1 Meeting

February, 28 2023 | 2:00 - 3:30 pm

**Theme:** *Accessible solutions to solving last mile food delivery for transit challenged Rhode Islanders.*

[Click Here to Watch the Meeting Recording!](#)

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### OBJECTIVES

- *Hear updates on new programs that support transit-challenged Rhode Islanders*
- *Discuss ongoing challenges and opportunities to provide home delivery for individuals experience nutrition insecurity*

### PRE-READING

- [Learn more about our panelists](#)
- [Food Bank News: Why Home Delivery is at a Crossroads](#)

### MEETING SUMMARY

The first Hunger Elimination Task Force (HETF) Meeting of 2023 was attended by over 60 participants. Randi Belhumeur from the RI Dept. of Health (RIDOH) welcomed everyone and provided an update on RIDOH's application to the CDC's State Physical Activity and Nutrition (SPAN) Cooperative Agreement. Our state's Director of Food Strategy, Juli Stelmaszyk shared that our statewide food strategy, Relish Rhody, will be updated this year and invited everyone to participate in the process. A panel discussion followed, and focused on accessible solutions to solving last mile food delivery for transit challenged Rhode Islanders. Featured speakers included: Cartwheel RI, Family Service of RI's Be Safe RI program, and Project Dash. All participants went into breakout rooms where they discussed how a lack of awareness about these services and stable funding is a barrier, and that ideal delivery solutions seemed to be those that formed via partnerships between organizations and those that are customized to

serve the needs of specific populations (e.g. delivering prepared meals to older Rhode Islanders is different than getting groceries to a single parent who wants to pay with SNAP funds).

## MEETING PARTICIPANTS

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## AGENDA

**2:00 pm Welcome and Introductions**

**2:05 pm Announcements**

**2:15 pm Panel: Accessible solutions to solving last mile food delivery for transit challenged Rhode Islanders**

- CartwheelRI
  - Evan McManamy, Co-Director
  - Mariana Roa Oliva
- Project Dash
  - Caitlin Gillis, Strategy and Operations at DoorDash
- Be Safe RI
  - Jared LaFond, Be Safe RI Program Director

**2:45 pm Breakout Session**

**3:15 pm Breakout Session Report Out**

**3:25 pm Final Meeting Announcements**

## NOTES

**2:00 pm Welcome and Introductions**

- The Hunger Elimination Task Force is a statewide network of food access, nutrition, and public health champions that work to reduce hunger and increase access to healthy, culturally-appropriate food for all RI residents. This task force is owned by the RI State Agencies involved in food system work and is facilitated by the RI Food Policy Council.

- Today we are hearing important updates on last-mile (aka home delivery) options for transit challenged individuals. During the COVID-19 pandemic, an incredible network of food access providers across our state stepped up to begin offering delivery services to ensure individuals who were isolating or quarantining at home or having trouble leaving their home to access food. New innovative partnerships and programs were formed to provide delivery in addition to longstanding services, such as Meals on Wheels, Office of Healthy Aging, and the RI Department of Health's Quarantine and Isolation Team programs that helped our citizens stay nourished during the pandemic. In 2021, 40 supplemental food delivery providers were surveyed by the RIFPC and results showed that 36% of them launched due to COVID restrictions. Now many of these newer programs that provided critical services to transit challenged people are running out of funding as state and federal COVID funding expires. The topic of delivery - the necessary infrastructure, funding and roles/responsibilities has been a key topic for this network for the past three years.

2:05 pm

#### Announcements

- **Update on RIDOH's Application to the State Physical Activity and Nutrition Grant by Randi Belhumeur, RI Department of Health (RIDOH):** RIDOH is currently underway with an application to the CDC's State Physical Activity and Nutrition (SPAN) Program. This five-year State Physical Activity and Nutrition Program (SPAN) grant will support investments to improve nutrition and increase physical activity in RI. This program provides recipients support and flexibility to work on governmental public health systems at the state and local levels to implement evidence-based strategies and to leverage resources from multiple stakeholders and sectors (e.g., agriculture, transportation, education, business, commerce, and housing). There are many promising programs and practices occurring throughout our state already that support these goals, and we look forward to demonstrating how we can leverage them in our application.
- **Update on RI Relish Rhody 2.0 Food Strategy Update, Juli Stelmaszyk, RI Commerce:** I am excited to share that this year we will be renewing our state food strategy - a process we are calling Relish Rhody 2.0 which will aim to both reflect on the impact of the last five years and set collective goals towards 2030. The process will be led by myself in partnership with leadership from state agencies RI Commerce, DEM, RIDOH, and EOHHS. The purpose of a food strategy is to help us identify common goals, connect partners for collective impact and establish shared metrics for strategic action. Our food strategy also helps us inform policymakers of statewide and local priorities, and catalyzes collective action across the food system.

- The first iteration of Relish Rhody was launched in 2017 under the Raimondo administration and it outlined 5 integrated focus areas.
  - Preserve & Grow Agriculture, Fisheries Industries in Rhode Island
  - Enhance the Climate for Food & Beverage Businesses
  - Sustain & Create Markets for Rhode Island Food, Beverage Products
  - Minimize Food Waste & Divert it from the Waste Stream
  - Ensure Food Security for All Rhode Islanders, in fact the Hunger Elimination Task Force was an initiative that was born out of the 2017 food strategy
  
- During this update process, we will be asking questions such as:
  - What has been the economic, social and environmental impact of the last 5 yrs?
  - What are the gaps/opportunities/learnings from past 5 yrs?
  - How should our priorities change as we look out to 2030?
  - We will also be developing a long term food security plan that will complement the RI Food Strategy and use the lessons learned the past five years to guide us in how to create a more food secure Rhode Island.
  
- A final item I want to bring to your attention is that there has been momentum in both the Governor's FY 2024 budget and the General Assembly (*2023 H 5803: An Act Relating to Taxation - Tax Credit for Food Donation*) to support a RI food donation tax credit. Currently, food businesses such as farms and restaurants can receive a federal tax deduction when they donate excess food to food relief organizations such as food pantries but it is typically cumbersome for small to mid sized food producers to participate. However, research has shown that tax credits are an effective tool for increasing donations. We feel that a tax credit has great potential for increasing the amount of fresh, locally prepared edible food recovered in our state, that can be distributed by hunger relief organizations. We will be examining this issue more over the next year.
  
- We will also be inviting you all to provide your perspective on all of these topics and more and are planning a food strategy listening session during an upcoming HETF meeting, so please stay tuned!

2:15 pm

**Panel: Accessible solutions to solving last mile food delivery for transit challenged Rhode Islanders**

- **Topic Overview by Caitlin Mandel, RI Food Policy Council:** Before we get to our panel discussion we just had two additional updates that are

important to our work. As many of you know, the emergency SNAP allotments that have been in place since March 2020 will expire this month. Starting March 1st, households will only receive their regular monthly issuance on the first of the month. Many households will lose at least \$95 a month. When combined with other pandemic era supports ending, and continued high prices for food and utilities we know that many Rhode Islanders already struggling with food insecurity will have an even harder time affording nutritious food. A company called [Propel](#) operates an app that allows individuals to track their debit card and EBT card balances at the same time. Over 5 million households in the US use this app, and the platform conducts frequent surveys of their users. This graph shows the difference in individuals skipping meals once states began to end these pandemic era benefits. We did want to mention two potential policy opportunities to support individuals and families impacted by this change. The first is a bill that was introduced to the General Assembly last week that would replace the \$95 a month payments for SNAP recipients lost when the emergency allotment ends. HB 5799 was introduced by Representatives Morales, Cruz, Cotter, Giraldo, Stewart, McGaw, McNamara, Speakman, Henries, and Tanzi . Please review and support this legislation which would continue this much needed support for RI families participating in SNAP.

- Additionally, the federal Farm Bill will be reauthorized this year and the nutrition title is expected to comprise 84% of total farm bill spending, mostly for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). The RIFPC has created a [list of Farm Bill Advocacy Priorities](#) and we invite you to share these priorities with your organizations and support this advocacy work to support and expand's SNAP critical role in on our country.
- **Panel Discussion, Facilitated by Diane Lynch, Board President of the RI Food Policy Council**
- **Cartwheel RI (Evan McManamy and Mariana Roa Oliva, Co-directors)**
  - Introduction: A nonprofit and a worker cooperative providing free home delivery of local fresh fruits and vegetables. Can access snap, food stamps, pay what you can. We also have a food delivery program for local pantries. We pay our workers a local wage. Customers order by a bilingual google form, or phone ordering, for both Fresco and food pantry.
  - Our seasonal item list is updated regularly (Fresco program)
  - We have updated our delivery logistics platforms
  - We can process EBT/SNAP payments. We have our own FNS number, and we utilized Farm Fresh RI's Bonus Bucks Program so customers can receive a 50% discount on fresh produce.

- Cartwheel is the first USDA approved online SNAP retailer based in RI.
  - Fresco Program: Farm Fresh Local Produce Delivery, worker cooperative model. Clients can receive donated food or purchase with a credit or EBT card.
  - Food Pantry delivery program: Completely free, partnering with 5 pantries currently. In 2022, Cartwheel completed 2,556 food pantry deliveries, many of these are weekly deliveries. This food pantry program was funded through a partnership with the RI Community Food Bank.
  - Question: When you started, how big were you?
    - Answer: We started working with FFRI in particular from 0, and grew from there since the beginning of the pandemic
- **Family Service of RI, Be Safe RI Program (Jared Lafond)**
    - I've been working with the Be Safe Program for the last two years. Be Safe started in February of 2020, Family Service was trying to get their clients Covid supplies, started including food shortly after that. It was a scramble for the first year to acquire food and supplies, and we are closing on February 15, 2023.
    - Family Service has been trying to find funding for the program, it was always meant to be temporary but was no longer sustainable for the organization. We made over 22,000 deliveries since we started, an average of 400 households a month. We were packing bags of food to feed 3-5 ppl for about 5 days and bringing them wherever they were needed. Folks would go online or call and place an order, we tried to deliver ASAP. We worked with FEMA crisis counselors too. We delivered personal care items (toilet paper, but also fresh food, frozen food, shelf stable food). There is still a need out there, we didn't slow down at all in the end.
      - Question: How many of the requests you received were you able to fulfill, were you able to serve the demand?
      - Answer: yes. We missed only a few of the 22k requests, we did our best to fulfill all of them, maybe not always as fast as I would have liked, from a couple of days to a week or two. It was never capped, just open by request.
      - Question: Was your delivery staff all volunteer?
      - Answer: We had part time drivers, staff works as drivers too. We started with a lot of volunteer drivers, but mostly done by FSRI staff.
      - Question: I am sure you've communicated to all of your customers that you can no longer offer this service, and you didn't see a falloff in demand, what is your sense of



what your customers were going to do and did you redirect them?

- Answer: Yes, we called everyone who had received more than 3 packages over the past few months to inform them and offer additional services they could use. We pulled together lists of pantries and delivery services we could point people to. We linked a pdf on our website. It feels hard, it feels like there isn't enough to point people to.

- **ProjectDash (Caitlin Gillis)**

- Project Dash is DoorDash's initiative that allows food banks, pantries, other nonprofits to utilize DoorDash's technology to deliver items to their clients
- We started as a "Hack a thon" employee project - but during the pandemic we pivoted to support that last mile delivery program. The biggest thing we believe in that everyone should have access to home delivery, not just those who are immunocompromised or living with a disability. There is a dignity and important convenience to it.
- Partners have access to a portal where they can upload their list of client addresses (DoorDash does not have access to this info, owned by the organization). Project Dash uses the technology to assign Dashers to pick up and deliver those items to the clients' home. The clients receive text message updates about delivery progress.
- Question: Is this integrated with the other deliveries? Is a Dasher delivering something from a restaurant and then dropping off emergency food?
- Answer: The employees may be the same, but the routes are separated.
- Question: Are the Project Dashers making the same revenue as when they are deliver restaurant meals? Yes the rate is the same, but they get paid per delivery and because there are multiple deliveries in one ProjectDash route, they are actually making more because it's batched and efficient (vs a one time restaurant meal delivery). These are attractive deliveries for Dashers.
- Question: How many partners are you working with in RI right now?
- Answer: Right now we only have a few partners in RI right now, they are food recovery partners, but we are looking to expand and bring this service to your state. We have much more volume in other new england states, and currently work with 250 nonprofit partners throughout the country, and just made our 4 millionth delivery, that equates to around 60 million meals since 2018.

- Question: What is the financial model for paying for these deliveries.
  - Answer: We work with our partners on an individual basis to understand their needs and the focus of these programs from a cost basis is how can we make this a more sustainable model, work with subsidized rates, help with grant coverage. Nonprofit partners do not pay the retail/restaurant rate. We want to continue to grow and become more innovative, want to get back into food recovery delivery as well.
- **Question for Evan and Mariana: Can you talk about your future plans, 1-3 years from now?**
    - Answer: We have the Fresco Fresh Produce, and Food Pantry delivery, and are trying to keep both going. Sustainability is always a challenge and a focus, but as the other panelists have said, there is a huge need
- **Question to All Panelists: Do you think it would make a big difference if in the next farm bill, the EBT card could be used to pay for delivery on the card?**
    - Mariana: I would say it's hugely important that SNAP can pay for delivery. People can pay with SNAP from supermarkets which sometimes limits what food people can access. I don't know if delivery fee can be paid for with SNAP but there is a need for free delivery of nutritious, culturally connected foods.
    - Jared: I think having that option sounds great, I know so many people are scrambling to get enough food with the SNAP benefits they have. So to have to use some of that for delivery may not help unless there is more money. If there was a way to support someone's needs to get it through delivery.
    - Caitlin: I don't think we would want the client to have to pay for the delivery, I think other sustainable funding (philanthropy, donors, government, health care) that could cover those costs.
    - Comment from the chat (Alice Howard): *"It will be a challenge for people in most communities to pay a delivery fee with EBT..."*
    - Comment from the chat (Dana Siles): *"Love the work you are doing! Rescuing Leftover Cuisine delivers surplus food from businesses to nonprofits that serve people facing hunger and food insecurity. During the pandemic, we delivered over 40K meals to 375 homes — but currently we only deliver to nonprofits."*
  - **Panel Q+A and Discussion**
    - Randi: ProjectDash was mentioned in the White House Conference on Hunger Nutrition and Health
      - Caitlin Gillis: We made a commitment through the conference to partner with cities to expand our program,

- either through Project Dash or community credits (gift cards). We are actively working with cities throughout the country.
- Brady Dunklee: I'd be interested in whether there is any data available on the kinds of barriers delivery recipients are facing in shifting to in-person shopping at pantries or markets. Are most people medically frail, experiencing transportation barriers, time barriers--some combination?
  - Rith Kue, RIDOH Quarantine and Isolation Unit:
    - We have connected isolating individuals with many supportive food access resources, but it's challenging. I wanted to thank CARTWHEEL RI and Be Safe RI for all the great work they've done in our state, and hope funding will come and we look forward to continuing to work together
    - Comment on current caseload: *"Fortunately cases are trending low and we are seeing about 30 cases per week but just back in beginning of February we had about 50 cases"*
    - *Comment from the Chat (Christina Amedeo): "the QI center at RIDOH was a great program to work with. combined up to March over 17,000 deliveries were facilitated"*
  - Rachel Newman Greene, PVD Healthy Communities Office
    - What is the changing need for the delivery landscape? Now that COVID is waning a bit, how do you see the COVID reality changing that versus that baseline of people that have mobility issues that mean they need to get food delivery?
    - Doug Murphy Project Dash:
      - We do have data from our regular polling to understand the access to charitable food. The number one issue is because of transportation barriers, of course people being homebound or living with a disability will always be a baseline need. We are often hearing that working families are having trouble visiting pantries when they are open.
  - Kyle Penrod: Age Friendly RI
    - We are mobilized around different domains of healthy aging. We are launching a pilot for a transportation project that is going.
    - In Spring 2022, we received a planning grant from the National Aging Transportation and Disability Center, concerned with increasing equitable access to transportation. We visited different areas of RI to

understand their needs. We wanted to explore this idea of leveraging underutilized vehicles that other nonprofits have. We identified a partner in Aquidneck Island, North end, Newport Housing Authority, Edward King Senior Center and Looking Upwards (providing delivery vehicle) We are looking to provide a closed loop transportation route to bring people to grocery stores, senior centers, etc. Parallel to this process we have done focus groups and we also hear that transportation is a challenge and impacts other areas of a person's life. We hope to launch this in June.

- Additional Comments from the Chat:
  - Christina Amedeo: *"We facilitated food delivery with the Elisha Project up to March 31st of 2022."*
    - For transportation to food pantries if the client is a Neighborhood Health Plan or Blue Cross Blue Shield members, they use can the program [Papa Pal](#). Papa Pals are part-time companion caregivers who support Papa members, providing things like help around the house, shopping, car rides, and companionship. Papa members include older adults, seniors and families.
  - Vernon Martin II: *"One question I would pose when applying for funding is: with the conclusion of the increased snap benefits would that produce a large enough food emergency to receive funds?"*
  - *Liz Moreira* Pawtucket Central Falls Health Equity Zone: *Great presentations! PCF HEZ and Pawtucket Family YMCA's health equity department still receives Q&I referrals from RIDOH and our CHW's help to coordinate family support including food deliveries. Very grateful for the continued partnership. Also great to hear that Cartwheel will continue to support Progresso Latino's food pantry in CF! BeSafe thank you for all of the support you provided PCF residents!*
  - Noreen Drexel *"I wonder if any local foundations would consider funding a transportation initiative? McBean, Loeb, vanBeuren"*

**2:45 pm Breakout Session**

**3:15 pm Breakout Session Report Out**

- **Please see Breakout Session Summaries**

**3:25 pm Final Meeting Announcements**

- **Question for the group:** "What is your most important takeaway from today?"

- Brady Dunklee: *"Takeaway for me is that this is a shared, urgent problem with lots of promising practices but no clear path to scale and sustainability. I hope that we can look for collective approaches to dignified and efficient access to food, particularly for vulnerable folks, and that we can get creative about funding to get us out of permanent pilot programs and into scale.."*
- **Polling Results:**
  - *I think the need for home delivery in RI is*
    - *Growing (78%)*
    - *Shrinking (17%)*
    - *Stable (5%)*
  - *Who should be delivering the food?*
    - *Food pantries/community distribution sites (30%)*
    - *Third party organizations such as ProjectDash or Cartwheel (70%)*
    - *No one (0%)*
  - *Who should be paying for the home delivery of food? (Select all that apply)*
    - *The recipient (at a low cost) (27%)*
    - *The food pantry/ community distribution site (33%)*
    - *The state of RI (70%)*
    - *Healthcare organizations because it supports food security and health (64%)*

**Our next meeting will be May 2, 2023 2-3:30pm!**