



Our Technological Revolution

SPRING 2025



OPERATION ▶





INNOVATE





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Operation Innovate FROM MY POINT OF VIEW

We changed the narrative on hunger by opening the first food bank on the East Coast in 1979 and haven't stopped innovating for our neighbors in need in the 46 years since.

While we are very good at what we do—getting the right food, to the right place, at the right time—we knew we could be even better.

As the food bank's Chief Financial Officer, I was privileged to lead our most recent effort to improve Maryland—Operation Innovate. The project began with one simple question: How can we leverage technology to better support our mission and strategic goals?

We began by assembling a diverse team to explore areas like customer relationship management, partner online ordering, financial management, accounts payable automation, and warehouse management. We visited sister Feeding America food banks to draw on their experiences and engaged with a team of consultants to ensure we brought the right expertise to the project.

The scope of work—investing in user-friendly, efficient systems that streamline our operations and provide timely, actionable data to make faster, more informed decisions—was substantial. To keep us focused and grounded, we developed four guiding principles to not only help us develop Operation Innovate's tools, but also to serve as a lens as we activate and use them for years to come.

Throughout this newsletter, you'll hear from employees and partners how we:

- Used collaboration and accountability to **foster strong relationships**
- Created an environment of engagement that **enables growth and empowerment**
- Prioritized the importance of **generating accurate data for decision making**, and
- Streamlined operations to **drive efficiency and effectiveness**

And we couldn't be happier with the results. We developed a solution that meets our current needs, while remaining scalable for the future.

Operation Innovate taught us a great deal about the importance of vision, collaboration, agility, perseverance, curiosity, and grace overall.

The experience reinforced the power of a united, forward-thinking team in driving lasting success through continuous innovation.

With gratitude,

SUE ZAVOYNA
CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER, Maryland Food Bank

From the desk of Carmen Del Guercio

My NEXT CHAPTER...



Leading this organization has been an incredible journey, and I can say with certainty that serving alongside you to fight food insecurity has been one of the most enjoyable and rewarding experiences of my life.

As I look back over these last eight years, there is just so much to be proud of: we've expanded and introduced new programs that reach more Marylanders than ever; we've created a community-based delivery model to better understand and serve the needs of diverse populations statewide; and we've amplified the voices of those with lived experiences to inform our work and advocate for change. We've also added incredibly talented teammates who have broad perspectives and a passion to serve. We've accomplished all this and more, while successfully navigating a number of crises, locally, nationally, and globally. In the face of uncertainty, we adapted, innovated, and leaned on each other, always ensuring that our neighbors had access to the food and support they needed.

So what's next for the Maryland Food Bank (MFB)? I am incredibly optimistic about the organization's future. Thanks to the efforts of so many teammates, volunteers, donors, partners, and friends, MFB has never been stronger. This assurance made my decision less difficult, and provides a solid foundation for a new leader to guide the food bank to even greater heights.

While there are some imminent headwinds, I'm confident our team can navigate, what I'm most excited about is MFB's longer-term prospects. The fact is that this work is about more than just meals; it's about bringing hope, dignity, and the promise of a better future to all Marylanders. And the food bank is well-positioned to do even more of this work, expanding access to healthy food while also tackling the deeper challenges that keep too many neighbors facing food insecurity in the first place. But we did not get to this point alone; your help has been critical to our success, and will continue to be needed in the future.

As I move on to my next chapter, I want to express my sincere appreciation to all those who've helped me on this journey. My incredible teammates, tireless partners, generous donors, and dedicated Board members, each of whom have made me laugh and cry, and have been a constant source of inspiration, courage, and pride. Thanks to you, this opportunity has been an incredible gift, and one I will always treasure.

CARMEN DEL GUERCIO

PRESIDENT & CEO, Maryland Food Bank



Belmont Elementary's Pantry Gets an A+

Featuring a powerful school pantry, where Miss Helen leads a team of experienced and passionate staff and volunteers that work closely with food insecure families, Belmont Elementary School is a great resource for local neighbors.

Families are able to access nutritious foods (like fresh produce and local blue catfish) as well as critical wraparound services like housing and utility bill assistance that can help eliminate the root causes of hunger common to the area.

Read the full story at mdfoodbank.org/belmont



Voices: A Lady of Distinction

On February 21, Nakia Coleman, a member of MFB's Speakers Bureau, took her community dedication to the next level, forging a partnership between Langston Hughes Community, Business, and Resource Center (CBRC) and her volunteer organization.

"It is really exciting to bring together two of my passions—being a member of the Speakers Bureau, and the Baltimore chapter of Top Ladies of Distinction—to help even more neighbors in need!"

The group organized a spaghetti dinner drive (the first of many to come in the new partnership) to help support and feed families in the northwest Baltimore community that rely on the Langston Hughes CBRC's help.



The Future is Growing

Maryland Food Bank staff, including Farm to Food Bank Manager Amy Cawley, and Chief Operating Officer Meg Kimmel, attended the Future Harvest Conference in Silver Spring, MD on January 17 and 18 to help educate local farmers about the different ways they can engage with us to help end hunger in Maryland, while becoming more financially stable, and contributing to the environmental health of our state.



Q&A

Transformational Philanthropy

Elise Krikau
Chief Philanthropy Office



Elle Wassertzug
Operations Associate
A. James and Alice B. Clark Foundation

Since 1987, the A. James and Alice B. Clark Foundation has been building community through investment in Maryland, and due to their generous philanthropic gift of \$5.75M, we were able to strategically plan and bring Operation Innovate to life. A recent conversation between our Chief Philanthropy Officer, Elise Krikau, and the Clark Foundation's Elle Wassertzug offers insight into how this powerful partnership came to light.

EK: *What about Operation Innovate made it attractive to the Clark Foundation?*

EW: The idea of sustainable capacity-building, of setting up our partners for success in the long term rather than leaving a significant funding gap when we're gone. Before his passing, Mr. Clark said "I feel very strongly that you should give to today's problems, and the next generation will shepherd those solutions in the future."

EK: *With the intent of Operation Innovate, and truly the overall model of the food bank so closely aligned with Mr. Clark's philosophy, it's hard to imagine a more impactful partnership. Can you share some of the reasons why Clark chose to not only meet, but exceed our original funding request?*

EW: The Clark Foundation runs on a trust-based philanthropic model. Over the years, seeing how the food bank continues to impact Maryland—through, and especially post-COVID—made it a pleasure to partner with you. Continuous conversations showed

us how strategic you are, and the way that you set up Operation Innovate made this feel like an organic continuation of our relationship.

EK: *In one of our earliest conversations, you remarked on how the way the Maryland Food Bank interacts with its community partners was very much in line with another of Mr. Clark's philosophies.*

EW: Yes, I remember! Humility was one of his biggest values, so the idea that you let partners speak for themselves, and don't just tell them what they need, spoke volumes to us.

EK: *We're humbled that you chose us as one of the final "investments" of the Clark Foundation and can't thank you enough.*

EW: The Foundation was formed because Mr. Clark felt it important to give back to the communities that made him successful, and the Maryland Food Bank will continue to honor that legacy in communities all across the state.

Tracey was also proud of the reduction in paper usage she's seen in just a few months. "We used to go through two or three reams of paper each day to process orders that were faxed in, let alone the paperwork for taking payments—that's all gone now!"



That's more than **\$5,000**
annual savings in paper reduction alone!

Our community partners are the heart and soul of the state's food assistance safety net, and without them, hunger would be an insurmountable challenge. We're thankful for these strong relationships, built on years of collaboration, and are humbled at their willingness to undergo the growing pains with us, ones that will ultimately lead to better outcomes for our neighbors.



A POV from A Community Partner

"Honestly? My first reaction was 'oh, no! I've been using one system for 10 years, and got it down to a science,'" shared Janice Parker, who oversees The Pantry at The OWE Center at Security Square Mall.

Janice, one of our more experienced partners, had been through some other technology additions and upgrades with MFB (Link2Feed, MealConnect, Agency Express) but sees a real difference in how MFB staff handled Operation Innovate.



"Even though it's a lot of different techy things, and I'm not a techy person, Rebecca (Mann, Senior Director, Community Programs) and Christel (Smallman, Regional Program Director) have been a godsend, there for me every step of the way, with wonderful help when I would call in a panic," she said.

The potential changes Operation Innovate is bringing was evident in Janice's voice as she excitedly described the new process. "I loved Agency Express, but this new system is so much bigger and better. I place my order, and I can actually pay for my order on the spot—this makes budgeting so much easier!"

**Partners can order donated (or grant-funded) food for free. They also have the option to purchase food from MFB, taking advantage of MFB's buying power.*





PREPARATION FOR OPERATION INNOVATE

While Operation Innovate is only a few months old, the early results are showing real promise.

By focusing on fostering strong relationships, enabling growth and empowerment, and generating accurate data to drive decision making, we are a more efficient and effective food bank.

With improved processes that align goals, drive accountability, and enable decisive collaboration, we are offering our community partners a simplified, better customer service experience, one that allows them more time to focus on the neighbors they serve.

Operation Innovate is making food easier to find, order, and manage for both us and our partners.

But it is our neighbors who will ultimately benefit from more streamlined programming that furthers our on-going efforts to have a more equitable food system for all Marylanders.

And it took a lot to get here.

PLANNING

30 consultants from **10** organizations

IMPLEMENTING

11 systems added/upgraded

FUNDING

\$4.3M in philanthropic support

TRAINING

2,500 hours with **66** staff & **473** partners



MARYLAND
FOOD BANK

PACK TO GIVE BACK

SAVE THE DATE

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 24

Pack to Give Back is Maryland's premier year-end event that brings our community together to assemble holiday meals to help feed our neighbors in need.



mdfoodbank.org/p2gb

Corporate
**SPONSORSHIP
& VOLUNTEER**
opportunities available



Contact Mary Wright to get the partnership started: mwright@mdfoodbank.org

BECOME A PACK TO GIVE BACK SPONSOR, AND:

- **Expand** food access to more Marylanders during the holidays
- **Advance** your corporate social responsibility agenda
- **Promote** team building at a fun, feel good event
- **Increase** brand awareness through event signage, social media channels, and inclusion in the MFB Annual Report

At Enterprise Holdings, we're about making a difference in the communities we serve. Supporting the Maryland Food Bank's 'Pack to Give Back' event has been close to our hearts because we believe in tackling food insecurity head-on. Our team is passionate about helping others, and through our partnership with the Maryland Food Bank, we've contributed to a truly impactful cause.

— CHRISTINE GHASSEMIEH | ENTERPRISE HOLDINGS

mdfoodbank.org



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