HAMILTON COUNTY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION
A CICF AFFILIATE

FEBRUARY 2022

HAMILTON COUNTY FOOD RESOURCE COMMUNITY PLAN

PREPARED BY

Community Solutions

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OVERVIEW.

The development of the **Hamilton County Food Resource Community Plan** (the Food Resource Plan) was sponsored by the Hamilton County Community Foundation (HCCF). HCCF's mission is "to build a community where opportunity meets growth for everyone, and philanthropic efforts support not-for-profit organizations doing vital work."

The HCCF strategic plan is organized around three pillars: Mental Health, Inclusive Economic Growth, and Family & Youth Empowerment. As part of the Family & Youth Empowerment, the HCCF committed to working to "ensure our families, including youth and seniors, have equitable opportunities to **access healthy food, develop fundamental life skills, live in a safe and healthy environment** and to **be educated** in environments that foster social and emotional learning."

Rooted in HCCF's strategic planning work, a Results Based Framework was used to identify a community-level result and strategies that guided the development of the Food Resource Plan.

Result: Every resident in Hamilton County has access to healthy food.

Strategies:

- Convene food pantries to assist them in collaborating with each other more effectively and efficiently to create delivery service models throughout the county.
- Support and partner with service providers to increase the capacity of food pantries as a point of access to wrap-around services.
- Assist in developing partnerships that create innovative solutions to accessing healthy food.

BACKGROUND.

Food Insecurity can be a temporary situation for a household or can last a long time. Systemic issues that contribute to food insecurity include such things as poverty, lack of affordable housing, chronic health conditions, and systemic racial discrimination. These are complex, deeply interconnected issues that permeate the lives of individuals

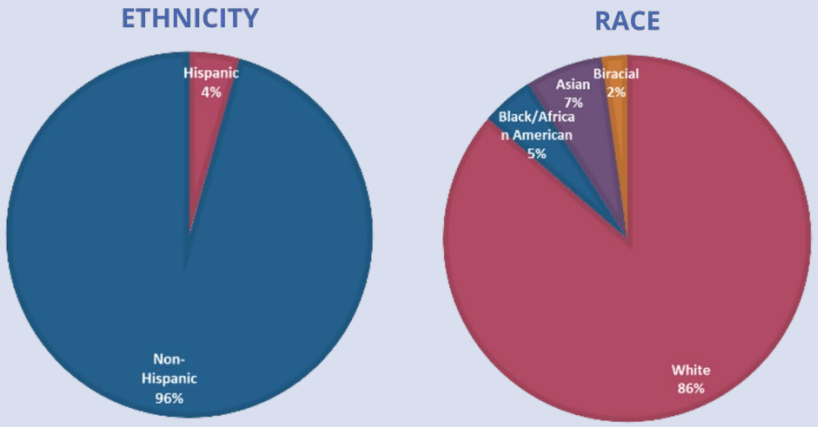
and communities. Those facing food insecurity are often confronted with the harsh reality of having to make difficult financial decisions, choosing between food and housing, utilities, transportation, or medical care.[1]

According to Feeding Indiana's Hungry, nearly 1.2 million Hoosiers experienced food insecurity during in 2020 at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.[2] Hamilton County residents were no exception. Emergency food system usage increased by 154%, while Gleaners Food Bank reported seeing a 59% increase in demand in Hamilton County. At the same time, food banks and pantries across the state experienced a 70-90% reduction in volunteers.[3] This increase in demand and new challenges highlight the critical importance of strengthening emergency food systems throughout Hamilton County.

UNDERSTANDING THE NEED IN HAMILTON COUNTY.

Hamilton County is the fourth most populous county in Indiana.[4] While only 4% of residents identify as Hispanic, and only 14% identify as persons of color, Hamilton County is becoming more racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically diverse.

Population Estimates by Race and Ethnicity.



(SOURCES: STATSINDIANA, U.S. CENSUS BUREAU)

[1] *Feeding America*
[2] *Feeding Indiana's Hungry*
[3] *Healthy Opportunities IN*
[4] *2020 US Census Bureau data*

A large share of Hamilton County residents need support to access healthy food. More than one-fifth of adults are not earning enough to cover their basic needs. [5] Among all residents, about one-in-ten experience food insecurity, but the share is even greater, 17%, among residents under the age of 18. [6]

Need and resources to address that need are not equally distributed within the county, with areas of the greatest need often being the more rural areas with the smallest populations, as seen in the figures below. The overall poverty rate in Hamilton County is relatively low, only 4.2%, but is much higher in rural areas. Arcadia and Sheridan have poverty rates three times higher than the county. Arcadia is 0.6 square miles with a population density of 2,746, and the highest poverty rate in the county, 14%. Sheridan is 2.1 square miles with a population density of 1,451, and a poverty rate of 12%. Cicero's poverty rate is 9%, while 9% of those under 18 in Westfield live in poverty.[7] See Appendix A for city specific demographic charts.

Population Size, Largest to Smallest:

Carmel: 101,643 people, 29.5% of county

Fishers: 97,020 people, 28.2% of county

Noblesville: 65,835 people, 19.1% of county

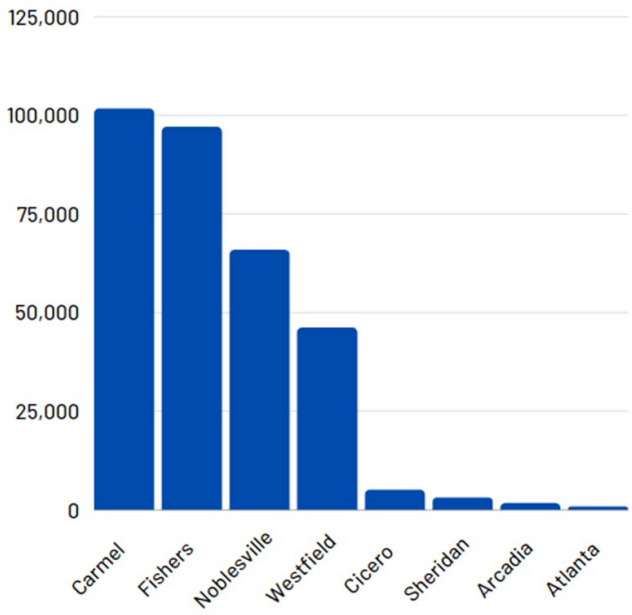
Westfield: 46,145 people, 13.4% of county

Cicero: 4,999 people, 1.5% of county

Sheridan: 3,048 people, 0.9% of county

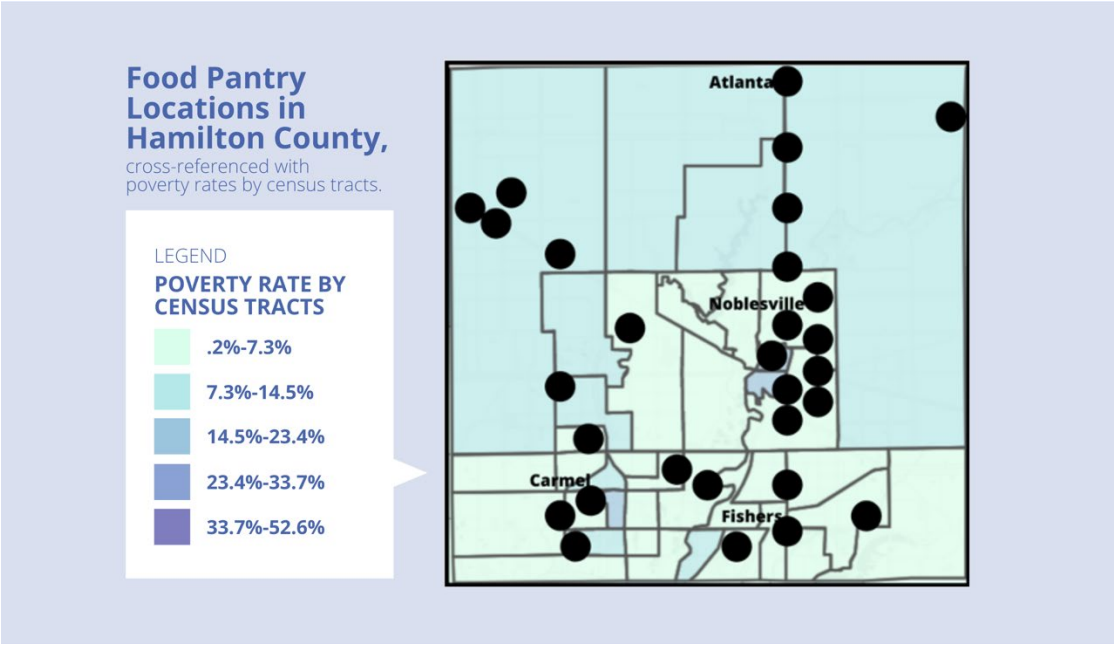
Arcadia: 1,648 people, 0.5% of county

Atlanta: 783 people, 0.2% of county

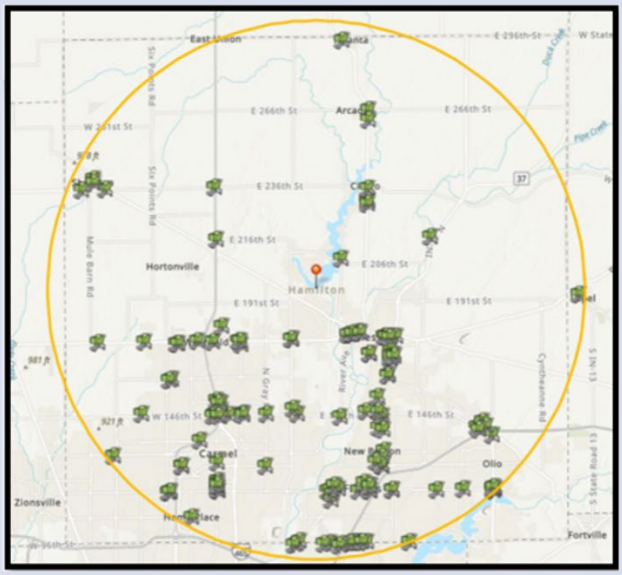


As seen in the figures below, the areas with the highest poverty rates have the fewest food pantry and SNAP retail options.

[5] *Ibid*
[6] *Gleaners Food Bank*
[7] *Ibid*



Sources: Hamilton County Harvest Food Bank, 2021; SAVI Community Profile, Hamilton County



SNAP RETAIL LOCATIONS IN HAMILTON COUNTY.

Source: USDA Food and Nutrition Services

THE PROCESS.

The HCCF engaged Community Solutions, Inc. (Community Solutions), a public health and community development consulting firm, to drive the development of this Food Resource Plan. Community Solutions integrates a results-based, data-driven framework to help communities harness their wealth of knowledge and wisdom into collective action to improve the lives of individuals and families. Specifically, Community Solutions facilitated the following:

DEFINITION OF THE ISSUE

Community Solutions conducted an environmental scan that included analysis of existing demographic data and surveys conducted by Hamilton Harvest Community Food Bank; surveys of pantries and other service providers facilitated through Good Samaritan Network; key informant interviews; and discussions with food pantry consumers.

COLLABORATIVE PLANNING SESSIONS

The Environmental Scan was used to drive cross-sector strategy sessions that engaged organizations with active involvement in this issue. Participants included food pantry providers, food banks, farmers markets, community farmers, educators, social service organizations, and public officials. In the first session, participants were introduced to the targeted result ("Every resident in Hamilton County has access to healthy food"), did a deep dive into the data from the environmental scan to begin to develop the story behind the data, and began to identify what it would take to move the data in a positive direction. At the end of this first session, participants identified other individuals and organizations who should be engaged in the planning process. The second session engaged participants in identifying the following characteristics of a strong system: stable food supplies, culturally responsive food, geographic availability, multiple points of distribution, connection to other resources, and comprehensive hours of operation. After some initial prioritization, participants broke into work groups to develop strategies focused on stable sources of food, geographical access, and connection to resources. At the third session, participants reviewed the objectives and strategies that had been developed to date, added additional strategies, and expanded on the existing ones. The participants also discussed the infrastructure for moving the plan to action (a coalition) and identified the initial steps and timeline for design and launch of the coalition.

SECTOR-BASED SESSIONS

Food pantries and the school systems are two key partners in ensuring that individuals and families can access food resources. Individual sessions were held with partners in these sectors to have intentional conversations around the needs they see, what they do to address those needs, the gaps/barriers experienced, and strategies to strengthen their systems.

These processes laid the groundwork for the development of the Food Resource Plan to ensure every resident in Hamilton County has access to healthy food.

FOOD SUPPORT SECTORS.

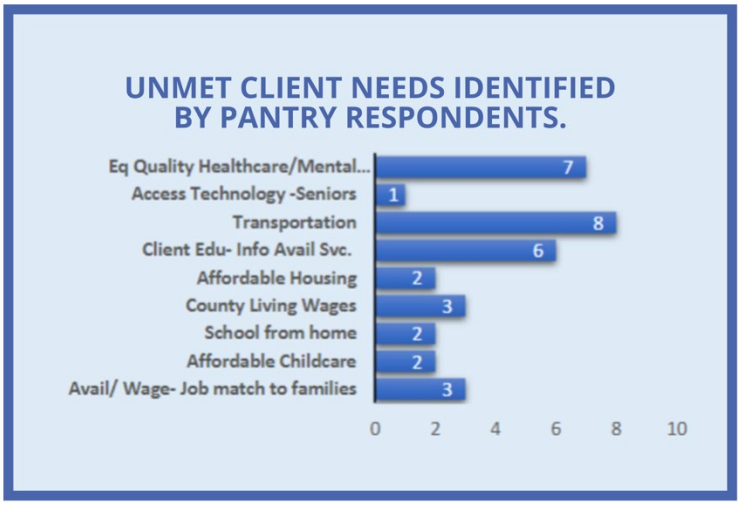
Every resident in Hamilton County has healthy food. This is one of the priorities of HCCF that is included under the Family and Youth Empowerment pillar of their strategic plan. The focus of this effort is on strengthening the food support networks that provide for the immediate needs of individuals and families in Hamilton County to address food insecurity. Hamilton County's food support networks consists of three core sectors: **1) food pantries, 2) school systems, and 3) farmers markets and community gardens.**

FOOD PANTRIES.

Food pantries can serve as safety nets for people experiencing food insecurity. Not only do the pantries provide necessary food, but they can connect vulnerable populations with services to address the root causes of their crises. To be a strong system of support, pantries must be able to consistently provide a variety of foods, be available in locations and during times most accessible to those who need them and provide reliable information about additional resources for their customers.

In January 2022, Community Solutions surveyed food pantry providers in Hamilton County about their ability to meet he needs of people in their community. Almost four-in-five respondents (79%) reported "always" being able to meet the need; however, discussions with pantry providers revealed barriers to access among those residents

most in need. Common barriers include lack of transportation, which can prevent people from coming to pantries, and language barriers. Challenges faced by the pantries to meet the demand include lack of volunteers to staff the pantries; not having large enough vehicles to transport food to the pantry; and lack of refrigeration for perishable items like meat, dairy, and produce. Food storage space was also identified in a 2021 survey conducted by the Hamilton County Harvest Food Bank (HCHFB).



Hamilton County Harvest Food Bank 2021

In the Community Solutions survey, almost all food pantry providers (95%) reported that they can connect the people they serve to other resources in the community. However, the HCHFB survey found clients still reported a variety of unmet needs, including transportation, healthcare (including mental health), employment services, and client education around available social services (see figure below).

SOURCES OF FOOD.

While there has always been a need for a network of food resources, COVID-19 has put additional stress on the system. Increased demand, changes to the distribution system caused by new safety protocols, and supply chain issues have amplified the challenges that pantries have in delivering healthy food to their customers.

Community Solutions survey participants identified several sources of food for their pantries including: HCHFB (89%), food drives/donations (79%), purchase from a store (74%), Midwest Food Bank (47%), Gleaners Food Bank (37%) and community gardens/farmers markets (37%). HCHFB, a volunteer-led organization, is the primary food resource for pantries in the county. While they conduct large-scale food drives, more than half of the food they donate to community pantries has to be purchased in order to keep up with increased demand.

Smaller pantries report having a difficult time partnering with Gleaners Food Bank or Midwest Food Bank because they lack the ability to pick up large quantities of food or

the needed storage space. Current policies at both of these food banks prevent HCHFB from receiving food from them and then distributing it to the smaller pantries.

ACCESSING THE PANTRIES.

Accessing healthy food has also been further complicated by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, especially in more rural areas. The planning process identified several key issues for Hamilton County residents experiencing food insecurity, including pantry location and hours of operation, lack of transportation, and cultural divides. While some restrictions are in place to ensure that the pantry food supply can be spread out to more individuals and families, they nevertheless limit certain households' access regular access to healthy foods.

According respondents to the HCHFB survey, more than three-in-four local pantries (77%) have residential requirements that include documentation of eligibility. Some food pantries require a valid form of identification or that clients prove they live within certain geographic boundaries. Many pantries limit quantities of food people can take or the frequency with which they access the pantry – about one-half of pantries limit households to one visit per month.

The publicly available food pantry listing distributed by HCHFB shows that county pantries tend to have limited weekend and evening operating hours, and these hours are especially limited at smaller pantries in rural areas. Meals on Wheels Hamilton County volunteers deliver more than 56,000 meals each year to elderly, chronically ill, and disabled residents, according to its website; however, there are few delivery options associated with food pantries in the county. Many families are not able to access pantries due to schedule conflicts with their jobs, schools, or other obligations or lack transportation to get to the pantry. Volunteer and staffing shortages further limit pantries' ability to expand hours of operation, but pantry and social service providers have been working to increase their food access options, including drop off sites, and yellow pantries (refrigerator-sized containers of non-perishable food) dispersed throughout the county.

Interviews and focus groups with food pantry clients revealed that some clients experience stigma associated with asking for help. Participants reported feeling uncomfortable, particularly when pantries are located outside of their home community and they are unfamiliar with the organization. When the location of the food pantry is not close to home, clients are less likely to encounter familiar faces, more likely to experience cultural disconnects, and more likely to face transportation and other

access barriers. There are opportunities to build community trust, bridge cultural divides, and facilitate a welcoming environment for all.

Client focus group participants also expressed a reluctance to enroll in SNAP benefits. SNAP benefits can provide a food safety net for individuals and families and limit their need to use the food pantry system. Reasons for the reluctance range from lack of information about SNAP benefits, including how to enroll to internalized shame about using them. As one participant succinctly stated, "food stamps are for poor people, and we are not poor."

As important as it is to help Hamilton County residents get more easily connected to food resources, it is equally important to increase opportunities for sharing of resources among the food pantries. Many food pantries in the county operate independently with limited resources. and face challenges that could be alleviated by a network of support. Pantry providers identified various ways a network of support could alleviate some of their challenges and increase access and resources available to the people of Hamilton County. These include: having a simple list of community resources for families that pantries could distribute; promoting the Township Trustee's Office as a centralized source of information, referrals, and assistance; developing a text communication system to give families updates on resources; promoting formal collaborations between pantries; and developing a peer network that would allow pantries to learn from each other, share resources, coordinate hours of operation, and provide common education materials to the people they serve.

SCHOOL SYSTEMS.

Educators have long been aware of the impact of hunger on learning. Kids who are hungry have a difficult time concentrating, processing information, and focusing on school. Hungry children have lower math scores and are often tardy or absent from school.[8] Schools and school personnel have been implementing various strategies to address this issue, from free and reduced-price meals to teachers' drawers full of snacks.

Schools are an easy access point for youth and families, which along with the fact that school personnel are often aware of which students need food assistance, make them

[8] National Education Association (NEA)

a strong asset in the food distribution network. There are six public school systems in Hamilton County serving some 300,000 Hamilton County youth. About 15% of Hamilton County school-aged children received free/reduced lunches during the 2019-20 school year, though the need varied widely across communities.[9] The shares of students receiving free/reduced price meals by school corporation were as follows in 2021[10]:

- 39%, Sheridan
- 29%, Hamilton Heights
- 22%, Noblesville
- 15% Hamilton Southeastern
- 15% Westfield-Washington
- 11%, Carmel Clay

Given the gaps in access to free and reduced meal services during breaks in the academic year, or during the academic year, depending on staffing and capacity, all Hamilton County school systems have engaged in Backpack and Summer Meal programs to ensure students have access to food on weekends and during school breaks. Backpack Programs vary across the systems in terms of the types of food distributed, the amount of food distributed (83-600+ lbs./week), and who receives the food. The Backpack Program was facilitated through Gleaner's Food Bank until 2021, at which point schools and their community partners assumed responsibility for their own programs. Many of the school systems work with the Hamilton County Youth Assistance Program (HCYAP) for this; though, Westfield and Noblesville partner with community-based organizations Open Door and Fueled for School, respectively.

While there should be consistency across the county in what resources are available to school-aged youth and their families, some schools struggle to provide these food programs and other barriers may prevent families from accessing those that are available. One common barrier is the stigma youth experience when it is known they participate in a food support program. School leaders noted that student participation is particularly difficult in the high schools and recommended providing a more discreet resource such as a gift card. Youth and teens may be particularly vulnerable to stigma and shame associated with food insecurity. Efforts should be made to provide food access in ways that reduce the stigma attached with the issue.

[9] Hamilton County Harvest Food Bank 2021 Annual Report
[10] Indiana Family and Social Services Agency, Division of Family Resources

COMMUNITY GARDENS & FARMERS MARKETS.

There are three farmers markets (Fishers, Noblesville, and Carmel) and nearly 30 community, school, and group gardens in Hamilton County.[11] These are generally available May-October, and the farmers markets operate 8am-12pm on Saturdays during those months. The distribution of locations[12] of these community resources (see map below) are reminiscent of the SNAP retail and food pantry locations – centralized around Fishers, Noblesville, and Carmel with fewer offerings in rural areas.

More than a dozen Hamilton County community gardens are listed as food pantry partners.[13] HCHFB and other pantries receive leftover produce from farmers markets. While these donations are welcome, smaller pantries often lack the capacity to store the produce, so the timing of the incoming donation with the ability of the pantry to distribute it quickly is important. HCHFB serves as a good "broker" for the produce, as they can accept it in larger quantities and distribute it to pantries in smaller quantities throughout the week.

Farmers markets can be a resource for fresh produce and other food for individuals enrolled in SNAP. While SNAP Fresh Bucks are integrated into all three farmers markets, farmers market coordinator interviews revealed that the process is complicated and requires a great deal of management:

- SNAP consumers must convert their benefits into Fresh Bucks at the market
- SNAP consumers then use the Fresh Bucks tokens at the individual vendors.
- Those vendors who accept the Fresh Bucks turn them into the market coordinators
- The market coordinators convert the Fresh Bucks into cash and pay the vendor.

[11] Hamilton County Garden Network Directory
[12] Hamilton County Garden Network Directory
[13] https://www.hamcogardennetwork.org/garden-to-food-pantry.html

- The sponsor of the market must then submit documentation to the state for reimbursement, which is not always timely.

Many SNAP beneficiaries may not even be aware that they can use their benefits at Farmer's Markets, and those who are may be reluctant to do so, given the stigma that can be associated with receiving SNAP. Farmers market operations staff say they recognize the need to increase promotions and education about the Fresh Bucks program, but they are unsure how to raise awareness about SNAP eligibility without perpetuating stigma.

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) vouchers can also be used at Farmer's Markets, but only at WIC approved vendors, and that approval process is difficult for vendors. Vendors interviewed reported that the time needed to complete required trainings and the "extensive" paperwork, are "not worth it," which means there are few WIC-approved vendors at the markets.

STRATEGIES.

TARGETED RESULT: EVERY RESIDENT IN HAMILTON COUNTY HAS ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOOD.

The Food Resource Plan represents the knowledge and wisdom of myriad partners who have been dedicated to addressing the issue of food insecurity. This plan brings them into alignment with each other, so they can leverage resources, collectively address gaps in the systems, and build and sustain a comprehensive system that ensures that Hamilton County residents can get their food needs met. Moving these strategies to action will require a framework that continues to bring these partners to the table; identifies and recruits new partners; consistently gathers, analyzes, and responds to data; and has an iterative process to (re)design strategies and hold each other accountable. The formation of the Hamilton County Food Resource Coalition will ensure the connections created and nurtured through the collaborative planning process make a meaningful difference for Hamilton County residents. The Hamilton County Food Resource Coalition should develop strategy work groups that meet as frequently as they need to do their work and the full coalition should convene at least quarterly to:

- Provide a forum for updates across strategy work groups
- Review data and evaluate progress

- Identify ongoing gaps and opportunities to engage other partners
- Serve as a forum for presentations on best practices, latest trends, etc.
- Discuss organization updates that impact the work
- Facilitate other assessment, planning, and/or evaluation activities

Data from across the systems should guide the Coalition's work and should be a priority for the partners.

With the support of the Hamilton County Community Foundation and in collaboration with Good Samaritan Network, HCHFB will serve as the backbone organization for this coalition. See Appendix B for an example of a Coalition structure.

What follows are the Objectives and Strategies that have been developed today by the participants in this planning process. These strategy charts are intended to continue to evolve as partners prioritize the work, make progress on the current strategies, and develop new strategies to continue to respond to the need. It should be noted that the strategy grids below do not include the anticipated Timeline for completion. This will be one of the first priorities for the work groups.

Objective 1: Support a data-driven, results focus county-wide coalition of partners who "hold" this work and are focused on achieving the result: "Every resident in Hamilton County has access to healthy food."

Lead Partner(s): Hamilton County Community Foundation
Supporting Partner(s): Hamilton County Harvest Food Bank; Good Samaritan Network

	Strategies	Strategy Leads/Partners	Timeline
1	Develop the infrastructure for the Coalition and "authorize" them to move to action. Infrastructure could include a Coalition Steering Committee and Strategy Groups focused on developing and implementing prioritized strategies – each Work Group should be represented on the Steering Committee. First task will be to develop a work plan to guide the first year of work.	Hamilton County Community Foundation; Hamilton County Harvest Food Bank	
2	Inventory what data is currently being collected and create and maintain a system for collecting quantitative and qualitative data across the systems to inform the priorities of the Coalition and monitor progress toward achieving the result. This would include such data as: a) school system information on the number of youth who participate in summer meals/Backpack programs; b) food pantry data on the number of individuals/families served; c) enrollment numbers in SNAP and use at Farmers Markets; d) enrollment number in WIC, etc.	Hamilton County Harvest Food Bank; school systems, pantry providers, SNAP, WIC providers, and Step Ahead	
3	Develop and implement an internal and external communication plan that ensures that coalition members have the data and information they need to inform their programs and the public is aware of the issue of food insecurity in Hamilton County and the work that is being done.	Hamilton County Harvest Food Bank; Good Samaritan Network	
4	Develop and implement strategies to reduce the stigma attached to food insecurity and reluctance of those in need to reach out for help.	The Coalition	

Hamilton County has a network of large and small pantries to serve the community. These pantries have a range of ability to store large quantities of food, some lack refrigeration resources to keep non-perishables (meat, fresh produce), many do not have the transportation resources to pick up food from area foodbanks, and many are operated by a handful of volunteers who work after hours and on week-ends to staff their pantries. In addition to this, many pantries rely on donations of food, which are not always consistent in terms of quantity or quality of items. All of these factors influence the ability for a pantry to meet the needs of the individuals and families they serve.

Objective 2: Ensure that pantries have access to the food they need to be able to provide healthy food to individuals and families in need.

Lead Partner(s): Hamilton County Harvest Food Bank; Good Samaritan Network
Supporting Partner(s): Food Pantries; Township Trustees

	Strategies	Strategy Leads/Partners	Timeline
1	Expand the role of Hamilton County Harvest Food Bank to be a central point for support for the pantries. This could include providing information on food resources, facilitating collective purchasing, creating a communication stream for pantries, and regular convenings to exchange information, review data, and develop strategies to meet the need.	Hamilton County Harvest Food Bank; pantries; Hamilton County Community Foundation	
2	Work with Gleaners Food Bank and Midwest Food Bank to develop a system that enables smaller pantries to receive food through them.	Hamilton County Harvest Food Bank; Hamilton Community Foundation	
3	Develop transportation/food pick up resources for pantries that do not have the ability to pick food up from bulk food providers.	Hamilton County Harvest Food Bank; Good Samaritan Network	
4	Identify specific sites where lack of storage space, refrigeration/freezer space is a barrier to receiving food and develop a plan to address this.	Hamilton County Harvest Food Bank; Good Samaritan Network	

5	Review/assess the system for pantries to receive food from community gardens and farmers markets to identify gaps and implement strategies to address those gaps.	Hamilton County Harvest Food Bank; Hamilton County Soil and Water "Produce Donation" map	
6	Explore and support efforts for year-round food production and expansion/replication of the Teter farm model to supply donation or wholesale purchases. Develop system for family garden donations.	Teter Organic Farm, Hoosier Young Farmers, HC Farmers Market Managers, Hamilton County Purdue Extension	

Access to food resources may be influenced by several things: not knowing where the food pantries are located, their hours of operation, and who they serve; limited resources available in the area; lack of transportation; language barriers; and stigma associated with needing help. No one strategy can address all of these issues.

Objective 3: Ensure that individuals and families can access food support networks regardless of race, place, or identity.

Lead Partner(s): Hamilton County Harvest Food Bank; Good Samaritan Network
Supporting Partner(s): Food Pantries; Township Trustees

	Strategies	Strategy Leads/Partners	Timeline
1	Maintain an updated listing of the food pantries and publicize that resource guide (electronically and in hard copy) through Hamilton County Harvest Food Bank, Good Samaritan Network, school websites, libraries, youth serving agencies, and other community entities.	Hamilton County Harvest Food Bank	
2	Develop and implement food support systems that meet the needs of individuals and families in less populated areas of Hamilton County. (i.e.: mobile pantry)	The Coalition	

3	Promote the Indy Hunger Network's Community Compass app through schools, libraries, community organizations, social media, and traditional media.	The Coalition	
4	Create an inventory of transportation and/or food delivery resources for individuals and families for whom transportation to a pantry/food resource is a barrier.	The Coalition	
5	Develop bilingual materials for outreach/communication with individuals and families and have interpretation tools available at the pantries (i.e.: through smart phones)	The Coalition	
6	Increase Utilization of SNAP/EBT/WIC at Farmers Markets	Hamilton County Farmers Market managers	
7	Continue to support the holiday food drives and engage partners across the county as distribution points	Good Samaritan Network	
8	Continue the partnership with Gleaners Mobile Pantries and new "Farmers Market" program that would be open to the public	Good Samaritan Network; Gleaner's Food Bank	

The impact that hunger has on the ability of a student to learn has been well documented in the research. Schools have a variety of strategies to address this, and each school system in Hamilton County currently works to ensure that students who qualify for the free and reduced lunch program receive Summer Meal programs and weekend Backpacks. The food is provided through various resources and partnerships including HCHFB, food pantries, food drives, private donations, school budgets, and places of worship. The HCYAP plays an integral role in addressing food insecurity in students, but given the breadth of services they coordinate, there may be a need to assess the long-term sustainability of this role in food insecurity.

As a distribution point, schools have several natural advantages – they have an established relationship with the target population, youth are already at the school which reduces transportation barriers, and they often have an infrastructure through their food service departments that can provide some support to the effort. School partners did note a significant challenge. Students (especially high school students) may

experience stigma associated with feelings of shame that can prevent them from accessing food resources. Options need to be in place that reduce the visibility of participation in food support services.

Objective 4: Ensure that food insecure, school aged youth in Hamilton County have access to food.

Lead Partner(s): Hamilton County Harvest Food Bank, Hamilton County Youth Assistance Program **Supporting Partner(s):** School systems in Hamilton County; Hamilton County Community Foundation

	Strategies	Strategy Leads/Partners	Timeline
1	Review the current system(s) for implementation of summer meals and Backpack programs across the school systems and identify opportunities to strengthen it. This could include the development of collaborative partnerships for each school's system; development of a group purchasing system; centralized Backpack preparation, etc.	Hamilton County Harvest Food Bank; School Systems; Hamilton County Youth Assistance Program, Fueled for School, Good Samaritan Network	
2	Develop and implement a plan in response to the review of the systems.	Hamilton County Harvest Food Bank; School Systems; partners identified in the review	
3	Develop strategies to provide access to food that removes stigma. This could be having food/snacks in areas such as the guidance counselor's offices; distribution of gift cards rather than bags of food; etc.	School systems	
4	Create an infrastructure for partners who are providing food to school aged youth to come together and exchange information about "what works", problem solve, and create a network of support.	Hamilton Community Foundation; Hamilton County Harvest Food Bank; school systems and community partners	

Individuals and families who need food resources are likely to need other support services as well. Food pantries have an opportunity to connect the individuals and families to additional community resources. The "connection" can be at several levels – distribution of community resource cards, assessment of specific needs and targeted connection to resources, referral to agencies that are able to work face-to-face with individuals, and electronic communications. A priority must be put on ensuring that the information on resources is up-to-date and accurate.

Objective 5: Build the capacity of food support networks to connect individuals and families to community resources.

Lead Partner(s): Good Samaritan Network
Supporting Partner(s): Township Trustees

	Strategies	Strategy Leads/Partners	Timeline
1	Develop "Top 10 Community Resources" for distribution at pantries, through Backpacks, partner websites and other food distribution sites. The Top 10 should include the first place to go for further assistance. Handout could include a QR Code for more information.	Good Samaritan Network	
2	Develop a "How to Guide" for accessing the Township Trustee and public benefits for distribution at pantries, through Backpacks and other food distribution sites. This should include locations, hours of operation, and exactly what is needed to begin the application processes.	Township Trustees; Hamilton County Division of Family Resources; Indiana Health Centers Hamilton County WIC	
3	Assess the capacity of the pantries to be able to guide individuals/families as they connect to resources. Facilitate the development of community/faith-based partnerships for pantries who do not have the staff/volunteer resources to do this themselves.	Good Samaritan Network	
4	Explore the potential to collect client email addresses and or cell phone numbers and centralize an email/test message system for updates on resources.	Good Samaritan Network; Pantries	

CONCLUSION.

The Food Resource Plan presents an opportunity for individuals and agencies with a commitment to addressing food insecurity to collaborate across sectors until every Hamilton County resident has access to healthy food. It should be noted that this Plan is focused on providing a system of food resources that can respond to the immediate needs of individuals and families.

Through the planning process, there were four takeaways that will be critical principles for the Hamilton County Food Resource Coalition as they move this work forward:

1. Every resident in Hamilton County needs to have access to food resources regardless of where they live and how often they need help.
2. Food resources need to be provided with attention language barriers and to cultural norms and preferences.
3. Food resources need to be provided in a way that minimizes stigma.
4. There are long term (policy) issues that need to be in place to fully address food insecurity at a systemic level and they must be pursued.

There are strong partners engaged in this work and a deep commitment to address food insecurity in the county. Successful implementation of this plan, through the framework of the Hamilton County Food Resource Coalition, will require deliberate effort and accountability from these partners to share their resources and move to aligned action to improve the network of support for residents in Hamilton County.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.

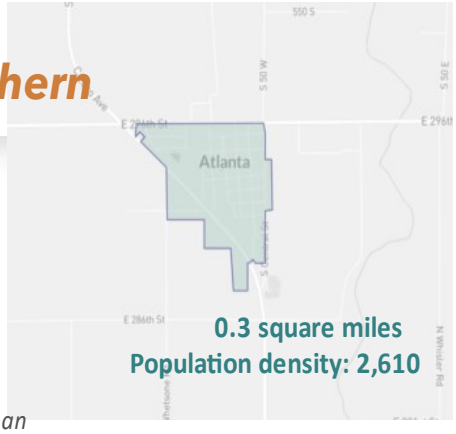
This plan was made possible through the generosity of the Hamilton County Community Foundation. Beyond the financial resources, they provided the collaborative space, leveraged their relationships, and actively participated in all phases of this process. Thank you to board of the foundation, Tom Killian, and Jeena Siela for their leadership.

Over 50 individuals provided their input through interviews, focus groups, surveys, and planning sessions. Thank you to the food pantry providers, food banks, school leaders, youth serving agencies, community based organizations, public servants, corporate leaders, and consumers of food resources in Hamilton County. Without this wisdom and dedication of time and effort, this powerful plan would not exist.

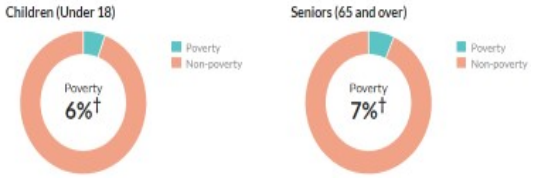
APPENDICES.

APPENDIX A - DATA BY CITY/TOWN

ATLANTA, IN *northern*



- **Poverty rate**: 8.3% *(trending up)*



- **15% of residents carpool to work** *(1.5x higher than Indianapolis-Carmel-Anderson and overall Indiana rates)*

Sources: Census Reporter, DataUSA

- **Median household income:** $60,250
- 6.4% of residents **lack health insurance** *(21.8% on Medicaid, 7.9% on Medicare)*
- 4.6% of residents self -identify as **Hispanic/Latino**

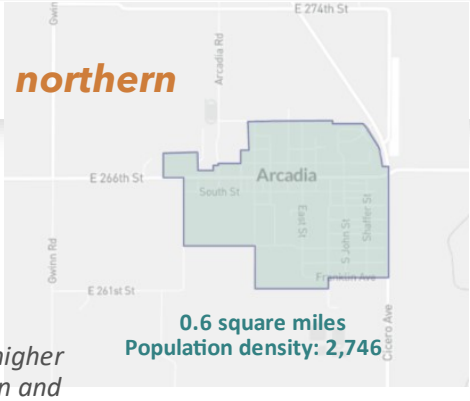
  Race: 93.7% White (Non- Hispanic), 0.7% Biracial (Non -Hispanic), 0.5% Asian

1

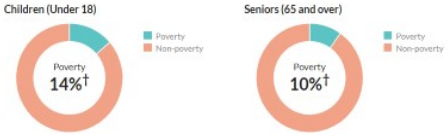
Community Solutions

ARCADIA, IN

northern



- **Poverty rate:** 14.5% **higher than national average of 12.3%*



- **12% of residents carpool to work** *(1.4x higher than the rates in Indianapolis-Carmel-Anderson and 1.3x higher than Indiana rate)*
- **Median household income:** $50,547
- 13.3% of residents **lack health insurance** *(15.8% on Medicaid, 10.2% on Medicare)*
- 0% of residents self -identify as **Hispanic/Latino**

Race: 98% White (Non -Hispanic), 1% Black/African American, 0.4% Biracial, 0.4% Asian

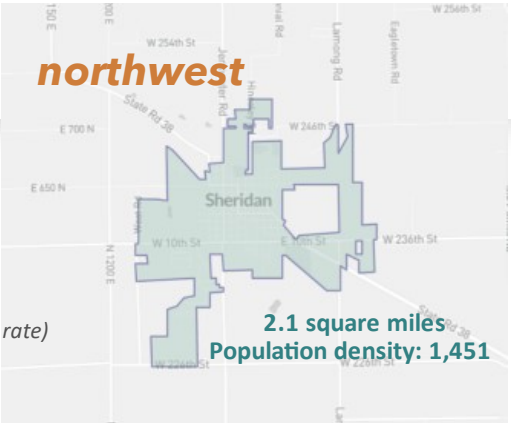
Sources: Census Reporter, DataUSA

2

Community Solutions

SHERIDAN, IN

northwest



- **Poverty rate:** 11.7% *(trending down)*

- **4% of residents walk to work** *(2x higher than Indianapolis-Carmel-Anderson rates and 1.5x higher than Indiana rate)*
- **10% carpool to work** *(25% higher than rates in Indianapolis-Carmel-Anderson & 20% higher than Indiana rate)*
- Has a liquor store, but **doesn't have a grocery store**
- **Median household income** : $48,173 *(trending up)*
- 13.4% of residents **lack health insurance** *(15.7% of residents on Medicaid, 8.75% on Medicare)*
- 0.6% of residents self -identify as **Hispanic/Latino**

Race: 96% White (Non -Hispanic), 2.8% Biracial (Non -Hispanic), 0.2% Asian

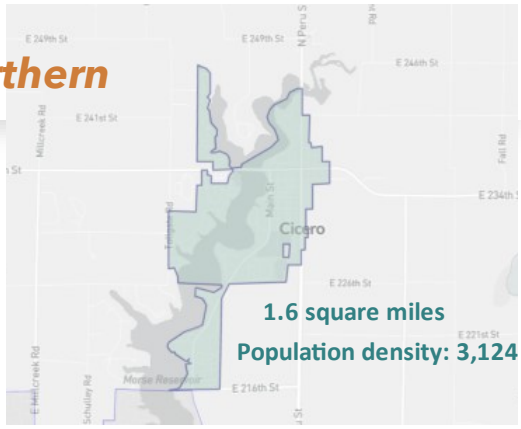
Sources: Census Reporter, DataUSA

3

Community Solutions

CICERO, IN

northern



Sources: Census Reporter, DataUSA

- **Poverty rate:** 9.2% *(trending up)*

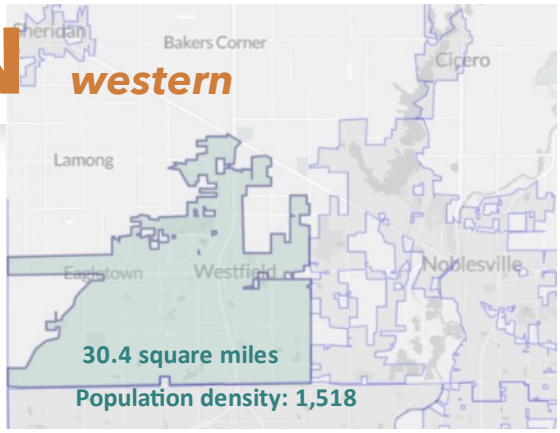
- **10% of residents carpool to work** *(25% higher than Indianapolis-Carmel-Anderson rates and 20% higher than Indiana rate)*
- **Median household income:** $67,702 *(trending down)*
- 6.4% of residents **lack health insurance** *(13.2% on Medicare, 9.1% on Medicaid)*
- 1% of residents self -identify as **Hispanic/Latino**

Race: 98.6% White (Non-Hispanic); 0.3% Asian; 0% Black/African American

4

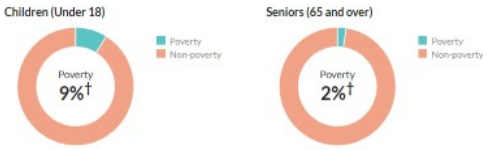
WESTFIELD, IN

western



Sources: Census Reporter, DataUSA

- **Poverty rate:** 6% *(trending up)*

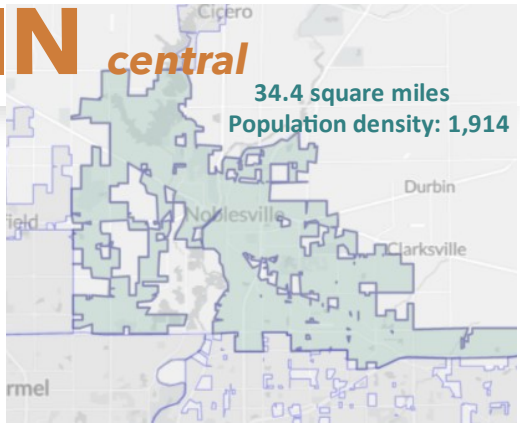


- **7% of residents carpool to work** and **1% of residents walk to work** *(slightly lower than regional and state averages)*
- **Median household income:** $98,376 *(trending up)*
- 6.5% of residents **lack health insurance** *(9.7% on Medicare, 5.6% on Medicaid)*
- 4.8% of residents self -identify as **Hispanic/Latino**

Race: 85% White (Non -Hispanic), 3.7% Asian, 3.2% Black/African American

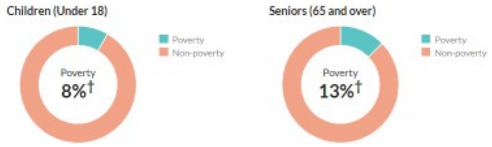
5

NOBLESVILLE, IN *central*



34.4 square miles
Population density: 1,914

- **Poverty rate:** 8.2% *(trending up)*



- **7% of residents carpool to work** and **1% of residents walk to work** *(slightly lower than regional and state averages)*
- **Median household income:** $82,218 *(trending up)*
- 5.2% of residents **lack health insurance** *(8.9% on Medicare, 6.7% on Medicaid)*
- 3.6% of residents self -identify as **Hispanic/Latino**

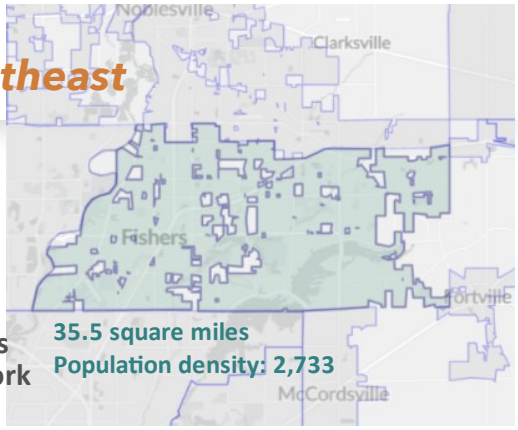
Race: 87% White (Non -Hispanic), 4.7% Black/African American, 2.6% Multiracial, 2.1% Asian

Sources: Census Reporter, DataUSA

Community Solutions

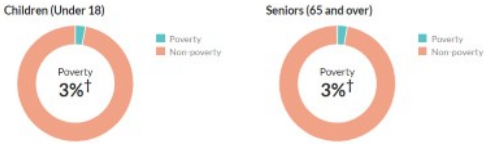
6

FISHERS, IN *southeast*



35.5 square miles
Population density: 2,733

- **Poverty rate:** 2.9% *(trending down)*



- **6% of residents carpool to work, 1% of residents walk to work** *(lower than regional and state averages);* **10% work from home** *(double regional and state averages)*
- **Median household income:** $109,454 *(trending up)*
- 2.9% of residents **lack health insurance** *(7.2% on Medicare, 2.7% on Medicaid)*
- 3.9% of residents self -identify as **Hispanic/Latino**

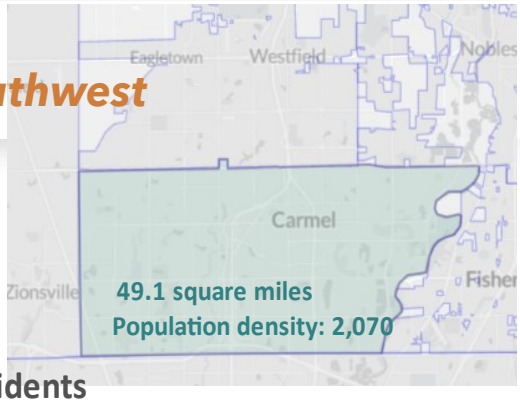
Race: 81% White (Non -Hispanic), 6.9% Asian, 6.1% Black/African American, 2.4% Multiracial

Sources: Census Reporter, DataUSA

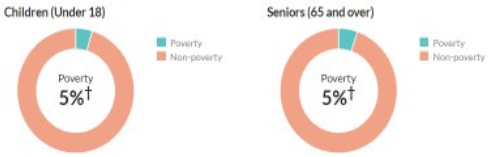
Community Solutions

7

CARMEL, IN *southwest*



- **Poverty rate:** 3.5% *(trending up)*

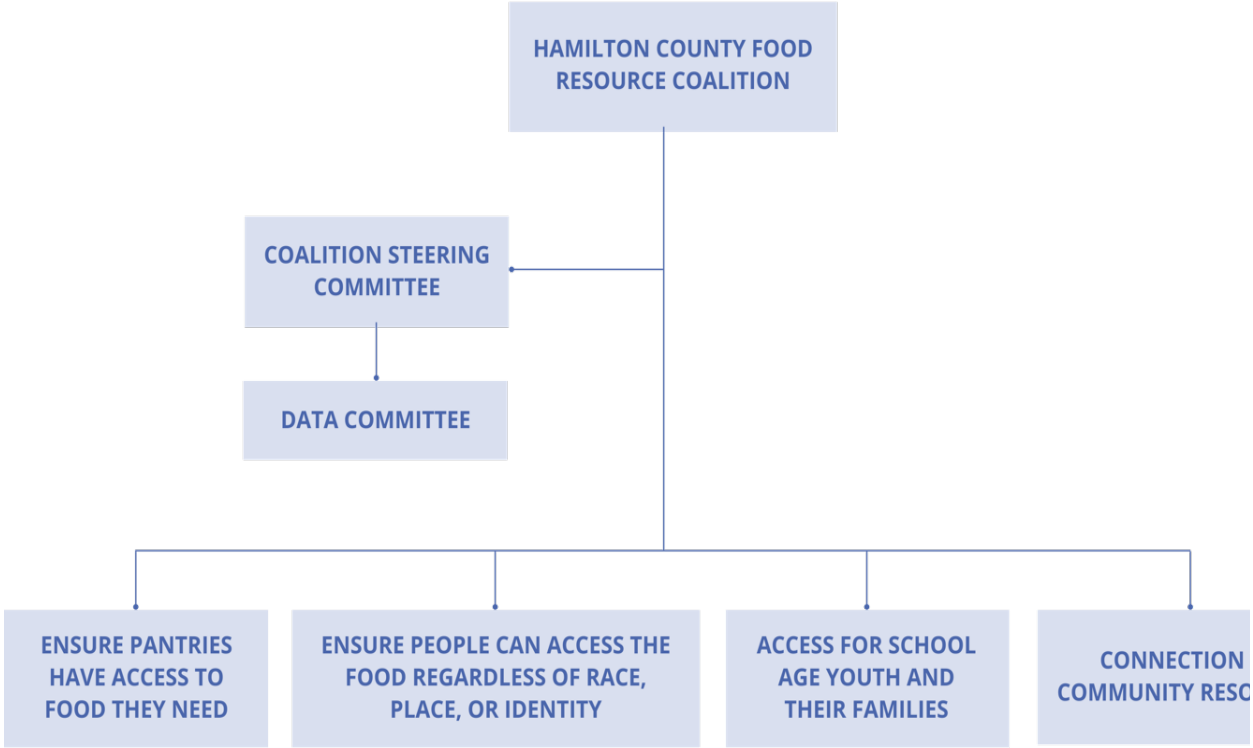


- **6% of residents carpool to work, 1% of residents walk to work** *(lower than regional and state averages);* **10% work from home** *(double regional and state averages)*
- **Median household income:** $112,765 *(trending down)*
- 3% of residents **lack health insurance** *(10.5% on Medicare, 3.1% on Medicaid)*
- 3.7% of residents self -identify as **Hispanic/Latino**

  Race: 80.3% White (Non -Hispanic), 10.3% Asian, 2.7% Black/African American, 2.3% Multiracial

Sources: Census Reporter, DataUSA

8

Community Solutions

APPENDIX B – SAMPLE COALITION FRAMEWORK